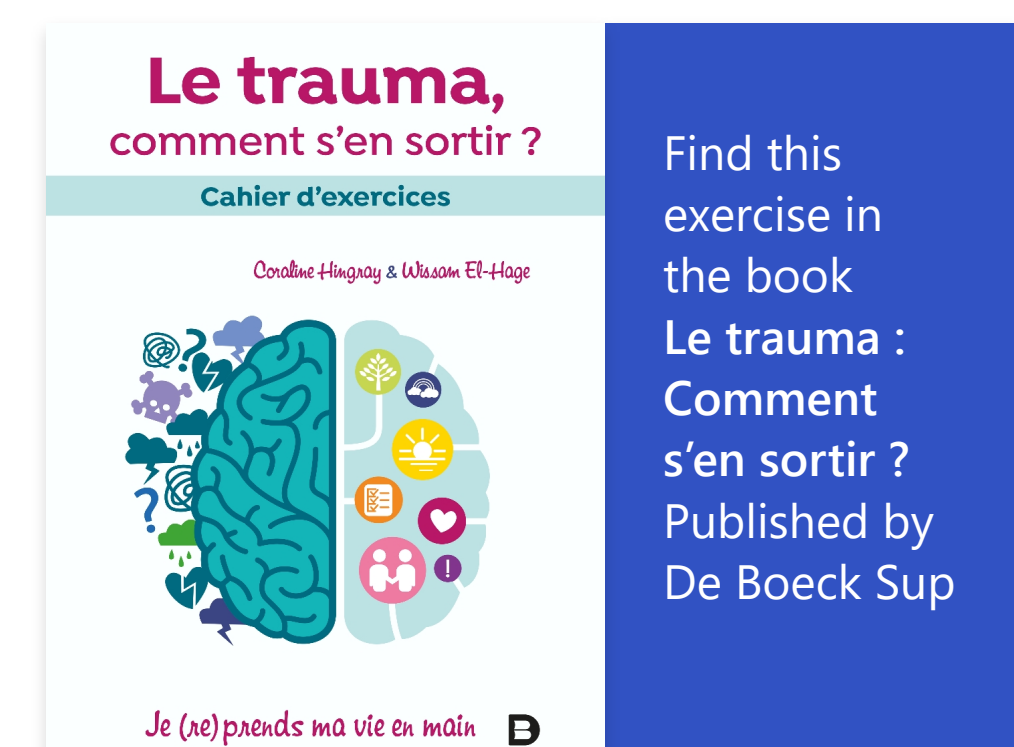


Practical information

CONFRONT THEM! FACE YOUR FEARS!



TRUE OR FALSE

“By avoiding what reminds them of the trauma, the victim feels reassured and soothed.” **False!** Even if they feel relieved at the time, this is a mechanism that actually increases the victim’s fear, reinforces their avoidance symptoms and reduces their autonomy and opportunities to flourish.

“A fear that is avoided grows, a fear that is faced decreases!” **True.** This is the habituation phenomenon, which we will explain in this section.

“Courage is about facing your fears, it’s not about having no fear at all!” **True.**

A REAL-LIFE EXPERIENCE

“ I never thought that I would be able to walk down the street where I had the accident again, let alone drive there! And yet, by starting with exercises based on less difficult situations, I realised that my fear, however unpleasant it was, eventually decreased and that it became weaker and weaker the more I repeated the exercise... I would never have thought it possible! I gained confidence, understood how my brain was confused and managed to do what was unthinkable six months ago! ”

SOME SCIENCE

Conditioning: at the time of your traumatic experience, you almost certainly felt fear. You also automatically recorded all the things that made up that moment (noises, smells, words, colours, objects), which your brain has associated with this fear. Through this spontaneous association, your body has been conditioned to respond automatically with fear or, at the very least, anxiety, when it finds itself in the presence of these things again. It will therefore try to avoid them. By avoiding these

situations (noises, smells, words, colours, objects, memories) and by running away from them, you immediately feel relieved... But by doing this you are reinforcing the conditioning of your brain to believe that it was right to avoid this fear, which makes the situation worse.

Exposure: currently, the most recognised method of therapy for combating this conditioning is gradual exposure to the feared and avoided situations, as well as to the memory.

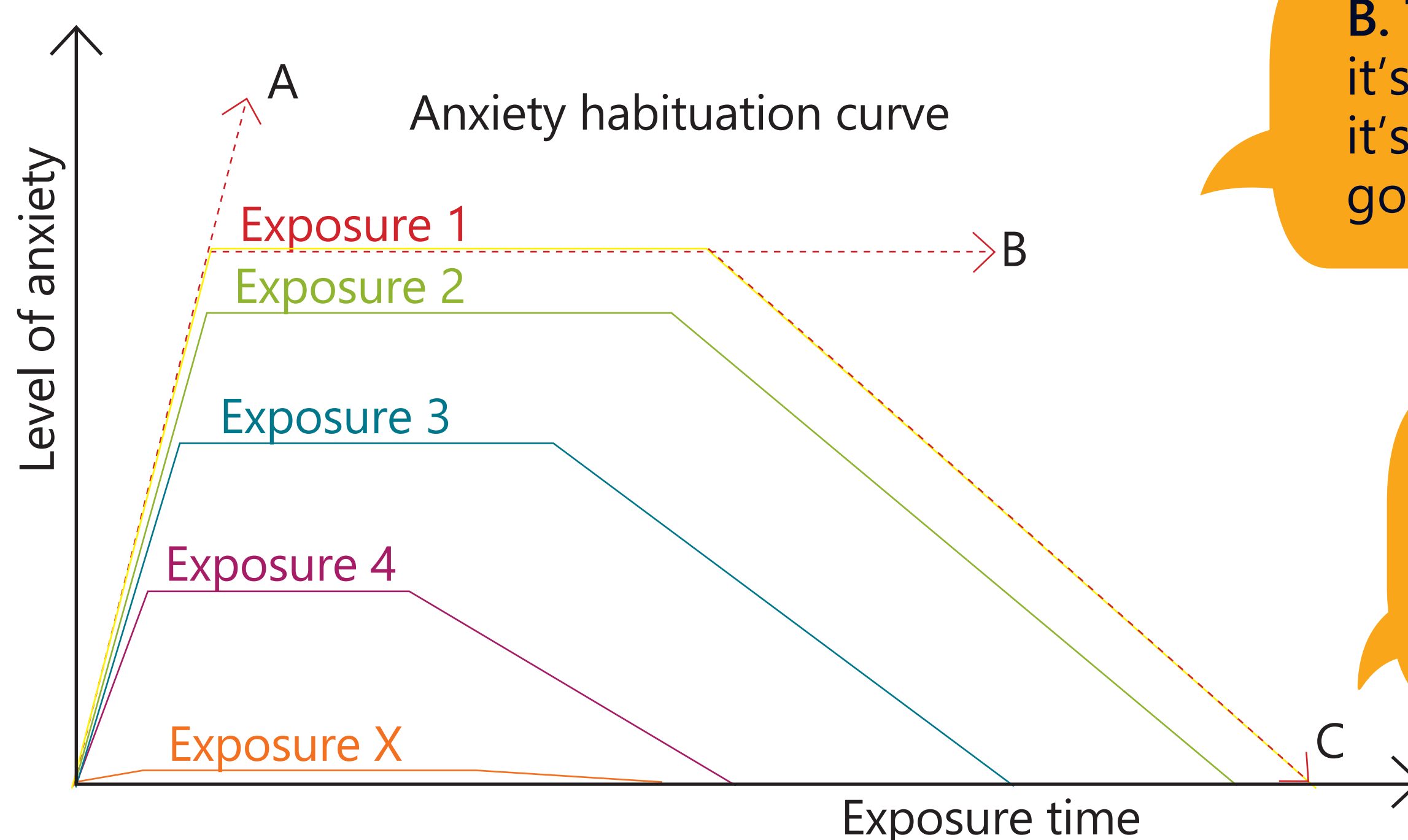
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A WORD FROM THE EXPERTS...

After a trauma, our fear sensor and threshold are out of balance. Fear is triggered excessively! You start to avoid more and more situations, thoughts and memories associated with the traumas. But the more you avoid them, the more you reinforce a fear that risks becoming ingrained. The goal of therapy is therefore to expose yourself to and confront the situations and memories that you have avoided and that frighten you, but in a gradual way, without putting yourself in danger. Each time you avoid them, you are also not making progress towards reaching a plateau or decreasing the anxiety, and so you are reinforcing the idea that the only way to reduce the anxiety is to avoid the triggers, but it always ends up decreasing spontaneously! For this, it is important to understand the **habituation curve** shown below. Let's look at what happens when we are frightened in a situation (exposure curve 1). The horizontal axis shows time (the further to the right you go, the more time passes). The vertical axis shows the level of anxiety (the higher it is, the more anxious you are). All scientific research has shown that when you repeat the same exercise over a long enough time, the anxiety level decreases more and more.



A. Anxiety rises:

it's getting worse and worse, it's going to rise more and more, I'm going to die, I can't take it any more.

B. The plateau:

it's not going away, it's unbearable, it's never going to end.

C. Habituation:

it's starting to become bearable, it's decreasing as time goes by.

THE ESSENTIALS

Progressive exposure is a powerful, concrete and scientifically proven way to:

- Reduce the physical sensations of fear and anxiety in the presence of things that remind you of the trauma.
- Encourage the resumption of activities that had been avoided and social contact.
- Increase self-confidence and feel pride.