

Beyond Talking: Targeted Exposures For the Bathroom & Eating

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Outline of Our Time Together

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Exposures

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Q & A

Acknowledgements

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Housekeeping

- Please stay for the entire presentation in order to obtain credit (CE- Go tracks this)
 - After the presentation, go into attendee dashboard and fill out the evaluation, which will generate the certificate
 - Please use the Q and A and/or chat (click anonymous if you want this)
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We Asked You!



Within the Facebook group- Parents of Children With Selective Mutism...

We asked YOU what your child struggles with most :

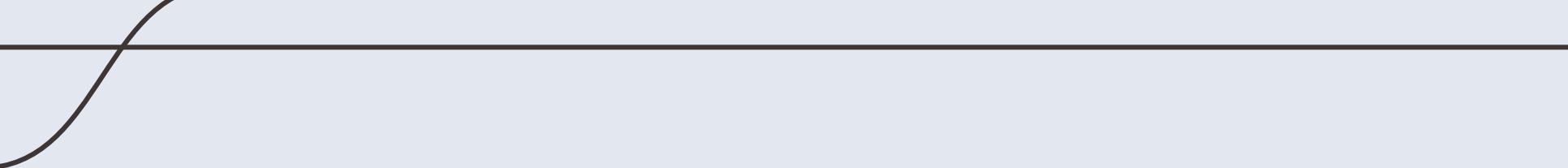
46% using bathroom at school

18% Using bathroom in public

24% Eating at School

10% Eating in Public

Note: Difficulties using the bathroom outside of the home and/or eating are not related diagnostically to SM, but they are common in children with SM.



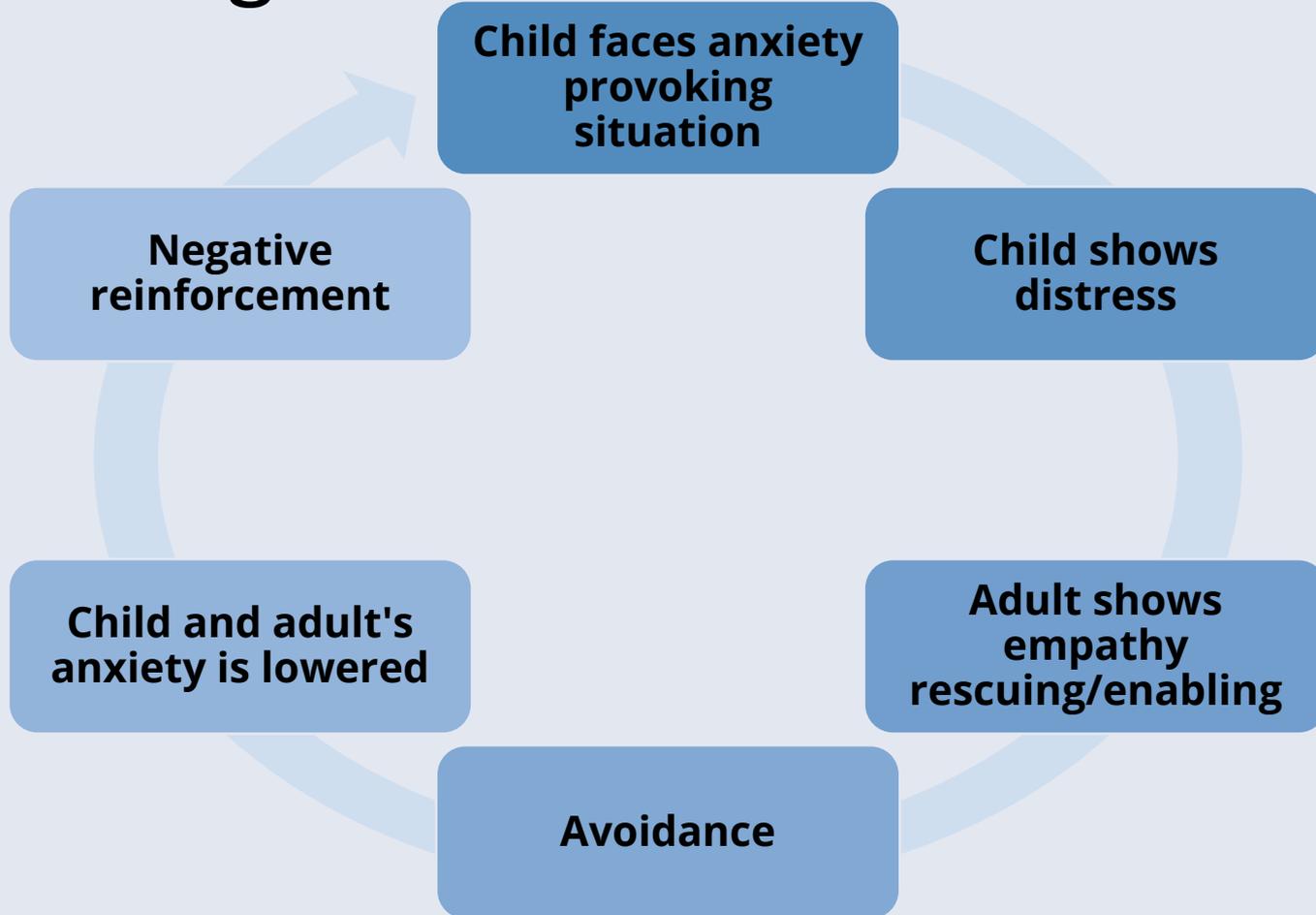
01
Anxiety &
Exposures



What Do We Know About Things That Cause Distress?

- It's natural to avoid things that cause distress or are perceived as "dangerous" (this keeps us alive!)
 - "False alarm"
 - Kids can't always tell us clearly what the concern is
 - they SHOW it in the body
 - Hiding, crying, protesting, resisting
 - Parents/caregivers *naturally* want to relieve their child's distress
 - Practicing something (even avoidance) means you get better at it
 - eg- only using a bathroom with a parent present or waiting to eat until after school.
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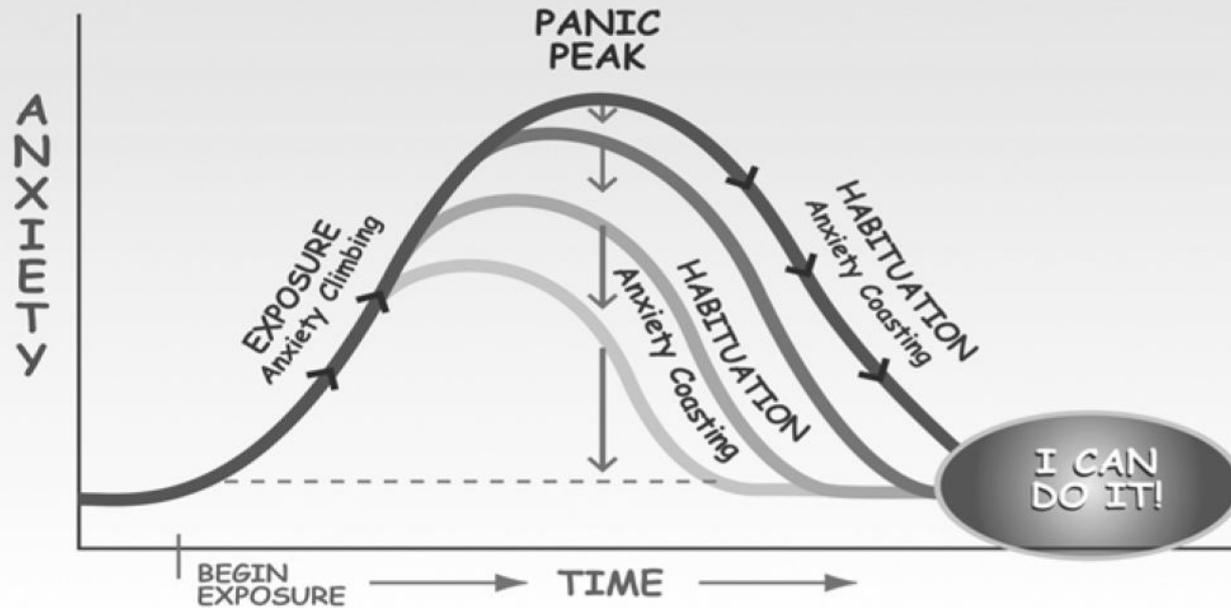
What's Negative Reinforcement?





The best way to help your child overcome their fears is by practicing the hard things (exposures)

Practice Makes it Easier



Exposure & Bravery Ladders

Fear Ladder: Organize specific steps in exposures starting from easiest to hardest.

Exposure: Planned practice of small steps on fear ladder to practice facing fear.

- One small step at a time
- Start easy where a child is already successful
- Keep it simple
- Avoid jumping on the ladder

Practice exposure on fear ladder
+ REWARD for doing a hard things

= learning hard things are no longer TOO hard

WASH RINSE REPEAT!

Use Of Rewards and Reinforcement

- Labeled praise + rewards
- Immediate reinforcement
- Stickers, checks, small prize
- Charts - the visual helps!
- Can use social rewards

02

Bathroom



Common Bathroom Fears

- Different fears related to bathroom
- Social fears
- Separation fears
- Bathroom itself / experience / sensory experience
- Speaking/Self Advocacy

Sample bathroom ladder

Independent Success



5

Child independently raises hand and asks to use the bathroom in front of the class

4

Child spontaneously asks to use the bathroom individually

3

Child is prompted to ask for the bathroom verbally

2

Child uses a nonverbal signal for bathroom use

1

Child is prompted to use restroom by teacher with no verbalization required "go ahead and go"

High Support

Sample bathroom ladder

Independent Success



- 5 Child goes with staff without parent
- 4 Staff takes child to bathroom with parent outside bathroom
- 3 Parent takes child to bathroom with staff outside bathroom
- 2 Parent takes child to bathroom with staff praising bathroom use (not in bathroom)
- 1 Parent takes child to bathroom at school and alone

High Support

Additional bathroom strategies

For School:

- Collaboration is key
- Making a planned ladder of steps to the goal

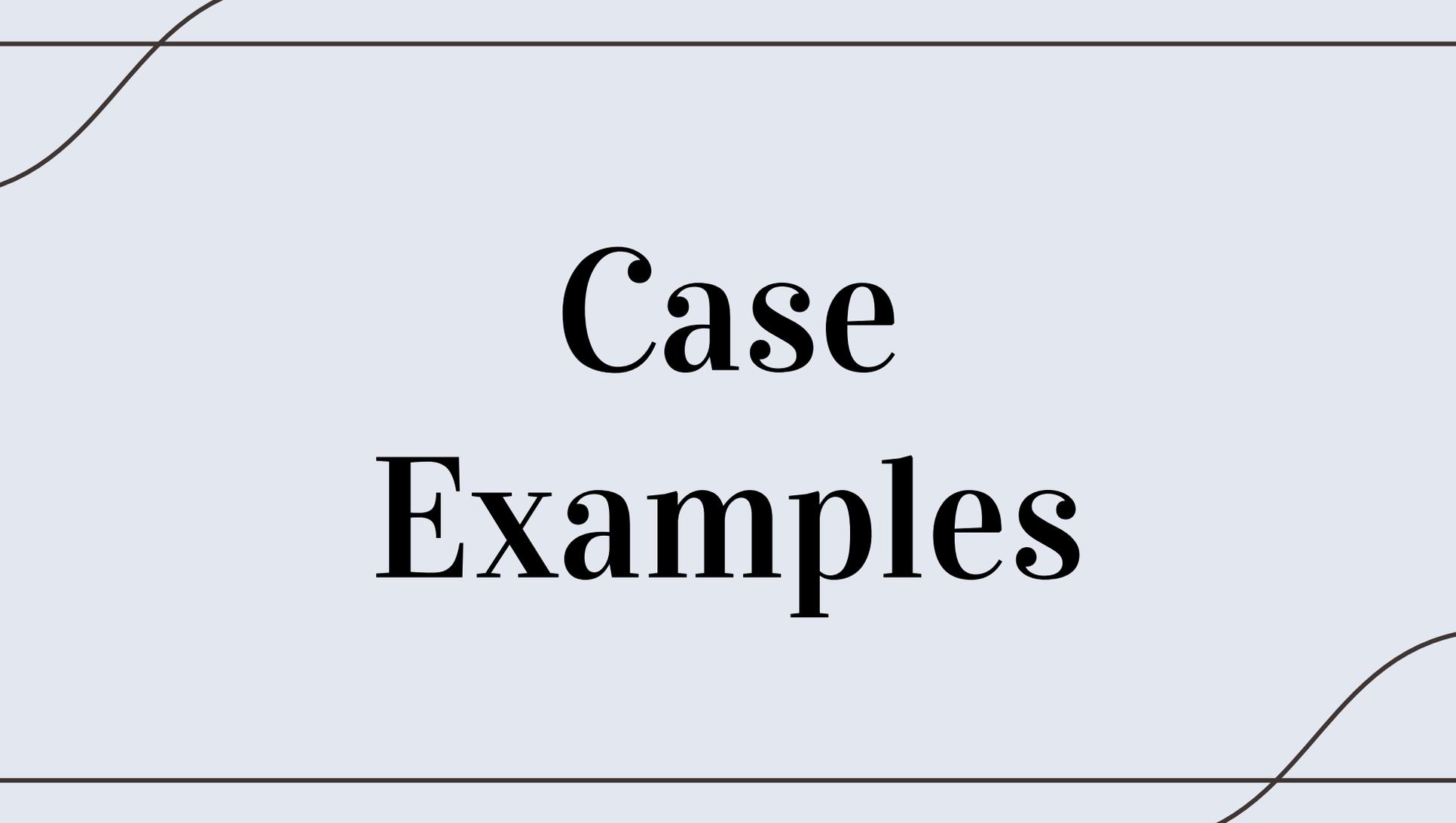
Other bathroom needs to create

- Specific toilet
- Going with buddy

Can apply these strategies to bathroom use in other places

For more severe symptoms:

- Start small!
 - Even exposures as short as sitting on toilet for 30 seconds
- Use shaping
- It's ok to use what works to get things started (eg iPad or a show) to make it a safe space



Case Examples

03

Eating

Common Eating Fears

- Social aspects
- Trying foods
- Advocating/Initiating
- Timing





Sample eating ladder

Independent Success



- 5 Child takes bites of school lunch among friends
- 4 Child eats bites of a less preferred lunch item among friends
- 3 Child eats bites of their favorite food among peers
- 2 Child eats bites of their favorite food away from their peers at the end of the table
- 1 Child eats a predetermined number of bites of their favorite food in cafeteria at an empty table

High Support

Additional eating strategies



For school:

- Pack child's favorite foods for eating practice
- Identify key person at school who will prompt eating practice
- Find a quiet location for eating practice
- Consider social dynamics to reduce difficulty so child can meet basic needs, then increase demand over time

Other eating needs:

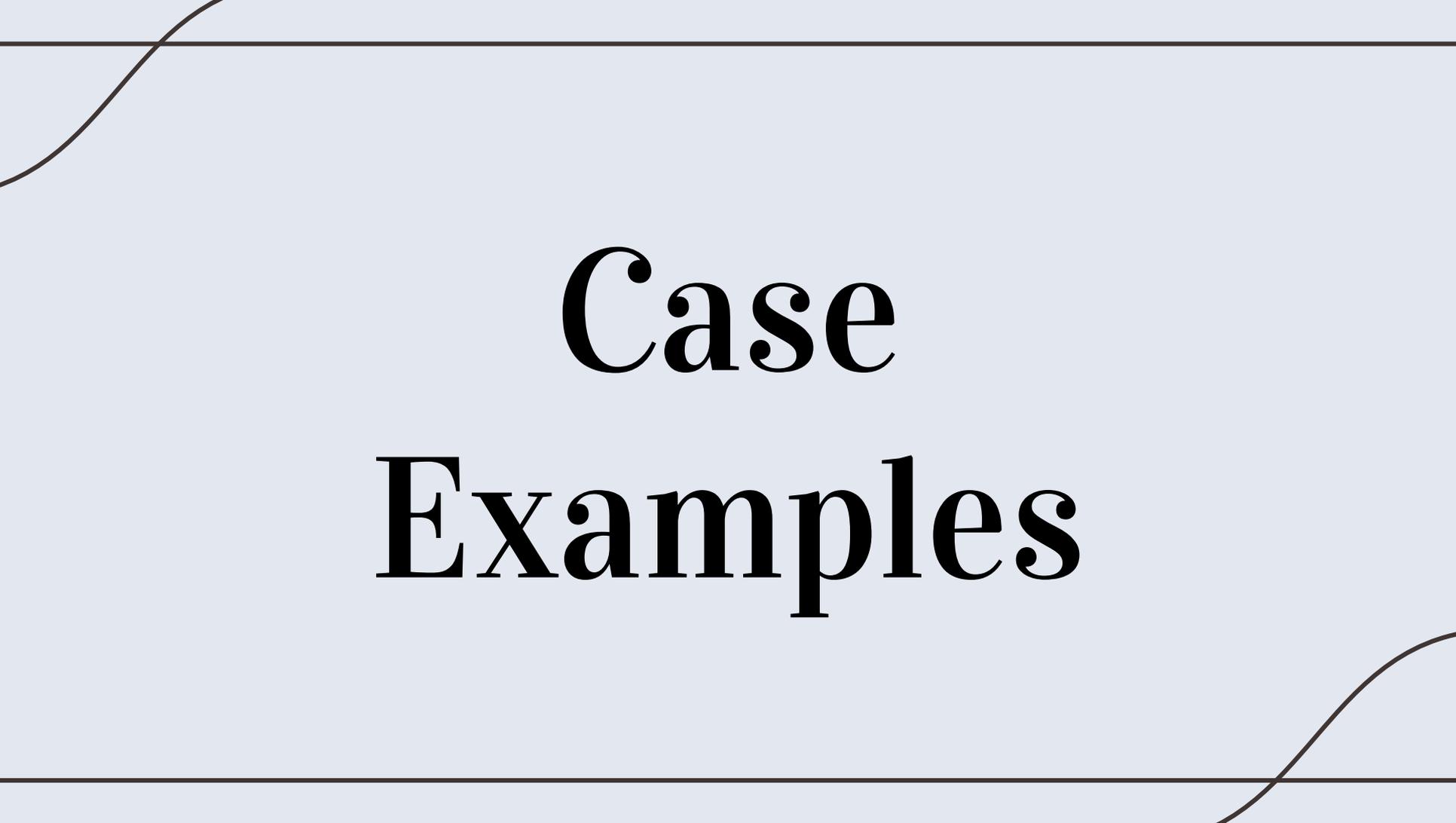
- More strategies
 - Create visual eating cues
 - Pre cut bites that child needs to eat during food practice
 - Play something distracting during food practice
 - Eating timer for time management
 - Utensils vs no utensils
 - Easy open containers



Additional eating strategies

For more severe symptoms, you can detail the hierarchy

1. Child eats in an empty room with parent
2. Child eats in an empty room with parent + teacher teacher faces a wall
3. Child eats in an empty room with parent behind a barrier while teacher faces child
4. Child eats in empty room behind barrier while teacher faces child and parent is outside
5. Child eats in an empty room with a teacher without barrier



Case Examples

Practice creating your own fear ladder

Independent Success



5

4

3

2

1

High Support



Child's Reaction During Exposures

Expect that anxiety will initially increase

- Ride the wave!
- This can look like...
 - Crying/distress
 - Aggressive behavior
 - Debate, negotiating
 - Frozen response
 - Avoidance or change in activity to play

Parent Tips to Support

Parent behavior support considerations

- Keep reassurance minimal
 - “You are okay” REDUCE!
- Eli Lebowitz (2008) concept of support
 -
- Enabling vs accommodating is a moving target

PRAISE WHAT YOU CAN and PRAISE OFTEN for anything associated with approach towards the exposure

Managing Adult Emotions

-

It is **normal** to feel distress when your child is anxious

- Tips:
 - Practice calm/neutral presence
 - Be aware of your facial expressions, word choice, and the intensity of the emotion you express
 - Use your own coping skills
 - Model frustration tolerance & non-anxious coping
 - Self-care
 - Oxygen to you first!
 - Support system
- Fake it before you make it
- Acknowledge that everyone is practicing hard things to normalize practice.

Managing Your Own Emotions

When the trusted adult or parents is nervous/fearful

- The child may conclude that a variety of scenarios are unsafe

It is **normal** to feel distress when your child is anxious

- Good parents want to fix it, parents of anxious children have to practice

What to do?

- Practice self-regulation to encourage this in the child (helps everyone)
- Remain (and practice) calm/neutral
 - Be aware of your facial expressions, word choice, and the intensity of the emotion you express
- Use your own coping skills
 - Model frustration tolerance & non-anxious coping
- Practice hard things and let your children observe (modeling)
- Acknowledge that everyone is practicing hard things

The doing hard things brave team cohesion matters!

- Who is on the brave team?
 - Parents / Teachers / Other Caregivers
- What system are needed to have consistency?
- It is important that parents are **consistent** in their messages to their children.
 - Established knowing boundaries and expectations.
 - Reinforces the messaging
- All caregivers should be involved in home practice
 - Rotate AM/PM roles to create equity and consistency in delivering brave challenges
 - Allows for increased practice in multiple places for generalization
- If team is not cohesive, there is higher risk that new behaviors only develops in some places with certain people.

Putting It All Together

Building distress tolerance to new hard things requires practice, awareness and trust that we provide approachable goals for a child.

Moving slow is fast progress. Prioritize building bravery to increase self-efficacy before moving up the ladder.

Simplify & trust the process.

Helpful Resources

- Selective Mutism Association
- SPACE

selectivemutism.org
spacetreatment.net

Thank You- Questions?

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