Imaginal Exposure Response Prevention Therapy (I-ERP) Therapist Guide

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This manual has been adapted from Butler, R.M., Crumby, E., Christian, C., Brosof, L.C., Vanzhula, I.A., & Levinson, C.A. (under review). Initial clinical efficacy of a prolonged imaginal exposure intervention, *Facing Eating Disorder Fears*: Findings from an open trial.

## Assessment and Psycho education (Session 0)

#### **Exclusion Criteria:**

Suicidality

(Hypo)Manic Episode

Psychosis:

\*\*If selected ANY of the EXCLUSION criteria, then patient may not be enrolled into the study\*\*

### Assessment and Psycho education

"Avoidance is a very important part of anxiety. It's natural to try to avoid things that make you anxious. Actually, that's what anxiety is for. It's for motivating you to avoid things in the world that could hurt you. For example, it is natural to try and avoid bears, because they could hurt you.

The problem with anxiety comes when, for some reason, you have become anxious of something that can't really hurt you. For example, food is not dangerous, but your body might react to it as though it is. That motivates you to avoid eating or to engage in unhealthy eating behaviours. If you avoid eating and avoid allowing yourself to experience any fears related to eating, you never get to see that your fears don't really come true, or if they do come true, that they aren't as bad as you thought they might be. Does that make sense?

When you do something anxiety provoking, anxiety usually peaks either toward the beginning of the anxiety provoking event or before you begin (for example, it might be really nerving to give a public speech, but after you get going you become more comfortable with it). Most people's anxiety goes down, at least a little bit, once they start. Alternatively, some people with eating disorders may notice that anxiety goes up again after a meal. This is common because the feeling of fullness can provoke anxiety all over again. However, in the same way that anxiety may go down at the beginning of a meal, anxiety does go back down again over time. Anxiety going up and then going back down again is part of a process called habituation. Habituation basically means "getting used to" something.

The good news is that each time you face your fear, you are more likely to see your anxiety go down. Even though right now it may just be the difference between feeling very, very anxious and feeling uncomfortably anxious, eventually your anxiety should reduce to the point that you can tolerate it.

What I've just been describing is what's called exposure therapy. Exposure is the main ingredient in nearly all of the effective treatments for anxiety. Psychologists have tried to come up with other methods, but exposure has been shown, time and again, to be a key component of successful treatment. Do you have any questions so far?"

"However, it can be hard to expose yourself to many eating disorder related fears, such as (being abandoned). So, we use something called imaginal exposure therapy. In imaginal exposure therapy we have you write about and imagine your fear. This type of exposure therapy has been shown to be just as effective as doing exposure therapy in real life.

So, what does this mean for you? This means that as you complete imaginal exposures (writing about and imagining your fear) you will become less and less anxious about your fear. This will help you gain control of your fears and any eating disorder behaviours you experience. Does this all make sense?"

We measure anxiety using SUDS Scale. That stands for "Subjective Units of Distress'

#### Place a copy of the SUDS Scale in front of the participants.

The SUDS scale goes from 0 to 100. 0 means that you're completely comfortable and relaxed. 25 means that you feel enough anxiety to get you going, but you don't feel uncomfortable—the anxiety is actually helping you out. A 50 is moderate anxiety, somewhat bothersome. A 75 is bothering you enough that you're considering leaving the situation entirely. A 100 is the worst anxiety you've ever experienced in your life. It can be any number between 0 and 100—those anchors are just there to give you an idea of what different ratings mean. Does all that make sense?

What would your SUDS rating be right now?"

"What would your SUDS rating be when you are imagining (INSERT THEIR FEAR)?"

#### Repeat the rating back to them and check to be sure it fits:

"So, at a SUDS of \_\_\_\_\_, you're pretty comfortable (or uncomfortable) with your level of anxiety, it's not (or it is) really bothering you?" Question any ratings that don't make sense (a very low rating, below 10, does not usually make sense when people are interacting with someone and may indicate that the participant believes it is a ten point scale; a very high rating, above 75, is unusual and may indicate that the participant does not understand that s/he is to rate their current anxiety).

"We will be asking you for your SUDS rating at various points during the imaginal exposure. When we ask you about your SUDS, don't think too much about it. Just give a number quickly and move on to the next thing.

"Finally, I want to talk a little bit more about things that you can do to make sure you get the most out of imaginal exposure therapy. We will remind you of these things again when you are doing the exposures.

<u>Prepare to feel anxious.</u> It is normal to feel uncomfortable when doing exposure therapy. In fact, if you become anxious it's a sign that you are doing exposure correctly. Your job is to remain in the situation until your anxiety subsides on its own. Remind yourself, the more I feel anxious, the faster this will work!

<u>Don't fight the anxiety or fear.</u> If you try to resist or fight the anxiety, you'll only make things worse. Instead, let the anxious feelings just be there. Remember that they're temporary. The worst thing that will happen is temporary distress.

<u>Do not use safety behaviors before, during, or after exposure.</u> In order to work properly, exposure practices must be completed without coping or safety behaviors, seeking comfort or reassurance from others, distraction, medications, alcohol, or other strategies that make

you feel safer or that prevent you from becoming anxious. Even very small or brief safety behaviors will spoil exposure. This means that you should not engage in behaviors like body checking or asking family members for reassurance. The point is to be anxious, so anything at all that might reduce anxiety will defeat the purpose of the exposure.

<u>REMEMBER TO STAY IN THE PRESENT TENSE.</u> When you are writing about or remembering your fear, make sure to stay in the present. Write about it as if it were happening to you right now. This will help the situation seem more real, and over time will give you more control over it.

<u>Keep track of your SUDS.</u> During imaginal exposure monitor how distressed you become using the SUDS scale from 0 (calm) to 100 (extremely anxious). Pay attention to whether your level of fearfulness changes as time goes by. We will be asking you periodically to record your SUDS.

A normal response to exposure therapy is to feel exhausted/tired/some depression after completing an exposure session. Exposure is hard work and your body and mind will be tired out afterwards. If you experience these feelings, it means you are working hard and doing the exposure therapy exactly how you should be! Try and give yourself some self-care afterwards, you deserve it!

"Do you have any questions about any of this?

## **SCREENING FOR ED FEARS**

List out participant fears. For each fear listed, ask: "On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being 'no fear at all' and 10 being 'the worst fear possibly imagined,' how would you rate this fear?"
For more general fears (e.g., rejection) confirm that fear is related to eating disorder. Read back the top three highest fears listed. Ask the participant which is their highest fear they would like to focus on.

NOTE: 1 = "No Fear At All"; 10 = "The Worst Fear Possibly Imagined"

Fear	Yes	No	Scale (1-10)	Check Top 3 Highest Fears
Food				
Food with Unspecified Calories (AKA Not Knowing How Many Calories Are in the Meal)				
Foods Not Portioned Out				
Foods Containing a High Amount of Calories				
Specific Times of the Day (i.e. Meal Time)				
Extra Food (i.e. Ketchup, Mustard)				
Desserts or Sweets				
Processed Foods				
Specific Foods (i.e. Red meat, Sugar Ask participant if they maintain a specific diet)				
Eat More Food Than You Can Burn Via Exercise				
Not Exercising				
Weighing More Than a Specific Number				
Tolerating Your Size/ Not Accepting Your Body				
Fatty Foods				

Gaining Weight				
Rejection				
Abandonment				
Judgment				
Laziness				
Making Mistakes				
Feeling Physically Uncomfortable				
Feeling Emotionally Uncomfortable				
Losing Control				
Being Compared				
Judgment on Appearance				
Judgment on Social Media				
Failing to Meet Expectations (i.e Familial Expectations of What Your Size Should Be)				
Judgment of Self				
Failing to Meet Societal Expectations				
Embarrassment About Appearance				
Embarrassment/Discomfort				
Embarrassed about your emotions				
"Are there any other fears that you have that I have not mentioned?" If YES, Please describe them below:				

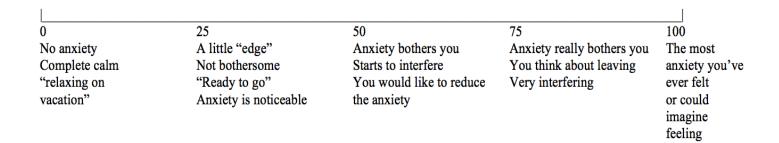
TOP 3 Fears: (Please write in each fear at the top)		
What do they fear specifically? (I.E. Types of Food feared)		

# IMAGINAL EXPOSURE TRAINING: Participant Requirements

	Yes	No		
Have you ever been in exposure therapy before?				
if YES, What was your experience like? (write description below)				
What would your SUDS rating be right now?				
What would your SUDS rating be when you are imagining				
(INSERT PARTICIPANT'S FEAR)?				
(For Consenter ONLY) Does the Participant's SUDS rating				
make sense?				

if NO, please explain (write description below)
Did patient explain that he/she felt good about how to use the SUDS rating system?
In the space below, please record any other pertinent information regarding the
participant's concerns/thoughts/etc.:

## **The SUDS Scale**



You can use any number between 0 and 100.

The anchors above are descriptions to give you a sense of the scale.

# Writing the script...

Ask: "What is	your SUDS right now?"	(Ask every 2-5 minutes)
Imaginal Scrip	ot	Session 3 (Page 1/4)
	specific fear you have at this tim rently being an inpatient at Newb	e in your life. Start at the beginning—the oridge."
subs:	"What is leading up to this spec	ific fear happening? Give as many details as
"What do you	feel in your body right now? Wh	at emotions are you feeling right now? What
thoughts are a	going through your head right no	w?"

	·
magine you are a normal weight and due to be discharged, how do you feel who	en your
amily see you; how do you feel when others see you for the first time?"	
What do you feel in your body right now? What emotions are you feeling right n	ow? Wha
noughts are going through your head right now?"	
	(Page 2/

"Imagine you are at normal weight, how to you feel when you walk into school, into you class on the first occasion; into the school dining room"

wnat do y	ou leel in your body right now? What emotions are you leeling right now? What
thoughts ar	re going through your head right now?"
SUDS	"Imagine you are at normal weight; how would you feel in a swimsuit on the
beach?"	
Deach.	
·	

"You are at a	a normal weight and a close school friend invites you to her birthday party - the
first you hav	e been to - and there are both boys and girls there, some you know and some
you don't. Tl	here is food and the cake is offered around"
"What do yo	ou feel in your body right now? What emotions are you feeling right now? What
thoughts are	e going through your head right now?"
SUDS	_ "Imagine you are at normal weight; you are going clothes shopping for the first
time; you try	on an item and it doesn't fit correctly."
"What do yo	ou feel in your body right now? What emotions are you feeling right now? What
thoughts are	e going through your head right now?"

SUDS	"Now imagine your fear is coming to an end. What is happening? How does it
end?"	

End SUDS:	
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## **SUDS SHEET**

Date:
SUDS 1:
SUDS 2:
SUDS 3:
SUDS 4:
SUDS 5:
SUDS 6:
SUDS 7:
SUDS 8:
SUDS 9:
SUDS 10:

## **Session 1**

## **Safety Behaviours**

Safety behaviours are actions carried out with the intention of preventing a feared catastrophe. In the short-term they often give a sense of relief, but in the long-term they are unhelpful because they prevent the disconfirmation of the beliefs that are maintaining anxiety.

#### What is a catastrophe?

Catastrophes can vary enormously, but tend to be about different kinds of threats to the individual, for example:

- Physical threat "I'll be killed", "I'll be hurt"
- Psychological threat "I'll go mad", "I can't cope"
- Social threat "I'll embarrass myself and never be able to show my face again", "They will think I'm an idiot"
- Eating disorder threat "I'll gain weight and never lose it."

What is your feared catastrophe?	
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#### What types of safety behaviours are there?

There are four types of safety behaviours:

- 1. Avoidance e.g. not going to a feared situation
- 2. Escape e.g. leaving a feared situation
- 3. Eating disorder safety behaviours exercising, counting calories, body checking, purging
- 4. Subtle avoidance, which can include things we do in our minds e.g.
  - distraction counting in my head during a panic to stop myself from going mad
  - calming my breathing otherwise I'll be overwhelmed by my fear and lose control
- averting my eyes in case someone picks on me and I'm humiliated what safety behaviours do you use?

What are the effects of safety behaviours?

• Short term: In the short-term safety behaviours lead to a reduction in anxiety. Any form of escape or avoidance is often accompanied by a powerful feeling of relief. Relief is powerful negative reinforcer, and once an individual has learned that a safety behaviour leads to relief, they are likely to use it again.

- Long term: In the longer term, safety behaviours act to maintain anxiety by preventing the disconfirmation of unhelpful beliefs. For example, if someone has the belief "dogs will attack me and bite my face" and avoids dogs, they don't get the opportunity to learn that most dogs are friendly, or fail to learn the difference between friendly and unfriendly dogs.
- Unintended consequences: Safety behaviours often have unintended consequences which can reinforce the original belief, make the anxiety worse, or lead to other problems.

#### What is the difference between a safety behaviour and adaptive behaviour?

Just by looking at the behaviour itself, there is no way of telling the difference between an unhelpful safety behaviour and a helpful adaptive behaviour. It is the *intention* which matters - safety behaviours are those which are *intended* to avert a feared catastrophe. For example, if the strategy of distraction is used to cope with a painful experience (e.g. a visit to the dentist) we say it is helpful. However, if distraction is used with the *intention* of preventing a catastrophe (e.g. to avoid a feeling of panic that I fear will make me go mad) then it can be viewed as an unhelpful safety behaviour.

Early	Belief	Safety	Short Term	Long Term	Unintended
Experience		Behaviour	Consequence	Consequence	Consequence
Made fun of for appearance and being exposed to a thin-ideal beauty standard in the media	If I gain weight, I will never be able to lose it, no one will like me, I will be rejected and abandoned	Counting calories (restricting) and other behaviours (over -exercise)	Reduction in anxiety because I am in control of weight gain	No opportunity to learn that I won't be abandoned or rejected if I lose weight, won't learn that I don't need to restrict and engage in compensatory behaviours to not gain weight	Difficulty enjoying eating food and relying on compensatory behaviours which impacts physical health and leads to disordered eating
Physically assaulted by a group of men walking home after I looked at them	People are dangerous, if I make eye contact with others, I will be attacked	Avert my eyes to avoid contact	Reduction in anxiety because I am not afraid that I will be attacked my others if I'm not looking at them	No opportunity to learn that I won't be attacked if I make eye contact with others.	Difficulty sustaining and forming relationships with others because I will not look at people which may make others uncomfortable
Making a mistake on a presentation in school	If I make a mistake everything will be horrible	Spend all my time working on my presentation	Reduction in anxiety as I will feel less likely to make a mistake if I have spent all my time perfecting the work	No opportunity to learn that I do not need to spend an excessive amount of time on a project to do it to a good standard	Not spending time with friends and family or doing things I enjoy due to being occupied with perfecting school work
Parents getting divorced	People leave people who they love, relationships don't last	Withdrawing from relationship due to scared of being rejected	Reduction in anxiety because I am not close enough to anyone for them to leave me and hurt me	No opportunity to learn that not all relationships fail and that I will not be rejected and left alone	No relationships with other people which leads to feeling lonely and having low self-esteem

## Homework

Complete exposure script and record SUDS; before, during (the highest point) and after

1. Date:	4. Date:
SUDS before:	SUDS before:
SUDS during:	SUDS during:
SUDS After:	SUDS After:
2. Date:	5. Date:
SUDS before:	SUDS before:
SUDS during:	SUDS during:
SUDS After:	SUDS After:
3. Date:	6. Date:
SUDS before:	SUDS before:
SUDS during:	SUDS during:
SUDS After:	SUDS After:

## Session 2

#### **Common Responses to Exposure Therapy**

Exposure therapy is hard work and your body and mind may be tired out afterwards.

Normal responses to exposure therapy can include:

- Feeling tired
- Feeling exhausted
- Some depression

You may feel some of these things after completing an exposure session. If you experience these feelings, it means you are working hard and doing the exposure therapy exactly how you should be! Try and give yourself some self-care afterwards, you deserve it!

## **Safety Behaviours**

Continue completing the safety behaviours table on page 7 (scenario 2)

## **Avoidance Hierarchy**

Construct a ladder of places or situations that you avoid. At the top of the ladder put those which make you most anxious. At the bottom of the ladder put places or situations you avoid, but which don't bother you as much. In the middle of the ladder put ones that are 'in-between'. Give each item a rating from 0-100% according to how anxious you would feel if you had to be in that situation. Overcome your anxiety by approaching these situations, starting from the bottom of the ladder.

Situation	Anxiety (	0-100%)

# SUDS SHEET - Exposure 2

Date:	
SUDS 1:	
SUDS 2:	
SUDS 3:	
SUDS 4:	
SUDS 5:	<del></del>
SUDS 6:	
SUDS 7:	

SUDS 8: \_\_\_\_\_

## Homework

Read exposure script and record SUDS; before, during (the highest point) and after

1. Date:	4. Date:
SUDS before:	SUDS before:
SUDS during:	SUDS during:
SUDS After:	SUDS After:
2. Date:	5. Date:
SUDS before:	SUDS before:
SUDS during:	SUDS during:
SUDS After:	SUDS After:
3. Date:	6. Date:
SUDS before:	SUDS before:
SUDS during:	SUDS during:
SUDS After:	SUDS After:

## **Session 3**

#### **Common Responses to Exposure Therapy**

Exposure therapy is hard work and your body and mind may be tired out afterwards.

Normal responses to exposure therapy can include:

Feeling tired

Feeling exhausted

Some depression

You may feel some of these things after completing an exposure session. If you experience these feelings, it means you are working hard and doing the exposure therapy exactly how you should be! Try and give yourself some self-care afterwards, you deserve it!

Safety Behaviours

#### **Avoidance Hierarchy**

Review avoidance hierarchy and adapt if appropriate (page 11)

Continue completing the safety behaviours table on page 7 (scenario 3 and 4)

# SUDS SHEET – Exposure 3

Date:	 -
SUDS 1:	 -
SUDS 2:	 -
SUDS 3:	 -
SUDS 4:	 -
SUDS 5:	 -
SUDS 6:	 -
SUDS 7:	 -
SUDS 8:	 <u>-</u>

## Homework

Read exposure script and record SUDS; before, during (at the highest point) and after

1. Date:	4. Date:
SUDS before:	SUDS before:
SUDS during:	SUDS during:
SUDS After:	SUDS After:
2. Date:	5. Date:
SUDS before:	SUDS before:
SUDS during:	SUDS during:
SUDS After:	SUDS After:
3. Date:	6. Date:
SUDS before:	SUDS before:
SUDS during:	SUDS during:
SUDS After:	SUDS After:

## **Session 4 (Final Session)**

#### What I Learned in Exposure Therapy or What I know About Anxiety Now

- The more I face something anxiety provoking the easier it gets
- If I feel like avoiding something because it makes me uncomfortable, I should face it instead
- Things that make me uncomfortable/anxious are usually not as bad they seem
- I should let myself feel my emotions
- Safety behaviors work in the short, but not the long term
- If you stay in a situation that is uncomfortable long enough, eventually it will not be uncomfortable
- Things that I am afraid of happening are likely not as bad as I think or are less likely to happen than I think
- I can handle my anxiety and my eating disorder!

Other things I have learned:		
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# SUDS SHEET – Exposure 4

Date:	
SUDS 1:	
SUDS 2:	
SUDS 3:	
SUDS 4:	
SUDS 5:	
SUDS 6:	
SUDS 7:	
SUDS 8:	

