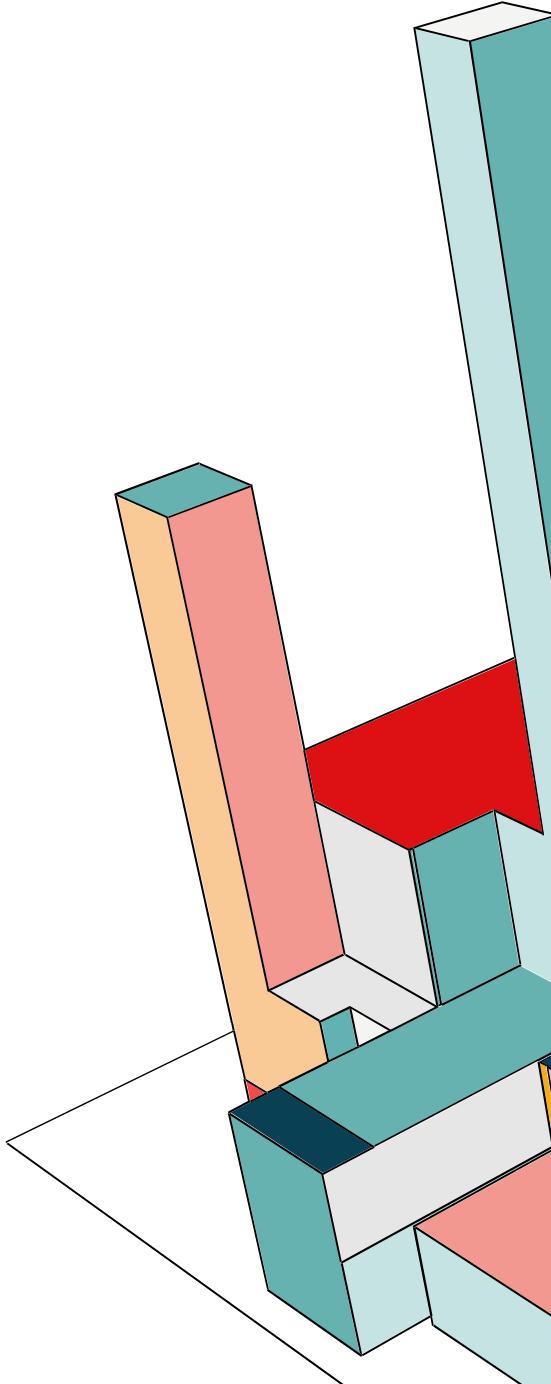


**INFORMAL EXPOSURE:**

**LIVING AN EXPOSURE  
LIFESTYLE**

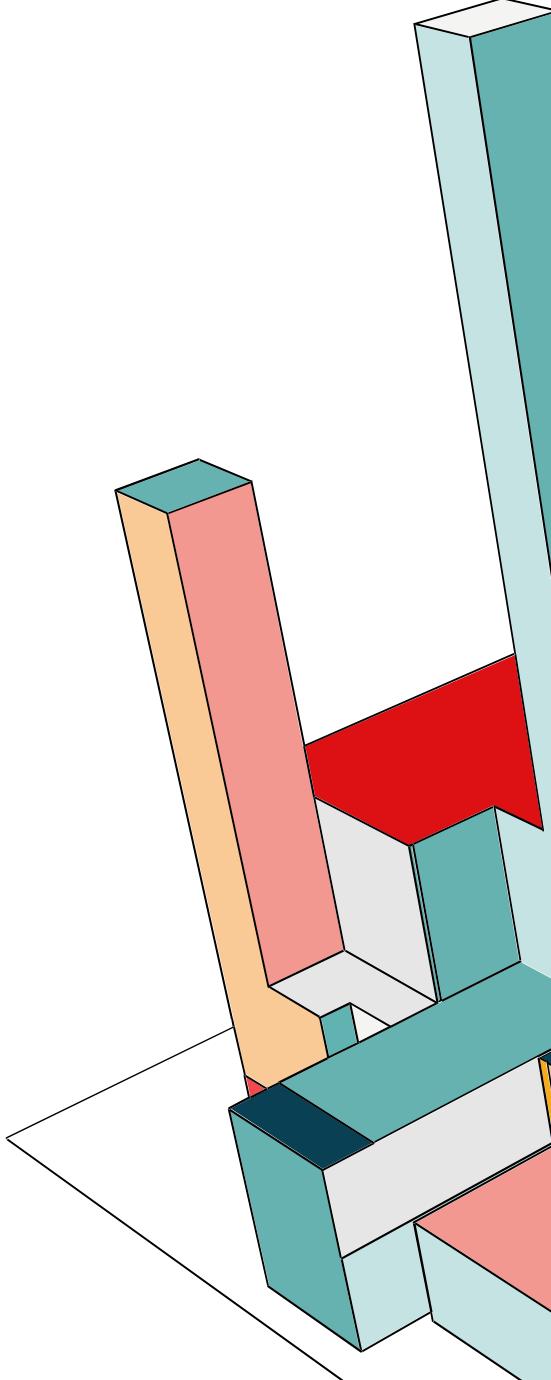
# WHAT ARE INFORMAL IN VIVOS?

- **Formal in vivos**
  - In vivo exposure practice planned with therapist
  - Identify fears testing, post-exposure coping plan, etc. in advance
  - Often complete Exposure Recording Form, SUDS, urge ratings, learning, etc.
- **Informal in vivos**
  - Riding out trauma-related emotions and memories triggered by a situation in daily life
  - Often comes up “on the fly” or with relatively less advance planning



# WHY ARE INFORMAL IN VIVOS IMPORTANT?

- Translates formal work in PHP into **situations that matter in our daily lives**
- More opportunities to **test beliefs** formed by trauma
  - Ex) open up to a friend with supportive response > “*maybe some people can be trusted*”
- Learning occurs in **real-time** and **actual life context**



# EXAMPLES

Formal exposure	Belief being tested	Informal exposure
	<i>I don't deserve to ask for help</i>	
	<i>I can't cope with reminders of my abuse</i>	
	<i>I don't deserve good things</i>	
	<i>My body is disgusting</i>	
	<i>I am worthless, incompetent</i>	

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# EXAMPLES

Formal exposure	Belief being tested	Informal exposure
Use DEAR MAN to ask friend to drive me to upcoming appointment	<i>I don't deserve to ask for help</i>	My car broke down, and I chose to call my friend and ask for a ride
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Use DEAR MAN to ask friend to drive me to upcoming appointment	<i>I don't deserve to ask for help</i>	My car broke down, and I chose to call my friend and ask for a ride
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Play my favorite game for 30 min	<i>I don't deserve good things</i>	
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Wear preferred revealing clothing	<i>My body is disgusting</i>	
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Wear preferred revealing clothing	<i>My body is disgusting</i>	At my annual doctor's appointment, I allow for a full physical exam
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Wear preferred revealing clothing	<i>My body is disgusting</i>	At my annual doctor's appointment, I allow for a full physical exam
Send an email with a typo on purpose	<i>I am worthless, incompetent</i>	I overcook dinner, and I serve it anyway and sit with my anxiety

# HOW TO APPROACH INFORMAL EXPOSURES

## Adopt an Exposure Lifestyle

A way to remember these skills is to remember the word **FREE**.

**F**ight Fear

- (do) Fight Fear
- Random acts of exposure
- Expand your world
- Embrace emotions

When fear shows up, CHECK THE FACTS to determine if it is justified. When fear does not fit the facts, use OPPOSITE ACTION and approach things that make you afraid ALL THE WAY without avoiding. Don't let fear limit your freedom!

**R**andom acts of exposure

NOTICE URGES TO AVOID and spontaneously choose to approach instead. LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES to randomly practice exposure and seize the moment when it arises. Use WISE MIND to decide when it is effective to approach rather than avoid.

**E**xpand your world

Be WILLING to do new things that make you uncomfortable. Try new activities, explore new places, and meet new people. SAY "YES" to things that are likely to INCREASE JOY and create new possibilities in your life. Let go of self-consciousness and PARTICIPATE fully in these new experiences.

**E**mbrace emotions

Allow yourself to EXPERIENCE EMOTIONS rather than trying to block or get rid of them. Let your emotions come and go naturally like a WAVE. Use MINDFULNESS OF CURRENT EMOTION to notice where you feel your emotions in your body. RADICALLY ACCEPT your emotions in order to achieve FREEDOM FROM SUFFERING.

# INFORMAL IN VIVOS: POINTS OF CAUTION

- Could backfire if too high on hierarchy or solid coping plan not in place
  - Escape or avoid the situation mid-way
  - Engage in safety behavior or “white knuckle”
- Miss opportunity for maximal learning by identifying beliefs testing in advance, tracking SUDS/urges, etc.
- Informal in vivos are NOT:
  - General distressing situations (non-trauma-related)
  - Harmful situations (e.g., being treated poorly, contact with past abuser)
  - Engaging in avoidance or safety behaviors (e.g., see man > leave store)

