Recommended Skills for CBT for Anxiety Disorders

An CBT therapist will demonstrate the ability to skillfully:

- Work collaboratively with clients
- Be Socratic
- Provide psychoeducation about anxiety, its causes, and its treatment
- Present a cognitive-behavioral formulation of anxiety to emphasize the misappraisals of threat and avoidance in maintaining fears
- Develop a client-specific cognitive-behavioral case-conceptualization and present the formulation to the particular client.
- Teach Cognitive Restructuring for evaluating problematic thoughts
  - Assist client in identifying automatic thoughts related to specific fears
  - Use socratic questioning to help client highlight logical errors in automatic thoughts, particularly “over-estimating likelihood of threat” and “catastrophizing the potential impact of the threat”
- Develop a Fear Hierarchy rank ordering specific feared stimuli or situations and identify strategies (avoidance, rituals, etc.) the client uses to control anxiety or minimize perceived threat
- Identify optimal format for exposures depending on the feared stimuli or situations (in vivo for external stimuli or situations, interoceptive for bodily sensations, imaginal for worries, intrusive thoughts, or traumatic memories).
- Work collaboratively with clients to develop specific exposures that will likely induce moderately high levels of activation (e.g., 7 out of 10)
- Identify expected automatic thoughts, and use cognitive restructuring to generate alternate possible outcomes
- Work with client to minimize or eliminate the use of safety behaviors during exposures
- Maintain exposure until anxiety begins to decrease (or plateau, if necessary)
- Debrief after the exposure to compare the expected outcomes (automatic thoughts), alternative possibilities (from the Cognitive Restructuring), and actual outcomes from the exposure
- Develop and reinforce a schedule of “homework” exposures to help generalize the treatment effects
- Develop strategies with the client to minimize relapse or return-of-fear