

Confident Parents Thriving Kids

ANXIETY PROGRAM



Canadian Mental
Health Association
British Columbia
Mental health for all

Module 4: Exposure

- **What is exposure?**
 - Exposure is when we face our fears over and over until it gets easier
 - Staying in the scary seeming situation allows children to learn that they do not have to stay away from these situations. Instead, they learn that anxiety goes down by itself.
- **Breaking down your target goal into smaller steps that your child to practice is called a 'bravery ladder'**
 - Start with easier steps at the bottom and gradually moving onto harder ones at the top
 - Pick steps as you go or pre-plan your steps
 - It may help to talk with your child about what steps to include on the ladder
 - Make sure you have everything you need for the exposure
- **Plan on informing your child of the plan**
 - Let them know what the next step is and what they will be rewarded with
 - Encourage them to add their own ideas
- **Practice!**
 - Often children will have to do the same step over and over until they are ready to move on to the next step
- **Rewards are important!**
 - Facing fears is hard, rewards help to give your child incentive to face their fears
 - The natural rewards will eventually take over as your child starts to accomplish their goals
- **Successful reward systems**
 - Be clear and specific about what they need to do to earn the reward
 - Reward right away
 - Tokens can be used to reward them right away and saved for a bigger prize
 - Make it special
 - Choose rewards that are only available when the exposure step is completed
 - No take backs—rewards earned should never be taken away
 - Reward and praise the effort not the outcome
 - Pay attention to every effort they make, even if it doesn't go exactly as planned
- **Back-up plans**
 - Sometimes an exposure step will be harder for your child than expected
 - Have a back-up plan instead of letting them escape the situation all together
- **Exposure tips**
 1. Stay calm and praise bravery
 2. Answer questions once
 3. Face real fears and slowly start to drop safety behaviors
- **Safety behaviour: Things kids do to make them feel better in the moment**
 - E.g., A child may not make eye contact when saying "hello" to a new person