

How Distressed Are You in Social Situations?

Objective: To identify the 20 social situations that cause you the greatest anxiety and rate them using the SUDS scale (Subjective Units of Distress).

You Should Know

People with social anxiety often avoid situations that could cause or increase their distress. Sometimes the fear is mild. Sometimes it feels nearly paralyzing. You might already be working on practicing some strategies to overcome your fears in actual situations. You might also have heard of an approach called “exposure therapy,” which means that you actually do (or “expose yourself” to) the people, places, and situations you fear in order to overcome your anxiety. It might sound scary at first, but there is a clear method you can follow that has been proven successful by experts.

The first step is to identify the social situations that you fear and then rate them on a special scale, called the SUDS scale (Subjective Units of Distress).

What to Do

First, list below 20 social situations that cause you social anxiety. Afterwards, you will rate them.

1. _____ SUDS Rating _____

2. _____ SUDS Rating _____

3. _____ SUDS Rating _____

4. _____ SUDS Rating _____

5. _____ SUDS Rating _____

6. _____ SUDS Rating _____

7. _____ SUDS Rating _____

8. _____ SUDS Rating _____

9. _____ SUDS Rating _____

10. _____ SUDS Rating _____

11. _____ SUDS Rating _____

12. _____ SUDS Rating _____

13. _____ SUDS Rating _____

14. _____ SUDS Rating _____

15. _____ SUDS Rating _____

16. _____ SUDS Rating _____

17. _____ SUDS Rating _____

18. _____ SUDS Rating _____

19. _____ SUDS Rating _____

20. _____ SUDS Rating _____

Now, review the rating scale below and think about each situation. Then assign each situation the number that applies most closely. There is no “right answer.” It’s purely subjective. It’s also based on what you feel *today*, not yesterday or tomorrow or some distant time in the future. If you’re working with a therapist, this scale can help you understand the severity of your social anxiety and also, ideally, show you that not every situation is off-the-charts terrifying or paralyzing.

SUDS Scale

0: Totally relaxed

1: Alert and awake, no real signs of distress

2: Minimal anxiety/distress

3: Mild anxiety/distress, doesn't interfere with performance

4: You are more away of your anxiety than you used to be

5: Moderate anxiety/distress, can continue to perform

6: You are increasingly aware of your anxiety and how it affect you

7: Quite anxious/distressed, interfering with performance

8: Very anxious/distressed, can't concentrate

9: Extremely anxious/distressed, feeling desperate, unable to handle it

10: Highest level of distress/fear/anxiety that you have ever felt, can't function

Think About It

When thinking about the social situations that make you anxious, were there any situations you found hard to write about?

Have you confided in anyone else about your difficulties in social situations?

Have you hidden your anxiety problems from any one in particular?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?
