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## About Lauren J. Hoffman, PsyD

Dr. Hoffman is a licensed clinical psychologist in NYC who helps children, teens, and adults face fears and build confidence and connection. She is passionate about making evidence-based tools, like exposure therapy, more engaging, practical, and approachable in daily life.

Learn more at

[www.laurenhoffmanpsych.com](http://www.laurenhoffmanpsych.com)

# THE EXPOSURE DECK

Social Anxiety Edition

INSTRUCTION GUIDE  
FOR THERAPISTS

# THE EXPOSURE DECK

Social Anxiety Edition

## INSTRUCTION GUIDE

This guide is for therapists. Adults using the deck on their own should refer to the **Quick Start Guide for Clients**.

Use The Exposure Deck to support exposure therapy, generate ideas for in-session practice, and encourage between-session challenges. Cards can also spark conversations about social fears, avoidance, or friendship skills.

**\*Themes may overlap. Settings are suggestions. Adapt freely.**

## THEMES



**Being Seen** (22 cards):

Let yourself be noticed by others.



**Get Digital** (15 cards):

Practice safe, connection-building online interactions.



**In the Spotlight** (29 cards):

Say, show, or do something in front of others.



**Making Connections** (32 cards):

Start or deepen connection & conversation.



**Real Life Skills** (27 cards):



Handle daily situations that involve interaction.



**Speaking Up** (25 cards):

Ask, assert, disagree, or express a need.

## SETTINGS

- **In-Session (Therapist Only):**  In-office challenges involving just the therapist.
- **In-Session (Others Involved):**  Office staff, waiting rooms, hallways.
- **Community:** Cafes, stores, libraries, other public spaces.
- **Daily Life:** At school, work, or in everyday routines.

## WAYS TO USE THE CARDS

- **Build a fear ladder:** choose ~15 cards from one theme. Sort by difficulty level.
- **Draw a challenge of the day or week** from a chosen theme or setting.
- **Use cards as discussion starters** to explore avoided or feared situations.
- **Make it a game:** earn points toward rewards for completing cards.

## HOW TO USE THE EXPOSURE DECK

### Step 1: Build a Fear Ladder

Pick one theme to focus on (e.g., Making Connections). Select ~15 cards and sort them from least to most difficult. This becomes your "ladder" to guide exposure work.

### Step 2: Pick a Starting Point & Actionable Goal

Choose a challenge that's a little uncomfortable but doable.

Set **action goals**, not feeling goals → "Ask 3 questions" vs. "Don't feel scared"

Repeat as needed and adjust difficulty as confidence grows.

If needed, **model → do it together → fade support**: therapist demonstrates, client shadows, then practices independently.

## HOW TO USE THE EXPOSURE DECK

### Step 3: Modify for What's Available

- Substitute roles (therapist for front desk staff)
- Use pretend scenarios (menus, phones, mirrors)
- Adjust context (classmate → sibling, coworker → friend)
- Layer complexity (add silly twists, time limits, an audience)

### Step 4: Practice, Reflect, Celebrate

Try the challenge. Afterwards, reflect:

- "What did you notice?"
- "What was the hardest / easiest part?"
- "Did anything surprise you?"

**Celebrate Bravery & Willingness.**  
Effort counts more than outcome.

## IMPORTANT REMINDERS FOR THERAPISTS

These cards are not a substitute for clinical judgment or training in exposure therapy. Always assess readiness, emotional / physical safety, and client consent. Modify or skip cards as needed.

### DO:

- Start small and build gradually
- Check in before and after each task
- Praise effort, not outcome
- Adapt to your environment
- Stop if client becomes overwhelmed
- Process strong emotional reactions

### DON'T:

- Push through resistance without collaboration
- Expect every exposure to happen in session
- Ignore signs of overwhelm or distress

## HANDLING STRONG EMOTIONAL REACTIONS

### When a Client Becomes Overwhelmed:

- **Pause immediately** - don't push through tears, panic, or shutdown
- **Validate the emotion**: "That felt really big. It makes sense you're feeling scared."
- **Scale it back**: "Let's try something smaller first."
- **Use grounding techniques**: Deep breathing, 5 senses, muscle relaxation
- **End on a positive**: Do an easier exposure, play a game, or celebrate a success

### Red Flags to Stop an Exposure:

- Panic attacks, crying, or hyperventilation
- Dissociation or "checking out"
- Aggressive responses or meltdowns
- Statements like "I can't" or "I want to leave"
- Physical symptoms (nausea, dizziness, headaches)

## TROUBLESHOOTING COMMON CHALLENGES

### "I don't want to do any of these"

- Modify the task to make it more fun or use their interests
- Use peer stories: "Another client told me this one was kind of fun."
- Make it into a game (points, tokens, challenge jar)
- Frame it as an "experiment"

### "What if people think I'm weird?"

- Remind them that most people are focused on themselves, not you
- Practice the "worst case scenario" and how you would handle it:  
If you ask a silly question, the clerk might look at you funny. That might feel awkward. We'll smile, say "Thanks anyway," and keep walking.
- Share stories of trying a similar challenge, even if it was awkward
- Start with very brief exposures and build

## TROUBLESHOOTING COMMON CHALLENGES

### "Isn't it rude to inconvenience someone on purpose?"

Remind the client:

- These are small requests or everyday mistakes people make all the time
- Most people don't mind or barely notice
- Staff are expected to help – it's part of their job
- We're practicing speaking up so you feel ready for real situations

### Avoidance Behaviors During Session

- Gently notice and name avoidance
- Break the task into smaller, more manageable steps
- Do the task side-by-side with the client or model the task

