

Building an Exposure Hierarchy

A hierarchy is a core component of Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP), used to structure feared situations into manageable steps for gradual exposure progression.

Situations are typically ranked from least to most distressing using the Subjective Units of Distress Scale (SUDS), rated on a 0–10 or 0–100 scale. Aim to include at least five scenarios to allow for gradual exposure progression, though 10 or more can offer flexibility and precision in treatment planning.

Below is an example hierarchy for harm-related obsessions targeting avoidance of sharp objects

Situation	SUDS Rating
Hold a butter knife while alone in the house	2
Hold a butter knife while near my family	4
Cook with sharp knives while my family is in another room	5
Record and listen to a script of how I could harm my loved ones	6
Cook dinner tableside for my family with sharp knives	8
Holding a sharp knife while next to a loved one	9
Hold a sharp knife while listening to my recorded script	10

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Situation	SUDS Rating

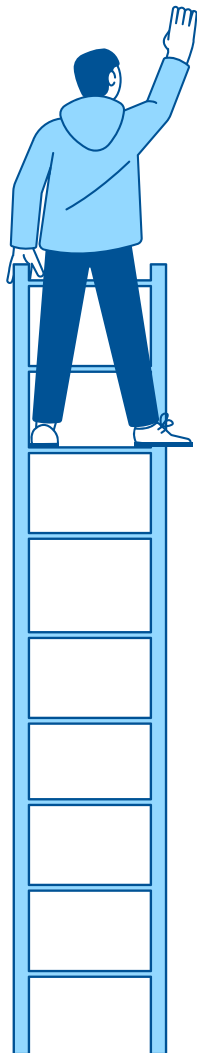


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The Fear Ladder

A hierarchy is a core component of Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP), used to structure feared situations into manageable steps for gradual exposure progression.

Items are typically arranged from least to most distressing using the Subjective Units of Distress Scale (SUDS). The ladder can include SUDS ratings or rely on height alone to illustrate increasing difficulty.



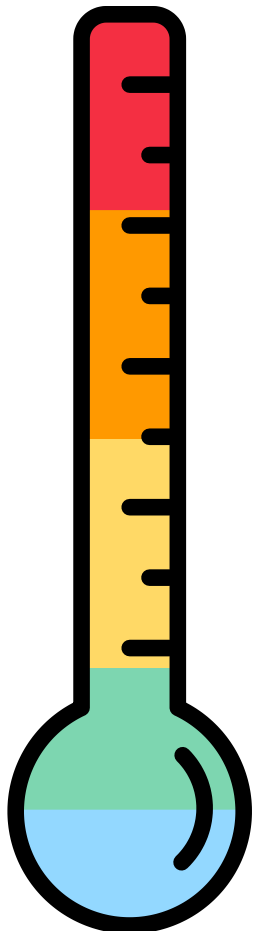
Situation	SUDS

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The Fear Thermometer

A hierarchy is a core component of Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP), used to structure feared situations into manageable steps for gradual exposure progression.

Items are typically arranged from least to most distressing using the Subjective Units of Distress Scale (SUDS). The thermometer can include SUDS ratings or rely on “temperature” alone to illustrate increasing difficulty.

	Situation	SUDS
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____
	_____	_____