

wrewer werwerwir



# Accepting Unpleasant Experiences, Thoughts, and Feelings

## Objective

To identify unpleasant thoughts and feelings associated with life experiences to increase opportunities for positive and rewarding experiences.

## You Should Know

Language is used to describe experiences, including those that have caused unpleasant or uncomfortable feelings. If you label experiences negatively, you might limit, avoid, or try to control situations to decrease or eliminate discomfort associated with those experiences. As a result, you may miss opportunities, encounter harm, or experience overall dissatisfaction with life. For example, if you label a party as boring because you felt left out of the conversation, you may decide that you will not go to any more parties.

This worksheet will help you understand that your experience of the present moment does not have to be determined by past experiences that you have identified as unpleasant or uncomfortable. Accepting unpleasant thoughts and feelings, rather than actively avoiding them, creates opportunities for positive and rewarding experiences that you might otherwise have missed.

## What to Do

Identify five negative thoughts or feelings that cause you to limit, avoid, or control certain activities (for example, anxiety, worry, sadness, jealousy, fear, insecurity, etc.):

---

---

---

---

---

Write down situations you avoid to keep from experiencing discomfort.

---

---

---

---

---

Identify and describe positive thoughts and feelings you could have if you permitted yourself to engage in these situations, rather than avoid them. Be as specific and descriptive as possible. This will help you identify the experiences you are choosing to miss out on.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Now, choose one activity you have avoided in the past: \_\_\_\_\_

Do this activity, then describe your thoughts and feelings throughout the experience.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

What did you do to change your negative thoughts and/or feelings to create a more positive experience?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Reflections on This Exercise

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 People Out to Get Me?

## Objective

To identify ways to relate to people to decrease paranoia regarding their intent and increase positivity through the pronoia approach.

## You Should Know

Some people feel that others are deliberating 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 do not 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.

So, give it a try and let go of the worry and see if your positive approach toward other people yields 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 are 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. For people with 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? What if they want to talk about kids or marriage? What if???* . . . You get the idea.

What would it be like to relax (at least a little more) and enjoy these experiences? To really be present and have fun meeting someone new and learning about them and sharing about yourself. Hard to imagine? Well, it can be done.

You might already be working on practicing some strategies to overcome your fears related to dating. 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 dating 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 Going on Dates” and “Exposure Therapy for Anxiety About Going on Dates.”

## 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, 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 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. 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 going on dates, 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 dating?

---

---

---

2. What situation or symptom causes you the least distress about dating?

---

---

---

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 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. Other parties are work-related occasions to kick back and relax outside the office. However, for many people with 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 don't like talking about yourself. And you are usually expected to make small talk or otherwise be "on" when you'd 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 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 going to parties 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 Going to Parties" and "Exposure Therapy for Social Anxiety About Going to Parties.")

## What to Do

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

- Shaking, trembling
- Dry mouth
- Sweating
- Rapid heartbeat
- Dizziness
- Nausea, gagging, vomiting
- Stumbling with your words, 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

Now, list below at least 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 \_\_\_\_\_

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

## SUDS Scale

- 0: Totally relaxed
- 1: 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 related to going to parties?

---

---

---

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

---

---

---

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?

---

---

---