

Creating an Exposure Hierarchy

Reminders of trauma can trigger uncomfortable emotions, painful memories, and debilitating symptoms. It's normal to want to avoid these reactions. Over time, however, avoidance causes these reactions to worsen. **Exposure** is a technique to combat avoidance. During exposure, you'll purposefully face trauma reminders in a safe and controlled way.

Example Exposure Activities

Talk about my trauma	Go to the location of my trauma	Go somewhere that reminds me of my trauma	Participate in an activity that reminds me of my trauma
Hold an object that reminds me of my trauma	Watch a TV show or movie that reminds me of my trauma	Read a book related to my trauma	Listen to music that reminds me of my trauma
Write the story of my trauma	Mentally review the story of my trauma	Draw or paint trauma reminders	Prepare food that reminds me of my trauma
Play a video game that reminds me of my trauma	Listen to someone talk about a similar trauma	Wear something that reminds me of my trauma	Look at appropriate images that remind me of my trauma

Qualities of Good Exposure Activities

Safe. While activities will be uncomfortable for you, they should never be unsafe.

Controllable. Activities should not depend on other people or events. For example, "be approached by a stranger" or "watch news about a hurricane near me" are not within your control.

Specific. The activity "walk a dog" is too vague. What dog will you walk? Where? A better activity would be "ask my neighbors to walk their dog for 30 minutes in our neighborhood."

Repeatable. Ensure you'll be able to do each activity at least four times.

Tip: Include activities with a range of distress ratings. You'll work your way up from those with lower ratings to those with higher ratings.

