

Table of Contents

Accepting Imperfection	1
Are People Out to Get Me?	6
Are You Anxious About Being the Center of Attention?	11
Are You Anxious About Going on Dates?	15
Are You Anxious About Going to Parties?	18
Are You Anxious About Job Interviews?	21
Are You Anxious About Public Speaking?	24
Are You Anxious About Using Public Bathrooms?	28
Are You Oversensitive to Criticism?	31
Are Your Worries Realistic?	35
Becoming Aware of Your Upsetting Thoughts and Feelings	39
Becoming Mindful of Your World Rather Than Your Anxious Thoughts	43
Challenging Your Negative Beliefs About Yourself	47
Change Your Procrastinating Behaviors	52
Controlling Your Anxiety with a “Worry Script”	55
Create a Fear Ladder	58
Create a Library of Your Values	62
Creating a Gratitude Journal	66
Creating an Emotional Emergency First Aid Kit	68
Dealing Effectively with Authority Figures	71
Does Your Anxiety Make You Depressed?	76
Do-It-Yourself Exposure and Response Prevention Guide	80
Eliminating Unhelpful Coping Strategies	85
Embrace the Unexpected	87
Embrace Your Imperfections	93
Exposure Therapy for Anxiety About Being the Center of Attention	99
Exposure Therapy for Fear of Using Public Bathrooms	105

Accepting Imperfection

Objective

To deliberately do something that would be considered socially inappropriate and to tolerate the discomfort this causes.

You Should Know

Many people with social anxiety have unrealistic expectations about themselves. They are tolerant of other people's flaws and gaffes, but not their own. Perfectionism can exist without social anxiety, of course, but when the two are paired, it can be a crippling combination. Not only do people suffer from not reaching their own internal, self-imposed level of achievement, but they experience distress in a host of social situations based on an external measure of who they think they are *supposed* to be. Meaning, perfect.

For example, at a choral concert, 60 choir members took the stage via a set of steps visible to the nearly 2,500 people on the expansive lawn at the outdoor venue. Heather, who has a fear of making a fool of herself in public, stumbled on one of the steps and fell, *splat*, bracing herself with her hands. People helped her up and she took her place in the lineup, but she was mortified. She was sure everyone in the choir and everyone in the audience were laughing at her and thinking she was a "stupid idiot." She continued to agonize about it throughout the concert.

It is likely that Heather was the only one who even gave any thought to it after it happened, much less a critical thought. Probably people felt empathy and hoped she was OK. This is how anxiety can interfere with one's life. But, with awareness and practice, that can change.

What if you were to experience yourself as imperfect by embarrassing yourself *on purpose*? You might feel your anxiety rising at the mere thought. This form of exposure therapy is called "constructive embarrassment." The idea is to expose yourself to uncomfortable feelings and learn to tolerate them—to actually welcome the feeling of embarrassment or humiliation so that you can get used to it and realize that nothing catastrophic happens and that you are human!

What to Do

This worksheet will help you plan to do a few "socially inappropriate" things in public. You might want to invite an understanding friend or group of friends as you practice your skills. On the line to the left of each item, rank on a scale from 1 to 5 the level of embarrassment you fear doing it would cause. Choose the 1s and 2s at first and work up to trying a 4 or 5, but avoid activities that would cause you to have *extreme* anxiety. Afterwards, record your reflections about the experience.

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.

___ Make a phone call and then say you have the wrong number and hang up.

___ 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 meeting or class.

___ Appear in public with a speck of food on your face.

___ Wear mismatched socks or shoes.

___ At a meeting or in a class, ask a question that you are worried might make you appear stupid.

___ Do three separate transactions at an ATM while others wait.

___ Skip instead of walking down the street.

___ Pause for 10 seconds while giving a presentation or speaking in public.

___ Order a messy meal when you are on a date.

___ Your own idea: _____

___ Your own idea: _____

___ Your own idea: _____

___ Your own idea: _____

What is the worst thing that happened doing any of these exercises? Did anyone make comments or look at you in a strange way?

What thoughts did you have after you completed this exercise? Do you feel less anxious about the possibility of embarrassing yourself?

Practicing doing the things your fear most is considered to be the best way to overcome your fear and anxiety. Do you think that you can continue this practice? Who can help support you in continuing to practice this kind of activity?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

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

Are People Out to Get Me?

Objective

To help you see that your feeling that others might be trying to undermine you or harm you might be inaccurate and to consider other ways to relate to people.

You Should Know

Some people feel that others are deliberately trying to influence or control their lives. In some cases, this might actually be true; in other cases, it might be exaggerated or even imagined in the person's mind. In understanding your own worries about other people being "out to get you," the most important first step is to notice what is happening and understand to what extent your symptoms are interfering with your life and your ability to function normally.

According to experts, there are a number of possible causes of these worrisome thoughts, some of which fall into a category called "paranoid thinking":

- genetic (family history)
- substance abuse or misuse (cocaine, marijuana, amphetamines, alcohol, hallucinogens)
- medication side effects
- underlying biochemical disorder of the brain
- trauma history such as war, physical or sexual abuse
- history of domestic violence/controlling-type relationship
- stress reaction to overwhelming physical or psychological events (disaster, accident, threats, losses)
- combination of the above factors

If you are so preoccupied with such thoughts that you are having difficulty functioning, or if you are hearing voices in your head that are telling you that people are out to get you, please seek help immediately from a mental health professional who can assess your symptoms and offer treatment, including possible helpful medications.

If, however, you are experiencing a more generalized sense that people don't understand you, are trying to manage or undermine your activities or goals, and you sense that you are somehow a "victim," but you are basically open to the idea that these are "just thoughts," then this worksheet is designed to help you develop some new strategies. You can assess more accurately what is happening and learn to let go of your fears and worries; you can also learn how to give people the "benefit of the doubt" before you judge their behavior as malicious.

What to Do

Below is a list of some attributes that can be present for people who believe that someone is "out to get them." These symptoms can range from mild to severe. Put a checkmark next to the items that you relate to. Then, next to each item you checked, rate the severity of those

symptoms according to the following scale: 0 = never, 3 = rarely, 5 = sometimes, 7 = often, 10 = always.

Symptom	Severity
• Offended easily	_____
• Difficulty trusting others	_____
• Not able to cope with any type of criticism	_____
• Assign harmful meanings to other people's remarks	_____
• Always on the defensive	_____
• Hostile, aggressive, argumentative	_____
• Unable to compromise	_____
• Difficult, if not impossible, to "forgive and forget"	_____
• Assume that people are talking ill of them behind their back	_____
• Overly suspicious; think that other people are lying or scheming to cheat them	_____
• Unable to confide in anyone	_____
• Find relationships difficult	_____
• Consider the world to be a place of constant threat	_____
• Feel persecuted by the world at large	_____
• Believe in unfounded "conspiracy theories"	_____
• Hearing persecutory voices	_____

Note: If your answers consistently fall into the 6-10 range, please seek medical or psychiatric attention to obtain a proper assessment, diagnosis, and treatment plan from a trained professional.

If your answers fall in the more mild-to-moderate range, please continue.

Now that you have identified some of the ways in which your worried thoughts are interfering with your life, on the lines below, write down several situations that you have encountered recently that have made you feel that people are out to get you, or have it in for you. Specify who the people involved are and what the situation is.

1.

2.

3.

Next, take each situation and reflect on your role in the interaction. Are you overly sensitive to that person in particular? Is it possible you are exaggerating their behavior because of your sensitivity versus assessing realistically what they're actually doing or saying? What would it be like to give that person the benefit of the doubt? What can you say out loud (or think inside yourself) to reassure yourself that a person might not have negative intentions? What could you say or ask that person to help you understand their intentions before you jump to any conclusions? Write your thoughts below for each situation.

1.

2.

3.

According to psychiatrist Samantha Boardman, MD, it is hard to get unstuck from the “me against the world” mindset. She recommends shifting the “paranoia” mindset to one she calls “pronoia”—the definitive belief that others are actually out to *help you*, and a belief in the goodness of the world and others in it. Many people, she suggests, are trained to be suspicious of strangers and of others’ intent, especially under stress. She cites studies that show that if one assumes a positive intention on the part of another person, one has a much more pleasant, less hurtful experience.

Dr. Boardman quotes Pepsi Chair and CEO Indra Nooyi, who said: “Whatever anybody says or does, always assume positive intent. . . . When you assume negative intent, you’re angry. If you take away that anger and assume positive intent, you will be amazed.” So, give it a try. Let go of the worry and see if your positive approach yields more and more positivity in your life.

Reflections on This Exercise

1. Name two people with whom you would like to experiment trying the “pronoia” approach to dealing with your worrisome thoughts.

2. Pick one situation you might be anticipating having with that person in the coming days and weeks and commit to experimenting with this new approach. Record your experience below.

3. Write down three reassuring things you can say to yourself anytime you notice you're having thoughts that people are out to get you.

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?

Are You Anxious About Being the Center of Attention?

Objective

To help you manage your anxiety related to being the center of attention through exposure therapy.

You Should Know

One of the primary worries for people with social anxiety is being the center of attention. The thought of giving a talk or presentation can be paralyzing; but, other situations where you might be the center of attention, even “positive” ones, cause anxiety as well, such as winning an award, being praised at work, being the “honoree” at a birthday or anniversary party, and so on.

People with social anxiety worry that others are judging, criticizing, or otherwise scrutinizing their every move or utterance—as if they’re under a microscope at all times. This may cause both physical symptoms such as shaking, sweating, blushing, or a tremulous voice, as well as anxious, self-critical thoughts and efforts to avoid or escape such situations at all costs. The roots of this type of anxiety can stem from childhood—perhaps you grew up with critical parents, or maybe you had a bad or humiliating experience in school that has always stuck with you.

What would it be like to relax and enjoy these experiences? To really be present and take in the recognition or warm wishes or pleasure that others have in honoring you? Hard to imagine? Well, it can be done.

You might already be working on practicing some strategies to overcome your fear of being the center of attention. One strategy is 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. (See the worksheet called “Understanding the Principles of Exposure Therapy.”)

The first step is to identify the aspects of being the center of attention that you fear and then rate them on a special scale, called the SUDS scale (Subjective Units of Distress). In subsequent worksheets, you may work on “Strategies for Overcoming Anxiety About Being the Center of Attention” and “Exposure Therapy for Anxiety About Being the Center of Attention.”

What to Do

Here are some typical fears and symptoms that people with social anxiety experience when they find themselves as the center of attention:

- Shaking, trembling
- Increased blood pressure
- Dry mouth

- Sweating
- Rapid heartbeat
- Dizziness, fainting
- Nausea, gagging, vomiting
- Worry about being judged or criticized
- Worry about your appearance
- Worry about others criticizing how you stand, walk, present yourself publicly

Now, list below at least ten situations that cause you anxiety when you are the center of attention. Afterward, you will rate the items. There is no right answer—write down whatever comes to mind.

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 _____

Now, review the rating scale below and think about each situation on your list. Then assign each situation the number that applies most closely. Your answer is 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 related to being the center of attention, and also, ideally, show you that not every situation is off-the-charts terrifying or paralyzing.

SUDS Scale

- 0: Totally relaxed
- 1: Somewhat relaxed
- 2: Minimal anxiety/distress
- 3: Mild anxiety/distress, doesn't interfere with performance
- 4: Mild to moderate anxiety
- 5: Moderate anxiety/distress, can continue to perform
- 6: Moderate to quite anxious
- 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

Reflections on This Exercise

1. What situation or symptom causes you the most distress about being the center of attention?

2. What situation or symptom causes you the least distress about being the center of attention?

3. On a scale from 1-10 (1 = not at all, 10 = highly motivated), how would you rank your motivation to work on one of the *lower-rated items* on your list (5 or under) in the coming weeks by using "exposure therapy" (practicing and role-playing) techniques? Explain.

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?

Are You Anxious About Going on Dates?

Objective

To help you manage your anxiety related to going on dates through exposure therapy.

You Should Know

Most people agree that dating is a stressful experience, filled with hopes, worries, expectations, and fears. If you have social anxiety, the prospect of meeting a total stranger in a public place can be at best worrisome, at worst paralyzing. The list of “what ifs” is clamoring in your brain: *Will they like me? Will I find them attractive? Will they find me attractive? What will we talk about? What if they see me sweating or blushing? What if I get so nervous I can’t even talk? What if we have nothing in common? What if they want to kiss or hug me? What if???* . . . You get the idea.

What would it be like to relax (at least a little) and enjoy dating? To really be present, have fun meeting new people, and learn about them. Hard to imagine? Well, it can be done.

You might already be practicing strategies to overcome your fears related to dating. One technique is called “exposure therapy,” which means that you actually “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 aspects of dating that you fear and then rate them on a scale called the SUDS scale (Subjective Units of Distress).

What to Do

Here are some typical fears and symptoms that people with social anxiety experience before or during a date:

- Shaking, trembling
- Increased blood pressure
- Dry mouth
- Sweating
- Rapid heartbeat
- Dizziness or fainting
- Nausea, gagging, or vomiting
- Worry about being judged or criticized
- Worry about your appearance
- Worry about others criticizing how you stand, walk, or present yourself publicly

Now, list at least ten situations that cause you anxiety when you think about dating or when you are on a date. Afterward, you will rate the items. There is no right answer—write down whatever comes to mind.

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 _____

Now, review the rating scale below and think about each situation on your list. Assign each situation the number that applies. Your answer is purely subjective, and it is based on what you feel *today*, not yesterday or tomorrow or some distant time in the future. This scale can help you understand the severity of your social anxiety related to going on dates, and also show you that not every situation is off-the-charts terrifying or paralyzing.

SUDS Scale

- 0: Totally relaxed
- 1: Somewhat relaxed
- 2: Minimal anxiety/distress
- 3: Mild anxiety/distress, doesn't interfere with performance
- 4: Mild to moderate anxiety
- 5: Moderate anxiety/distress, can continue to perform
- 6: Moderate to quite anxious
- 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

Reflections on This Exercise

What situation or symptom related to dating causes you the most distress?

What situation or symptom causes you the least distress?

On a scale from 1-10 (1 = not at all, 10 = highly motivated), how would you rank your motivation to work on one of the *lower-rated items* on your list (5 or under) in the coming weeks by using "exposure therapy" (practicing and role-playing) techniques? _____ Explain.

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?

Are You Anxious About Going to Parties?

Objective

To help you identify your anxiety related to going to parties and rate your level of related distress.

You Should Know

Parties are typically occasions where people have fun, enjoy the company of friends and family, and celebrate being together. However, if you have social anxiety, parties can cause distress, both before and during the event. You might worry about what you look or sound like. You might worry about what to say or how to say it. You may avoid talking about yourself. And you are usually expected to make small talk or otherwise be “on” when you would rather be at home in your safe, predictable environment.

Many people with social anxiety choose to avoid situations that could cause or increase their distress, including “fun” events like parties. Sometimes the fear is mild. Sometimes it feels nearly paralyzing. You might already be 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 “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 aspects of going to parties that you fear and then rate them on a scale, called the SUDS scale (Subjective Units of Distress).

What to Do

Here are some typical fears and symptoms that people with social anxiety experience at parties:

- Shaking or trembling
- Dry mouth
- Sweating
- Rapid heartbeat
- Dizziness
- Nausea, gagging, or vomiting
- Stumbling with your words or being inarticulate
- Worry about making small talk with people you don't know
- Worry about being the center of attention
- Worry about being judged or scrutinized
- Worry about having to talk about yourself
- Worry about your appearance
- Worry about coming across as ignorant or stupid

List up to ten situations that cause you social anxiety at parties, using the list above or anything else that comes to mind. Afterwards, you will rate the items.

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 _____

Review the rating scale below and think about each situation on your list. Assign each situation the number that applies. There is no “right answer.” It is purely subjective, and it is based on what you feel *today*, not yesterday or tomorrow or some distant time in the future. 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: Somewhat relaxed

2: Minimal anxiety/distress

3: Mild anxiety/distress

4: Mild to moderate anxiety

- 5: Moderate anxiety/distress
- 6: Moderate to quite anxious
- 7: Quite anxious/distressed
- 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

Reflections on This Exercise

What situation or symptom causes you the most distress related to going to parties?

What situation or symptom causes you the least distress related to going to parties?

On a scale from 1 - 10 (1 = not at all to 10 = highly motivated), how would you rank your motivation to work on one of the *lower-rated items* on your list (5 or under) in the coming weeks by using "exposure therapy" (practicing and role-playing) techniques? _____ Explain.

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?

Are You Anxious About Job Interviews?

Objective

To help you identify your anxiety related to job interviews and rate your level of related distress.

You Should Know

Whether you're looking for a job for the first time or embarking on a job change or a career change, the interview process naturally raises your anxiety and stress level. It's perfectly normal to have some anxiety before and during job interviews. In fact, a 2013 survey conducted by Everest College found that 92 percent of the respondents were afraid of at least one aspect of the job interview process.

But if you have social anxiety, the process can be especially hard. You must interact with strangers who are authority figures and who are, like it or not, evaluating you. In addition, you are expected to be "on," upbeat, and to present yourself as successful and knowledgeable. How intimidating is that?

The good news is that it is possible to learn some solid skills that will help you in your efforts. But first, this worksheet will help you assess the problem and to what degree your fears and anxiety about job interviews are causing you difficulties. In subsequent related worksheets, you will explore mental and physical strategies that can lower your anxiety; and learn "exposure" techniques that can help you feel more and more comfortable with the process.

What to Do

What are your fears about what might happen during a job interview? Here is a list of common fears:

- Shaking, trembling
- Dry mouth
- Sweating
- Rapid heartbeat
- Dizziness
- Nausea, gagging, vomiting
- Stumbling with your words, being inarticulate
- Brain freeze, losing your train of thought
- Worry about being the center of attention
- Rambling or oversharing because you're nervous
- Not knowing the answers to questions
- Not knowing what questions to ask the interviewer
- Worry about your appearance
- Coming across as ignorant or stupid

Note your top ten fears and/or symptoms on the lines below (add your own as needed) and then rate their severity according to the SUD (Subjective Units of Distress) Scale:

SUD Scale

- 0: Totally relaxed
- 1: Somewhat relaxed
- 2: Minimal anxiety/distress
- 3: Mild anxiety/distress, doesn't interfere with performance
- 4: Mild to moderate anxiety
- 5: Moderate anxiety/distress, can continue to perform
- 6: Moderate to quite anxious
- 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

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 _____

Reflections on This Exercise

1. What situation or symptom causes you the most distress related to the job interview process?

2. What situation or symptom causes you the least distress related to the job interview process?

3. On a scale from 1-10 (1 = not at all, 10 = highly motivated), how would you rank your motivation to work on one of the *lower-rated items* on your list (5 or under) in the coming weeks by using “exposure therapy” (practicing and role-playing) techniques? Explain.

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?

Are You Anxious About Public Speaking?

Objective

To help you identify your anxiety related to speaking in public and rate your level of related stress.

You Should Know

Public speaking. Even the sound of it strikes fear in your heart. It turns out you're not alone. In fact, one survey revealed that 75 percent of Americans have some degree of fear of public speaking—and that it ranked even higher than fear of death! Public speaking, or *glossophobia*, doesn't only refer to getting up on a stage and delivering a keynote address at a conference. It can also refer to talking at a meeting, reading out loud in front of a class, offering a toast at a party, asking a question in a group, and so on.

Many people with social anxiety choose to 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. (See the worksheet called "Understanding the Principles of Exposure Therapy.")

The first step is to identify the aspects of public speaking that you fear and then rate them on a special scale, called the SUDS scale (Subjective Units of Distress). In subsequent worksheets, you may work on "Strategies for Overcoming Social Anxiety About Public Speaking" and "Exposure Therapy for Social Anxiety About Public Speaking."

What to Do

Here are some typical fears and symptoms that people with social anxiety experience when they have to speak in public:

- Shaking, trembling
- Increased blood pressure
- Dry mouth
- Sweating
- Rapid heartbeat
- Dizziness, fainting
- Nausea, gagging, vomiting
- Worry about stumbling with your words, being inarticulate
- Worry about being the center of attention
- Worry about being judged or criticized
- Worry about your appearance

- Worry about coming across as ignorant or stupid

Now, list below at least ten situations that cause you anxiety when you have to speak in public. Afterwards, you will rate the items. There is no right answer—write down whatever comes to mind.

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 _____

Now, review the rating scale below and think about each situation on your list. Then assign each situation the number that applies most closely. Your answer is 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 related to public speaking, and also, ideally, show you that not every situation is off-the-charts terrifying or paralyzing.

SUDS Scale

- 0: Totally relaxed
- 1: Somewhat relaxed
- 2: Minimal anxiety/distress
- 3: Mild anxiety/distress, doesn't interfere with performance
- 4: Mild to moderate anxiety
- 5: Moderate anxiety/distress, can continue to perform
- 6: Moderate to quite anxious
- 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

Reflection on This Exercise

1. What situation or symptom causes you the most distress about speaking in public?

2. What situation or symptom causes you the least distress about speaking in public?

3. On a scale from 1-10 (1 = not at all, 10 = highly motivated), how would you rank your motivation to work on one of the *lower-rated items* on your list (5 or under) in the coming weeks by using "exposure therapy" (practicing and role-playing) techniques? Explain.

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?

Are You Anxious About Using Public Bathrooms?

Objective

To help you identify your anxiety related to using public bathrooms and rate your level of related distress.

You Should Know

It is often called “shy bladder syndrome” or “pee phobia,” but the formal word for fear of using a public bathroom is *paruresis*. According to the International Paruresis Association (IPA), up to nearly 20 million people in the USA experience paruresis. The problem can range from mild to severe, that is, from feeling inhibited about urinating in public places to total avoidance of any bathroom other than the one at home.

The effects of paruresis can seriously interfere with people’s lives—at work, while traveling, concerts, sporting events, and other social situations, and, if it goes on long enough, it can cause medical problems. If you are suffering from paruresis, it is important to rule out any medical cause for inhibited urination. Some doctors will prescribe medications to relax muscles or improve flow, but most experts agree that those solutions don’t necessarily “cure” the problem.

The good news is that it is possible to learn ways to overcome this problem through using cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) techniques. But first, this worksheet will help you assess the problem and to what degree your fears and anxiety about using public bathrooms are causing you difficulties. In subsequent related worksheets, you will explore mental and physical strategies that can lower your anxiety; and learn “exposure” techniques that can help you feel more and more comfortable with the process.

What to Do

What are the issues that come up for you when it comes to using public bathrooms? Here are some common problems that people suffering from paruresis report:

- Need for total privacy when using any bathroom other than the one at home
- Difficulty using the bathroom at home if someone else is there
- Fear that other people can hear you while you are going to the bathroom
- Fear that people are judging you or thinking poorly of you when you are on the toilet
- Anxiety about needing to go to the bathroom
- Avoiding drinking so you don’t have to use a public bathroom
- Avoiding attending events because you might have to use a public bathroom
- Critical thoughts about yourself when going to the bathroom (shame, embarrassment)
- Hard to use the bathroom if it’s too busy
- Hard to use the bathroom if it’s too noisy
- Fear of someone barging in if the door doesn’t close properly
- Worry about other people waiting to use the bathroom while you are going

- Being in a hurry and not being about to go when sitting on the toilet

Add any others here:

Now, look at the list above and note the situations/locations in which you experience anxiety and put your fears and/or symptoms on the lines below (add your own as needed). Then rate their severity according to the SUD (Subjective Units of Distress) Scale:

SUD Scale

- 0: Totally relaxed
- 1: Somewhat relaxed
- 2: Minimal anxiety/distress
- 3: Mild anxiety/distress, doesn't interfere with performance
- 4: Mild to moderate anxiety
- 5: Moderate anxiety/distress, can continue to perform
- 6: Moderate to quite anxious
- 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

Situation	Severity Rating
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 _____

Reflections on This Exercise

1. What situation or symptom causes you the most distress related to your fear of using public bathrooms?

2. What situation or symptom causes you the least distress related to your fear of using public bathrooms?

3. On a scale from 1-10 (1 = not at all, 10 = highly motivated), how would you rank your motivation to work on one of the *lower-rated items* on your list (5 or under) in the coming weeks by using “exposure therapy” (practicing and role-playing) techniques? Explain.

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?

Are You Oversensitive to Criticism?

Objective

To help you identify situations where you are oversensitive to criticism and develop strategies for countering that pattern.

You Should Know

Nobody likes to be criticized, but some people let their fear of criticism dominate their lives. In some cases, that fear can keep them from trying new things, taking risks, and getting close to others. It is painful to be oversensitive to criticism and it is often based on an internalized negative self-view. Perhaps you were shamed or overly criticized as a child and still experience yourself as “small” in relation to others, especially those in authority. For instance, if you have a performance review at your job, do you tend to hear only the negative parts and tune out the positive? Do you shut down, or lash out, when your partner offers a constructive suggestion to you about a particular behavior?

If you are already aware that you tend to magnify what might be a mildly negative appraisal of you into a huge personal attack, that’s a positive thing. Awareness is the first step toward change! In life, it might not be possible to avoid people’s criticisms of you, but you can learn to react and respond in more helpful, less damaging ways. This worksheet offers you an opportunity to reflect on the situations that trigger your oversensitivity and learn better coping skills.

What to Do

On the lines below, write down five situations when you notice you are oversensitive to criticism. Specify who the people involved are and what the situation is. Then note in each case what the consequences are of your oversensitivity (isolation, low self-esteem, irritability, avoidance, etc.).

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Next, repeat this statement three times aloud: “Criticism can help me in life.” How does that feel? Yes, criticism, when it is given in a constructive and well-meaning way, offers you the opportunity to improve in different areas of your life—at home, on the job, and in your community. Learning how to lower your reactivity to criticism can take time.

Be kind and patient with yourself as you think about and practice the following strategies:

- Notice objectively what someone is saying.
- Notice your “automatic” negative, self-critical voice and ask it to soften the volume.
- Think this affirmation: “I am seeking improvement not approval.”
- Be assertive—if you feel you’ve been wrongly criticized, step back, take a breath, and say so.
- Be proactive—if you’ve made a mistake, approach the other person before they approach you. Ask what you might have done differently to improve the situation.
- Let go. Interrupt your ruminating and obsessing with reassuring statements and/or an activity.
- Open yourself up to the value of another’s criticism, even though it may feel hard.
- Learn to listen with an open mind.
- Try not to become defensive in the moment. If you feel the urge to snap back, step away and rethink your response.
- Forgive yourself. Repeat phrases such as “I did the best I could,” “My intentions are positive,” “I can’t always be perfect,” “I let that person down, but I forgive myself,” “I’m going to make mistakes sometimes; everyone does,” “I’m not a bad person just because I made a mistake,” etc.
- Practice self-compassion. Change your inner talk to match what you would say to a friend or loved one whom you care about.
- Take a deep breath. Breathing is always a good strategy when you find yourself caught up in anxious thoughts.
- Try to understand the other person’s perspective.
- Directly ask for constructive criticism.
- If you find yourself getting upset, postpone the conversation until you’re calmer.
- Ask for specifics if you receive a vague or fuzzy critique.
- Think about what you might get out of learning to do something differently, including learning a new skill, instead of talking yourself out of it.
- Thank the person offering you feedback, even if it was not constructive or helpful.
- Resist the urge to offer a “counter critique” if you are upset or angry.

If you find that these strategies aren’t working for you and that you continue to suffer from oversensitivity to criticism that might be causing you anxiety, depression, anger, guilt, or shame, consider working with a therapist or other mental health professional to better understand and overcome this pattern.

Reflections on This Exercise

1. Which three of the above strategies are you willing to try in the coming week or so? Pick at least one that feels “very hard” to do to push yourself out of your comfort zone a bit.

2. Write down three things you can say to yourself next time you notice you’re reacting to criticism with oversensitivity.

3. Pick one situation from your list in the beginning of this exercise. Write down how you would like to approach that type of situation differently in the future.

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?

Are Your Worries Realistic?

Objective

To understand and accept that events are influenced by the laws of probability rather than your worries.

You Should Know

Just because something is possible does not mean it is probable. People with anxiety disorders are often consumed with the idea that something terrible will happen if they don't act in a certain way. They become so overwhelmed by anxiety, they often don't take the time to realistically examine whether what they fear most is likely to come true. For example, it is *possible* that you could be struck by lightning, but statistically it is *not probable*. It is also *possible* that you could win the lottery, but statistically it is *not probable*. Anxiety disorders can make it difficult to distinguish between what is possible and what is probable.

What if you applied the theory of probability to your anxiety disorder? Probability is the likelihood that an event will occur. Of course, it is always possible that your fears may be warranted, but is it probable? Most people with anxiety disorders imagine the worst outcome and act accordingly to prevent it. But think about this: If it is possible for the worst outcome to occur, it is equally possible for the best outcome to take place.

What to Do

This exercise will help your rational mind better understand the concept of probability. You will begin by thinking about something you worry about because you think it could have a terrible outcome. Then you will look at nine other possible outcomes. With each outcome, you will consider the likelihood (probability) that the outcome will happen and why.

Determining the Probability of a Good or Bad Outcome

Begin by writing down the worst outcome you can imagine. Then write down other possible outcomes. Try and write down at least nine other possible outcomes, *making sure that at least three of the possibilities are positive ones.*

Now go back and write in the probability that each outcome will occur and the reasons for your probability estimate. Write out whether the probably is low, medium, or high.

Possible Outcome	Probability	Reasons/Comments
I will make an idiot out of myself and get fired.	Low	This is not probable because I spent more than 10 hours practicing the presentation. And besides, my work is really appreciated, so why would I be fired for screwing up a presentation?
I will spill a glass of water on my presentation.	Low	I'll take a sip of water before the presentation and won't even have a glass of water near where I am speaking.
I'll get a standing ovation.	Low	Even if I give a great presentation, the subject is not that exciting!
People will be interested in what I say and someone will give me a compliment.	High	This is what happened before.
I'll have to go to the bathroom in the middle of the presentation.	Low	This has never happened, and I'll use the bathroom before I start.
I'll talk too softly, and someone will ask me to speak up.	Medium	This has happened before, but it wasn't too bad.

Now try this for yourself on the next page.

Possible Outcome	Probability	Reasons/Comments

Reflections on This Exercise

Did you find yourself becoming anxious during this exercise? What thoughts came to mind when doing this exercise?

Write down some worries where you need to examine the probability of the outcomes

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from the exercise?

Becoming Aware of Your Upsetting Thoughts and Feelings

Objective

To help you become aware of how you are avoiding the things that cause you to be anxious and upset.

You Should Know

Many people deal with their problems by trying to avoid painful thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories. They think that if they just distract themselves from these inner experiences, then they will be fine. However, while avoiding these unpleasant inner experiences may help temporarily, these strategies usually only work for a short period of time.

There is also a significant personal cost to your avoidance. Some people spend hours each day avoiding the things that could upset them instead of using this time to enjoy life. This exercise is designed to help you examine how you are avoiding the things that cause you to be anxious and upset, and how this keeps you from having a happier and more fulfilling life.

What to Do

Begin by listing the inner experiences you are trying to avoid. List three thoughts that upset you.

List three feelings that upset you.

List three sensations that upset you.

List three memories that upset you.

Write any additional upsetting thoughts, feelings, sensations, or memories here.

Now think about the things you do to avoid these unpleasant inner experiences. List the things you do to distract yourself from unpleasant inner experiences.

List the activities or events you avoid to keep from having painful inner experiences.

List the places you avoid to keep from having painful inner experiences.

List the people you avoid to keep from having painful inner experiences.

List substances—including alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, and food—you use to try and avoid unpleasant inner experiences.

Is there anything else you do to avoid unpleasant or painful inner experiences?

Now go back to what you have written and circle the three things you do most often to avoid unpleasant inner experiences. In the space below, write down how your life might be different if you could accept these unpleasant inner experiences rather than work so hard to avoid them.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Becoming Mindful of Your World Rather Than Your Anxious Thoughts

Objective

To focus on the world using your five senses rather than just on your anxious thoughts.

You Should Know

Do you often find yourself agonizing over what might happen in the future, worrying about every possible thing that might go wrong, while simultaneously condemning yourself for what went wrong in the past? Being consumed by all this turmoil does not allow you to appreciate or enjoy the moment: a birthday celebration or even a simple night out with your friends.

Anxiety disorders can demand that you ignore what is taking place around you by bombarding you with disturbing thoughts, urges, and images. These unwanted experiences distract you from living your life in the moment and instead encourage you to obsess about a past you cannot change and an uncertain future you cannot predict or control.

What if you tried to live your life according to the uplifting and freeing principles of mindfulness instead of the rigid rules of your anxiety disorder? Mindfulness encourages you to notice and accept your thoughts, while at the same time not allowing you to be obsessed with them. By teaching you to focus on the present moment in a meaningful, nonjudgmental way, it takes away the power of your anxious thoughts.

What to Do

This exercise will encourage you to draw your attention away from your anxious thoughts and toward yourself, using your five senses as a guide.

- Commit to using your sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell to channel your thoughts in a purposeful direction.
- Commit to doing this at least once a day for at least three weeks until you become accustomed to focusing your mind on the present.
- Begin by focusing on one sense for at least one to two minutes, taking the time to truly separate that sense from the next as you move from one to the other.

It does not matter what order you practice the five senses in. You can switch them around as you see fit. You can sit in a comfortable position the first few times, and as you become accustomed to performing it you can engage in it at any time or place.

At first this exercise may seem silly to you and even somewhat difficult, but as you continue to practice you will find it easier to incorporate mindfulness into your daily experience until it becomes a natural part of who you are.

Five Senses Mindfulness Exercise

Sight

- Observe what is around you, noticing shape, color, and texture.
- Look for things you would not usually take the time to notice, such as shadows, a crack in the sidewalk, the texture of your bedspread, or any other small details that usually escape you.

Sound

- Take the time to listen to what is in the background instead of what is obvious.
- Don't just notice the sound of laughter, but try to discern different types of laughs.
- Rather than simply listening for the sounds of traffic, try to distinguish horns honking from tires squealing.
- Instead of bristling at loud music, take the time to figure out what genre you are hearing.
- Listen to previously unnoticed sounds, like the hum of the refrigerator, or the clicking of the oven as it cycles on and off.

Touch

- Become aware of the differing feel of everyday items that surround you.
- Alternate touching items that are cold and warm, and notice how they make your hands feel.
- Touch items with various textures to notice the difference among them.
- Knit, play with play dough, or pet an animal, and notice the sensations in your fingers and hands as you feel your motions unfolding.

Taste

- Take a drink, and notice the feeling of the liquid rolling over your tongue.
- Chew on a piece of gum or candy, and take the time to notice the taste from when you first put it in your mouth until you are finished with it.

Smell

- Focus your attention on your surroundings to notice what different smells are in the air.
- Keep strong-smelling gum or candy with you to quietly smell in order to center yourself when you feel your anxiety rising. Other items such as lavender, perfume, or lotion also can provide a satisfying aroma that invokes mindfulness.

Five Senses Meditation

For a five-day period, set aside at least twenty minutes to practice this meditation, focusing on a different sense each day. For each sense, choose one suggestion from the mindfulness exercise to focus on.

Five Senses Meditation Chart

Sense	Focus of your meditation	What you noticed	What Feelings Came Up?
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			

Reflection of This Exercise

After practicing mindfulness, what did you notice that you had not previously noticed?

Over time, how did practicing mindfulness impact your ability to focus on the present?

What difficulties did you encounter in practicing your mindfulness exercises? What adjustments did you make, if any, to make it easier for you?

How could you integrate the practice of mindfulness into coping with your anxiety disorder?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Challenging Your Negative Beliefs About Yourself

Objective

To identify your basic beliefs about yourself and what you can accomplish in your life and how these beliefs affect your overall happiness and life fulfillment.

You Should Know

Many people with social anxiety believe that they are different from other people. And, for many, “different” doesn’t mean better than or more special. Unfortunately, it often means the opposite—that they are somehow less important or less worthy than others—and this can cause a great deal of suffering. Most of the time, those beliefs are laid down early on in life, as a result of internalizing criticism or demands for perfectionism from parents or caretakers.

Awareness is the first step toward change. With awareness, you can begin to unravel those internalized messages. Most experts agree that cognitive-behavioral techniques are highly effective in challenging one’s negative beliefs, even if they *seem* like a fixed part of your personality. That’s because, according to neuroscientists, the brain is changeable, which is referred to as “neuroplasticity.” It may take time, but most valuable things in life do. Can you imagine having a lighter, happier, more positive view of yourself? Are you willing to hold a mirror up to yourself even if it seems difficult at first? Excellent. Then you’re already on your way.

What to Do

In this worksheet, you will identify your basic or core beliefs that seem true to you, and that might be holding you back from enjoying a more fulfilling life. Then you will create some challenging statements, along with evidence to start contradicting those beliefs.

On the lines below, write down the most common negative phrases or messages that come to mind when you think about yourself. What makes you feel “not good enough”?

Some examples include:

- I was born anxious and nothing’s going to change that.
- No therapy will ever work for me.
- I am not like other people.
- I am incompetent at everything I try.
- I don’t belong anywhere.
- I have no value.
- I am worthless.
- I am powerless.
- I am always wrong.
- I am unsure of myself.

- I am unlovable.
- I am defective (damaged, broken).
- I will never amount to anything.
- I am a bad person.

Now, ask yourself, are those statements actually *true*? Or are you open to reconsidering those core beliefs? On the lines below, write down the belief and then provide some *evidence* that this is *not true*. For example, *Core Belief: I am incompetent at everything I try. Challenging Statement: I am good at many things, such as writing, cooking, and singing.*

Core Belief:

Challenging Statement:

Core Belief:

Challenging Statement:

Core Belief:

Challenging Statement:

Core Belief:

Challenging Statement:

Core Belief:

Challenging Statement:

Core Belief:

Challenging Statement:

Core Belief:

Challenging Statement:

Core Belief:

Challenging Statement:

Core Belief:

Challenging Statement:

Reflections on This Exercise

1. Write down some thoughts about what your life might be like if you had a more positive self-view.

2. How would you like to use your Challenging Statements to work on changing your negative beliefs about yourself (i.e., repeat the phrases often; share them with your therapist; notice the critical voice when it arises, and so on)?

3. Name three people in your life you can ask to offer you positive feedback about yourself.

Make a commitment to contact them in the next week or so.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

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

Change Your Procrastinating Behaviors

Objective

To end your need to procrastinate by learning strategies.

You Should Know

Procrastination is the act of delaying or postponing a task or set of tasks. Sometimes procrastination encourages the belief that there must not be any mistakes, resulting in a sense of false obligation to constantly repeat or review what has been done. Consequently, tasks that aren't done perfectly are often not done at all. When people believe it is pointless to try if they can't meet the extraordinarily high standards they set for themselves, messy rooms, cluttered desks, and uncompleted essays and projects are often the result.

What to Do

Take the following assessment to determine how much procrastination impacts your life.

I often find myself saying "I'm too tired; I'll do it tomorrow." True False

If I don't have everything I need, I can't start now. True False

I don't have enough time to do it all, so I will wait until I do. True False

I often find myself saying "It's too late to start now." True False

It won't be right or perfect so there is no point doing it. True False

My home (desk, room, car) is messy and unorganized because I can't seem to get started organizing or cleaning. True False

I often find myself performing tasks late that I had intended to do days before.
 True False

I have to reread my emails or written work over and over again until it looks just right.
 True False

I feel that if things are not done to a high state of perfection there is no point doing them.
 True False

I usually take a long time to make decisions even if I have the information I need.
 True False

I have to be inspired in order to begin any task. True False

I usually have to rush to complete tasks on time because I have waited so long to begin them.
 True False

I try to do many things in one day and end up not doing any of them. ____ True ____ False

When faced with a huge task, I become overwhelmed and anxious.

____ True ____ False

Ten Tips to Help You Manage Your Procrastination

Select a few of the following strategies to help you make positive changes in your life. Set a goal of practicing at least one or more strategies per week.

1. Think honestly about what you fear will happen if you don't perform to perfection whatever task you have set for yourself. Decide if your fears are probable, meaning that statistically your worst fear could really come true, or merely possible, meaning that there is a slim chance it could come true.
2. Forgive yourself for procrastinating in the past. Studies show that self-forgiveness can help you feel more positive about yourself and reduce the likelihood of procrastination in the future.
3. Rephrase your internal dialogue. The words *must*, *need to*, and *have to*, for example, imply that you have no choice in what you do. This can make you feel disempowered and might even result in self-sabotage. However, saying, "I choose to," "I want to," or "I would like to" implies that you own a project, and can make you feel more in control of your workload.
4. Create a detailed timeline with specific interim deadlines. Focusing on just one deadline for whatever task you need to complete is stressful and gives you too much room to procrastinate. Several smaller deadlines are more manageable.
5. Break your work into little steps. Relying on your fears to dictate how you will complete your task often makes you focus, worry, and obsess only on the end result.
6. Change your environment. Make your space as positive and as life affirming as possible. Open the windows, or perhaps write positive Post-it notes that remind you what is important to you. Leave yourself encouraging voicemails.
7. Ask someone to check up on you. Peer pressure works! This is the principle behind self-help groups.
8. Tackle tasks as soon as they arise, rather than letting them build up over another day.
9. Collaborate with another person or a group; for example, bake cookies for the school bake sale with another parent, or work on a school project with a group. Collaboration often makes the work go faster and seem less intense. It also gives you a chance to see how others work and deal with anxiety.

10. Promise yourself a reward and follow through with it. If you complete a difficult task on time, reward yourself with a treat, such as a slice of cake or a coffee from your favorite coffee shop. And make sure you notice how good it feels to finish things!

Which strategy worked the best for you, and why?

Which strategy did not work so well for you, and why?

What strategies do you think you will use to maintain and manage your tendency toward procrastination?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Controlling Your Anxiety with a “Worry Script”

Objective

To learn a technique to face your negative thoughts and upsetting feelings rather than avoid them.

You Should Know

Many people spend hours each day trying to avoid worrying about things that upset them. People distract themselves by watching TV, focusing on a new worry to avoid thinking about an old one, or even self-medicating with drinking, drugs, or overeating. None of these things help reduce worrying.

In fact, most people find that the harder they try to avoid the thoughts that make them anxious, the worse they get. Trying to push something out of your mind is a little like trying to push a beach ball underwater: it takes a lot of work to keep it down, and the minute you let it go, it pops right back up again.

Rather than putting all your energy into avoiding upsetting thoughts and images, you can choose to face your fears, and writing worry scripts is one way to help you do this. By writing a worry script about your biggest worry, you will be facing your negative thoughts and upsetting feelings rather than trying to avoid them. Writing scripts will also help you get a clear picture of what is really upsetting you. Many people who write a worry script for a few weeks report that they feel less anxious about the things they were worrying about.

How to write a worry script:

- Choose a place where you won't be interrupted. Turn off your cell phone, music, and television. Set aside about 30 minutes to complete each script.
- Write about one thing you are worrying about.
- Write about the worst-case scenario of one of your worries. For example, if you are worrying about your child getting bullied in school, write about the worst events that could happen to your child and the worst ways he or she might react.
- Write a script that is vivid and includes how things look, sound, and feel. Include your feelings and reactions.
- Write a new script on the same subject each day, going deeper into your feelings with each script.
- After about two weeks, you can move to the next worry.

NOTE: If you feel anxious and even tearful while you are writing, keep at it! Experiencing these feelings means you are on the right track. Even though it may be difficult, the more you face your fears and worries, the more likely they will eventually fade.

My Worry Script

Date: _____ Beginning Time: _____ Ending Time: _____

Summarize what you are worrying about in a sentence:

Describe your worry in vivid detail:

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Create a Fear Ladder

Objective

To overcome your anxiety by learning to face your fears step by step.

You Should Know

It is completely normal to want to avoid the thoughts, images, and situations you fear. In fact, that sixth sense you have that signals danger can even be helpful and serve to keep you safe from harm; for example, if someone dares you to do something you know is dangerous and should be feared, like approaching a wild animal. However, your anxiety can trick you into taking even the simplest everyday event, such as leaving your home, driving a car, or seeing the color red, and twisting it into an idea that leaves you fearful.

You can face these fears by exposing yourself to situations that are less scary to you and then working your way through even scarier situations. Think about what it was like to learn how to swim or ride a bike. You didn't jump into the water right away or ride down a busy street the first day. You probably dipped your toes into the water, then practiced putting your face in, or had someone hold you on the bike at first way before you began riding it alone.

Now, imagine the process of overcoming your fears as a ladder you have made the difficult decision to climb. Reaching the top might appear to be overwhelming, even unimaginable. However, if you take your time, mastering one rung at a time as you climb higher and higher, you will eventually succeed and make your way to the top, out of the reach of your fears.

What to Do

Follow these steps to help you face your fears.

1. Think of a goal you would like to achieve regarding overcoming your ultimate fear.
2. Make a list of everything you associate with your specific fear. Try to think of at least five things.
3. Rank the list on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 representing what you fear least and 10 representing what you fear most.

My goal is to overcome my fear of:

So that I can:

Fear List:

Guidelines for Fear Ratings

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Slight fear			Moderate fear			Substantial fear			Extreme fear

Rank your fears from the lowest at the bottom to the highest.

Fears: thoughts, situations, images, places, other	Fear rating
	Highest
	Lowest

How did rating your fears from what you fear least to what you fear most impact the way you usually experience them?

How do you think you would react to exposing yourself to your lowest-rated fear and then working your way up to the top?

Describe how you felt in the past when you overcame a fear, such as swimming, riding a bike, or speaking in public. What strategies did you use, and how did they help you overcome your fear?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Create a Library of Your Values

Objective

To focus on your values by recognizing how important they are to you.

You Should Know

Your values—core beliefs created from your desires, self-image, and experiences, and garnered from your parents, family, and friends, are what define you. Your values give a special meaning and direction to your life, often serving as a guide for you to follow when making decisions that are important to you.

However, those who struggle with mental health issues often discover that their values, the parts of themselves that are most cherished, are perpetually under siege by the alarming and relentless content of their thoughts, causing them to constantly say to themselves, “I must be a bad person if I have such evil and unacceptable thoughts”—and eventually to believe it. This belief creates an internal mental anguish that occurs when people have disturbing thoughts that are the complete opposite of their true values.

Remembering, celebrating, and concentrating on who you truly are by focusing on your values or what you hold dear can help you take your power back and reclaim your life.

What to Do

Imagine that your values are like your most treasured stories, ones you enjoy because they resonate deep within you in a way that is comforting and satisfying. Create your own personal library, where you can go whenever you feel the need to remind yourself of who you are and what is really important to you.

1. Choose five or more of the most important values from the list to create your library, or write your own if you prefer.
2. Write each value on the spine of one book.
3. On each book cover, write why this value is important to you.
4. Take a picture of the books you have created.

Achievement

Caring

Compassion

Adventure

Charity

Compromise

Beauty

Civility

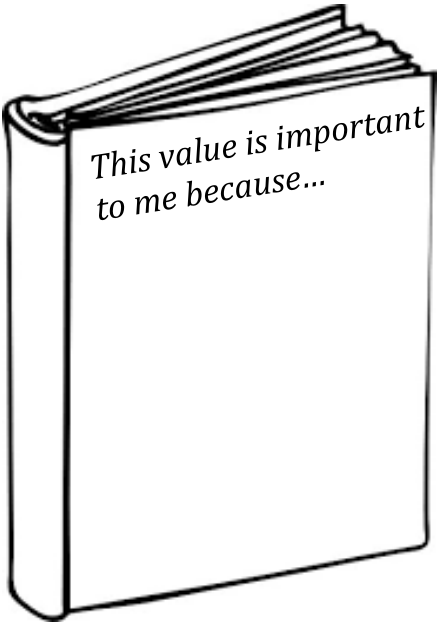
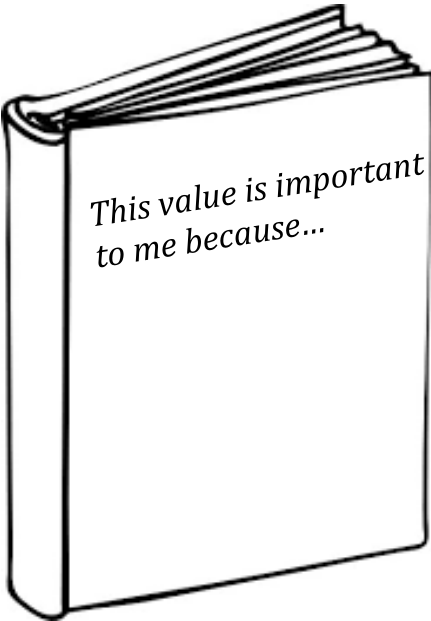
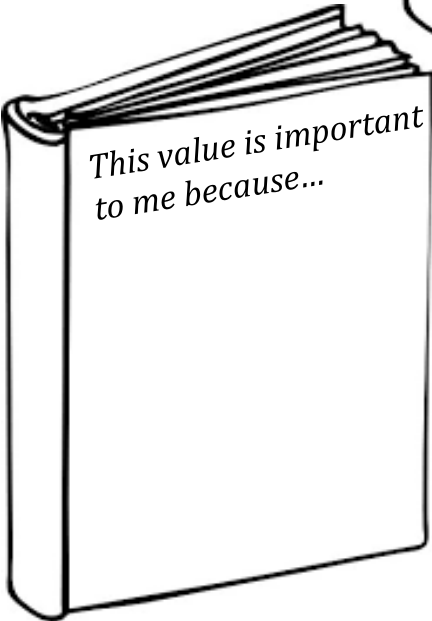
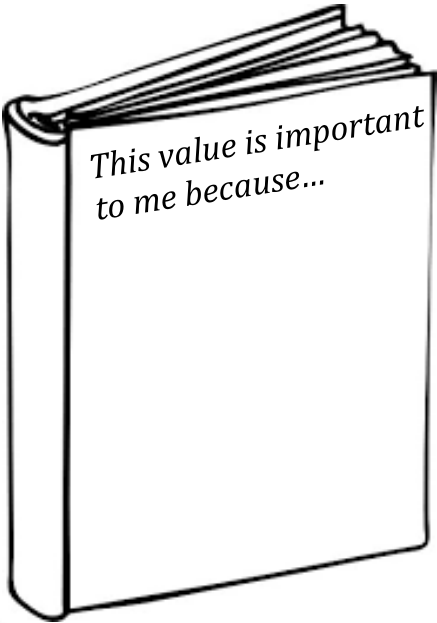
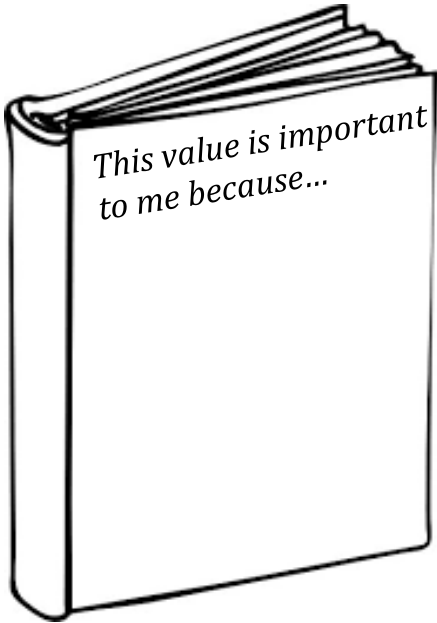
Confidence

Calmness

Class

Connections

Courage	Power
Creativity	Purpose
Drive	Reason
Fairness	Recognition
Free time	Relaxation
Freedom	Respect
Friends	Responsibility
Fun	Safety
Generosity	Sharing
Grace	Spirituality
Helping others	Stability
Honesty	Success
Honor	Trust
Humor	
Independence	
Innovation	
Inspiration	
Joy	
Kindness	
Knowledge	
Loyalty	
Nature	
Optimism	
Parenting	
Patience	
Peace	
Popularity	



How have your struggles impacted your ability to adhere to your values?

What does it feel like to reflect and focus on what you value as opposed to problems?

How do you think that knowing and appreciating your values will help you challenge your problems?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Creating a Gratitude Journal

Objective

To adopt a daily “attitude of gratitude” to enhance mood.

You Should Know

Researchers who study why some people are happier than others consistently find that adopting a daily “attitude of gratitude” lifts our spirits and acts as a barrier to the small and large things that would normally upset us. People who are consistently grateful have been found to be happier, more energetic, more hopeful, and report more frequent positive emotions.

Being grateful is more than just saying “thank you.” Robert Emmons, a prominent researcher on how gratitude affects our lives, describes gratitude as “a felt sense of wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life.” Dr. Sonja Lyubomirsky, a professor at the University of California and author of *The How of Happiness*, notes that gratitude has many benefits in our daily lives, focusing us on positive experiences, helping us be more connected to others, and increasing our satisfaction with life.

What to Do

Use the “Daily Gratitude Calendar” to record something you are grateful for each day. Don’t repeat yourself, but rather look for something new to be grateful for as soon as you wake up.

Write down something you are grateful for each day for 30 days. Try not to repeat yourself.

Day	What I Am Grateful For

Creating an Emotional Emergency First Aid Kit

Objective

To create an emotional emergency first aid kit for times when you are stressed or upset.

You Should Know

It is important to take care of your mental health every day. Just like with your physical health, you should practice a variety of good habits, including getting enough sleep, exercising, eating nutritious food, spending time with your family and friends, practicing relaxation techniques, and more. All of these activities affect the “feel good” biochemicals in your brain and will help you develop a sense of calm and well-being.

Sometimes, however, you may have an emotional emergency, and just like responding to a physical emergency, having the right Emotional Emergency First Aid Kit can help. This worksheet will give you ideas about tools you can use when you are feeling especially anxious or depressed, particularly if you feel you are going to do something that will cause you harm.

You can create a physical Emergency Kit from the list below, assembling objects in a large plastic baggie or other small container, and/or you can create a digital Emergency Kit with tools on your smart phone or tablet. The important thing is to have these tools and techniques within easy reach when you might experience an emotional emergency.

Begin by checking off the tools you think would be helpful to keep in your Emotional Emergency Kit. Then go ahead and assemble the kit and make sure that you keep it with you at times when you anticipate you will be stressed or upset.

What to Do

Check off the tools you think would be most useful to use when you feel overwhelmed by emotions. Add additional ideas at the bottom of this page.

___ **A “grounding” object such as a small ball or stone**

Just squeezing this object, and paying attention to your physical reaction, can help calm your emotions.

___ **A list of people you can call**

This list would include three or four people who are emotionally supportive. If you can't reach them, write down what you want to say, but don't send them an email or text. Wait until you can actually talk to the people on this list to ask for support.

___ **A journal to write down your feelings or to draw and doodle**

You can do this digitally or use a notebook and pen or pencil.

_____Positive photographs

Have a few easily-accessible photographs or videos. These could be of people, pets, or special places. Looking at these pictures should stimulate positive feelings and happy memories.

_____Water

Sitting and relaxing with a drink of water can have an immediate effect on your mood. Don't gulp it down, but rather sip, relax, and be "mindful" of how you are feeling.

_____Inspirational reading

Many people find comfort in reading poems, prayers, or inspirational stories.

_____Funny videos

If you can't find something to make you smile or laugh on YouTube®, there are dozens of websites that are designed to lighten up your day. No matter what your mood, your favorite video can help.

_____Chewing gum

Many people don't realize that chewing gum has a calming effect on the brain because repetitive motion produces serotonin.

_____A relaxing audio

There are hundreds of guided imagery soundtracks you can download to your smartphone or tablet, as well as meditation audios, and other forms of music designed to help you relax. Don't listen to sad songs or songs that remind you of a difficult time in your life.

_____A list of activities you can do to improve your mood

What usually helps you feel better? For some people it's taking a walk, for other people it's doing a hobby or a craft. Make sure that this list contains activities that get you moving, preferably in the company of others.

Other Things to Include in Your Emotional Emergency Kit:

Dealing Effectively with Authority Figures

Objective

To feel more empowered to deal effectively with those in authority by practicing assertiveness skills.

You Should Know

For many people, especially those with social anxiety, interactions with authority figures can be fraught with worry. You may fear that you are being perceived as bad or incompetent. You may fear that you will be criticized or berated in private or in public. You may even “fear the fear” associated with dealing with authority figures. For instance, many people are afraid that the physical symptoms that accompany their anxiety will be noticed by others. These can include blushing, sweating, fast heartbeat, dizziness, or stammering.

Facing an authority figure can feel intimidating, and even paralyzing, especially if that authority figure has some control over your future, such as a boss who is in a position to fire you.

Some people are simply born more fearful than others. However, many timid children grow out of this innate character trait, given the right support.

Some people were not born timid but grew up in homes where there was a significant amount of criticism, yelling, and even abuse. This type of family environment can affect people for a lifetime.

In this worksheet, you will identify the authority figures in your past as well as your present. Then you will learn about simple strategies for assertive interactions with authority figures.

Note: If you are currently dealing with an authority figure who is verbally or physically harassing or mistreating you, ask for help immediately from a safe person (friend, family, professional), consult with your Human Resources Department if the problem is at work, or, if necessary, call the police.

What to Do

To raise your awareness about your anxiety in dealing with authority figures, write down the names and/or the role of authority figures in your past, such as parents, step-parents, grandparents, older siblings, other relatives, teachers, coaches, religious leaders, and so on.

Next to each name, write down what it was like to interact with them. For example: “I felt safe with my father,” or “I felt intimidated by my teacher,” or “I felt angry and sad about my older brother, who bullied me.”

Name	Relationship	What You Felt Then

Next, write down the names and roles of the authority figures in your current life and what your feelings are about dealing with them. You can include family members, teachers, bosses, supervisors, managers, landlords/landladies, or other people in a position of authority in your current life.

Name	Relationship/Role	How You Feel When You Deal with Them Now

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What are some *fears* about your interactions with the authority figures in your present life?

What difficulties have you encountered in *actual* interactions with authority figures? What happens to you physically? Emotionally? Describe below.

Now that you are more aware of what happens to you with authority figures in your current life, here are some strategies for dealing with them more effectively. It may take some practice to feel more comfortable, but be persistent. What you carry with you from your past does not need to be repeated in the present.

Strategies for More Assertive Communication with Authority Figures

- Realize that authority figures are people too, with vulnerabilities and soft spots.
- Check your posture. If you are slumping, straighten your body and hold your head high.
- Make eye contact, even if it's hard.
- Speak with a confident voice.
- Listen actively, making sure not to interrupt or talk over the other person's words.
- Control your breathing as best you can. Take deep, diaphragmatic breaths to stay cool.
- Be aware of when you feel defensive about something. Try to hear both sides.
- Be open to receiving suggestions and advice.

- If you feel paralyzed by a question, say, “I need to think about that and I’ll get back to you.”
- Recognize that authority figures have to do a tough job sometimes by setting limits or sharing bad news. Try not to take it personally.
- Share your feedback or point of view openly and honestly. Take your time.
- If you feel yourself shutting down or wanting to escape, take a moment to collect yourself, perhaps grounding yourself in your feet or taking a few breaths.
- Be kind to yourself if you have visible anxiety symptoms. Everyone gets nervous with authority figures. It is not a sign of a character flaw. It is not the end of the world.
- Think positively before or during a meeting: “I can do this,” “I have a right to stand up for myself,” “I am competent and trustworthy,” “I am open to feedback and constructive criticism.”

Now it’s your turn to write down some positive strategies that you would like to use the next time you have to encounter an authority figure. Be creative. Be realistic. And be patient with yourself.

Reflections on This Exercise

1. From the lists above, identify which strategies seem the hardest for you and why.

2. Which strategies are ones you think you could use? Why? Commit to trying one each time you are with an authority figure.

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?

Does Your Anxiety Make You Depressed?

Objective:

To help you determine if you need treatment for depression as well as anxiety

You Should Know

It is common for people with anxiety disorders to also have symptoms of depression. In fact, research indicates that up to 70% of people with anxiety disorders also shows symptoms of depression. These two problems are very different, but they do share some symptoms in common. Both depression and anxiety often cause people to be nervous, irritable, find it hard to focus, and to have trouble sleeping.

It is often difficult to determine which problem came first. Being depressed can make you anxious and being anxious can make you depressed.

However, depression comes along with a different set of symptoms that need to be addressed.

The major indicators that you are depressed include:

- a frequent sad mood
- an inability to enjoy daily activities
- a lack of energy
- feelings of guilt or worthlessness

If you want to find out more about your depression, you can take a short test at Mental Health America. <https://screening.mentalhealthamerica.net/screening-tools/depression>. Please note that the site will ask you a few personal questions after the screening, but it is completely anonymous, and you will not be asked any questions that could identify you.

Please note: If you have suicidal thoughts immediately seek help. Call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline at 800-273-8255.

What to Do

This worksheet will address one of the most common problems associated with depression, the inability to do activities that bring meaning to your life. Planning your day so that it includes meaningful activities can help motivate you to spend more time doing things that will lift your mood and bring purpose to your life. Your success or lack of success with this exercise can help you determine if you need additional treatment for depression.

Activities That Give Your Life Meaning

You should begin this exercise by writing down activities that will make any day more meaningful.

Write down an activity that expresses your values.

Write down an activity that always makes you smile.

Write down an activity that always relaxes you.

Write down an activity that always connects you with people you care about.

Write down an activity that always stimulates your thinking.

Write down an activity that makes you proud of yourself.

Write down an activity that brings back wonderful memories.

Write down a spiritual activity that makes you feel connected to a higher power.

Write down an activity that is always fun.

Write down other activities that give your life meaning and purpose.

On the chart below, schedule at least two meaningful activities from the previous page each day. Choose activities that you know are logistically possible to do. In other words, don't plan a trip to the beach if you are hundreds of miles away from the beach, but rather plan activities that require relatively little effort. At the end of each activity , rate your mood, from 1 = sad and hopeless to 10 = happy and satisfied with my life. You can also add comments about each activity.

Make copies of this chart and fill in a chart every day for at least a week.

Date: _____

Time	Activity	Rating	Comments
7am			
8am			
9am			
10am			
11am			
Noon			
1pm			
2pm			
3pm			
4pm			
5pm			
6pm			
7pm			
8pm			
9pm			
10pm			

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Do-It-Yourself Exposure and Response Prevention Guide

Objective

To learn to tolerate the anxiety and distress your fears provoke by directly exposing yourself to them.

You Should Know

Exposure and response prevention therapy (ERP) is the best-known and most successful method used to treat stubborn obsessions and their accompanying compulsions.

This therapy has two goals:

- Facing your fears by accepting and tolerating your obsessions no matter how distressful and intrusive they are
- Committing to not engaging in time-consuming and useless compulsions to escape from your fears

Exposure refers to the process of deliberately exposing yourself to your obsessions. Response prevention refers to making a mindful decision to accept what makes you uncomfortable and anxious without responding to it.

There are two ways to use ERP, and you can choose the one that is best for you:

- **Graded exposure:** This is the most popular method of exposure. It consists of constructing a fear hierarchy, or ladder, in which feared objects, activities, or situations are ranked from the least difficult exposure to the most disturbing one.
- **Flooding:** This method includes using the fear hierarchy to begin with an immediate exposure to the most difficult tasks. This is considered the best way to conduct ERP, but only if the anxiety can be tolerated.

What to Do

Step 1: Prepare for change.

This therapy is often done in a therapist's office but with proper guidance, grit, and commitment can be done independently as well. It can be overwhelming, and you may have some anxiety surrounding it, which is to be expected. However, know that it can also be the most rewarding endeavor you have ever taken on. Just remember not to become alarmed if you are experiencing some initial doubts and fears surrounding the process.

Step 2: Focus on your goals.

It is important to specifically identify what obsessions and compulsions you would like to extinguish. Having an overall goal will help you focus on what is important to you.

List the goals you would like to reach by participating in ERP therapy.

Step 3: Build your support.

Ask for the help and support of friends or family members who can coach you and offer you emotional support along your journey. Make a list of those who will support you and what they will do.

Step 4: Commit to the time.

Answer the following questions to reflect on how you will plan for the time necessary to complete your exposure plan.

How will you make time for your exposure?

How will it impact your work and family time?

Know that ERP therapy cannot be accomplished in a day. Please prepare to set aside at least three to six weeks to complete the program and allow at least two to three hours a day to work through the anxiety you will experience practicing the art of accepting but not engaging in your compulsions.

Step 5: Develop a plan.

1. List the triggers you would like to work on exposing yourself to, and rate how anxious each makes you on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the lowest.
2. Select a trigger you would like to make your goal. You should probably choose a trigger that is no higher than a 7 and not lower than a 2 for your first goal and then work your way to a higher trigger.
3. Carry out the exposure for at least a two-week period, even though your anxiety level may seem high, while committing to not engaging in the compulsion.
4. Repeat the exposure until your anxiety rating is 2 or below.

Use this worksheet to track your progress in exposing yourself to the trigger you have selected as your goal.

Triggers	Anxiety rating of trigger (1-10)

Tracking Your Progress

Goal I would like to meet:

Date	Trigger	Obsessive thought	Result	Anxiety level at start	Anxiety level at end	Notes

How did it feel to make the pledge to challenge your fears?

How did you address finding the time necessary to work on the exposure plan?

How did you address any difficulties you experienced while trying to meet your goals?

What skills do you think you gained from engaging in your exposure plan? How do you think you could transfer those skills into other areas of your life?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Eliminating Unhelpful Coping Strategies

Objective

To help you identify and eliminate unhelpful coping strategies you use to “protect” yourself from anxiety.

You Should Know

Anxiety can be very unpleasant, so it is only natural to try and avoid fearful situations at all costs. But studies tell us that avoiding things that make you anxious is the worst thing you can do. In fact, most of the things that people do to protect themselves from anxiety are unhelpful and just prolong this problem. This worksheet is designed to help you identify the things you do to “protect” yourself from experiencing anxiety. Remember, there is no need for protection from danger that doesn’t exist. Giving up these unhelpful strategies will help you rid yourself of your anxiety.

List the situations you avoid because you are afraid they may trigger you. Then rate each one on how hard it will be to give this up, where 1 = not hard at all, and 10 = extremely hard.

List any rituals you use in the hope that they will magically help you avoid feeling anxious:

_____	Rating _____
_____	Rating _____
_____	Rating _____
_____	Rating _____

List ways you distract yourself when you are anxious:

_____	Rating _____
_____	Rating _____
_____	Rating _____

List any people you feel you must have with you in situations you think might trigger anxiety:

_____	Rating _____
_____	Rating _____
_____	Rating _____

List any objects that you feel magically protect you from anxiety:

_____	Rating _____
_____	Rating _____

_____ Rating _____

Are there things you must “check” several times when you feel anxious?

_____ Rating _____

_____ Rating _____

_____ Rating _____

List the unhelpful strategies you are ready to give up, starting with the ones with the lowest rating:

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

Embrace the Unexpected

Objective

To increase your tolerance for the unexpected and decrease the anxiety you feel surrounding uncertain situations by reframing the role uncertainty plays in your life.

You Should Know

Uncertainty is a universal part of life, wide-ranging and unavoidable. People feel concerned about the impact of global issues, such as terrorism or climate change, and are uncertain about what the future holds. The experience of uncertainty can be intensely personal and can involve the anxiety surrounding the birth of a child, a medical diagnosis, or the results of a job interview. It can also involve the mundane, where you find yourself fretting over whether your favorite football team will win, or if the shoes you're buying will match the dress you have at home.

What is not universal is the way people interpret and react to uncertainty. People without anxiety can have all these experiences and may feel some fear. They may even feel somewhat overwhelmed; however, their feelings are fleeting and not overpowering. Those with anxiety might feel distraught over these competing uncertainties and engage in behaviors to ease their fears.

Think about some uncertainties that are already in your life but that you take for granted and are able to tolerate; for example, when you start a new project at work or drive to a new destination. What makes those situations tolerable in comparison to others? Think about times when uncertainty has been a positive part of your life; for example, presents that were a surprise, an unexpected hug from a loved one, or your child's first step or word.

As you learn to tolerate uncertainty, you can try reframing it in order to expand the way you interpret it.

What to Do

These are some common traits of those who experience a strong sense of uncertainty. Place a check next to the traits you recognize in yourself.

- Seeking reassurance
- Making extensive lists
- Procrastinating
- Refusing to delegate tasks or allow anyone to help you
- Having to plan every vacation and every other event you are involved in

_____ Looking for an exorbitant amount of information about every event, problem, or activity you want to engage in

Exposure and response prevention therapy (ERP), the best-known treatment for anxiety, consists of gradually exposing yourself to your fears over a period of time. In this activity, you will expose yourself to situations that make you feel uncertain, until you feel less and less anxiety. Engaging in the exposures will allow you to acknowledge and accept your fear of recurring uncertainty so that your anxiety surrounding these situations will decrease significantly.

Start by asking yourself these questions:

What are some disadvantages you experience as a result of your inability to tolerate uncertainty?

What are some advantages to tolerating uncertainty, and what do you specifically have to gain from learning to tolerate uncertainty?

Next, follow these steps:

1. Make a list of uncertain situations that cause you anxiety. You can choose from the examples provided, and/or add situations that are unique to you.
2. Rate the situations on a scale from 1 to 10, according to your anxiety level.
3. Expose yourself to one or more situations a week. Use the weekly exposure sheet to track your progress.
4. Engage in the exposure at least three times per week.
5. Repeat the exposure until your anxiety level drops to a 2 or below.
6. Increase your exposure tolerance by inventing new and random situations to expose yourself to.

Uncertain Situations List

- Go to the grocery store without a list.
- Ask a friend to choose a movie for you both to see, without telling you its title.
- Fix a meal and eat your dessert first.
- Fix breakfast for dinner or dinner for breakfast.
- Have a friend or family member buy an item of clothing for you, and then wear it.
- Read the first book of a series you want to read; don't read the sequel for two weeks.
- Take a different driving route to work.
- Make a simple dish without using a recipe.
- Go to a restaurant and order something you have never eaten before.
- Eat at a type of restaurant new to you.
- Jog without counting your steps or miles. Continue until you feel like it is time to stop.
- Go on a short errand without wearing something you always wear: earrings, makeup, your favorite shirt, or a lucky watch.
- Write an email or a text to a friend. Send it without checking it for grammar or anything else.

Weekly Exposure

	Uncertain situation	Anxiety level before exposure	Anxiety level after exposure	Notes on experience
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				

Was tolerating uncertainty easier or more difficult than you expected? In what ways?

Did most of your exposure practice turn out positive? If so, did that surprise you?

When your exposure practice did not work as expected, how did you cope with it?

What do you think it would look like if you incorporated uncertainty into your life on a daily basis?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

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Objective

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- Read the first book of a series you want to read; don't read the sequel for two weeks.
- Take a different driving route to work.
- Make a simple dish without using a recipe.
- Go to a restaurant and order something you have never eaten before.
- Eat at a type of restaurant new to you.
- Jog without counting your steps or miles. Continue until you feel like it is time to stop.
- Go on a short errand without wearing something you always wear: earrings, makeup, your favorite shirt, or a lucky watch.
- Write an email or a text to a friend. Send it without checking it for grammar or anything else.

Uncertain Situations That Cause You Anxiety

Situation	Anxiety level from 1-10

Weekly Exposure

	Uncertain situation	Anxiety level before exposure	Anxiety level after exposure	Notes on experience
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				

Was tolerating uncertainty easier or more difficult than you expected? In what ways?

Did most of your exposure practice turn out positive? If so, did that surprise you?

When your exposure practice did not work as expected, how did you cope with it?

What do you think it would look like if you incorporated uncertainty into your life on a daily basis?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?

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

It is recommended that you complete the worksheets called “Are You Anxious About Being the Center of Attention?” and “Strategies for Overcoming Fear of Being the Center of Attention” before you begin work on this activity. In the previous worksheets, you identified your fears and rated their severity. Then you learned and practiced some cognitive and physical strategies to learn to manage your anxiety about being the center of attention.

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?

Exposure Therapy for Fear of Using Public Bathrooms

Objective

To help you overcome anxiety related to using public bathrooms through exposure training.

You Should Know

In the two other worksheets about paruresis, or shy bladder syndrome, you identified your feared situations and worked on developing physical and cognitive strategies for facing in to your fears. (See “Are You Anxious About Using Public Bathrooms?” and “Strategies for Overcoming Fear of Using Public Bathrooms.”) Now you will add new skills by doing exposure therapy.

Exposure therapy can be highly effective. In a report done by the International Paruresis Association, 80 percent of people suffering from this anxiety syndrome saw improvement in their symptoms by doing exposure therapy, which involves gradually facing into and eventually mastering your fears through doing the very thing you are afraid to do. (See the worksheet called “Understanding the Principles of Exposure Therapy.”) You are going to deliberately cause yourself to be anxious and then learn, over time, that nothing catastrophic happens as a result.

What to Do

Exposure therapy for paruresis involves gradually using bathrooms in situations that present progressively more challenges. If your severity scale (SUD) ranked 7 and above (in the severe range), you might want to seek a behavioral therapist who specializes in exposure therapy for paruresis. However, if your symptoms are in the mild to moderate range, you can enlist the help of a trusted friend or loved one and do the gradual exposure exercises with them to support you.

The following elements of your training are important, according to psychologist Arlin Cunci, MA, a behavioral specialist:

- A trusted friend or relative to help you with exposures
- At least one hour twice per week to practice
- Paper and pen to write out a hierarchy
- Access to locations to practice exposures

Who could you ask to help? Name at least two or three potential helpers in case one can't do it.

Note: If you can't find a partner, you can certainly do the exercises on your own if you wish.

Notice in the next few days whether your need (urgency) to urinate interferes with your ability to perform in a public bathroom. Record your observations here:

1.

2.

3.

If the urgency to urinate makes the process easier, that is good information for your practice sessions. You might want to drink a lot of fluids prior to each session.

Consult your list from the “Are You Anxious About Using Public Bathrooms?” Start with the lowest-rated items on the list and work up to the ones with the highest severity rating. For example, if you rated urinating at home when someone else is present as the easiest (1) and urinating at a busy public place as the hardest (9), start with urinating at home with someone else present.

Ask your helper to stay in another room while you try. Let yourself urinate for at least three seconds before you deliberately stop the flow. Then break together for three minutes. Be sure not to rely on habitual strategies such as running the water or masking the noise. You are trying to increase your anxiety, but gradually, and relying on habitual coping mechanisms will slow down the process.

After three minutes, repeat the practice—urinate for three seconds, then stop. Break for three minutes. Do this pattern for up to an hour, in your safest situation.

Next, plan to practice in a more difficult situation, consulting your original list, with your partner accompanying you, if you wish. Don’t spend more than four minutes trying to urinate. If it’s too hard, try again another time, or choose a different, easier practice. Be kind to yourself. Self-criticism never helps. Note the next hardest situation below:

Set a goal of working on your exposure training several times a week, all the while recording your observations, using the chart below. Notice your anxious thoughts. Consider using helpful

physical and cognitive strategies to lower your anxiety, which you have identified on your other worksheets.

After 12 sessions, you should notice great improvement. Try to arrange to do even more exposure sessions to boost your confidence and experience. You may use the chart below to keep track. Feel free to amend it according to your personal needs and goals.

Situation	Symptom/Severity 0 to 10	Physical Strategy Tried	Habitual Thought	Reassuring Statement

Reflections on This Exercise

1. Which exposure situation yielded the most successful outcome? Explain.

2. Which situation was the hardest to do? Why?

3. Did you notice any difference between your experience of the symptom in your practice situation versus a real situation? Explain.

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? Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
