

## MINDFULNESS PRACTICE FOR SOCIAL ANXIETY

**Mindfulness:** paying attention to something in the present moment with curiosity rather than judgment.

**Thought defusion:** being aware of your thoughts and feelings without becoming involved with them.

**External mindfulness for social anxiety:** paying attention with curiosity (taking interest) in the conversation, person, activity and/or situation in the present moment, while treating your thoughts and feelings like background noise. Get absorbed, engrossed, lost in the conversation or activity. Focus on what you see and hear (touch, taste, smell), rather than what you feel and think. *Get out of your head and into the moment.*

### Curiosity training while observing:

- Daily watch one or more of these attention training videos. Start with videos 6-8, then watch 1-5: [youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjGQ1qp\\_IGNW8OdES0K5pITPvz4pVPp0d](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLjGQ1qp_IGNW8OdES0K5pITPvz4pVPp0d). Get absorbed in all that you see and hear in these videos, while treating your thoughts and feelings as background noise. Gently return your attention to what you see and hear whenever you're distracted.
- Watch this music video about a socially anxious high school senior (Waving Through a Window from the musical, *Dear Evan Hansen*): [youtube.com/watch?v=REIOnCTwjF0](https://youtube.com/watch?v=REIOnCTwjF0). Optionally watch any other music video of your choice. Slowly alternate your focus on the lyrics, the instruments, the different singers and actors. Watch the video again and switch your focus to different elements. Get engrossed in what you see and hear. Treat your thoughts and feelings as background noise.
- When you tire of the recordings, go into a location with a variety of sounds and sights, and ideally including people you are not interacting with. Spend 10 minutes or so closely paying attention to what you see and hear, slowly alternating your focus from one sight or sound to another. Treat any thoughts and feelings you may have as background noise.
- For all of the above, daily log the per cent mindful you were each time you practice.

### Curiosity training while participating:

- Every day for at least 5 minutes, focus mindfully (with an attitude of curiosity as opposed to judgment) during conversations you are in. **Get absorbed / lost in the conversation.** Treat your thoughts and feelings like background noise.
- Make sure you put yourself in such situations daily so you can practice.
- Ideally start with conversations in which you are pretty comfortable. Proceed to conversations you are more anxious about as you get better at this. Consider signing up for anonymous conversations with eager strangers through the **dialup** app.
- Adopt an attitude of curiosity: ie. take interest in the person(s) and what they are saying.
- Practice this gently, patiently and persistently; don't criticize yourself or strain to be perfect at this.
- Optional: silently say "mindful," "curious," or "background noise" when you slip and focus on thoughts or feelings; then return your attention to the conversation or activity in the moment. Or simply return your attention to what you see and hear without using the silent word.
- If you have difficulty remembering to practice, **turn your social anxiety into a cue:** whenever you feel anxious during an interaction, **treat that anxiety as a reminder to get out of your head and focus externally on the conversation / activity / person in the moment.**
- Daily log the minutes and per cent mindful you were each time you practice.

# MINDFULNESS PRACTICE LOG

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## Curiosity training while...

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Write date</b> ➔  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>OBSERVING</b><br>(log what you observed, how long, % mindful)           |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>PARTICIPATING</b><br>(log conversation / activity, how long, % mindful) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Write date</b> ➔  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>OBSERVING</b><br>(write what you observed and your % mindful)           |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>PARTICIPATING</b><br>(log conversation / activity, how long, % mindful) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Write date</b> ➔  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>OBSERVING</b><br>(write what you observed and your % mindful)           |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>PARTICIPATING</b><br>(log conversation / activity, how long, % mindful) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Write date</b> ➔  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>OBSERVING</b><br>(write what you observed and your % mindful)           |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| <b>PARTICIPATING</b><br>(log conversation / activity, how long, % mindful) |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

# EXPERIMENT WORKSHEET

Name \_\_\_\_\_

| Before experiment                              |  | After experiment   |   |   |
|--|--|--|---|---|
| SITUATION & DATE:                              | PREDICTIONS:<br>What exactly do you fear will happen (your verbal hot thoughts and disturbing images)? What are the underlying core beliefs?<br>⇒ <b>Rate belief: 0-100%</b>   | EXPERIMENT:<br>What will you do to test your predictions? Specify your behavioral goals. Include: external mindful focus & drop safety-seeking behaviors.  | EVIDENCE:<br>What actually happened? Did your feared predictions come true? If so, how bad was it for you, and how did you cope with it?  | WHAT I LEARNED:<br>What do these experiments tell you about yourself, your hot thoughts & core beliefs? How can you build on this?<br>⇒ <b>Rate belief: 0-100%</b>  |
| 5/11: going to a party where I know few people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--I won't know what to say, or I might say something stupid.</li> <li>--I'll appear tense &amp; nervous.</li> <li>--People will think poorly of me, and won't enjoy talking to me.</li> <li>--I have an image of people snickering, giving me disapproving looks, and getting out of the conversation quickly.</li> <li>--85%</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--attend party &amp; stay 2+ hours</li> <li>--greet 5+ new people</li> <li>--start 2 conversations</li> <li>--focus mindfully on the conversation</li> <li>--try to keep the conversations going for at least 15 minutes</li> <li>--speak more expansively</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--One conversation seemed to be enjoyable to both of us. We both talked actively for about 20 minutes.</li> <li>--No one appeared to react negatively to me, not even in the first awkward conversation.</li> <li>--Two people came up to me and started conversations.</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--If I approach people, focus mindfully and speak longer, I'm pretty good at making social conversation, and some people enjoy talking to me. A little awkwardness with a new person is no big deal.</li> <li>--70%</li> </ul>                                       |
| 5/9-12: social conversation with coworkers     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--I won't know what to say, or I might say something stupid.</li> <li>--I'll appear tense &amp; nervous.</li> <li>--People will think I'm bothering them.</li> <li>--People will think poorly of me, and won't enjoy talking to me.</li> <li>--I have an image of people snickering, giving me disapproving looks, and getting out of the conversation quickly.</li> <li>--65%</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--initiate social conversation with at least 1 coworker daily</li> <li>--focus mindfully on the conversation</li> <li>--try to keep each conversation going for 2-3 minutes</li> <li>--speak more expansively</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--Most people reacted in a friendly way. They asked me follow-up questions and seemed interested in chatting.</li> <li>--Steve was brief with me and kept looking at his work. I took that to mean he was busy &amp; wanted to be left alone, so I excused myself. But he was friendly the next day.</li> <li>--Kim initiated a conversation with me the day after I talked with her.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--Most of the time coworkers enjoy talking to me. If someone turns out to not want to talk, I can excuse myself and no harm has been done. I'm good enough at making conversation so long as I focus mindfully and speak more expansively.</li> <li>--75%</li> </ul> |

# EXPERIMENT WORKSHEET

Name \_\_\_\_\_

| <i>Before experiment</i>     |   | <i>After experiment</i>  |   |   |
|------------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| <b>SITUATION &amp; DATE:</b> | <b>PREDICTIONS:</b><br>What exactly do you fear will happen (your verbal hot thoughts and disturbing images)? What are the underlying core beliefs?<br>⇒ <b>Rate belief: 0-100%</b> | <b>EXPERIMENT:</b><br>What will you do to test your predictions? Specify your behavioral goals. Include: external mindful focus & drop safety-seeking behaviors. | <b>EVIDENCE:</b><br>What actually happened? Did your feared predictions come true? If so, how bad was it for you, and how did you cope with it? | <b>WHAT I LEARNED:</b><br>What do these experiments tell you about yourself, your hot thoughts & core beliefs? How can you build on this?<br>⇒ <b>Rate belief: 0-100%</b> |
|                              |   |  |   |   |

## ***Pride and Gratitude Log***

This is a strategy to retrain your mind to counteract your old habit of mental-filtering onto the negative elements of what you experience, and to ignore, disqualify or not even notice the positive elements. The results of using this strategy regularly for at least a month are typically improved mood and self-confidence, and lessened social anxiety.

To achieve these results, however, it is necessary to use this strategy daily, and not just occasionally. Fortunately, it generally takes less than five minutes, and it usually feels good.

Here are the directions and some suggestions:

- Make it a daily practice to think back over the past 24 hours and write down anything positive that you experienced in an ongoing log (paper or electronic). Be specific. Do not disqualify the positive, no matter how small, imperfect or repeated the positive experience is. Do not write any qualifiers or anything negative here. (If you are feeling distressed about something, then separately complete a Cognitive Restructuring Worksheet on that upset.) It doesn't matter whether or not you actually *feel* pride or gratitude at this point. If it is at least partly positive, then write it down! With further practice in regularly using this log, you will likely begin to actually feel proud and grateful.
  - Reenter positive things that occur on more than one day, but make it a goal to write at least one new thing each day. If you stop including positive things because you have included them in previous days' logs, you are implicitly giving yourself the distorted message that they do not count and you may take them for granted. But do try to include at least one new item each day, even if that means choosing to do something just so you can log it!
- ⇒ For each item you write for which you were at least partially responsible, also write down the personal strengths or qualities of yours of which this is evidence. This helps you see that one small positive thing you have done is reflective of a strength / quality of yours that is actually very important and enduring. For example: you may have had a good conversation with a friend, which might be evidence that you can be an engaging conversationalist, a good friend and a likable person.
- It is important to enter items in this pride and gratitude log *every day* in order to retrain your mind to look for and value these previously neglected positive things about your life. Some people find it helpful to schedule a regular time every day to complete the log, paired with some activity they are already in the habit of doing daily, eg: during your first cup of coffee, just before going to bed, etc. Perhaps set an electronic alert to remind you.
  - Some people prefer to make entries in their log multiple times during the day, often soon after experiencing something positive. Some find it is easier to remember these experiences this way, and that it reinforces the positive feelings you get from them more effectively. You can make these ongoing entries in a notebook or electronic device which you routinely carry with you. Just make sure you make your entries at least once per day.
  - Periodically reread your Pride & Gratitude Log, or sections of it.

# COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING WORKSHEET

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**SITUATION & DATE** event, circumstance or experiment (past, present or future) when you feel distressed or avoid  
*5/11: going to a party where I know few people*

**FEELINGS (intensity 0-100% before & after completing CRW)** emotions and physical sensations  
*--nervous: 90% → 60%                      --embarrassed: 50% → 35%                      --jittery: 50% → 25%*  
*--tense: 75% → 50%                      --self-conscious: 100% → 50%*

**HOT THOUGHTS (belief 0-100%)** your most distressing ideas, concerns, images, predictions &/or core beliefs  
*--I won't know what to say, or I might say something stupid. 75%*  
*--I'll appear tense & nervous. 80%                      --People will think poorly of me,*  
*--I've got to find a way out of this. 75%                      and won't enjoy talking to me. 100%*

**SAFETY-SEEKING BEHAVIORS** things you do or avoid to try to cope, including how you focus your attention  
*--don't initiate conversations                      --stay off by sidelines                      --withdraw, say very little*  
*--try to script what to say next                      --focus on myself to try to appear less nervous*

**COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS** in your hot thoughts  
*--perfectionistic thinking                      --magnifying & minimizing*  
*--fortune telling                      --self-defeating thinking*

**CHALLENGING QUESTIONS** to debate your hot thoughts  
*--What's the objective evidence?                      --How likely is it that this would happen,*  
*--What good things might I experience?                      and how could I handle it if it did?*

**CONSTRUCTIVE ATTITUDE (belief 0-100%)** a truer, compassionate & helpful alternative to your hot thoughts, predictions &/or core beliefs (including answers to your challenging questions)

*While mingling in other settings, I've found that the conversation is more likely to go well if I focus mindfully in the moment, and not on my feelings and how I think I'm coming across. If one conversation doesn't go so well, I can feel proud that I was being friendly and took a risk. Then I'll simply move on and talk to someone else. Some people have told me I don't appear as anxious as I think I do. In the rare event that someone is so rude as to say I appear nervous or that I said something stupid, I can simply acknowledge it non-defensively and point out that everyone has this experience at times. Some people will enjoy talking to me and I'll enjoy talking to some people, despite some initial awkwardness. But no one is liked by everyone, so I don't have to be afraid of being disliked by a stranger at a party.* 65%

**Positive motivators** specific ways you expect to benefit (short- & long-term) by doing the experiment or action steps

*This is good practice at meeting people and making small talk. I'll feel proud of myself for trying and for being friendly, no matter how it goes. I'll probably enjoy some of the conversations. I might meet someone I like. In the long run, this will help me make friends and get a date.* 80%

**Short version** *Focus on enjoying the conversation.*

**BEHAVIORAL GOALS & ACTION STEPS** a more helpful alternative to your safety-seeking behaviors

**[Rerate your feelings after completing this worksheet.]**

*--attend party & stay 2+ hours                      --focus mindfully on the conversation*  
*--greet 5+ new people                      --try to keep the conversations going*  
*--start 2 conversations                      for at least 15 minutes each*

# COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING WORKSHEET

Name \_\_\_\_\_

**SITUATION & DATE** event, circumstance or experiment (past, present or future) when you feel distressed or avoid

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**FEELINGS (intensity 0-100% before & after completing CRW)** emotions and physical sensations

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**HOT THOUGHTS (belief 0-100%)** your most distressing ideas, concerns, images, predictions &/or core beliefs

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**SAFETY-SEEKING BEHAVIORS** things you do or avoid to try to cope, including how you focus your attention

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**COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS** in your hot thoughts

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**CHALLENGING QUESTIONS** to debate your hot thoughts

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**CONSTRUCTIVE ATTITUDE (belief 0-100%)** a truer, compassionate & helpful alternative to your hot thoughts, predictions &/or core beliefs (including answers to your challenging questions)

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**Positive motivators** specific ways you expect to benefit (short- & long-term) by doing the experiment or action steps

Short version

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**BEHAVIORAL GOALS & ACTION STEPS** a more helpful alternative to your safety-seeking behaviors  
[Rerate your feelings after completing this worksheet.]

## COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

**ALL-OR-NOTHING / BLACK-OR WHITE / PERFECTIONISTIC THINKING:** You see things in black and white categories. There are no gray areas in between. If something is less than perfect, you see it as terrible or as a failure.

**OVERGENERALIZING:** You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern, or representing a character defect.

**MENTAL FILTERING:** When something is a mixture of negative and positive aspects, you dwell overwhelmingly on the negative details. Your view of the whole thing becomes negative as a result.

**DISQUALIFYING THE POSITIVE:** You reject or belittle positive experience by insisting that it doesn't count for some reason.

**MIND READING:** You jump to the conclusion that someone is thinking or feeling negatively toward you. You're probably projecting your negative thoughts about yourself onto someone else.

**FORTUNE TELLING:** You jump to the conclusion that things will turn out badly, and you feel convinced that your prediction is an already established fact.

**MAGNIFYING & MINIMIZING:** You exaggerate the importance of some things (eg. your deficiencies or someone else's achievements), and you shrink other things down until they appear unimportant (eg. your desirable qualities or someone else's imperfections).

**CATASTROPHIZING:** You attribute extreme and horrible consequences to the outcomes of events.

**EMOTIONAL REASONING:** You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are in the external world. For example, you feel embarrassed or ashamed, so you assume you behaved poorly.

**SHOULD / MUSTS:** You have a strong and inflexible sense of the way that things should / must / have to / ought to be.

**LABELING:** Instead of describing a situation or behavior you don't like, you attach an all-encompassing and negative label to a whole person. For example: "I'm a loser;" or "He's selfish."

**PERSONALIZING:** You see negative events as indicative of something wrong with you, or as somehow your responsibility.

**SELF-DEFEATING THINKING:** Any thought that causes you needless pain or turmoil, or which makes it harder for you to get what you want. Such thoughts often lead to vicious cycles and self-fulfilling prophecies.

## CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

- → What's the *objective, concrete* evidence supporting or refuting my hot thoughts?
- → How likely is it that this bad thing would come to pass? How would I cope with it or overcome it if were to happen?
- → What's the WORST that could happen? What's the BEST that could happen? What's MOST LIKELY to happen?
- What would an impartial, independent observer think of this situation?
- What would I say to a friend who is thinking and feeling the way I am? What would a good friend say to me?
- What aspects of this situation are simply not in my control, no matter how much I worry about it? What are the advantages of *accepting* that these things are not in my control?
- Instead of simply worrying, what action steps can I take now to prevent or cope with problem that concerns me?
- What's the worst that could happen? How awful would that be compared to the worst thing I ever experienced?
- What are the advantages vs. disadvantages for me to believe or worry about this?
- What alternative explanation or possibility is there? What's the evidence for that alternative?
- How important is my concern? To what extent does my future really reside on this?
- How much will this matter to me one week / one month / six months / one year from now? Why will this change over time?
- If I were in his / her shoes, what are the possible reasons why I would have acted that way?
- Does \_\_\_\_\_'s opinion reflect that of everyone else? Could other people feel differently?
- Is an old button of mine is being pushed in this situation? How is that affecting my response to the present situation?
- What would be a more helpful way for me to think about this?



# COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

## How to Do It Effectively

- 1. Make sure that you have all your feelings down, and rate their intensity, 0-100%.** Feelings are either emotions or physical sensations. Self-talk, even if it includes the word "feel," belongs under Hot Thoughts.
- 2. Make sure all your feelings are explained by your hot thoughts.** Try to limit your list to the 1-4 *hottest thoughts*: those that make you feel most upset or distressed. Include any disturbing predictions you may have. Be as specific and concrete as possible as to how you think things will turn out for you. Rate your belief in these hot thoughts, 0-100%
- 3. Difficulty identifying your hot thoughts?** Try a little IMAGERY: close your eyes and imagine yourself in the situation you are writing about. Let yourself experience the feelings you have in this situation for a few minutes. Then patiently observe the words, scenes &/or predictions going through your mind without responding to them. These are your hot thoughts, so write them down. Or try this FORMULA: "I was feeling this way because I was concerned that...." Complete the sentence and write down your answer under Hot Thoughts.
- 4. Translate rhetorical questions into statements.** If one of your thoughts is in the form of a rhetorical question (eg. "What if I screw up?"), write it down instead as a statement (eg. "It would be humiliating if I screwed up!").
- 5. Write down primary as well as secondary thoughts.** Sometimes the thoughts we're most aware of are "secondary:" ie. what we are thinking about the fact that we are already feeling badly or avoiding something. Make sure you also include the *primary* thoughts: ie. *the concerns that caused you to feel badly or avoid something in the first place.*
- 6. Identify your safety-seeking behaviors:** what you do or avoid to try to cope with this situation, including how you focus your attention (eg. self-monitoring your symptoms, critiquing your "performance," scripting what to say next.)
- 7. Find the cognitive distortions** that you can see in each of your hot thoughts. Choose from the list.
- 8. Choose a few challenging questions** to help you debate your hot thoughts. Pick a few questions from the list that you believe best challenge your thoughts, and write them down in this section. Definitely consider the first three (with arrows), but consider using one or two of the others, as well. Don't write down the *answers* to challenging questions here. Instead, incorporate the answers to the challenging questions in your Constructive Attitude.
- 9. Make sure all your hot thoughts are countered by your Constructive Attitude (CA).** If there is a negative aspect to the situation that is not distorted, then acknowledge this in your CA and state how you can effectively cope with or overcome that problem.
- 10. Optional structure for CA:** Until you develop your own style, you may want to try this optional structure when writing your CA: "IT'S TRUE THAT [followed by brief summary of any negative evidence supporting elements of your hot thoughts]. HOWEVER [followed by a more detailed summary of evidence refuting your hot thoughts]. THEREFORE [followed by a conclusion that is truer, compassionate and helpful]."
- 11. Try to make your CA compassionate and positively worded.** Avoid the tendency to use double negatives or to be on the defensive or self-critical in your CA. Try to be compassionate to yourself and others in your CA (supportive, caring and understanding), like a loving parent or friend would be.
- 12. Make sure your CA is believable to you.** This is *not* the "power of positive thinking." A positive CA that you don't particularly believe is not likely to help. But be willing to stretch yourself a little. Something that you think is at least 60% believable (ie. you think it's *probably* true, but aren't sure) is a good start.
- 13. Include a few positive motivators** in your CA. Positive motivators are specific ways you hope to benefit by doing the experiment or the action steps that you identify in the next section. Include both immediate and longer-range benefits.
- 14. Add a short version of your CA.** This should be no more than a single phrase or a very short sentence that encapsulates the heart of your longer version. It is intended as an easily memorized reminder to yourself that you can use in the midst of an experiment or a difficult moment.
- 15. Under Behavioral Goals & Action Steps, write down specific and helpful alternatives to your safety-seeking behaviors,** as well as any additional specific steps you may wish to take to better handle the situation.
- 16. Rerate the intensity of your feelings** upon completion of this worksheet (in the Feelings row). Effective cognitive restructuring will usually decrease the intensity of your negative feelings significantly. If not, check to see that you have all your hot thoughts recorded, and that you've countered them in a way you find believable and helpful.