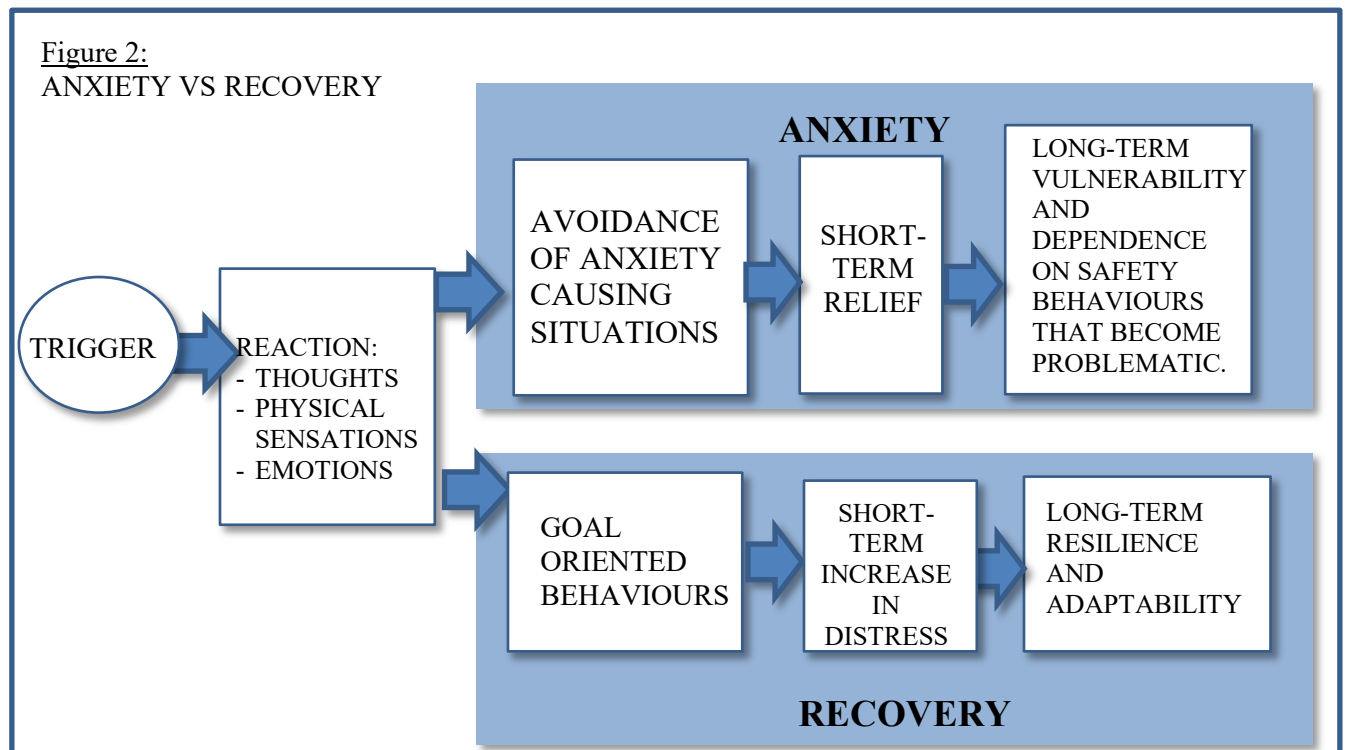
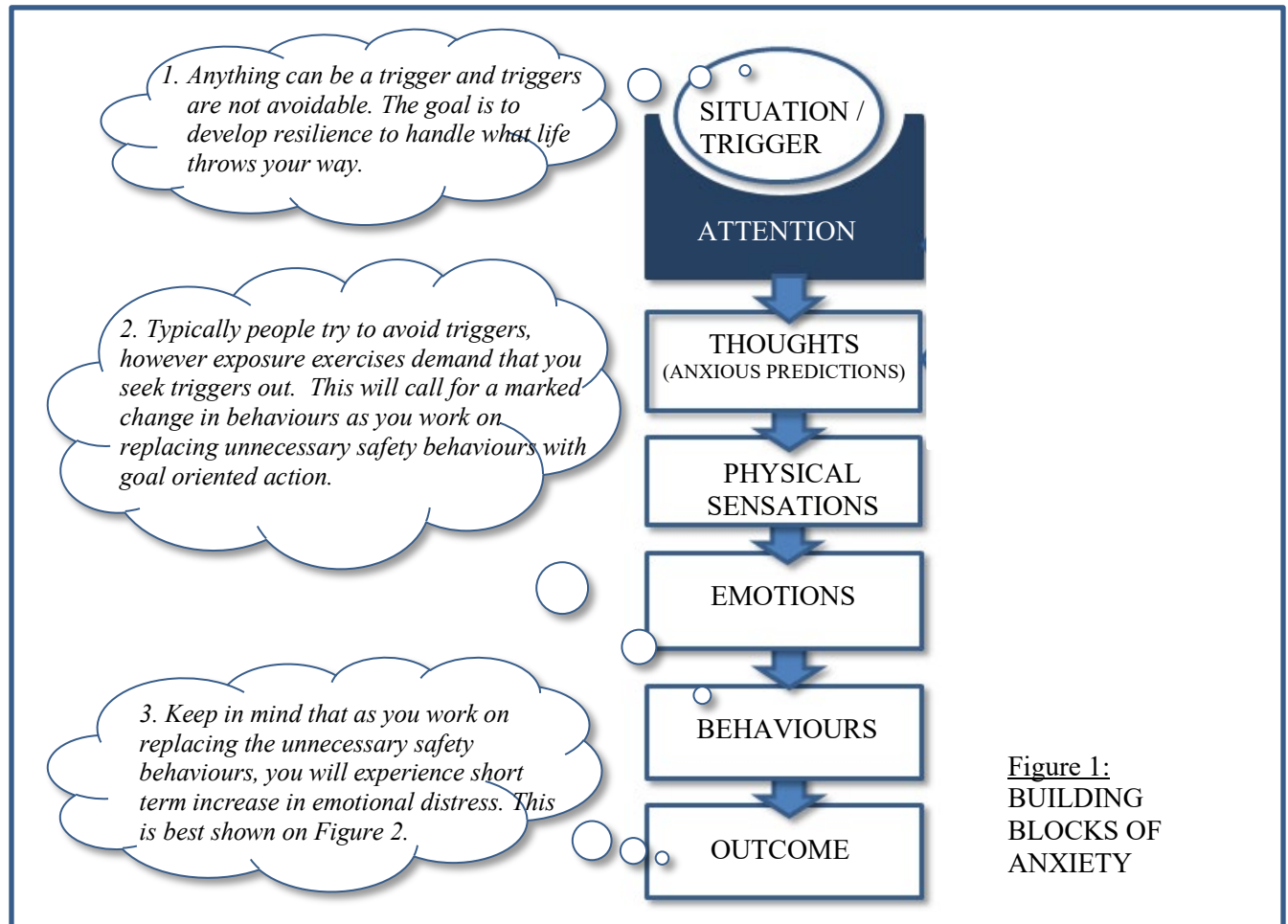


# OVERCOMING ANXIETY – 7 FACING OUR TRIGGERS – PART 1



## I CAN'T DO THIS! THOUGHTS ABOUT EXPOSURE EXERCISES

<p><u>Benefits of engaging in exposure:</u></p>	<p><u>Costs of engaging in exposure:</u></p>
<p><u>Benefits of not engaging in exposure:</u></p>	<p><u>Costs of not engaging in exposure:</u></p>

## WHAT MAKES EXPOSURE WORK?

- Exposure exercises give you a chance to disconfirm our fears. Learning through new experiences can inhibit unnecessary anxiety.
- Exposure exercises give you a chance to use your skills and prove to yourself that you can handle difficulties.
- Exposure exercises give us an opportunity to habituate to situations that generate unnecessary fear. Habituation is a physiological process that reduces the state of alertness when we are exposed to feared but safe triggers for a long enough time.

## HOW TO PROCEED?

1. Decide on a behavioural goal.
2. Construct an exposure ladder for that specific behavioural goal.
3. Set up time for exposure exercises; select tasks that generate distress levels of 50 to 70.
4. If you find the task to be too challenging, complete Gaining Perspective Worksheet. If you still believe that the task is too much, go back to your exposure ladder and select a task that creates less distress.
5. Complete a behavioural experiment worksheet to help you prepare and summarize your learnings (the preparation part of the sheet is completed before the exercise the lessons learnt part is completed after the exercise)
6. Record your outcomes on the Exposure Tracking worksheet.
7. Make sure you keep a momentum going and do one small exercise each day.

## SELECTING BEHAVIOURAL GOALS

Goals should be personal, realistic, achievable, measurable and specific (PRAMS)

<b>PERSONAL</b>	Choose situations/triggers that are most relevant to your personal life. Focus on things that make it difficult for you to accomplish your life goals (e.g., fear of public speaking might cost you a promotion) or things that you think about too much to be able to achieve a peace of mind (e.g., preoccupation with illness leaves little time to do anything else).
<b>REALISTIC</b>	A goal of not having any anxiety is unrealistic. In fact, desensitization exercises produce anxiety before we can learn from them and habituate. Define your goals in behavioural terms. For example, “ <i>Feel little anxiety at a mall</i> ” is not a behavioural goal and might discourage you because you feel quite a bit of anxiety during your first walk. By contrast, “ <i>walk in a mall for one hour and have casual conversations with salespeople despite interference from anxiety</i> ” is a behavioural goal that will lead to eventual reduction in anxiety.
<b>ACHIEVABLE</b>	Make sure that your goals are achievable and within your control. A goal of finding a job within the next 3 months is partially within your control and might be achievable but you might end up finding a job in 4 months instead of 3. A goal of sending 3 job applications a day for the next 3 months is fully within your control and fully achievable and increases your chances of finding a job without being disappointed.

<b>MEASURABLE</b>	Make sure your goals can be measured. For example, “ <i>Having confidence at a party</i> ” is hard to measure but a goal of “ <i>Speaking to a guest at a party for 2 minutes</i> ” is measurable.
<b>SPECIFIC</b>	Let’s make our goals as behaviourally specific as possible. For example, a person who is afraid of their panic symptoms and reaches out to relatives for reassurance might have a goal of “ <i>managed a panic attack on my own for 60 minutes</i> ” whereas a person who is shy about talking might have a goal of “ <i>sat down in a crowded food court with a small meal and made a neutral comment about the food to the stranger sitting at the next table</i> ”.

Be mindful of couple of things:

- People have a tendency to postpone working on goals that really matter, which leaves them with working on less important goals and feel that therapy is not getting them any closer to what they want
- Goals that really matter generate the most anxiety.
- Sometimes achieving one goal (e.g., being able to strike conversations at social events) requires you to work on multiple mini-goals (e.g., being able to tolerate large groups of people, being able to start and maintain a conversation with someone you see often at work or school, being able to feel comfortable that you have something interesting to say) and each mini-goal might require its own desensitization step-ladder.
- Guard against subtle avoidance. For example, going to a party but avoiding eye contact and keeping to yourself will only reinforce your apprehension about interactions with others.

Now, make a list of the goals you want to achieve and estimate how much anxiety you might feel while trying to achieve your goals.

GOAL	How difficult is this goal for you (0 to 100)?	How important is this goal for you (0-100)?
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

## EXPOSURE LADDER

GOAL: .	Predicted level of distress (0-10)

TASK (What I need to be able to tolerate doing in order to reach my goal.)		Predicted Level of Distress (0- 100)	Order of implementation
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			

Break the goal into smaller steps by changing:

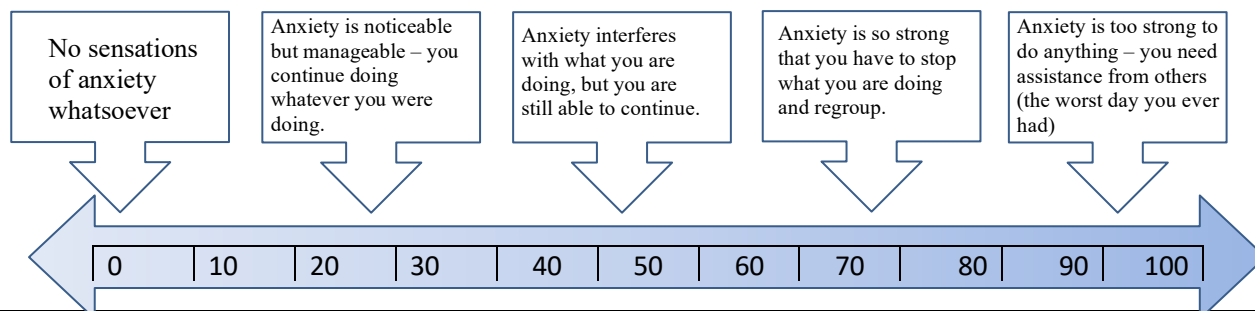
- What you do
- When you do it
- Where you do it
- How long you do it for

*To optimize your learning, repeat your tasks in many different settings. Making eye contact at a mall or saying hello during a walk are typical exercises that we use to help people with social anxiety. However if you always go to the same place, your learnings might not transfer to other situations, like saying hello and introducing yourself at a larger social function at work.*

## BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIMENT: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DO SOMETHING THAT YOU ARE ANXIOUS ABOUT?

<b>A: PLANNING AND PREPARING</b>		
<b>1:</b> What do you plan to do? Where? When? For how long?	<b>2:</b> How much distress do you think you will feel? (0-100)	
<b>3:</b> What outcome would represent successful completion of the exercise?		
What do you predict your experience will look like?		
<b>4:</b> What body sensations are you likely to feel?	<b>5:</b> What thoughts are you likely to have?	<b>6:</b> What behaviour urges are you likely to experience?
What can you do about your reactions?		
<b>7:</b> What can you do about the body sensations?	<b>8:</b> What can you do about your thoughts?	<b>9:</b> What can you do about your behaviour urges?
<b>B: LEARNING</b>		
What actually happened? <i>(Complete this part after your exposure exercise)</i>		
<b>1:</b> What were the body sensations and how did you manage?	<b>2:</b> What were your thoughts and how did you manage?	<b>3:</b> What did you have the urge to do and how did you manage?
<b>4:</b> What are the facts about what you have experienced? Were you hurt, put in danger or confronted?		<b>5:</b> How much distress did you feel? (0-100)
<b>6:</b> What lessons have you learnt for the next time? (Remember: desensitization requires repetition)		

## KEEPING TRACK AND KEEPING HONEST



<b>DATE:</b>								
Rate the intensity of your overall anxiety throughout the day using the scale above and mark it on the graph.	100							
	90							
	80							
	70							
	60							
	50							
	40							
	30							
	20							
	10							
	0							
What challenges / stresses were you faced with today?								
What skill have you practiced?	<input type="checkbox"/> Postpone the worry (APPLE) <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioural Experiment <input type="checkbox"/> Grounding	<input type="checkbox"/> Postpone the worry (APPLE) <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioural Experiment <input type="checkbox"/> Grounding	<input type="checkbox"/> Postpone the worry (APPLE) <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioural Experiment <input type="checkbox"/> Grounding	<input type="checkbox"/> Postpone the worry (APPLE) <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioural Experiment <input type="checkbox"/> Grounding	<input type="checkbox"/> Postpone the worry (APPLE) <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioural Experiment <input type="checkbox"/> Grounding	<input type="checkbox"/> Postpone the worry (APPLE) <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioural Experiment <input type="checkbox"/> Grounding	<input type="checkbox"/> Postpone the worry (APPLE) <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Perspective <input type="checkbox"/> Problem Solving <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioural Experiment <input type="checkbox"/> Grounding	
What were you able to accomplish during the day?								
<i>What exposure exercises or challenges did you set for yourself?</i>								
How much time was spent on worrying?								
How much time was spent on doing something proactive (problem solving, taking action steps)?								