

Understanding exposure and response prevention

ERP is a well-established behavioural approach for OCD. It is planned collaboratively, with attention to learning rather than simply enduring distress.

MAP THE CYCLE

ERP begins by understanding the pattern, including less visible mental rituals.

- Identify triggers, intrusive thoughts, images, sensations or doubts.
- Notice checking, reassurance, avoidance, reviewing and mental rituals.
- Clarify the short-term relief and longer-term cost of the response.

BUILD A GRADED PLAN

Useful exposure is deliberate and connected to the person's goals.

- Choose steps that are challenging enough to create learning.
- Begin at a workable point rather than trying to prove courage.
- Agree what response prevention will involve for each step.

PRACTISE NEW LEARNING

The aim is not to guarantee safety or make every thought disappear.

- Approach the trigger while allowing uncertainty to be present.
- Reduce or delay the usual ritual, checking or reassurance.
- Notice that distress can change without completing the compulsion.

REVIEW AND ADJUST

ERP should remain collaborative throughout treatment.

- Review what was learned, not only how anxious you felt.
- Adjust the pace when tasks are too easy, too broad or not linked to the cycle.
- Plan for setbacks and generalise learning to daily life.

Keep the resource in context

ERP should be tailored to the person and the OCD pattern. It is not flooding, humiliation or exposure without consent. Discuss questions or difficulties with the treating clinician.