

Social Phobia

Patient Treatment Manual

This manual is both a guide to treatment and a workbook for people who suffer from social phobia. During treatment, it is a workbook in which individuals can record their own experience of social phobia, together with the additional advice for their particular case given by their clinician. After treatment has concluded, this manual can serve as a self-help resource when challenges or difficulties are faced.

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Introduction

Social phobia is a treatable condition. This manual takes you step by step through a cognitive behavioural program. By working through it you will learn about the nature of social phobia, anxiety, and panic. Not only will you learn skills that will enable you to develop more control over your anxiety, you will also learn to worry less about appearing anxious and about being evaluated.

To learn these skills will require time and effort. To be effective, they will need to be practiced regularly. The more you put in, the more you will get out of the program. However, you are unlikely to be completely cured by the time you get to the last page, or even to the last session of your treatment program. To get lasting improvement you need to be prepared to go on working. Research around the world has demonstrated the possibility of long-term achievements, as well as continued improvement.

What Is Social Phobia?

Social phobia is a fear of being scrutinized, evaluated, or the center of attention. However, the real underlying fear is of being evaluated *negatively*. People with social phobia commonly fear that others will find fault with them or think that they are incompetent or strange. They may worry that this will occur during social interaction with one or more other people, when they are doing something under observation or even in situations where there is just the chance that they may attract attention. Sometimes, this may involve just being with others.

The person with social phobia believes that being judged negatively may result from being seen to be anxious (for example, blushing, sweating, trembling, or shaking), from saying or doing something embarrassing, appearing awkward or making a mistake. Some also believe that there is some aspect of their appearance or behavior that may attract criticism.

Feared situations include public speaking (including tutorials and presentations), parties, writing or signing one's name under scrutiny, standing in a line, using the phone with others around, eating or drinking in public, using public toilets, and public transportation. Some individuals fear that embarrassing bodily functions will occur inappropriately, for example, losing control of bowel or bladder, passing flatus, vomiting, stomach noises.

The main fears in social phobia may relate more to *performance* situations or more to *social interaction*. There may be great anxiety about looking anxious or even having a panic attack in these situations. The individual may believe that this anxiety will be obvious and will lead others to evaluate them negatively. When social interaction is the main fear, the individual often worries about having nothing to say, being boring, saying something inappropriate or being judged as inadequate in some way. In any case, social situations are either endured with intense anxiety and discomfort (during which, panic attacks may occur) or are avoided. Anxiety and avoidance may be linked to only one situation, (circumscribed social phobia) but commonly occur in many situations (generalized social phobia).

The fears in social phobia are excessive and unreasonable. While in the situation, feeling acutely anxious and convinced that things are going badly, it may not seem that the fear is unreasonable. However, most individuals with social phobia realize that their anxiety in social situations is much greater than for those who do not suffer from the disorder. Thinking about things more calmly once

out of the situation it is usually possible to accept that the anxiety triggered by the actual circumstances was excessive. More about this later.

How Does Social Phobia Differ from Shyness and Normal Social Anxiety?

Many people describe themselves as shy, although there is no clear definition of what this means! Shyness with others, or increased self-consciousness, occurs in phases through childhood. It is common in the teenage years as an individual starts to think about how others might see them. For most people, this type of social anxiety decreases with age.

Some social situations continue to cause a degree of anxiety for most people. Good examples are public speaking, or arriving alone at a social gathering of unfamiliar people. Normal social anxiety is not disabling, it settles quickly during or after the event, and it does not begin weeks before the event. There is no expectation of negative evaluation. Things are different for the person with social phobia. They tend to start worrying a long way in advance, the discomfort may well get worse as they stay in the situation, and next time they may be even more worried. Afterwards they may go over and over aspects of their performance with which they were unhappy. The reasons for this will be discussed in detail in a later section of the manual. Severe shyness that causes significant avoidance of social interaction or distressing anxiety in social situations is probably social phobia.

What is Avoidant Personality Disorder?

Individuals with avoidant personality disorder are anxious in almost all types of social interaction. They fear, and expect, not only negative evaluation, but also rejection or humiliation. There is often a sense of inferiority to others, low self esteem, and considerable avoidance of social interaction. Interestingly, looking anxious is often not the greatest concern of those with the avoidant personality style. These individuals may be far more anxious about how they are relating to others, and fearful that in some way they will be found inadequate or worthless and be rejected. The problem has usually been present since early childhood, and involves deeply ingrained patterns of thinking. Estimates vary greatly as to how common this problem is, but at least a quarter of those with social phobia will also have the avoidant personality style. Avoidant personality styles can be helped by the social phobia program because there is so much overlap between the two disorders. If you have an avoidant personality, you must be prepared for the fact that it will probably take some time to overcome your problems to a satisfactory degree because they have been present for so long, and to such an extent. In many cases, you will find it helpful to seek ongoing help with your problems after this program finishes. You can discuss this matter further with your therapist.

How Common is Social Phobia?

Social phobia has been documented across a range of cultures. It is estimated that between 1.5-4.5% of the population has social phobia at any time. Slightly more women are affected than men. However, probably more men are affected by avoidant personality disorder. Social phobia usually starts in the teenage years and tends to be a chronic disorder that does not go away spontaneously. Studies consistently indicate that most people have suffered with social phobia for many years before they seek or find appropriate treatment.

What Causes Social Phobia?

We still don't know for sure what causes social phobia. It seems that the most important factor related to the development of social phobia is a genetic vulnerability to anxiety in general. This is

probably largely due to greater sensitivity and reactivity of the nervous system. Some people tend to react more, often with anxiety or nervousness, when faced with any type of external event. These people seem to be more vulnerable to developing anxiety problems. There is also an increased risk of developing social phobia if a close relative has the disorder. It is unusual for social phobia to develop from a specific incident, although this may happen more often in “circumscribed” social phobia (where only one or a few situations cause anxiety). Aspects of the family environment do not appear to be very important causative factors.

The Effect of Personality

Personality refers to habitual ways of thinking about ourselves, our relationships with others and our environment, and the coping strategies we use in these situations. Individuals with social phobia tend to describe themselves as sensitive, emotional and prone to worry. As we have seen, this does tend to run in families. People who are very sensitive to criticism, or overly concerned about creating a good impression may be more susceptible to social phobia. Some of these attitudes are learned in childhood, but genetic and temperamental factors also influence personality development in ways we do not fully understand.

Hypersensitivity, emotionality, and proneness to worry can be a handicap. You can’t radically alter your personality – but nor should you want to! There are advantages to being sensitive: Sensitive individuals care about others and can empathise readily, which are valuable characteristics. We can teach people to be less sensitive but it is very hard to teach someone to be more sensitive! Those with social phobia are “people people”. What you *can* change about your personality is the *degree* to which you show various traits. This course aims to help you to learn to be less sensitive and less worried about what others think.

Treatment of Social Phobia

Cognitive behaviour therapy has been shown to result in long term improvement. Cognitive behaviour therapy is based on the principle that how we feel about a situation is determined by how we think about it. It is based on the work of Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis. These principles will be discussed in detail later in the program. The components of a cognitive behavioural program for social phobia include:

- Knowledge about anxiety and social phobia
- Control of anxiety and panic
- Changing unhelpful thinking patterns
- Involvement in social interaction

Drug treatments are also available in social phobia but many people will not need medication. When medication is necessary, it is still important to learn cognitive behavioural techniques for managing social phobia, since this appears to give the best long term result. Your doctor can give you more information.

The Aims of this Program

What you can expect by the end of this program is for your symptoms to have shown a noticeable degree of improvement. You should have a good understanding of what is required to treat social phobia and be confident that you can continue to apply the principles you have learned with a good expectation of further success. Your therapist can discuss this with you in more detail.

Anxiety is part of an automatic response to threat that all animals share. It is known as the flight or fight response. A series of physiological changes is triggered which is designed to give the animal extra strength and speed in order to successfully escape from the threat, or, if trapped, to fight it.

Such changes include:

- **Increase in alertness.**
- **Increase in heart rate and blood pressure, to pump extra blood to the muscles.**
- **Extra blood goes to the skin and sweating increases to help cool the body.**
- **Muscles tense ready for action.**
- **Blood is diverted away from the gastrointestinal system and digestion of recent meals slows down. Any waste products already in the bowel are hurried along.**
- **Saliva production decreases, causing a dry mouth.**
- **Breathing rate speeds up. Nostrils and air passages in lungs open wider to get in air more quickly.**
- **Liver releases sugar to provide quick energy.**
- **Sphincter muscles contract to close the openings of the bowel and bladder.**

This response is produced by the release of various stress hormones, most notably adrenaline, which occurs instantaneously once a threat is perceived. It is designed as an immediate and *brief* response. Once out of danger the hormones that were released are rapidly metabolized (destroyed) by the body and the flight or fight response ceases. Think about the last time you narrowly avoided a collision on the road ... what happened once you knew you were safe? You probably felt pretty shaky for ten minutes or so, but then almost back to normal.

In animals the flight or fight response is largely instinctual. Humans may also have instinctive fears, for example, of snakes, heights, storms. However, humans also *learn* to fear situations. When an individual feels threatened they will become anxious. This anxiety often becomes linked in the individual's mind with the situation in which it occurred.

The flight or fight response is designed to help us to escape from physically threatening situations. The key point, though, is that it is triggered by *perceived threat*. Whilst this threat may be physical (for example, a near miss traffic accident or being followed down a dark alley) it can also be more abstract in nature. We may become anxious when we feel the threat of a loss of some type. In social phobia, the threat is the loss of the approval or acceptance of others, or of the individual's social standing. The *actual* likelihood of being disapproved of or rejected may be small. It is the individual's perception of being under threat of negative evaluation that is the key. To some extent the strength of the anxiety response will relate to the perceived likelihood of the consequences which are felt to threaten the individual, and how catastrophic the individual believes these consequences would be.

An anxiety disorder arises when the flight or fight response is being repeatedly triggered at too low a threshold, or by situations that do not actually represent a threat to survival. The flight or fight response occurs as an automatic reaction to perceived threat. It cannot be eliminated. What needs to change is the individual's tendency to interpret situations as threatening.

What is a panic attack?

Panic means a sudden spell or attack of feeling frightened, anxious or very uneasy. Typically symptoms come on suddenly and escalate in severity over the next 5-10 minutes. A panic attack is essentially a severe flight or fight reaction.

During a panic attack the following symptoms may occur:

- *feeling short of breath*
- *pounding heart*
- *sweating*
- *trembling or shaking*
- *blushing*
- *trembling or croaking voice*
- *nausea or a fear of vomiting*
- *dizziness or light-headedness*
- *tingling fingers or feet*
- *tightness or pain in the chest*
- *a choking or smothering feeling*
- *hot or cold flushes*
- *feelings of unreality*
- *a feeling that you cannot get your thoughts together or speak*
- *an urge to flee*
- *a fear that you might die*
- *a fear that you might act in a crazy way.*

You can see from the list of changes that occur during the flight or fight response how at least some of these symptoms arise. Any or all of these symptoms may occur. Not every one with social phobia gets panic attacks. Each individual tends to have their own pattern of symptoms in response to anxiety, and to find some symptoms more distressing or unpleasant than others. In social phobia, blushing, sweating and shaking are often seen as the most troubling symptoms.

When anxiety becomes severe, most people try to escape the situation in order to prevent the feared consequences (the "flight" aspect of the flight or fight response). In other words, if an individual fears that their anxiety will cause them to look odd, or say something inappropriate they will try to escape the situation before this can happen. Once out of the situation the anxiety usually settles quickly.

Most people rapidly learn to predict the situations in which the anxiety or panic is likely to occur. Some people quickly begin to avoid such situations altogether. Anticipatory anxiety can be a severe problem. Sometimes an individual really intends to go through with a social outing or performance situation but avoids it at the last minute because their anxiety has escalated to the point where they feel totally unable to manage the situation. Avoiding situations that cause anxiety may seem the

only alternative to the negative evaluation that it is feared may result if social performance is adversely affected by anxiety.

But what if your performance wasn't as badly affected as you thought? You would lose the opportunity to learn this. Your anxiety would probably start spreading to other types of social situations. Meanwhile, your level of confidence and self esteem would drop as you found yourself more and more restricted in what you felt you could cope with. Hence, you would become even more anxious about the situations you feared. When social phobia has been present for a long time the individual often structures his or her life around the need to avoid certain situations or expends considerable effort and anxiety planning what to do in case a panic should occur.

This program will teach you how to control your anxiety and panic and how to cope with situations in which anxiety is likely to occur.

EXERCISE: MAKE A LIST OF SITUATIONS IN WHICH YOU WOULD FEEL VERY ANXIOUS

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

The Role of Hyperventilation

We now turn our attention to one particular aspect of the flight or fight response, namely, the increase in rate of respiration, or overbreathing.

Efficient control of the body's energy reactions depends on the maintenance of a specific balance between oxygen and carbon dioxide. This balance can be maintained through an appropriate rate and depth of breathing. The flight or fight response triggers an increase in the rate of breathing in preparation for taking flight. When this response is triggered by a social situation, you are unlikely to respond by running away, at least, not literally! The increase in oxygen intake is not matched by an increase in carbon dioxide production and an imbalance results.

Hyperventilation is defined as a rate and depth of breathing that is too much for the body's needs at a particular point in time. The imbalance which results causes many physical symptoms, including:

- *dizziness*
- *light-headedness*
- *confusion*
- *breathlessness*
- *blurred vision*

- *feelings of unreality*
- *numbness and tingling in the extremities*
- *cold, clammy hands*
- *stiffness in the muscles (including the muscles of the chest, which can lead to a sensation of chest pain or tightness)*

When marked, overbreathing can be hard, physical work, leading an individual to feel hot, flushed, and sweaty. Hyperventilation also causes a heightened sense of anxiety, which in turn makes it increasingly difficult to think objectively. It may also be a factor in the experience of constant anxiety and edginess that some people describe.

You can demonstrate for yourself how an increase in breathing can affect the way you feel by deliberately overbreathing until you experience symptoms of overbreathing such as feeling dizzy and lightheaded. Note that symptoms rapidly settle once you allow your breathing to return to normal.

Recognizing Hyperventilation

One way to determine if you are overbreathing is to count the number of breaths you take in a minute.

EXERCISE: Try monitoring your breathing rate now.

For one minute (timed), count one breath in and out as 1, the next breath in and out as 2, and so on. It may be difficult at first, but don't try to change your breathing rate.

Time yourself for one minute and write the answer here _____.

If your rate was over 12 breaths per minute then you are probably hyperventilating.

A technique for controlling hyperventilation is described in the next section.

What Other Factors Contribute to Anxiety?

Many individuals report an almost constant sense of anxiety, edginess or dread. There can be several reasons for this. One is chronic overbreathing as mentioned above. But many lifestyle factors also contribute to high levels of tension and anxiety.

Consider the following:

- *Are you feeling stressed or worried about something?*

Are there situations in your life that are causing chronic unhappiness or anxiety? Can anything be done to improve the situation? If you don't know where to start, talk to your therapist about a structured problem solving approach.

- *Are you smoking too much or drinking too much tea or coffee?*

Tobacco, tea, and coffee are all stimulants that increase your basic level of tension or arousal and accelerate the flight or fight response. Some individuals are particularly sensitive to caffeine.

- *Are you drinking too much alcohol?*

Although alcohol has immediate anxiety-relieving properties that can make it seem attractive, when consumed in excess it has toxic effects on many organs, including the liver, heart, stomach, nerves and brain. Under the influence of alcohol you won't be yourself. You also won't be learning anything that will help you manage better in the future or to cope in situations where you can't drink. You will also tend to feel even more sensitive and prone to anxiety "the day after".

- *Are you using marijuana?*

Many people believe that marijuana helps them relax. However, many also find that after the acute relaxation stage they find themselves feeling more sensitive than usual to others, and hence their anxiety levels rise. Again, you're not yourself, and you're not learning anything.

- *Are you getting insufficient sleep?*

Excessive tiredness can reduce your coping reserves and predispose you to anxiety.

- *Do you have trouble being assertive?*

Many people with social phobia have trouble getting their own needs met. Many have difficulty saying "No" to the requests and demands of others. This may leave the person feeling stressed and out of time for their own needs as well as resentful towards others for making these demands. Learning to be assertive will help reduce your tension. This topic will be looked at in more detail later in the program.

- *Are you overly conscientious, working too hard or too fast, or trying to be perfect?*

You will achieve more by staying calm and working at a reasonable pace. Have fair and reasonable expectations of yourself.

- *Are you getting regular exercise?*

Exercise helps anxiety in several ways. In addition to its well known physical benefits it also leads to better quality sleep so you feel more rested. It improves mood and outlook. It also helps to reduce levels of tension and anxiety. You probably need to exercise at least every other day in sessions lasting 30 minutes or more in order to get most benefit.

It is impossible to reduce stress altogether. Rather, the aim is to develop the best possible coping strategies and the confidence to use them in order to minimise the amount of stress and anxiety triggered by demanding situations. It is also important to reduce hypersensitivity and the tendency to misinterpret situations as more threatening than they really are.

Anxiety reduction will be most successful when an attempt is made to address all sources of stress and anxiety and introduce effective anxiety management strategies as a way of life.

The Relationship of Anxiety to Performance

People who fear the consequences of anxiety become afraid of even small amounts of anxiety in case it escalates out of control. But anxiety can be useful. In the event of real danger the flight or fight response may save our life one day. The relationship between anxiety and performance is surprising. What would you predict it would be?

EXERCISE: TRI MATCHING THE FOLLOWING:

POOR PERFORMANCE

HIGH ANXIETY

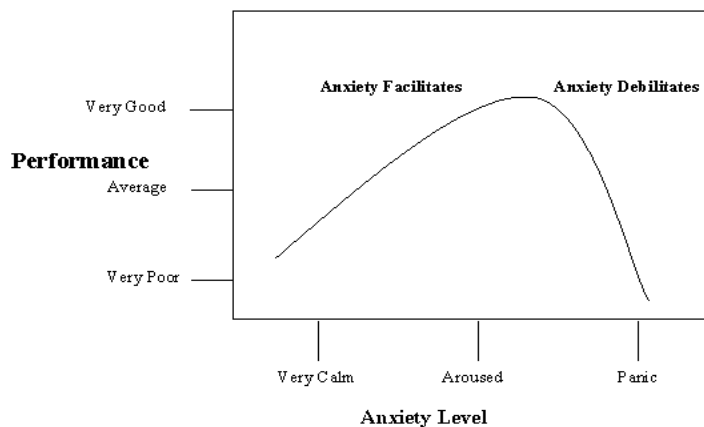
AVERAGE PERFORMANCE

MODERATE ANXIETY

BEST PERFORMANCE

LOW ANXIETY

When this was first studied in a research experiment the researchers did not expect the results they found. In fact, the relationship between anxiety and performance was found to be as shown in the diagram below.



Several important points arise from studying this diagram. First, it can be seen that an average performance can be obtained at two different levels of anxiety. A person who is reasonably calm will perform averagely well, as will a person who is very tense. However, should extra demands be placed on the reasonably calm person, there is a wide margin for anxiety to increase without performance deteriorating. On the other hand, for the person who is already very tense, a further increase in anxiety is likely to result in deterioration of performance. But note that such deterioration does not occur until *very high* anxiety levels have been reached.

Ideally, then, we should aim for calmness as we go about our daily business. In this way, we will have larger coping reserves for times when we have to face stressful situations. Regular practice of a relaxation technique can help to achieve this.

Remember, however, that without some increase in tension or anxiety you will not do your best. Note from the diagram that the best performances come at higher levels of anxiety than those that produce average performances. The increase in mental alertness and ability to focus that anxiety produces is actually essential to achieving our best level of performance. You can probably think back to some situations in your own life where this was the case. . . . Would you have done so well in a certain interview or in examination situations, for example, if you had not been more anxious than usual? This program does not aim to eliminate anxiety from your life. Rather, the aim is to learn to control unwarranted anxiety, and not get worried about appropriate and reasonable levels of anxiety.

Summary

Anxiety results when the flight or fight response is triggered by feeling threatened in some way. In social phobia, anxiety results when the fear of being negatively evaluated in a social situation triggers the flight or fight response. Hyperventilation occurring as part of the response can make symptoms worse but responds readily to controlled breathing. Moderate levels of anxiety actually enhance performance. It is probably best to aim to keep everyday levels of anxiety low by paying attention to lifestyle factors so that when faced with a demanding situation the resulting increase in anxiety will not be overwhelming.

The previous section discussed the nature of anxiety and panic, and the situational and lifestyle factors which can contribute to generally heightened levels of stress and anxiety. By paying attention to these factors you can help reduce your level of *arousal* - the degree of tension and alertness you feel – when this is excessive for your needs and your health.

Specific anxiety management strategies include:

- Hyperventilation control - the slow breathing technique covered in Section 2
- Relaxation Training

Slow-Breathing Technique

It is known that even a slightly elevated rate of depth of breathing beyond what is required in the circumstances can contribute to feelings of anxiety. Many individuals will not have obvious hyperventilation, and currently it is not felt to play a major role in the anxiety experienced by most people with social phobia. It is more likely to be of importance if you noted an elevated breathing rate in the exercise above, or if you do actually suffer panic attacks.

The slow breathing technique can be used as the foundation of your anxiety management strategies, helping to calm you down so that you can think more clearly and apply the “straight thinking” strategies you will learn in the next part of the program. It can also be useful strategy to shift your focus away from your anxious concerns, and many people over the years have found the technique helpful for these reasons. The best approach is to use the technique at the first signs of anxiety.

The slow breathing technique will give you a breathing rate of 10 breaths per minute. It is best to use a watch in practice sessions initially to make sure that you get the feel for the right timing – when we feel anxious there is a tendency for us to feel a bit “speedy” and want to do everything too fast! Concentrate on making your breaths smooth and light. Breathe through your nose to help limit the amount of air you take in and thus prevent overbreathing. It should feel as though the air is just drifting lightly past your nostrils. Relax your stomach muscles. The movement is so light that it is unnoticeable from normal breathing to anyone who may be watching. Ready? Now do the following:

SLOW BREATHING TECHNIQUE

1. Take a medium sized breath in, hold it and count to 6 (timing 6 seconds with your watch).
2. When you get to 6, think “relax” and breathe out. Try and feel as though you are releasing tension as you breathe out.
3. Next breathe in for three seconds and out for three seconds, in a smooth and light way.
4. At the end of each minute (after 10 breaths) hold your breath again for 6 seconds, think “relax”, breathe out, and then continue breathing in the six-second cycle for another minute.

Continue breathing in this way until you are feeling calmer. Sometimes, you will notice that symptoms of anxiety return after a short while. That's okay, just do your controlled breathing again for as long as it takes to settle. It is probably because you are still having anxious thoughts about the situation. As you develop your straight thinking skills this should become less of a problem.

If you find it hard to do this in the anxiety-provoking situation, consider the possibility of taking "time out" to calm yourself. For example, at a party you might slip out to a quiet spot for a short time and do your breathing, then return to the party. With practice, you will find it easier to control breathing while you are actually in the situation.

Daily Record of Breathing Rate

Instructions: It is important to practice this technique until you are able to use it automatically in anxiety-provoking situations. For the next three weeks at least you should practice this slow breathing technique for about 5 minutes at a time, four times a day. There are two reasons for this. The first is that frequent and regular practice will make the technique second nature to you. It will thus be more likely that you use it even when your mind is clouded by anxiety! The second reason is that regular practice will have the result that this healthy breathing style becomes your natural breathing rate and style. The following chart is for you to record your breathing rates before and after each practice session.

Choose 4 convenient times spread through the day to monitor your breathing and do the practice. Wait for 20 minutes or so after any strenuous activity. Time yourself for a minute before you do your practice, without trying to modify your breathing rate. Then do your practice. After your practice, time your breathing rate for a minute, again without consciously trying to change your breathing. Your therapist will be able to use your records to monitor your progress. You may also learn more about your own patterns of anxiety and overbreathing from studying your chart.

Some people worry about the fact that counting their breathing rate makes them too conscious of it, and alters it somehow. This is probably true to a small extent, but not enough to really matter.

The chart on the next page is provided for you to record your breathing rates.

Problems with Breathing Control: Troubleshooting

A small number of individuals report that they get symptoms of anxiety when they first start breathing retraining. This may happen as you become more aware of times when you are anxious as part of this program, which requires you to confront your anxiety rather than trying to avoid it. Most people find that if they persevere with the breathing practice it does begin to have a calming influence.

Other people report that when they first begin to practice this slow breathing technique it feels unnatural. This is only to be expected if you have been habitually breathing at a higher rate, too deeply or too shallowly, or in some irregular fashion. As you practice the slow-breathing technique it will come to feel not only more natural, but also more comfortable.

Don't become too focussed on your breathing. It's just one of the building blocks in your anxiety management program. Do your practices, use it when you're anxious and forget about it the rest of the time!

What is Relaxation?

Relaxation is the voluntary letting go of tension. This tension can be physical tension in the muscles or it can be psychological tension. When we physically relax, the impulses arising in the various nerves in the muscles change the nature of the signals that are sent to the brain. This change brings about a general feeling of calm, both physically and mentally. Muscle relaxation has a widespread effect on the nervous system and therefore should be seen as a physical treatment, as well as a psychological one.

The Importance of Relaxation Training

Muscles are designed to remain in a relaxed state until needed to perform some physical activity. In usual circumstances, muscles do not remain at a high level of tension all the time, but show fluctuating patterns of tension and relaxation according to the demands that are placed on different muscle groups by a person's daily activities.

The flight or fight response also results in muscle tension. When people have been under stress for long periods of time, they may maintain high levels of muscle tension. They may experience headaches, muscle pain and fatigue. Ongoing muscle tension may also contribute to the feelings of constant apprehension, irritability and jumpiness which many individuals report. Anxiety attacks occur more easily. Some minor event, such as an unexpected encounter with a friend, can trigger further tension which in turn can lead to panic. It takes practice to regain control over the state of tension in the muscular system when there have been high background levels of tension for some time. Regular practice of an active relaxation technique such as progressive muscle relaxation can help reduce blood pressure and the production of stress hormones.

Components of Relaxation Training

By learning to relax you can reduce general levels of arousal and tension and increase your reserves for coping with challenges. To do this you will need to:

- **Learn to recognize tension**
- **Learn to relax your body in a general, total sense**
- **Learn to let tension go in specific muscles**

Recognizing Tension

Consider the following:

- Where do you feel tension?
- Do your muscles show characteristic signs of tension, such as soreness, fatigue or feeling hard to the touch?
- Which reactions within yourself lead to an increase in tension? (e.g. frustration, anger, anxiety)
- Which external events lead to an increase in tension? (e.g. queues, driving in traffic, arguments, work or study demands).

Relaxation Training - Progressive Muscular Relaxation

In progressive muscular relaxation (PMR), the muscles are relaxed in a progressive manner, working your way around the body. With practice you will learn to better recognize and voluntarily reduce muscle tension.

Relaxation is a skill that is learned through regular practice. To achieve the full benefits you will need to commit yourself to at least several weeks of daily practice.

It is suggested that you begin by using a tape to assist you to carry out the steps of tensing and relaxing all of the major muscle groups of your body in turn. It doesn't matter when you do your relaxation, but try to ensure that you will not be disturbed. Initially, do the exercises in a quiet room so that you can give your entire concentration to relaxation. However, since the ultimate aim is to be able to relax anywhere, anytime, don't worry too much about trying to ensure absolute quietness or a darkened room. Select a comfortable chair with good support for your head and shoulders. Or cushions against a wall. Some people prefer to do the exercises lying down, but do not use this position if you are likely to fall asleep, since this is designed to be an *active* relaxation technique. You can't learn to relax while you're asleep! If you do want some method to help you get to sleep, go over the relaxation exercises in your mind or keep a relaxation tape specifically for that purpose. As you master the relaxation exercises, try various postures and situations. You may use the relaxation tape as preparation for some activity over which you anticipate difficulty.

Getting the most out of progressive muscle relaxation

- ❖ Avoiding tensing too tightly. A maximum of 60 – 70% tension is recommended.
- ❖ Don't tense to the point of pain or discomfort.
- ❖ Don't worry if your mind wanders during the tape. Try just to drop whatever it is that distracted your attention and gently try to focus back on the tape.
- ❖ Some people feel anxious during relaxation exercises. This can be because they are anxious about "wasting time", because their mind wanders on to anxieties and worries, or simply because the relaxed feeling is unusual and provokes anxiety.

Applied Relaxation

The instructions below are based on a technique of applied relaxation developed by Lars-Goran Ost. The aim is to develop relaxation skills that are portable and can be applied to real life situations. It is essential that you have first mastered progressive muscular relaxation (PMR). Once you can relax well and easily with PMR, you can practice applied relaxation techniques to achieve a state of relaxation more and more quickly, in more natural situations. Eventually, you will be able to relax even while carrying out some other activity, such as writing, walking, talking or driving a car.

The aims of applied relaxation are to be able to:

- relax rapidly (30 seconds)
- relax while actually in anxiety-provoking situations

Applied relaxation is a skill that most people can acquire. As a skill it will take time to learn, and a practice to develop and maintain.

Stage 1: Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) without tape

During this stage, you should begin to practice PMR without the tape. Do your exercises in the

same order and in the same manner as on the tape. In general, you should hold the tension for about 5 seconds, then relax over 10-15 seconds before tensing again.

You will need to practice this at least daily, and become proficient at achieving a good relaxation response by this method before moving on to the next stage. In general, this is likely to take about two weeks of practice. To monitor your progress and note any problems or difficulties to target, it is helpful to keep a record of your progress. Under 'components or relaxation' you can write 'PMR – no tape' or 'Stage 1' to indicate what stage of applied relaxation you were practicing. The same chart will be kept as you progress through the more advanced stages. Note the degree of anxiety or tension before relaxing and then after relaxation. Note any persistent areas of tension, and any other problems or difficulties. Record the time spent doing the relaxation exercise. If you are able to continue the session until you feel relaxed this will help you to become more efficient.

Stage 2: Release-only relaxation

During this stage you will begin to relax your muscles directly, without first tensing them. Although it may seem difficult at first, usually by this stage your control over your level of muscular tension will have developed to the degree where, with a little practice, you will be able to achieve a good relaxation response in less than 10 minutes using this technique.

Also during this stage you may find it helpful to work from the head down. Begin with some smooth, regular breaths (as you do in your breathing control exercises). Think 'relax' before you exhale, and feel yourself relaxing more with every breath. Imagine you are just letting go, and releasing tension. Begin by relaxing the top of your head, then your forehead....eyebrows.....eyelids.....jaw.....tongue and throat...lips....your entire face. Continue to breathe in a smooth and light way, 3 seconds in and 3 seconds out. Relax your neck....shoulders....arms.....hands.....all the way to your fingertips. Continue to breathe smoothly....breathe away the tension. Let the relaxation spread to your chest....your stomach.....waist.....and around to your back. Now relax the lower part of your body....your bottom.....thighs.....knees.....calves.....feet.....all the way to your toes. Continue for a short time to breathe smoothly, lightly, and regularly and feel that you relax more with each breath.

Should you experience an increase in tension in any muscle group and have trouble relaxing this, you can briefly tense first, then relax.

Stage 3: Cue-controlled Relaxation

The aim during this stage is to further strengthen the association between saying "relax" to yourself and actually relaxing which we introduced as part of the slow breathing technique. Saying "relax" becomes the "cue" to release tension and feel relaxed. In the process the time taken achieve a state of relaxation can be further reduced.

To do this practice as follows, at least twice a day.

1. Relax using the release-only method of Stage 2.
2. When fully relaxed concentrate on your breathing. Concentrate on thinking *relax* to yourself just before exhaling.
3. Continue to practice in this way for about 3 minutes

After a week of practicing in this way, combine steps 1 and 2 above. That is, release tension from head to toe while breathing in a smooth and light way, 10 breaths per minute, thinking *relax* before

each exhalation. Learn to scan your body for any tension and relax that muscle group. Practice in this way for another week. Eventually, you may be able to achieve a good state of relaxation in as little as 3-4 minutes.

Stage 4: Differential relaxation

The aims of this stage of relaxation are to learn to extend your relaxation skills to almost any situation, and to learn to keep relaxed muscles that you are not actively using.

Step 1 – To start with, practice at home seated comfortably. Use the cue-controlled method to relax. Continue to breathe smoothly and lightly. Scan your body for tension and be sure to relax any tense muscles.

In the next stage begin to do small movements with some muscle groups while keeping all muscles not directly involved in the action relaxed.

Try the following exercises:

- Open your eyes and look around the room without moving your head.
- Look around the room moving head and eyes.
- Wiggle the fingers or one hand.
- Raise one arm, then the other.
- Tap one foot.
- Lift one leg, then the other.

While you perform each movement, consciously relax the rest of your body and remember to breathe smoothly, lightly, regularly. Next, try the above exercises while seated in an ordinary chair. When you can complete them successfully, sit at a desk and try the following:

- Write something on a piece of paper.
- Talk on the phone.
- Talk with another person face to face.

Once you have mastered this level of differential relaxation, move on as follows.

Step 2 – the next step is to practice the above exercises while standing. You may wish to practice initially while standing near a wall, as you may find you feel a little unsteady and the proximity of the wall may be reassuring. As before, use your cue-controlled relaxation technique first, then practice staying relaxed overall while performing gradually more complex movements.

Step 3 – the final step in this stage is to relax while standing, then stay relaxed while walking. Initially you will probably find that this feels quite awkward and difficult. This is only to be expected. With frequent practice you will find it easier and more natural to do.

You will probably need several weeks of practice to master these steps. Since you will by now be able to relax quite quickly, you can afford the time to practice more frequently. This will enable you to become proficient at these techniques more quickly, but will also be a model for what should become a habit for you: that is, to monitor for tension and relax frequently throughout the day. Be sure that you feel comfortable with your skills so far before moving on to the next stage of applied relaxation.

Stage 5: Rapid Relaxation

The aims at this stage are to further reduce the time taken to achieve relaxation, and to develop the ability to relax successfully in a variety of situations that occur naturally in the course of your life. To start with you should practice in relatively non-stressful situations. You will need to practice these techniques 15-20 times a day. Since with continued practice you will be able to relax in about 30 seconds, this will not actually take up much of your time!

To practice relaxation in this stage, wherever you are, do the following:

- *Breathe in over 3 seconds.*
- *Before exhaling think “Relax”.*
- *As you breathe out feel yourself relaxing from head to toe.*
- *Repeat this one or two times.*
- *Scan the body for tension, and relax any muscles you are not actively using in whatever situation you are in at the time.*

Think of something that occurs 15-20 times during the day that you might use as a reminder to relax. For instance, if you get phone calls about this often you might decide to relax after or during each phone call. You might use more than one ‘reminder’ signal if the frequency of one is not high enough.

Within 1-2 weeks of practice you should find that you can achieve a relaxed state within a minute. At this point you are ready to apply your relaxation skills to anxiety-provoking situations.

Stage 6: Applied Relaxation

Now you can begin to extend your relaxation skills to anxiety-provoking situations. Begin this stage by continuing to practice your rapid relaxation technique throughout the day, but begin to apply it in a few stressful situations each day, too. To begin with, try to find a situation where you can stay for 10-15 minutes practising your applied relaxation techniques without actually having to perform. Examples might include crowded situations, standing in a queue or listening in a meeting or tutorial. When you have some confidence with this, try to extend it to situations where you may have to perform or interact in some way. Once you have mastered it, applied relaxation can be particularly useful in situations where you may be taken by surprise and do not have time to prepare yourself. Remember to use it in conjunction with straight thinking, which you will learn about in the next part of the program.

Don’t expect to be completely successful at first. You may find that you cannot maintain the relaxed state, or cannot relax effectively in every situation. No one manages their tension and anxiety perfectly in every situation! With practice your skills will increase, and you can extend the number and difficulty level of situations in which you use this technique successfully.

Stage 7: Maintenance

You will need to practice these skills regularly to maintain them. Make applied relaxation a part of your life. Develop the habit of reacting to tension by relaxing!

If you experience any difficulties or problems, be sure to discuss them with you therapist.

APPLIED RELAXATION TABLE

| Date | Time | Component of Applied Relaxation | Degree of Anxiety <i>Before</i> 0-100 | Tension- <i>After</i> 0-100 | Comments-Problems |
|------|------|---------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| | | | | | |

Problems with Relaxation: Troubleshooting

Some people report they cannot relax, or they can't bring themselves to practice relaxation. Since all human beings share the same biological make-up there is no purely physical reason why relaxation should work for some and not others. The reason relaxation may not work for some people is usually due to some psychological factor or insufficient practice. These problems can be overcome. If you are experiencing difficulty relaxing you should discuss this with your therapist. Some examples of difficulties are given below.

1. "I am too tense to relax"

We all share the same physiological makeup and we can all relax! The more tense you are, the more difficult it may be. Keep practicing and it will happen for you eventually. If you get too tense, leave it there for the day and try again tomorrow. If you're having real problems talk to your therapist.

2. "I feel guilty wasting so much time"

You have a right to take time to do things that are important for your health. Relaxation is an important part of your recovery.

3. "I can't find the place or time".

Be adaptive. If you can't find 20 minutes, find 10 minutes somewhere in the day to relax. If you do not have a private room at work, go to a park or sit in your car.

4. "My mind wanders"

This is completely normal for anxious beginners. By training yourself to drop the distracting thought and return your focus to the relaxation process you can improve your overall ability to concentrate.

5. "I'm not getting anything out of this."

It's only human nature to want an instant cure, but you can't expect to undo years of tension in a few relaxation sessions. Give the training time to take effect.

In general, if you find yourself making a lot of excuses for not relaxing you should review your motivation for undertaking this type of treatment.

Summary

The slow breathing technique and the skill of applied relaxation can help to reduce acute symptoms of anxiety. Progressive muscular relaxation helps to reduce the overall level of arousal with frequent practice. Other strategies to help to reduce arousal levels include regular exercise, sufficient sleep and reducing sources of sleep and anxiety in the work and home environment.

People with social phobia experience anxiety in the company of others. However, there are marked variations between individuals in terms of the degree of anxiety that is experienced, and the number and types of situations which provoke anxiety. In order to overcome social phobia it is important to develop an understanding of the general sorts of underlying thoughts and anxieties in this condition, and *your* specific thoughts and fears in particular. It will then become clearer to you why you are anxious in particular situations, and how you can begin to overcome your fears. We refer to these underlying thoughts as "cognitions", and learning to deal with them constructively is the "cognitive" part of the program, often referred to as "cognitive restructuring."

Cognitive Therapy: The Importance of the Way You Think

It may seem surprising, but no outside situation or event can directly cause feelings of distress. What does cause us to become upset? The answer is: It's our point of view!

Consider the following example. Three people are waiting at a bus stop. They see the bus approaching, hail the bus and the bus just drives straight past without stopping. The first person in line begins to jump up and down waving her fists in the air and shouting: She seems angry. The second person in line bursts into tears, appearing distressed. The third person in line begins to laugh very heartily, seeming amused. Now, the same thing happened to all of them, yet there were three different reactions. Clearly, it is not the event that caused the reactions. So what was it? To know why each person reacted as they did, we have to know what they were thinking. It turns out that the first person was thinking to herself, "How dare the driver go right past! I'm going to be late for an important meeting." Hence, she feels angry. The second person woke up feeling a bit blue that morning. When the bus goes past he thinks, "Oh no. Nothing is going to go right today, I feel so miserable." The third person thinks, "Hooray! The next bus is not for half an hour. I have a completely legitimate excuse to be late. I think I'll go have a cup of coffee."

A basic principle of cognitive therapy is that it is the interpretations we make of situations that determine our emotional response. These interpretations are influenced by our previous experiences of similar situations and by aspects of personality, including our general sensitivity, our feelings about ourselves and our relationships with others, and our worldview. Of course, some events may realistically be unpleasant, or situations uncomfortable, but they are rarely, of themselves, capable of causing us to feel extreme levels of:

| | |
|-------------|---------------|
| anxiety | fear |
| depression | worthlessness |
| inferiority | anger, etc. |

Hence, if you find yourself frequently feeling very anxious, angry or unhappy, it is likely that you may be making unhelpful or unrealistic interpretations of events or situations in which you find yourself. People tend to develop patterns of thinking about particular types of situations. One of the aims of cognitive therapy is to examine the ways in which we are thinking about ourselves and our world. If we identify some habitual unhelpful or unrealistic patterns of thinking about certain types of situations, the next goal is to identify more helpful ways of thinking about such situations. The ultimate goal is to create new habits of appraising situations that make our lives easier and happier. This will take a great deal of active practice.

Specific Anxieties in Social Phobia

The predominant emotion in social phobia is anxiety. As we have seen, anxiety occurs in response to a perceived threat through activation of the flight or fight response. Whilst this response developed in animals as an emergency response to physical danger, in humans it can also be triggered by the threat of some type of loss. It may be that a fear of losing our social standing with others may trigger the anxiety of social phobia. It may also relate to some deep seated need to be accepted by others which could date from prehistoric times when an individual's survival in a harsh and dangerous environment depended on acceptance by the tribe. In any case, it is now clear that the anxiety in social phobia is triggered by a fear of being negatively evaluated. Underlying this is an excessive concern about the opinions of others.

You can compare your degree of concern about what others may think of you with the general population by completing the following questionnaire, developed by Watson and Friend.

FNE SCALES

In each case indicate whether or not the statement applies to you by writing either T for true or F for false. Please be sure to answer all the statements.

1. ___ I rarely worry about seeming foolish to others.
2. ___ I worry about what people will think of me even when I know it doesn't make any difference.
3. ___ I become tense and jittery if I know someone is sizing me up.
4. ___ I am unconcerned even if I know people are forming an unfavorable impression of me.
5. ___ I feel very upset when I commit some social error.
6. ___ The opinions that important people have of me cause me little concern.
7. ___ I am often afraid that I may look ridiculous or make a fool of myself.
8. ___ I react very little when other people disapprove of me.
9. ___ I am frequently afraid of other people noticing my shortcomings.
10. ___ The disapproval of others would have little effect on me.
11. ___ If someone is evaluating me, I tend to expect the worst.
12. ___ I rarely worry about what kind of impression I am making on someone.
13. ___ I am afraid that others will not approve of me.
14. ___ I am afraid that people will find fault with me.
15. ___ Other people's opinions of me do not bother me.
16. ___ I am not necessarily upset if I do not please someone.
17. ___ When I am talking to someone, I worry about what they may be thinking about me.
18. ___ I feel that you can't help making social errors sometimes, so why worry about it.
19. ___ I am usually worried about what kind of impression I make.
20. ___ I worry a lot about what my superiors think of me.
21. ___ If I know someone is judging me, it has little effect on me.

22. ___ I worry that others will think I am not worthwhile.
23. ___ I worry very little about what others may think of me.
24. ___ Sometimes I think I am too concerned with what other people think of me.
25. ___ I often worry that I will say or do the wrong things.
26. ___ I am often indifferent to the opinion others have of me.
27. ___ I am usually confident that others will have a favorable impression of me.
28. ___ I often worry that people who are important to me won't think very much of me.
29. ___ I brood about the opinions my friends have about me.
30. ___ I become tense and jittery if I know I am being judged by my superiors.

Score this questionnaire by giving yourself 1 point if you said “True” to numbers 2,3,5,7,9,11, 13,14,17,19,20,22,24,25,28,29,10. Score 1 point if you said “False” to 1,4,6,8,10,12,15,16,18,21,23,26,27. Your score gives an indication of how concerned you are to get the approval of others in your life. Approximately 75% of people in the general population score less than 19 on this scale. Scores higher than this indicate a level of over concern about others’ opinions of you that is likely to cause distress – and result in anxiety in social situations.

That’s not to say that others don’t get any social anxiety. They do. Everyone would like to think that they are accepted and approved of by others they come in contact with. We all know the feeling of embarrassment when we make a silly mistake, say something inappropriate or draw attention to ourselves in an unflattering, and usually accidental, way. However, there are several differences between *normal social anxiety* and social phobia.

| Normal social anxiety | Social phobia |
|---|---|
| Moderate desire for approval | Strong desire for approval |
| Expectation of approval | Expectation of disapproval |
| Reasonable tolerance for disapproval | Extremely distressed by disapproval |
| Easily forgets about faux pas | Dwells on faux pas, very upset by them |
| When in doubt interprets response as positive | When in doubt interprets reaction as critical |

So, it is the fear of negative evaluation that is the core of the problem, but it is compounded by unrealistic beliefs about:

- *How bad you think negative evaluation is, and what you believe the consequences will be for you*
- *How likely you think it is that you will be evaluated negatively*

This explains why some people that show the apparent signs of anxiety that worry you - who blush or tremble, sweat or shake, appear lost for words or stumble over what they are saying – do *not* appear to worry about it. Indeed, many of the people we have treated in the past have commented that they have encountered people who did what they themselves feared without worrying about it, for example, the person who shook when writing, yet seemed unconcerned, and certainly had not

developed a fear of writing. Furthermore, most of our program participants report that they do not think any less of the person for showing these “embarrassing” behaviours. Nor do they feel that other observers at the time were critical of the person. It often seems that individuals with social phobia have one set of "rules" or standards for themselves - a very harsh and strict set - that they don't apply to others in their lives. This is despite the fact that they expect others to apply these rules to them.

Sometimes, though, people with social phobia apply the same unreasonable standards they have for themselves to everyone. Thus you may find yourself feeling sorry for someone who looks anxious or makes a mistake, or you may even judge them critically. It can come as a surprise to learn that others don't care nearly as much as you do about what others think of them, and probably wouldn't be overconcerned even if they knew you were critical of them! (But don't worry, they can't read your mind!). The range of behaviour that is seen as acceptable and normal in social situations is almost certainly broader than you currently believe.

| COMMON PERSONAL BELIEFS IN SOCIAL PHOBIA | COMMON BELIEFS ABOUT WHAT OTHERS THINK |
|---|--|
| "I have to appear competent!" | "What a fool." |
| "I must be entertaining or I'll be seen as a failure" | "That person seems inept or silly." |
| "If they see my anxiety, they will think me weak." | "What's wrong with them?" |
| "If I have nothing to say it will be a catastrophe." | "She seems a bit odd." |
| "They will start to dislike me." | "He can't control himself." |

As part of this program, we are going to examine the way you think about yourself and others. It is likely that you have some unrealistic and therefore unhelpful beliefs, and we now know that these are especially likely to revolve around the theme of negative evaluation from others. The aim of the program will be to reshape these views; to make them realistic and helpful to you in your daily life. We call this “cognitive restructuring” – or learning how to think realistically. Remember, however, that we are not aiming to eliminate all anxiety from your life, since there are times when such a reaction is perfectly reasonable, and helpful. Rather, we are aiming to reduce as much as possible unnecessary or extreme degrees of anxiety. **We are also aiming to help you to learn to feel more comfortable with normal social anxiety.**

The following sections will take you through a step by step, practical approach to making this happen.

The ABCs of Realistic Thinking

The following diagrams summarize what has been discussed previously.

| A | | C |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| The Activating event or Action | | The Consequences: your feelings and behaviour |
| The bus not stopping for you | <u>Is presumed to lead to</u> | Feeling angry, depressed, anxious or happy |

But thoughts intervene between A and C and thus the true association is:

| A | B | C |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| The Activating event or Action | Your Beliefs , thoughts or interpretations | The Consequences: your feelings and behaviour |
| <i>The bus not stopping for you</i> | <u>Leads to</u> <i>"I'll be late for an important meeting"</i> <i>or</i> <i>"Nothing goes right for me"</i> <i>or</i> <i>"This is a good thing to happen"</i> | <u>Which results in</u> <i>Feeling angry,</i> <i>or</i> <i>depressed</i> <i>or</i> <i>happy.</i> |

If you habitually tend to expect the worst, over react when things don't go well and if you worry too much about what others think, you will start to feel better if you can change these patterns!

Cognitive Restructuring Changing the Way You Think

This will take some practice. It is best approached in a series of steps. These are:

- 1. Learning to identify the thoughts that go through your head in response to events, and the interpretations you make of events and situations.**
- 2. Learning how to look at each of these thoughts objectively, and decide whether they represent reasonable assessments of the situation (challenge them).**
- 3. Restating any unrealistic or unhelpful thoughts in a way that better reflects the reality of the situation and is more helpful to you.**
- 4. Putting the more helpful beliefs into practice by basing your behaviour on them.**

Step 1: Identify Your Thoughts

It is not easy at first to determine what you are thinking about any given situation. One reason for this is that many of our thoughts occur almost automatically in response to frequently encountered situations. For this reason they are sometimes referred to as “automatic” thoughts. Anxious individuals also develop habitual ways of thinking about the situations that worry them.

The following features are characteristic of habitual unrealistic thoughts. They are:

Automatic: *They just pop into your head without any effort on your part.*

Distorted: *They do not fit all of the facts.*

Unhelpful: *They keep you anxious, make it difficult to change, and stop you from getting what you want out of life.*

Involuntary: *You do not choose to have them, and they can be very difficult to switch off.*

Our appraisals of events and situations are made at lightning speed, and this is another reason why we are usually unaware of them and why, initially, they can be difficult to track down. But generations of people using these methods have demonstrated that it can be done. With sufficient practice it will begin to come naturally to you.

One way to get started is to use any feelings of anxiety, fear, or discomfort and work backwards. That is, if you feel uncomfortable, then there must be some underlying thought that caused the feeling. In any situation or interaction in which you find yourself unhappy with your feelings or actions, ask yourself:

- *How do I feel?*
- *What has been happening recently?*
- *What do I think about myself?*
- *What do I think about the other person?*
- *What do I think about the situation?*

To help you determine what you were thinking, you can also try asking yourself, "What could I just hear?" or "What might I have been worrying about?" With time, you will probably find that you have a small collection of particularly troublesome thoughts that occur in many situations. Once you know about these, you can have a high index of suspicion that they are also causing trouble in your current situation, and be sure to listen for them.

To practice this first step, think about a recent situation where you found yourself feeling more anxious or upset than you think was reasonable. In your workbook write down the situation which triggered the anxiety, think back to how you felt emotionally at the time, then see if you can work back to identify what might have gone through your head at the time. Your example should look something like this:

| A Activating event or situation | B Beliefs/Interpretations | C Consequences. Emotional state & SUDs rating. |
|---|---|---|
| Running into a colleague from work in the street at the weekend | I have to say something. I don't know what to say. I'll look awkward and uncomfortable. They will wonder why I am looking so | Anxiety 80 (Ducked quickly into a shop to escape). |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | strange. They will think less of me and might tell others at work who will laugh at me. | |
|--|--|--|

The ‘SUDs’ rating is a way for you to estimate how strong or unpleasant the emotions that you experienced felt to you. ‘SUDs’ stands for: **S**ubjective **U**nits of **D**istress. You estimate the strength of the emotion according to the following scale:

| |
|---|
| x-----x-----x-----x-----x |
| 0 30 50 80 100 |
| Nil Mild Moderate Severe Worst Ever |

Keeping a diary in your workbook can help you to become aware of thoughts, or cognitions, that you get in particular situations, so that you can begin to see patterns emerging in the types of thoughts that are causing you to feel anxious and uncomfortable. It is important to record your challenges to these cognitions in your diary or workbook, too.

Step 2: Challenge Your Thoughts

You will now challenge your thoughts to meet the requirements of being helpful and realistic. In this step it is important to subject the beliefs and interpretations that you identified above to critical examination. Are your interpretations logical? Are they supported by the facts? If not, then you should not accept them as a true and accurate representation of the situation. You can ask yourself the following questions to help you challenge your thoughts:

- *What is the evidence?*

Do the facts of the situation back up what you think, or do they contradict it? Imagine that you are presenting this evidence in a court of law: would it stand up to cross-examination? Would others likely make the same interpretation? It is important to be realistic about whether people really are looking at you, talking about you, judging what you do. You may be so anxious that you do not correctly interpret what is happening around you. Hence it takes a conscious effort to make interpretations of the environment, and your own performance, that are as objective as possible.

- *What alternative views are there?*

There are many different ways to look at any experience. How else could you interpret what has happened? Think of as many alternatives as you can, and review the evidence for and against them. When you consider it objectively, which alternative is most likely to be correct?

- *How likely is it?*

How likely is it really that what you fear will happen?

- *How much would it really matter?*

If the thing you fear did happen, how much would it *really matter* in your life? Would it really be the worst thing you could ever imagine happening? Would it have to affect the rest of your life? Could you live with it? Be objective and realistic.

- *Are you making “errors” of thinking?*

People with social phobia typically develop habitual patterns of interpreting information about their social environment. They may distort how they see their experiences in systematic ways. We call these “cognitive errors” or “cognitive biases”. We now believe that these are very important in maintaining anxieties in social phobia. We also believe that they explain why, despite showing

great courage and perseverance in “forcing” themselves to confront feared situations, many people only find things getting harder.

Some of these types of cognitive biases have been given names to help you remember them so you can check for them in your own thinking. Particularly prominent are “mind reading”, “fortune telling”, “mental filtering”, and “discounting”. Which of these errors can you find in your own thinking?

All or none thinking :

You see things in black and white categories. For example, because you felt uncomfortable at one stage during a dinner party you decide that the whole experience was a bad one. Or you think, "I made a mistake on that ... the whole job is ruined."

Overgeneralization:

You see a single event as a never-ending pattern. For example, "I didn't handle that meeting very well ... I never cope in meetings".

Mental filter (focusing on the negative):

You pick out a single detail and dwell on it exclusively, or make unwarranted conclusions. For example, after not receiving a promised phone call from a friend, you conclude, "They don't really care about me." Or while talking to someone, you are momentarily at a loss for words at one point. Looking back on the whole experience you think: "I had nothing to say".

Discounting or disqualifying the positive:

You reject successful experiences by insisting they don't count for some reason or another. In this way, you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by your everyday experiences. For example, you manage to take the bus all the way to work, but discount it by saying, "It wasn't really full today, so it doesn't really count." Or you discount the achievement by saying something like, "Even a baby could do that".

Jumping to conclusions:

You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definite facts that convincingly support your conclusion.

Mind reading:

You automatically assume that you know that someone is thinking negatively about you and you don't bother to check this out with them. "They thought I was boring ... I could just tell".

The fortune teller error:

You anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already established fact. For example, you worry about a presentation you have to give and think, "I know I will make a fool of myself and they all will laugh."

Catastrophizing

You exaggerate the importance of such things as your mistake or someone else's achievement. You expect the very worst and tell yourself that things are extremely bad. "It was awful". "I can't stand it".

Emotional reasoning:

You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: "I feel bad, so things must be going badly." "I feel anxious so it must be obvious to others".

"Should" statements:

You try to motivate yourself with shoulds, musts, and oughts. If you find yourself unable to do something, you then feel guilty and demoralized, for example, "I should be able to understand this the first time that I read it." If you direct these should statements toward others you feel anger, resentment, and frustration, for example, "They should have known how I was feeling."

Personalization and "omnipotence":

You see yourself as the cause of some negative external event, or as the centre of attention. For example, you think, "I always bring bad luck," or "Everyone was looking at me," or "I made them uncomfortable". Remember that just as you are responsible for your own thoughts and feelings, so are others responsible for themselves. You can't make anyone think or feel anything.

It is important to be realistic about how much attention people are paying to you, and how likely it is that you will be harshly judged. By and large, people who don't know you, don't care about you and don't think about your behavior. They are much more interested in their own lives - the fight they had last night, the new car they just bought.

People who do know you would have already made up their minds about you. They are not going to make the extreme shifts in their opinions of you that you expect them to. They might think that you seem a bit stressed today. They *might* think of you as being a tense person, or even a nervous type, maybe even that you're shy - but that is about all they are going to think, and does it really matter? What things are most important to you in how you would like others to think of you? It is also important to be realistic about how much you need to have the approval of others.

| A Activating event or situation | B Beliefs and interpretations | C Consequences | D Dispute (challenge) beliefs: record realistic thoughts |
|--|---|---------------------------------|---|
| Drinking coffee in front of people at the railway cafe | <p>My God, I might shake and spill the coffee.</p> <p>They will see me shaking and ...</p> <p>They will think I am mad or crazy.</p> <p>They won't like me and ...</p> <p>They'll move or turn away.</p> <p>They might even talk about me. That would be awful because can't stand to appear conspicuous, or tense, or nervous, because that means that I'm a failure as a person.</p> | Anxiety 80/100 | <p>I probably won't, as I usually cope OK.</p> <p>They may, but they probably won't even notice me.</p> <p>They probably wouldn't think anything of it.</p> <p>Even if they did, it would probably be that I'm a bit tense.</p> <p>They probably won't think that I'm mad or crazy – they might think I'm upset or physically ill.</p> <p>They probably won't talk about me as they have much more interesting things on their minds.</p> <p>Anxiety 45/100</p> |

Practice Example

Write down an example of a situation where you may have overreacted. Choose some situation in which you recently felt panicky or uncomfortable. To begin with, choose a situation that was only mildly upsetting. As you become more familiar with the technique, you can work on situations that cause high anxiety. Record the details of this situation in the “A” column. It can be helpful to go next to the “C” column and write down how you felt about this situation at the time. For example, you may have felt anxious. You may also have felt disappointed, frustrated or angry. Write down all the emotions you can recall, and then give *each* emotion a SUDs rating to reflect how strongly you experienced it at the time. Next, try to recall what you were thinking, or would probably have been thinking, in that situation, and record these thoughts in the “B” column. Try to be as inclusive as you can – that is, try to catch *everything* that might have gone through your mind about the situation. If you are successful you will find that there is at least one thought that matches each emotion in an understandable way. In the fourth column, write down your realistic challenges to each thought. Rate the amount of anxiety you would experience if you were thinking in this more helpful and realistic way about the situation.

| A Activating event or situation | B Beliefs and interpretations | C Consequences Emotions & SUDs | D Dispute (challenge) beliefs: record realistic thoughts |
|---|---|--|--|
| | | | Anxiety /100 |

Realistic thinking does not reject all negative thoughts and it is not simply positive thinking. It is looking at yourself and your environment in a realistic way, a way that maximizes the chances of successful coping. It is important to distinguish realistic thinking from irrationally positive, or wishful, thinking.

Some examples of the difference between unrealistic, wishful, and realistic thinking are shown below. In each case, try to identify the type of cognitive distortion involved in the irrational thoughts.

Unrealistic Thinking:

I didn't get the job, which proves that I am a failure. I'll never get a job or have things go right for me.

Wishful Thinking:

I didn't want the job anyway.

Realistic Thinking:

I am disappointed I didn't get that job, but I can cope.

Unrealistic Thinking:

What if I can't cope with this? It will be absolutely disastrous.

Wishful Thinking:

It'll be easy.

Realistic Thinking:

I'll probably be able to cope. It doesn't have to be perfect: I'll give it my best shot.

It is often difficult to tell the difference between various forms of thinking. Here are some clues to what you might be saying.

Unhelpful Or Unrealistic thinking:

"I must . . ."

"I've got to . . ."

"What if . . . that would be awful/unbearable"

"I couldn't stand it if . . ."

Wishful Thinking:

"It'll work out . . ."

"I don't care that . . ."

"It wouldn't have done any good anyway"

"I'll will it to happen"

Realistic And Helpful Thinking:

"I would like very much to . . ."

"I'd prefer not to . . ."

"I will do everything I can to . . ."

"If things don't go the way I want, I might be disappointed but I don't have to become overanxious or depressed"

Common Problems Answering Negative Thoughts: Troubleshooting

- *"I don't seem to have any thoughts."*

If at first you find it difficult to pin down what you are thinking, ask yourself, "What might I have been thinking about a situation like this?" "What would I be worried about?" If you can't identify your thoughts while you are in the situation, think about it immediately afterwards, once you are calmer. With practice, you will be able to identify and challenge your thoughts even when you are in a difficult situation.

- *"I can't think of any alternatives."*

Standing back, questioning, evaluating, and answering our thoughts is not something we normally do. You may well find it difficult at first to be objective and to find answers that affect your feelings to any great extent. Do not be discouraged if at first you cannot always find effective answers. Would you expect to win Wimbledon after six tennis lessons?

- *"I don't really believe the rational thought."*

You don't have to be convinced. Treat the rational thought as a hypothesis to be tested. Then act as if it's true, and see what happens. For example, to test the hypothesis that you are always the center of attention, try going for a walk down a busy street. As you pass people, glance at them to briefly make eye contact. What do you notice?

- *"I still feel anxious."*

This feeling relates to the problem above. Since you don't yet fully believe that nothing terrible is likely to happen, you will not be free of anxiety. However, you know that you can cope despite feeling anxious, you know that some anxiety is a normal part of life, and as you collect evidence to support your rational views of social interaction you will believe these more and therefore gradually feel less anxious. Your graded exposure program is particularly helpful in this regard.

Do not get discouraged if you find the same thoughts occurring again and again. If you have been anxious for some time, thinking irrationally will have become a well-established habit. It will take time to break it. The more often a particular thought occurs, the more opportunity you will have to answer and change it.

“Ten Irrational Ideas”

The following is based on Albert Ellis' work on rational emotive therapy and his book *A New Guide to Rational Living* (Ellis and Harper).

IT IS IRRATIONAL TO THINK THAT:

- You must have love or approval from all the people you find significant.
- You must prove yourself thoroughly competent and have talent at something important.
- You have to view life as awful, catastrophic, or depressing when things don't go the way that you want.
- People who harm you or do misdeeds are bad or villains and you should blame, damn, and punish them.
- If something makes you anxious, you should become terribly preoccupied with it and upset about it.
- People and things should turn out better than they do - if they don't, you have to view it as awful.
- Emotional misery comes from outside conditions and you have little ability to control your feelings and get rid of anxiety, hostility, and depression.
- You will find it easier to avoid facing difficulties and situations than to undertake rewarding forms of behavior that involve self-discipline.
- Your past is all-important, and because something affected you once it has to keep on determining your feelings and behavior.
- You can achieve happiness by being passive and uncommitted.

Your therapist will discuss these unrealistic ideas in more detail in your group.

Do not expect your belief in the negative thoughts to disappear completely, all at once. They have probably been around for a long time, whereas the answers may be quite new to you. It will take time and practice to build up belief in them, and you will need to test them out in action.

Summary: Identifying and challenging unrealistic thoughts about situations and events is a key element in overcoming social phobia. By consistently challenging unrealistic beliefs and testing realistic beliefs in real life situations (through graded exposure), you will gradually develop habitually realistic and helpful ways of thinking about things.

Ultimately, a phobia can only be overcome when an individual confronts his or her fears. This is called "exposure" to the feared situation. The most commonly used technique is to start by confronting the *least* anxiety-provoking situations initially. As confidence grows, increasingly more difficult situations are tackled. This process is known as "graded exposure" and research has shown that it is a powerfully effective technique in overcoming phobias. The aim of this chapter is to help you to formulate a plan for confronting your fears that will be both tolerable in terms of the anxiety it causes you and effective in helping you to overcome your social phobia.

Why is Exposure Necessary?

In the second section of this manual we discussed the development of situational fears, that is, fears of certain situations that the individual has learned to associate with anxiety or even panic. Being in such situations, or even thinking about being in such situations, triggers anxiety as part of the *flight or fight* response. The natural impulse is to escape or avoid the situation. This effectively reduces the anxiety.

Unfortunately, this natural tendency to avoid situations which provoke distress or uncomfortable degrees of fear or anxiety is, in fact, one of the key factors which contribute to the development of a phobia in the first place, and then help to maintain it. For example, let's say you are asked to "say a few words" at a gathering of co-workers to farewell a friend and colleague of yours who is leaving. You may immediately think,

"Oh no. There's no way I could do that. I wouldn't know what to say. What if my mind went totally blank?"

This makes you feel so anxious that you devise some excuse so as to avoid having to make the speech. You then feel much calmer. You may be thinking something like,

"Phew! That was a lucky escape. I would have made a fool of myself: "

However, you probably also feel disappointed in yourself and perhaps even quite critical of yourself. This pushes your self confidence even lower. You also lose the opportunity to discover that maybe you actually *could* have managed to say a few words that were well received by your audience and appreciated by your friend.

So, several important consequences of avoidance are:

- (1) The original fear is strengthened or *reinforced* (that is, you strongly believe that had you not avoided the situation you would surely have embarrassed yourself because of your ineptitude as a public speaker)
- (2) You miss the opportunity to have an experience that might disprove or *disconfirm* your negative beliefs about yourself and start to build some confidence
- (3) You miss the opportunity to practice a social skill: most people, only develop confidence in their social skills because of frequent practice, including learning from their mistakes.

Note, of course, the importance of *what you think* about these situations in determining your behaviour and emotions. To mount a successful graded exposure program in social phobia it is essential to apply your "straight thinking" skills in every situation.

The other major problem with using avoidance to try to control anxiety is that fears often seem to spread or *generalize* across situations. For example, you might start out being anxious about speaking on the telephone only when someone who makes you nervous is close enough to overhear. You might then try to avoid that situation, but gradually you find that you're not really comfortable using the phone when *anyone* is nearby. ..with time you find that you worry a lot about what the person on the other end might be thinking about what you have to say, too. .. eventually you find yourself trying to avoid all phone conversations ...you don't make calls and you won't answer the phone. ..To relate this to the discussion above, about the importance of how you think about situations, it is likely that way back with that first element of avoidance the message you were unconsciously giving yourself was: "X might think what I have to say is foolish ...that would be awful... I will make sure I don't say anything when he's/she's around". In other words "I can't trust myself' and "the opinions others have of me are paramount".

So, confronting feared situations is an absolutely essential part of the program. What will make it bearable is taking a graded approach and applying your straight thinking skills to keep you realistic about the actual degree of risk.

Principles of Graded Exposure

There are several key features to a successful graded exposure program.

A moderate level of anxiety

Anxiety-provoking situations are listed, and the level of anxiety each might be expected to cause rated so that the situations can be ranked in order from least to most anxiety-provoking, thus creating the *exposure hierarchy*. The individual chooses to confront a situation which is *moderately* anxiety-provoking. It is better to err on the side of choosing a situation which is easier than expected, rather than choosing something daunting and feeling unable to proceed, or feeling overwhelmed. Fears can be made worse if a person suddenly forces himself or herself, without sufficient preparation, to confront something that has been avoided for years, or which is perceived as extremely threatening. In this situation, the anxiety produced by a sudden and overwhelming exposure can actually strengthen the association between the situation and the fear. This is known as *sensitization* and is the opposite of what we are trying to achieve!

Repeated Exposure

Just confronting a situation once will not be enough. It takes many repetitions, in conjunction with assiduous application of straight thinking techniques, to "wear down" the anxiety associated with a given situation. This is the process of *desensitization*, the desired outcome of a graded exposure program.

Frequent Exposure

The more frequently a situation is confronted the sooner the degree of anxiety it is capable of provoking will begin to decrease.

No Escape

It is very important to remain in the situation until the anxiety provoked by it begins to diminish. Many people initially feel anxious about this. "How bad could the anxiety get? What if I lost control?" are fears that many people report. Firstly, remember that you are deliberately going to choose to tackle only those situations which are *moderately* anxiety-provoking. Secondly, research has shown that anxiety only increases to a certain level -you have probably already had the worst panic or anxiety attack you will ever have, particularly now that you have already been practicing some anxiety management strategies. Such research has shown that, even if an individual did not apply any breathing control or straight thinking strategies, but simply stayed put in the situation, their anxiety would spontaneously diminish over the next 30-90 minutes. This makes physiological sense, since the flight or fight response is designed to be used as an *emergency* response. Anything that doesn't kill you within a half hour or so is reclassified by the automatic parts of our brains as not being a true emergency. ...and the response is switched off.

It is true that many individuals report experiences of anxiety that seem to last for hours at a time. However, in most instances the flight or fight response is waxing and waning in intensity in response to recurrent anxious thoughts about the situation. It is rarely maintained at a "full-blown" level for long. Once again, this illustrates the necessity of actively applying straight thinking techniques *while in the anxiety-provoking situation*. If our thoughts about a situation remain realistic and helpful, we will *not* suffer extremes of anxiety.

"No escape" also means not using alcohol or sedatives to control or avoid anxiety. Instead, choose a level of anxiety that you can manage without these unhealthy aids.

Planning Your Program

Step 1: Identify your problem situations and choose your goals to create your exposure hierarchy

In Section 2 you listed some situations in which you feel anxious. Add to this list any other goals of social interaction or performance that you would like to be able to achieve. At this stage it would be most helpful to identify very specific goals, such as the following examples:

"To be able to eat a meal with a couple of close friends at the local restaurant"

"To be able to sign credit card vouchers"

"To make a short announcement in front of 10 people at work"

It is helpful to have a range of goals which vary from relatively easy to very difficult. The more specific your goals are, the easier it is to formulate a program to achieve them. For example, "to enjoy going to parties" as compared to "to be able to go to Jane's party this Saturday night, stay for at least 20 minutes, and talk to two people for about 5 minutes each." Being specific also helps you to more accurately gauge the level of anxiety you feel and identify and challenge any unrealistic or unhelpful thoughts about the task.

Include both long-term and short-term goals. Some of your long-term goals may well be described in fairly broad terms, for example, "to feel more comfortable socially". You will find it helpful to consider how you are actually going to achieve these goals, and devise some steps toward them. For example, if you chose "to be comfortable in social situations" you would have to decide how to define "comfortable," you would have to decide which social situations you want to be

comfortable in, then you would have to begin to practice exposure to each of these social situations, or groups of similar situations.

Do not aim to eliminate anxiety. For example, the goal "to go to Paul's dinner party and not feel anxious" will be very hard to achieve, since some anxiety in this situation is quite reasonable. A further problem with this approach is that the focus continues to be on the anxiety. The more you worry about trying not to get anxious, the more likely you are to actually get anxious. If you were told not to think about a pink elephant, how would you go about it? The goals "to go to Paul's dinner party" or "to go to Paul's dinner party and manage my anxiety" are much more reasonable.

Key Points about Setting Social Goals

- Make your goals realistic
- Break difficult, broadly focused or long term goals into specific steps
- Do not aim to eliminate anxiety

In the space below we would like you to work out five goals of your own choosing. These goals should vary in difficulty from those things that you hope to achieve in the next few weeks, to those that may take six months to attain.

MY GOALS

| |
|----------|
| 1. _____ |
| 2. _____ |
| 3. _____ |
| 4. _____ |
| 5. _____ |

Step 2: "SUDs" ratings

Use the SUDs scale introduced in Section 4 to estimate the degree of anxiety each goal might cause. In this case, a SUDs rating of 100 represents the worst anxiety you have ever experienced, and 0 is no anxiety. We will also use SUDs ratings to monitor your progress.

Step 3: Breaking down your goals into steps

Any goal with a SUDs rating of more than 30-40 will need to be broken down into smaller steps to enable you to work up to the goal a little at a time. Take the example of the goal "to be able to eat a meal in the local restaurant." This comes from an individual with a fear of eating in public. In order to be able to work toward eliminating this fear you might start with (1) small amounts of food and (2) uncrowded restaurants. Then, gradually, you would increase the amount of food and the number of people.

Goal: To Be Able To Eat A Meal In The Local Restaurant

| This goal could be broken down into the following steps: | SUDs |
|--|-------------|
| Have a soft drink at the restaurant early in the morning | 30 |
| Have a soft drink at lunchtime | 45 |
| Have a cup of coffee and a sandwich early in the morning | 50 |
| Have a cup of coffee and a sandwich at lunchtime | 65 |
| Order a soup at dinner; stay at least 20 minutes then may leave even if not finished | 75 |
| Order a full meal at dinner and stay until it is all eaten | |
| - with friend aware of problem | 90 |
| - with friends not aware of problem | 100 |

The task in planning steps to achieve an exposure goal is to think of ways in which you could do something similar to but easier than your goal task. Look at the example above and notice what changed at each step. The following are aspects of tasks or activities that can commonly be modified (you may think of others):

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Who | is present when you are working towards your goal |
| What | behavior you set as your goal -exactly specified |
| When | you carry out the task |
| Where | you carry out the task |
| for how long (duration) | you perform the task or stay in the situation |

The number of steps involved depends upon the level of difficulty of the task involved. Using the example above, for some people, some of these steps might be too easy. In that case, you would eliminate those that are too easy.

Be realistic in your rating -it's better to overestimate than underestimate the anxiety a given step might cause and work on tasks where you feel you have a reasonably good chance of being successful. Some people use the "75% rule". That is, you only set goals that you are about 75% certain you can achieve. If you use this rule you can determine if you are going from one step to another with too big a jump, that is, attempting a level that you are not ready for. If you feel less than 75% certain of success, make that step easier so as to increase your confidence. But don't use the 75% rule as a reason for avoiding activities -you can always modify the activity in some way. (See below for imaginal desensitization for help in some situations.)

SUDs or confidence ratings can also be used to determine when you are ready to progress to the next step. Basically, you stay at a given level until either you are about 75% sure of being able to achieve the next step, or your anxiety ratings have fallen to 30/100 or less on the current step.

If anxiety becomes severe, don't panic or run away. If circumstances allow it, stop your activity temporarily. Find a place to sit down or rest, control your breathing and any unrealistic thinking, and wait for the fear to diminish, as it will within a few minutes. If circumstances prevent you from stopping an activity, consider allowing yourself to continue the activity with no pressure to

perform. For example, if there are silences in the conversation, let them happen. It is not your responsibility to fill every gap.

Aim never to leave a situation out of fear -take time out if you need it, control your breathing, stay focused on the task at hand -not on yourself! Stay at least until you feel your anxiety level starting to decrease. Best of all is to remain for a time in the situation even after your anxiety has settled. If you do not stay until your anxiety has lessened, you will see it as a failure, lose confidence and your fear is reinforced.

Monitor your progress by keeping a diary of your exposure work which includes both the predicted and actual SUDs experienced. You may have to make running adjustments as you discover in the middle of a program that the next step is too easy or too hard. Your diary can include goals, steps and achievements, together with comments about how you felt and how you dealt with particular situations (coping strategies). This will help you to both structure your progress and give you feedback as to how you are doing. You can learn as much from your difficulties as from your successes. Continued use of a diary is highly recommended.

Try to work on at least three goals at anyone time. When you have achieved one step or goal, move on to a more difficult goal. It can be helpful to work on both short- and long-term goals at the same time. Remember that your long-term goals may require many steps.

Aim to do something every day.

Getting the most from your exposure program

Several thinking patterns that seem to develop commonly in those with social phobia can stop you from getting the benefit you deserve from all the hard work you put into exposure practice. These habits may be summarized as follows:

"Discounting" or Minimizing

For example, "So I managed to ask a question in class. That's pathetic compared to what all the others can do." Or, "Yes, I caught the bus, but it wasn't very crowded and I only went a couple of stops so it hardly even counts. I should be able to catch the express at peak hour but I can't. ..."

Take one step at a time and give yourself credit! More is achieved by positive encouragement than by criticism. If you can be patient and keep taking the small steps you'll eventually reach your goal!

The Video Replay

Recent research has suggested that individuals with social phobia have quite a different perspective of social situations than those with only normal levels of social anxiety. When someone without social phobia attends a party or social gathering, they may be a little nervous and self conscious initially, but after a few minutes their attention is firmly focused on what is happening around them -particularly other people that they are interacting with, listening closely to what they say and making eye contact. Their recollections will be as though they are watching a video that they themselves made.

In social phobia it is quite different. The anxiety and self-consciousness are probably worse to start with, particularly if there has been a lot of worry about the occasion in advance (we call this anticipatory anxiety). Unfortunately, it only gets worse for many. We now know that this is

because their attention stays focused on themselves. It is as if they are watching a video of themselves as though taken by some one else. This is sometimes referred to as "self-focused attention" or as taking "the observer perspective". The person suffering with social phobia tries to imagine the image that others are getting of them -do I look relaxed? Do I sound anxious? Oh no, I can feel my face going red! Et cetera! Naturally, this constant monitoring is also very distracting, and sooner or later the person will miss some part of the conversation and possibly truly be at a loss as to an appropriate reply.

As if all this isn't bad enough, once safely home the "Video Replay" starts. As if watching a video of themselves the person replays every awkward moment, every sign of anxiety they felt they displayed- over and over. The Video Replay is often combined with "Focusing on the Negative" - positive achievements are overlooked. The net result can be that a person takes what was in fact a positive achievement of a planned goal and ends up interpreting it as a failure. This is the main reason why so many individuals that report having pushed themselves to do things describe it having had a demoralizing effect rather than building their confidence.

Focusing on the Negative

All positive elements are ignored and the person focuses only on perceived mistakes, the net result being a perception of failure.

Unrealistic Expectations

Many people expect too much of themselves in too short a time. It takes time to overcome what may be close to a lifetime of anxiety. Additionally, it's important to know that improvement doesn't happen in a straight line. It's absolutely typical to find that something you did with relative ease last week causes unexpected difficulty this week, and to experience real setbacks from time to time. We devote a special section to this at the end of the manual.

Imaginal Desensitization

In a few instances, it may be difficult to approach your goal in a series of real-life steps. In such cases, some steps can be practiced in imagination. This type of desensitization is less powerful than real life exposure, but it does provide a way of adding in-between steps in some all-or-none or one-tittle-only activities. Imaginal desensitization is best limited to situations where you are unable to perform a step in real life. It should be used in combination with real life exposure to feared situations. Imaginal desensitization alone will not cure social phobia.

The following method can be used for imaginal practice:

- Specify in detail the situation to which you want to desensitize yourself.
- List all the steps involved in performing this activity, or devise versions of this activity that gradually increase in difficulty.
- Record these details on a card, or series of cards, that you will use to script your imagination sessions.
- Rank the examples in order of difficulty or anxiety that they provide.
- Imagine each scene following a relaxation session. Do not imagine the scene when you feel tense or fearful: stop and relax.

For example, suppose that you wish to rehearse a job interview. This is a normal fear, but the person with social phobia may become so preoccupied about it that they are a nervous wreck by the time of the interview and thus more fearful about saying or doing something stupid, or being badly judged. Of course, you can always practice one or two of the steps associated with interviews in real life, for example, getting a friend to be the interviewer, or actually visiting the interview building the day before the interview. However, there may be other factors that make it difficult for you to practice the situation.

You could proceed through the following in your imagination:

- You arrive at the reception desk, and give your name.
- You are seated waiting for the interview in a quiet room.
- You are seated waiting in a room with three other candidates.
- You are seated with three other candidates and about 10 office staff.
- Your name is called and you have to stand up.
- You are introduced to someone who gives his name.
- You enter the interview room. There is one person to interview you.
- You enter the interview room. There are three people to interview you. ..and so on.

Begin by imagining yourself in these scenes operating in a competent manner. If you begin to feel anxious, don't go further until you have controlled your anxiety. In this way, you can rehearse competent behavior at the same time as desensitizing yourself to the fear. Only imagine one scene at a time. Move on to the next when you can imagine any given scene with little anxiety. Once you have mastered all your steps you can add some challenges to desensitize to. For example, if you have fears of particular things going wrong (e.g. your prepared speech blowing off the lectern if your feared situation is public speaking) imagine yourself coping with the challenge in a calm and competent way.

Exercises Planning Activities

We would now like you to practice making a graded exposure plan for the following goals:

1. Goal: Performing some task at work (e.g., filling out a form) while your boss is watching over your shoulder .

Steps:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

2. Goal: Giving a five-minute speech at a friend's anniversary party.

Steps:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Achieving Your Own Personal Goals

From your list of five goals, select two that you would like to begin to work on first, and write these below. To get started, choose either something low on your anxiety hierarchy or else something that is a priority for you. Set out beneath each goal the steps you intend to take in order to achieve it.

1. Goal: _____

Steps:

SUDs

- | | | |
|---|-------|-------|
| • | _____ | _____ |
| • | _____ | _____ |
| • | _____ | _____ |
| • | _____ | _____ |
| • | _____ | _____ |
| • | _____ | _____ |
| • | _____ | _____ |

2. Goal: _____

Steps:

SUDs

| | | |
|---|-------|-------|
| • | _____ | _____ |
| • | _____ | _____ |
| • | _____ | _____ |
| • | _____ | _____ |
| • | _____ | _____ |
| • | _____ | _____ |
| • | _____ | _____ |
| • | _____ | _____ |

Implementing Your Program

Use your diary to plan a week or so ahead. Even if you are having a bad day, you should always do something, but you only need go over the steps that you have already mastered. Confront a situation frequently and regularly until you overcome the fear. Many fears need to be confronted frequently (that is, 3 to 4 times a week) at first, otherwise your fear will rise again by the time you do it next. The general rule is: the more you fear it, the more frequently you need to confront it.

Repeat each step over and over until the SUDs it generates have dropped to 30 or less consistently (that is, a few times in a row). An example of a diary is shown below.

Confront your previously feared situation regularly even after you no longer fear it. This will make sure it stays under your control.

Practicing the Steps

Use the standard relaxation and breathing control exercises before you go out. Think realistically and helpfully about the task you plan. Get yourself as calm as possible -but you don't have to be completely calm to cope.

Use your anxiety management techniques while in the situation.

Concentrate on the task at hand, not on how you are feeling, how you look, or what others might be thinking about you.

Give yourself recognition for your efforts and plan rewards for achievements. Learn to congratulate yourself when things go well, and be supportive of yourself when you don't do as well as you'd have liked -learn to be a good friend to yourself.

Example of Diary

This person is fearful of scrutiny and of interacting with others.

| Date | Task | SUDs | | Comments |
|--------|--|-----------|--------------|---|
| | | predicted | actual | |
| 19 Mar | Sit with magazine in staff canteen for cup of coffee towards end of lunch (10 minutes) | 40 | 50 | It was more crowded than I expected; just kept my head down and tried to concentrate on magazine |
| 20 Mar | Sit with magazine in staff canteen for cup of coffee towards end of lunch (10 minutes) | 50 | 50 | Quite difficult to walk in; reminded myself no-one pays attention, really |
| 21 Mar | Sit with magazine in staff canteen for cup of coffee towards end of lunch (10 minutes) | 50 | 40 | Seemed a bit easier today |
| 22 Mar | Sit with magazine in staff canteen for cup of coffee towards end of lunch (10 minutes) | 50 | 35 | No-one really pays much attention |
| 23 Mar | Sit with magazine in staff canteen for cup of coffee towards end of lunch (10 minutes) | 50 | 30 | Not as many people here on Friday, maybe; looking forward to a break from this! |
| 24 Mar | Go to movie with Sally at morning session; sit near exit | 40 | 30 | It was easier than I thought – cinema VERY quiet; Sally is really supportive; I actually enjoyed the movie! Will go more often. |
| 25 Mar | Bus to local shops Try on 4 pairs of shoes at the shoe store where they have the assistants | 40 60 | 40 80? 50 | Not busy on the weekend. Nearly couldn't go through with it as store was quite busy- felt sorry for assistant-but a few people had left and assistant was very cheerful |
| 26 Mar | Sit with magazine in staff canteen for cup of coffee towards end of lunch (10 minutes) | 50 | 50 | Just as hard as last week – very disappointing; did straight thinking – just hard coming back after a break + canteen busy; reminded myself: no-one cares |
| 27 Mar | Sit with magazine in staff canteen for cup of coffee towards end of lunch (10 minutes) | 50 | 30 | Much more settled today |
| 28 Mar | Sit with magazine in staff canteen for cup of coffee towards end of lunch (10 minutes) | 50 | 30 | No real problem: time to try the next step |
| 29 Mar | Take late lunch & eat in staff canteen: join Trish if she's there or else sit with magazine (30 min) | 60 | 40 | Not much harder than the last step, really. Trish not there – read magazine. Will try this one a few more times to be sure. |
| 30 Mar | Take late lunch & eat in staff canteen: join Trish if she's there or else sit with magazine (30 min) | 60 | 35 | Feeling more confident. Looked up a few times and no-one was looking my way at all. |

Summary

An excessive fear of negative evaluation gives rise to anxiety in a range of social situations. The natural tendency is to avoid situations which make us anxious. Unfortunately, avoidance and escape only strengthen the underlying fears, and contribute to the spread of fear across more and more situation. In order to overcome anxiety it is necessary to confront feared situations. This can be done in a planned and graded way which builds confidence gradually without provoking extreme levels of anxiety. Anxiety management skills and straight thinking techniques help control the anxiety generated by confronting feared situations and help to reduce future anxiety. Success requires frequent and repeated exposure to feared situations.

What is Assertion?

Healthy assertion – assertiveness - is about *choice* and *communication*. It is the making of active choices about what to do and say. It is the ability to communicate our opinions, thoughts, needs, and feelings in a direct, honest, and appropriate manner - when we choose. It is the ability to recognize our rights and responsibilities and the rights and responsibilities of others, and making choices about how to manage interpersonal situations in a way that respects the rights of all concerned. Being assertive means taking care of ourselves – without trampling others.

Being assertive results in having more confidence and more control over your life, and taking responsibility to meet your own needs, which in turn leads to an increase in self-esteem. When you feel like this about yourself, you are more able to make closer and more satisfying relationships with other people. Being assertive includes the ability to choose how to relate, having weighed the risks and benefits. Being assertive enables you to be flexible and modify your responses as the situation requires, rather than being locked in to one particular way of relating.

Being assertive includes:

- valuing yourself and believing that you have the right to express your opinions and get your needs met
- being willing to share yourself with others, rather than holding everything inside
- respecting the rights and needs of others
- being able to choose how to respond to people or situations
- feeling okay about yourself, your needs, and actions

What Faulty Assertion?

There are two forms of faulty assertion: underassertion (passivity) and aggressiveness.

Underassertion

When you are underassertive you do not express your feelings, needs, and opinions to others. You deny your own rights to communicate. In practical terms, you often end up doing things that you can't really afford, don't enjoy, or haven't the time for. Emotionally, unassertiveness erodes your self-esteem as you criticize yourself for not having been able to say what you really thought, or what you really wanted. People who are unable to assert their own needs and opinions often bottle up feelings such as anger, resentment, and disappointment. Such feelings increase arousal and tension levels in the body, and make panics and anxiety more likely. Often a point is reached where the feelings can't be controlled anymore, and then the person explodes aggressively. Of course, after this, they feel guilty and go back to bottling their feelings up all over again. You can see that being underassertive can lead to more aggression than being assertive would!

Aggressiveness

Some people have a habit of reacting aggressively from the start in many interactions. There can be many reasons for this, including an underlying world view that others are usually treat them unfairly or are out to make life difficult for them (another type of unrealistic, unhelpful thought). When people are aggressive, they are often left feeling guilty and ashamed of their behavior. Their victims often feel put down and want to get their own back. Aggressiveness leads to greatly increased arousal, and may leave a person always on the verge of anger and anxiety.

What is the difference between being assertive, aggressive or underassertive? The following examples illustrate these different responses to various interpersonal situations.

Example 1: *Your reckless brother wants to borrow your car. You don't want to lend it to him because you don't feel confident that he won't crash it. What do you say?*

Nonassertive: Oh.....all right, but please be careful.

Aggressive: You've got a nerve asking to borrow my car. I'm not that stupid.

Assertive: I don't feel comfortable about the way you drive, so I'm not going to loan it to you. That doesn't mean I don't want to help you. Have you thought of renting a car while yours is in for repairs?

Note that you may want to add a constructive suggestion to show that you are aware that the person has a problem that still needs solving. This is your choice and obviously will vary with circumstances. You could just say "No."

Example 2: *The boss comes out of his office and puts your latest assignment down in front of you. "This is trash!" he tells you. How do you respond?*

Nonassertive: I'm sorry is it that bad?

Aggressive: Well, if it's so bad, do it yourself then.

Assertive: I think it would be best if you could tell me what's wrong and how it can be improved.

Example 3: *Waiting in line at the post office, Janice is about to be served when someone starts to speak and says "It's only a quick question." There are many people waiting, for various reasons. What would you do?*

Nonassertive: Okay, go ahead.

Aggressive: Don't you think I've got better things to do than to wait here and listen to your problem?

Assertive: I've been waiting quite a while and it is my turn now. I don't expect to be very long either.

Underassertiveness is the most common assertiveness problem in social phobia and avoidant personality styles. The two most common reasons for this seem to be:

Fear of negative evaluation.

The person with social phobia fears that if they say what they really think, or what they would like to happen, that others will reject them, criticize them, or think less of them.

Fear of upsetting others

In particular, a belief that if you say "No" to someone, or disagree with their opinion, that you will be responsible for upsetting them and causing them distress. This involves cognitive errors such as omnipotence, personalization, fortune telling, and mind reading.

People learn faulty assertion from their experiences throughout their lives. Many people learned to make nonassertive responses because that's the way they saw their parents behave, or because that was the way their parents, teachers, or other authority figures expected them to behave. Once these patterns become established, they can be difficult to change because the thought of behaving in a more assertive manner provokes too much anxiety (how would the other person respond? What if they became angry or upset?) After many years, people act this way purely from habit. A new, healthier style of assertive interaction can be learned in place of these old habits. It is time for you to critically examine whether your current style of relating to others is most appropriate and helpful to you in your life now.

The principles of assertiveness hold that each of us is responsible for ourselves and our actions. It is up to us to choose how to respond to others, and up to them to choose how to respond to us. We have the *right* to make up our own minds about what to think and how to act. In reality, this makes life a lot easier! It means that we don't have to try and be a "mind reader" to know what others really want and thus try to "make them happy" – it's up to them to tell us what they want (or don't want). We don't have to feel that asking for something is an imposition on someone else – because they have the right to refuse us if what we ask is not convenient. The *Bill of Assertive Rights* lists the basic rights of interpersonal interaction to which each of us have claim. Look carefully through each of these and note your reaction to them.

Bill of Assertive Rights

- You have the right to be the judge of what you do and what you think.
- You have the right to offer no reasons and excuses for your behavior.
- You have the right not to be responsible for finding solutions to other people's problems.
- You have the right to change your mind.
- You have the right to make mistakes.
- You have the right to say, "I don't know."
- You have the right to make your own decisions.
- You have the right to say, "I don't understand."
- You have the right to say, "I don't care."
- You have the right to say no - without feeling guilty.

Many people feel somewhat shocked by some of these statements. It is important to note that this is a list of your *rights*. That is, not what you *should* do in any situation, but rather what you *could* choose to do. When you make your decision about how to respond in any given situation, you have these rights to take into consideration.

Choosing how to respond in any situation

When we feel uncomfortable in some interaction it is helpful to think through the situation and decide how to respond. This is particularly relevant in difficult interactions of a recurring nature – for example, the colleague who is often rude, a demanding relative.

The first step is to use your cognitive challenging skills to identify your thoughts and feelings in the situation and check that they are realistic. For example, to be sure that you are not misinterpreting someone’s reaction, jumping to conclusions about things or taking things personally. Just because you have strong feelings does not mean that they give a true picture of what is happening – you might *feel* anxious and inadequate but it doesn’t mean that you are coming across badly to others. There may be a problem, but you will deal with it most effectively if you are realistic about it. For example, there may be a colleague who says, “I’m busy. Come back later” in a terse manner when you ask for some assistance that it is their job to provide. You might think, “They don’t like me. They’re always rude ... I can’t stand working with them.” You might start to feel anxious and uncomfortable any time you had to interact with them and might try to put it off or avoid it. It would be important to be realistic about the situation.

- *Just because the person was a bit short with you, does it mean they don’t like you? What other explanations could there be?*
- *Are they only like this with you, or have you seen them behave this way with others?*
- *Are they always like this, or only sometimes? In what situations are they more likely to behave this way?*

You could then consider ways you might resolve the situation without having to quit your job! The process of making sure that your interpretations about the situation are realistic helps you to clarify the problem, and it is usually now possible to state the problem more accurately. In this case, the problem might be expressed as: “X often refuses to help me when I need their assistance and does this in a manner which I find slightly aggressive”. The next step in finding a solution to this problem is to consider each person’s *rights and responsibilities* in the situation.

For example, with the situation above, you might decide the following:

| | |
|---|---|
| My Rights | X’s Rights |
| I have the right to ask for what I need I have the right to be treated with respect | To be treated with respect To communicate their needs and wishes |
| My Responsibilities | X’s Responsibilities |
| To get my job done – this means I need X’s assistance at times – I may have to be prepared to negotiate about how this is best accomplished | To do their job – this means they need to assist me at times |

It can then be helpful to use a technique called “Structured Problem Solving” to help you choose the best solution to the problem.

Structured Problem Solving

Structured problem solving provides a framework for identifying and evaluating potential solutions to problems, and for planning the implementation of chosen solutions or problem-solving strategies. The steps in this process are summarised below.

Structured Problem Solving

- | | |
|---------|--|
| Step 1: | Identify the problem |
| Step 2: | “Brainstorm” potential solutions |
| Step 3: | Critically assess the pros and cons of each potential solution |
| Step 4: | Choose the best solution(s) |
| Step 5: | Plan how to implement the solution(s) |
| Step 6: | Review outcome |

In step 1 it is important to clarify the problem and state it as accurately as possible, trying to avoid being overly emotional about it or making “cognitive errors” about what is really happening.

In step 2 the aim is to think as creatively as possible about potential solutions. Don’t be critical at this stage – just let the ideas flow. If there are people you would feel comfortable talking the problem over with, you can include on your list any suggestions they make. Make sure you also consider what *you* would like to happen – it might not prove the most feasible option, but you owe it to yourself to at least consider your own preferences.

Step 3 is where you critically evaluate the pros and cons of each potential solution. Be sure to be realistic in your assessments. For example,

- Would you have the resources to carry out this solution?
 - * Time
 - * Money
 - * Personal resources and skills including ability to be assertive at his point in time (i.e. being mindful of what you can do now, not what you’d *like* to be capable of eventually)
- Would this solution be likely to solve the whole problem? Part of the problem?
- What problems might the solution itself lead to?
- How might the other person react to this solution?

It can be helpful to give a relative weighting to the pros and cons of each solution. It’s important not to cut corners in this exercise – take the time to consider *each* solution in turn. You will usually find that the time you spend on this structured problem solving exercise is a good investment. It helps to stop worrying in an unstructured, ultimately unhelpful way, and it helps you to feel comfortable that you considered every option that you could think of at the time. Your work sheet might look something like this:

Solutions:

| 1. Speak to my superior about the problem with X | | | |
|---|----------|---|----------|
| pros | (weight) | cons | (weight) |
| Don't have to confront him/her myself | *** | X might be angry about not being approached directly – might hold a grudge | * |
| Superior is very approachable | ** | I don't improve my assertiveness skills | ** |
| | | Superior may think less of me for not handling it myself – might count against me for promotion | ** |
| 2. Email X and suggest that I notify him/her when I need help so we can arrange a mutually convenient time | | | |
| pros | | cons | |
| Don't have to speak to X directly about it | *** | Means I have to wait for help until convenient for X | * |
| Likely to be an acceptable solution to X as allows him/her to help me at his/her convenience | *** | X might be offended that I didn't speak to him/her directly | * |
| Gives X time to consider it & at his/her convenience | * | | |

List other possible solutions here:

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

What might be the pros and cons of each?

In **step 4** the best solution, or sometimes combination of solutions is chosen by reviewing the pros and cons of all the options.

Step 5 calls for a specific plan of action to be devised for implementing the chosen solution(s):

- *What will you say and to whom?*
- *When will you say it?*
- *How will you organise to meet or otherwise get the message to the person?*

Step 6 is equally important. By planning a review it helps you to recognise that it may not be possible to find the “perfect” solution no matter how hard you have tried. In some cases the review is best scheduled after you have carried out a specific planned behaviour or intervention. In other cases, for example, a situation where you decide to try out a new style of response or of relating to another person, you might decide to review the situation after a certain period of time has elapsed. When you perform your review, re-evaluate the problem, and decide whether it requires further action. If so, go through the above process once more, taking account of what you have learned and the changes that may have occurred.

Sending the message effectively

If you choose a solution involving direct discussion with another person, send messages effectively and without blame by:

- careful timing
- using "I" rather than "you" statements. "I feel . . . when you . . . because . . ."
- matching your spoken and nonverbal messages
- being specific about how others' behavior disturbs you
- acknowledging others' feelings when appropriate, "You seem upset by what I've said," and checking whether this is an accurate perception

You can see from the examples throughout this section that in an assertive encounter no one should feel put down. If people choose to react badly to your assertion, then you can regard this as their problem and not some fault of your own. It is their choice how to respond. People who attempt to make you feel bad after a healthy assertive encounter are usually trying to manipulate you without concern for your wishes, often because of their own problems of low self esteem. Such people would themselves benefit from an assertiveness training program.

A key word is *choose*, because you can be assertive and choose not to speak up for your rights, or choose to act more aggressively on occasions. This is quite different from continuously acting passively or aggressively without having any control over how you react. There may be times where you choose *not* to assert your rights. That's perfectly okay and quite normal: as long as it was an active choice. For example, you might choose to put yourself out for a loved one. You might choose not to assert your rights in a brief encounter where you judge it is not worth the energy and you will never have to deal with that person again. You also need to consider the long-term consequences to the other person and to the relationship of speaking up for yourself. Your partner, friends, and colleagues may need time to adjust to the positive changes in your behavior. In some relationships, your new assertiveness may challenge the current balance of power and you and the other(s) in the relationship will need to allow time for communication.

Choices

To assert your rights or keep them in reserve

How much of your inner feelings to reveal

How much to tell people about yourself

How to respond in any situation

Choosing the assertive option is often much more difficult than acting in an aggressive or underassertive manner. Try giving responses that illustrate the different styles of reacting in the following examples:

Example 1: *You are just about to answer a question that your brother has asked you and your father answers for you. He has done this ever since you were young. You want to answer for yourself. Your response to your father is:*

Nonassertive:

Aggressive:

Assertive:

Example 2: *Your friend sees that you are just going shopping. She says, "While you're shopping, would you pick up my dry cleaning, please?" You are not planning to go anywhere near the dry cleaners and parking there is inconvenient, so you don't want to say yes.*

Nonassertive:

Aggressive:

Assertive:

Example 3: *When you took a new job 12 months ago, one colleague in particular was very welcoming, helping you to settle in by inviting you to sit with them at lunch, and introducing you to others. On a number of occasions this friend has asked you to loan them money to tide them over until pay day, and you did so as you felt you couldn't refuse. They have never paid any of the money back. Now they come to you for another loan. What do you do?*

Nonassertive:

Aggressive:

Assertive:

Nonassertive Myths

There are beliefs that many people hold which make it difficult for them to assert themselves. These beliefs are called *myths* because they are very rarely tested against reality. When they are, they are usually found to be untrue. The two most common myths that prevent people with excessive social anxiety from asserting themselves are:

The Myth of a Good Friend

You are following this myth if you say things like "He should have known that I didn't want that" or "She should have understood why I said that." What you are really saying is "He/She should have been able to read my mind." The assumption is that friends should know how you feel about everything at any given moment. It is also important to remember that other people do not always hold the same things to be important as you do. For example, you may believe that punctuality is important. If a friend is late for an appointment, you may say, "If he took me seriously he would have been on time." Your friend, however, may see no relationship between how seriously he takes

you and how punctual he is. Punctuality may simply be an unimportant factor in his life. In this case, he would not understand why you would be offended. The most sensible way to resolve this type of problem is by open discussion. You will not always get your own way, of course, but at least you will let your friends know what is important to you and you won't have to rely on their "reading your mind."

The Myth of Obligation

You believe in this myth if you say to yourself "If my friend asks me a favor, I have to agree if I am a true friend." Also, you are likely to believe the converse of this, that is, if you ask a friend a favor, he or she has to agree if that person is a true friend. If you believe in this myth, you will never feel comfortable about asking or giving favors, because you will not see that there is a choice involved. That is, when someone asks you to do something you may feel resentful because you will not be able to say no. Also, you will not be able to ask anyone to do anything because you will believe that they cannot say no!

Protective Skills

In some situations, your healthy assertion will be met by strong resistance. Others may act aggressively, irrationally, in an extremely emotional fashion, or refuse to listen to your point of view. In these circumstances, you may need to use *protective skills*. These are less than ideal in that they rarely resolve a situation in a mutually satisfactory way, but they can help you deal with highly unsatisfactory situations where your assertive behaviour is not reciprocated. Remember: first respond assertively. Only when this seems to be failing because of an unreasonable response from the other person should you use these "protective skills."

Protection 1: Broken Record

When it is clear that another person is not prepared to accept your response or even consider your point of view, then it is time to give up on explanations, stop answering questions, and simply repeat your answer over and over again, without any further reasons or explanations. For example, saying no, without explanation, over and over again to a pushy salesman or refusing an inappropriate request from a friend, over and over again. It is important to remain calm and not become aggressive yourself, as this can escalate the situation. The most common mistake that people make with this technique is not sticking to the same response, but allowing themselves to be drawn into making further explanations or answering questions that the other person raises.

Protection 2: Selective Ignoring

With this technique you choose not to respond to the inappropriate aspects of another person's communication to you. Often this will lead them to give up on it. For example, someone continues to complain to you about some past event, despite the fact that you have discussed it many times with them in an effort to help them, and they never seem to listen to advice or try to get over it. When you fail to respond to their complaints, while continuing to respond to other topics of conversation, the lack of response will eventually make it too unrewarding for them to keep bringing it up. It may help to say once and for all: "I know you are still upset about that, but you know that I don't believe it is at all helpful to keep going over it. So if you bring this up again, I will ignore it. I would much rather talk to you about other things." Selective ignoring can also be a helpful technique where you feel others are repeatedly criticizing you over something from the past

(that you may or may not agree was deserving of criticism at the time). You might say something like: "I have listened to your point of view, and we have discussed this matter many times in the past. You know that I disagree with you. I don't want to talk about it any more and I am not going to respond to it from now on. If you bring this up again, I will ignore it. This doesn't mean that I'm not prepared to talk to you about other issues." Then make sure you do ignore it! Of course, it is often hard to ignore criticism, especially if we think it is unfair – but if you've not succeeded in changing their mind thus far you probably never will.

Protection 3: Disarming Anger

When someone is being inappropriately aggressive toward you, it is sometimes possible to disarm his or her anger by refusing to carry on the conversation until the anger dies down. For example, you can say, "I can see that you're angry about this and I want to talk it over with you, but I don't feel that I can while you're angry. Let's talk later when we're both calm and ready to discuss it." Be prepared to listen and discuss their concerns when they do calm down. If you have both been arguing, and are both angry, it may be more appropriate to suggest that you both have "time out" – time to cool down - without blaming each other for the anger. "Look, we're both pretty worked up. Why don't we leave it for now and talk about it later when we're calmer?"

Protection 4: Sorting Issues

Often people will confuse several issues. For example, someone close to you might say, "If you really cared for me you would loan me that money." This can confuse us, too, and make it harder to respond assertively. It is important to sort the issues here, for example, "It is not that I don't care for you, it is just that I don't wish to lend money." You may need to combine the broken record technique with this technique to get maximum effectiveness.

Protection 5: Dealing with Guilt

Some people have learned to try to get their needs met by making others feel guilty, rather than behaving assertively themselves. For example, the friend or relative who asks for a favour by saying, "I helped you out by picking up the kids ... you really owe it to me to help me move house." Does this accord with the Bill of Assertive Rights? Sorting the issues can be important here. For example, "I am grateful to you for having picked up the kids the other day. I'm sorry I can't help you move house on Saturday." Our susceptibility to *unreasonable* guilt can be increased if we have unrealistic expectations of our own behaviour (to always do the right thing, never to upset anyone, to please everyone, to be perfect). If you find yourself feeling guilty, the first thing to do is ask yourself why are you feeling guilty, what have you not done that you told yourself you "should" have done?

Protection 6: Apologies

There are circumstances in which apologies are appropriate. We all make mistakes. For instance, it may be that you forgot to do something you said you would do. The person you said you would help complains about it but extends their complaint to a criticism of everything about you. You can see that the person may have been inconvenienced, and recognize their right to be annoyed or a bit upset by your forgetfulness, yet make it quite clear that in apologizing for that, you do not accept everything else they say about you (sorting the issues). Note that a more assertive response from the person involved would have been to tell you how they felt about your forgetfulness, and what they might like you to do to rectify the situation. The words, "I'm sorry" are frequently overused.

Often, they are not genuinely meant. The person who is always saying he is sorry feels guilty when there is no need. She fails to recognize her right to her own opinions and her own life. It is useful to avoid saying “I’m sorry” unless you genuinely feel there are good reasons to apologize.

Protection 7: “I’ll Let You Know”

For many of the reasons that underlie other forms of unassertive behaviour in social anxiety disorders, sufferers often feel unable to say “No”. Their first response to requests for assistance is always “Yes”. This often leaves them over committed and with no time for themselves. When such assistance is not reciprocated it can also lead to feelings of resentment. Many people are not quite ready to say “No” without feeling guilty or offering reasons or excuses. Or they never give themselves a chance because they say “Yes” right away! This protection is about learning to give yourself some time to think about it. Time to consider your rights and your wishes and make a considered *choice* about how to respond. Time to plan how to say “No” if you want to – it’s not easy at first. Train yourself to say, “I’ll need to check my diary” or “I need to think about it” or “I’ll let you know tomorrow” (make sure you do).

Decision To Change

In order to gain from an assertiveness training program, you have to be sure that there are some aspects about your normal way of responding that you wish to change, that is, you have to make a conscious decision to change. You have to weigh up the costs and benefits of changing versus staying the same. The following questions can help you to make this decision. Add any other comments or dimensions that may apply to your particular situation.

What do I gain from staying nonassertive?

- praise for conforming to others' expectations
- maintenance of a familiar behavior pattern
- avoidance of taking responsibility for initiating or carrying out plans
- avoidance of possible conflict

- _____

- _____

- _____

What do I lose by being nonassertive?

- independence
- the power to make my own decisions
- the opportunity to get my own needs and wishes met
- others' respect for my rights and wishes
- the ability to influence others' decisions, demands, and expectations

- _____
- _____
- _____

What do I gain by becoming assertive?

- Improved confidence and self esteem
- The opportunity to take control over my own destiny

- _____
- _____
- _____

What do I lose by becoming assertive?

- If I try and fail I would be more upset than being able to tell myself that I failed because I didn't really try ...
- My friends may not like the change in me

- _____
- _____
- _____

Do the gains of becoming assertive outweigh the losses?

If not, why not?

If so, am I willing to make the change by acting assertively?

Can I enlist the support, understanding, and cooperation of others involved, either in the situation or in my life?

How will I begin to make these changes?

Be prepared to negotiate

Keep the "we" in the relationship and be prepared to be flexible. You will feel more comfortable when you know what the other person's wishes are (because they have told you, rather than because of your mind reading!), they know what yours are, and you can begin to negotiate if these differ.

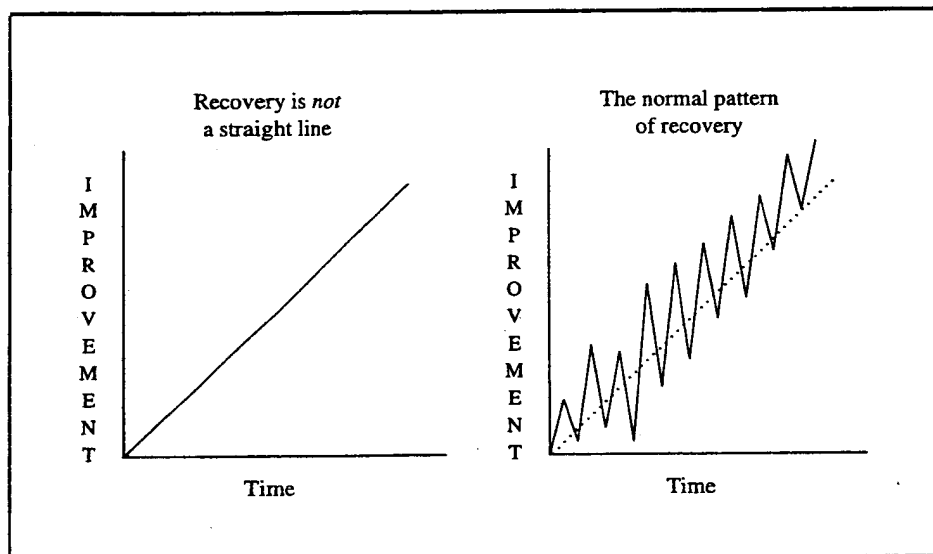
Try starting with a few assertive skills in a few situations and gradually build up your skills. It's often easier to being with new acquaintances, then friends of longer standing. It is hardest of all to change longstanding patterns of interaction with family members. Give yourself, and others, time to adjust. You may find useful some of the books listed at the end of this manual.

Summary

Assertiveness is about making choices in your interactions with others and communicating with them in ways which are satisfying and effective. When you behave assertively you consider the rights of yourself *and* others, then choose how to respond. Healthy self esteem requires the ability to be assertive and behaving assertively builds self esteem and confidence. Being assertive challenges many of the unhelpful beliefs that are part of social phobia.

Setbacks are inevitable. They happen to *everyone*. When it happens, people often become alarmed or despondent, fearing they have gone back to their very worst. The setback is often viewed as devastating because it has a lot of emotional meaning for the person who has put considerable effort into recovering. No matter how badly you feel during a setback, no-one ever seems to go all the way back to their worst level of incapacitation or to totally lose their new skills.

Setbacks often occur at times when you face additional stresses in your life, such as job, family, or money worries, or ill health, or when facing some particularly challenging situation. For most people, the apparent setback is only a passing phase. After the stressors pass, you will find it easier to get yourself out and about again. You can help this process by actively working to resolve the problems that face you so that you can once again devote your energy to facing your fears. While you feel stressed, don't let your program go completely, but try to maintain the gains you have already made. However, even if you slip back a little, it is not a catastrophe: you moved forward before and you can do it again. Ups and downs in the recovery process are the rule rather than the exception, and a typical pattern is illustrated in the diagram below. Coping successfully with setbacks actually builds your confidence, and you are less likely to stumble over the same problem in the future.



Prolonged Setbacks

Prolonged setbacks or difficulties in making progress are generally the consequence of not practicing your new skills! You will not get better just by thinking about it and hoping your anxiety will just go away. If you are experiencing difficulties, carefully read your manual again (from the beginning) and follow the recommendations. Go back to basics with your anxiety management strategies: practice the hyperventilation control and relaxation exercises – *every day*. Review your

cognitive challenging skills and check for “cognitive errors”. Be alert for “shoulds” and unhelpful expectations of yourself. Be honest about avoidances and safety behaviours: these stop you from really confronting and therefore mastering your anxiety. Set yourself realistic goals of graded exposure and give yourself plenty of support and encouragement.

Checklist

I am doing the following

- Using hyperventilation control at the first sign of anxiety
- Exercising 4 times per week
- Getting up at the same time every day
- Keeping my nicotine, caffeine and alcohol intake nil or low
- Abstaining from illicit drugs
- Regularly **writing down** anxious thoughts and challenging them
- Working to eliminate cognitive distortions and “shoulds”
- Setting realistic goals
- Giving myself praise and encouragement
- Confronting feared situations daily
- Using graded exposure
- Remaining alert for subtle avoidance and safety behaviours
- Working to eliminate avoidance
- Really confronting my fears

Learn to be your own best friend

Many sufferers of social phobia have low self esteem. They are highly critical of themselves when they fail to meet their own expectations. It is essential to learn how to give yourself support and encouragement – it means more when it comes from within. Be kind to yourself when you don’t do as well as you’d have liked – how would you respond to someone else, or, especially, a child? Congratulate yourself on your effort as well as your successes. Consider setting yourself small rewards for meeting goals. Set your goals at realistic levels and learn to appreciate small successes. It may be only a small step, but if you keep taking small steps you will eventually reach your goals.

Mastering anxiety is going to take time. It is challenging and tiring and difficult, and no-one else *really* knows what it’s like. Learn to be kind to yourself and you’ll not only last the distance, but you’ll find it a whole lot easier to challenge unhelpful beliefs about how much the opinions of others really need to matter.

If you are still having trouble, seek advice from your therapist.

Summary

Setbacks are inevitable. They can be a learning experience and result in greater confidence. Don’t panic, but go back to basics – revise the work you have done in this manual. The techniques work, but only if you use them. Get help if you need it. Learn to be kind to yourself.

Recommended Reading

The following books are on the shelves in many bookstores and libraries. If not, they can often be ordered. When you read these or any similar books on the management of anxiety, remember that they are best regarded as guidelines only. Be critical in both a positive and negative sense when reading these books, so that you get what is best for you out of them. Most of these books are fairly inexpensive.

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