Exposure Therapy Case Vignette

We are interested in studying how therapists use exposure therapy to treat clients with anxiety disorders.

Instructions: Imagine that you are conducting the first session of exposure and response prevention with a 39-year-old woman who has been diagnosed with Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. She experiences frequent obsessions of being contaminated by coming into contact with objects or surfaces that many other people have touched, and she fears contracting a serious illness as a result.

1. Select Exposure Item
Below is an exposure hierarchy that you and the client have created together. The hierarchy items are rated on a 0 to 100 scale of subjective distress (0 = no distress, 100 = extreme distress). Please select an item you think would be challenging yet feasible for her to conduct exposure with. Circle your response.

100 Place hands on the base of a toilet plunger
90 Hold a bandage with dried blood on it
80 Hold a pair of used underwear from a second-hand store
70 Hold a pair of unwashed socks
60 Place hands on an old, worn bathmat
50 Place hands inside of another person’s hat
40 Hold several sheets of unused toilet paper taken from a public restroom
30 Hold a “dirty” dollar bill
20 Hold someone else’s pen
2. **Begin Exposure Session**
When the task is about to begin, the client expresses reservations about coming into contact with the item you have selected. She says, “This seems very difficult. Do I really have to do this?”

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How likely are you to engage in the following behaviors? (write a number using the scale above)

- _____ Instruct the client to use arousal reduction techniques (e.g. diaphragmatic breathing, muscle relaxation)
- _____ Reassure the client that she will not get sick from the object.
- _____ Remind the client of the treatment rationale and benefits of exposure.
- _____ Encourage the client to contact the exposure item.
- _____ Allow the client to select an easier item.

How likely are you to grant the following client requests? (write a number using the scale above)

- _____ Allow the client to only touch the object with his/her finger tips.
- _____ Allow the client to use hand sanitizer during the exposure.
- _____ Allow the client to wipe their hands on their pants.
3. **Ten Minutes into the Exposure Task**
The client reports that her distress rating is at 60, and you notice that she is breathing much faster than when the exposure task began. The client says, “This is getting *really* hard. I swear germs are getting on my hands. Do I have to keep going?”

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How likely are you to engage in the following behaviors? (write a number using the scale above)

- Instruct the client to use arousal reduction techniques (e.g. diaphragmatic breathing, muscle relaxation)
- Encourage the client to remain in contact with the object.
- Reassure the client that she will not get sick from the object.
- Remind the client of the treatment rationale and benefits of exposure.
- Increase the intensity of the exposure by making the client come into more contact with the object.
- Allow the client to terminate the exposure.

How likely are you to grant the following client requests? (write a number using the scale above)

- Allow the client to only touch the object with her fingertips.
- Allow the client to use hand sanitizer during the exposure.
- Allow the client to wipe her hands on her pants.
4. **Twenty-Five Minutes into the Exposure Task**
You notice that the client continues to breathe rapidly, and is now sweating and shaking slightly. The client reports a distress rating of 85 and says, “This is awful. I just know I’m going to get sick. I’m feeling lightheaded and I don’t know if I should keep going.”

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- [ ] Remind the client of the treatment rationale and benefits of exposure.
- [ ] Increase the intensity of the exposure by making the client come into more contact with the object.
- [ ] Allow the client to terminate the exposure.

How likely are you to grant the following client requests? (write a number using the scale above)

- [ ] Allow the client to only touch the object with her fingertips.
- [ ] Allow the client to use hand sanitizer during the exposure.
- [ ] Allow the client to wipe her hands on her pants.
5. **Thirty-Five Minutes into the Exposure Task**
You notice that the client’s breathing has slowed, and she has stopped sweating and shaking. The client reports a distress rating of 55, and says, “This is getting easier. Is it okay if I stop now?”

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- _____ Remind the client of the treatment rationale and benefits of exposure.
- _____ Increase the intensity of the exposure by making the client come into more contact with the object.
- _____ Allow the client to terminate the exposure.

How likely are you to grant the following client requests? (write a number using the scale above)

- _____ Allow the client to only touch the object with her fingertips.
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