

Exposure Role-Play Scripts

Instructions for School Professionals

The exposure role-plays below are designed for you to model what it might look like when students practice exposures on their own. Group members will be acting as “coaches” as you complete the role-plays as the “student.” They will provide feedback about what to do and not do to get the most out of an exposure. Below are examples of exposures conducted both correctly and incorrectly. During the incorrect examples, you will role-play the use of safety behaviors and avoidance. Try to use verbal and nonverbal cues to help the students recognize these unhelpful behaviors during the role-play. Students should call out feedback throughout the role-plays to correct problematic behavior. The students’ active involvement in “coaching” you will help them strengthen their understanding of exposure.

Role-Play: Fear of being judged

“Let’s role-play a couple of examples of using exposure to practice facing our fears. This time, let’s say I’m afraid of people judging me. This fear is really distressing for me. I have been avoiding interactions with others for fear that I will say or do something that will lead them to think that I’m ‘dumb’ or ‘stupid.’ I want to build stronger friendships; however, I avoid reaching out to others. I have already started to create a small fear ladder, and here are a few of my options.”

List on the board:

- Sitting by someone new and talking to them during lunch
- Asking several friends to hang out through text message
- Making small talk with a stranger in a public place

“What other exposure ideas can you think of that I could add to my fear ladder?”

“Now that we have generated some more ideas for my fear hierarchy, it’s time to get started on the exposure practice. I am going to role-play a few examples of exposure. During some of the examples, I will do the exposure correctly. At other times, I might be tempted to avoid or lessen the intensity of the exposure somehow to cope with my anxiety. I will need you to help coach me on how to do the exposure, so that I can keep practicing overcoming my fears. If you see me trying to reduce my fear in the exposure, call out and challenge me to try to stick with it! Any questions before we get started?”

“Let’s practice!”

Exposure Practice Role-Play #1: Sitting by Someone New and Talking to Them During Lunch

"I will start by practicing the exposure of sitting by someone new and talking to them during lunch. I need one volunteer to help me in this exposure. Would someone be willing to volunteer to be the new person that I will sit by at lunch?...Great, thanks!"

Pretend to be in the lunchroom. Show signs of nervousness (such as playing with hands or looking anxiously around the room). Speak thoughts aloud so the students can participate with the role-play. You could say something like, "Wow I am really feelings anxious," and, "Okay, I see someone new that I could sit by. I will start to walk over..."

Interrupt your walking with a safety behavior. You could say, "I think I will go back to my locker and get a book to read while I sit by this new person at lunch. That still counts as exposure... right?" Allow for feedback from the students. Maybe the students challenge you to continue with your exposure without getting a book to read. Incorporate their feedback and continue the exposure role-play.

Pretend to walk over the new person's table and sit down. Say, "Hello, My name is ____." Pretend to make small talk together. Reflect aloud your thoughts to the students. "Hmmm, I am noticing that I am not feeling quite as anxious as I expected I would when I was first walking over here." You could add, "I still feel a bit anxious, however it's easier to talk to them than I expected."

End first role-play. "Okay, let's pause there. You did a fantastic job providing feedback."

Discuss:

Leader Questions	Possible Responses
<p><i>"You really helped to challenge me to face my fears when I was tempted to go get a book to read. Why did you think that it would be better for me not to go get the book?"</i></p>	<p>Maybe they recognized it was an avoidance behavior that could temporarily relieve some of the anxiety, but would most likely prevent you from talking to the new person, and thus prevent you from overcoming this fear in the long term.</p>

Exposure Practice Role-Play #2: Asking Several Friends to Hang Out Through a Text Message

“During this next exposure practice, I’ll try asking several friends to hang out through a text message.”

Begin role-play, pretend to have cell phone. Think aloud, *“I really want to spend time with some friends this weekend. There is a new movie out that I really want to see. I wonder if ___ or ___ would want to see the movie with me. I know it would be helpful to practice facing my fear by asking them to go with me.”*

Begin pretending to text. Pause. *‘Ugh, I just worry that they will think that I am so ‘bossy’ for asking them to hang out this weekend. What if they don’t want to go, or what if they already saw that movie? Maybe I should just say something like ‘I know you’re probably busy or don’t want to see this movie, but maybe we could go to the movies this weekend and see ___’* Allow for feedback from students. See if they help “coach” you to reduce your attempts to apologize or give excuses, and face your fear head on with a short and direct request. Continue to make the text and then send it off!

End second role-play. *“Great job coaching me again on this role-play.”*

Discuss:

Leader Questions	Possible Responses
<i>“What are some possible responses that I might receive from these two friends?”</i>	They might be excited to spend time with you Might be happy you asked Might be too busy, etc.
<i>“What could I learn from this experience if they are not able to go or do not want to go?”</i>	Learned that you can tolerate the anxiety Learned that it is worth the risk of asking Maybe one friend still wants to go
<i>“What positive outcome might happen from practicing this exposure?”</i>	Make a friend Have a good time at the movie Be more likely to ask a friend to hang out in the future
<i>“What are some downsides to making lots of excuses or apologies when you are requesting something from someone?”</i>	They may take advantage of you You might start to value other people’s time/happiness more than your own They may find it annoying

Exposure Practice Role-Play #3: Make Small Talk with a Stranger in a Public Place

"In our final exposure role-play, I will try making small talk with a stranger in a public place. I need two volunteers to be 'strangers' in this role-play." Pull the two volunteers aside and instruct the first stranger to be unfriendly to you when trying to make small talk. Instruct the second stranger to be friendly in response to the small talk.

Begin the role-play. Pretend you are waiting in line at a store in the mall. You decide to try making small talk with the first stranger, who is in front of you in line. Show signs of some nervousness and say something like, *"It's pretty crowded in here today,"* or, *"What an awesome sale!"* The first (unfriendly) stranger gives a rude response, such as an eye roll or the cold shoulder.

Reflect with the group. *"Now I feel like a complete loser. I can't believe I tried to face my fears with this person, and they were so rude. This exposure was hard and it didn't even work! Maybe I should just go home and call it quits."* Have the group provide feedback about fighting the powerful urge to avoid.

Maybe you see the second (friendly) stranger at another section of the store. Think aloud with the students. *"I know that repetition is really important with exposure. I know that it's important to stick with it, even when it gets tough. And that it is more important to focus on my behavior than on the outcome. It's important to me to be able to make small talk, even if some people are rude. Maybe I'll try to talk to one more person today."*

Walk over to the second stranger and make small talk. You could say, *"I really like the shirt you're looking at,"* or, *"That color would look great on you!"* The second (friendly) stranger replies kindly, *"Thanks! That's so nice of you to say!"*

End third role-play.

Discuss:

Leader Questions	Possible Responses
<i>"Making small talk with the second stranger went a lot better than it did with the first! What can I learn from my experience with the first stranger who was unfriendly to me?"</i>	Maybe feeling the disapproval of others was not as painful as expected Realized that you are able to make small talk even when it doesn't go well Realized that you could try again even when something difficult happened
<i>"Do you think it would be tempting to give up on exposure, if trying it for the first time did not go all that well? How can you fight that urge?"</i>	Remember your motivation for doing the exposure in the first place – how will your life be better if you get better at this skill?
<i>"What would have happened if I would have stopped the exposure after talking with the first stranger?"</i>	Would not have had a chance to experience a more positive outcome Anxiety might have "won" which could reinforce anxiety and avoidance

Final Discussion and Review:

Leader Questions	Possible Responses
<p><i>“How does avoidance help in the short term?”</i></p>	<p>Calm down Feel better Don't have to deal with it</p>
<p><i>“How does avoidance impact the situation in the long-term?”</i></p>	<p>Fear doesn't go away, often gets worse Teaches us that we have to avoid in order to handle things Our lives get more restricted over time Less social relationships</p>
<p><i>“What kinds of safety and avoidance behaviors did you see that I was using or tempted to use in the role-plays?”</i></p>	<p>Getting a book to read at lunch Apologizing or making excuses when texting Stopping the exposure practice all together</p>
<p><i>“What exposure tips would make this exposure practice even more beneficial for me?”</i></p>	<p>Repetition Prolonged practice Trying it in new scenarios</p>
<p><i>“What do you think I would have learned after completing the exposures?”</i></p>	<p>Learned to cope with feelings of anxiety Maybe it was not as scary/difficult as expected Maybe it led to positive outcomes, etc.</p>