builtbymeli

NAME _____

DATE _____

Building Your ERP Hierarchy

A structured exposure hierarchy with ritual prevention — the map for ERP practice.

WHAT ERP IS — AND WHAT IT IS NOT

Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) is the best-supported psychological treatment for OCD. It works best with a therapist trained in it, especially for the first exposures. Exposure means deliberately entering situations that trigger the obsession. Response prevention means refraining from the compulsion that usually follows. The goal is not to reduce anxiety through the exposure — it is to learn that the feared consequence does not occur, and that the discomfort is tolerable and temporary. ERP works by correcting the false belief that compulsions are necessary.

AN IMPORTANT NOTE ABOUT THIS HIERARCHY

This worksheet is for building the hierarchy — the ordered list of exposures from least to most difficult. The exposures themselves are recorded in an exposure practice record (the ERP Practice Record worksheet in this series). Build the full ladder here before beginning practice. A well-built hierarchy makes the exposure work more systematic and sustainable. Include ritual prevention — what you will refrain from doing — for each step, because an exposure without response prevention is not ERP.

NOTES

builtbymeli worksheets are self-guided educational tools, not therapy or clinical services. They do not reproduce any standardized clinical assessment. Use alongside therapy. If you are in crisis, call or text 988.

1 Your Exposure Hierarchy

Rate distress from 0–100 (SUDS — Subjective Units of Distress). Aim to have items spread across the range, not clustered at the top. Include both situational exposures (entering feared situations) and imaginal exposures (deliberate mental contact with feared content) where relevant. The ritual prevention column is essential — for each item, what specifically will you not do?

SUDS	EXPOSURE TASK — SPECIFICALLY WHAT YOU WILL DO	RESPONSE PREVENTION — WHAT YOU WILL NOT DO	TYPE
20–30			
30–40			
40–50			
50–60			
60–70			
70–80			

SUDS	EXPOSURE TASK — SPECIFICALLY WHAT YOU WILL DO	RESPONSE PREVENTION — WHAT YOU WILL NOT DO	TYPE
80–90			
90–100			

2 Planning the First Exposure

The first exposure sets the pattern for the work that follows. Plan it carefully — specific enough that there is no ambiguity about what you will do and what you will not do.

THE FIRST EXPOSURE I WILL ATTEMPT

Exactly what the task involves...
Where I will do it...
How long I will stay in the exposure...
What SUDS level I expect at the start...

RESPONSE PREVENTION FOR THIS EXPOSURE

Specifically what I will not do during and after this exposure — behavioral compulsions and mental compulsions both...
What I will do instead if the urge is strong...

3 What I Expect — and What ERP Will Teach Me

ERP works through new learning — you enter the situation expecting the feared outcome, and discover it does not occur (or the distress is manageable without the compulsion). Naming what you expect to learn is part of what makes ERP work.

WHAT OCD PREDICTS WILL HAPPEN WITHOUT THE COMPULSION

OCD says that if I don't do the compulsion...
The feared consequence is...

WHAT I AM WORKING TO LEARN THROUGH ERP

Through this exposure I am trying to discover that...
The new belief I am working toward is...

CLOSING REFLECTION

ERP is difficult and it asks a great deal of you. What is the reason you are willing to do this work?

Why this work matters to me...
What I am working toward...
What I want back from OCD...

BETWEEN-SESSION PRACTICE

Complete your first exposure before the next session and record what happens in an exposure practice record. Begin with an item in the 20–30 SUDS range. The hierarchy will evolve as you work — items may shift, new ones may emerge. That is expected. The hierarchy is a living document, not a fixed contract.

BRING TO YOUR SESSION

→ Are there any items on the hierarchy that feel impossible — and if so, can you identify a smaller step that would work as a bridge?

→ What is the response prevention that feels most difficult — and why?

→ What did you notice from completing the first exposure?

NOTES