Exposure and Response Prevention

OCD: Recording the ERP Practice You Plan With Your Therapist

Exposure and response prevention (ERP) is a therapy for OCD where you face what triggers your fear and then hold off on the compulsion. Psychologist Victor Meyer first described it in 1966. Researchers including Edna Foa later developed and tested it, and it is now a first-line therapy for OCD. ERP is done with a trained therapist, who plans each step with you. Use this worksheet to understand the steps and to record the practice you and your therapist agree on.

1 How ERP works

An **obsession** is an unwanted thought, image, or urge that causes anxiety. A **compulsion** is anything you do to make that anxiety go away. In ERP, the **exposure** is facing the trigger on purpose, and the **response prevention** is choosing not to do the compulsion afterward.

Obsession	Compulsion	Exposure	Response prevention
Germs on door handles will make me sick.	*Washing my hands for several minutes.*	*Touch the kitchen door handle.*	*Wait an hour before washing my hands.*
I left the stove on and the house will burn.	*Going back to check it again and again.*	*Turn the stove off and leave the house.*	*Check once, then do not go back.*

Why does this work? *A compulsion brings quick relief, which teaches your brain that the danger was real and the ritual kept you safe. That keeps the cycle going. When you face the trigger and skip the compulsion, you learn that the anxiety usually eases on its own and that you can cope with it while it lasts. With repeated practice, many people find the fear and the urge get weaker.*

2 Before you start, with your therapist

- Make a fear ladder together, from the triggers that bother you a little to the ones that scare you most.
- Start low on the ladder and move up only when your therapist agrees you are ready. Do not try your strongest fears on your own.
- Agree which compulsions you are dropping, including hidden ones like checking in your head, counting, or asking for reassurance.

The compulsions my therapist and I agreed I will work on dropping:

This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.

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3 ERP practice log

Rate your anxiety from 0 (none) to 10 (the most you can imagine) before, at the highest point, and at the end. Write down whether you did the compulsion. If you did, that is useful information to bring to your therapist.

Date	Exposure I practiced	Before	Highest	End	Did I do the compulsion?
Mon 3/9	*Touched the kitchen door handle, then made a snack*	*6*	*8*	*3*	*No, I waited an hour*

4 What I learned

What happened to my anxiety when I did not do the compulsion?

What I want to talk about with my therapist next time:

ERP should feel hard but manageable. If a practice feels overwhelming, stop and talk it through with your therapist before trying it again.

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