

Coping Skills for Exposure

Supporting Yourself Through Anxiety-Provoking Situations

What This Worksheet Is For

Exposure therapy involves facing situations, thoughts, or objects that bring about fear or anxiety. It's normal to feel discomfort when doing this—but having the right coping strategies can make it easier to manage distress, build confidence, and follow through with your goals.

This worksheet introduces several coping skills and helps you choose the ones that work best for you. These skills are not meant to eliminate anxiety instantly, but to help you stay present and committed while anxiety naturally decreases over time.

You'll identify, practice, and reflect on the use of specific coping strategies before, during, and after exposure exercises.

Clinicians can use this worksheet alongside exposure hierarchies to improve emotional regulation, enhance self-efficacy, and prepare clients for gradual exposure.

Step 1: Learn Common Coping Skills for Exposure

Below are some coping skills often used in exposure therapy. Read through and check off the ones you'd like to try.

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Coping Skill	Description
<input type="checkbox"/>	Deep Breathing	Inhale slowly for 4 counts, hold for 4, exhale for 6. Calms the nervous system.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Grounding (5-4-3-2-1)	Name 5 things you see, 4 you can touch, 3 you hear, 2 you smell, 1 you taste.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supportive Self-Talk	Say things like "This is uncomfortable, not dangerous," or "I can handle this."
<input type="checkbox"/>	Progressive Muscle Relaxation	Tense and relax muscle groups to release physical tension.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Visualization	Picture a safe, calm place in your mind as you breathe and focus.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Paired Action	Face the fear while doing something comforting—like holding a grounding object.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Values-Based Motivation	Remind yourself why this exposure matters to you.
<input type="checkbox"/>	Movement or Posture Shift	Ground your body by standing tall, placing feet flat, or stretching gently.

Step 2: Choose Your Coping Skills Plan

Now select 2–3 coping strategies from the list above that feel most useful or appealing. These will be your go-to skills during exposure practice.

Coping Skill #1:

How will you use it during exposure?

Coping Skill #2:

How will you use it during exposure?

Coping Skill #3:

How will you use it during exposure?

Step 3: Practice and Reflect

Use your coping skills during an exposure activity this week. Then reflect on what worked, what didn't, and what to adjust for next time.

Describe the exposure situation you practiced:

What coping skills did you use?

Rate your anxiety before exposure (0–10): _____

Rate your anxiety after exposure (0–10): _____

Did your coping skills help you stay with the exposure? Why or why not?

What would you like to do differently next time?

Step 4: Create a Coping Skills Card

Write a quick summary of your top 2–3 coping skills to keep in your phone, notebook, or wallet. Having them ready when anxiety strikes helps reduce the urge to avoid or escape.

My Coping Skills Toolkit

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Clinician Tip

Use this worksheet to build client readiness before exposure begins or to troubleshoot avoidance behaviors mid-treatment. Reinforce the idea that coping skills do not eliminate fear—they help clients stay engaged long enough for anxiety to decrease naturally. Encourage repetition and refinement over time.