

# Creating An Exposure Hierarchy

## Conquering Your Fear

The best way to overcome fears is to face them in small steps. To do this, you can create an Exposure Hierarchy which will gradually “expose” you to the situations that you fear until you can face your fears with a minimum of concern. Avoiding your fears never helps and in fact may even make them worse.

This technique works with many kinds of fears and specific situations that make you anxious. It is recommended that you create your Exposure Hierarchy with a supportive professional.

The goals of an exposure hierarchy include:

- Doing things you have been avoiding;
- Reducing anxiety over time;
- Learning and using skills to handle anxiety;
- Enjoying activities again;
- Feeling more control in your life.

## Measuring Your Distress

Anxiety is measured by a scale called the Subjective Units of Distress Scale or SUDS. This scale goes from zero to 100. A zero means you have no distress, a fifty means you have moderate distress, a one hundreds means you have the worst distress you can imagine.

## Creating Your Exposure Hierarchy

1. Pick a fear you would like to work on. This could be a fear of crowds, a fear of enclosed places, or a fear of flying. Enter this on the Fear line on the attached worksheet.

2. Now write down specific situations related to your fear that you wish to avoid. Write them in the Situations Boxes, listing as many as you can. It will be easiest to work on your fear if you can list at least 10 to 15 fears.

These situations are related to the thing you fear most. For example, if you are afraid of flying and being in the air over an open ocean, you might also be afraid of going to the airport, waiting to board, taking off, and so on.

3. Put a SUDS number by each situation indicating how upset each situation would make you. As you write down the things that make you fearful or anxious, you may think of more related situations as well. Write them down as you think about them, and put in your SUDS rating.

4. When you have filled in this form and can't think of any more situations related to your fear, recopy your information on a new worksheet, beginning with the situations that make you least fearful (e.g. the

lowest SUDS score) and ending with the situation that makes you most fearful (e.g. the highest SUDS score).

The next step will be to “expose” yourself to each situation and record your response using the worksheet “Practicing Exposure Therapy.”

# Exposure Hierarchy

Enter a fear you would like to address on the line provided. Enter specific situations you avoid related to that fear. Enter one situation per line. Try to list as many as you can. Next, rate each situation in the rating box. On a second copy of this form, reorder the situations that you fear from the lowest SUDS score to the highest.

Fear \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_

	SITUATION	SUDS SCORE
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
14		
15		