

Troubleshooting Exposure

You might encounter either of two major problems during systematic desensitization:

- You might experience no anxiety at the presentation of an item.
- You might be unable to decrease a high level of anxiety even after numerous cycles.

Some causes and solutions are presented below.

Problem 1:

Little or no anxiety is produced on the first or second cycle of an anxiety hierarchy item.

CAUSE	SOLUTION
The situation is not being imagined vividly enough.	Describe the situation in greater detail. <i>or</i> Imagine the scene for a longer period of time.
The situation induces a lower level of anxiety than a previous item.	Describe the situation in greater detail. <i>or</i> Eliminate this item.

Problem 2:

A high level of anxiety persists after numerous cycles.

CAUSE	SOLUTION
The situation has not been placed in the appropriate order in your hierarchy.	Develop a new item to be placed before this item. <i>or</i> Place this item later in your hierarchy.
The situation is so embellished that it contains elements of scenes later in your hierarchy.	Rewrite the description of this item.
You are focusing on a scene too long for the intensity of anxiety it has the power to produce.	Decrease the amount of time imagining the scene. <i>or</i> Rewrite the item to break it into two new items.