

Exposure Therapy for Anxiety About Being the Center of Attention

Objective

To help you overcome social anxiety related to being the center of attention through exposure training.

You Should Know

Are you ready to practice exposure training in a real-life situation? Don't worry, you don't have to hop on a stage and give a speech tomorrow. You will be using an effective technique called **exposure therapy** or **exposure training**. (See the worksheet called "Understanding the Principles of Exposure Therapy.") Your fear of being the center of attention can be overcome through a willingness to change and by creating a plan to gradually face into and eventually master your fears through doing the very thing you are afraid to do and realizing your worst fears do not come true.

What to Do

The best way to overcome your fear of being the center of attention is to do just that. Create situations where you *are!* In this exposure training, you will plan to do several so-called "socially inappropriate" things in public. You might want to invite an understanding friend or group of friends with whom to practice your skills. On the line to the left of each item, rank on a scale from 1 to 5 the level of anxiety you fear doing it would cause. Choose the 1s and 2s at first and work up to trying a 4 or 5, but don't choose an activity that would cause you to have *extreme* anxiety.

Here are some possibilities. Feel free to add your own situations to the list.

___ Stumble on purpose.

___ Go to a movie after it has already started and ask to climb over people.

___ Jog in place in a park or at a bus stop.

___ Spill your glass of water at a nice restaurant.

___ Dress casually for a formal event (or vice versa).

___ Talk to yourself out loud at a supermarket.

___ Face the wrong way in an elevator.

___ Hum softly during a staff or group meeting.

___ Wear something "loud" or "flashy."

___ At a meeting or in a class, ask a controversial question, or state your strong opinion about the topic under discussion.

___ Skip instead of walking down the street.

___ Go to a restaurant and tell them it's your birthday—have them sing "Happy Birthday" to you.

___ Go to a Karaoke bar and sing! Stay on stage through the applause rather than dash offstage.

___ Pretend you are a model posing in a busy public place. Have a friend pretend to be a professional photographer and take your picture for an extended period (3-4 minutes).

___ Stand on a street corner and sing "Mary Had a Little Lamb" or "America, the Beautiful" for five minutes.

___ Your own idea:

___ Your own idea:

___ Your own idea:

___ Your own idea:

Use the following chart to record your experience. Note the fear you are trying to create. What symptom(s) arise and how severe is it? What is the habitual anxious thought that comes up for you? What would you like to say to yourself instead? Note any reflections.

Situation	Symptom/Severity 0 to 10	Physical Strategy Tried	Habitual Thought Reassuring Statement	Reflections
<i>Having people sing "Happy Birthday" to me</i>	<i>Rapid heartbeat, 6</i>	<i>Deep breathing</i>	Habitual: <i>I want to run and hide!</i> Reassuring: <i>It's OK. Nothing bad is happening. Enjoy people's good wishes.</i>	<i>I was very anxious, but I got through it and noticed people's happy faces.</i>

If you found this helpful, set up another situation(s) with gradually higher stakes and record what occurs. The idea is to expose yourself to ever-increasing levels of anxiety until you become more comfortable tolerating them.

You may also create a chart to record any party experiences and see how you do. It takes time to be comfortable with anxiety symptoms, but the more you do it, the better you'll get!

Reflections on This Exercise

1. What was the hardest part about doing this exercise? Why?

2. What was the easiest part? Why?

3. What situation do you have coming up at which you will be the center of attention? Write down what strategies you will use to help yourself relax, enjoy the moment, and stay present.

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?
