

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_IGNW8OdES0K5plTPvz4pVPp0d. 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. 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
Curiosity training while...

Name _____

Write date➔							
OBSERVING (log what you observed, how long, % mindful)							
PARTICIPATING (log conversation / activity, how long, % mindful)							

Write date➔							
OBSERVING (write what you observed and your % mindful)							
PARTICIPATING (log conversation / activity, how long, % mindful)							

Write date➔							
OBSERVING (write what you observed and your % mindful)							
PARTICIPATING (log conversation / activity, how long, % mindful)							

Write date➔							
OBSERVING (write what you observed and your % mindful)							
PARTICIPATING (log conversation / activity, how long, % mindful)							

Brief Cognitive Strategies

Oral Cognitive Restructuring: Completing a cognitive restructuring worksheet (CRW) is usually the best way to learn and master this skill, and to handle situations or moods that are very difficult. But there are briefer versions of doing cognitive restructuring that you may want to try as a first step once you have mastered this skill doing worksheets. When you are feeling distressed or avoiding something, try completing a CRW orally: go through the rows one-by-one through self-talk. If you are alone, it will probably be more effective to do so out loud (or in writing) rather than silently in your mind. You can skip some rows, but make sure you at least identify the feelings, hot thoughts and safety behaviors, and that you counter them with a constructive attitude and action steps to take. Then focus mindfully on doing these action steps while treating your thoughts and feelings like background noise. If, after trying this, you find that you are still feeling distressed or continue to avoid for more than an hour, then complete a CRW that very day!

The Three Cs: This is a shorter version of oral cognitive restructuring that uses three steps:

1. **Catch it:** identify your hot thought(s) when you experience a negative feeling or avoidance.
2. **Check it:** evaluate the evidence regarding how realistic, helpful and compassionate your hot thoughts are.
3. **Change it:** identify a constructive attitude: a more realistic, helpful and compassionate alternative to your hot thoughts. Identify action steps you will take based on your constructive attitude. Then focus mindfully on these steps while ignoring your thoughts and feelings.

If, after using this approach, you find that you are still feeling distressed or continue to avoid for more than an hour, then complete a Cognitive Restructuring Worksheet that very day!

Thought Responding (extremely brief oral CR): If you have a repeated pattern of distorted hot thoughts, identify a short version of a constructive attitude (CA) that you believe at your best of times. For example, if you repeatedly criticize yourself for perceived mistakes, you might use a short CA such as “I don’t have to be perfect; no one does.” Or simply use “Oh, well!” and shrug it off. If you repeatedly compare yourself negatively to others, you might use “Everyone has strengths and weaknesses.” If you repeatedly worry about things, consider using “I’ll do the best I can; no one can make everything turn out perfect.”

- Whenever you notice you are engaging in the targeted hot thoughts (eg. self-criticism, negative self-comparison, or repetitious worry), then recite your short CA. Do so out loud and with a tone of calm and confidence if you are alone, as it is more effective this way. Until thought responding has become a new habit, try carrying this short CA with you (eg. on a card or in your electronic device). You may also find it helpful at first to wear or carry some sort of symbolic reminder (eg. a special piece of jewelry, a rubber wrist band, a religious object, a pretty stone, etc.)

⇒ Do not criticize yourself for having the hot thoughts, or paradoxically you end up strengthening them. Everyone has hot thoughts. We do not have control over whether or not our brain generates a hot thought. The goal is NOT to stop having hot thoughts. No one can accomplish this goal; nor is it necessary. The goal is simply to not believe your hot thoughts and to defuse from them emotionally: to see them as passing mental noise and to not take them seriously. In fact, this thought-responding strategy can turn your hot thoughts into your friends, as they become a paradoxical reminder to affirm yourself.

- Remember, if you find you are still feeling distressed or continue to avoid for more than an hour, complete a Cognitive Restructuring Worksheet that very day!

(over)

There's an app for that: There are many apps that are abbreviated versions of a cognitive restructuring worksheet. The one I like the best is called **CBT Thought Diary** (or Thought Diary for short). It's quick, easy and always on your phone! (Unfortunately, it doesn't have a place for safety-seeking behaviors and alternative action steps/goals, but you can add that.)

Thought Defusion & Mindfulness: An alternative approach is to apply the concept of thought defusion: being aware of your thoughts and feelings without getting involved with them. Rather than respond to the content of your hot thoughts (as in cognitive restructuring), simply notice these thoughts with an attitude of detachment and indifference as though they were background noise. Then redirect your attention mindfully (with curiosity rather than judgment) to a valued activity or a person in the moment. Use this strategy repeatedly--in a gentle and calm manner, and without self-criticism--whenever you are distressed by your thoughts. Optionally, you may silently use a gentle, non-critical word (eg. "mindful" or "present") to briefly interrupt your thought and return your attention to the activity or person in the moment.

- A variant of the above that some people find easier to use is to label your negative thoughts while they are occurring in your mind in an emotionally detached manner, eg.: ***"I notice I'm having an anxious [depressed / angry / embarrassed / upset] idea. It will pass."*** Then redirect your attention to focus mindfully on a valued activity or person in the moment. This simple technique reminds you that a thought is just a passing idea; it is not a fact. Use this strategy whenever you are distressed by your thoughts. But do so calmly and gently, without self-criticism.
- You can also practice this technique through daily meditation in which you focus mindfully on your stream of thoughts in a detached manner. Whether your thoughts are negative, positive or neutral, simply notice them as they drift by with an attitude of detachment and indifference. Do not engage your thoughts in any way; just observe them. You may find it helpful to imagine yourself watching a video of what's going on in your mind: you just sit back and watch, but you don't jump into the video! Some people find it helpful to imagine their thoughts drifting away in floating balloons...or passing clouds...or blowing leaves...or slow-moving train cars. Meditate as long as it takes until you truly feel indifferent toward your thoughts.

Paradoxical Repetition: If you find yourself troubled by repetitive hot thoughts, a paradoxical approach can turn these ideas into empty words that have no power over you. When you are alone, take one specific hot thought that has been bothering you (eg.: I am such an idiot; I screwed up again; This is going to be awful), and repeat that one thought out loud, over and over and over, using a very silly and exaggerated tone of voice, for two or three minutes until it starts feeling amusing. Some people find it helpful to sing these thoughts out loud, making up a melody as you go or using one you know. (Try singing "I am such an idiot" to the tune of Mary Had a Little Lamb and see how it feels!) Or speak one of your hot thoughts into a smart phone app such as AutoRap, Talking Tom, Talking Pierre and Voki, and learn to laugh at these previously upsetting ideas.

Be a Good Parent / Friend to Yourself: Make it a goal to congratulate or affirm yourself on an ongoing basis for anything positive you did that was somewhat challenging, no matter how small or imperfect. Be specific. Do not let your perfectionistic tendencies lead you to disqualify the positive. If you are troubled by any mistakes or other imperfections on your part, transform self-criticism into a constructive learning experience by simply identifying what you can do differently next time. But *first* start with patting yourself on the back for the positive things you did.

- Make this process a new and ongoing habit you engage in frequently, at least once a day. This will help raise your self-esteem and self-confidence. Carrying or wearing a symbol every day (eg. a special piece of jewelry, a rubber wrist band, a religious object, a pretty stone, etc.) may help you remember to make this an ongoing, healthy life habit. You can combine this with keeping a daily Pride and Gratitude Log.

COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING WORKSHEET

Name _____

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

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

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

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

COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS in your hot thoughts

CHALLENGING QUESTIONS to debate your hot thoughts

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

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

Short version

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

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 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.

COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL EXPERIMENTS FOR OVERCOMING SOCIAL ANXIETY

How to Do Them Effectively

- 1. Pick your experiments strategically.** First, pick an experiment that could help bring you a little closer to achieving one of your personal therapy goals. Then consider whether your experiment idea feels too high or too low on your Fear & Avoidance Hierarchy. If it feels really quite scary, you may want to pick something in the same direction that feels a bit easier as your next step. If your experiment idea seems quite easy, then find something that confronts your fears a bit more. You may get specific experiment ideas from the blue sheet and the internet resources listed on the 2nd paragraph of that sheet. If an important experiment you have recently done still feels quite difficult, then do it repeatedly until you feel more confident.
- 2. Choose both proactive experiments, as well as reactive ones.** Proactive experiments are those in which you are going out of our way to do a challenging activity you were not already going to do in order to help you reach your personal therapy goals. Reactive experiments are when you turn challenging situations you already experience in your life into experiments by following the steps on this instruction sheet. Both proactive and reactive experiments will help you make progress. However, proactive experiments are (more or less) doubly therapeutic because the very act of choosing to go out of your way to challenge your fears is a step forward in overcoming those fears!
- 3. Experiments are aimed at learning: by testing hypotheses and gathering evidence.** One of the main reasons for doing these experiments is to test the validity of the hot thoughts that make you feel socially anxious and otherwise upset. Later in therapy, you will also use experiments to test the validity of your underlying core beliefs about yourself and how others relate to you. We are using the scientific method here, where an experiment is conducted in order to generate evidence supporting or refuting your hypotheses: your hot thoughts and core beliefs. Therefore, it is important that the experiments you choose trigger your typical socially anxious hot thoughts (and underlying core beliefs).
- 4. Complete the first three columns of the Experiment Worksheet (EW) before doing your experiment, or before a series of repeated experiments.** In the 2nd column, make sure you identify your hot thoughts (and core beliefs), and the specific feared predictions they generate: what exactly you fear may happen during the experiment. In the 3rd column, identify your specific behavioral goals for the experiment (including external mindful focus): what exactly you plan to do during the experiment to drop your safety seeking behaviors and to test your hot thoughts (and core beliefs). Ideally choose the opposite of your safety-seeking behaviors among your behavioral goals for the experiment. But consider your Fear & Avoidance Hierarchy: modifying your goals can greatly affect how anxious you feel about doing the experiment.
- 5. OPTIONAL: Complete the Cognitive Restructuring Worksheet (CRW) before doing the experiment if it triggers a lot of anticipatory anxiety and worry, or you are not certain you can get yourself to do it.** Make sure you write several positive motivators—how you expect to benefit by doing the experiment—so that you feel more motivated to carry your experiment out and overcome the inclination to avoid. Then copy the constructive attitude (CA), (including positive motivators and short version) and your behavioral goals onto a file card or smart phone, and carry this with you before and during the experiment. At least a few times before the experiment—and whenever you find yourself worrying about it—read your CA (including positive motivators and short version) and your behavioral goals out loud and with oomph / conviction. You may wish to make and periodically listen to an audio recording of yourself reading your CA and goals with oomph. It is also helpful to silently repeat the short version of the CA a few times daily so that it can quickly come to your mind when doing your experiment. You can probably further lessen your anticipatory anxiety and worry if you write out a debate or argument between your CA and your hot thoughts before you do your experiment. Make it a vehement, lively exchange, and make sure your CA wins the debate! This debate can also be acted out with oomph in a therapy session.
- 6. Think about frequency and duration when choosing experiments and setting goals.** Ideally do some short experiments every day so that it feels like a regular part of your life. Also do at least one long experiment of at least 60 minutes duration each week so you give yourself the opportunity for more practice and to get more absorbed in the conversation or activity. It is best to not stop an experiment before you have carried out your behavioral goals, so don't make your goals too hard or not fully in your control. If the

experiment is inherently a brief one, it is generally more effective to pick a setting that allows you to do this frequently in a relatively short amount of time, or to do it a few times every day. Try to do your experiment, and try to complete your goals within the experiment, as soon as possible, because avoidance / procrastination actually increases your anxiety for later! Also, aim to spend at least two hours per week doing experiments so that you get enough practice to make good progress.

7. **OPTIONAL: Use confident imagery to lessen your anticipatory anxiety about your experiment.** Close your eyes and imagine yourself in the setting of your experiment, making the scene as detailed and vivid as possible. If you have difficulty imagining the experiment, try closing your eyes and silently narrating the scene in vivid detail, using the present tense (*I am...*, *I see...*). In your imagery, first let yourself feel much of the anxiety you would feel during the actual experiment. Then imagine yourself feeling increasingly confident while you carry out your experiment goals. Don't script or practice what you are going to say because that's a self-defeating safety-seeking behavior. Just imagine yourself pursuing your behavioral goals, over and over again, with increasing confidence each time. Repeat this imagery exercise on multiple days until you feel increasingly confident. Later, bring up an image of yourself doing this experiment with a sense of confidence just before actually doing the experiment in real life.
8. **OPTIONAL: Practice head-held-high (HHH) assertion.** Although our worst social fears seldom materialize, we can lessen our anxiety and increase our self-confidence by practicing how we would handle it if your fears were to come true. If you still have a lot of anticipatory anxiety about an experiment after doing the CRW (#5) or confident imagery (#7), then complete the Head-Held-High Assertion worksheet about your feared predictions. Write these assertions on a card or in your smart phone, carry them with you. Then repeatedly practice reciting your assertions out loud and with oomph / conviction, like an actor getting increasingly into the role while practicing. You may wish to make and periodically listen to an audio recording of yourself reading your assertions with oomph. Also repeatedly practice using these assertions while doing confident imagery of your experiment (#7): imagine your fear coming true during an experiment, and you responding using your assertions with increasing oomph and conviction. Continue practicing your assertions in any and all of these ways until you feel confident you can handle your fears coming true.
9. **If you can't do the original experiment, do another one.** If fear or circumstances prevent you from doing what you had planned, then do another experiment. Baby steps are fine; just keep moving forward! Avoidance provides temporary relief, but it strengthens your anxiety for the next time.
10. **During the experiment:** Do not drink alcohol or take tranquilizers or beta blockers just before or during an experiment, or you probably will not gain self-confidence. During the experiment, focus mindfully: get absorbed in the conversation and activity in the moment, while defusing from your negative thoughts and feelings (treating them like background noise). Finally, if you're running into great difficulty, take a cognitive restructuring break (eg. in the bathroom): identify and challenge your distorted thoughts and self-defeating behaviors; then come up with a constructive attitude (CA) and a few behavioral goals to work on when you return to the activity. Or just read your CA and behavioral goals if you brought them with you (#5). Then return to the experiment, focus mindfully, and carry out your behavioral goals
11. **After the experiment, be a compassionate, good parent or friend to yourself.** 1st step: congratulate yourself for what you did. Identify the specific helpful things you did. Do not disqualify the positive. DO NOT RUMINATE about what you think went wrong. Instead, pat yourself on your back for the positive things you did, and be SPECIFIC. Savor your victory, no matter how small! 2nd step: instead of criticizing yourself, turn any problems that occurred into a constructive learning experience by identifying what you want to do differently the next time. Treating yourself with compassion, like a good parent or friend would, not only feels better; it helps you build self-confidence and make more progress more rapidly. Beating yourself up is a step backwards because it lowers self-confidence and will increase social anxiety for the next time.
12. **After the experiment, complete the last 2 columns of the Experiment Worksheet.** Doing so will help you learn from the experiment, decrease your belief in your socially anxious hot thoughts and core beliefs, and increase your self-confidence. If you find yourself ruminating about what you think went badly in the experiment, and you've already tried being a good parent/friend to yourself (#11), then complete a Cognitive Restructuring Worksheet about having done your experiment in order to counter your perfectionistic thinking, and to counter your mental filtering onto the negative while disqualifying the positive.

EXPERIMENT WORKSHEET

Name _____

Before experiment			After experiment	
SITUATION & DATE:	PREDICTIONS: What exactly do you fear will happen (your verbal hot thoughts and disturbing images)? What are the underlying core beliefs? ⇒ Rate belief: 0-100%	EXPERIMENT: What will you do to test your predictions? Specify your behavioral goals. Include: external mindful focus & drop safety-seeking behaviors.	EVIDENCE: 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: What do these experiments tell you about yourself, your hot thoughts & core beliefs? How can you build on this? ⇒ Rate belief: 0-100%

EXPERIMENT WORKSHEET

Name _____

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

SOME IDEAS FOR SOCIAL ANXIETY EXPERIMENTS

SOCIAL, FRIENDSHIP, DATING

➔ Some settings in which you can do the following experiments include: the job; a park; a book store; a pet store; the National Zoo; the National Mall; a shopping mall; friendly grocery stores; a bar/club; a coffee shop; a restaurant; a museum; a “meetup” or other organizational activity; a volunteer activity; a committee; a political/activist group/event; a social/recreational/hobby group; a group sports/athletic activity; a group hike/run; a singles event; the gym; a party; before/after a religious service; before/after a class; before/after a support group/12-step group; attending a lecture/tour; waiting for or on a bus/train/plane; a conference; a festival or other community event; standing in line.

➔ Look for groups & activities in which to do experiments: **group volunteering** (onebrick.org; volunteermatch.org; singlevolunteers.org; idealist.org; gayforgood.org); **general social activities** (meetup.com; dcfray.com, projectdcevents.com, eventbrite.com; gravy.com; meetin.org; thingstododc.com; prosinthecity.com; goldstar.com; internationalclubdc.com; lotsofevents.com; livingsocial.com; livingliberally.org; playnakid.com; kickball.com; Wash. City Paper; Wash. Post weekend section; the Smithsonian, Phillips Gallery & other museums; patc.net [group hikes]; groups.google.com; groups.io); **LGBT activity calendars & organization listings** (thedccenter.org/events.html; metroweekly.com/community/calendar; meetup.com/GoGayDC; do search on LGBT in meetup.com; thedccenter.org/organizations; teamdc.org/team-links [athletic groups]; gayforgood.org [volunteering]; otherpages.com/sub-category/community-resources.html).

- make eye contact, smile and say hi to many strangers
- initiate brief conversations with multiple strangers
- greet & start conversations with multiple strangers you are attracted to
- prolong conversations with strangers/acquaintances longer than you normally would
- join a small group conversation already started where people are mingling
- talk to strangers one-on-one using the DialUp app
- reveal more about yourself in conversation than you normally do
- ask someone out socially or on a date that you have just met
- invite friends/acquaintances/group members to do something social (individually or as a small group)
- host a dinner, party or other social activity for friends/group members at your home
- call friends/group members up just to talk
- place/respond to personal ads/profiles online and in publications; then have follow-up phone calls & dates
- participate in a speed dating event (where you talk to many people briefly, one-on-one)
- ask people to dance at a social event, club or dance class, then strike up conversations with them
- express yourself more freely/exuberantly (eg. in conversing, telling a story, dancing, cheering at an event)

BEING AMONG STRANGERS

- eat at a restaurant alone
- go alone to a movie, shopping mall or crowded store
- use a public bathroom
- walk in crowded neighborhoods
- go on crowded buses/trains
- write in front of people (e.g. writing checks in a store checkout line; writing on the blackboard in a class)
- eat in front of people (e.g. at a common table in a cafeteria; with a group of friends at a restaurant)

ASSERTION

- express a contrary opinion
- suggest to friends where you would like to eat, what movie you would like to see, etc.
- tell a waiter you don't like something or want something replaced
- take an item you purchased back for a return
- tell a coworker or boss when you disagree or don't like something they did
- ask for a raise/promotion
- tell a friend/partner/relative/group member when you feel hurt/upset

- tell someone you're interested in how you really feel about him/her
- turn down a request for assistance
- ask for assistance
- ask to borrow something
- tell someone when you are offended by what they said
- come out to someone as lesbian/gay/bi/trans
- compliment people (friends, acquaintances and/or strangers)
- tell people something positive about yourself

PERFORMING

- participate in Toastmasters at different levels (just attend, table topics, specific roles, prepared speeches)
- speak up more at work/organizational/support-group meetings
- lead work/organizational/support-group meetings
- give a presentation or workshop
- job interviews and informational interviews
- make a series of work-related, volunteer-related or information-gathering phone calls
- perform in karaoke night, open-mike night, choir, community theater/dance, etc.
- dance when there are no/few others on the dance floor
- take a class on public speaking, acting, music, singing, dance
- call in on a radio talk show

PARADOXICAL EXPERIMENTS

- make mistakes or do a mediocre job on purpose, as long as you do not harm others (eg. at work, in conversation, in emails, when hosting a dinner party or other social activity)
- pretend to forget an acquaintance's name when you actually remember
- have friendly conversations with strangers with the goal of being rejected by multiple people
- go to a bar and politely compliment multiple people (whether or not you're not interested in them); wish them a nice evening and move on to the next person regardless of their response to you
- ask multiple people "stupid questions" on purpose
- ask multiple people for directions to an obvious location you are already at (eg. Dupont Circle or the Capitol)
- order a coffee; when the server gives it to you ask if it's decaf, and then unapologetically say you want decaf
- bring items to a checkout line in a store then, after it is rung up, unapologetically say you don't have any money and won't be able to buy them
- go to restaurant or bar and only order tap water; drink the water, thank the server & leave without apology
- go to a hotel, ask about their cancellation policy, and book a hotel room; just after doing so, unapologetically explain you changed your mind and cancel the room
- go to a store, ask for assistance to find an item, then buy it; immediately return the item, unapologetically saying that you changed your mind
- draw attention to yourself in public settings by acting foolish
- speak at Toastmasters unprepared, and perhaps make mistakes on purpose
- sing at karaoke if you are not a good singer, or if you are completely unprepared
- do some other activity in public that you are not good at: eg juggling, singing or playing guitar on a street corner; put out a hat for donations
- sing loudly as you walk around the National Mall or other crowded location; look people in the eye
- stand in a crowded Metro train and loudly announce each stop ahead of time
- walk backwards slowly in a crowded location for 5 minutes
- dress poorly, or obviously unmatched, or have a very visible stain on your clothing while at work or a social event; make sure you look people in the eye
- wear your shirt inside out and buttoned incorrectly in a crowded store, and look many people in the eye
- in a bar or other public gathering place, ask others to offer criticism, and thank them gratefully for it
- attend a meeting of a group, and calmly express an opinion that is greatly contrary to theirs
- occasionally express contrary opinions with individuals (eg. about restaurants, movies, politics, religion) when you do not care, just for the sake of disagreeing with others
- go to a bar or other public gathering place and politely ask multiple people to go on a date with you; regardless of their response, politely thank them and move on to the next person; the goal is to collect rejections & normalize them
- ask multiple people for help or for favors you do not need, with the goal of collecting rejections; thank them
- ask multiple strangers to have their pictures taken with you, with the goal of collecting rejections; thank them
- tell people unapologetically you are anxious, even when you are not (eg. in conversations, meetings, radio call-ins)
- exaggerate or even create your anxiety symptoms on purpose (eg. sweating, blushing, jitteriness, light-headedness, dizziness, voice quivering) while you interact with people and look them in the eye

Paradoxical Experiments for Social Anxiety

- ***Identify the feared outcomes that your hot thoughts are so concerned about***, eg.: judgment, criticism, rejection, embarrassment, mistakes, social blunders, calling attention to yourself, or being visibly anxious. Then ***choose a series of experiments in which you paradoxically make it your goal to deliberately seek out the feared outcomes, ideally repeatedly***. For example, make it your goal to be rejected. Or make a mistake on purpose. Or do foolish things in public. Or deliberately ask a “stupid” question. Or dare to be mediocre (do a B job rather than an A job on a particular task). Or purposely under-dress or wear obviously stained clothing. Or “accidentally” drop a handful of coins on the floor in a meeting, class, or public setting. Or tell people when you are feeling anxious. Or create anxiety-like symptoms on purpose (eg. sweating, blushing, jittering, fidgeting, swallowing) when interacting with people. Or ask for help or favors when that are likely to be refused.
 - Complete the first 3 columns of an Experiment Worksheet before doing these experiments. (If you are feeling very anxious about doing these experiments and are unsure you can get yourself to carry them out, then also complete a Cognitive Restructuring Worksheet to lessen your anticipatory anxiety and increase your motivation.) Make sure you write out your hot thoughts (and perhaps your underlying core beliefs), including your specific feared predictions of how others will react to you during these experiments.
 - Also before conducting these experiments, complete a Head-Held-High Assertion Worksheet in which you write proactive assertions to use right after doing your paradoxical experiments. Practice your assertions using any of the following: recite your assertions out loud with a tone of confidence and conviction, optionally making a recording of this to listen to; or practice imagery of your fears coming true and you responding confidently using your assertions.
- ⇒ *When conducting your paradoxical experiments, focus mindfully and use your HHH assertion (or adapt it) whenever possible. Try using your assertion proactively, even if the person does not react badly to you (eg. “Don’t mind me, I’m sometimes awkward when talking to new people.”) Using your assertion proactively helps you build self-confidence and gather evidence to test your hot thoughts. Make sure you are a “good parent to yourself” after each repetition of the experiment, congratulating yourself for each positive thing you did and the courage it took. Do not criticize yourself for any problem. Instead, just identify what you can learn from this experiment that you want to do differently the next time. Then complete the last 2 columns of the Experiment Worksheet after each set of experiments.*
- Believe it or not, rather than being devastating or humiliating, paradoxical experiments will likely become fun and liberating. You will generally make the most progress if you ***do these experiments repeatedly: ideally, a few times in a row involving different people, or at least once daily on multiple days***. This allows you to garner much evidence to test your hot thoughts and underlying core beliefs. You will also likely experience your anxiety lessening over time, and see how it is transformed into a sense of strength, liberation and fun.
 - These experiments take courage and self-determination, certainly. But you do not have to be heroic. Take a series of small steps. If something feels too hard or risky to do, then find something lower on your fear and avoidance hierarchy to do in that same direction. You may find it easier and more fun to do some of these experiments with friends or therapy group co-members. Do the experiment repeatedly until it is less difficult. Then work your way up your fear hierarchy to do more challenging experiments. Keep pushing yourself. Ultimately, the bolder your experiments, the freer you will become of your fears.

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.

Name _____

Date _____

INVENTORY OF SELF-DEFEATING CORE BELIEFS

Please read all of the following core beliefs and put a check by the ones you believe much of the time, especially when you are anxious / depressed / insecure. **Make changes, if necessary, in the wording of these beliefs in order to improve the fit.** When you are done, go back and place additional checks by the 4 or 5 beliefs that seem to be most influential in your life.

- _____ 1. I can't find happiness unless I'm very attractive / intelligent / rich / successful / creative.
- _____ 2. To be rejected is horrible because it means I'm worthless / undesirable / not good enough.
- _____ 3. People will think less of me if I make a mistake or don't handle something very well.
- _____ 4. My life is empty / meaningless if I'm not loved.
- _____ 5. Taking even a small risk is foolish because the loss could be devastating.
- _____ 6. People like / respect me for what I do, not what I am.
- _____ 7. I cannot be happy unless most people I know admire / approve of me.
- _____ 8. If I ask for help it is a sign of weakness.
- _____ 9. I'm not a good / worthwhile / likable person if I don't completely meet my responsibilities & expectations.
- _____ 10. If I fail at my work then I am a failure as a person.
- _____ 11. If I cannot do something well there is little point in doing it at all.
- _____ 12. People who don't follow all the rules are bad / selfish.
- _____ 13. If someone criticizes or disagrees with me it indicates that s/he does not like me.
- _____ 14. If I fail partly it is almost as bad as being a complete failure.
- _____ 15. If other people knew what I was really like they will think less of me and probably reject me.
- _____ 16. I have never learned how to meet people / make friends / make small talk / relate to people well.
- _____ 17. I must always be in control or there will likely be terrible consequences.
- _____ 18. If I let someone get too close that person will take away my control / freedom.
- _____ 19. My value as a person depends greatly on what others think of me.
- _____ 20. It is weak / immature to not be in control of one's emotions.
- _____ 21. It's terrible to hurt someone's feelings, and I should never do that.
- _____ 22. People who have good ideas are better than those who do not.
- _____ 23. There are only winners or losers in life.
- _____ 24. I should never express anger or I will hurt someone or lose control.
- _____ 25. To be a good / moral / worthwhile person, I must help everyone I know who needs it.
- _____ 26. I don't measure up to others.
- _____ 27. If someone does something displeasing to me it means that s/he doesn't like / care about me.
- _____ 28. If I don't have other people to depend on I cannot cope / be happy.
- _____ 29. It is wrong to be proud / boastful / rude / angry.
- _____ 30. I can't stand unpleasant feelings, and I should avoid situations that make me feel that way.
- _____ 31. It is dangerous to trust or get close to other people because they might hurt me badly.
- _____ 32. If others dislike or are displeased with me I cannot be happy.
- _____ 33. It is best to give up my own interests if necessary in order to please other people.
- _____ 34. My happiness depends on other people and circumstances; I have little control over how happy I am.
- _____ 35. I need the approval of other people in order to be happy.
- _____ 36. If I avoid problems the problems tend to go away.
- _____ 37. I am socially inept.
- _____ 38. I can't make good decisions on my own.
- _____ 39. I cannot be happy if I am alone / single.
- _____ 40. I can't cope with difficulties in life without someone's help.
- _____ 41. If I am not special / among the best then I am not good enough.
- _____ 42. Rules are often arbitrary, unfair and stifling, and I shouldn't have to follow them.
- _____ 43. If I don't have order / systems / control then everything will fall apart.
- _____ 44. I have been unfairly treated and I am entitled to get my fair share.
- _____ 45. I am a very special person compared to most other people.
- _____ 46. It is wrong to be focused on pursuing pleasure / sexual gratification / selfish interests.
- _____ 47. In order to be happy others have to pay attention to me.
- _____ 48. Don't feel too good about something that happens or it will just turn out bad and I'll get disappointed.
- _____ 49. Other people will try to use / manipulate / hurt me if I don't watch out.
- _____ 50. I'm different from others and don't really fit in or belong.

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HOW TO WRITE HEALTHY NEW CORE BELIEFS

Re-read your unhealthy old core beliefs, then read each of the suggested methods of writing healthier, alternative beliefs below. Pick at least 2 of these methods to try out.

No matter which methods you use, check your work to see that you have met these three criteria for effective new core beliefs:

- make sure your new beliefs counter *all* your old (unhealthy) beliefs
- make sure your new beliefs are *believable* to you (ie. you consider them to be *probably true*, or at least that you believe them at your best of times)
- try to word the new beliefs in the positive, and avoid double negatives

1. **Cognitive Restructuring**: Write down your most important unhealthy, old core beliefs in the Hot Thoughts section of a Cognitive Restructuring Worksheet. For Situation, simply write “unhealthy old core beliefs.” Then complete the remaining rows of the worksheet, carefully following the directions on the purple sheet. The Constructive Attitude is a rough draft of your healthy, new core beliefs.
2. **Your Best of Times**: Think of the time(s) in your adult life when you have felt *most confident and positive about yourself and your life* (not just pleased about something that happened). What were your core beliefs operating at those times? I'm not talking about the automatic thoughts that were *explicitly* on your mind; I'm referring to the underlying, *implicit* beliefs you had then (about yourself, other people, the world, etc.)
3. **Imagining a Confident Future**: Think of the most emotionally challenging situations for you to experience, or the feared outcomes which you try your hardest to avoid experiencing (eg. rejection, judgment, embarrassment, failure). Next, think through how you would ideally like to be able to handle these challenging situations and the feared outcomes if you felt better about yourself. Then close your eyes and spend a few minutes imagining yourself handling one or more of these challenging situations and fears come true with a sense of self-confidence. Repeat this imagery until it feels stronger and more emotionally resonant for you. Keeping your eyes closed, think about what you would have to believe about yourself and others in order for you to feel and act in this self-confident way you imagined. Write down these healthy new core beliefs.
4. **People You Admire**: Think of the people you have most admired or looked up to in your life. It doesn't matter whether or not they are alive, or whether you know them personally or are famous people you have never known. Include also people whom you look up to for certain qualities but not for other qualities. Then write down what you imagine would be the core beliefs these persons must have in order to create the qualities you so admire in them.
5. **You as Mentor**: Imagine that you are the mentor to a teenager or young adult. Imagine that this young person confides in you the personal problems, fears and self-doubts that s/he has been experiencing in life. Imagine also that this young person's problems are similar to your own. What would you like to teach this young person to believe so that s/he may overcome these problems, fears and self-doubts?

Unhealthy Old Core Beliefs & Healthy New Core Beliefs

(Old) If someone does something that displeases me, that means he/she doesn't like me because I am flawed.

(New) Many people like me, flaws and all, just as I like many people, flaws and all.

(Old) People that don't follow the rules are bad.

(New) No one follows all rules all the time. That's part of being human. I can befriend people that I like nonetheless.

(Old) I have never learned how to meet people or connect well with people.

(New) When I am mindfully focused on the conversation, I usually connect well with people.

Short versions of new core beliefs:

I am wonderfully flawed, and I am capable of connecting with equally flawed people when I'm mindfully focused.

Unhealthy Old Core Beliefs

- I'm boring, no fun to be around, and socially awkward.
- I don't measure up to others and I don't like myself the way I am – if I was more like other people I would feel better about myself.
- I cannot be happy unless most people I know like and respect me.
- It's terrible to hurt other people's feelings and I should never do that.
- I must always be in control of every situation to make sure no one judges me or thinks poorly of me.

Healthy New Core Beliefs

- There will always be some people better than me and some people worse than me at everything – it is all relative and all subjective.
- Not everyone will like me, but they're not worth crying over. The people worth investing my time and energy in are the ones who appreciate me for who I am.
- No matter what other people (or myself, for that matter) think of me or how they judge me, I have intrinsic value as a human being.
- Nobody is perfect and I am still a good and likeable person even if I sometimes hurt or offend others.
- I cannot control other people's thoughts or behavior toward me. It is actually liberating to realize the only thing I can control is my perspective.

Cost-Benefit Analysis of Core Beliefs

Advantages v. Disadvantages: This exercise can help you better understand your natural ambivalence and fears about letting go of your unhealthy old beliefs and behavior patterns, and deepen your motivation to make further life changes.

- First analyze your unhealthy old CBs. Divide a sheet into two columns labeled Advantages and Disadvantages. Under Advantages, write out all the ways your old CBs have helped at some point in your life. Some of these advantages may only be short term and may result in longer-term disadvantages. Include them anyway, but make sure you put the associated disadvantages in the other column. Some of these advantages may have only been true in the past. Include these as well, but indicate they are no longer true. Do not forget to list ways that your old CBs have: provided you with protection or defense; made things easier or less effort; or given you a sense of identity / security / familiarity. Although these advantages are typically short-term and greatly outweighed by the longer-term disadvantages, they are important reasons why we tend to fear and even resist changing our unhealthy old CBs.
- Under Disadvantages, write down all the ways your old CBs have hurt you.
- When you are done, write a number from 0 to 100 at the bottom of each column to indicate the relative weight or importance of the items in that column. The two numbers should add up to 100. In determining what number to give, consider the importance of each item in your life at present, not simply the total number of items.
- Then do this same Advantages v. Disadvantages exercise for your healthy new CBs. When you are done, give each column a number indicating its relative weight. Some of these advantages and disadvantages may simply be the reverse of what you wrote on the previous worksheet, of course. Include these, nonetheless. But if you give it some thought, you are very likely to uncover unique advantages and disadvantages that are specific to your healthy new CBs.
- Periodically reread what you have written and add any additional ideas as you think of them.

Core Belief Argument: Conduct a role play with a therapist or therapy group co-member. Write out your old and new CBs. You play yourself acting as if you fully believe your new CBs. The therapist or group member plays your old CBs personified. Then go for it! Argue on behalf of your new CBs using both reason and passion (strong emotion). Do not get on the defensive. Take charge! Let your old CBs know how you feel about them and the way they have hurt you and held you back. Stand up to the critic/bully with strength and conviction. Act as if you are sick and tired of your old CBs until you really feel empowered or invigorated.

(over)

- If you have anxiety about asserting yourself with strong emotion, complete a Cognitive Restructuring worksheet about doing so before conducting the CB argument role play. Also, practice reciting your healthy new CBs (long and short versions) out loud and with oomph at least once every day as a way to both familiarize yourself with them, as well as to practice expressing them forcefully.
- Have a video recording made of this role play, and periodically watch it mindfully to reinforce your new CBs.
- Write out an argument between your old and new CBs, or between your old CBs and yourself fully believing your new CBs. Incorporate into this argument some of the key points you included in your advantages v. disadvantages worksheets (above). Make sure this argument is filled with passion on behalf of your healthy new CBs. (See sample arguments.) Periodically reread this and add any additional points as you think of them.

Core Belief Trials: In a few individual cognitive-behavioral therapy sessions, you and the therapist can prepare for and conduct a series of trials in which you serve as defense attorney refuting the charges put forth by your unhealthy old CB's prosecuting attorney, also played by you. After two or three such trials in which you successfully defend your innocence against these bogus charges, you will then have the opportunity to put the prosecuting attorney on trial for malpractice! There are simple homework activities between sessions in which you are gathering evidence to support your innocence and refute the false charges put forth by your unhealthy old CBs. These CB trials are a very powerful and often transformative strategy that greatly helps many people weaken their unhealthy old CBs and increase self-esteem and self-confidence.

Gathering Evidence For & Against Core Beliefs

Keep a Daily Evidence Log: For much of our lives, our unhealthy old CBs have led us to engage in mental filtering and disqualifying the positive. This has lead us to only see or value evidence that falsely seems to confirm our old CBs, which has the effect of reinforcing and strengthening these unhealthy attitudes and fueling a vicious cycle. The aim of keeping a daily Evidence Log is to retrain our minds so that we also see and value the evidence supporting our healthy new CBs and refuting the unhealthy old ones.

- Keep a daily log of evidence supporting your healthy new CBs, and/or refuting your unhealthy old CBs. Have a copy of both your old and new CBs as a bookmark in your paper journal, or as the heading on a file in your computer or mobile device. No less than once a day, ideally at about the same time each day, look at your old and new CBs. Then mentally review all the positive or partially positive events of that day that you can remember. Write down anything that you experienced that day—or even just thought about that day from further in the past—that in some way supports your new CBs and/or refutes your old CBs.
- ⇒ Be careful not to let think all-or-nothing thinking or disqualifying the positive stop you from including evidence in your log. Write down any evidence supporting your new CBs or refuting your old, no matter how small, imperfect or repeated that evidence is. And remember: evidence is observable fact. Your feelings and thoughts are not evidence.
- ⇒ Make sure that every time you conduct an experiment, write down the evidence you can garner from that experiment relating to your CBs in your Evidence Log. (See instruction sheet: Experiments to Test & Defy Unhealthy Core Beliefs.)
- ⇒ It is important that you follow the above steps and make entries into your Evidence Log EVERY DAY in order to help train your mind to pay attention to and value this positive evidence. It only need take 5 minutes or so.
- If you wish, you may combine this daily Evidence Log with the daily **Pride and Gratitude Log**, and daily **reciting your new CBs**. (See instruction sheets: Pride and Gratitude Log; and Affirming Your Healthy New CBs")
- Each day, right after making entries into your Evidence Log, write down how much you believe each of your old and new CBs: 0% = not at all; 25% = a little; 50% = moderately (ie. you are on the fence); 75% = strongly; 100% = absolutely. Core belief change is a gradual, not all-or-nothing process, with ups and downs. This will help you track progress.
- Be encouraged to revise and add to your new CBs, long or short versions, as you gather more and more evidence and develop new perspectives.
- Periodically reread your Evidence Log, or sections of it, to reinforce your healthy new CBs.

Gathering Historical Evidence: You can further strengthen your new CBs by gathering evidence from your recent or more distant past. Go through all your completed Post-Experiment Worksheets and see what evidence you could gather from those old experiments supporting your new CBs or refuting your old. You may also review different periods of your life (eg. young

childhood, adolescence, college, other periods of adulthood) and scan your memory for such evidence. Enter all this evidence you gather from your past in your Evidence Log.

Why Others Like/Admire/Respect You: Think of the people who like and respect you, both currently and in the past. Then write down all the reasons you can think of as to what do they value or admire about you. Infer this from the ways they relate(d) to you, and from things they may have said. Afterwards, consider asking a few of these individuals to tell you (ideally in writing) why they like, admire and/or respect you. Ask them to be fully honest with you. Then review what you learned about why others like/admire/respect you—both from your own work, as well as what any of these people actually told you—and enter everything that supports your new CBs or refutes your old in your Evidence Log.

Conduct Field Research: Look at your unhealthy old CBs and write down the underlying assumptions implicit/explicit in these attitudes. Then conduct a little field research to test out your assumptions.

- **Surveys:** For example, if you think it is weak or weird to experience much anxiety or do/say foolish things, then survey many people as to what makes them nervous, or what embarrassments they have experienced, or what they think when they notice someone appearing anxious or acting foolish. If you think others will not respect you for performing imperfectly or making mistakes, then survey many people as to how they react when others screw up. Remember to record your findings in your Evidence Log.
- **Systematic Observation:** For example, if you assume you have to be charismatic, interesting, funny or impressive for others to enjoy conversing with you, spend some time observing many other people's conversations. Rate how charismatic, interesting, funny or impressive they are on a scale from 0-100%. If you assume that it would be terrible to appear nervous, make mistakes, interrupt or have awkward silences, then observe how often you can find these things occurring in many other people's interactions. If you assume you are unattractive, look for the unattractive qualities in many people you think of as attractive, and look for the attractive qualities in many people you think of as unattractive. You may even observe many couples and silently rate the attractiveness of each partner to see how much of a discrepancy there is, and how subjective attractiveness really is. Whatever approach you take, record your findings in your Evidence Log.

Core Belief Continuum: Write down a healthy new CB of yours at the top of a sheet of paper or electronic file. Then draw a vertical line along the left side of the page, and scale it from 100% at the top down to 0% at the bottom. Using pencil so you can erase, write your name where you believe you belong on the scale. Then write onto the page the names or descriptors of several people (whether you know them or not) who, to varying degrees, represent your new CB or its opposite. Make sure you **include someone who is an extreme example of the opposite of your new CB at the bottom**. Review what you've written and decide if you need to move where you put your own name. Then add experiments you do in therapy on the continuum, and move your name up or down based on the evidence you are gathering.

For example, let's say your old CB is that you are socially inept and your new CB is that you have adequate social skills when you are mindfully focused. Put your name down where you believe you belong on the continuum as to how adequately socially skilled you are when you focus mindfully. Then, for 0, write down the most extremely socially unskilled person you are aware of, whether you know that person or not. Add the names of several others you know at varying points in between. Review the scale and see if you need to move where you placed your name. Now add experiments you do to the continuum, and move your name based on the evidence you gather.

Imagery to Strengthen Healthy New Core Beliefs

Pick a present-day situation that activates your unhealthy old core beliefs: ie. that makes you upset, anxious or avoid something. You may wish to pick a trigger that you are planning to experience in the near future, and use the exercise below to prepare yourself for it.

Get into a relaxed position when you are alone. Breathe slowly and deeply for a few minutes. Make sure you are filling your lungs completely: your belly should go out when you breathe in, and go in when you breathe out. Try to pay attention solely to your breathing, or to a relaxing phrase (eg. "let go") you silently say in rhythm with your breath. Your mind will wander at times throughout this exercise. When it does, just note the distraction without judgment or frustration, and then gently redirect your attention back to your breathing. Do this as frequently as necessary, but always gently (without judgment or frustration).

After you have the hang of this and are feeling pretty relaxed, read your healthy new CBs a few times slowly as you continue to breathe in this manner. Close your eyes and focus on a phrase or sentence that comes from or represents your healthy new CBs while you continue your relaxed breathing. Let the phrase evolve on its own.

Begin to visualize yourself in the situation you picked that activates your unhealthy old CBs. First set the scene: try to see, in your mind's eye, the place, objects and persons that are there. Focus on one of these things until it looks vivid. Pay attention to the colors you see, the sounds you hear, the things you smell and/or the textures you feel. Look down in your mind's eye and see your hands and legs. Make sure you are present in this scene.

Then play out the scene acting as if you fully believed your healthy new CBs. Replay that scene over and over and over until it seems more vivid and you feel stronger and more confident. Don't focus on how others in the scene are reacting to you because that's not in your control. Instead, play the scene over and over with an increasing sense of strength and self-confidence regardless of the reactions you get. Keep up the slow, deep, steady breathing throughout. Silently recite phrases from your healthy new CBs before or during each scene repetition as an aid to increase your self-confidence. Let these phrases evolve into whatever you find most useful. Be persistent. You may need to repeat the scene many several before you feel strong and self-confident. Then focus on **a snapshot image of your confident self** in this scene for a couple minutes. Alternatively, choose and focus on **a symbol or icon that, to you, represents your healthy new core beliefs**. As you do so, repeat the new CB phrases you found most helpful.

Practice bringing up this snapshot image of your confident self, or the icon of your healthy new core beliefs, briefly but repeatedly every day. Repeat the healthy new CB phrase as you do so. Then try to bring it up this image/icon and phrase when your old core beliefs are activated (ie. when you are upset, anxious or avoiding something), or when you are about to do a challenging experiment.

HEAD-HELD-HIGH ASSERTION

Fear-Come-True

[Write the things you fear the most in social or performance situations that make you anxious. Be specific as to what you most fear will happen, and what you most fear people will say or do in reaction to you. Include anything you most fear, no matter how unlikely it is to occur.]

Head-Held-High

[Write the specific ways you would like to handle your fears-come-true, including both what you would SAY and DO. Write out how you would like to assert yourself to the persons who criticize or otherwise react negatively toward you. Use a tone of confidence and conviction. Don't be defensive, overly apologetic or aggressive. Disarm the critics by starting your assertion with acknowledging any truth there may be in the criticism or other negative reaction, but minus any exaggeration or insult. Then stand up for yourself. Write it out even if you don't think you would have the nerve to say it, as long as you would want to.]

HEAD-HELD-HIGH ASSERTION

Fear-Come-True

[Write the things you fear the most in social or performance situations that make you anxious. Be specific as to what you most fear will happen, and what you most fear people will say or do in reaction to you. Include anything you most fear, no matter how unlikely it is to occur.]

1 -I start blushing/sweating when mingling with new people at a social event, and someone tells me I look weird and weak.

2 -I say something stupid or incorrect during a conversation, and the other person gives me a weird look. I assume he/she thinks poorly of me and has lost respect for me.

3 -I unintentionally offend someone in a conversation, and s/he tells me how hurt and angry s/he is at me.

4 -Someone tells me that s/he thinks I'm boring, unappealing or unattractive, and so doesn't want to have anything to do with me.

5 -I appear nervous when speaking at a meeting and people tell me that must mean I don't know what I'm talking about and am not good at my job.

6 -I go blank when speaking at a meeting because I am so anxious. I can't continue speaking, and people start looking at me strangely. I presume they must be thinking poorly of me, and that they no longer respect me.

Head-Held-High

[Write the specific ways you would like to handle your fears-come-true, including both what you would SAY and DO. Write out how you would like to assert yourself to the persons who criticize or otherwise react negatively toward you. Use a tone of confidence and conviction. Don't be defensive, overly apologetic or aggressive. Disarm the critics by starting your assertion with acknowledging any truth there may be in the criticism or other negative reaction, but minus any exaggeration or insult. Then stand up for yourself. Write it out even if you don't think you would have the nerve to say it, as long as you would want to.]

1 -It's true that I do blush and sweat easily when I'm uncomfortable. We all have quirks, and that happens to be mine. [Then continue the conversation.]

2 -It's true, that was a silly thing for me to say. I'm sorry about that. I'm just like everyone else in that I sometimes say silly things. Oh, well. Let's move on. [Then continue the conversation.]

3 -I apologize. I certainly didn't mean to offend you. I sometime make mistakes. [Then continue the conversation.]

4 -Oh, well. It's unfortunate that you don't find me to your liking. Fortunately, we all have different tastes and other people like me as I am. [Then move on and start a conversation with someone else.]

5 -It's true that I get nervous speaking in front of groups. Lot's of people do. But I happen to be very good at my job and have important things to say. [Then continue speaking at the meeting.]

6 -Excuse me. I'm afraid I just lost track of what I was saying. Oh, well. I'm going to go back to my previous point and continue from there. I'd appreciate your patience and attention. [Then continue speaking at the meeting.]

Experiments to Test and Defy Unhealthy Core Beliefs

Conducting homework experiments can be a powerful strategy to generate evidence that will undermine your belief in your unhealthy old CBs, and strengthen your belief in your healthy new CBs. Here are several strategies:

Straightforward Experiments: When completing an Experiment Worksheet (EW) in preparation for a straightforward homework experiment to work on achieving a therapy goal (eg. making friends, dating, being assertive, public speaking), identify the unhealthy old core belief that is generating your hot thoughts and feared predictions. Write that CB in 2nd (Predictions) column of your worksheet, along with your hot thoughts and feared predictions about that situation. Write CB- just before the unhealthy old core belief. Then, after the experiment, record the evidence you have gathered and what you have learned regarding your core belief in the last two columns of the EW. (See sample EW.)

If you choose to also complete a Cognitive Restructuring Worksheet (CRW) before your experiment, then identify your unhealthy underlying core belief, along with your hot thoughts and predictions, in the 3rd row (Hot Thoughts), and write CB- just before that belief. Then, when writing your Constructive Attitude a few rows further down, include a healthy new core belief to counter the unhealthy old one triggered by this experiment, and write CB- just before that healthy belief. (See sample CRW.)

Paradoxical Experiments: Another approach is to first identify the feared outcomes that your unhealthy old CBs tell you to dread and avoid at all costs, eg.: judgment, criticism, rejection, embarrassment, mistakes, social blunders, calling attention to yourself, or appearing anxious. Then choose a series of experiments in which you paradoxically make it your goal to deliberately seek out the feared outcomes. As in straightforward experiments (above), make sure you write the unhealthy CBs you are testing in an EW (and optionally a CRW) before conducting the experiment. Then, after the experiment, record the evidence you gathered and what you have learned related to your core belief in the remaining columns of the EW. (See sample EW and CRW.)

Rebel Experiments: Write down several of the specific personal rules dictated by your unhealthy old CBs: the ways you *should* behave, and the ways you *should avoid* behaving. Then write down a series of experiments you could do in which you make it your goal to deliberately break one of more of these personal rules repeatedly. This is akin to using nonviolent civil disobedience as a strategy to defy an unjust authority, except that the unjust authority in this case is your unhealthy old CBs.

Before conducting these experiments, complete an EW (and optionally a CRW) in which you identify the unhealthy old CB you are defying, and write CB- just before it. It is ideal to repeat these experiments, as your self-confidence will build over time. Finally, complete the remainder of the EW after your experiment in which you record the evidence you gathered and what you have learned related to your core belief. (See sample EW and CRW.)

Act As If: Plan out in advance a series of repeated experiments in which your goal is to act as if you fully believe your healthy new CBs in a situation that is likely to trigger your unhealthy old CBs. Identify as behavioral goals for your experiments the specific things you would do if you fully believed your healthy new beliefs. Record all this in an EW (and optionally a CRW) you complete before the experiments. Ideally, repeat similar experiments several times until it feels more comfortable and natural, and less like acting. After your experiments, complete the remainder of the EW in which you identify the evidence you gathered and what you have learned related to your CBs. (See sample EW and CRW.)

You can also conduct unplanned, reactive act-as-if experiments when you find yourself confronted by a situation which activates your unhealthy old CBs (ie. when you feel anxious, upset, or tempted to avoid something you otherwise want to do). First, recite your relevant healthy CBs, long or short versions. Then ask yourself: if I truly believed my new core beliefs right now, what would I do? Then act as if you truly believed your new CBs by doing these things, and focusing mindfully while doing so. Complete an EW afterwards in which you record the evidence you gathered and what you have learned about your CBs. (See sample EW.)

Consider conducting daylong experiments, eg.: act as if you have a Teflon coating preventing rejection or embarrassment from sticking; act as if your flaws and deficiencies make you interesting and desirable; act as if you enjoy learning from mistakes and disappointments. Then complete an EW afterwards, and identify the evidence you gathered and what you have learned related to your CBs. (See sample EW.)

For all versions of acting as if, make sure you are basing your experiments on something that you do, in fact, at least *partly* believe and see as personally *beneficial* to believe, or that you actually *do* believe during more confident times in your life. Then push yourself to act as if you *fully* believe it. Although it may feel uncomfortable and phony at first, the results are likely to be positive and self-reinforcing. Conduct such experiments repeatedly until it feels more comfortable and natural, and less like acting.

Imagery of your confident self: After preparing for experiments in any of the above ways, try doing imagery of you conducting these experiments with self-confidence. Start by reading your healthy new CBs, and then create vivid imagery of you doing the experiments acting as if you fully adopt this more constructive mindset. Repeat the imagery multiple times until you feel less anxious and more self-confident doing the experiments. Try doing imagery of different versions of your experiments: with strangers reacting to you in different ways, some of them negative. Practice responding to any fears come true in your imagery with confidence. (See #7 & 8 in the yellow instruction sheet: Cognitive-Behavioral Experiments for Overcoming Social Anxiety.) Then do the experiments in real life!

Other ways to record your evidence: It is helpful to keep all your evidence refuting your unhealthy old CBs and supporting your healthy new CBs in one place so you can periodically review it. Doing so will probably help improve your mood, and increase your self-confidence and self-esteem. Consider using any of the following to consolidate in one place all the evidence your CB experiments generate: a daily CB Evidence Log, a Core Belief Continuum and/or a daily Pride and Gratitude Log. (See instructions sheets: Gathering Evidence; Pride and Gratitude Log.)

CORE BELIEF ACTION PLAN

Name _____

UNHEALTHY OLD CORE BELIEFS (briefly stated)

HEALTHY NEW CORE BELIEFS (briefly stated)

RULES (dos & don'ts) DICTATED BY YOUR OLD CBs

PERSONAL GOALS you want to make good progress on before ending therapy

EXPERIMENTS you want to do before ending therapy to **REBEL** against your old CBs or **ACT AS IF** you fully belief your new CBs (straightforward and paradoxical)

CORE BELIEF ACTION PLAN

Name _____

UNHEALTHY OLD CORE BELIEFS (briefly stated)

I'm fundamentally deficient.

If someone sees any of my deficiencies, s/he will not respect, like or love me.

HEALTHY NEW CORE BELIEFS (briefly stated)

I have strengths and weaknesses, just like everyone else.

People respect, like or love me for who I am and don't expect perfection, just like I value others despite their imperfections.

RULES (dos & don'ts) DICTATED BY YOUR OLD CBs

- Don't go to social activities unless a few good friends will be there.
- Don't initiate conversations with strangers, especially those I'm attracted to.
- Don't join group conversations, or stay quiet when I am in groups.
- Do script to make sure I have things to say.
- Do avert eye contact, speak softly and speak briefly.
- Do monitor my anxiety symptoms to try to hide them.
- Do ask lots of questions to keep the focus on the other person.
- Don't talk about myself, tell stories or assert myself.
- Do end conversations early so I don't embarrass myself.
- Don't speak up at meetings, or keep it very brief if I have to speak.
- Do use fast-acting drugs (alcohol, benzos, beta blockers) to hide my symptoms.

PERSONAL GOALS you want to make good progress on before ending therapy

- Meet new people and invite them out socially.
- Make friends.
- Date people I'm attracted to.
- Give reports and presentations in meetings.

EXPERIMENTS you want to do before ending therapy to REBEL against your old CBs or ACT AS IF you fully believe your new CBs (straightforward and paradoxical)

- Attend a group social activity each week, and initiate conversations with strangers (especially those I'm attracted to), and join group conversations with strangers.
- Invite and go out with people as friends.
- Invite out people I'm attracted to and go out on dates.
- In all above conversations: no drugs/alcohol; focus mindfully on the conversation; reveal more about myself; speak expansively; have balanced conversations; tell stories; make more eye contact; speak louder; extend the conversations longer.
- (Paradoxical) During some conversation, show anxiety symptoms or ask/say something stupid, then use brief HHH assertion, then continue the conversation.
- Speak up more often and longer at staff meetings (without taking meds).
- Give a presentation or speech at work or Toastmasters (without meds).