Desensitization:

Some children have phobias that interfere with normal functioning. For some children a neighbor’s pet or a visit to the doctor’s office can provoke anxiety. Desensitization is a step by step approach to getting a child to deal with anxiety.

For example, in the case of a child who is afraid of their neighbor’s fenced dog, one might desensitize the child using the following sequence:

- Looking at pictures of dogs
- Going outside and observing the dog from a distance
- Teaching the child to read the dog’s mood (e.g. wagging tail is friendly; growling means stay away)
- Going outside and gradually moving closer to the yard that contains the dog
- Petting a friendly dog
- Petting the neighbor’s dog through the fence with an adult near by
- Petting the dog in the yard with an adult near by

In the case of a child who is extremely afraid of injections, one might desensitize the child using the following sequence;

- Reading about a child going to the doctor’s office
- Talking to peers who have received vaccines
- Visiting the doctor’s office and playing in the waiting room
- Visiting the doctor’s office and being examined without an injection
- Visiting the doctor’s office and pretending to receive a vaccine
- Returning to receive an actual vaccine