

EXPOSURE RULES

Purpose of Exposure: To challenge the distorted belief that you are incapable of tolerating uncertainty about your harm-related thoughts and feelings.

1. Don't do exposure in a manner where accidental harm is likely to take place.

- There is no reason Exposure Response Prevention (ERP) should include risk-taking behaviors that fall outside of generally understood safety principles. Example: *A therapist will not ask you to run in the middle of the street, or drive blindfolded.*
- We do take the risk of driving with a seatbelt, at a reasonable speed, and with our disturbing thoughts, but without compulsions.

2. You don't have to violate your values in the name of ERP.

- Nothing about exposures demands that you violate your personal moral or ethical code.
- Your OCD may make you doubtful about your moral and ethical code and your integrity; however, remember that this is the nature of OCD thoughts. Thoughts are not facts. Having thoughts does not make them reality.
- ERP does not ask you to harm anyone or engage in any particular behavior you believe inherently wrong.
- Ask yourself if the feeling of immorality is coming up from your values or from your OCD.
- Example: Allowing yourself to have scary thoughts while holding a knife to cut an apple in the same room as your therapist or a loved one may feel immoral, but is it really? My guess is that holding a knife to cut an apple in someone's presence does not itself go against your values.

3. No Testing!

- Testing or checking to be certain about your feelings about the exposure renders the exposure useless.
- Trying to prove that you won't harm yourself or others or trying to prove that you're not a "BAD" person only interferes with your ability to expose yourself to UNCERTAINTY and teaches the brain that your tests are valid assessments of reality. This is a compulsion to receive certainty and reassurance. This is not a treatment strategy.