Exposure and response prevention explained

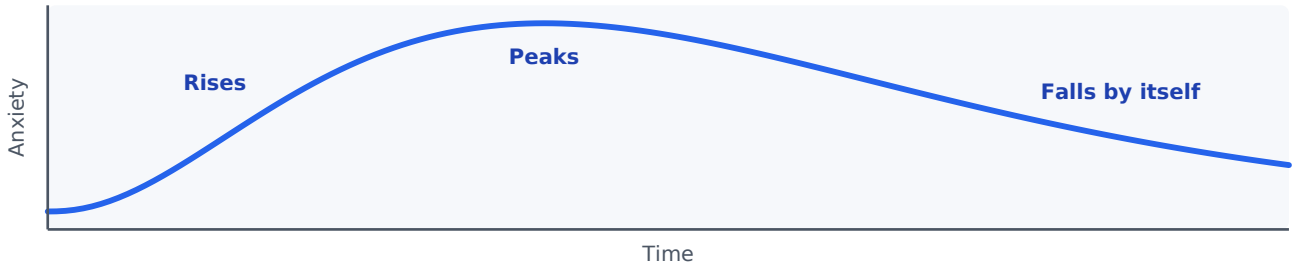
How exposure and response prevention works, and how to do it.

ERP has two halves, and both matter.

Exposure
Deliberately facing the thoughts, objects and situations that set off your obsessions, starting with easier ones.

Response prevention
Not doing the compulsion afterwards. No washing, checking, reviewing, asking or cancelling out. You stay with the feeling and let it pass.

What happens



At first the anxiety climbs, and every instinct says to do the compulsion. If you wait, it peaks and begins to fall by itself. You learn two things: the feared outcome does not happen, and you can bear the feeling.

The rules

1. **Plan it.** We build a ladder together. You choose each step.
2. **Do it fully.** Really touch it, really think it, really leave it unchecked.
3. **No compulsions, including mental ones.** No "it will be fine" either. That is reassurance.
4. **Stay with it** until the urge has clearly dropped, or until you have learned what you came to learn.
5. **Repeat** daily until it becomes boring. Then move up.

Common pitfalls

- Doing the exposure, then a small or delayed compulsion "just to be safe".
- Swapping a visible compulsion for a mental one.
- Getting someone else to check or reassure.
- Distracting yourself so you are not really there.

What to expect
ERP is hard, and it is meant to be. Anxiety during a practice means you are doing it right. People are often surprised by how quickly the first steps become easy.

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My ERP ladder

Exposure steps, from manageable to hardest.

Name _____ Date _____

For each step, write what you will face and what you will not do afterwards. Rate how distressing it would be if you did it without any compulsion: 0 (none) to 100 (the worst imaginable).

Step	What I will face	What I will not do afterwards	Distress (0 to 100)
8 (hardest)			
7			
6			
5			
4			
3			
2			
1 (easiest)			

Begin with a step rated around 30 to 50. Practise it every day until the distress has roughly halved, then move up.

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