

Understanding Social Anxiety

Challenging Anxious Thinking

What Is Social Anxiety?

SOCIAL ANXIETY IS CHARACTERIZED BY EXCESSIVE AND PERSISTENT WORRY ABOUT EMBARRASSING ONESELF, OR SHOWING ANXIETY SYMPTOMS, IN SOCIAL AND/OR PERFORMANCE SITUATIONS (AMERICAN PSYCHIATRIC ASSOCIATION, 1994).

Those who experience social anxiety focus on what they believe others are thinking of them. They tend to have four central worries:

1. **They are likely to perform poorly**
2. **Others will judge their performance harshly**
3. **The consequences of disapproval will be severe**
4. **Their performance reflects personal inadequacy** (Wilson, 1996).

Specifically, they fear others see them as:

- anxious
- weak
- crazy
- boring
- unintelligent
- unattractive
- stupid
- weird
- unlikable
- inadequate

Generally, individuals who experience social anxiety fear one or more of the following:

1. **Formal speaking and interaction**
(e.g. giving a class presentation)
2. **Informal speaking and interaction**
(e.g. going to a party, meeting strangers)
3. **Assertive interaction**
(e.g. expressing disagreement, returning goods to a store)
4. **Being observed**
(e.g. eating in public, being watched while working) (Liebowitz, 1987 in Heimberg and Becker, 2002).

When individuals with social anxiety are fearful of only one or two social situations they are considered to be experiencing “discrete” social phobia (Leahy and Holland, 2000). Those who fear many social situations (the majority of those with social anxiety) are considered to have “generalized” social phobia (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Feared situations are most commonly avoided. Less frequently, they are anticipated and endured with intense distress (due to concern about being judged or evaluated negatively by others) (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Some individuals experience intense feelings of anxiety after the feared event is over (because they believe they have been judged or evaluated negatively).

Those with social anxiety tend to recognize that their fear is excessive and/or feel concerned about the level of anxiety they are experiencing (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

“Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something else is more important than fear.”

Ambrose Redmoon

Feared Situations

The four top-ranking fears:

1. Public speaking
2. Writing in presence of another
3. Using public washrooms
4. Being the center of attention (Wilson, 1996)

Factors That Impact Social Anxiety

Aspects of Others

- Age
- Gender
- Physical attractiveness
- Cultural background
- Perceived confidence
- Perceived aggressiveness
- Perceived intelligence
- Perceived social status

Relationship to Other

- Level of intimacy
- Familiarity (e.g., stranger or friend)

Aspects of the Situation

- Lighting
- Formality of situation
- Number of people
- Activity (e.g., eating, talking)
- Ability to use alcohol
- Duration of event

OTHER COMMON FEARS

- Meeting new people
- Job interviews
- Dating
- Tests, assignments
- Making eye contact
- Asking for directions
- Giving exact change
- Walking against traffic
- Walking into a crowded room
- Working in the presence of another
- Speaking to a person in a position of authority
- Initiating or maintaining conversations
- Going to a party
- Expressing opinions
- Expressing disagreement
- Giving compliments
- Receiving compliments
- Calling an unfamiliar person

The Impact Of Social Anxiety

SOCIAL ANXIETY IS CONSIDERED AN EXTREME FROM OF SHYNESS (LEAHY AND HOLLAND, 2000). MANY PEOPLE HIDE THEIR ANXIETY, FEELING ASHAMED OF THEIR SYMPTOMS. FOR SOME, THE SYMPTOMS OF SOCIAL ANXIETY ARE SEVERE ENOUGH TO RESULT IN SIGNIFICANT IMPAIRMENT IN LIFE FUNCTIONING (LEAHY AND HOLLAND, 2000).

Social anxiety adversely impacts:

- ➡ daily routine (e.g., walks most places to avoid taking public transportation)
- ➡ family life (e.g., doesn't go out with family)
- ➡ social life (e.g., few friends, feelings of loneliness)
- ➡ academic performance (e.g., won't do presentations, won't talk to professors)
- ➡ occupational functioning (e.g. underemployed because avoids certain jobs)



REDUCED QUALITY OF LIFE

What Causes Social Anxiety?

Likely a combination of factors

- **Genetics** – often have relatives who are shy/have social anxiety
- **Learning by example** – anxious parents as role models
- **Prior experience** – remember having been embarrassed in past
- **Negative Thinking** – developed negative thoughts about:
 - social situations (e.g., “Everyone will judge me.”)
 - themselves (e.g., “I’m boring.”)
- **Poor Social Skills** – not had the chance to learn strong social skills

Components Of Social Anxiety

Physiological

Exposure to a feared situation promotes an immediate anxiety response, which may take the form of a panic attack (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

Common anxiety symptoms experienced by those with social anxiety:

- rapid heart rate
- blushing
- dry mouth
- shortness of breath
- sweating
- shaking
- muscle tension
- urinary urgency
- lump in throat
- upset stomach

Socially anxious people may also experience chronic tension (including headaches and gastrointestinal upset) as a result of being continually vigilant in social situations (Markway et al, 1992).

Behavioral

Exposure to feared situations causes individuals to do one or more of the following:

- **anxiously anticipate:** worrying excessively long before a social event/performance.
- **freeze:** intended in prehistoric times to provide time to assess danger, prevent impulsive actions that might provoke attack and enhance camouflage when escape wasn't possible (Markway, et.al. 1992).
- **escape:** literally, or “in your head.”
- **avoid:** not showing up, not speaking up, avoiding eye contact, drinking.
- **endure with intense distress:** “white knuckling” it through.

Cognitive

Individuals with social anxiety exaggerate threat, assume the negative (about themselves and others), judge themselves harshly and struggle to believe in their own efforts.

SOCIAL ANXIETY FACTS

- Social phobia is the third most common mental health issue (after depression and alcoholism) (Turk, Heimberg and Hope, 2001).
- Social phobia is the most common anxiety disorder (Davidson, 2003).
- The public is generally unaware of social phobia because it has received very little attention in the media (Markway et al, 1992).
- Age of onset is typically 11 – 15 years old; many report sooner (Leahy and Holland, 2000).
- For 15 – 34 year olds, prevalence rate ~ 1 out of 7 people (Turk, Heimberg and Hope, 2001).
- Prevalence is increasing (Turk, Heimberg and Hope, 2001).
- More prevalent among women than men (Heimberg and Becker, 2002)
- Public speaking is consistently reported as the most feared social situation (Markway et al, 1992).
- Can result in serious impairment (Leahy and Holland, 2000).
- Social anxiety often co-occurs with other anxiety disorders and mood disorders (Turk, Heimberg and Hope, 2001).
- A significant number of individuals with social anxiety abuse alcohol (Turk, Heimberg and Hope, 2001).
- Vast majority (over 80%) of those with social anxiety don't seek treatment (Wilson, 1996).
- Average age people present for treatment: 30 years old (Leahy and Holland, 2000).
- Symptoms can worsen during times of stress (DSM-IV, 1994).
- Research supports the effectiveness of cognitive-behavioral treatment for social anxiety (Leahy and Holland, 2000).

What The Mind Does

Individuals with social anxiety exaggerate threat. They tend to:

- have a higher frequency of negative thoughts than positive thoughts (Heimberg and Becker, 2002).
- see themselves as unacceptable to others (Turk, Heimberg and Hope, 2001).
- have more thoughts concerning the impressions they are making on others (Leahy and Holland, 2000).
- expect themselves to never make a mistake – an impossible expectation (Markway et al, 1992).
- assume they must be liked/approved of by everyone (Markway et al, 1992).
- rate their social performance more harshly than others do (Turk, Heimberg and Hope, 2001).
- underestimate the quality of their social performance (Leahy and Holland, 2000).
- overestimate the degree that their anxiety symptoms are visible (Leahy and Holland, 2000).
- see social relationships as critical and competitive rather than cooperative (Turk, Heimberg and Hope, 2001).
- expect disapproval when it's not likely (Markway et al, 1992).
- expect disapproval to be severe (Markway et al, 1992).
- make more negative interpretations of ambiguous feedback (Stopa and Clark, 2000 in Heimberg and Becker, 2002).
- make more catastrophic interpretations of mild negative feedback (Leahy and Holland, 2000).
- have a better memory for negative social feedback (Leahy and Holland, 2000).
- struggle with assertiveness and feelings of inferiority (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

USING UP ATTENTIONAL RESOURCES

Individuals with social anxiety tend to devote attention to detecting threat.

Worrying about making mistakes

Monitoring for threat in the environment

Comparing self to others

Monitoring for physical symptoms of anxiety

Evaluating performance while performing

Thinking about how others are responding

Interpreting reactions of others as negative

Believing that the performance is poor



REDUCED ABILITY TO PERFORM

How Negative Beliefs Are Maintained

Focusing on internal cues

When socially anxious individuals monitor their own behavior for signs of incompetence or visible anxiety symptoms they fail to notice external cues (e.g., positive feedback from others).

Avoiding

This prevents socially anxious individuals from testing and disconfirming negative beliefs about their ability to perform.

Setting up self-fulfilling prophecies

Socially anxious individuals frequently act in ways that make their negative beliefs about themselves come true (e.g., she avoids eye contact → others avoid her because she seems disinterested in them → she continues to believe others see her as unlikable.)

Incorrectly processing information

Socially anxious individuals don't tend to notice or remember positive feedback they receive from others. They do, however, easily recall negative feedback. They also tend to interpret feedback that is ambiguous as criticism.

Remember The Paradox THE MORE YOU ACCEPT YOUR ANXIETY SYMPTOMS...
THE LESS THEY MATTER, THE LESS INTENSE THEY WILL BE, AND THE BETTER YOU ARE ABLE TO PERFORM

Understanding My Social Anxiety

INCREASING YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF YOUR SOCIAL ANXIETY IS KEY TO LEARNING TO BETTER COPE. CAREFULLY CONSIDER YOUR ANXIETY EXPERIENCE AS YOU ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW.

- T / F I have relatives who are shy or have social anxiety
- T / F I remember having been embarrassed/humiliated in the past
- T / F I have negative thoughts about my ability to cope in social situations
- T / F I have not had the opportunity to learn strong social skills
- T / F I have excessive and persistent worry about embarrassing myself
- T / F I am worried that others will notice when I'm feeling anxious
- T / F Too often, I worry about what other people think of me
- T / F I believe my social anxiety is excessive
- T / F I feel concerned about my level of social anxiety
- T / F I believe that social ease is an indication of personal worth
- T / F I believe that positive performance is an indication of personal worth

When I'm anxious, my body

When I'm anxious, I think:

When I'm anxious, I notice these behaviors:

I'm afraid that I will perform poorly when:

I'm scared people will judge me harshly when:

I think that when people disapprove of me, this will happen:

Understanding My Social Anxiety Continued

I avoid these social situations for fear of being perceived negatively:

- going to a party
- meeting new people
- dating

I avoid these “performance” situations for fear of being judged negatively:

- giving a class presentation
- asking a question in class
- being watched while I work

I anticipate a great deal of anxiety before:

I endure these situations with a lot of distress:

Because I fear I was judged negatively, I worry a lot after these situations:

Social anxiety adversely impacts my:

- daily routine
- academic performance
- social life
- occupational functioning
- family life

T / F I have more negative thoughts than positive thoughts

T / F I see myself as unacceptable

T / F I expect myself to be perfect.

T / F I believe everyone should like me

T / F I rate my social performance more harshly than others do

T / F I probably underestimate the quality of my social performance

T / F I probably overestimate how noticeable my anxiety symptoms are

T / F I generally see relationships as competitive rather than cooperative.

T / F I expect disapproval when it's probably not likely

T / F I expect disapproval to be severe

T / F I probably make negative interpretations of ambiguous feedback

T / F I probably make catastrophic interpretations of mild negative feedback

T / F I have a good memory for negative feedback

Address the Fear THE BEST PREDICTOR IN BETTER MANAGING SOCIAL ANXIETY IS THE ABILITY TO ADDRESS THE FEAR OF NEGATIVE EVALUATION.

Identifying Anxious Thinking

We all have a running monologue that goes on in our mind everyday. We talk to ourselves about the past, present and future, about others and about ourselves. This self-talk, or what we say to ourselves, is a critical determinant in how we feel. In other words, our thoughts form the foundation for our moods.

Two people thinking about the same situation in different ways can experience different emotional reactions. For example, if person A thinks that a class being canceled is an inconvenience, feelings of frustration or anger may arise. If person B thinks that the cancellation is a good opportunity to relax or catch up on some reading, feelings of happiness or relief may result. In short, it is largely how we interpret situations that determine our emotional response.

Individuals who experience difficulties with anxiety tend to engage in negative self-talk about themselves and others. Negative self-statements such as “I can’t cope” and “Others will never like me” and “The world is a horrible place” promote feelings of anxiety and lower self-confidence.

Negative self-talk tends to:

- happen automatically (people aren’t aware it’s happening until they begin to closely examine their thinking)
- be brief (“I won’t manage.”)
- sound like it could be true

Bourne (1995)

Also, individuals who experience anxiety difficulties may engage in anxious thoughts that are:

PROBABILITY OVER-ESTIMATIONS – overestimating the chance that something negative will happen.

Examples: People will think I’m stupid.
 I’ll mess up my presentation

CATASTROPHIC OVER-ESTIMATIONS – overestimations of how bad the outcome of a situation will be.

Examples: It would be terrible if he didn’t like me.
 It would be awful if I showed up late.

Brown, T., O’Leary, T., & Barlow, D. (2001)

In addition to probability and catastrophic overestimations, anxious thinking is typically characterized by the following:

“WHAT IF” WORRYING

“What if I blush?” or “What if they think I’m stupid?” This type of self-talk leads people to be on edge and vigilant for signs of trouble. It is talk that overestimates the probability of something negative happening (focusing on the stakes vs the odds). It’s difficult to relax when you are waiting for something bad to happen.

SELF-CRITICISM

“I’m a loser.” or “My presentation sucked.” People who look for flaws and highlight mistakes tend to ignore their positive qualities and feel less confident about their ability to handle life (including anxiety). It’s difficult to relax when you are never good enough.

HELPLESSNESS

“I can’t handle it.” Continually believing that you are not making progress and that life is too hard leaves you feeling powerless and regretful. It’s difficult to relax when everything is too challenging.

PERFECTIONISM

“I have to do better than everyone else.” or “I must succeed.” Constantly driving to achieve in all areas, combined with low tolerance for mistakes results in feelings of stress and pressure. It’s difficult to relax when you always have to be the best.

My Negative Self-Talk

THE NEGATIVE SELF-TALK THAT PROMPTS AND PERPETUATES ANXIETY IS OFTEN BRIEF AND OCCURS AUTOMATICALLY. LEARNING TO THINK ABOUT YOUR THINKING WILL HELP YOU TO IDENTIFY AND CHALLENGE ANXIOUS THINKING. USE THE SPACE BELOW TO RECORD SOME OF YOUR MOST FREQUENTLY USED ANXIOUS SELF-STATEMENTS.

“What if” thinking

Self-criticism

Thoughts of helplessness”

Thoughts of perfection

Bourne (1995) Wilson (1996)

PEOPLE YOU MAY KNOW OF WHO HAVE STRUGGLED WITH SOCIAL PHOBIA (DAVIDSON, 2003):

- Carly Simon
- Chevy Chase
- Oprah Winfrey
- Donny Osmond
- Aretha Franklin
- Barbra Streisand

Examine Your Thinking

Individuals who experience difficulties with anxiety often hold deeply ingrained beliefs about themselves and others that foster and/or maintain their anxiety. These beliefs may set up expectations that are extremely difficult to meet, leaving individuals with chronic feelings of nervousness, dissatisfaction and even failure.

Below is a list of assumptions that are often related to anxiety. Ask yourself how much you believe each statement using the following scale:

0 = not at all

1 = a little

2 = a lot

3 = completely

Also, as you are reading the statements in each of the categories below, similar statements that you say to yourself may come to mind. To assist you in examining your thinking, write these in the blank spaces after each category.

PERFECTIONISM

___ I believe I must always be successful.

___ It's not ok if I perform less than perfectly.

___ My effort is never adequate.

___ I will sacrifice just about anything to be the best at what I do.

CONTROL

___ It's important for me to be in control at all times.

___ I worry that others evaluate me negatively when I am anxious.

___ To me, lack of control in a situation is a sign of weakness/failure.

___ I feel anxious when someone else is in charge of a situation.

UNLIKEABILITY

___ I am less socially adept than others.

___ If people knew how anxious I am, they wouldn't want to be around me.

___ I'm not unattractive to others.

___ I'm boring and have nothing interesting to say.

___ If anyone sees how anxious I am, they'll think I'm defective.

"Of all the liars in the world, sometimes the worst are your own fears"

Rudyard Kipling

Examine Your Thinking Continued

0 = not at all

1 = a little

2 = a lot

3 = completely

PLEASING OTHERS

- How I feel about myself is based on everyone else's opinion of me.
 - I do things I don't want to do in order for others to like me.
 - I'm good at looking after others; I'm not as good at looking after myself.
 - I hide negative feelings to avoid upsetting others.
-
-
-

CAPABILITY

- I believe others do a better job than me.
 - I believe that I have poor judgment.
 - I believe that I have little common sense.
 - I find it hard to believe when someone says my work is good.
-
-
-

RESPONSIBILITY

- I have to be available all the time for others.
 - If I look incapable, I'll be letting people down.
 - No matter how overwhelmed I feel, I have to do whatever I am asked.
 - I shouldn't ever ask for assistance, no matter how much I could benefit from it.
 - I have to look after other people's needs before I take care of my own.
 - I must worry about everyone, or it will be my fault if something bad happens.
-
-
-

DEPENDENCE

- I feel unable to cope on my own.
 - I need to have others help me or be with me when I'm anxious.
 - I need the reassurance of others.
 - I am dependent and helpless.
-
-
-

If you rated statements at a 2 or 3, your beliefs may be perpetuating anxiety. These beliefs, however, need not be maintained. After identifying a troublesome belief, you can develop new ways of thinking in order to reduce anxiety.

Based on Babior, S. & Goldman, C. (1996). *Overcoming Panic, Anxiety and Phobias: New Strategies to Free Yourself from Worry and Fear*. Duluth: Whole Person Associates.

Challenging Anxious Thinking

BECAUSE NEGATIVE SELF-TALK IS LEARNED (YOU AREN'T BORN WITH ANXIOUS SELF-TALK), IT CAN BE UNLEARNED. THIS PROCESS INVOLVES THE FOLLOWING:

- **Thinking about your thinking** - notice when you are engaging in negative self-talk.
- **Slowing down** - use deep breathing to help you relax.
- **Challenging your thinking** - in the beginning it may be useful to use paper and a pen.
- **Generating encouraging self-statements** (that discourage anxiety).

How to Challenge Anxious Thinking

Method #1

1. IDENTIFY THE SITUATION. Identify the anxiety-provoking situation.
2. IDENTIFY NEGATIVE SELF-TALK. Record your anxious self-talk. Start out by working with one anxious self-statement a time.
3. CHALLENGE THE THINKING. Ask yourself:
 - Is it always true?
 - What are the odds of this really happening?
 - Am I looking at the whole picture?
 - Am I being totally objective?
 - How might someone else think about this?
 - Could there be another possibility?
 - Is there another explanation?
 - What is the worst that can happen?
 - Is this way of thinking helpful?
 - Would I talk to a friend this way?
4. GENERATE SELF-TALK THAT DISCOURAGES ANXIETY
 - acknowledge how you are feeling
 - say something supportive
 - make sure what you say is believable to you

Adapted from Bourne (1995) and Greenberger & Padesky (1995)

Positive vs Negative Self-talk

NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

Automatic

Believable

“What if” worrying
(future focused)

Assume something negative will happen

Self-criticism

Theme: “I’m helplessness”

Perfectionism

Rejects feelings

Adapted from Bourne (1995)

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Automatic

Believable

“What is” talk
(present focused)

Assume something will happen, but not necessarily something bad

Supportive self-statements

Theme: “I’m capable”

Permission to make mistakes and be less than perfect

Acknowledges and accepts feelings

SUPPORTIVE SELF-TALK

- I can feel anxious and cope at the same time.
- It would be ok is some people don't like me.
- I feel anxious and I can slow myself down and manage.
- I'm really scared people will think I'm stupid, but I can focus on my own opinion of myself.
- I do cope, despite feeling nervous.
- I can make a few mistakes and my presentation can still go well.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Challenging Anxious Thinking Method #1

Example #1

1. IDENTIFY THE SITUATION.

You are about to give a class presentation. Your hands are sweaty and your heart is starting to beat more quickly.

2. IDENTIFY NEGATIVE SELF-TALK. What are you saying to yourself?

“Three people have already presented on this topic and they did a great job. I’m so nervous that I’ll probably forget what I’m saying. Everyone will see my hands shaking and think I’m a loser. I’m going to blow this!”

3. CHALLENGE THE THINKING. Some questions to ask yourself:

- **Is it *always* true that** I blow presentations?
No. But I often don’t do well.
- **What are the odds** that I will blow this presentation?
Probably low to moderate. I am prepared, but also anxious.
- **Am I being objective?** *No.*
My anxiety is making it hard for me to focus on my strengths.
- **Is this way of thinking helpful?**
No. It’s making me feel bad. The more anxious I get, the more difficult the presentation will be.
- **What is the worst that can happen?**
I fail the presentation and people see me looking nervous. I won’t fail the class even if I fail the presentation. And people aren’t so interested in other people’s anxiety that they remember and focus on it. My classmates are more interested in how they did, than how I did.
- **Would I talk to a friend this way?**
No. I would never tell a friend, “You’re going to blow it!”

4. GENERATE SELF-TALK THAT DISCOURAGES ANXIETY (ACKNOWLEDGES FEELINGS, SUPPORTIVE and BELIEVABLE).

“Presentations are challenging for me. I do get quite nervous. However, I can do this anyway. I don’t need to be perfect at it. My anxiety doesn’t need to stop me.”

Example #2

1. IDENTIFY THE SITUATION. You are sitting in DQ and you see a classmate walk in. She waves hello and then goes to sit with someone else.

2. IDENTIFY NEGATIVE SELF-TALK. What are you saying to yourself?

“Why didn’t she want to sit with me? Why didn’t she call me over to their table? Maybe she doesn’t like me. There’s something wrong with me. I’m boring. No one ever wants to spend any time with me.”

3. CHALLENGE THE THINKING. Some questions to ask yourself:

- **Is it *always* true that** no one ever wants to spend time with me?
No. I do have people I spend time with.
- **What are the odds** that she doesn’t like me?
Probably low. She’s been friendly to me so far.
- **Am I being objective?**
No. I have no clear evidence to suggest she doesn’t like me.
- **Is this way of thinking helpful?**
No. It’s making me feel bad. The more anxious I get, the more difficult the presentation will be.
- **Is there another explanation?**
She already had plans with her friend. Maybe they wanted to talk about something personal.
- **Is this way of thinking helpful?**
No. It’s making me feel bad.
- **Would I talk to a friend this way?**
No. I would never tell a friend, “You’re going to blow it!”

4. GENERATE SELF-TALK THAT DISCOURAGES ANXIETY (ACKNOWLEDGES FEELINGS, SUPPORTIVE and BELIEVABLE).

“It feels like she left because she doesn’t like me. I’m tempted to assume the worst. But I can resist the urge to trash myself over this. Maybe she already had a lunch date with her friend. I’ll talk to her tomorrow in class.”

Adapted from the work of Bourne (1995) and Greenberger & Padesky (1995).

Challenging My Anxious Thinking

Method #1 Worksheet

1. IDENTIFY THE SITUATION.

2. IDENTIFY NEGATIVE SELF-TALK.

3. CHALLENGE THE THINKING. Some questions to ask yourself:

■ Is it *always* true that _____

■ What are the odds _____

■ Am I looking at the whole picture? _____

■ Am I being objective? _____

■ How might someone else think about this? _____

■ Could there be another possibility? _____

■ Is there another explanation? _____

■ What is the worst that can happen? _____

■ Is this way of thinking helpful? _____

■ Would I talk to a friend this way? _____

4. GENERATE SELF-TALK THAT DISCOURAGES ANXIETY (ACKNOWLEDGES FEELINGS, SUPPORTIVE and BELIEVABLE).

How to Challenge Anxious Thinking

Method #2

TRY THIS “MATH METHOD” AS ANOTHER WAY TO CHALLENGE ANXIOUS THINKING. HERE ARE THE STEPS TO FOLLOW:

1. IDENTIFY THE SITUATION.
2. IDENTIFY THE ANXIOUS THOUGHT.
3. RATE HOW MUCH YOU BELIEVE THIS THOUGHT (0-100%).
4. CONSIDER POSSIBILITIES OTHER THAN YOUR ANXIOUS THOUGHT.
5. RATE HOW MUCH YOU BELIEVE EACH OF THESE OTHER POSSIBILITIES (0-100%).
6. DO THE MATH.
7. RECONSIDER YOUR ANXIOUS THOUGHT.

Based on Antony, Martin. (29 & 30 Apr. 2004). “Assessment and Treatment of Anxiety Disorders in Adults and Children.” Psychological Society of Saskatchewan 2004 Spring Institute, Saskatoon, SK.

An Example Of The “Math Method”

1. IDENTIFY THE SITUATION.
Walking in tunnel, said hello to classmate and classmate didn't respond.
2. IDENTIFY THE ANXIOUS THOUGHT.
“She doesn't like me.”
3. RATE HOW MUCH YOU BELIEVE THIS THOUGHT (0-100%).
80%
4. CONSIDER POSSIBILITIES OTHER THAN YOUR ANXIOUS THOUGHT.
She didn't hear me.
She was distracted.
She did respond and I didn't hear her.
She was in a hurry.
She was in a bad mood.
5. RATE HOW MUCH YOU BELIEVE EACH OF THESE OTHER POSSIBILITIES (0-100%).

She didn't hear me.	40%
She was distracted.	20%
She did respond and I didn't hear her.	10%
She was in a hurry.	30%
She was in a bad mood.	10%
6. DO THE MATH.

She didn't hear me.	40%
She was distracted.	20%
She did respond and I didn't hear her.	10%
She was in a hurry.	30%
She was in a bad mood.	<u>10%</u>
	110%
7. RECONSIDER YOUR ANXIOUS THOUGHT.
I believed 80% that she doesn't like me. But other possibilities add up to more than 20%. It's possible that I made an incorrect assumption and that something other than “she doesn't like me” is true.

Challenging My Anxious Thinking

Method #2 "Math Method" Worksheet

1. IDENTIFY THE SITUATION.

2. IDENTIFY THE ANXIOUS THOUGHT.

3. RATE HOW MUCH YOU BELIEVE THIS THOUGHT (0-100%).

4. CONSIDER POSSIBILITIES OTHER THAN YOUR ANXIOUS THOUGHT.

5. RATE HOW MUCH YOU BELIEVE EACH OF THESE OTHER POSSIBILITIES (0-100%).

6. DO THE MATH.

7. RECONSIDER YOUR ANXIOUS THOUGHT.

Test Your Predictions

AN EFFECTIVE WAY TO BETTER UNDERSTAND YOUR NEGATIVE SELF-TALK IS TO CLOSELY EXAMINE YOUR PREDICTIONS OF WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS.

Invariably, people discover that what they think will happen (e.g., people will stare, others will laugh, etc.) does NOT occur. In other words, the fortune-telling of those with social anxiety is very often inaccurate and self-defeating!

Upcoming situation

What I think (predict) I will do “wrong”

How I think (predict) others will respond to me

What actually happened

How I actually “performed”

How others actually responded

What I learned about my thinking

Leahy and Holland (2000)

Other Useful Strategies

1. **Survey Others** – ask others about their anxiety
2. **Ask Others for Feedback** – following a “performance” ask about how anxious you appeared/how you did
3. **Observe Others’ Behavior**– notice when others are anxious and that their outcomes are not catastrophic

Leahy and Holland (2000)

How Are My Social Skills?

While many people with social anxiety do not have difficulties with social skills (but do worry about how they are being perceived), others have not yet had the opportunity to identify and correct social skills deficits that may be contributing to an anxiety problem. Consider how you manage the following important verbal and nonverbal social skills:

- Grooming (e.g., hair combed, clothes and shoes clean and in good repair)
- Hygiene (e.g., bathed, brushed teeth)
- Personal space
 - Intimate and personal distance ~ 2-4 feet (reserved for those you know very well)
 - Social distance ~ 4-12 feet (for acquaintances and more formal interactions)
 - Public distance >12 feet (for performances to an audience)
- Eye contact (e.g., maintain without staring)
- Facial expressions (e.g., appropriate to content of discussion)
- Body posture (e.g., sitting up straight, relaxed, arms uncrossed)
- Tone of voice (e.g., speaking in a confident manner, volume is easily heard)
- Initiating and maintaining a conversation (e.g., making introductions, asking questions, listening, etc.)
- Self-disclosure (e.g., appropriately sharing your thoughts and feelings)
- Giving and receiving compliments (e.g., able to do so graciously)
- Asserting yourself (e.g., making and refusing requests)

If you believe you may benefit from assistance with social skills, check your library or local bookstore for information about improving social skills.

Markway et al. (1992)

Roadblocks To Effective Communication

Because individuals with social anxiety over-focus on the impression they believe they are making on others, they can find it difficult to be active listeners and effective communicators. During conversations with others, they may find themselves:

- **Comparing** themselves to the other person (e.g., “She seems so much smarter than me,” “He’s so funny and I’m so boring”).
- **Filtering** what the other person is saying (i.e., focusing on only certain aspects of what is being said, such as negative feedback, instead of hearing the whole message).
- **Rehearsing** what to say next instead of listening carefully to what the other person is saying.
- **Derailing** the conversation by changing the subject to feel more comfortable.
- **Pacifying** the other person to avoid any anxiety associated with conflict.

Learning to be an active listener and to communicate in an assertive manner is an important part of anxiety treatment for some people. If you need to, take the time to develop these skills.

Based on Antony, Martin. (29 &30 Apr. 2004). “Assessment and Treatment of Anxiety Disorders in Adults and Children.” Psychological Society of Saskatchewan 2004 Spring Institute, Saskatoon, SK.

How Assertive Am I?

Assertive communication is characterized by an ability to listen to the perspective of others and express oneself honestly and respectfully. It involves stating requests or ideas clearly and with confidence, without feeling guilty or apologizing. Assertive communicators are self-aware (i.e. know their own feelings, goals, etc.), responsible (for their own thoughts, behaviour, etc.) and honest (i.e. provide consistent verbal and non-verbal messages).

The following may suggest a need for more assertiveness: feeling disrespected, difficulty in taking action to achieve your goals, attempting to get what you want by trying to make others feel guilty, and feelings of resentment and helplessness.

Learning to communicate more effectively often involves better identifying and accepting your own feelings and needs, recognizing your rights, developing verbal and nonverbal assertiveness skills and practicing (on paper, with a friend, "for real") assertive communication.

Assess how you tend to communicate by checking the items below that apply to you.

	Passive	Assertive	Aggressive
Characteristics	<input type="checkbox"/> Allow other to choose <input type="checkbox"/> Emotionally dishonest <input type="checkbox"/> Indirect <input type="checkbox"/> Self-denying	<input type="checkbox"/> Choose for self <input type="checkbox"/> Tactfully honest <input type="checkbox"/> Direct <input type="checkbox"/> Self-respecting	<input type="checkbox"/> Choose for others <input type="checkbox"/> Tactlessly honest <input type="checkbox"/> "Too direct" <input type="checkbox"/> Self-enhancing
Goal of Communication	<input type="checkbox"/> To avoid conflict	<input type="checkbox"/> To express needs and feelings without guilt	<input type="checkbox"/> To dominate
Body Language	<input type="checkbox"/> Avoid eye contact <input type="checkbox"/> Hunched shoulders	<input type="checkbox"/> Maintain eye contact <input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed posture	<input type="checkbox"/> Staring <input type="checkbox"/> Finger pointing
Voice	<input type="checkbox"/> Overly soft	<input type="checkbox"/> Firm	<input type="checkbox"/> Loud
Feelings During Communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Anxious <input type="checkbox"/> Ignored <input type="checkbox"/> Angry at self	<input type="checkbox"/> Confident <input type="checkbox"/> Goal-oriented <input type="checkbox"/> Self-respecting	<input type="checkbox"/> Righteous <input type="checkbox"/> Controlling <input type="checkbox"/> Guilty
Others' Feelings During Communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Guilty <input type="checkbox"/> Superior <input type="checkbox"/> Frustrated with you	<input type="checkbox"/> Respected <input type="checkbox"/> Heard	<input type="checkbox"/> Humiliated <input type="checkbox"/> Angry <input type="checkbox"/> Distrustful
Others' View of You	<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of respect <input type="checkbox"/> Distrustful	<input type="checkbox"/> Respectful <input type="checkbox"/> Trusting	<input type="checkbox"/> Angry <input type="checkbox"/> Distrustful
Potential Outcome	<input type="checkbox"/> Your rights violated <input type="checkbox"/> Others achieve their goals <input type="checkbox"/> You do not achieve your goals	<input type="checkbox"/> Your rights respected <input type="checkbox"/> Others rights are respected <input type="checkbox"/> Outcome negotiated	<input type="checkbox"/> Others rights violated <input type="checkbox"/> Others don't meet goals <input type="checkbox"/> You achieve your goals
Underlying Beliefs	<input type="checkbox"/> People shouldn't be displeased with me	<input type="checkbox"/> I'm responsible for my needs	<input type="checkbox"/> I have to dominate to protect myself

Adapted from Neidhardt, Weinstein & Conry (1990)

How Can I Communicate Effectively?

SOCIAL ANXIETY CAN MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO COMMUNICATE IN AN ASSERTIVE MANNER. HERE IS A STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS THAT CAN HELP.

- 1. Determine the problem**
(e.g. "I need help cleaning the apartment").
- 2. Determine how you feel about the problem**
(e.g. tired, annoyed more help hasn't been given).
- 3. Determine your rights**
(e.g. right to have roommate help clean the apartment).
- 4. Determine what you want**
(e.g. roommate to do her own dishes, clean bathroom every second week, dust weekly).
- 5. Designate a time to assert yourself**
(e.g. "I'll talk to my roommate tonight at supper").
- 6. Practice asserting yourself**
(e.g. "I'm feeling tired of housework and would like more help. Can you,,").
- 7. Assert yourself by stating the problem, your feelings, what you want and the consequences**
(e.g. "I'm feeling tired of housework and would appreciate more help. I'd really like to see us work something out. It would work for me if you could do your own dishes, clean the bathroom every second week and dust the apartment weekly. I'll do my dishes, clean the bathroom every other week and vacuum...What do you think?...It's too hard to live here and focus on studying if I have to do all the housework. I'll have to find another apartment if we can't work something out.").

Here are some other ideas to try.

- **Use "I" statements**
(e.g. I think/feel/need/would like/want/would appreciate...). Be specific about exactly what you want. Requests, not demands, work better.
- **Use "you" statements to express empathy**
(e.g. "You seem tired."), not to blame or judge ("You're lazy").
- **Stay on topic.** Letting the conversation get sidetracked delays resolution.
- **State problems in terms of their impact on you**
(e.g. "I felt sad when you forgot my birthday."). "You" statements (e.g. "You forgot my birthday.") can result in a defensive response.
- **"We" responses suggest a willingness to negotiate and be involved in creating a solution**
(e.g. "We could brainstorm about this issue.").
- **When someone responds to an assertive request with very intense emotion, it is sometimes helpful to delay further discussion**
(e.g. "I can see that you're very upset. Let's talk about this after supper.").
- **Facilitate further discussion by acknowledging the other person's point of view, even if you don't agree with it**
(e.g. "I can see how you might think that I'm being stubborn.").
- **Be aware of your body language.** Look people in the eye and assume an "open posture."
- **Avoid apologizing for your request;** it waters down your message.

When Social Anxiety Is No Longer A Problem

There are effective strategies that individuals can master in order to decrease or eliminate problematic anxiety. There are also many accounts of people who were successful in overcoming excessive anxiety, and continue to reap the benefits of their hard work. When anxiety is better managed, individuals can meet their potential and live more satisfying and stimulating lives.

WHAT WILL YOUR LIFE BE LIKE WHEN SOCIAL ANXIETY IS NO LONGER A PROBLEM?

- When I better manage my anxiety my relationships will _____

- When I'm more relaxed I will _____

- When anxiety is no longer a problem I will be _____

- When I meet my goal it will be _____

- Less anxiety will free me to _____

- Just wait until I _____

- When I overcome this anxiety _____

- Being more relaxed will mean _____

- When I have recovered my social life I will _____

- The most exciting thing about feeling better will be _____

- It will be such a relief when _____

- Being calm and confident will impact my work by _____

- When I feel better about myself _____

- Successfully managing anxiety will show me that _____

Suggested Reading For Social Anxiety

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