

CBT-Based Client Guide

# **Social Anxiety Disorder**

Client Workbook

This workbook uses evidence-based cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) strategies to help you understand and overcome fear of social situations. Work through each section with your therapist.

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## What Is Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD)?

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Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) involves marked fear or anxiety about social situations in which you might be scrutinized by others. You may fear that you will act in a way that is embarrassing, humiliating, or will lead to rejection. These situations are either avoided or endured with intense distress.

### DSM-5 Key Features

Fear of one or more social or performance situations where exposure to possible scrutiny by others occurs. The person fears they will act in a way that will be negatively evaluated, causing embarrassment, humiliation, or rejection. The fear is out of proportion to the actual threat. The anxiety causes significant distress or functional impairment. (APA, 2013)

## The Cognitive Model of Social Anxiety

According to Clark & Wells (1995), when a socially anxious person enters a feared situation, a number of processes maintain anxiety: (1) activation of a negative social self-image (e.g., 'I appear incompetent'); (2) self-focused attention — monitoring yourself from the 'inside out'; (3) **safety behaviors** — actions taken to prevent feared outcomes that paradoxically prevent disconfirmation of fears; and (4) **post-event processing** — reviewing the event in a negative, biased way afterward.

### Evidence Base

CBT — particularly exposure-based therapy combined with cognitive restructuring — is the gold-standard treatment for SAD (Hofmann & Smits, 2008; Mayo-Wilson et al., 2014). Treatment dismantling research shows that reducing safety behaviors is a key mechanism of change.

## Worksheet 1 - My Social Anxiety Profile

*Understanding the specific patterns of your social anxiety is the first step to change.*

### Social situations I most fear (check all that apply):

- Talking in groups
- Meeting new people
- Speaking in public
- Eating/drinking in front of others
- Being watched working
- Starting/maintaining conversations
- Asserting myself
- Writing/performing while observed
- Attending parties/social events
- Using public restrooms

### My #1 most feared situation:

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### What I fear will happen in that situation:

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### Current distress level:

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
None		Mild		Moderate			Severe			Worst ever

## Worksheet 2 · Identifying Safety Behaviors

*Safety behaviors are actions you take to prevent your feared outcome. While they provide short-term relief, they maintain anxiety long-term by preventing you from learning that your fears are unlikely or survivable.*

### Common Safety Behaviors in SAD

Avoiding eye contact • Rehearsing what to say • Speaking quietly • Gripping objects • Wearing concealing clothing • Drinking alcohol before events • Leaving early • Staying near the exit • Asking for reassurance • Over-preparing • Staying silent.

My safety behavior	Fear it is meant to prevent

Which safety behavior could I drop first as an experiment?

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## Worksheet 3 · Thought Record for Social Fears

*After a feared social situation, use this thought record to challenge the thoughts driving your anxiety.*

**Describe the situation:**

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**What was my automatic thought (what I feared others thought of me)?**

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**How much did I believe it? (0–100%):**

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**Evidence FOR the thought**

**Evidence AGAINST the thought**

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**Balanced/alternative thought:**

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**How much do I believe the original thought now? (0–100%):**

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## Worksheet 4 · Social Cost-Benefit Analysis

*Examine the real cost of avoidance vs. the cost of facing your fear.*

**Situation I am avoiding:** \_\_\_\_\_

	AVOIDING the situation	FACING the situation
Short-term		
Long-term		
Effect on self-concept		
Effect on relationships		

**What does this analysis tell me?** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Worksheet 5 - Exposure Hierarchy

An exposure hierarchy is a list of feared situations ranked from least to most anxiety-provoking. You will start with lower-ranked items and work your way up, allowing anxiety to decrease naturally (habituation) and disconfirming your feared predictions.

Rank	Situation	Fear Rating (0-10)	Safety Behaviors to Drop
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			



## Worksheet 7 · Post-Event Processing Challenge

*Post-event processing (PEP) is a biased review of a social situation that focuses on perceived failures and ignores positive aspects. It maintains and worsens social anxiety. This worksheet helps you conduct a fair review instead.*

**Social situation I am reviewing:**

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**What my mind is focusing on (the negative reel):**

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**What actually went well or was neutral:**

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**What I would say to a friend who had this experience:**

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**A fair, balanced summary of how it went:**

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### **Key Insight**

The way we REMEMBER a social event is heavily influenced by our anxiety level during it. Anxious memory systematically overweights negative information (Rapee & Heimberg, 1997). A deliberate review corrects this bias.

## Worksheet 8 · Building My Social Confidence

Track your social successes — even small ones. This builds an evidence base for a new, more confident social self-concept.

Date	Situation	What I did (despite anxiety)	What happened (vs. feared prediction)	New belief about myself

**My overall progress statement:**

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*References: APA (2013). DSM-5. | Clark & Wells (1995). In R.G. Heimberg et al. (Eds.), Social Phobia. Guilford. | Craske et al. (2014). Behav Res Ther. | Hofmann & Smits (2008). J Psychiatr Res. | Mayo-Wilson et al. (2014). Lancet Psychiatry. | Rapee & Heimberg (1997). Behav Res Ther.*