

Tools for Helping Anxious Teens

Workbook

65
Ready-to-Use
Worksheets

BY ANGELA M. DOEL, MS, &
LAWRENCE E. SHAPIRO, PHD

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By Angela M. Doel, MS, and Lawrence E. Shapiro, PhD

Between Sessions Resources, Inc.
Norwalk, CT

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Disclaimer: This book is intended to be used as an adjunct to psychotherapy. If you are experiencing serious symptoms or problems in your life, seek the help of an experienced mental health professional.

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About the Series

Tools for Helping Anxious Teens is part of a series of workbooks designed to give therapists and their clients easy access to practical evidence-based psychotherapy tools.

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Introduction

Fear and worry are commonly experienced by adolescents as a normal part of growing up. But when these emotions get in the way of a teen's daily life and disrupts his or her routine, this could be a sign of an anxiety disorder.

When is Anxiety a Problem for an Adolescent?

Although everyone experiences anxiety, some teens begin to feel anxious and/or worried so often or so intensely it makes them feel uncomfortable and begins to interfere with their daily lives. This might show up as an extreme response to a situation or event he or she believes is threatening, and the intensity of the reaction might be out of proportion to the actual danger. This response often includes worrying about harm or danger, heightened physical responses, and the avoidance of situations, places, or events – leading to considerable distress that interferes with his/her daily activities at school, at home, or with friends.

Other common ways in which teens may experience anxiety include:

- Panic attacks
- Obsessions and/or compulsions
- Perfectionism
- Selective mutism, in which a teen does not speak in certain situations
- Anxiety when separated from a parent or caregiver
- Avoidance of social situations
- Excessive worrying

Anxiety affects 32% of American adolescents ages 13 to 18, according to the [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\)](#). Over the past twenty years the number of anxious teens has been steadily increasing. According to the [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#), 80% of kids with diagnosable anxiety disorders fail to receive appropriate treatment—though anxiety disorders are highly treatable.

Research shows treatment of mild anxiety should begin with therapy. However, if the teen suffers from moderate to severe anxiety, a combination of medication and therapy might be the best approach. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is an effective and appropriate treatment for adolescents with anxiety disorders. The worksheets in this book are intended to be used as tools to complement the therapeutic approaches you use with your adolescent clients. They are designed to increase clients' awareness of the relationships between their emotions, thoughts, physical sensations, and anxiety. The assignments provide steps for clients to manage their distress and anxious thoughts in healthier ways.

It is Time for Teens to Overcome Their Anxiety

There are many factors that contribute to the increase in anxiety disorders in teens. In addition to genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events, consider the following factors:

- Increasingly high expectations and pressure to succeed.
- Living in a world that feels scary and threatening.
- Pressure from friends to use substances like alcohol or recreational drugs.
- Constant connection via electronic devices to social media and messaging apps.

Whatever the cause, this rise in anxiety is a real problem for teens.

Chronic anxiety may lead to serious mental health problems: depression, substance abuse, and even suicide. Anxiety interferes with teens' ability to focus and learn, leading to academic problems that can have lifelong impact. Teens may also experience physical problems, such as headaches, chronic pain, or digestive problems.

Using This Workbook

Tools for Helping Anxious Teens was written to help teens manage and reduce the sometimes-debilitating symptoms of anxiety. The assignments can be thought of as therapy homework, and you can explain to your adolescent clients why each exercise is important, guiding them in learning new emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills that can reduce their anxiety.

This workbook offers 65 worksheets that will help teens learn strategies to manage their anxiety in constructive ways, instead of turning to unhealthy or harmful coping strategies. Each worksheet is written specifically for adolescent clients in a manner that is practical, user-friendly, and easy to understand. While no single worksheet is effective for everyone, we are confident you will discover techniques that inspire change.

The workbook ends with an appendix that addresses coping with anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Importance of Therapeutic Homework

For new skills to be most effective, your clients need to practice them regularly between counseling sessions. Using homework assignments, teens can rehearse new coping strategies to effectively manage anxiety, strengthening the insights and intentions that surface during counseling sessions.

Research suggests that homework enhances the effectiveness of counseling sessions, and clients who complete homework assignments on a consistent basis tend to have better outcomes. In addition to giving the counseling context and focus, homework provides concrete feedback for the counselor about a client's progress. For instance, when there are issues with homework compliance, counselors can identify obstacles and challenges to the client's goal achievement.

How to Use This Workbook

Each worksheet has four sections: Objective, You Should Know, What to Do, and Reflections on This Exercise. The **Objective** states what the client should expect to have accomplished upon completion of the worksheet. **You Should Know** offers background information about the issue(s) being addressed in the worksheet. **What to Do** features a variety of exercises or tools, including thought-provoking questions to answer, charts to track activities, and questionnaires to complete.

In the **Reflections** section, clients are asked to provide feedback on the worksheet, including rating how much the exercise helped them, and writing what they learned from the exercise. This is perhaps the most important part of the worksheet because it helps you and the client determine progress or improvement that was made upon completion of the assignment.

Section 1. Understand Your Anxiety

Is Anxiety a Problem for You?

Objective

To identify the symptoms of anxiety and determine if those symptoms are creating problems in your life.

You Should Know

Everyone experiences anxiety, and sometimes worry or fearfulness signals danger, letting you know that you need to leave a situation or be on high alert. However, sometimes anxiety becomes exaggerated and unhealthy, limiting your experiences and impacting your social life, relationships, and how well you function at home and in school.

Teens deal with lots of changes and uncertainties but, for some teens, anxiety becomes a chronic state that interferes with their ability to attend school and perform at their highest potential. Participating in extracurricular and social activities, as well as making and keeping friends, becomes challenging.

Sometimes anxiety is generalized, free-floating feelings of unease or worry, or it develops into panic attacks or phobias. Do you know the common symptoms of anxiety? They are:

- Excessive fear and worry
- Restlessness
- Wariness or uneasiness
- Constant nervousness
- Heightened self-consciousness
- Overly shy or introverted
- Frequent thoughts of losing control
- Unrealistic concerns about social or academic competence
- Intense fear of a specific object or activity
- Obsessions (repeating thoughts) or compulsions (repeating actions to relieve anxiety)

You might also have physical symptoms, such as sensations of unreality, shortness of breath, headaches, trembling, sweating, muscle tension, choking sensations, chest pains, stomachaches, nausea, dizziness, and numbness or tingling in the arms or legs.

What to Do

Anxiety can include feelings, physical sensations, thoughts, and behaviors. The following list might not include all of the thoughts, feelings, or body sensations that you have when you are anxious. Check off the statements that apply to you. Add anything you experience that is missing from this list.

- _____ People tell me I worry a lot.
- _____ I have a hard time controlling and changing my thoughts.
- _____ I get annoyed and snap at people when I'm anxious.
- _____ There are events or experiences from my past that trigger anxious feelings.
- _____ If I have an upcoming event (for example, a big test or class presentation), I worry about it for days or weeks.
- _____ I feel on edge, like I'm waiting for something bad to happen.
- _____ I get upset when things don't go my way or plans change.
- _____ I worry about what people are thinking or saying about me.
- _____ I have a hard time focusing or paying attention because I'm distracted by worry.
- _____ I think about the same things over and over again.
- _____ I feel like I'm going crazy or losing my mind.
- _____ I take even small things really seriously.
- _____ When I'm really anxious I sweat, shake, feel lightheaded, or experience other unpleasant body sensations.
- _____ I avoid certain places or things because they make me anxious.
- _____ There are activities or behaviors that I do over and over again.
- _____ My mind races and I have a hard time falling asleep.
- _____ I spend time thinking about things I can't control, or worrying about what might happen in the future.
- _____ I avoid talking with people I don't know.
- _____ I'm afraid I will embarrass or humiliate myself.
- _____ I usually focus on what can go wrong.
- _____ Worrying makes me feel sick.
- _____ I avoid going to dances, parties, or out on dates.
- _____ There is too much pressure to get good grades.
- _____ I get really nervous taking tests or presenting in class.
- _____ I don't like to try new things.
- _____ I use drugs or alcohol to deal with my anxiety.

_____ I am afraid of something specific (for example, dogs, thunderstorms, the dark, riding in an airplane, receiving an injection, being away from my parents or caregivers, etc.).

Describe: _____

_____ Other: _____

_____ Other: _____

_____ Other: _____

Add up your number of checks. How many did you check off? _____

If you checked off more than 10 statements, anxiety is a problem for you.

Are there other thoughts, feelings, behaviors, or physical sensations that you think might be caused by your anxiety? Describe.

What areas of your life have been negatively affected by your anxiety?

What do you do to deal with anxiety? Describe.

Name someone you can talk to about this problem: _____

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Are Your Worries Realistic?

Objective

To understand and accept that events are influenced by the laws of probability rather than your worries.

You Should Know

When you worry, you focus on what you think might happen in the future. You might imagine all the ways the situation could turn out—especially the ways it could turn out badly. Your worries might revolve around situations you can't control, and you might believe that something terrible will happen if you don't act in a certain way. Feeling overwhelmed, you might not realistically examine whether what you fear most is likely to come true. Just because something is possible doesn't mean it's probable. Anxiety can make it difficult to distinguish between what's possible and what's probable.

Consider Ryan, a 16-year-old high school junior. He earns good grades and is involved in lots of activities. He has many friends, and he gets along with his brother and sister. Unfortunately, Ryan spends hours worrying and preparing for the upcoming SAT that is required for college admissions. He worries about doing terribly on the test, disappointing his parents, and failing to get admitted into college. Ryan is losing sleep and struggling to get through the day. The test is three months away.

What if Ryan applied the theory of probability to his worries? Probability is the likelihood that an event will occur. Is it likely that if Ryan prepares for the test he will do poorly? Of course, it's always possible that his fear is warranted, but is it probable? Many teens with anxiety imagine the worst outcome and act accordingly to prevent it. But think about this: if it's possible for the worst outcome to occur, it's equally possible for the best outcome to take place. Ryan's life is negatively impacted by his anxiety over doing well on a test.

What to Do

This worksheet will help your rational mind better understand the concept of probability. Begin by thinking about something you worry about because you think it could have a terrible outcome. Then you will look at nine other possible outcomes. With each outcome, you'll consider the likelihood (probability) that the outcome will happen and why.

First, review the example. Then, in the blank chart, write down the worst outcome you can imagine. Then, write down other possible outcomes. Write down at least nine other possible outcomes, making sure that at least three of the possibilities are positive ones.

Now go back and write in the probability that each outcome will occur and the reasons for your probability estimate. Describe whether the probability is low, medium, or high.

| Possible Outcome | Probability | Reasons/Comments |
|---|-------------|---|
| I will spill a glass of water during my class presentation. | Low | I'll take a sip of water before the presentation and I won't even have a glass of water near where I am presenting. |
| I'll get a standing ovation. | Low | Even if I give a great presentation, the subject is not that exciting! |
| My classmates will be interested in what I say and someone will give me a compliment. | High | This happened to me in the past. |
| I'll have to go to the bathroom in the middle of the presentation. | Low | This has never happened, and I'll use the bathroom before I start. |
| I'll talk too softly, and someone will ask me to speak up. | Medium | This has happened before, but it wasn't too bad. |

Now try this for yourself.

| Possible Outcome | Probability | Reasons/Comments |
|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| | | |
| | | |
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| Possible Outcome | Probability | Reasons/Comments |
|------------------|-------------|------------------|
| | | |
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| | | |

Reflections on This Exercise

What thoughts and feelings came to mind when you did this exercise? Explain in detail.

Thoughts: _____

Feelings: _____

Write down some worries where you can consider the probability of the outcomes.

1. _____

Probability: _____

2. _____

Probability: _____

3. _____

Probability: _____

How realistic are your worries? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Does Your Worrying Hurt You?

Objective

To identify the physical symptoms caused by your excessive worrying.

You Should Know

If you worry too much, you might have physical problems. Common physical symptoms associated with excessive worrying include:

- Restlessness or feeling on edge.
- Easily fatigued.
- Muscle tension.
- Dizziness.
- Headaches.
- Stomach problems, including nausea or diarrhea.
- Shortness of breath.
- Dry mouth.
- Rapid heartbeat.

Your body experiences worry as stress, producing “stress biochemicals,” including cortisol, adrenaline, norepinephrine, and others. When your body is constantly flooded with these biochemicals, you can also experience high blood pressure, decline in immune system functioning, and a variety of other serious illnesses.

Besides the physical problems that excessive worrying can cause, constant worrying can also lead to habits that cause poor health. These habits include alcohol or drug use, overeating, and sleep problems.

Consider Claire. She can’t stop worrying about her family because her parents are divorcing. As a result, she has headaches and stomachaches. Her worries affect her ability to sleep, and she has a hard time waking up on time to get ready for school. She frequently visits the school nurse, who believes that Claire is avoiding class. It hasn’t occurred to Claire (or the school nurse and Claire’s teachers) that she is experiencing physical problems associated with worry-related stress.

What to Do

Do you think your worrying is affecting you physically? This worksheet is designed to help you identify if your worries are causing physical problems.

Note: If you have ongoing physical problems, tell your parents and see your doctor to find out if there is a medical cause that requires treatment.

Begin by entering the physical problems you think are associated with worry and anxiety. Then, note how often they occur: daily, weekly, or monthly. Rate the intensity of your physical problems when you worry, using a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = not at all affected by my worrying, and 10 = always gets worse when I worry. Finally, add any comments regarding how your worrying affects you.

| Physical Problem | Frequency (Daily/Weekly/ Monthly) | Rating (1-10) | Comments |
|------------------|---|------------------|----------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

Brainstorm ways you can take care of your body in order to decrease physical symptoms associated with your worrying.

Sleep (e.g., turning off your phone and going to sleep at the same time each night)

Exercise (e.g., getting involved with an extracurricular activity or taking a walk after school each day)

Nutrition (e.g., cutting down on caffeinated drinks)

Relaxation Exercises (e.g., using an app to meditate for 10 minutes each day)

Are there any other areas in your life where you can make changes? Describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn in this exercise that was helpful?

How Do Your Worries Affect Others?

Objective

To identify how your excessive worrying and anxiety affects the people around you.

You Should Know

For most teens with anxiety, their constant worrying is uncontrolled and they can't see how their anxiety affects the people around them. If you find yourself worrying and anxious all the time, then it's almost certain that your state of mind and your behaviors are affecting people around you.

The following are five common ways that your anxiety can affect your relationships. Note that your anxiety can affect your relationships in different ways at different times.

1. You may be overly dependent. You might seek constant reassurance from the people around you that everything is going to be okay. You might also require the physical presence of certain people in situations that make you anxious.

2. You just want to be alone. Do you avoid certain social situations or people? If you're ashamed of your worrying or fears, you might find it easier to just be alone.

3. You might adopt a restricted lifestyle that also restricts those around you. Do you avoid crowded places or doing things that are unfamiliar? In general, anxious teens seek familiarity and avoid situations where there might be unwanted surprises. This cautious lifestyle affects those around you because they might limit activities to protect you from getting upset.

4. You may turn to alcohol or drugs to calm down. Drugs or alcohol might offer the illusion that you can escape your worries or feel better in the short-term. Obviously, this can present an entirely new set of problems that will affect people around you.

Consider Chris. She worries about staying safe in her neighborhood. She seeks reassurance from her family, and constantly checks to see if the doors and windows are locked. She never leaves her home alone after dark, and she avoids spending too much time outside. She used to enjoy playing basketball at the park with her friends, but she no longer goes to the park because of her fears. Her family becomes annoyed and even angry with her because she constantly asks questions to feel reassured. Chris can't seem to stop herself. Can you relate to Chris?

This worksheet is designed to help you put yourself in other people's shoes and consider how your anxiety is affecting them. Avoid feeling guilty about your behavior; this exercise isn't intended to make you feel more anxious! Instead, you will understand how your worries affect the people around you so you can conquer your worries and fears.

What to Do

Fill in the names of people in your life who are affected by your anxiety, including parents, siblings, friends, teachers, or relatives. Then, go back and think about how your worrying affects each

person and record your thoughts in the second column. In the third column, record what these people said when you asked them how your anxiety affects them. You might see that you're correct about how others are affected, but you could be wrong. It's possible that many people close to you are not that aware of your anxiety. In the last column, record something you can do differently to change your behavior.

| Significant Person/ Relationship | How I Believe My Anxiety Affects That Person | How The Person Said My Anxiety Affects Them | What Can You Do Differently? |
|---|---|--|---|
| | | | |
| | | | |
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Reflections on This Exercise

Name one person in your life who's most affected by your anxiety.

Is that person aware you're trying to overcome anxiety? How is this person helping you?

How do you think life will change for that person if you overcome your anxiety and excessive worrying? Describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Understand Social Anxiety

Objective

To identify and understand the physical, emotional, and mental symptoms of social anxiety.

You Should Know

It's normal to feel nervous in some social situations. For example, going on a date or giving a presentation may cause 'butterflies' in your stomach. But if you have social anxiety (also called social phobia), everyday interactions cause significant anxiety, fear, self-consciousness, and embarrassment because you're afraid of being evaluated or judged by other people. This fear can lead to avoidance that can disrupt your life and affect your daily routine and participation at school or social activities.

Teens with social anxiety experience intense nervousness and self-consciousness in social situations—or sometimes when just thinking about social situations! Often there are accompanying physical symptoms, such as sweating, shaking, upset stomach, or blushing, and these body sensations can intensify anxiety.

If you struggle with social anxiety, you may find that your physical symptoms and fear of humiliation cause you to focus on your own thoughts and feelings rather than on the people around you. You might get caught up in the 'what-ifs' and self-doubt rather than being aware and involved in what is going on around you. To protect yourself from distress, you might withdraw during social interactions or avoid them altogether.

What to Do

Think about a recent social situation that made you anxious. Rate the symptoms you experienced from 1 to 10, where 1 = none, and 10 = very intense.

What was the situation? _____

| | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| _____ Muscle tension | _____ Fear |
| _____ Heart palpitations | _____ Embarrassment |
| _____ Trembling or shaking | _____ Shame |
| _____ Sweating | _____ Nervousness |
| _____ Gasping or shortness of breath | _____ Humiliation |
| _____ Dizziness | _____ Blushing |
| _____ Upset stomach or nausea | _____ Feeling that your mind has gone blank |

_____ Shaky voice

_____ Little-to-no eye contact

_____ Numbness or a feeling of disconnection

_____ Chest or neck tightness

_____ Other symptom: _____

_____ Other symptom: _____

What are the top two symptoms you experienced?

Think about a past situation when you experienced those symptoms. Describe what happened.

Since that happened, do you avoid people or situations that make you anxious? _____

Are you worried that you'll experience those symptoms again? _____

Your symptoms can change over time. They may flare up if you are stressed or have increased pressure or demands. Although avoiding situations that produce anxiety make you feel better in the short-term, your anxiety is likely to continue if you don't find ways to cope.

How do you typically deal with your symptoms? Explain.

Can you think of tools or resources that can help you cope with social anxiety?

Name one person who can support you in dealing with your social anxiety.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

How Distressed Are You in Social Situations?

Objective

To identify social situations that cause you the greatest anxiety and rate them using the SUDS scale.

You Should Know

If you have social anxiety, you probably avoid situations that cause or increase your distress. You might worry that you'll embarrass yourself or experience uncomfortable physical reactions. Sometimes the fear is mild, but at times it might be paralyzing. Maybe you have heard of an approach called "exposure therapy," which means that you actually do (or "expose yourself" to) the people, places, and situations you fear to overcome your anxiety. It might sound scary at first, but there is a clear method you can follow.

The first step is to identify social situations you fear and then rate them on a special scale called the SUDS scale (Subjective Units of Distress). Later in this workbook you will practice exposing yourself to situations that make you anxious.

What to Do

First, list 20 social situations that make you anxious.

1. _____ SUDS Rating _____
2. _____ SUDS Rating _____
3. _____ SUDS Rating _____
4. _____ SUDS Rating _____
5. _____ SUDS Rating _____
6. _____ SUDS Rating _____
7. _____ SUDS Rating _____
8. _____ SUDS Rating _____

9. _____ SUDS Rating _____
10. _____ SUDS Rating _____
11. _____ SUDS Rating _____
12. _____ SUDS Rating _____
13. _____ SUDS Rating _____
14. _____ SUDS Rating _____
15. _____ SUDS Rating _____
16. _____ SUDS Rating _____
17. _____ SUDS Rating _____
18. _____ SUDS Rating _____
19. _____ SUDS Rating _____
20. _____ SUDS Rating _____

Now, review the rating scale that follows and think about each situation. Assign each situation a number. There is no right answer, and it's based on what you feel *today*, not yesterday or tomorrow or some distant time in the future. This scale can help you understand the severity of your social anxiety and also show you that not every situation is off-the-charts terrifying or paralyzing.

SUDS Scale

- 0** No distress, totally relaxed.
- 1** Alert and awake, concentrating well, no real signs of distress.

- 2 Minimal anxiety/distress.
- 3 Mild anxiety/distress, doesn't interfere with functioning.
- 4 Mild to moderate anxiety/distress. You are more aware of your anxiety.
- 5 Moderate anxiety/distress, uncomfortable, but can continue to perform.
- 6 Moderate to strong anxiety/distress. You are aware of your anxiety and how it affects you.
- 7 Quite anxious/distressed, interfering with performance. Physiological signs may be present.
- 8 Very anxious/distressed, can't concentrate. Physiological signs present.
- 9 Extremely anxious/distressed, feeling desperate.
- 10 Highest level of distress/fear/anxiety that you have ever felt.

Reflections on This Exercise

When thinking about the situations that make you anxious, describe one situation you found hard to write about.

Have you confided in anyone else about your difficulties in social situations? _____

Do you hide your anxiety or worry? _____

Write down the names/relationships of trusted adults (including family members, friends, counselors, coaches, teachers, etc.) who can help you with this problem.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Understand and Track Your Panic Attacks

Objective

To understand what triggers your panic attacks and track them to learn how to manage symptoms.

You Should Know

A panic attack is a sudden and sharp rise in anxiety accompanied by physical symptoms such as racing heart, dizziness, numbness, nausea, or shortness of breath. Have you ever had a panic attack? This can be a scary experience, especially since it can occur out of the blue.

You might think: Am I going crazy? Am I going to die? Am I going to faint or have a heart attack? These thoughts can trigger even more anxiety, which often leads to worsened symptoms, so it's important to understand that you're not in any danger; your body is overreacting to feeling very anxious. You're experiencing a "false alarm."

If you experience frequent panic attacks, you might constantly worry that you'll have another panic attack, and the anticipation causes you to become even more anxious. Sometimes this worry becomes so intense that you avoid going places where a panic attack might happen, limiting where you feel comfortable going (e.g., attending school, going to the mall, or using public transportation). The more you understand your panic attacks, the closer you'll be to getting rid of them for good. This worksheet is designed to help you understand panic attacks and what triggers your symptoms.

Consider Nicole. Recently she experienced a panic attack when she was walking through a crowded mall. Her chest became tight, she felt dizzy, and she began sweating. She thought she was going to faint. She believed she had to escape the crowd or she would die. Now she is fearful of returning to the mall because she's worried it will happen again.

What to Do

Below is a list of common symptoms of panic attacks. Rate the severity of each symptom from 1 to 10, where 1 = I do not have this symptom at all, and 10 = I have this symptom frequently.

_____ Palpitations, pounding heart, or accelerated heart rate.

_____ Sweating.

_____ Trembling or shaking.

_____ Sensations of shortness of breath or feeling smothered.

_____ Feelings of choking.

_____ Chest pain or discomfort.

_____ Nausea or abdominal pain.

- _____ Feeling dizzy, unsteady, light-headed, or faint.
- _____ Chills or heat sensations.
- _____ Numbness or tingling sensations.
- _____ Feelings of unreality or that you're going crazy.
- _____ Feeling detached from yourself (this is called *depersonalization*).
- _____ Fear of losing control.
- _____ Fear of having a heart attack or dying.
- _____ Sense of danger or impending doom.

Next, check off the following questions that apply to you.

- _____ Do you experience a fear of places or situations where getting help or escaping might be difficult, such as in a crowd or on a bridge?
- _____ Do you feel unable to travel without a friend or family member?
- _____ For at least one month following an attack, have you felt persistent concern about having another one?
- _____ For at least one month following an attack, have you worried about having a heart attack or "going crazy?"
- _____ For at least one month following an attack, have you changed your behavior to avoid another panic attack?
- _____ Have you had other problems, such as changes in sleeping or eating habits?
- _____ Do you feel sad or depressed more days than not?
- _____ Do you feel disinterested in life more days than not?
- _____ Do you feel worthless or guilty more days than not?
- _____ During the last year, have you used alcohol or drugs to deal with your anxiety?

How often do your panic attacks occur? _____

How long do the panic attacks usually last? _____

Describe the most distressing symptoms you experience.

Describe your typical panic attack, including your thoughts, physical sensations, and feelings.

Describe what usually helps your panic attacks go away.

How do panic attacks affect your life? Explain.

How will your life change when you no longer have panic attacks?

Do you have any medical conditions? If yes, describe. Are you on any medications? List vitamins, supplements, and any substances you use for fun.

Use this chart to track your panic attacks for one month. Rate the severity of your panic attacks from 1 to 10, where 1 = I wasn't really bothered, and 10 = severe anxiety; I thought I was going to die.

| Date | Trigger | Symptoms You Experienced | What Triggered the Attack? | Severity (1-10) | What Did You Do to Cope? |
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Reflections on this Exercise

What was the hardest part about doing this exercise?

What can you do to cope with and manage your panic attacks?

Who can help you with this problem? _____

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Are You Oversensitive to Criticism?

Objective

To identify situations where you are oversensitive to criticism and develop strategies for changing this pattern.

You Should Know

Do you let your fear of criticism dominate your life? Sometimes your fear of criticism can keep you from trying new things, taking risks, and getting close to others. It's painful to be oversensitive to criticism, and it's often based on an internalized negative self-view. Perhaps you were shamed or overly criticized when you were very young, and you still view yourself as "small" in relation to other people. For instance, if you get feedback about a class presentation, do you tend to hear only the negative parts and tune out the positive feedback? Do you shut down or lash out when your parent offers constructive suggestions?

If you're aware that you tend to magnify what might be a mildly negative appraisal of you into a huge personal attack, that's a good thing. Awareness is the first step toward change! In life it probably isn't possible to avoid criticism, but you can learn to react and respond in healthier ways. This worksheet will help you reflect on situations that trigger oversensitivity and learn skills to help you cope.

What to Do

On the lines below, write down five situations when you reacted to criticism. Who was involved? Describe the situation and what happened (anger, low self-esteem, irritability, avoidance, etc.). Then, circle the number of each situation where you might have reacted in an oversensitive way.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Constructive criticism offers you the opportunity to improve in different areas of your life—at home, school, and in your community. When you hear criticism, repeat this statement three times aloud: “Criticism can help me in life.” How does that feel? Could it change the way you react?

Learning how to lower your reactivity to criticism can take time. Be kind and patient with yourself as you think about and practice the following strategies:

- Listen to what someone is saying with an open mind and try to understand the person’s perspective.
- Notice your automatic negative, critical reactions and stop them.
- Repeat to yourself: “I seek improvement, not approval.”
- Be assertive—if you’ve been wrongly criticized, step back, take a breath, and say so.
- Be proactive—if you’ve made a mistake, approach the person and apologize. If appropriate, ask what you could have done differently.
- Forgive yourself. Repeat phrases such as, “I did the best I could,” “I’m going to make mistakes sometimes. Everyone does,” “I’m not a bad person for making a mistake.”
- Let it go—stop obsessing or worrying about what happened.
- Practice self-compassion by changing your inner talk to match what you would say to a loved one or friend.

- See the value in another’s criticism. What can you learn from this experience? Ask for clarity, if required.
- Try not to become defensive or offer a “counter critique.” Step away and rethink your response.
- If you’re upset, ask to postpone the conversation.
- Take deep breaths, or find other ways to calm yourself.
- Thank the person offering feedback—even if it was not helpful or constructive!

If these strategies don’t work for you, and you continue to suffer from oversensitivity to criticism, consider talking with a trusted adult or working with a counselor to better understand and overcome this pattern.

Reflections on This Exercise

Which three of the above strategies are you willing to try in the coming week? List them here.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Write down three things you can say to yourself next time you notice you’re reacting to criticism.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Pick one situation from your list above. Describe how you would like to deal with that type of situation in the future.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

Are You Afraid to Be Away from Your Parents or Caregivers?

Objective

To decrease your anxiety about being away from parents or caregivers.

You Should Know

As you grow older and more independent, you are likely doing more and more things apart from your parents or caregivers. You might feel excitement, even if it makes you nervous. When you think about being apart from your parents or caregivers, you might feel anxious to the point of not wanting to leave home at all. You might even experience physical symptoms, such as headaches, nausea, dizziness, stomachaches, sleep problems, or other discomfort.

You might try to hide your worry or ignore it because you think some people might say, “You’re too old for that,” or “What’s the big deal? Don’t be a baby.” This only makes matters worse because pushing away your true feelings doesn’t work. Do you find yourself in a cycle of worry when it comes to being apart from your parents or caregivers? If so, there’s good news. You can learn skills and strategies for managing separation anxiety.

One skill you can use is called mindfulness. Mindfulness can help you disengage from your worries and fears that something bad will happen if you’re away from your parents or caregivers. But first, let’s get a better picture of what is happening to you now.

What to Do

Circle any of the symptoms below you have experienced when you were apart from your parents or caregivers, such as going to school or camp, or staying home while they were out.

- stomachache
- dizziness
- racing heart
- shallow breathing
- headache
- heart palpitations
- shortness of breath
- panic attack
- pain in any part of your body
- inability to sleep

What one symptom is most distressing for you? _____

What situations typically trigger these physical symptoms? How long do they last? What helps you deal with the symptoms, if anything? Explain.

Describe how you try to avoid situations where you're apart from your parents or caregivers.

What things would you like to be doing that you're currently avoiding because of your anxiety?

Name your fears and worries related to being apart from your parents or caregivers.

Mindfulness refers to noticing what's happening in the present moment, without judgment and with acceptance. One aspect of mindfulness is the awareness that your fears and worries are just thoughts—thoughts that intrude on your day and can control your life! But guess what? You can learn to manage your thoughts. Rather than running away from them, trying to suppress them, or feeling ashamed or guilty for even having them, you can practice paying attention to them and accepting them.

These five steps help you accept intrusive thoughts:

1. Label your intrusive thoughts as “just thoughts.” Remind yourself they have no power over you.
2. Tell yourself these thoughts are just your brain going on “automatic,” and you can safely ignore them.
3. Accept and allow the thoughts into your mind. Don’t try to push them away.
4. Take long, slow, deep breaths from your belly until your anxiety starts to decrease.
5. Continue whatever you were doing prior to the intrusive thought.

This may seem strange, but the next thing you need to do is to *practice* having upsetting thoughts. Forcing yourself to have the upsetting thoughts you’ve been avoiding is the only way you can learn to accept them. When you learn to accept your upsetting thoughts rather than fight them, they will soon stop being a big part of your life.

On the following chart, use the five steps described above. First, record the situations that regularly trigger your upsetting thoughts, then record your most common thoughts. Next, rate the distress you experience while having these thoughts on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = they don’t really bother me, and 10 = I can’t stand them and I’m really upset. Then, practice the five-step acceptance procedure. It might take 15 to 20 minutes. Enter Y if you were able to complete the procedure or N if you were not. Finally, rate your distress again from 1 to 10.

Do this every day for at least two weeks, and see if your upsetting thoughts are still playing a big part in your life.

| Trigger Situation | Common Intrusive Thoughts | Level of Distress (1-10) | 5-Step Procedure (Y/N) | Level of Distress (1-10) |
|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
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As you practice managing your fears and worries, you might also try “trial separations” where you purposely and gradually spend more and more time away from your parents and caregivers. You can get help from trusted adults in coping with the anxiety that you might experience until you get used to it and realize that nothing bad actually happens.

Reflections on This Exercise

What was it like to fill out the chart?

What is the main situation that caused you the most anxiety?

Keep track of that situation closely, and practice your mindfulness skills for another several weeks. Then, record the results.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Are You Really Sick?

Objective

To identify if your physical symptoms are related to anxiety and stress.

You Should Know

Getting sick is common for teens, from strep throat to the flu. Usually a trip to the doctor, some antibiotics, and a few days in bed is enough to feel better. But if you worry about each ache and pain and wonder if it's a serious illness, you may have something called health anxiety. For example, you may have a headache and worry that it's a brain tumor, or you may have a stomachache and wonder if it's appendicitis.

It's much more likely that physical symptoms aren't a life-threatening illness, but are just normal body sensations. Ironically, the stress and worry you feel about your health can make your symptoms increase and worsen. This constant worry can also contribute to trouble sleeping, loss of appetite, and difficulty concentrating at school.

Here are signs of health anxiety. Put a check next to any that describe you.

- ☐ I worry that any physical discomfort I have is a sign of a serious illness.
- ☐ I'm always checking myself for any sign of illness.
- ☐ I often ask my parent to take me the doctor.
- ☐ I frequently ask my parent to take my temperature.
- ☐ I think about and talk about my health constantly.
- ☐ I often find lumps that no one else can feel.
- ☐ I frequently visit the school nurse.
- ☐ When I'm at school, I spend a lot of time in the bathroom because I feel sick.
- ☐ I'm afraid to be around people who are sick.

Describe any other experiences you have that might be a sign of health anxiety.

Sometimes teens develop physical symptoms because they are anxious or worried. A teen who is stressed out about a class presentation may develop stomach issues, including nausea and diarrhea. A teen who has been bullied at school may be worried about getting beat up between classes and may develop headaches that cause him or her to miss school for several days. These are real physical symptoms that develop from excess worry and anxiety.

Have you ever been so worried about something that it made you physically ill? Describe.

What to Do

Your thoughts and worries about illness are just thoughts. They aren't a sign that something is actually wrong with you. However, if your worrying actually causes your illness, or your health anxiety gets in the way of your schoolwork, activities, and enjoyment of life, you should ask for help.

Other suggestions:

- Avoid doing online searches based on your symptoms. The Internet will always come up with several scary "diagnoses."
- Find activities you enjoy that can distract you from thinking about your symptoms.
- Try stress management and relaxation techniques.

Using the following chart, track your health worries to determine when they are happening. First, describe your symptoms and note when they occur. Explain what you think might be wrong with you, and then rank how likely a diagnosis is to happen on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = not likely to happen, and 10 = definitely will happen. Finally, come up with other explanations for your symptoms.

| What Are Your Symptoms and When Do They Occur? | What Do You Think Is Wrong with You? | Is a Diagnosis Likely? (1-10) | What Could Be Another Cause of Your Symptom(s)? |
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Reflections on This Exercise

Did you notice any patterns in the experience of your symptoms? Describe.

Are there any other activities you can try to decrease your anxiety about your health?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

How Do Avoidance Behaviors Impact Your Life?

Objective

To stop avoiding the places, people, and objects you fear by identifying your avoidance behaviors.

You Should Know

Do you avoid going to the mall because you worry you'll catch the flu? Do you insist that your friends drive because you worry you'll get into an accident or hit an animal or person? Do you refuse to take the bus, or are you afraid to fly in an airplane? Have your fears added something wonderful or taken something intangible away from your life?

You might not recognize these behaviors as compulsive, but they are. Compulsions take on various forms and are defined as any act that's performed as a result of an irresistible urge to behave in a certain way, especially when it's against your conscious wishes. Compulsions are usually thought of as obvious acts, such as needing to check locks or excessively washing your hands. But avoidance is also a type of compulsive behavior—yet you might believe that avoiding places, objects, and people keep you safe.

Over time you'll find that your sense of fear will increase because you never give yourself the opportunity to see if you can deal with uncomfortable situations, or learn whether your conclusions about what's safe (or not) are accurate.

What to Do

Review the examples provided and add other things you avoid.

Places: public restrooms, malls, schools, public parks, hospitals, airports, train stations, swimming pools, meeting places, any crowded area.

Other: _____

People and animals: dogs, cats, birds, spiders, insects, relatives, children or babies, classmates, teachers, doctors, dentists, people who are or who have been sick.

Other: _____

Objects: various colors, cars, pencils, pens, shoes, diapers, dirty clothes, numbers or letters, specific images, paper, garbage.

Other: _____

Situations: driving or riding in a car, riding in a bus or train, flying on an airplane, being physically close to sick people, being in a crowd, coming in close contact with certain numbers or colors that you consider unlucky, being around certain animals or insects, going places by yourself.

Other: _____

For the next two weeks, use the chart to identify places, people, animals, objects, and situations you avoid because they make you anxious. Rate your anxiety level on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 = low anxiety, and 10 = most extreme anxiety you've experienced.

| Date | What Did You Avoid? | Anxiety Level (1-10) | Describe Your Thoughts, Feelings, and Physical Symptoms |
|------|---------------------|-------------------------|--|
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What did you avoid the most?

In what ways is your life worse or better when you engage in avoidance behaviors?

What did your life look like before you started avoiding things?

What will your life look like if you stop avoiding things?

Who or what can help you stop this behavior?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Are You Too Rigid About Routines and Schedules?

Objective

To identify your rigid habits, patterns, routines, and schedules and explore strategies for less rigidity and more spontaneity in your life.

You Should Know

Routines, schedules, and daily plans are a great way for you to meet your obligations, fulfill your responsibilities, and pave the way for success and creativity. Following certain patterns of behavior over and over again can contribute to establishing a healthy lifestyle for a lifetime. For instance, if you never miss your 6:00 a.m. workout before school, you're performing a routine that contributes to your health and happiness.

But if you feel you must stick to your routines and schedules such that you experience anxiety or distress at the thought of interrupting or changing them, this can be a problem. You might be trying to control emotionally-challenging situations that make you anxious or upset.

In this worksheet, you'll explore what your routines and habits are, as well as their consequences, and review some strategies for making changes.

What to Do

Describe your regular routines you feel you *must* follow, or it will cause problems for you. Write whatever comes to mind, no matter how minor or insignificant it might seem; for instance, brushing your teeth at a certain time, organizing your clothes or other items in a certain way, and so on.

Now list five routines from the above list that you feel are especially important—ones that you would not want to change or be asked to change *no matter what*:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

What are the positive gains of your rigid adherence to those routines?

What are the negative consequences of your rigid adherence to those routines?

What do you feel might happen if you interrupt the routines you listed? Be specific.

Here are some things you can try:

- If routines and habits are an attempt to manage your distress, such as anxiety or fear, learn deep breathing or relaxation exercises to help you calm your body and mind.
- Tell yourself that nothing bad will happen if you break a routine, and you can let go, slowly, over time, of the need to be so rigid. Make a plan to limit your repetitive or habitual behaviors (e.g., cut back the time spent doing the behavior 5-10 minutes at a time).
- Adjust anything in the environment, such as intrusive lighting or sounds, which might trigger repetitive behaviors.
- Write in a journal about what feelings come up if you cut back on your routines or habits.
- Set up a reward system for achieving small goals of changing your routines.
- Explore alternatives—join a group or start a fun activity. This could be a finding a hobby, engaging in a sport, or joining an art class, hiking group, rowing club, and so on. Push yourself out of your comfort zone, within reason. The more you experience a positive outcome to breaking routine, the more flexible you'll be.
- Practice meditation to manage your emotions.

Reflections on This Exercise

What is the first step you'd like to take to eliminate your need for rigid routines?

What might get in the way of taking action right now? Be specific.

What activities and interests can you pursue to shift your focus away from any obsessive or repetitive behaviors or patterns that are bothering you or interfering with your life?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do to make additional progress in this area?

Does Your Anxiety Make You Depressed?

Objective

To identify if your anxiety is contributing to the development of depressive symptoms.

You Should Know

If you have anxiety, you might also have symptoms of depression. These two problems are very different, but they share some symptoms. Both depression and anxiety often cause teens to be nervous or irritable. They might also have difficulty focusing or trouble sleeping.

Sometimes it's hard to determine which problem came first. Being depressed can make you anxious, and being anxious can make you depressed. However, depression includes a different set of symptoms that should be addressed.

Here are the signs and symptoms of teen depression. Check off any that apply to you.

- ☐ Sadness or hopelessness.
- ☐ Irritability, anger, or hostility.
- ☐ Grumpy, easily frustrated, or prone to outbursts.
- ☐ Tearfulness or frequent crying.
- ☐ Withdrawal from friends and family.
- ☐ Loss of interest in activities.
- ☐ Inability to have fun or experience pleasure.
- ☐ Poor school performance.
- ☐ Changes in eating or sleeping habits.
- ☐ Restlessness and agitation.
- ☐ Feelings of worthlessness or guilt.
- ☐ Extremely vulnerable to criticism, rejection, and failure.
- ☐ Lack of enthusiasm and motivation.
- ☐ Fatigue or low energy.
- ☐ Lack of focus or difficulty concentrating.
- ☐ Extreme indecisiveness.

____ Unexplained aches and pains.

____ Thoughts of death or suicide.

How many did you check off? ____

If you checked off five or more symptoms, you probably have co-occurring depression.

What to Do

This worksheet will address one of the most common problems associated with depression: the inability to engage in fun or pleasurable activities. Planning your day so it includes fun activities can help motivate you to spend more time doing things that will lift your mood.

What is an activity that always makes you smile? _____

What is an activity that always relaxes you? _____

What is an activity that you do with friends? _____

What is an activity that stimulates your thinking? _____

What is an activity that makes you proud of yourself? _____

What is an activity that brings back wonderful memories? _____

What is an activity that that you always enjoy? _____

What are other activities that give your life meaning and purpose? _____

On the following chart, schedule at least two activities each day you know you can complete and that require relatively little effort. After the activity, rate your mood from 1 to 10, where 1 = sad and hopeless, to 10 = happy with my life. Add comments about each activity, including any thoughts, feelings, or increase in symptoms you experience. Complete the chart every day for at least two weeks.

| Date | Activity #1 | Rating | Activity #2 | Rating | Comments |
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Reflections on This Exercise

What did you find most challenging about this activity?

What activities brought you the most happiness? Describe your experiences.

Did you experience an increase in anxiety during the activities? Explain.

Who and what are some people, resources, or tools that can help you plan fun activities?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 2. How Anxiety Affects Your Social and Academic Life—And What to Do About it!

Identify Social Situations That Make You Anxious

Objective

To identify the social situations that are most likely to make you anxious and rate them according to how much anxiety you feel in each situation.

You Should Know

If you have social anxiety, you might avoid all situations that make you uncomfortable. You might also limit social interactions to ones that are either very familiar or unavoidable. When a social situation is unavoidable, you may develop other symptoms from constant worrying to physical symptoms to panic attacks.

Remember, all social situations are not the same and, when you think about it, certain situations probably bother you more than others. This worksheet is designed to help you see that some social situations do not cause you as much discomfort as others.

Consider Joe. Joe avoids going to parties because he doesn't like crowds, and he's uncomfortable when his friends are drinking and partying. Last year he had a panic attack at a party, and he hasn't attended one since that scary night. Even though Joe's friends pressure him to attend parties, he's just too uncomfortable and always says no. He feels like he's missing out, and he misses socializing with his friends.

What to Do

Think about all the social situations that make you anxious and write them down. Now, imagine yourself in the situation, rating the intensity of the anxiety each situation causes you. Use a scale from 1 to 100, where 1 = no anxiety, and 100 = overwhelming anxiety. In the last column, describe how you can cope with this situation.

| Situation | Intensity (1-100) | How Can You Cope with This Situation? |
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Reflections on This Exercise

Describe the social situations that cause you the most anxiety.

Which social situations cause you the least anxiety? Explain.

What are some of the ways you cope with feeling anxious?

Describe the situations you avoid entirely.

How is your life affected when you avoid these situations?

Now that you understand that different social situations cause you different levels of anxiety, what can you do to manage your anxiety in situations that cause you to feel the most anxious?

Select one social situation that causes you low levels of anxiety.

What will it be? _____

Now, schedule this activity within the upcoming week (date/time): _____

After completing this exercise, describe what happened. How did you feel before and after doing this activity? Explain.

What did you do to cope with anxiety while completing this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Identify Your Worst Fears About Social Situations

Objective

To identify your fears about the worst things that could happen to you in social situations.

You Should Know

You might not fully understand what causes you to avoid social situations. Sometimes you automatically become anxious before certain situations occur, such as attending parties, going on a date, presenting in class, or even being asked for your opinion. Before the situation or activity, you might plot your escape route, imagine excuses for not showing up, or spin a web of catastrophic thoughts about all the bad things that might happen. This reaction is called anticipatory anxiety.

Most teens have some degree of nervousness in anticipation of certain situations, but for teens with social anxiety, the anticipation itself can become crippling and interfere with getting through each day.

It's important to recognize that as scary as these thoughts are, they are just thoughts. Nothing bad is actually happening in the moment. If you have social anxiety, the worry and fear are so ingrained that the anxious thoughts are like a reflex. Sometimes physical responses kick in, too. You might notice your heart beating faster. You might start sweating or feel like you can't breathe. The "what-if" thoughts start churning about all the things that could go wrong, causing you to feel sick to your stomach. Does this sound like you?

The great news is if you identify your thoughts and fears in advance of social situations, you can slowly gain confidence and discover that your worst fears won't actually come true!

What to Do

In this worksheet, you'll clarify your worst fears about social situations. Before you do this exercise, be sure you are in a place where you feel safe and where you're unlikely to be interrupted. Let your imagination run wild while knowing nothing bad is happening in the present moment. If you experience some anxiety, that's normal. Just take some breaths and keep going.

Close your eyes and imagine yourself in the situations listed on the next page. Really put yourself in the situation in your mind as much as you are able. Then, write down your worst fears in words, phrases, or sentences. You could also draw an image of the fear. For example, in the first scenario, someone might write: "If my teacher asks for my opinion, my worst fear is that I'll start blushing and stammering; then, I'll feel like I can't breathe and I won't be able to talk at all. I'll start to panic and have to leave the room to throw up in the bathroom, if I even make it that far. Then, I'll never be able to look anyone in the eye again, and eventually they'll know what a basket case I am."

You're in class and your teacher unexpectedly asks you to share your opinion about the subject under discussion.

You're invited to attend a surprise party for a friend, but you find out most of the people there are strangers.

You're surprised by family and friends for your birthday, and suddenly you're the center of attention.

You're asked to go out to eat with a friend, as well as some people you don't know.

In class, everyone is asked to take turns reading aloud.

Your best friend sets you up on a blind date with someone you think you might like.

You're out with friends and need to use a public restroom.

You play on a sports team that's about to compete for the championship.

You have to take an important test.

Describe a situation of your own that causes you anticipatory anxiety. What are your worst fears?

What is a situation you currently avoid because it makes you so uncomfortable?

What's the worst thing you imagine will happen in this situation?

What's the best thing that could happen in this situation?

What's the most likely thing that will happen in this situation?

Reflection on this Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Are You Avoiding School?

Objective

To understand the reasons behind your school avoidance and identify strategies for coping with your feelings.

You Should Know

Some teens struggle to get to school on a regular basis. Does that describe you? Perhaps you're shy, anxious, or depressed. Maybe you feel "different," or you're upset about something that happened at school. Perhaps you've been bullied or criticized but you haven't told anyone. Maybe there are problems at home, such as divorce, illness, trauma, or arguing that make it difficult to leave home to go to school. Perhaps you're feeling excluded by, or competitive with, other kids. There could be many reasons why you avoid going to school.

If you avoid going to school, you probably aren't trying to "get out of doing something." Instead, you're probably trying to cope with overwhelming emotions that make you want to retreat and avoid dealing with them. That's understandable, but it can cause negative consequences in your life, such as school failure, loss of self-esteem, and ongoing anxiety or depression.

Rather than avoiding the worries and fears that arise when you face the need to go to school, it's important for you to face your worries in a planned, safe way.

What to Do

Answer the following questions as honestly as you can.

How often do you miss school? _____

What are the main reasons you miss school? Reasons might include illness, family problems, depression, anxiety, bullying, shyness, relationship problems, peer teasing, teacher criticism, and so on.

Are there any particular people you are trying to avoid? Name them and explain why.

What are the positive effects of avoiding your peers and/or teachers at school? For example, you might say you feel safer, you avoid conflict, you feel less depressed, etc.

What are the negative consequences of avoiding your peers and/or teachers at school? For example, your grades are poor, your parents are upset, or you feel lonely or “stupid.”

Here are some strategies for dealing with skipping school to avoid teachers or peers:

- Practice mindfulness. When you’re mindful, you notice what’s happening right here and now without judgment and with acceptance. You can learn not to worry so much about things that have happened in the past or things that have not yet happened. You can learn to accept your feelings rather than try to run away from them. Be kind and compassionate to yourself.
- Learn relaxation and meditation techniques. Calming yourself when you’re upset or anxious is a skill that you can use for the rest of your life. Check out apps such as www.insighttimer.com, www.headspace.com, or www.happify.com, or find ones online that work for you.
- Understand your thoughts and worries are just that—ideas in your head that might not actually be true.
- Try “exposure therapy” by gradually facing the thing that you’re avoiding with support from someone safe. You might go to school *while* you’re anxious and even experience an increase in anxiety while you’re there, but it doesn’t need to be a catastrophe. You can practice deep breathing. Tell yourself reassuring statements, like “I can do this!” “Nothing bad is happening,” “I’m going to be OK,” and so on. Take it one step at a time.

- Set up a reward system with your family. For instance, you earn a privilege or small gift if you go to school. This can be motivating, but you should also continue working on your fears.

Reflections on This Exercise

What are the first steps you'll take to address your school avoidance?

What obstacles might get in the way of addressing this problem?

Name one or two people you trust who can help you work on this problem.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

How to Handle School Pressure

Objective

To increase coping strategies to lessen the pressure to do well in school.

You Should Know

Even for the most organized, motivated, and rested student, school pressure can sometimes pile up so much that it can be overwhelming. You might be juggling extracurricular activities along with a part-time job, as well as trying to keep up with your schoolwork and social and family life. You might be pressuring yourself, or you might have parents who push you hard. You might be dealing with teachers with high expectations, or you might be experiencing a combination of all of these!

Stress is not a bad thing because it can motivate you to act, but too much can result in negative consequences, such as headaches, anxiety, depression, insomnia, substance abuse, or eating disorders. When you become overwhelmed, it can be hard to focus or set priorities, and then you might fall behind on your tasks and responsibilities.

It's never too late to figure out how to handle academic pressure and stress. If you learn strategies now, they can serve you throughout college or your post-high school life and into your adult working life, too.

What to Do

In this worksheet, you will look at the things causing stress in your life and then review strategies for lowering your school-related stress. Answer the following questions to the best of your ability.

What are the *main* sources of school pressure or stress that you feel right now? Be sure to identify specific *internal sources* (desire to achieve and excel, perfectionism, fear of failure) as well as *external sources* (pressure from parents, teachers, coaches, and so on).

What are two other sources of school pressure that you're experiencing right now?

What negative effects are you experiencing related to school pressure or stress?

Physical:

Emotional/Psychological:

Social:

Family:

Financial:

Other:

How are you dealing with those negative effects?

Here are some ideas for how to manage school pressure and related stress:

- Listen to your thoughts, but don't let them take control. They are just thoughts, and they don't need to determine your actions all the time.
- Lower your own high expectations or demands to be perfect. Unattainable goals can lead to burnout and disappointment. Sometimes it's OK to aim for "good enough."
- If your parents or caretakers are particularly demanding, find a quiet time to talk openly with them about how stress is affecting you. If you need help, talk to a sibling, teacher, or guidance counselor.
- Make a to-do list and mark which items are high, medium, or low priority. Focus on the high-priority items first.
- Organize your workspace, whether you work at a table, desk, or on your bed. Clear away the clutter so you can focus on your work. Keep the supplies you need handy.
- Review your schedule and consider cutting out unimportant activities or obligations.
- Tackle tasks one step at a time; avoid "fast-forwarding" or obsessing about all the things you *haven't* done yet.
- Take care of yourself! Eat healthy meals, exercise, take breaks, and learn to meditate or practice yoga.
- Limit your caffeine use; too much coffee, caffeinated sodas, or energy drinks can cause irritation and agitation.
- Do something relaxing.
- Schedule fun activities unrelated to schoolwork or grades.
- Get enough sleep! The brain is still developing during adolescence, and your body is going through hormonal changes. Sleep deprivation is a key cause of burnout and stress among high school students.
- Take breaks from your devices. Yes, this is a hard one, but constant exposure to media of all kinds affects the nervous system. You might install a "block" or "break" app to remove distractions. Set a curfew for texting or other electronic activities every night. Ask for help. Find a buddy to do this with to make it a lot easier.

Reflections on This Exercise

What is the first step you're willing to take to deal with school pressure?

Name two activities you're willing to try in the next week to help you manage your school stress.

1.

2.

Who are two or three people you feel comfortable talking to about your school pressure?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

Do You Worry About Your Grades?

Objective

To identify when you are worrying excessively about your grades and learn a technique to decrease your worrying.

You Should Know

Some students find they are so anxious about their grades they have trouble sleeping, eating, and concentrating. Some students worry so much they start to experience physical problems like stomachaches or headaches. Some students start using alcohol and drugs to cope with the stress.

A little worrying is perfectly normal, but excessive worrying about grades can cause lots of other problems, and your worrying doesn't help. You might even find yourself spending so much time worrying about grades that it keeps you from studying, and obviously that's not what you want.

This worksheet will help you identify whether you're worrying so much about your grades that your worrying and anxiety has become a problem. You will also learn a technique to deal with constant worries that cause distress.

Note: Some people have a tendency to worry more than others, but you don't have to let your worries run your life. If you worry about a lot of things, not just grades, make sure that your parents, teachers, or counselor knows this is a problem for you.

What to Do

You'll know that you're worrying too much about grades when you have constant worries and you can't let them go. We call these worries "intrusive thoughts" because they intrude on your normal activities, just like a pesky gnat might bother you.

The five steps below can help you deal with excessive and intrusive worries about your grades. *The general idea is not to fight these worries and try to get rid of them, but rather just accept them for what they are.* When you learn to accept your worries rather than resist them, you will find they become less important in your life.

1. Label your worries as "just thoughts." You can be aware of your worries about grades, but understand they are just thoughts you're having. You don't have to respond to them. What does this mean? Imagine that you're looking at Instagram and you notice an image of a terrible storm. You could stop what you're doing and start thinking about this storm. You could imagine yourself in the storm, thinking about getting wet and blown around. You could imagine the storm blowing down trees, even tearing apart your home—or worse. But you probably wouldn't do this. You would just scroll on to another image. After all, the image is just an image. It has no power. *And your thoughts about grades have no power over you either. Your worries are just thoughts.*
2. Tell yourself these thoughts are just your brain on "automatic," and you can ignore them.
3. Accept and allow the thoughts into your mind. Don't try to push them away.

4. Breathe from your belly until your anxiety starts to decrease.
5. Continue whatever you were doing prior to your worries.

Use the chart below to track how successful you are at using the 5-step technique. Enter the date. Rate the severity of your worrying from 1 to 10, with 1 = not much at all, and 10 = I can't think of anything else but my grades. Indicate whether you used the 5-step technique with Y (yes) or N (no). List how many minutes and seconds it took you resume what you were doing after your worrying started. If you used the 5-step technique, rate how much you felt in control, from 1 = I felt in complete control of my worries, to 10 = my worries totally controlled me.

| Date | Worrying Severity (1 to 10) | Used the 5-Step Technique? Y/N | Time to Resume Activity (M:S) | How Did You Stop Your Intrusive Worrying? (Which Steps?) | Feelings of Control (1 to 10) |
|------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|-------------------------------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

How did this exercise help you with your worry about grades? Describe.

What else has helped?

What is your next step in managing your worries?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What was the most surprising thing you learned from completing this exercise?

Feel Less Anxious When Taking Tests

Objective

To use breathing techniques to feel less anxious when taking tests.

You Should Know

Taking tests can be stressful, even when you've studied and prepared. Many students worry about how they will do on an exam, no matter how confident they are or how much they've studied. But sometimes normal worry can turn into something called test anxiety, which can make it impossible to concentrate and remember information. Below are some of the symptoms. Have you experienced any of them?

- Physical symptoms including headache, fast heartbeat, shortness of breath, and nausea.
- Feeling overwhelmed and forgetting everything you studied.
- Negative thoughts, such as believing you will fail the exam.
- Second-guessing yourself as you answer questions or changing your answers repeatedly.

What happens when you take a test? Describe your thoughts, feelings, and body sensations.

Are there other anxious symptoms you have experienced before or during a test?

What to Do

There are things you can do to reduce your anxiety before a test, such as exercising to burn off excess energy, getting a good a night's sleep the night before, and, of course, being well-prepared for the test by studying and practicing.

During the exam itself, a breathing exercise can help. Follow these steps:

1. Breathe in through your nose as you count to 4.
2. Exhale through your mouth as you count to 8.
3. Repeat a positive statement to yourself, such as: "I can do this. I am prepared."
4. Visualize yourself finishing the test, feeling confident that you have done a good job.

5. Return your attention to the test.
6. Repeat this exercise again, if necessary.

Practice this breathing technique five or six times before a test, while studying, or while doing your homework. Then, use the technique when you actually take a test. Use the chart below to write down changes that you notice while doing the breathing exercise.

| Date of Test | Type of Test | How I Felt Before the Breathing Exercise | How I Felt During the Exercise | How I Felt After the Exercise |
|---------------------|---------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

Did you find that your test anxiety decreased over time? Explain how the breathing technique affected your anxiety when taking tests.

What other activities do you find helpful for relieving stress before taking tests?

Describe other situations when you feel anxious and the breathing exercise might help.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Are You Anxious About Being the Center of Attention?

Objective

To manage your anxiety related to being the center of attention.

You Should Know

If you have social anxiety, you might be afraid of being the center of attention. The thought of presenting in front of your classmates can be paralyzing, but other situations where you might be the center of attention, even “positive” ones, probably cause anxiety as well. You might feel anxious when winning an award, being praised at school, or performing on stage.

Teens with social anxiety worry that others are judging, criticizing, or otherwise scrutinizing their every move or utterance—as if they’re under a microscope. This may cause both physical symptoms such as shaking, sweating, blushing, or a tremulous voice, as well as anxious, self-critical thoughts and efforts to avoid or escape such situations. The roots of this type of anxiety can stem from early childhood; perhaps you have critical parents, or maybe you had a bad or humiliating experience when you were younger that has always stuck with you.

What would it be like to relax and enjoy these experiences? Hard to imagine? Well, it can be done.

One strategy to overcome your fear of being the center of attention is called “exposure therapy,” which means that you actually “expose yourself” to the people, places, and situations you fear in order to overcome your anxiety. It might sound scary at first, but there is a clear method you can follow that’s been proven successful by experts.

The first step is to identify the aspects of being the center of attention you fear, and then rate them on a special scale called the SUDS (Subjective Units of Distress) scale.

What to Do

Here are some typical fears and symptoms that you might experience when you find yourself the center of attention:

- Shaking or trembling.
- Change in blood pressure.
- Dry mouth.
- Sweating.
- Rapid heartbeat.
- Dizziness or fainting.
- Nausea, gagging, or vomiting.
- Fear about being judged or criticized.
- Worry about your appearance.
- Worry about others criticizing how you stand, walk, or present yourself publicly.

Now, list at least ten situations that cause you anxiety when you are the center of attention. Afterward, you will rate the items. There is no right answer—write down whatever comes to mind.

1. _____ SUDS Rating _____
2. _____ SUDS Rating _____
3. _____ SUDS Rating _____
4. _____ SUDS Rating _____
5. _____ SUDS Rating _____
6. _____ SUDS Rating _____
7. _____ SUDS Rating _____
8. _____ SUDS Rating _____
9. _____ SUDS Rating _____
10. _____ SUDS Rating _____

Now, review the rating scale and think about each situation on your list. Then assign each situation the number that applies most closely. Your answer is purely subjective. It's also based on what you feel *today*—not yesterday or tomorrow or some distant time in the future. This scale can help you understand the severity of your anxiety related to being the center of attention and also show you that not every situation is off-the-charts terrifying or paralyzing.

SUDS Scale

- 0: Totally relaxed
- 1: Somewhat relaxed
- 2: Minimal anxiety/distress
- 3: Mild anxiety/distress, doesn't interfere with performance
- 4: Mild to moderate anxiety
- 5: Moderate anxiety/distress, can continue to perform
- 6: Moderate to quite anxious
- 7: Quite anxious/distressed, interfering with performance
- 8: Very anxious/distressed, can't concentrate
- 9: Extremely anxious/distressed, feeling desperate, unable to handle it
- 10: Highest level of distress/fear/anxiety that you have ever felt, can't function

What situation or symptom causes you the most distress about being the center of attention?

What situation or symptom causes you the least distress?

On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = not at all, and 10 = highly motivated, how would you rank your motivation to work on one of the *lower-rated items* on your list (5 or under) in the coming weeks by using "exposure therapy" (practicing and role-playing) techniques? _____

Now that you have identified your worries and your feared symptoms and their severity, it's time to do something about them so you can move forward with more ease and confidence.

Let's start with some beginning exercises that are part of "exposure therapy" that aim to create symptoms and fears *on purpose* so you can get used to them and learn to manage them.

Common symptoms of physical anxiety include shortness of breath, dizziness, dry mouth, rapid heartbeat, shaking, trembling, sweating, spacing out/feeling unreal, difficulty swallowing, and gag reflex. Write down the physical anxiety symptoms you experience, or fear experiencing, when you are in a situation where you're the center of attention.

Review the chart below for a list of common physical anxiety symptoms and ways you can practice bringing on uncomfortable symptoms that might arise in such a situation. Set aside some time at home or in a safe place where you feel comfortable. Ask a family member or friend to be with you so you can have support or someone to discuss the experience with after you practice. Know that you're in control at all times, and you can stop at any point. Doing these exercises at least two or three times daily for a week or more is recommended.

Perform the activity only to the point of mild discomfort (not extreme discomfort). In this way, you can get used to the *sensations as sensations* and become more accepting of them, despite the temporary discomfort.

| Symptom | How to Induce Physical Anxiety Symptoms |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Shortness of breath | Breathe through a straw or small tube like a coffee stirrer or a cocktail straw; breathe very deeply through your mouth for one minute. |
| Dizziness | Spin in a swivel chair for about one minute; spin yourself around and around; roll your head around and around or shake it back and forth rapidly (do not do this if you have neck pain or an injury). |
| Dry mouth | Put gauze or other material into your mouth (such as the rolled tubes that dentists use) to absorb any saliva. |
| Rapid heartbeat | Run in place; run up and down a flight of stairs for two to three minutes or until you feel your heart pounding. |
| Shaking, trembling | Hold on to an object very tightly until your hand begins to shake; tense your muscles very tightly until they start to tremble; hold a push-up until your arms start to tremble. |
| Overheating or flushing | Take a hot, steamy shower or wear a warm coat in a warm room. |
| Spacing out, feeling unreal | Stare at your eyes while looking directly into a mirror for two or more minutes; stare at one spot or stare at your hand for two or more minutes. |
| Difficulty swallowing, gagging | Hold your throat in the middle of a swallow; put pressure on your throat for one minute; swallow four or five times in a row. |

Record your practice exercises on the following chart (use your own paper if needed). Describe your symptom and rate the severity of your anxiety from 1 to 10, where 1 = little to no anxiety, to 10 = the worst anxiety I've ever experienced. Then, reflect on your experience.

| Induction Exercise Practiced | Symptom | Severity of Anxiety Related to the Symptom | Reflections |
|------------------------------|---------|--|-------------|
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Now, for each of the above symptoms, write down the typical *anxious thoughts* that arise when you either imagine experiencing or actually experience them.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

Next, develop a set of statements or affirmations you can say to yourself when you're the center of attention and have physical anxiety symptoms. Here are some examples that people who experience shortness of breath could say to themselves:

- I notice that I'm short of breath.
- This is so uncomfortable, but nothing bad is happening.
- This is my anxiety firing up.
- I'm not dying.
- It's just a physical sensation.
- Relax. Everything is going to be OK.
- My fear is just a fear. It's not rational. The probability of its coming true are slim.
- I can do this. I just need to stop, tell myself to take some deep breaths, and center myself.
- I have control over my breath right now.
- I know how to notice my anxious thoughts and tell myself they are just thoughts.

Now, take the three symptoms you commonly experience and write down some reassuring statements you can say to yourself, drawn from the list above or from your imagination.

Symptom: _____

Reassuring Statements: _____

Symptom: _____

Reassuring Statements: _____

Symptom: _____

Reassuring Statements: _____

Next, list your feared situation or symptom and its SUD (Subjective Unit of Distress) rating from earlier in this exercise. Think of a reassuring thought and a physical strategy that you would like to practice in an actual situation.

| Event | Anxiety Symptom SUD rating | Habitual Thought | What I Could Say or Do Instead? |
|---|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <i>Example: I am at a restaurant and they are about to sing "Happy Birthday" to me.</i> | <i>Shortness of breath, 6</i> | <i>I want to crawl in a hole and disappear. What if I pass out? What if I turn beet red?</i> | <i>Take three long, deep breaths to calm down. Make eye contact with one person at the table. Tell yourself you are special and worthy of attention.</i> |
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Are you ready to practice exposure training in a real-life situation? Don't worry; you don't have to hop on a stage and perform tomorrow. You will be using exposure therapy, and your fear of being the center of attention can be overcome through a willingness to change and by creating a plan to gradually face into your fears through doing the very thing you are afraid to do—and realizing your worst fears do not come true.

The best way to overcome your fear of being the center of attention is to do just that. Create situations where you *are the center of attention!* In this exposure training, you will plan to do several "socially inappropriate" things in public. On the line to the left of each item, rank on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = very little anxiety, and 10 = the worst anxiety imaginable. Choose the ones you ranked 1 and 2 to practice first, and work up to trying a 5 or 6.

Here are some possibilities. Feel free to add your own situations to the list.

- _____ Stumble on purpose walking down the hall at school.
- _____ Go to a movie after it has already started and ask to climb over people.
- _____ Jog in place in a park or at a bus stop.
- _____ Spill your glass of water at a nice restaurant.
- _____ Dress casually for a formal event (or vice versa).
- _____ Talk to yourself out loud in class.
- _____ Face the wrong way in an elevator.
- _____ Hum softly during class.
- _____ Wear mismatched shoes.
- _____ Ask a controversial question in class, or state your strong opinion about the topic under discussion.
- _____ Skip instead of walking down the street.
- _____ Go to a restaurant and tell them it's your birthday. Let them sing "Happy Birthday" to you.
- _____ Sing karaoke on stage and enjoy the applause rather than run offstage.
- _____ Pretend you are a model posing in a busy public place. Have a friend pretend to be a professional photographer and take your picture for 5 minutes.
- _____ Stand on a street corner and sing "Mary Had a Little Lamb," or "America, the Beautiful," for 5 minutes.
- _____ Your own idea: _____
- _____ Your own idea: _____

Use the chart to record your experiences. Note the fear you are trying to create. What symptom(s) arise and how severe are they? What anxious thoughts come up for you? What would you like to say to yourself instead? Note any reflections.

| Situation | Symptom/ Severity (1-10) | Physical Strategy | Habitual Thought/ Reassuring Statement | Reflections |
|---|--------------------------------|----------------------|--|--|
| People sang "Happy Birthday" to me. | Rapid heartbeat, 6 | Deep breathing | Habitual: I want to run and hide! Reassuring: It's OK. Nothing bad is happening. Enjoy people's good wishes. | I was very anxious, but I got through it and noticed people's happy faces. |
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If you found this helpful, set up other situations with gradually higher stakes and record what occurs. The idea is to expose yourself to ever-increasing levels of anxiety until you become more comfortable.

Reflections on This Exercise

What was the hardest part about doing this exercise? Why?

What was the easiest part? Why?

What situation do you have coming up where you will be the center of attention? Write down what strategies you will use to help yourself relax, enjoy the moment, and stay present.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Feel Less Anxious During School Presentations

Objective

To reduce your anxiety about making school presentations.

You Should Know

Are you afraid to make presentations in school? You're not alone. For many students, standing in front of the class and being the center of attention can cause anxiety, fear, or panic. You might be worried about being laughed at by classmates. You could have concerns about stammering or forgetting what you were going to say, or letting classmates see your nervousness. You could be afraid of having a physical reaction that everyone will see, such as fainting, vomiting, or sweating.

Giving presentations in front of your teacher and classmates is a required part of your schoolwork. If you're planning to go to college, your professors will most likely assign presentations. Additionally, you may end up working in an occupation where giving presentations to your team or your customers is an expected task. So, since giving presentations is unavoidable, what can you do?

First, acknowledge that some fear and discomfort is normal—and this includes some physical side effects, such as sweating, blushing, or dry mouth. Next, consider the more you do something, the less scary it becomes. While avoiding a situation might make you feel better in the short term, it has long-lasting consequences. The situation tends to feel even bigger and scarier the next time it comes around, causing your anxiety to increase even more. When you can stay in a situation even though it makes you feel anxious, you will stop the cycle of anxiety.

What to Do

Exposure therapy allows you to “expose” yourself to situations you fear to overcome your anxiety. So, the more you give presentations or speak in front of groups, the less frightening it will become. Here are some small steps you can take to get started.

- Raise your hand to be “called on” when your teacher asks a question, or ask a question of your own.
- Volunteer to do an exercise or demonstration in front of the class.
- Walk into class after most of your classmates are seated, so that most of them will be looking at you.
- Talk, sing, or play an instrument in front of a small group of your friends.
- Share your fear with others. Tell a few trusted classmates that you're anxious about the presentation, and ask them to help you practice.
- Other idea: _____

Now, follow these steps.

1. Select several activities from the list above.
2. Rate the activities on a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest level of anxiety.
3. Expose yourself to the activities, starting with the one with the lowest anxiety ranking.
4. Rate the situation again after the exposure.
5. Increase your tolerance by selecting the next highest anxiety ranking, and continue through the list until you are exposed to the activity with the number closest to 10.

| Activity | Anxiety Level Before Exposure (1-10) | Anxiety Level After Exposure (1-10) | How I Feel Now |
|-----------------|---|--|-----------------------|
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Here are a few questions that will help you challenge some of your anxious thoughts about giving a class presentation.

What are my biggest fears about this presentation?

What is the worst that can happen if these fears came true?

Understanding that your fears are about the “worst things that could happen,” what is the *most likely* thing that could happen?

How do you think you will feel once you are done with the presentation?

Once you have practiced “exposing” yourself to situations where you might be anxious in front of others, use the following chart to record how you deal with anxiety during real presentations.

| Type (Name) of Presentation | Date | Anxiety Level Before (1 to 10) | Anxiety Level After (1 to 10) |
|-----------------------------|------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
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Reflections on This Exercise

How have these exercises changed how you feel about giving class presentations?

Do you feel more confident about giving presentations? Explain your answer.

Are there any other activities that normally make you anxious that you'd be willing to try as a result of these exercises?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Missing Out Because You're Anxious

Objective

To identify and practice tolerating situations that trigger social anxiety to decrease feelings of “missing out.”

You Should Know

If you have social anxiety, usual, expected, and normal social situations almost always trigger fear or anxiety. Your fears are generally out of proportion to the situation. You might know that your fears are unreasonable and that other people don't feel the same way. You might feel alone and believe that no one understands you—and you might often feel left out.

If you frequently avoid situations that make you uncomfortable, and you feel self-conscious and distressed because of this avoidance, you might feel like you are “missing out.”

What to Do

Here are common situations you might avoid because they make you anxious. Check off each statement that applies to you.

- _____ Working with a group of peers to complete a class project.
- _____ Writing on a whiteboard or chalkboard at the front of the classroom.
- _____ Walking through crowded hallways.
- _____ Using public bathrooms.
- _____ Talking to people you don't know.
- _____ Taking tests.
- _____ Starting or joining conversations.
- _____ Speaking to adults.
- _____ Participating in physical education class or sports.
- _____ Performing on stage in front of a crowd.
- _____ Asking a group of friends to get together or inviting your peers to a party.
- _____ Having your photo taken.
- _____ Asking someone out on a date.
- _____ Reading aloud in front of the class.
- _____ Eating in front of other people.

_____ Entering a room where other people are already seated.

_____ Attending parties, dances, or other school activities.

_____ Answering questions in class.

_____ Talking on the telephone.

_____ Asking teachers questions or asking for help.

_____ Going to the mall or other crowded places.

Do you avoid any of these situations to the point you feel that you are “missing out”? Describe.

Based on your selections above, fill in situations that commonly make you anxious, and rate how uncomfortable *thinking* about the situation makes you, where 1 = just a little uncomfortable, to 10 = extremely anxious.

| Situation | Rating |
|-----------|--------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

Then, choose at least one situation to practice: _____

Rate how uncomfortable *doing* the activity makes you, where 1 = just a little uncomfortable, to 10 = extremely anxious. Rate how you felt just before doing the activity, and how you felt after. See how many minutes you can spend each week tolerating the situation, spending *more* time each week doing the activity that makes you anxious.

| Week | Rating Before (1-10) | Situation | Rating After (1-10) | Minutes Spent | Notes |
|--------|-------------------------|-----------|------------------------|------------------|-------|
| Week 2 | | | | | |
| Week 3 | | | | | |
| Week 4 | | | | | |
| Week 4 | | | | | |

Reflections on This Exercise

After one month of practicing tolerating the situation that makes you anxious, write down your thoughts.

Write down the top three strategies you used to tolerate the situation that makes you anxious.

What was it like to try those strategies? What did you notice inside yourself? What did you notice about the situations? Did it become easier over time?

Do you still feel like you are “missing out?” Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 1- = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Understand How Social Media Affects Your Social Anxiety

Objective

To understand how social media contributes to anxiety and identify ways to develop more social relationships in the real world.

You Should Know

If you have social anxiety, you might avoid social situations and become isolated. With social media as an acceptable way of communicating 24/7, you now have even more ways and more excuses to avoid being around other people.

Oddly enough, the increase in the use of social media can actually increase your anxiety. Depression and anxiety, especially among teens, are associated with spending too much time online. Are you “addicted” to “likes” and measure your self-esteem by the comments you receive? Is it true that the more “friends” you have, the happier you are? If you compare yourself to others and their seemingly perfect lives, this might be a recipe for increased anxiety.

There are benefits to social media: information and photo sharing, venting feelings, getting support, and more. But people with social anxiety are prone to hiding out on social media, which can be a form of escaping “real life.” So, even though use of technology can be a coping mechanism for social anxiety, it may also cause your anxiety to worsen because it isn’t dealt with.

Overcoming social anxiety can best be achieved through repeated practice with people in person. The less you practice social skills, the harder it is to improve those skills. In this worksheet, you will evaluate your social media use, learn some alternatives to using social media, and reflect on next steps.

What to Do

Write down the devices and applications you use on a regular basis, and estimate how much time you spend per day on each device, noting how you communicate (e.g., text, DM, Snap Chat, other social media apps). For help in assessing your device time, you might want to install a time-tracking app such as Moment or (OFFTIME) to gather data.

Device/App/Mode of Communication

Estimated Time Spent Daily

What are the positive effects of your technology use, such as sharing thoughts and feelings?

What are the negative effects of your technology use, such as lack of face-to-face time or difficulty having an in-person conversation without interruption?

Now, for the negative effects listed, think about how you can change your use of technology. In the lines below the list, write down what you are willing to try in the next week or so, such as:

- Schedule social activities that feel safe to you, such as small-group gatherings with friends.
- Go to a concert, movie, or sporting event.
- When you feel anxious, instead of reaching for your phone, move your body. Walk, go up and down stairs, or activate your body to bring oxygen to your brain.
- Make an effort to be social in small groups without using your phones. Make eye contact with others and engage in “low-risk” small talk about mutually comfortable subjects.
- Practice sharing, in person, your thoughts and feelings with friends and loved ones. Resist the urge to hide behind the “safety” and “anonymity” of texting or emails.
- Plan to reduce time on devices. Set a goal of limiting tech use to a specific number of minutes per day. Then, stick to it.
- Alternatively, *schedule in* your use of technology.
- Install a blocking app that restricts your access to social media.
- Shut off all devices an hour before bedtime.
- Make time to be in nature: cycling, walking, hiking, or running with friends.
- Take a meditation or yoga class.
- Go to the gym.

Add your own ideas:

Now, each day schedule alternatives to spending time on your devices. Rate your anxiety before doing the activity, where 1 = just a little uncomfortable, to 10 = extremely anxious. After you spend time completely away from your devices, again rate your anxiety, where 1 = just a little uncomfortable, to 10 = extremely anxious. Calculate the total time you're away from your devices each day.

| Date | Anxiety Before (1-10) | Activity | Anxiety After (1-10) | Total Time Away from Tech Devices |
|------|-----------------------|----------|----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | | | | |
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Reflections on This Exercise

Which of the alternatives to using technology listed above seem the easiest and most fun for you? Explain.

Which alternatives seem the most challenging? Explain.

Of the easy and the challenging alternatives that you identified, which ones can you commit to scheduling, despite any resistance you might feel?

How anxious were you during the time you were away from your tech devices?

Did you notice a decrease in your anxiety as the week progressed? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Reduce Your Self-Consciousness in Social Situations

Objective

To practice ways to manage self-consciousness in social situations.

You Should Know

Teens with social anxiety often feel that everyone is evaluating their every word and their every movement. However, if you were to actually poll the people you fear are observing and judging you, the majority of them would likely say they're not. In fact, in many cases, they might say they didn't even notice you.

This doesn't mean that you are not a memorable person with many fine qualities and not worth noticing. It simply means that people with social anxiety tend to have an inner self-assessment mechanism that skews more toward self-criticism than self-kindness. And, believe it or not, even if other people *are* judging you, it doesn't mean they're right, and it shouldn't affect your self-image.

Teens who are very self-conscious usually focus their attention inward, to the exclusion of noticing what's going on around them. You might be acutely aware of physical sensations or symptoms, such as blushing or a racing heart. You might notice that you are fidgety or restless. You might experience embarrassment or shame. Also, you might have a series of thoughts about somehow being inadequate or different. You project onto other people what you think they're thinking—and then the situation gets worse.

You might also feel unsafe or exposed, and you might have the urge to escape to the safety of being alone, providing temporary relief for your anxiety. But is it really helping you? What if you were to develop skills to endure those situations and retrain your brain to be more present with other people and even have fun?

What to Do

In this worksheet, you'll learn the skills to become less self-conscious in social situations and replace your self-consciousness with *curiosity and self-compassion*.

Reducing self-consciousness involves learning to refocus your attention from inward to outward. So, getting to know what's going on inside is an important first step. You will then learn to refocus your attention outward by observing others and recording your observations.

Answer the questions below about a situation you recall when you felt highly self-conscious or embarrassed in a social situation. Be as honest as you can.

What was the situation? _____

When did it take place? _____

Were you by yourself or with someone? _____

What did you experience physically (anxiety symptoms)? _____

What do you remember about how you felt? _____

What do you remember about what your thoughts were during the experience? Be as specific as you can. _____

What do you think the other person or people were thinking about you? _____

Now you are going to go out “in the field” to gather data. This exercise has two parts: focusing inward and focusing outward. Choose a public setting where the stakes are low: you don’t know anyone, and you aren’t risking being judged or scrutinized by someone you might see again. Examples include riding a bus or subway, going to the mall, going to a coffee shop or café, and so on.

For Part 1, you’ll focus for at least four or five minutes on yourself and consider the following questions. What are your physical sensations? What are you feeling? What kinds of thoughts are you noticing? Are any memories or images coming up? If you start to notice that you’re focused on other people or on your surroundings, simply bring your mind back to the inward focus on yourself and your experience at this moment.

Note all the details you can remember. What did you notice? Was focusing inward pleasant or unpleasant? Did you notice any judgment, or were you able to maintain your objective, curious stance? What *did* you notice about the other people in your surroundings while you were focusing on yourself?

[illegible]

For Part 2, visit a public setting (the same or a different one) and focus your attention outward. Notice the people. Pick one or two people to observe (without being too obvious about it). What do you notice? How are they dressed? What do you imagine their mood is? Do they seem to have a lot of energy or not? Do they seem engaged in what they are doing or distracted? If the situation allows, you might say something innocuous to that person (“Nice day, don’t you think?” “Looks like it’s going to snow,” “How about that game last night?”). See what that feels like and write down your observations below, focusing on what you noticed and what you felt.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]

Record your observations about what was different between Parts 1 and 2 and what was the same. Was one part more pleasant than the other? How hard was it to look inward in a public setting? What was it like looking outward? Be specific.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Reflections on This Exercise

The goal of this exercise was to practice noticing what's going on around you and redirecting your self-conscious thoughts. Where else might you practice this important skill? At school? At a party? Describe.

Set a date/location for practicing this skill: _____

By redirecting your attention outward, you are gathering new information about the world around you. Write down two or three surprising things that you noticed during this exercise about yourself and others. Make a commitment to look for those surprising things in other people or situations in the future.

Were you able to maintain your stance of curiosity and self-compassion? If yes, describe below what helped you? If not, what do you think got in the way?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

There's Nothing Small About Small Talk

Objective

To practice conversations with a variety of people to increase your comfort in social situations.

You Should Know

If you're shy and anxious in social situations, making small talk is an important way to practice your conversational skills.

This worksheet is designed to help you practice small talk with a variety of people and rate your comfort level. The more often you practice small talk, the more you will be comfortable in other types of social situations.

But first, here are some things to keep in mind when practicing your conversational skills.

- Make eye contact.
- Use open body language.
- Be positive.
- Find things in common to talk about.
- Try using compliments to open a conversation.
- Ask questions, and also state your opinions.
- When you ask a simple question, you might get a one-word answer, so be prepared for two or three follow-up questions.
- Give details when you answer questions.
- Pay attention to social cues, such as body language or facial expression, to see whether to continue or stop a conversation.
- Be patient with yourself. If you are shy and find it hard to talk to people, you will need to practice making small talk every day until these conversations become easier.

What to Do

Look for opportunities to start conversations in different situations. Then, note the length of time you spent in each conversation and rate your comfort level from 1 to 10, with 1 = totally at ease, and 10 = very uncomfortable. Think of other social situations that might be challenging for you, and write them in the blank spaces. Then, answer the questions.

Situations to Practice Social Conversations (Small Talk)

| Assignment | Duration | Comfort Level (1-10) |
|--|----------|----------------------|
| Start a conversation with a stranger while waiting in line. | | |
| Start a conversation with a relative you don't usually talk to. | | |
| Start a conversation with someone out in public. | | |
| Start a conversation with a stranger about the weather. | | |
| Start up a conversation in a grocery store. | | |
| Start a conversation with a stranger about sports. | | |
| Ask a classmate you don't know very well a question. | | |
| Start a conversation with a server in a restaurant or coffee shop. | | |
| Start a conversation with someone who is walking a dog. | | |
| Ask an older person a question about his or her past. | | |
| Start a conversation with a classmate you don't know very well. | | |
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Reflection on This Exercise

Of the conversation challenges above, which one was the most difficult for you? Why?

The more you practiced, did it get easier for you? Did you experience less anxiety? Explain.

What else can you do to increase your comfort engaging in small talk?

Who can you turn to for support and encouragement while working on this problem?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Are You Anxious About Going on Dates?

Objective

To identify the aspects of dating that make you anxious.

You Should Know

Dating can be a stressful experience filled with hopes, worries, expectations, and fears. The idea of meeting up with someone you're interested in can be at best worrisome, at worst paralyzing. The list of "what ifs" might make you want to cancel the date! *Will they like me? Will I find them attractive? Will they find me attractive? What will we talk about? What if they see me sweating or blushing? What if I get so nervous I can't even talk? What if we have nothing in common? What if they want to kiss or hug me? What if???* . . . You get the idea.

What would it be like to relax and enjoy dating—to be present and have fun? Hard to imagine? Well, it can be done.

One technique to overcome your fear of dating is called "exposure therapy," where you actually "expose yourself" to situations you fear in order to overcome your anxiety. It might sound scary at first, but there is a clear method you can follow to become more comfortable with dating.

The first step is to identify the aspects of dating that you fear, and then rate them on a scale called the SUDS (Subjective Units of Distress) scale.

What to Do

Here are some typical fears often experienced before or during a date:

- Shaking or trembling.
- Change in blood pressure.
- Dry mouth.
- Sweating.
- Rapid heartbeat.
- Dizziness or fainting.
- Nausea, gagging, or vomiting.
- Worry about being judged or criticized.
- Worry about your appearance.
- Worry about your date criticizing how you stand, walk, or present yourself.

List at least ten situations that cause anxiety when you think about dating or when you are on a date. Afterward, rate the items using the SUDS scale.

SUDS Scale

- 0: Totally relaxed
- 1: Somewhat relaxed
- 2: Minimal anxiety/distress
- 3: Mild anxiety/distress, doesn't interfere with performance
- 4: Mild to moderate anxiety
- 5: Moderate anxiety/distress, can continue to perform
- 6: Moderate to quite anxious
- 7: Quite anxious/distressed, interfering with performance
- 8: Very anxious/distressed, can't concentrate
- 9: Extremely anxious/distressed, feeling desperate, unable to handle it
- 10: Highest level of distress/fear/anxiety that you have ever felt, can't function

| | | | |
|-----|-------|-------------|-------|
| 1. | _____ | SUDS Rating | _____ |
| 2. | _____ | SUDS Rating | _____ |
| 3. | _____ | SUDS Rating | _____ |
| 4. | _____ | SUDS Rating | _____ |
| 5. | _____ | SUDS Rating | _____ |
| 6. | _____ | SUDS Rating | _____ |
| 7. | _____ | SUDS Rating | _____ |
| 8. | _____ | SUDS Rating | _____ |
| 9. | _____ | SUDS Rating | _____ |
| 10. | _____ | SUDS Rating | _____ |

Reflections on This Exercise

What situation or symptom related to dating causes you the most distress?

What situation or symptom causes you the least distress?

On a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = not at all, and 10 = highly motivated, how would you rank your motivation to work on one of the *lower-rated items* on your list (5 or under) in the coming weeks by using “exposure therapy” (practicing and role-playing) techniques? _____

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Strategies for Overcoming Dating Anxiety

Objective

To manage your dating anxiety through practice to decrease physical discomfort.

You Should Know

Dating can be stressful—you want to meet someone you like, someone you might want to see again, and someone who “gets” you. That’s a lot of pressure for a few hours out of the house. All those expectations, hopes, and fears! Maybe you’d rather just stay home and avoid dating altogether! Or hang out with friends. If you want to date, there are ways to manage your anxiety about dating. It might take some work, but it will be worth it.

What to Do

First, here are some general tips about how to approach the world of dating with less anxiety:

- Tell yourself it’s just a date, not a test of your worth.
- Take deep breaths.
- Focus on your strengths by identifying your positive attributes.
- Be prepared with some topics of interest to share.
- Remind yourself to stay in the present moment (don’t review or fast-forward).
- Do an activity together (hike, sporting event, concert).
- Be patient and compassionate with yourself.
- Remember your date is probably nervous, too. Everyone wants to make a good first impression.
- Don’t compare your date to other people you’ve been out with.
- Let go of thinking you have to prove yourself to your date.
- Keep an open mind about things that might be “different” about your date.
- Ask questions to draw them out.
- Learn something new or try something new on a date.
- Choose a FUN place to meet.

Most teens who have anxiety about dating are worried that their date will be judging, criticizing, scrutinizing, or otherwise thinking negatively about them. This can cause physical anxiety symptoms, as well as a stream of self-critical thoughts.

Let’s start with some beginning exercises that are part of “exposure therapy,” which aims to create symptoms and fears *on purpose* so that you can get used to them and learn to manage them.

Write down the physical anxiety symptoms you experience, or fear experiencing, when you are on a date. Common symptoms include: shortness of breath, dizziness, dry mouth, rapid heartbeat, shaking, trembling, sweating, spacing out/feeling unreal, difficulty swallowing, and gag reflex.

Review the chart below for a list of common physical anxiety symptoms and some ways that you can practice bringing on symptoms that might arise in such a situation. Set aside some time at home, and ask a family member or friend to join so you can have support or someone to discuss the experience with after you practice. Know that you are in control at all times and can stop at any point. Doing these exercises at least two or three times daily for a week or more in advance of the situation is recommended. Do the activity only to the point of mild discomfort (not extreme discomfort). In this way, you can get used to the *sensations as sensations* and become more accepting of them, despite the temporary discomfort.

| Symptom | How to Induce Physical Anxiety Symptoms |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Shortness of breath | Breathe through a straw or small tube like a coffee stirrer or a cocktail straw; breathe very deeply through your mouth for one minute. |
| Dizziness | Spin in a swivel chair for about one minute; spin yourself around and around; roll your head around and around or shake it back and forth rapidly (do not do this if you have neck pain or an injury). |
| Dry mouth | Put gauze or other material into your mouth (such as the rolled tubes that dentists use) to absorb any saliva. |
| Rapid heartbeat | Run in place; run up and down a flight of stairs for two to three minutes or until you feel your heart pounding. |
| Shaking, trembling | Hold on to an object very tightly until your hand begins to shake; tense your muscles very tightly until they start to tremble; hold a push-up until your arms start to tremble. |
| Overheating or flushing | Take a hot, steamy shower or wear a warm coat in a warm room. |
| Spacing out, feeling unreal | Stare at your eyes while looking directly into a mirror for two or more minutes; stare at one spot or stare at your hand for two or more minutes. |
| Difficulty swallowing, gagging | Hold your throat in the middle of a swallow; put pressure on your throat for one minute; swallow four or five times in a row. |

Record your practice exercises on the following chart. Describe the symptom, and rate the severity of anxiety related to each symptom from 1 to 10, where 1 = little to no anxiety, and 10 = the worst anxiety imaginable. Then reflect on your experience.

| Induction Exercise Practiced | Symptom | Severity of Anxiety Related to the Symptom | Reflections |
|------------------------------|---------|--|-------------|
| | | | |
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| | | | |
| | | | |

Now, for each of the above symptoms, write down the typical anxious thoughts that arise when you either imagine experiencing or actually experience a date. For example, "I'm terrified that I will start sweating and make a fool of myself."

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

Next, develop a set of reassuring statements or affirmations you can say to yourself when you are on a date and have physical anxiety symptoms. Here are some examples that someone who experiences shortness of breath could say to themselves:

- I notice I'm short of breath.
- This is so uncomfortable, but nothing bad is happening.
- This is my anxiety firing up.
- I'm not dying.
- It's just a physical sensation.
- Relax. Everything is going to be OK.
- My fear is just a fear. It is not rational. The probability of its coming true are slim.
- I can do this. I just need to stop, tell myself to take some deep breaths, and center myself.
- I have control over my breath right now.
- I know how to notice my anxious thoughts now and tell myself they are just thoughts.

Now, take three of the symptoms you listed above and write down some reassuring statements you can say to yourself, drawn from the list above or from your imagination.

Symptom: _____

Reassuring Statements: _____

Symptom: _____

Reassuring Statements: _____

Symptom: _____

Reassuring Statements: _____

Next, list your feared situation or symptom and its SUD rating from the previous worksheet, as well as the accompanying thoughts. Then, think of a reassuring thought and a physical strategy that you would like to practice in an actual situation.

| Activity | Anxiety Symptom/ | Habitual Thought | What I Could Say or |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Example: First date at</i> | <i>Shortness of</i> | <i>I want to crawl in a hole</i> | <i>It's going to be OK. I can</i> |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
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| | | | |

Reflections on This Exercise

What was the hardest part about doing this exercise?

What was the easiest part?

What are your feelings about the prospect of practicing these skills in a real-life dating situation?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?

Exposure Therapy for Dating Anxiety

Objective

To decrease dating-related anxiety through exposure training.

You Should Know

For many teens with social anxiety, dating can cause distress, both before and during the date. Maybe you're worried about making small talk or making a fool of yourself in some way. Maybe you're worried your date will think you're unattractive. Maybe the noise and stimulation is overwhelming. You might believe you have nothing interesting to say. These worries and fears can keep you from participating in many pleasurable things that dating has to offer: caring, sharing, support, romance, friendship, fun, and so on.

You can manage your fears if you're willing to create a plan to gradually face your fears through doing the very thing you are afraid to do and realizing your worst fears do not come true.

There's no way to go on a *real* date as a "test run" because any date is a real date! So, exposure therapy for fear of dating begins in a different way from typical exposure therapy. You might first try "mock dates" with a friend or loved one; then, you might graduate to choosing a person to date that you're less nervous about. The goal is to allow yourself to experience a mild level of anxiety you can learn to cope with—not run away or resort to "safety" behaviors.

What to Do

You're now ready to go on a mock date. You can set up conditions that might cause you to have similar symptoms as a real situation.

Who can you ask to go on a mock date with you? _____

Let the person know you're trying to *cause/induce* anxiety to flare up. Maybe they can think about ways to throw you off course or challenge you.

Pick a date and time when you would like to schedule your exposure experience: _____

Pick a specific venue where you'll have your mock date (somewhere public where you might experience social anxiety). Write down your ideas:

What specific mental coping strategies will you try on the mock date?

What specific physical coping strategies will you try on the mock date?

Once you have completed one mock date, schedule as many as you feel are necessary to practice trial dating. Use the chart to record your mock date experiences. Note the fear you're trying to create. What symptoms arise and how severe are they? What are the habitual anxious thoughts that come up? What would you like to say to yourself instead? Note any reflections.

| Fear | Symptom/ Severity (0 to 10) | Physical Strategy Tried | Habitual Thought / Reassuring Statement | Reflections |
|---|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|---|--|
| <i>Fear: Losing my train of thought and rambling.</i> | <i>Rapid heartbeat, 5</i> | <i>Deep breathing</i> | Habitual: <i>They must think I'm an idiot.</i> Reassuring: <i>It's OK to lose my train of thought. Everyone does it. Stop, breathe, and refocus.</i> | <i>I was very anxious, but I redirected my energy, my breath slowed down, and I was able to refocus.</i> |
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If you found this helpful, keep track of your actual dates and record your experiences on the chart or make one of your own. Ask for help from a parent, counselor, or friend.

Reflections on This Exercise

What was the hardest part about doing this exercise? Why?

What was the easiest part? Why?

Did you notice any difference between your experience of anxiety symptoms in your practice situations versus a real situation? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?

Section 3. More Techniques to Overcome Anxiety

Keep a Worry Log

Objective

To record your worries for a one-week period and determine if there are any patterns to your worries.

You Need to Know

You might spend a lot of time worrying. Are you thinking about the bad things that can happen? Teens with anxiety typically worry about little things as well as big things, for example: “Will I forget to submit my paper on time and receive a bad grade?”

Worrying all the time can be a tremendous drain. Are you ready to worry less? Are you ready to have more time for your important relationships, fun activities, schoolwork, and even daily tasks?

The first step to reducing your worrying is to understand it better, and you can do this by identifying the kinds of things you worry about, what triggers you to worry, and how much anxiety your worries cause you.

Your Worry Log will help you learn more about when you worry, what triggers your worry, and how much anxiety your worries cause you.

Consider Tara. She used the worry log for one month and realized how much time she spent worrying about things she had no control over. Her worry log allowed her to realize what caused her to worry, when she usually worried, and how much worrying affected her life. Tara realized that she tended to worry when she was really tired, stressed about school, and when her parents scolded her. She also recognized that her worrying was impacting her grades—and she was losing sleep thinking about all the things she was worried about!

What to Do

Make copies of the following chart and record your worries for at least two weeks. Any time you find yourself worrying, write it in the chart. Rate your anxiety from 1 to 10, where 1 = a little anxiety, and 10 = the worst anxiety imaginable. Make notes about why you were worried, as well as what triggered your worries.

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Week of: _____

| Date/ Time | Why Were You Worried? | What Triggered the Worry? | Level of Anxiety (1-10) |
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Reflections on This Exercise

Did you notice a pattern or was there a particular worry that repeated itself? Explain.

Once you became aware that you were worrying, could you stop yourself? If yes, explain how. If no, why not?

What are some ways you can distract yourself from worrying?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Embrace Your Worries with Humor

Objective

To decrease your anxiety through distracting yourself with humor.

You Should Know

When you have recurring and unwanted thoughts or worries, don't fight them. Instead, embrace them! It may sound strange, but new research suggests that the more you try to stop thinking about something, the more you *will* think about it.

Take a moment and give it a try. Close your eyes and visualize an alligator lying on your bed. Think about this image for a minute. Now try *not* to think about an alligator on your bed. If you're like most people, this is very difficult and the image you're trying *not* to think about keeps popping into your mind.

What to Do

Write down something you worry about.

Now, take a look at the following humorous ways to deal with worry and put a checkmark by things you think you might like to try.

_____ For five minutes, sing a song about your worry to the tune of Happy Birthday over and over again.

_____ Draw a funny picture of the worst thing that could happen if what you worry about came true.

_____ Make up a story about something you worry about all the time, and add a terrible ending.

_____ Write down the worry about twenty times. Then, write it twice more with your non-dominant hand.

_____ Translate your worry into another language. Then, read the translation aloud five times. You can use <https://translate.google.com>. Now, do it again in two more languages.

_____ Write the thing you worry most about, reversing the letters of each word.

_____ Get a plain tee-shirt and write or draw your worry on the shirt with a fabric marker. Make it as colorful as you can, and wear it around the house for a few hours. Don't forget to take a look at yourself in the mirror!

_____ Fill your mouth with food and repeat the thought that worries you five times.

_____ Imagine yourself worrying as if you were in a horror movie. Visualize yourself in the place where you are most likely to worry, except that a similar scary villain is playing you.

_____ Draw a comic strip about your worry or use a website like www.ToonDraw.com to make one up.

_____ Create a rap song about your worries with a program like Smule Auto Rap or TikTok. Just record your worries, and the app will turn it into a rap song. Play the song at least five times and share it with others.

For one week, try at least one humorous activity every day involving your most significant worry. Rate how you feel before and after each activity from 1 to 10, where 1 = little or no anxiety, and 10 = extreme anxiety.

| Activity | Date/Time | Anxiety Before the Activity (1-10) | Anxiety After the Activity (1-10) |
|----------|-----------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

As you practiced different activities, did you notice any new thoughts? What were they?

These activities were meant to be humorous. Were they? Did you smile? Did you laugh out loud?

Did you find your anxiety around these worries diminished over the week? Describe.

Did you share what you were doing with other people? What was their reaction?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

*This comic strip was made with ToonDoo (www.ToonDoo.com) a free online cartoon creator.



Control Your Anxiety with a Worry Script

Objective

To face and manage your anxious feelings and worries rather than avoid them.

You Should Know

You might spend hours each day trying to avoid worrying about things that upset you. Do you distract yourself by checking your phone, playing video games, or even drinking, drugs, or overeating? None of these things help reduce worrying.

In fact, the harder you try to avoid the thoughts that make you anxious, the worse they get. Trying to push something out of your mind is a little like trying to push a beach ball underwater: it takes a lot of work to keep it down, and the minute you let it go, it pops right back up again.

Rather than putting all your energy into avoiding upsetting thoughts, you can choose to face your fears, and writing worry scripts is one way to help you do this. By writing a worry script about your biggest worry, you'll face your negative thoughts and upsetting feelings rather than avoid them. Writing scripts will also help you get a clear picture of what's really upsetting you. Many teens who write a worry script for a few weeks report they feel less anxious about the things they were worrying about.

How to write a worry script:

- Choose a place where you won't be interrupted. Turn off your phone, music, and television. Set aside about 30 minutes to complete each script.
- Write about one thing you're worrying about.
- Write about the worst-case scenario.
- Include vivid details—how things look, sound, and feel. Include your feelings and reactions.
- Write a new script on the same subject each day, going deeper into your feelings.
- After about two weeks, you can move to the next worry.

Note: If you feel anxious, or even fearful, while you're writing, keep at it! Experiencing these feelings means you are on the right track. Even though it might be difficult, the more you face your fears and worries, the more likely they will eventually fade.

My Worry Script

Date: _____ Beginning Time: _____ Ending Time: _____

Summarize what you are worrying about in one sentence: _____

Describe your worry in vivid detail:

[illegible]

Reflections on This Exercise

What was it like completing this exercise? Describe.

What did you find challenging about this exercise?

After practicing this technique for a few weeks, did you find you worried less? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Alter Your Rituals

Objective

To decrease your compulsive need for symmetry by changing your usual obsessive-compulsive rituals.

You Should Know

Symmetry-driven obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) refers to the irrational fear or obsession that something terrible will happen if you don't place items or perform acts in a symmetrical and ritualized way. You might feel an overwhelming sense of uneasiness or discomfort when items are not placed in an exact order or in a certain way. For example, you may experience an overwhelming need for items to be balanced, such as holding your phone with evenly placed hands. You may become upset when words or items you believe should be symmetrical don't line up as you think they should.

Interrupting the patterns of symmetry that you feel bound to follow will allow you to increase your awareness of why, when, and how you perform your rituals in order to honestly evaluate your need to continue them.

What to Do

When you are caught up in the OCD cycle of obsessions and compulsions, you may not even realize all the different ritualized behaviors you perform. Preparing a list requires you to acknowledge and accept your actions and recognize the impact they have on your life.

List five symmetry-based rituals you perform.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Engaging in multiple rituals encourages distraction and increases your inability to recognize your obsessive and compulsive patterns. Focusing on a particular ritual encourages you to notice and explore all areas of the behavior you practice, helping you find a way to choose a different approach instead of having your behavior dictated by your fears and obsessions.

Choose one of the five rituals you listed to explore

further:_____ Sometimes you'll discover your rituals blend together;

you perform them so quickly they become second nature. Taking time to explore your rituals makes it trickier for you to ignore the control they have over you and the impact they have on your life.

What triggers you to perform your ritual?

What outcome are you trying to avoid or escape by performing it?

What are the specific actions you engage in? Are they completed in a certain order or a certain number of times?

Where are you when you are performing this ritual? _____

Is anyone with you when you are performing it, or are you alone? _____

If you sort items, describe any direction that you feel items must face. _____

What is your body doing during the ritual? Are you standing or sitting? Are you holding something? Must your hands be placed in a certain way?

Altering your ritual allows you to become more mindful of the intense effort and time you put into compulsions—time that could be spent doing something you enjoy instead! Making a conscious decision to change your compulsions also helps you reassert your power instead of passively reacting to whatever obsession you are trying to avoid or escape.

Now it's time to change your ritual.

1. Select one or more of the suggestions from the list that follows, or alter your ritual in your own unique way.
2. Implement one or more changes every day for at least a two-week period.
3. When you feel comfortable, try to stop the ritual altogether.
4. As soon you eliminate one ritual, move on to another.

Suggestions:

Change the order of the objects you feel compelled to put in a certain way.

Example: *Take the items on your desk and put them in different places.*

Change the order in which you perform the ritual.

Example: *If you feel you must dress in a certain order in the morning, change the order of how you get dressed.*

Change the frequency.

Example: *If you have to wash your hands six times, wash them three times instead.*

Change the amount.

Example: *If you always have to have five pencils with you, have three instead.*

Change the place where you conduct your ritual.

Example: *If you must get dressed in one room, get dressed in another room.*

Change the direction.

Example: *If your shoes must point forward in your closet, place them backward instead.*

Change how you physically perform your ritual.

Example: *If you usually stand, try to sit. If your hands have to be placed exactly on each side of a cup, move them so that one is higher and one is lower. If your eyes are usually closed during your mental ritual, open them.*

Get creative! Think of your own unique ways to make small or large changes in your rituals.

Next, complete the following chart to track your progress.

1. Choose a ritual you want to change.
2. Describe how you want to change the ritual.
3. Note your anxiety level from 1 to 10, where 1 = little to no anxiety, and 10 = very anxious, (when you begin to make changes and your anxiety level afterward).

Write down the results of your practice.

| Date | Ritual to Alter | Change(s) | Anxiety Level at Beginning (1-10) | Anxiety Level After (1-10) | Results of Change |
|------|-----------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

Describe the level of difficulty or ease you experienced in changing your rituals.

What was the most challenging part of completing this exercise?

Describe any change in your anxiety while you were practicing altering your rituals.

How did your experience add to or detract from your sense of self-awareness and self-confidence?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Eliminate Unhelpful Coping Strategies

Objective

To identify and eliminate unhelpful coping strategies you use to “protect” yourself from anxiety.

You Should Know

Anxiety can be very distressing, so it’s only natural to try to avoid fearful situations at all costs. Actually, avoiding things that make you anxious is the worst thing you can do. In fact, most of the things you do to protect yourself from anxiety are unhelpful and just prolong this problem.

This worksheet is designed to help you identify things you do to “protect” yourself from experiencing anxiety. Remember, there is no need for protection from danger that doesn’t exist. Giving up these unhelpful strategies will help you rid yourself of your anxiety. List the situations you avoid because you’re afraid they might make you anxious. Then, rate each one on how hard it will be to give up, where 1 = not hard at all, to 10 = extremely hard.

List any rituals you use to help you avoid feeling anxious.

| | |
|-------|--------------|
| _____ | Rating _____ |
| _____ | Rating _____ |
| _____ | Rating _____ |
| _____ | Rating _____ |

List ways you distract yourself when you are anxious.

| | |
|-------|--------------|
| _____ | Rating _____ |
| _____ | Rating _____ |
| _____ | Rating _____ |

List people you feel you must have with you in situations that make you anxious.

| | |
|-------|--------------|
| _____ | Rating _____ |
| _____ | Rating _____ |
| _____ | Rating _____ |

List any objects that you feel protect you from feeling anxious.

| | |
|-------|--------------|
| _____ | Rating _____ |
| _____ | Rating _____ |
| _____ | Rating _____ |

Are there things you must “check” several times when you feel anxious?

| | |
|-------|--------------|
| _____ | Rating _____ |
| _____ | Rating _____ |
| _____ | Rating _____ |

List four unhelpful strategies you are ready to give up, starting with the ones with the lowest rating.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Over the next week, work toward eliminating unhelpful coping strategies. Use the following chart to track your progress. For each day, choose one unhelpful strategy to decrease or eliminate. Describe what you’ll do instead. Note your anxiety level from 1 to 10, where 1 = little to no anxiety, and 10 = very anxious, (when you begin to make changes and your anxiety level afterward).

| Date | Strategy to Decrease/ Eliminate | New Coping Strategy/How Did You Cope? | Anxiety Level at Beginning (1-10) | Anxiety Level After (1-10) | Results of Change |
|------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

Describe what happened when you tried to reduce or eliminate unhelpful coping strategies.

What was the most challenging part of completing this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Reduce All-or-Nothing Thinking

Objective

To decrease anxiety levels by reducing all-or-nothing thinking.

You Should Know

All-or-nothing thinking is a negative thought process or cognitive distortion common in teens with anxiety. When thinking in all-or-nothing terms, your views are often divided in extreme ways. Everything—from your view of yourself to your life experiences—is divided into black-or-white terms. This leaves room for little, if any, gray area in between. Very rarely is anything completely one way or the other. People and situations tend to have varying mixes of negative and positive.

Even in a bad week, there are usually some good days.

All-or-nothing thinking involves using absolute terms, such as never or always. You may fail to see the alternatives in a situation or solutions to a problem. If you have anxiety, you might only see the downside to any given situation. You might believe you're either wildly successful or a complete failure.

Here are some tips to correct all-or-nothing thinking:

- Avoid unconditional terms, such as never, always, or nothing.
- Notice when you're thinking in extremes. Ask yourself if there are gray areas.
- Try to find the positive side of a situation or problem.
- When you can only see one side of a situation, seek out advice or support from a friend, family member, or other adult (coach, mentor, counselor, or teacher). They can help you brainstorm solutions and possibilities, allowing you to think beyond absolute terms.

What to Do

The graphs below illustrate that there is a large gray area between the extremes. For each of the categories below, circle the number that indicates where you would realistically rate your own experiences.

Your Friends:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|--------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|--------------------|
| I have no friends. | | | | | | | | | Everyone loves me. |

School:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|---------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| I will never succeed in school. | | | | | | | | I get straight A's without even trying. | |

Your Family:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------------------------|----|
| I feel no support from my family. | | | | | | | | My family loves everything I do. | |

Skills & Talents:

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----------------------------|----|
| I am not skilled in any way. | | | | | | | | I do everything perfectly. | |

Choose one area above and describe ways you can avoid all-or-nothing thinking.

Was it challenging for you to think about different possibilities or solutions? Explain.

Who can help you avoid all-or-nothing thinking when you're presented with problems or situations in the future? Name at least three trusted family members, coaches, teachers, or friends that can assist you.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful to 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Talk Back to the Thoughts That Make You Anxious

Objective

To talk back to your irrational thoughts with fact-based logic to diminish your anxiety.

You Should Know

Irrational thoughts fuel anxiety. Your irrational thoughts (also called cognitive distortions) are based on errors in thinking rather than in fact. When you learn to talk back to your irrational thoughts with fact-based logic, you will diminish your anxiety and it will be easier to face your fears.

This worksheet lists irrational thoughts commonly held by teens who experience anxiety. Each statement is followed by a reality-based “talk back” statement.

What to Do

Begin this exercise by reading all the statements carefully, paying particular attention to the “talk back” arguments. Focus on the logic in each “talk back” statement and why these statements are true.

Then, review the irrational statements and write in a rational “talk back” statement. It doesn’t have to be exactly the same; it just has to be logical and based on fact.

Finally, think of any other irrational thoughts you have that fuel your anxiety. Write them down and then identify rational fact-based “talk back” statements.

Begin by reading the following examples that include rational “talk back” statements. Notice how they are grounded in fact rather than in fear.

1. My anxiety will cause me to have a heart attack.

Talk Back: Anxiety can simulate symptoms of a heart attack, but these symptoms are not dangerous and will soon pass. I don’t have to be afraid.

2. If I am in a crowd, I will faint.

Talk Back: If I feel light-headed or dizzy, I can just breathe deeply and slowly to get more oxygen. I’ve never fainted in a crowd before. I’m not going to faint.

3. I feel like I am going crazy.

Talk Back: Anxiety can play tricks on my mind, but these thoughts and feelings will soon pass. Being afraid doesn’t mean I am going crazy.

4. People will think I'm weird because I'm so anxious about everything.

Talk Back: Lots of people have anxiety. Everyone knows what it feels like to be anxious. People won't think I am weird.

5. People will think less of me because I'm so anxious.

Talk Back: Most people don't judge others harshly. If someone doesn't like something about me, it won't negatively affect me.

6. I will do something inappropriate and people will think I'm crazy, or I could even get into trouble.

Talk Back: The fear of doing something inappropriate is just a thought I'm having now. I've never done anything like this before, and I never will! People won't think I'm crazy, and I won't get into trouble.

7. Something terrible will happen if I _____ (fill in a situation you're avoiding).

Talk Back: This is an example of catastrophic thinking. It's a symptom of anxiety and not reality-based. The probability of this happening is almost non-existent. I don't need to avoid this situation.

8. If I feel really anxious, I must leave the room.

Talk Back: I don't have to leave the room if I'm uncomfortable. I know these feelings will soon pass, and I can just let them go.

9. I can't let anyone find out I have problems with anxiety; I must keep this a secret.

Talk Back: Many people are anxious. Hiding my problems doesn't help. Facing my fears is the only way to get rid of them for good. Telling people about my problems could help relieve my anxiety.

10. If I have a panic attack while at _____, I would be so embarrassed I would never be able to face anyone again.

Talk Back: The nature of my anxiety is that I fear things that aren't true. There's no shame in having a problem with anxiety. I won't be embarrassed if I have a panic attack. I will breathe deeply and calm myself down.

11. I will always be anxious.

Talk Back: I can develop skills to face my fears and get rid of my anxiety forever.

12. I can't _____ because of my anxiety.

Talk Back: I can do it. I'm not going to give into my fears and restrict my life.

Now write down your own “talk back” statements arguing with common irrational thoughts. You don’t have to remember exactly what was said in the examples, just use your own words and make sure your thoughts are based in reality.

1. My anxiety will cause me to have a heart attack.

Talk Back:

2. If I’m in a crowd, I will faint.

Talk Back:

3. I feel like I am going crazy.

Talk Back:

4. People will think I’m weird because I’m so anxious about everything.

Talk Back:

5. People will think less of me because I’m so anxious.

Talk Back:

6. I will do something inappropriate.

Talk Back:

7. Something terrible will happen if I _____.

Talk Back:

8. If I have extreme anxiety, I must leave the room.

Talk Back:

9. I can't let anyone find out I have problems with anxiety.

Talk Back:

10. If I have an anxiety attack while at _____, I will be so embarrassed!

Talk Back:

11. I will always have problems with anxiety.

Talk Back:

12. I can't _____ because of my anxiety.

Talk Back:

Now write down other thoughts that make you anxious and how you would talk back to them using fact-based logic.

Irrational fear-based thought: _____

Talk Back: _____

Irrational fear-based thought: _____

Talk Back: _____

Irrational fear-based thought: _____

Talk Back: _____

Irrational fear-based thought: _____

Talk Back: _____

Irrational fear-based thought: _____

Talk Back: _____

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

It's OK If You're Not Perfect!

Objective

To deliberately do something considered socially inappropriate and tolerate the discomfort this action causes.

You Should Know

You might think the better you perform in school, the more successful you'll be in life. It's reasonable for you to have high standards and work hard to meet your goals. Unfortunately, disciplined behavior can cross the line to perfectionism if it interferes with social, emotional, or academic functioning. Striving to be perfect can actually stop you from reaching your goals.

Perfectionism is fueled by, and fuels, anxiety. You might struggle daily with worry, anxiety, and an intense fear of failure. Anxious thoughts support perfectionistic behaviors, and when your results fall short of expectations, you probably experience even greater anxiety. It can be a hard cycle to break.

Consider Heather. At a choral concert, 60 choir members walked up to the stage on a set of steps visible to the nearly 2,500 people on the expansive lawn at an outdoor venue. Heather, who has a fear of making a fool of herself in public, stumbled on one of the steps and fell—*splat*—bracing herself with her hands. People helped her up, and she took her place in the lineup, but she was mortified. She was sure everyone in the choir and everyone in the audience were laughing at her and thinking she was a “clumsy idiot.” She felt like she failed, and she had a difficult time focusing throughout the event because she was beating herself up. It's likely that Heather was the only one who even gave any thought to it after it happened, much less a critical thought. People probably felt empathy and hoped she was okay.

What if you were to experience yourself as imperfect by embarrassing yourself *on purpose*? You might feel anxious at the thought! This form of exposure therapy is called “constructive embarrassment.” The idea is to expose yourself to uncomfortable feelings and learn to tolerate them—to actually welcome the feeling of embarrassment or humiliation so you can get used to it and realize that nothing catastrophic will happen and you're human—just like everyone else!

What to Do

Check any of the following statements that apply to you:

- ☐ I'm dissatisfied with a standard that others view as acceptable.
- ☐ I often procrastinate until I'm sure of what to do and/or how to earn a high grade on an assignment.
- ☐ I'm afraid to answer questions in class for fear of being wrong.
- ☐ I'm afraid to take risks.
- ☐ I'm angry with myself, and say harsh things to myself, when I make a mistake.
- ☐ I avoid starting tasks because I'm afraid I won't do them "right" or "well."
- ☐ I get very upset when my grades are lower than I expect.
- ☐ I can't cope with mistakes.
- ☐ I feel like I've failed if I don't say and do things perfectly.
- ☐ I take criticism personally.
- ☐ I do my work or complete tests slowly to avoid mistakes.
- ☐ I focus on neatness and the appearance of my work.
- ☐ I start over repeatedly to "get it right."

Total checked statements: _____

If you checked five or more statements, you probably try very hard to be perfect, leading to worry and anxiety.

This exercise instructs you to plan a few "socially inappropriate" things to do in public. Below are some possible activities. Feel free to add your own situations to the list. On each line, rank each item on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = little to no anxiety, and 10 = extreme distress.

- ☐ As you're walking down the hall at school, stumble and fall on purpose.
- ☐ Go to a movie after it has already started and ask to climb over people.
- ☐ Turn in an essay that is not your best work.
- ☐ Make a phone call; then, say you have the wrong number and hang up.
- ☐ Spill your drink or drop a tray of food in the cafeteria.
- ☐ Dress casually for a formal event (or vice versa).
- ☐ Talk to yourself out loud in class.

- ___ Face the wrong way in an elevator.
- ___ Hum softly during class.
- ___ Go to school and walk around with a speck of food on your face.
- ___ Wear mismatched socks or shoes.
- ___ Ask a question in class that you're worried might make you appear stupid.
- ___ Intentionally answer questions incorrectly on a test.
- ___ Skip instead of walk down the street.
- ___ Pause for 10 seconds while giving a presentation.
- ___ Order a messy meal when you are on a date.
- ___ Your own idea: _____
- ___ Your own idea: _____
- ___ Your own idea: _____

Now you'll practice doing the activities in public. Choose the activities you marked 1 or 2 first, then work up to trying a 5 or 6. You might want to invite a friend or group of friends to join you as you practice the skills. Then, record your reflections about the experience.

"Socially inappropriate" activities you will do:

Describe in detail your experience engaging in "socially inappropriate" activities.

What is the worst thing that happened doing any of these exercises? Did anyone make comments or look at you in a strange way?

What thoughts did you have after you completed this exercise? Do you feel less anxious about the possibility of being imperfect?

Practicing doing the things you fear most is considered to be the best way to overcome your perfectionism. Do you think you can continue this practice? Who can help support you in continuing to practice this kind of activity? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Face Your Fears with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

Objective

To face and manage your fears instead of avoiding them.

You Should Know

You might feel that paralyzing fear consumes and shapes your life, like a vicious circle or trap from which you can't escape. It's often the most difficult aspect of anxiety to overcome. You fear your own mind, which is filled with both unwelcome and disturbing thoughts. You fear losing control of yourself and saying or doing things that are totally against your values.

Imagine you did something different: something that on the surface seems ridiculous—crazy, even! What if instead of trying to control your reaction to a frightening image that you can't un-see or avoid a terrible thought, you become aware of your fears, face them, speak about them aloud, and accept them as something that makes you human? What if you acknowledge your difficulties and the role fear has played in your life? What if you embrace your perceived weaknesses, while also acknowledging your strength and resilience?

Your natural tendency when faced with overwhelming fear might be to fight it by trying to control it. However, this approach only serves to increase anxiety, as the fear only temporarily subsides.

Drawing upon the teachings of mindfulness, acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) recognizes that suffering stems from the tendency to escape or avoid pain instead of facing it. You disconnect from the present and attach to negative thoughts that you mistakenly think define you. This dissatisfaction is intensified when you base your actions on those fears instead of acting based on your values.

One of the major principles of ACT is to accept your reactions and be present with them, no matter how disturbing they are. Practicing acceptance may at first make you feel very anxious, but being able to tolerate your anxious feelings by fully experiencing the sensations, thoughts, and emotions that accompany your fears is the first step toward decreasing the power your fears have over you.

What to Do

Place a check by the fears in the list below that dominate your life, and add fears you have that are not listed here.

_____ being disappointed

_____ being hurt

_____ feeling embarrassed

_____ feeling like a failure

_____ feeling anxious

_____ becoming dependent

_____ being different

_____ appearing crazy

_____ being uncomfortable

_____ being lonely

_____ making a decision

_____ making a mistake

_____ being misunderstood

_____ hurting others

_____ losing control

_____ being imperfect

_____ experiencing pain

_____ feeling rejected

_____ seeming stupid

_____ facing the unknown

Other: _____

Other: _____

Choose at least three fears from your list and, using the prompts that follow, write about how they have impacted your life. As you write, consider the following:

- Observe what you're experiencing without reacting.
- Let your emotions or thoughts happen without giving in to your fears.
- Recognize the difficulty that experiencing these fears has made in your life without judging or criticizing yourself.
- Give yourself permission to be fearful.

My fear of _____ has stopped me from going to the following places I would like to go: _____

My fear of _____ has made me afraid to try the following things:

My fear of _____ has caused me so much anxiety that I have resorted to the following activities in order to reduce my anxiety:

My fear of _____ has impacted my relationships in the following ways:

My fear of _____ has influenced my plans for the future in the following ways: _____

My fear of _____ has impacted my life by:

How well were you able to observe and not react to fears and anxiety? Describe.

How well were you able to allow your emotions or thoughts to happen without reacting?

Explain how you avoided judging yourself when you realized how fear has affected your life.

What do you think will happen if you give yourself permission to be fearful?

How did it feel to acknowledge and accept your feelings of anxiety?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

What to Do When You Worry Too Much About Your Health

Objective

To reduce your excessive worrying about your health by learning different strategies for managing your anxious thoughts and feelings.

You Should Know

You've probably seen characters on TV and in movies who are considered hypochondriacs: people who worry excessively about their health—even though they have no actual physical problems.

But worrying about your health all the time is no laughing matter. This type of worrying can be part of an anxiety disorder and, paradoxically, worrying about your health can actually cause physical symptoms that can make you feel worse and cause more worry. You might constantly seek reassurance you're not dying of a fatal disease, but often reassurance doesn't diminish the worry. If you constantly worry that you're sick, you might think that your parents, and even your doctors, are missing something—creating more stress—which can become a vicious cycle.

Chronic worrying about your health, and even about your death, is just a flow of thoughts and, in reality, has no special power over you. In this worksheet, you'll explore different strategies to overcome the problem.

What to Do

Review the list below and put a check next to the items that apply to you; then, describe your current experience.

- ☐ I worry that any physical symptoms or sensations are a sign that I have an illness.
- ☐ My parents or caregivers frequently take me to see doctors to seek reassurance that my symptoms are not serious, only to be told that either nothing is wrong or that the problem is not serious.
- ☐ I use the Internet to research my physical symptoms.
- ☐ I constantly check my body, wondering if something is wrong.
- ☐ I seek my parents', friends', or others' validation or reassurance about my health.
- ☐ I avoid going out for fear of catching an illness or being exposed to germs or toxins.
- ☐ I don't tell anyone about my worries because people tend to laugh at me or downplay my concerns, which makes me feel even more anxious and alone.

Describe your experiences:

When did you first start worrying about your health? _____

Do you have a family history of people with anxiety about health or physical concerns? _____

How does your family history or messages you heard when you were little support your worries?

What are the consequences of your chronic worries about your health, such as avoiding people, irritating people, missing school, failing to fulfill your goals, and so on?

Describe your level of motivation to make changes regarding worrying about your health, where 0 = not motivated, 1 = somewhat motivated, 2 = moderately motivated, and 3 = highly motivated: _____

If you wrote a 0 or 1, what can help you become more motivated to change?

Below are steps to reduce worries about your health. If you find that your ability to participate in normal daily activities is seriously affected by your health worries, please talk to your parents, guidance counselor, or therapist.

1. Schedule a medical exam. Schedule a complete physical to properly assess your current health and rule out medical reasons for any symptoms you're experiencing.

2. Educate yourself about physical symptoms. Learn that certain bodily sensations that you think are dangerous or fatal are not necessarily indications of an underlying illness. For instance, there can be many explanations for headaches; it's seldom a sign of a brain tumor.

3. Avoid the Internet. A minor symptom, such as a headache or stomachache, can yield scary results, such as tumors or cancers, which worsen anxiety. If you do this habitually, you might consider setting a goal of cutting back and eventually eliminating your searches.

4. Stop checking yourself. Stop taking your temperature, measuring your blood pressure, or taking your pulse. Find something outside of yourself and your body to focus on.

5. Give away or dispose of any medical devices that are not doctor-prescribed.

6. Find a support group of teens who share similar worries. Exchange information and coping strategies in order to feel less alone.

7. Exercise. Moving your body can help you manage stress, depression, and anxiety. You can keep it simple, such as a short walk or run, a bike ride, or visit to the gym. Or, you can do something more active such as rowing, swimming, hiking, or mountain climbing. Your overall health can improve as a result of regular exercise, and you can begin to feel better about yourself.

8. Practice telling yourself you're fine and you're causing yourself undue stress.

9. Meditate or practice deep breathing. This will calm your body down.

10. Examine the evidence for your fear. Is it actually true? Might there be another way to look at the symptom? Treat your thoughts and worries as a "habit" that is keeping you from having a pleasant day or a pleasant life. This takes time and consistent practice, so be patient.

Reflections on This Exercise

What did you learn from this exercise that you did not know before?

Referring to the recommendations above, what are you willing to try?

Whom can you ask for help for your health worries?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Use Visual Metaphors to Accept Your Worries and Distressing Thoughts

Objective

To use visual metaphors to detach from your worries and distressing thoughts to reduce your anxiety.

You Should Know

You might spend a lot of time and energy trying to get rid of your upsetting thoughts and worries. What if you stop trying to get rid of them at all? This may seem strange because it's the opposite of what you feel like doing, but the more you try and get rid of your thoughts, the harder it is to get rid of them! When you learn to accept your thoughts and detach from them, they will no longer have power over you.

For example, suppose someone told you to stop thinking about a pink elephant. Immediately you would probably get a visual image of a pink elephant, even though you were told not to do this. The more you try not to think of a pink elephant, the more it comes to mind. The more you try to rid yourself of specific thoughts, images, and memories, the more they will take control of your mind and even your actions.

So, stop struggling with your worries! Just accept them. Don't try to distract yourself. Don't try to change your thoughts. Certainly, don't try to dull your thoughts with drugs or alcohol. Also, don't pretend your anxieties and worries don't exist.

Instead, as difficult as this sounds, just accept your worries, detach from them, and observe them without reacting to them in an emotional way. Try to "objectify" your worries, remembering that your thoughts are just thoughts—they have no special powers.

What to Do

This worksheet includes four metaphors that can help you understand and practice the principle of detaching from your worries by objectifying your thoughts and just observing them. After you read the different metaphors, practice using them several times a day. Even if you're not worrying at the time, you should still practice using these visual metaphors.

Don't Struggle in Quicksand

When you struggle to get out of quicksand, you sink deeper. When you relax and float, you will eventually find you're able to swim or walk out of the quicksand. Contrary to popular movies, quicksand does not "suck you down." Quicksand is usually shallow and, when you stop struggling, it's easy to get out.

Try using this metaphor to stop resisting your worries. Imagine your worries are a pool of quicksand. Struggling will make it harder for you to get out. Accepting your worries as just thoughts and not real dangers will rob them of their power. When you stop struggling, your

worries lose their power over you. Just walk away. After you do this exercise, rate your anxiety from 1 to 10, where 10 = very anxious, and 1 = very calm and disengaged from your worries: ____

Ignore Annoying Passengers in Your Car

You've probably had the experience of riding in a car with annoying passengers. Maybe a complaining friend is sitting next to you, or your siblings are making a lot of noise. So, what do you do? You just consciously tune out the noise from the passengers in the car and let it fade into the background. You're aware of the annoyance, but you tune it out.

Now, sit back and visualize yourself riding in a car, but your worries are the passengers. They are clamoring to get your attention, but you just tune them out. They are just background noise as you keep on going about your daily routine. After you do this exercise, rate your anxiety where, 10 = very anxious, to 1 = very calm and disengaged from your worries: ____

Watching the Worry Train

Imagine your worries are cars on a train. Each car contains a different worry. Visualize each car on the train and then think for a moment about the worry that's in each one. Now, sit back and visualize this train pulling out of the station. Watch it as it rounds the bend and then continues on a journey out of sight, taking your worries away. Relax and visualize this metaphor. Then rate how you feel. After you do this exercise, rate your anxiety from 1 to 10, where 10 = very anxious, to 1 = very calm and disengaged from your worries: ____

Clouds Floating By

Think about something that you're worried about. Say this worry out loud and visualize the worst thing that could happen. Now, take a photo in your mind of that worry. Imagine that photo is resting on a cloud. Don't do anything to make the cloud go away, but just let it float away on its own, carrying off the picture of your worry. Watch it from the ground and see what happens to it. After you do this exercise, rate your anxiety, where 10 = very anxious, to 1 = very calm and disengaged from your worries: ____

Now, use the following chart to practice using visual metaphors each day for two weeks. Rate how you feel before practicing the exercise, during the exercise, and after, where 10 = very anxious, to 1 = very calm and disengaged from your worries. In the 'Notes' section, reflect on your experience.

| Date | Visual Metaphor You Used | How Did You Feel Before the Exercise? (1-10) | How Did You Feel During? (1-10) | How Did You Feel After? (1-10) | Notes |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|---|--|---|--------------|
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After you have practiced using visual metaphors every day for two weeks, answer the questions below.

Did you notice that you felt less anxious or worried after each visualization exercise? Describe.

How would you describe any changes in your moods or distressing feelings at the end of two weeks?

What other changes did you notice (thoughts, behaviors, reactions, feelings, and so forth)?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Control Your Hair Pulling

Objective

To control compulsive hair pulling by using behavioral techniques to reduce or eliminate the behavior.

You Should Know

Trichotillomania (pronounced TRICK-uh-TILL-uh-MAIN-ee-uh), abbreviated as TTM, is also called hair-pulling disorder. It's a psychological problem that involves recurrent, irresistible urges to pull out hair from your scalp, eyebrows, or other areas of your body, despite trying to stop. TTM likely results from a combination of genetic and environmental factors and has often been strongly associated with other psychological problems, such as obsessive-compulsive disorders, anxiety disorders, tics, and Tourette's syndrome.

TTM can be related to both negative and positive emotions. On the one hand, hair pulling is a way to deal with stress, anxiety, tension, boredom, loneliness, fatigue, or frustration. On the other hand, you might find it feels good, so you continue the behavior in order to evoke that positive feeling.

Hair pulling can be "focused," "automatic," or a combination of both. If you're a focused hair puller, you intentionally pull your hair out as a way to relieve distress. You might have rituals, such as finding just the right hair or biting on the pulled hairs. With automatic hair pulling, you might not even realize what you're doing; you might "zone out" while watching TV, reading, or playing video games. You might try to hide your hair pulling because it can cause feelings of shame and guilt.

You can learn skills to manage your hair pulling. The first step is awareness of your thoughts, feelings, and the situations that occur before and after hair pulling. Identifying your own triggers is important, too, as everyone's triggers can be different. Next, you can learn a strategy called Habit Reversal Training, best done in collaboration with a trained therapist.

What to Do

Review the list below and put a check next to the items that describe your situation.

- _____ You repeatedly pull your hair out, typically from your scalp, eyebrows, or eyelashes but sometimes from other places on your body; sites may vary over time.
- _____ You feel an increasing sense of tension before pulling or when you try to resist pulling.
- _____ You feel a sense of pleasure or relief after the hair is pulled.
- _____ You have noticeable hair loss, such as shortened hair or thinned or bald areas on your scalp or other areas of your body, including sparse or missing eyelashes or eyebrows.
- _____ You prefer specific types of hair, rituals that accompany hair pulling, or patterns of hair pulling.
- _____ You bite, chew, or eat pulled-out hair.
- _____ You play with pulled-out hair or rub it across your lips or face.
- _____ You repeatedly try to stop pulling out your hair or try to do it less, without success.
- _____ You have significant distress or problems at school, at home, or socially that cause you to pull out your hair.

Describe your current experience.

When did you first start pulling out your hair? _____

When did it seem to become a problem for you? _____

Describe the positive gains of hair pulling for you. What do you “get out of it”?

What are the negative consequences of hair pulling for you?

Describe your level of motivation to make some changes regarding your TTM behavior as of today, where 0 = not motivated, 1 = somewhat motivated, 2 = moderately motivated, and 3 = highly motivated: _____

Habit Reversal Training

Drs. Nathan Azrin and Gregory Nunn developed behavioral approaches, including Habit Reversal Training (HRT), to deal with hair-pulling. The four primary components of HRT include:

- **Self-awareness training.** Keep a detailed record of all instances when you pull out your hair, including when, where, why, and with whom this happens. Note all urges and sensations associated with the hair pulling before, during, and after.
- **Relaxation training.** Practice progressive muscle relaxation exercises or other body-focused relaxation techniques, such as a body scan.
- **Diaphragmatic breathing.** Learn this deep breathing skill, which can relax the mind and body.
- **Competing response training.** Learn a muscle tensing action which “competes” with the hair-pulling behavior. For instance, a competing response would be the opposite of the repetitive behavior and something that you can do for more than two or three minutes. Some experts suggest balling up your hands into a fist and holding them rigidly on the side of your body, or you can tense your arm muscles over and over, tensing and releasing, until the urge subsides or disappears.

Keep track of when you use your HRT strategies. Notice in particular any urges and attempts to use a competing response so you can see improvement over time. Over time, you can learn to control your hair-pulling behavior at work, school, and other public places. Use the chart below or create one of your own to track your behavior.

| Why Did You Pull Your Hair? (When/Where) | My Emotions Before Pulling | My Emotions During Pulling | Strategy Used to Reduce Behavior | My Emotions After Using the Strategy |
|---|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
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Reflections on This Exercise

What are your fears and worries about practicing the strategies suggested above?

Whom can you talk to about your hair pulling—someone neutral and accepting? Name at least two people you trust.

What would you like to gain from trying to control your hair-pulling behaviors?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Help for Your Hand Washing

Objective

To acknowledge and manage your compulsive hand-washing by learning to wash your hands in a way that is helpful and not hurtful to you.

You Should Know

Handwashing is widely known as one of the best ways to combat diseases and maintain overall health. Thorough handwashing has become a common practice, with many people becoming accustomed to washing their hands multiple times per day. As a result, it can be difficult for people with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) to understand what is and isn't an appropriate hand-washing technique.

Hand-washing compulsion is probably the most prevalent manifestation of contamination OCD. If you engage in compulsive hand washing, you will recognize that the obsessive fear surrounding getting or giving a disease, combined with your need for perfection and your uncertainty regarding the cleanliness of your hands, has become a vicious cycle.

Hand-washing OCD is characterized by the fear of becoming contaminated by your own actions or the actions of someone else or the fear of spreading germs to others. It can stem from many sources; these are the most common:

- Fear of coming close to possible contaminants, such as bacteria, germs, dirt, bodily secretions, hospitals, or people who might be sick.
- Fear of objects that might seem dirty or contaminated, such as pencils, doorknobs, or hand rails.
- Magical thinking about colors, the names of illnesses, numbers, or other things that you fear could cause contamination.
- Fear of making yourself or others sick by your carelessness.

Without even being aware of it, you may feel compelled to expand your handwashing rituals to relieve your anxious feelings of being dirty — then, before you know it, you are compulsively washing your hands. In fact, many people report that they are so consumed by their compulsive handwashing that they are unsure or forget how often “normal” people wash their hands.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) states that you should wash your hands for at least twenty seconds:

1. Before, during, and after preparing food.
2. Before eating food.
3. Before and after caring for someone who is sick.

4. Before and after treating a cut or wound.
5. After using the toilet.
6. After changing diapers or cleaning up a child who has used the toilet.
7. After blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing.
8. After touching an animal, animal feed, or animal waste.
9. After handling pet food or pet treats.
10. After touching garbage.

Each handwashing should take the same amount of time as it takes to sing “Happy Birthday” twice.

What to Do

Answer the following questions to assess whether you are experiencing hand-washing compulsions.

- Do you experience disturbing thoughts, images, urges, or sensations that you feel can only be eliminated by cleaning and washing your body, hands, or other surfaces that you come in contact with? ____ True ____ False
- Do you have a ritual or highly structured hand-washing routine that you feel you must perform in order to feel clean? For example, do you wash each finger and nail separately? ____ True ____ False
- Do you feel compelled to wash your hands a certain number of times in order to feel clean? ____ True ____ False
- After washing your hands, do you feel it’s highly probable that you missed a spot? ____ True ____ False
- Do you frequently find yourself washing your hands over and over because you experience an overwhelming uncertainty that they are really clean? ____ True ____ False
- Have your hands become red, raw, chapped, or cracked? ____ True ____ False
- Do you go to the extreme to avoid places or situations that might expose you to germs? ____ True ____ False
- Do you avoid shaking hands or touching objects that may expose you to germs, dirt, or disease? ____ True ____ False
- Do you feel that you can control your obsessive thoughts or compulsive acts even though you realize that they are excessive? ____ True ____ False

Next, complete a hand-washing log so that you can observe objectively the amount of time you spend washing your hands. Track your handwashing for one week. At the end of the week, total the amount of time you spent washing and the number of times you washed your hands. Add any notes that you feel are relevant or important.

Week: _____

| | Total Time Spent Washing | What Triggered Your Hand Washing? | Tally How Often You Washed Your Hands | Notes |
|--------------|---|--|--|--------------|
| Day 1 | | | | |
| Day 2 | | | | |
| Day 3 | | | | |
| Day 4 | | | | |
| Day 5 | | | | |
| Day 6 | | | | |
| Day 7 | | | | |

How does your hand washing impact your life?

How does your behavior compare to the CDC guidelines?

Does this information encourage you to continue your hand-washing practices? Does it suggest you should change your behavior?

Reflection on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to manage your hand washing?

Stop Yourself from Fainting When You Get a Shot or Give Blood

Objective

To use the “Applied Tension” technique when you are getting an injection or giving blood to avoid fainting.

You Should Know

Nobody really likes getting an injection or giving blood. Most teens feel a little nervous, even queasy, before going to an appointment when they expect these medical procedures to occur. However, some teens have a reaction that goes well beyond being nervous. If you start to sweat, hyperventilate, feel dizzy, or even faint every time you even think about needles, then you may be one of tens of thousands of people who suffer from “blood/injection/injury phobia.”

Fainting is caused by a sudden drop in your heart rate or blood pressure. Most of the time when you’re anxious or fearful, your heart rate and blood pressure actually go up. This is why it’s so rare to faint when you’re feeling anxious. However, some people with a fear of blood or needles experience an initial increase and then a sudden drop in their blood pressure, which can result in fainting. For many teens, the fear of fainting overrides the fear of needles and blood. In the worst-case scenario, you might avoid getting necessary medical procedures because you fear needles and the sight of blood.

If you do have a fear of fainting, you should know that injuries caused by fainting are actually pretty rare. However, since falling from a standing position without support can be harmful, it’s important to tell any medical professional you are seeing that this is a concern of yours, particularly if you’ve fainted before.

Fortunately, if you find yourself anxious and fearful that you will pass out when you get an injection or give blood, there is something you can do about it. A technique called “Applied Tension” can help you avoid fainting. This worksheet shows you how to master the Applied Tension technique, which is easy to learn although it takes a little practice.

You’ll need to practice the exercises for at least a week prior to getting an injection or giving blood. This involves just tensing your legs, torso, and arms repeatedly for 20 to 30 seconds at a time. You know you are doing it correctly when your face feels a little flushed after your practice.

First, sit in a comfortable chair and tense the muscles in your arms, legs, and torso for about 10 to 15 seconds. Your face will get warm as you tense up. Then, relax your body for 20 to 30 seconds. Repeat this 4-5 times. Note that the goal is not to become completely relaxed, as this will cause your blood pressure to drop. Rather, the goal is to let your body return to a normal state (not overly tense or completely relaxed).

Once you have practiced the technique, it will be easy to do if you find yourself feeling light-headed at the doctor’s office. You can do the technique while the procedure is going on, but don’t

tense the arm that is receiving the needle since this will make it more painful. Instead, relax the arm getting the needle while tensing other parts of your body.

Use the chart to record practicing the technique several times a day for at least a week.

Practicing the Applied Tension Technique

Practice for at least a week, 4-5 times a day, before visiting the doctor. It's important to practice so you feel comfortable with the technique before having to use it. Tracking your practice will help ensure that you're prepared for your medical visit. Think about the last time you had a problem getting an injection or giving blood each time you practice. Rate your anxiety on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 = no anxiety or fear, to 10 = so anxious you feel faint.

Date of scheduled medical visit: _____

| Day | Time | Number of Times You Tensed Up | Rate Your Fear/Anxiety Level |
|-----|------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

Are there other situations where you're afraid you might faint that you can use this technique?

Will mastering this technique help you in specific ways? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Curb Your Compulsions to Diminish Your Anxiety

Objective

To decrease your anxiety and regain power over compulsions by purposely shortening the length of your compulsive behavior.

You Should Know

As you know, engaging in compulsions can be incredibly time consuming, essentially stealing precious moments of time that you could be spending with your family and friends or participating in an activity you enjoy. If you experience compulsions frequently, you might feel compelled to repeat your compulsive behavior past the point of exhaustion, and yet you still are unable to stop.

Do you often feel as though you are being held hostage by your compulsions after losing countless hours conducting a ritual over and over again, washing your hands incessantly, or checking each and every light in your house only to wonder “what if?” and find yourself checking all over again? Do you ever look at the clock in shock at the realization of how much time you have wasted engaging in pointless activities?

What to Do

This worksheet will help you shorten the length of time you spend on your compulsions and establish control over how your time is spent. This exercise gives you permission to feel your anxiety, while simultaneously allowing you to recognize you’re the one giving yourself permission to indulge in your compulsion; therefore, you also have the power to end it when you feel the time is right. Perform the following steps to complete this exercise.

1. Fill in the compulsion log for one week. Note how often and for how long you engage in your compulsions.
2. When you find yourself engaging in a compulsive behavior, set a timer for a period that’s at least *ten minutes less* than the time you usually engage in this compulsion.
3. Rate your level of anxiety associated with the compulsion, and level of anxiety associated with reduced time engaging in the compulsion, from 1 to 10, where 10 = very anxious, to 1 = very calm/little-to-no anxiety.
4. You might have a friend or family member remind you when it’s time to end.
5. Make a copy of the chart and do this for consecutive two-week intervals, lessening the time spent on the compulsion by an additional ten minutes until the compulsion no longer has power over you.

| | Obsession | Compulsive behavior | Level of anxiety associated with compulsion (1–10) | Time spent engaging in compulsion | Goal time <i>*at least 10 minutes less</i> | Level of anxiety associated with reduced time (1–10) |
|--------------|---|------------------------------|---|--|---|---|
| | Example: <i>Boyfriend is ignoring me.</i> | <i>Checking social media</i> | 8 | 2 hours | 90 minutes | 7 |
| Day 1 | | | | | | |
| Day 2 | | | | | | |
| Day 3 | | | | | | |
| Day 4 | | | | | | |
| Day 5 | | | | | | |
| Day 6 | | | | | | |
| Day 7 | | | | | | |

Reflections on This Exercise

How did facing your compulsions instead of fighting against them impact your level of anxiety?

How did decreasing the time spent on your compulsions change as you continued this exercise?

How did it feel to incorporate choice into your compulsions instead of being compelled to finish them only when you were completely exhausted?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Reduce Over-Stimulation to Focus on Yourself

Objective

To relax your mind and body by identifying and limiting the activities in your life that cause anxiety and keep your mind on “alert.”

You Should Know

You probably live in a world full of stimulation: TV, radio, music, smartphones, computers, video games, traffic, and other noises. Sometimes it’s out of your control, but other times you seek out the stimulation—perhaps to avoid feelings, or perhaps because silence feels weird or uncomfortable.

Constant stimulation and mental activity can lead to anxiety, attention and memory problems, and difficulty concentrating or focusing—all of which can be challenging and stressful.

Give your brain a break. That doesn’t mean you need to go off to a Zen retreat and take a vow of silence. You can experiment with simple ways to take breaks from all the noise and stimulation. Start by noticing that there’s a quiet place deep inside of you—if only you take a moment to listen.

What to Do

Here is a list of things that might keep you from relaxing your mind. For the next week, select several items from this list and change your habits or revise your schedule, if possible. See if you notice any change in your feelings or general mood.

- Checking email
- Listening to loud music
- Going to loud outdoor concerts
- Listening to music with earbuds
- Talking on the phone
- Watching streaming videos
- Checking social media accounts
- Going out with friends
- Going to parties
- Responding to texts or IMs
- Visiting friends and family

What else would you add to this list? _____

What are the top three items that are getting in the way of relaxing your mind?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = very unwilling, 5 = somewhat willing, and 10 = very willing, how willing are you to experiment with cutting back on or eliminating your top three activities for the next week? _____

If you want to cut back, when and how much will you allow yourself to do this activity? For example, check Snap Chat only three times a day for no more than five minutes. Be very specific.

Tell someone you trust about your choice and ask for accountability. Better yet, find an “unplugging” buddy!

Name of person/buddy: _____

How do you feel about cutting back on or eliminating the activities that interfere with relaxing your mind?

Use the following chart to keep track of your “unplugging” activities. Each day cut back or eliminate an activity, and note for how long. Finally, reflect on your thoughts and feelings about cutting out the activity.

| Date | Activity you cut back or eliminated | How long? | Reflect on thoughts/feelings |
|------|-------------------------------------|-----------|------------------------------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

What was it like to cut back or eliminate activities that cause anxiety and keep your mind on alert?

How did this exercise reduce your anxiety and/or help you relax? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Mindful Meditation 101

Objective

To quiet your mind and body through practicing formal and informal mindful meditation.

You Should Know

Mindfulness means noticing what’s happening right here and now, without judgment and with acceptance. Even a few minutes of quieting the mind and body on a regular basis can reap big benefits—less anxiety and stress—and improvements in memory and attention. You’re training your brain to default to a more relaxed state. That happens only with regular practice. Just as you wouldn’t expect a marathon runner to be able to run a race without training, don’t expect that you’ll immediately reap the benefits of meditation. Go slow and steady, one step at a time.

You might want to search for meditation, mindfulness, or guided visualization recordings on YouTube. Sometimes you might want to meditate with music, sometimes without. Explore, experiment, and find what works best for you.

There are two categories of mindfulness meditation practices: formal and informal. *Formal practice* requires setting aside a specific time each day or twice a day to be mindful, and it can be done either sitting or walking. *Informal practice* refers to paying mindful, nonjudgmental attention while doing certain routine daily activities, such as taking a shower, washing the dishes, making your bed, going for a walk, and so on. Start by choosing one daily activity at a time so you don’t get overwhelmed.

What to Do

In this exercise, you’ll start with the formal practice of sitting meditation. Sitting meditation requires setting aside a specific time each day, twice a day, or as often as you can to sit quietly with your eyes closed (or open, gazing steadily downward, if you prefer). Experts often recommend twenty minutes per day, but if that doesn’t work for you, try ten, or five, or even start with three. You can always build up over time, just like marathon runners in training.

For your sitting meditation, find a time when you can eliminate all distractions and unplug from the world. To start, you might choose to repeat a mantra, which is a word of your choice, such as “peace,” “calm,” “one,” “love,” or something that you can use as your anchor when your mind wanders—which it inevitably will.

Don’t worry, and don’t judge yourself. Just watch the thoughts floating past you, like clouds in the sky. *The mindful moment comes when you notice your mind wandering.* Simply bring your attention back to your anchor. You can also use your breath as an anchor or any mindful self-compassion phrases. By regularly practicing sitting still and simply noticing the flow of thoughts and sensations without judgment and with acceptance, you’ll get better at noticing when you are not mindful. Again, that “waking up” moment is a moment of mindfulness, pulling you out of your trance and into the present moment.

For your informal mindfulness practice, pick one of the activities mentioned above (taking a shower, washing the dishes, making the bed, or going for a walk) and see what it's like to pay full attention to what is happening right here and now. In the shower, do you feel the water on your body? Is it warm enough? Is it too hot? Do you feel the soap or the shampoo? Can you be present throughout the shower? If your mind wanders, bring it back to the sensory experience of being in the shower.

This week, try to schedule at least three or four formal sitting meditation sessions and one or two informal practices. During each activity, practice being mindful: notice how your body feels; notice your breath; notice any sensory experiences, such as what you see, hear, smell, or touch. Write down your experiences and your responses.

| Date | Formal Practice | Informal Practice | Response |
|------------------------------------|--|---|---|
| Example: <i>Monday, January 12</i> | <i>Sat for 10 mins. on my couch after school -no phone or TV! Focused on breath.</i> | <i>Paid attention while brushing teeth.</i> | <i>Got fidgety but stuck with it. Noticed the fidgetiness, but tried not to judge; tasted the minty toothpaste.</i> |
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Reflections on This Exercise

What did you find challenging about this exercise?

After practicing mindful meditation for one week, did you find that your stress and/or anxiety was reduced? Describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Become Mindful of Your World Rather Than Your Anxious Thoughts

Objective

To focus on the world using your five senses rather than on your anxious thoughts.

You Should Know

Do you often find yourself agonizing over what might happen in the future, worrying about every possible thing that might go wrong, while simultaneously condemning yourself for what went wrong in the past? Being consumed by all this turmoil does not allow you to appreciate or enjoy the experience: a birthday celebration or even a simple night out with your friends.

Anxiety disorders can demand that you ignore what's taking place around you by bombarding you with disturbing thoughts, urges, and images. These unwanted experiences distract you from living your life in the moment and instead encourage you to obsess about a past you cannot change and an uncertain future you cannot predict or control.

What if you tried to live your life according to the uplifting and freeing principles of mindfulness instead of the rigid rules of your anxiety disorder? Mindfulness encourages you to notice and accept your thoughts, while at the same time not allowing you to be obsessed with them. By teaching you to focus on the present moment in a meaningful, nonjudgmental way, it takes away the power of your anxious thoughts.

What to Do

This exercise will encourage you to draw your attention away from your anxious thoughts and toward yourself, using your five senses as a guide.

- Commit to using your sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell to channel your thoughts in a purposeful direction.
- Commit to doing this at least once a day for at least three weeks until you become accustomed to focusing your mind on the present.
- Begin by focusing on one sense for at least one to two minutes, taking the time to truly separate that sense from the next as you move from one to the other.

It does not matter what order you practice the five senses in. You can switch them around as you see fit. You can sit in a comfortable position the first few times, and as you become accustomed to performing the exercise, you can engage in it at any time or place.

At first this exercise may seem silly to you, and even somewhat difficult, but as you continue to practice you will find it easier to incorporate mindfulness into your daily experience until it becomes a natural part of who you are.

Five Senses Mindfulness Exercise

Sight

- Observe what is around you, noticing shape, color, and texture.
- Look for things you would not usually take the time to notice, such as shadows, a crack in the sidewalk, the texture of your bedspread, or any other small details that usually escape you.

Sound

- Take the time to listen to what is in the background instead of what is obvious.
- Don't just notice the sound of laughter, but try to discern different types of laughs.
- Rather than simply listening for the sounds of traffic, try to distinguish horns honking from tires squealing.
- Instead of bristling at loud music, take the time to figure out what genre you are hearing.
- Listen to previously unnoticed sounds, like the hum of the refrigerator or the clicking of the oven as it cycles on and off.

Touch

- Become aware of the differing feel of everyday items that surround you.
- Alternate touching items that are cold and warm, and notice how they make your hands feel.
- Touch items with various textures to notice the difference among them.
- Play with play dough or pet an animal, and notice the sensations in your fingers and hands as you feel your motions unfolding.

Taste

- Take a drink, and notice the feeling of the liquid rolling over your tongue.
- Chew on a piece of gum or candy, and take the time to notice the taste from when you first put it in your mouth until you finished it.

Smell

- Focus your attention on your surroundings to notice what different smells are in the air.
- Keep strong-smelling gum or candy with you to quietly smell in order to center yourself when you feel your anxiety rising. Other items such as lavender, perfume, or lotion also can provide a satisfying aroma that invokes mindfulness.

For a five-day period, set aside at least twenty minutes to practice this meditation, focusing on a different sense each day. For each sense, choose one suggestion from the mindfulness exercise to focus on.

Five Senses Meditation Chart

| Day/Sense | Focus of Your Meditation | What Did You Notice? | What Feelings Came Up? |
|-----------|--------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Day 1 | | | |
| Day 2 | | | |
| Day 3 | | | |
| Day 4 | | | |
| Day 5 | | | |

Reflection of This Exercise

After practicing mindfulness, what did you notice that you had not previously noticed?

Over time, how did practicing mindfulness impact your ability to focus on the present?

What difficulties did you encounter in practicing your mindfulness exercises? What adjustments did you make, if any, to make it easier for you?

How can you integrate the practice of mindfulness into managing your anxiety?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Section 4. Change Your Thinking

Own Your Thoughts

Objective

Diminish the power your thoughts have over you by learning to separate your interpretation of your thoughts from the actual thoughts themselves.

You Should Know

Have you ever imagined yourself engaging in some unthinkable, inappropriate behavior, such as standing up and screaming in a classroom where everyone is silent or walking by a fire alarm and pulling it? This is completely normal. Everyone has thoughts that are weird, unpleasant, and even disturbing at times. Most teens will quickly have the disturbing thought and then just as quickly forget about it.

You might define these types of thoughts as “good” or “bad” and then judge yourself as being good or bad based on the positive or negative meaning you apply to the thought. You might even be tempted to fight against the thought by controlling it or trying to stop it altogether.

If you have obsessive thoughts, you might have a different experience in which you not only can’t let the upsetting thought go but also find yourself attaching personal meaning to it, elevating it to the point where your obsession becomes entrenched. Trying to control a thought or stop it are strategies that do not help stop obsessions and most likely make them stronger.

Instead, learn to regard the thoughts clinically, as facts that can be explored to determine their worth in shaping your life. Practice categorizing your thoughts that bother you not as good or bad but as limiting or expanding your life, encouraging or discouraging you to thrive, or as simply being helpful or unhelpful to you.

What to Do

Create a thought interpretation notebook that will help you:

- recognize the power your thoughts have over you.
- separate your interpretation of your thoughts from the actual thoughts themselves, in order to diminish their power over you.
- judge your thoughts objectively to determine if they are healthy or harmful.
- reframe your thoughts so they are more realistic and positive rather than negative.

To create your thought interpretation notebook, answer the following questions about each obsessive thought you have. You can use additional paper, if needed.

What is my obsessive thought?

What do I think my thought means to me? To my future?

How does this impact my life negatively or positively?

How do my negative thoughts make me feel about myself?

How does the person I define myself to be compare to the person I know I really am?

If I look at my thought objectively, without any interpretation, how likely is it to come true?

If I did nothing about my thoughts, what realistically might or might not happen?

Thinking of my thought objectively, how could I reframe it in a more positive manner that's helpful to me?

What is my obsessive thought?

What do I think my thought means to me? To my future?

How does this impact my life negatively or positively?

How do my negative thoughts make me feel about myself?

How does the person I define myself to be compare to the person I know I really am?

If I look at my thought objectively, without any interpretation, how likely is it to come true?

If I did nothing about my thoughts, what realistically might or might not happen?

Thinking of my thought objectively, how could I reframe it in a more positive manner that is helpful to me?

What is my obsessive thought?

What do I think my thought means to me? To my future?

How does this impact my life negatively or positively?

How do my negative thoughts make me feel about myself?

How does the person I define myself to be compare to the person I know I really am?

If I look at my thought objectively, without any interpretation, how likely is it to come true?

If I did nothing about my thoughts, what realistically might or might not happen?

Thinking of my thought objectively, how could I reframe it in a more positive manner that is helpful to me?

Put your thought interpretation notebook to work for you!

1. To instantly evaluate your thoughts, take at least two of the most helpful questions and recite your answer to them every time you have a disturbing thought. Continue for two weeks.

2. Use a simple two-minute meditation:

- Close your eyes.
- Breathe deeply in and out.
- Imagine a group of gnats buzzing around you. As they circle your head, realize they are annoying but harmless and that you can deal with them.
- Now picture your disturbing thoughts as if they are noisy bugs flying at a distance. You can hear them, but they are in the background. Imagine ignoring them, focusing on something else.

3. Even though it might feel uncomfortable, add some uncertainty to your usual response to your obsessive thought by asking yourself, "What might happen if I didn't do anything about this?"

- Allow at least five minutes to go by before you take any action.
- Extend the time by an additional five minutes every time you have the thought, until you don't feel the need to respond at all.

Reflections on This Exercise

How did it feel to purposely separate your thoughts from your interpretation of those thoughts?

Did you feel as though the emotions you experienced enhanced or weakened the intensity of your interpretation of your thoughts?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Become Aware of the Physical Reactions to Your Distressing Thoughts

Objective

To practice mindfulness to reduce physical reactions to distressing thoughts.

You Should Know

When you have anxiety, just thinking about something can upset you and cause your body to react. Your thoughts can trigger a physical response in your body, like tightness in your chest or digestive upset, leading to increased anxiety. Sometimes, this can result in a panic attack. Major distress can start with just a simple thought.

Mindfulness increases your awareness of the present moment. You can acknowledge your thoughts without reacting in a judgmental or negative way. Being non-judgmental is the key, and that's what we're going to work on with this exercise, as it's designed to help you become aware of upsetting thoughts *without* triggering a physical response in your body.

What to Do

Get comfortable and read the unpleasant phrases below. Choose one to focus on. For at least five minutes, visualize the image using all the appropriate senses: sight, sound, smell, touch, and taste. Even though the images are very unpleasant, don't judge them. See if you can be mindful and present without negative physical reactions.

1. A person vomiting on you.
2. Opening a door and finding a dead animal in the room.
3. Looking at an open, oozing sore.
4. Sitting in a dark cave with insects crawling around you.
5. An active shooter in your school.
6. Drowning or suffocating.

Think of other disgusting or upsetting images:

7. _____

8. _____

Practice this mindfulness technique with two of the above repellant phrases for five minutes each. Rate how you did with each, using a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 = I didn't respond to the image at all, and 10 = I was completely disgusted by the visualization and felt really uncomfortable.

1. Situation: _____

Experience: _____

Rating: _____

2. Situation: _____

Experience: _____

Rating: _____

Now, describe one situation that normally causes you to be very anxious and upset.

Practice this same exercise, thinking about this situation in a mindful and non-judgmental manner.

Do this at least once a day for seven days. Use the chart to record your progress.

| Date and Time of Practice | Your Experience | Rating (1 – 10) |
|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

After you have practiced this exercise for one week, describe any changes in your physical reactions.

What did you find challenging about this exercise?

Did you find that your anxiety was reduced after doing this exercise for one week?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Confront Thoughts That Make You Anxious

Objective

To address and accept rather than avoid thoughts that make you anxious.

You Should Know

Avoiding your worries just makes them worse. You might seek ways to distract yourself from thoughts that make you anxious; unfortunately, this is the opposite of what you should be doing. The more you simply accept and allow your thoughts to happen—even the most disturbing ones—the less power they will have over you.

In this worksheet, you will practice confronting thoughts that make you anxious—rather than avoiding them.

What to Do

The following are activities that will force you to have anxiety-provoking thoughts over and over again until they lose their power over you. As you do this activity remember: *These are thoughts, and thinking them cannot make bad things happen.*

Begin by writing down an upsetting thought that you normally try to avoid because it makes you anxious.

What do you usually do to avoid upsetting thoughts that make you anxious? Explain.

Now put a check mark by one or two of the following activities that will force you to have this thought:

_____ Write down this thought at least 25 times on a sheet of paper.

_____ Sing this thought to the tune of “Happy Birthday” (or another tune).

_____ Draw a picture of the worst thing this thought represents.

_____ Say this thought in front of a mirror for three minutes.

_____ Make a recording of this thought and play it for at least five minutes.

_____ Create a collage representing this thought, cutting out words from newspapers or magazines and pasting in pictures that represent what the thought is about.

_____ Say the thought at least 10 times in a ridiculous voice.

_____ Translate the thought into another language and repeat it in that language several times.

Keep track of how you're feeling when you try the activities. Do at least one activity every day for at least one week. Rate how upsetting you found this thought after each activity on a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 = not really upsetting, and 10 = the worst anxiety I've experienced.

| Date | Activity | Length of Time | Rating |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---------------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

Which activity did you find most helpful in confronting your thoughts? Explain.

What did you find most challenging about this activity?

Do you still feel that you have to avoid thoughts that make you anxious? If the answer is “yes,” continue this exercise for another week. Then, describe your experience.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Five Steps to Deal with Intrusive Thoughts

Objective

To cope with intrusive and recurring thoughts by accepting them rather than fighting them.

You Should Know

Everyone has unacceptable intrusive thoughts at some time. Take a look at these examples:

- Josh walked down the corridor of his school and suddenly had the thought that he might pull the fire alarm.
- Samantha stood near the edge of the rooftop of her building and suddenly thought she might jump off.
- Nadia was sitting in church and she suddenly felt like she might shout out some obscene words.

Most of the time, these are passing thoughts. Although they might be totally unacceptable and completely out of character, they come and go very quickly, and minutes later you forget all about them. In many ways, they are more of a curiosity than a problem.

But, for some teens, intrusive and unacceptable thoughts get “stuck” in their brains. For example, a common intrusive thought of people with anxiety is that something will happen to a family member, and he or she will be hurt or even killed.

Unfortunately, the more you try to get rid of intrusive thoughts, the more they are sure to come back. Instead of trying to fight your intrusive thoughts, accept them. These five steps can help you do just that.

1. Label your intrusive thoughts as “just thoughts.” Remind yourself that they have no power over you.
2. Tell yourself that these thoughts are just your brain going on “automatic,” and you can safely ignore them.
3. Accept and allow the thoughts into your mind. Don’t try to push them away.
4. Breathe from your diaphragm until your anxiety starts to decrease.
5. Continue whatever you were doing prior to the intrusive thought.

What to Do

This may seem strange, but the next thing you need to do is to *practice* having upsetting thoughts. Forcing yourself to have the upsetting thoughts you have been avoiding is the only way you can learn to accept them with the five-step acceptance procedure described above. When you learn to accept your upsetting intrusive thoughts rather than fighting them, they will soon stop being a big part of your life.

In the chart below, write down situations that regularly trigger intrusive thoughts and the most common thoughts that you have. Then, rate the distress you experience while having these thoughts on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = they really don’t bother me, and 10 = I can’t stand

them anymore. Practice the five-step acceptance procedure. This will normally take 15 to 20 minutes. Enter 'Yes' or 'No' on the chart to indicate whether or not you practiced it. Finally, rate your distress again from 1 to 10. Do this every day for at least two weeks, and see if your intrusive thoughts are still playing a big part in your life. You might need to make a copy of this chart.

| Trigger Situations | Intrusive Thoughts | Level of Distress (1-10) | 5-Step Procedure (Y/N) | Level of Distress (1-10) |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|
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| Trigger Situations | Intrusive Thoughts | Level of Distress (1-10) | 5-Step Procedure (Y/N) | Level of Distress (1-10) |
|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|
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How did this practice decrease the intensity of your intrusive thoughts? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

The Movie in Your Head Isn't Real

Objective

To understand that your worries are not real and your mind is just playing tricks on you.

You Should Know

Do you watch scary movies? Do you cover your eyes when you see gore? Do you jump or even scream when some horrible monster suddenly appears with drooling sharp teeth or a knife in its hand? Part of the “fun” of watching these movies is the powerful emotional and visceral reactions you have because your mind is tricking you into thinking that what you are watching is real, even though you know you are just sitting watching a movie in the theater or at home.

This is a little like what happens when you let your worries control your mind. It's like you are watching a “Worry Movie” in your head, expecting something bad to happen, and you feel like it's real. This movie in your head might even cause physical reactions in your body: your heart might speed up, you might feel sweaty, or your stomach might feel like it is tied in a knot.

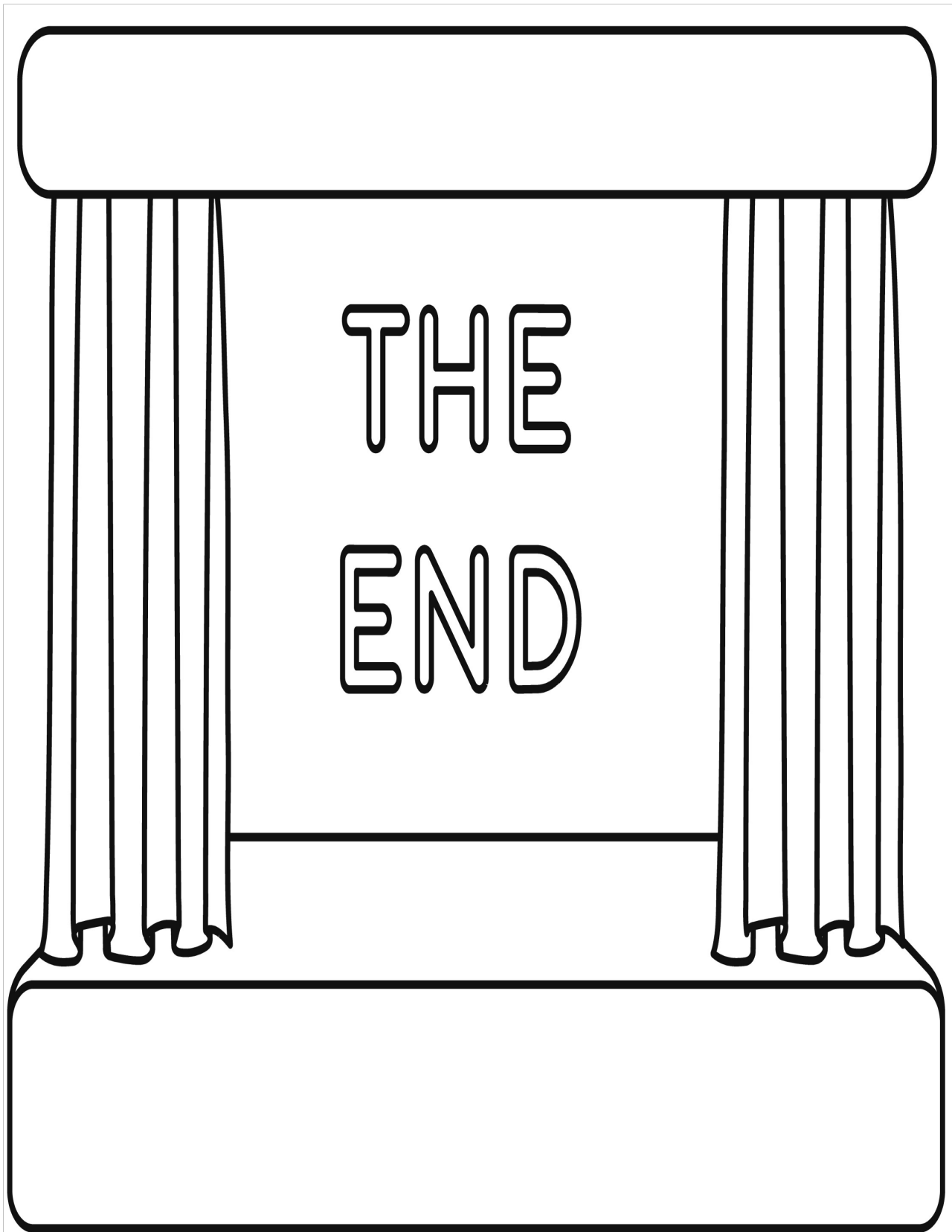
The difference, of course, is that when you leave the movie theater or turn off the TV, you are back to reality, and you're fully aware that your reaction was a fantasy. You might think about the special effects in the movie, the actors, or the way other people reacted. You might be thinking about doing your homework or going out with friends. You're back to reality.

However, when you play a movie that features the worries in your head, you never really leave the theater or turn off the TV. You might say to yourself, “This probably won't happen,” or “I'm stupid for thinking about this,” but your mind and your body never quite accept the fact that your worries aren't based in reality, and the things you're imagining aren't really dangerous.

What to Do

Begin on the next page by drawing a picture of your most disturbing worry as if it were a movie playing on a screen. Include as many details as you can in the picture, and give the movie a title. Then, follow the instructions that follow to observe your worries without responding to them as if they were real.

TITLE: _____



Activities to Teach Your Mind Your Worries Are Not Real

Find a really scary movie to watch at home. Before you turn it on, relax in a comfortable chair and breathe deeply for about five minutes. Now, remind yourself this is “just a movie.” Skip to a place in the movie that you know will be scary, but emotionally distance yourself from what is going on so that you don’t react with fear. Pretend that you are watching an ordinary event, like a garbage truck picking up the trash.

How successful were you at blocking your emotional reaction to the scary movie? Rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = not at all successful, and 10 = very successful. _____

Describe how easy or difficult this was for you.

Now sit back, relax, and close your eyes. Pretend that you’re watching a movie of your worries. Think about whatever worries you most, making the images in your mind as real as possible. Include all the details as if you were watching an actual movie. Again, emotionally distance yourself from what is going on in your “Worry Movie.” Pretend that it’s just a documentary about something vaguely interesting to you.

How successful were you at blocking your emotional reaction to your Worry Movie? Rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = not at all successful, and 10 = very successful. _____

Describe how easy or difficult this was for you.

Run your “Worry Movie” in your head for five or ten minutes every night for one week. Note how successful you were each night at thinking about your worries but not reacting to them emotionally. Rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = not at all successful, and 10 = very successful.

| Date | Rating | Comments |
|------|--------|----------|
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Reflections on This Exercise

How did this exercise show you that your worries are not real and your mind is just playing tricks on you? Explain.

What did you find most challenging about this activity?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

You Don't Need Constant Reassurance About Your Worries

Objective

To reduce your need for reassurance by mindfully delaying your participation in compulsive acts.

You Should Know

You might be surprised to learn an excessive need for reassurance is considered to be a compulsion. It's a compulsion because it's an act carried out repeatedly with the expectation of relieving anxiety.

Excessive reassurance-seeking is sometimes compared to an addictive behavior because you can never engage in this compulsive act just once, kind of like eating potato chips. You can never eat just one, and instead you find yourself compelled by some mysterious force to eat one after another until every chip is gone.

This seemingly harmless behavior is actually very harmful for several reasons:

- It gives your obsessions power over you by validating them and by persuading you that your disturbing, irrational thoughts have meaning and substance and should, therefore, be paid more attention than they deserve.
- It allows and encourages you to avoid accepting your feelings of anxiety and doubt by giving you an escape that only serves to stop you from facing and working through your fears, while reinforcing the idea the best way to alleviate your discomfort and feeling of uncertainty is to compulsively seek reassurance.
- It reinforces the idea you're incapable of tolerating anxiety or distress.

What to Do

The act of thinking and planning when you'll seek reassurance makes you a willing and active participant in your life. You'll find that breaking this cycle by delaying seeking reassurance for even a short amount of time makes it easier for you to realize how much control you have. You'll begin to recognize you can tolerate more anxiety and distress than you realized.

1. Give yourself permission to seek reassurance, and keep track of the average amount of time you spend engaging in it.
2. Make a plan to delay seeking reassurance for at least fifteen minutes after you notice the signs that your obsessive thoughts are triggering you.
3. Practice delaying seeking reassurance for two weeks.

4. At the end of two weeks, increase the time you delay seeking reassurance for an additional fifteen minutes.
5. Continue to repeat this exercise for as long as you need to break the hold that seeking reassurance has over you.

This exercise has many benefits:

- It will help you to learn to tolerate your anxiety for longer periods of time, which will make you realize that you're able to tolerate being uncomfortable.
- It will increase your confidence in your ability to rely on your strengths and your commitment to yourself to work through difficult situations.
- It will allow you to realize that there are many other ways to relieve your anxiety rather than seeking reassurance.
- It will eventually reduce your need to seek reassurance.

Delay Reassurance

Write down your worry: _____

Write down your goal.

How long will you delay seeking reassurance?

Ask yourself these questions before you seek reassurance.

- Does what I am doing help or hinder my enjoyment of life?
- Does what I am doing match what I value in my life?
- Does what I am doing make me feel happy or upset?
- Does what I am doing propel my life's emotional, social, psychological, or academic goals or stop them in their tracks?

Complete the following chart for two weeks. You might need to make a copy of the chart. Describe the worry that prompts you to seek reassurance. Rate your anxiety before and after you seek reassurance on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = no anxiety, and 10 = severe anxiety. Include whether or not you were able to delay seeking reassurance, and the amount of time you delayed seeking reassurance.

| Date | Worry That Prompted You to Seek Reassurance | Anxiety Level (1-10) | Amount of Time You Delayed Seeking Reassurance | Did You Successfully Delay Seeking Reassurance? (Yes or No) | Anxiety Level (1-10) |
|-----------------------|---|-----------------------------|---|--|-----------------------------|
| <i>E x . 3/15</i> | <i>I am worried that I will catch the flu from my sister.</i> | <i>9</i> | <i>I waited 30 minutes, but I couldn't help myself and I asked my mom if she thinks I'll catch the flu.</i> | <i>Yes, I was able to wait 30 minutes before I asked my mom for reassurance.</i> | <i>6</i> |
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Did you delay seeking reassurance most of the time? Some of the time? Not at all? Explain.

What would it take to make delaying reassurance easier for you?

What strategies did you use to delay seeking reassurance? Describe.

Which strategies were helpful? Which ones were not?

Do you feel more in control or less in control of your life after the exercise?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Accept Unpleasant Experiences, Thoughts, and Feelings

Objective

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

You Should Know

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

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

What to Do

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

Write down situations you avoid to keep from experiencing discomfort.

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

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

Schedule a date and time to do this activity: _____

Once you do the activity, describe your thoughts and feelings throughout the experience.

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

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Tolerate and Overcome Physical Discomfort

Objective

To replicate uncomfortable physical sensations associated with anxiety in order to tolerate and overcome those sensations.

You Should Know

You might experience physical discomfort when you are fearful and anxious. If you think about a class presentation you have to deliver, your heart might beat faster, your chest may tighten, you may sweat, and you may even feel like you are going to faint.

These physical reactions can be scary, and you might feel like you are having a heart attack or that you are disconnected from reality. When this happens, you can become just as afraid of the physical reactions as you are to the actual situation that causes your anxiety.

There is one way to break this cycle of anxiety and fear—practice the physical sensations that make you nervous and panicky. If this doesn't sound like fun, you're right—it isn't.

What to Do

There are three parts to this exercise. Use the steps below to complete the following chart.

1. Identify the physical sensations that accompany your anxiety. In the first column of the chart, circle the physical symptoms you have when you are anxious.
2. Create those uncomfortable feelings. The second column will give you some ideas how to do this. At first, practice these several times with a coach or friend in the room. This person will encourage you to perform the exercises so that you mimic the physical sensations associated with your anxiety, and he or she will also protect you from any possible physical injury—like falling if you get dizzy.
3. Record your practice re-creating the physical discomfort that you associate with your fear and anxiety. Although this isn't pleasant, the more you practice, the sooner you will be able to master your anxiety, change your thinking, and decrease your worry about physical symptoms. The more you practice the physical feelings that you associate with anxiety and panic, the less likely you are to be negatively influenced by these feelings.

First, circle the physical symptoms you are most likely to have when you are feeling anxious and panicky.

| Uncomfortable Feelings | How to Create Those Feelings |
|---|--|
| Lightheadedness Feeling Faint | Hyperventilate for one minute. Breathe loudly and rapidly (similar to a panting dog) at a rate of approximately forty-five breaths per minute. Place your head between your legs for one minute, then quickly sit up. |
| Feeling Weird or Unreal | Think of how big the universe is and how small you are. Think about the 200,000 years that humans have been on the earth and all of your ancestors. Sit in a completely dark and completely quiet room for five minutes. |
| Blurred Vision | Stare at a lightbulb for one minute and then attempt to read. |
| Difficulty Breathing | Hold your nose and breathe through a thin straw for one minute. |
| Increased heart rate Tightness in your chest | Drink an espresso or other caffeinated drink. Do five minutes of moderately intensive cardiovascular exercise like running up and down the stairs. |
| Upset Stomach | Do twenty jumping jacks after a meal. |
| Feeling Shaky | Tense all of your muscles and hold the tension for one minute. |
| Sweating | Wear a jacket, or wrap yourself in a blanket in a hot room. |
| Feeling Dizzy | Spin around really fast for one minute. |
| Other physical symptoms: _____ _____ | How can you replicate these feelings? |

The phrase “practice makes perfect” has never been truer than for people overcoming feelings of anxiety. Although it’s unpleasant, practicing the uncomfortable feelings that accompany anxiety will help you control your emotions and manage your thoughts. For two weeks, use this chart to record the time and dates of your practice, as well as your reactions. Rate your anxiety about each session on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = no anxiety, and 10 = extreme anxiety.

| Date/Time | Physical Sensations | Emotional Reaction | Thoughts | Rating |
|-----------|---------------------|--------------------|----------|--------|
| | | | | |
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Reflections on This Exercise

After practicing the physical sensations that make you nervous and panicky for two weeks, how did your body sensations, feelings, and thoughts change? Explain.

After practicing the physical sensations that make you anxious, how was your anxiety affected? Did it increase, decrease, or stay the same? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Adopt a Solution-Oriented Attitude

Objective

To review your problems and discover ways to cope to reduce anxiety.

You Should Know

If you're like most teens, you probably feel like you have many problems—and you're probably right. A problem can be something that frustrates you, makes you stressed or upset, causes difficulty for others, or increases your anxiety. Life is full of problems for all of us, but teens do seem to have more problems than either children or adults because they are caught between these two different worlds with very different expectations.

However, that doesn't mean you can't learn to solve your problems or at least cope with them better. When you learn to cope with a problem, you are aware of it, but you don't let it affect other areas of your life. For example, imagine two people, each of whom has injured themselves.

Ryan:

- Stays in bed for a week until he can walk without pain.
- Stops talking to his friends until he feels better because they get on his nerves.
- Drinks alcohol when his parents are away because it helps with the pain.
- Doesn't bother doing any schoolwork because his knee bothers him too much to concentrate.

Larissa:

- Gets crutches so that she can continue her life as normally as possible.
- Takes aspirin for the pain.
- Finds a gym with a whirlpool because the doctor said it might heal the muscle quicker.
- Keeps up with her friends and her schoolwork because it takes her mind off her physical problem.

As you can see, the problem is the same for both, but each person copes with it differently. Ryan probably creates even more problems for himself. Larissa minimizes the effect of the problem. These same principles apply to psychological and interpersonal problems as well. The way you choose to cope with them is entirely up to you.

What to Do

Start by making a list of all your problems, big and small. Don't hold back. List as many as you like, no matter how small they seem.

Write down your top three problems.

1.

2.

3.

Now, review your lists and write down three problems you've solved.

1.

2.

3.

Reflections on This Exercise

Do you cope better with easier problems or harder problems? Some teens are surprised to learn they actually have an easier time solving difficult problems and they let the easy ones really bother them. Explain.

Write down five ways you already cope with or solve problems.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Describe additional ways to solve your problems. Include resources, tools, or people that can help you.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Concentrate on the Present and the Future

Objective

To focus on the present and the future instead of the past to solve a problem.

You Should Know

Every day is like a new page in the book of your life. You can write whatever you like! If you want, you can write today's page as a continuation of your problems and worries, or you can start fresh. Suppose that today your story didn't have the same problems as you had yesterday or the day before. Suppose that today you began writing your problem out of your life.

How would you begin to write your problem out of your life? What will today (or tomorrow) look like if your problem does not play such an important part?

What to Do

What is one problem you're experiencing right now?

Try writing about just one day in your life that is a fresh start.

What can you do right now to increase the likelihood that you'll solve this problem?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Anticipate Success

Objective

To focus on the future to solve a specific problem you are currently experiencing to increase your chances of success and reduce your anxiety.

You Should Know

Sometimes you unconsciously create your future. Without thinking about it, you put yourself in situations or make decisions based on needs or conflicts of which you're not really aware. You might unintentionally make things worse for yourself or others. However, your mind can also work to make your life better.

Recognizing the importance of your unconscious wishes and needs, Solution-Oriented Therapy asks you to concentrate on how things will be in a future where your problems have less influence or may be absent altogether.

This worksheet will help you focus on the positive aspects of your life rather than on the problems. Sometimes your unconscious needs direct your decision-making and lead to anxiety. Instead, you can learn to solve problems in a productive and beneficial way, reducing your stress and anxiety. The concept of a "self-fulfilling prophecy" is a very real psychological phenomenon. You can make your future better or worse. Why not make it better?

What to Do

Describe a problem you have. _____

Imagine this problem is gone in one year. Describe how your life has changed.

Now reread what you wrote in the previous exercise. Does anything come to mind that will make this happen? Even if it isn't directly related to the problem, write it down.

Make a copy and read it frequently, perhaps once a week. Keep reading about the future. Convince yourself that it can happen. Keep thinking about even the simplest ways to make positive changes in your life.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Fill Your Mind with Positive Thoughts

Objective

To increase positive thinking to reduce anxiety and bring a greater sense of well-being.

You Should Know

If you're anxious, it's important to accept these thoughts rather than fight them or avoid them. In other words, you can tolerate anxious thoughts and understand they are just thoughts and cannot hurt you.

Here is a four-step procedure to help you deal with these distressing thoughts.

1. Recognize and label your thoughts.
2. Observe them rather than react to them.
3. Replace anxious thoughts with positive affirmations or thoughts.
4. Allow time to pass.

Paying attention to positive thoughts may have many benefits, and continued practice may even help re-wire your brain. Replacing anxious thoughts with positive thinking may actually help you cope better with stress, reduce your anxiety, and even improve your health.

This worksheet is designed to help you focus on positive thoughts to reduce your anxiety and improve your overall sense of well-being. It requires you to write down positive thoughts in a journal for two weeks and then reflect on whether this activity helps you focus less on your anxious thoughts.

What to Do

Get a journal or notebook, and each day pick an activity from the list on the next page. Use one page for each activity. Complete at least one activity a day for two weeks. At the end of the two weeks, answer the questions about how this activity helped you and how it impacted your anxiety.

| Activity | Date Completed |
|--|----------------|
| Write down five of your best qualities. | |
| Describe a favorite memory. | |
| Describe in detail the best day of your life. | |
| Make a list of your five most precious possessions. | |
| Make a “bucket list” of five things you’d like to do. | |
| Write down five positive adjectives to describe yourself. | |
| Write down a list of five favorite people you have known in your life. | |
| Write down five things you’d like to do with your family. | |
| Write down five things you’d like to do with your friends. | |
| Write down five people who inspire you. | |
| Write down five things for which you’re grateful. | |
| Write about a dream place you would like to live. | |
| Write about a favorite sports hero and why you admire them. | |
| Describe something that makes you proud. | |
| Describe a memorable birthday. | |
| Describe a favorite holiday and what you like about it. | |
| Describe a favorite place in nature. | |
| Write down a favorite dream you can remember. | |
| Write down a favorite memory from your early childhood. | |
| Write down five things you are good at. | |
| Find and write down three inspirational quotes. | |
| Describe what you would do if you won \$10 million. | |
| Write down the names of five people you love. | |
| Write down five people that have positively influenced you. | |
| Write down five things you have accomplished. | |
| Write down five good things that happened at school. | |
| Write down three vacations you would like to take. | |
| Write down a list of the five funniest movies or TV shows you enjoy. | |
| Describe a favorite character from a book. | |
| Describe a favorite character from a movie. | |
| Write down any positive thoughts you’re having today. | |

At the end of the two weeks, answer the following questions.

Did you notice any change in your thoughts over the last two weeks? When did this happen?
Describe your experience.

Ask people who know you well whether they noticed anything different about you in the last two weeks. Write down what they said.

Did you notice any decrease in your anxiety over the last two weeks? Describe.

What was your favorite assignment out of all of the activities you completed? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

Section 5. Lifestyle Changes

How Do You View Yourself?

Objective

To develop a positive but realistic self-image to reduce your anxiety.

You Should Know

Sometimes teens have a poor self-image and dwell on their faults rather than their strengths, increasing their anxiety. They measure themselves against an unrealistic ideal of the way they “should be.” Where does that unrealistic ideal come from? Teens who grew up in families where there was a high demand for perfection or achievement sometimes struggle to fulfill those expectations in their academic and home lives. Other teens might be criticized for the least little flaw and focus on those flaws as core parts of their self-image—not learning that, in essence, nobody’s perfect. If they do 99 out of 100 things right, they’ll dwell on the one “wrong” thing and worry about how they can “fix” themselves.

Does this sound familiar? Do you have a running narrative in your mind about how you’re failing to live up to your own or someone else’s standards? Do you criticize yourself or feel you’re not “good enough”? What would it be like to embrace yourself fully, “warts and all”?

What to Do

Below are some ways you can improve your self-image. After each item, write down one or two *specific things* you’ll do in relation to that item, and when and how you would like to build that particular skill. For example, for “Exercise,” you might say, “I’ll take a 20-minute walk at least four times a week starting Monday.”

1. Challenge your negative thoughts. Listen closely to what your inner critic says. Ask yourself, “Is that actually true?” Challenge those ingrained beliefs that bring down your self-esteem. Write some statements to counter them here. Example: Instead of “I’m not good enough,” try, “I’m a worthy and capable human being with strengths and weaknesses.”

2. Develop a kind inner voice. When you hear your inner critical voice rear its familiar head, imagine that you’re listening to people you care about. What would you want to say to help them feel better about themselves? Use those words and that kind tone with yourself too, and keep practicing making that shift for as long as you need.

[illegible]

5. Notice what's in your control and what isn't. If your anxiety is related to things you can't control ("If only I were taller, I'd be happier," "If only I looked like_____, I'd be popular," etc.), then you are setting yourself up for continued misery. Focus your energy on identifying things in your life that you can do something about, and begin to act on those. Write them here.

6. Do something you love to do! Are you passionate about cooking? Reading? Fashion? Singing? Sports? Computers? Animals? What are you currently doing or not doing to invest time and energy into your passions? What would you like to do more of? Note any excuses or rationalizations you might think of that keep you from pursuing these activities.

7. Be grateful. Establishing a "gratitude practice" every day can help boost your mood and your self-esteem. List here some things you appreciate. They can be small, like the pleasure of chewing a tasty piece of cheese, or big, like your health or your family or having a warm bed at night.

8. Give back/pay it forward. If you're anxious, it's often hard to think about anything but your worries. You might have trouble seeing other people's needs sometimes. Consider volunteering some time to a cause that has meaning for you, such as the Food Bank or an animal shelter. You might also consider what skills and talents you have that you could pass along to someone else. You could be a mentor or tutor to a younger child or a volunteer who helps others to discover their own strengths. What goes around comes around, as they say. Studies show that the happiest people are the ones who are involved in serving others.

9. Find positive people in your life. Maybe you feel down a lot and avoid hanging out with others whose lives might seem “better” than yours. Identify the people in your life whom you feel comfortable with, who bolster your self-esteem, and who see your wonderful qualities and accept your flaws and mistakes. Make an effort to spend more time with them and less time with people who bring you down. What would you like to do to meet that goal?

10. Exercise! Sure, you’ve probably heard this a million times, but it’s true. Exercise has been proven to lessen anxiety and help you feel better about yourself. Set small, realistic goals (e.g., walking for a few minutes a day) and build up to more if you wish. Releasing positive hormones such as endorphins can be a great side effect of increased movement. As they say, just do it!

11. Step out of your bubble. Are you stuck in a routine? Do you feel like a stick-in-the-mud as a result? Make a plan to do something different, whether it’s visiting a place you’ve never been, reconnecting with an old friend, or going to an event where you are likely to meet new people. It can feel challenging at first, but moving out of your comfort zone can give you a boost of energy and a new perspective on the possibilities for your life.

Reflections on This Exercise

What was it like to reflect on the above suggestions? Which ones do you feel excited about? Which ones do you feel some resistance to?

For those you feel some resistance to, what encouraging words would you like to offer that part of yourself in order to boost your motivation?

Who in your life loves you unconditionally? Try to connect with that person regularly to remind yourself of your worth and your positive qualities. Then, remember to tell yourself the things that person tells you. How does this person feel about you? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

How Diet Affects Your Anxiety

Objective

To improve your diet to decrease anxiety symptoms.

You Should Know

If you have anxiety, you might feel physically unwell. Coping with anxiety can be challenging, but making lifestyle changes might lessen your anxiety symptoms and make you feel better. Watching what you eat may help. Since diet, stress, and mood are all intertwined, it's important to consider what you're consuming - not only for your physical health, but also for your emotional well-being. It's not necessary to go to extremes in changing your diet. By simply being more mindful of what you're putting in your body, you can find small ways to improve—and that can add up to big changes.

You might want to avoid these items to reduce anxiety:

- **Caffeine**—This stimulant is in coffee, tea, chocolate, soda, energy drinks, and some over-the-counter medications. The temporary boost it provides can end in fatigue, headache, and tension. Caffeine is a potential trigger for anxiety attacks and a contributor to other health issues, such as insomnia, heartburn, aggression, irritability, heart palpitations, and high blood pressure.
- **Salt**—Sodium is present in many processed foods, so check labels and look for low-sodium or salt-free alternatives. Sodium consumption affects fluid retention, weight, and blood pressure, all of which, in turn, can affect your mood.
- **Sugar**—Excessive intake of simple sugars (such as white or brown sugar and honey) can cause health problems, such as diabetes and hypoglycemia—the latter of which is often accompanied by symptoms similar to those experienced during a panic attack. Also, the temporary uplifting effects come with some other serious downsides, including an increased risk of depression in those who have a sugar-heavy diet.
- **Preservatives and hormones**—These substances are present in processed foods and many types of meats. Our bodies were not built to handle these additives, and their possible side effects have been heavily debated. Swapping in some whole, unprocessed, organic foods can help reduce consumption of these potentially harmful substances.
- **Nicotine and alcohol**—Introducing these substances into your system can cause a range of problems, including aggravating anxiety. Nicotine is a stimulant, like caffeine, and alcohol a depressant. Both can affect your sleep.

What can you eat to improve symptoms of anxiety? Try the following suggestions.

- **Eat a protein-rich breakfast.** You'll feel fuller longer and your blood sugar will remain steady so that you have more energy. Check Google for protein-rich breakfast ideas.
- **Eat complex carbohydrates.** Carbohydrates increase the amount of serotonin in your brain, which is calming. Eat foods rich in complex carbohydrates, such as whole grains: oatmeal, quinoa, whole-grain breads, or cereals.
- **Drink plenty of water.** Even mild dehydration can affect your mood.
- **Pay attention to food sensitivities.** Some foods or food additives can cause unpleasant physical reactions. These physical reactions may lead to irritability or anxiety.
- **Regularly eat healthy, balanced meals.** Nutritious foods are important for overall physical and mental health. Eat lots of fresh fruits and vegetables. It may also help to eat foods high in omega-3 fatty acids on a regular basis, such as salmon and walnuts. Nutrient deficiencies can cause irritability, anxiety, and fatigue.

Changes to your diet will make some difference to your general mood and well-being, but it's not necessarily a substitute for treatment. Lifestyle changes, such as improving sleep habits, increasing social support, using stress-reduction techniques, and getting regular exercise will also help.

What to Do

For the next month, keep track of what you consume, and describe how you feel each day. Rate your anxiety symptoms on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 = little or no anxiety, and 10 = severe anxiety. Make copies of the following chart or use a notebook or journal.

Week of: _____

| Day | Food and Beverages Consumed | Substances or Medications | Anxiety Symptoms | Rate Anxiety (1-10) |
|------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Monday | | | | |
| Tuesday | | | | |
| Wednesday | | | | |
| Thursday | | | | |
| Friday | | | | |
| Saturday | | | | |
| Sunday | | | | |

After tracking your food and beverage consumption for one month, describe your experiences. Include how your anxiety symptoms changed.

Describe what you added or excluded. Did it make a difference? Increase or decrease your anxiety symptoms? Describe.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What other changes can you make?

Activities That Help Counteract Your Anxiety

Objective

To schedule weekly activities to lessen stress and decrease anxiety symptoms.

You Should Know

A certain amount of stress is inevitable, and some stress is even good for you. However, sustained or chronic stress will elevate stress biochemicals such as cortisol, which can take a toll on your mood as well as your body. Chronic stress can lead to long-term anxiety and worsening symptoms, as well as other health problems. Stress might also cause you to skip meals, drink alcohol, do poorly in school, or lose sleep. All of these factors can trigger or worsen anxiety.

Even if you can't find ways to reduce specific stressors, you can still find activities which can counterbalance the stress in your life. There are many activities you can do which will reduce the cortisol levels in your body and bring you feelings of calm and control.

This worksheet will help you identify activities you can do every day to fight the negative impact of stress and lessen your anxiety. When you make "stress-busting" activities a daily habit, you will start to see a noticeable difference in your mood, stress levels, and anxiety. You will have an increased ability to focus on both the issues that are bothering you and the things you do each day to bring happiness and pleasure into your life.

What to Do

Choose one activity to do daily from each category. Estimate the amount of time you will do the activities each day. Finally, put a checkmark when you have accomplished this activity each day in a week. Make copies of this chart and complete it for one month.

Week of: _____

| Activity | Check Activity You Will Do | Date/ Time to Complete | Completed? (check if completed) | How Did You Feel After the Activity? |
|-----------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Scheduled Relaxation | | | | |
| Deep breathing | | | | |
| Meditation | | | | |
| Visualization | | | | |
| Relax with quiet music | | | | |

| | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|--|--|
| Yoga | | | | |
| Other: | | | | |
| Self-Care | | | | |
| 7-9 hours of sleep | | | | |
| Good nutrition | | | | |
| Exercise at least 30 minutes | | | | |
| Massage | | | | |
| Other: | | | | |
| Social Activities | | | | |
| Meaningful conversation(s) | | | | |
| Fun activities with family or friends | | | | |
| Meals with family or friends | | | | |
| Spiritual activities | | | | |
| Other: | | | | |
| Time Management | | | | |
| Set goals and steps to achieve them | | | | |
| Write a realistic “to do” list | | | | |
| Ask for help | | | | |
| Realistic scheduling and planning | | | | |
| Other: | | | | |
| Creative and Fun Activities | | | | |
| Journaling | | | | |
| Hobbies | | | | |
| Time with pets | | | | |
| Play | | | | |
| Other: | | | | |

Reflections on This Exercise

What activities decreased your stress and anxiety symptoms? Describe.

If you found completing any of the activities challenging, describe your experience. What can you do differently to fit activities that reduce stress and anxiety into your weekly schedule?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5= moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Stretch Out of Your Comfort Zone

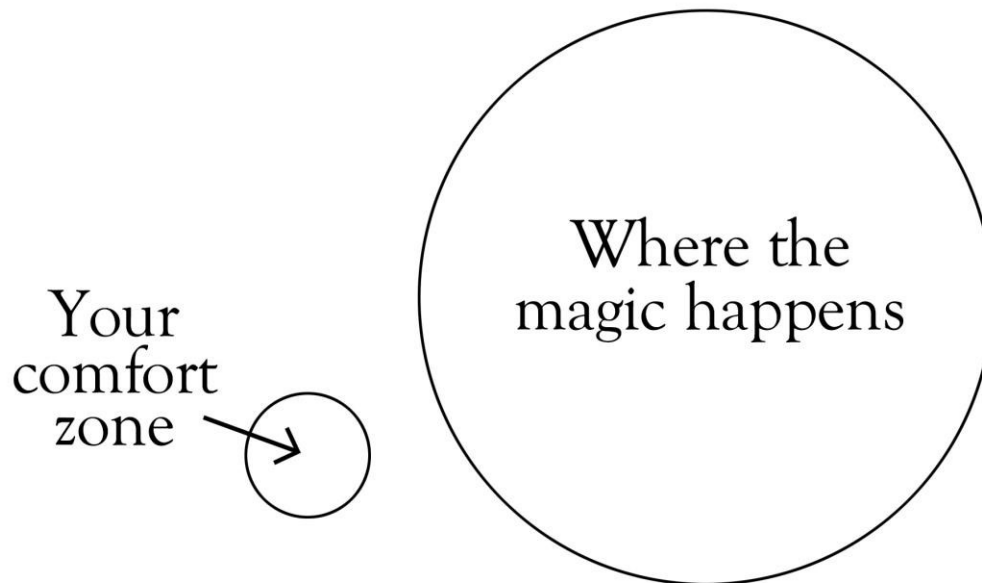
Objective

To take steps toward new and different life experiences by identifying your comfort zone and thinking about how you can move beyond it.

You Should Know

Sometimes the idea of creating a safe network might feel scary. If you are someone who is shy, feels anxious in social situations, tends to isolate, or otherwise avoids people or unfamiliar situations, it can be especially challenging.

Changing habits is hard. You might have resistance to—and fear of—change. You have a comfort zone: the things and objects, people, activities, and habits that keep you feeling safe. But, here's the catch. Changing habits in a big way inevitably involves some discomfort.



Isn't this a great image? First, the MAGIC circle is a lot bigger than the COMFORT ZONE circle. That's encouraging! But see that empty space between the circles? That space represents the UNKNOWN, which can be both exciting and scary.

To get from one circle to the other, you'll have to navigate some unknown territory. Have you ever heard the saying "Leap and the net will appear"? It's the same idea. With good planning and good support, you can succeed. But there are no guarantees. As Yoda from the *Star Wars* movies said, "Do or do not. There is no try."

What to Do

In this exercise, you'll identify the components of your personal comfort zone. Next, you'll imagine "where the magic happens" for you. Then, you'll identify some concrete steps to take to guide you along your journey.

What are the components of your comfort zone? What helps you feel safe but might be interfering with moving forward? Be as detailed as you can.

Things/Objects

People

Activities

Habits

What are your thoughts and feelings about the unknown (that blank space between the circles)? What has helped in the past when you succeeded in moving out of your comfort zone and into the unknown in your life? List the items that helped you below.

What items in your list above represent “where the magic happens” for you?

What steps are you willing to take to get closer to “where the magic happens” for you? Be detailed. Be optimistic while still being realistic.

Today

Tomorrow

In the next week

In the next month

In the next year

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Overcome Anxiety with the Help of Exercise

Objective

To identify activities you can consistently engage in to reduce your anxiety.

You Should Know

Regular exercise can help you overcome your anxiety. During exercise, your brain increases the production of chemicals that can lift your mood and regulate your emotions. With regular exercise, you'll feel stronger and more confident, and more likely to feel that you can make positive changes in your life. Exercise will also increase the oxygen flow to your brain, which may help you think more clearly, rationally, and more positively.

1) Circle the types of exercise you can do on a regular basis.

| | | | |
|----------------|---------------|----------|------------------------------|
| bike riding | baseball | football | handball |
| jogging | hiking | soccer | karate or other martial arts |
| walking | skateboarding | surfing | Pilates |
| weight lifting | basketball | skiing | yoga |
| tennis | swimming | dancing | golf |

Write down other physical activities you think you can do that aren't listed above.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

2) Now, choose three exercises you would like to do over the next week.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

3) How much time you need for each exercise? Fifteen minutes? A half-hour? An hour?

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

4) For each of the exercises, write down how often you can realistically do them in a week.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

5) For each of the exercises, write down which days are best to exercise and what time of day is most realistic.

a) _____

b) _____

c) _____

Use this chart to record how many times you actually exercise and the effect that exercise has on your anxiety.

| Day | Type of Exercise | Amount of Time | Mood Before | Mood After |
|-----------|------------------|----------------|-------------|------------|
| Monday | | | | |
| Tuesday | | | | |
| Wednesday | | | | |
| Thursday | | | | |
| Friday | | | | |
| Saturday | | | | |
| Sunday | | | | |

After one week of consistent exercise, did you feel less anxious, more anxious, or about the same?

Reflections on This Exercise

Describe your experience, including obstacles or challenges.

What was your favorite form of exercise? Can you continue practicing this activity? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Get More Sleep to Reduce Anxiety

Objective

To track sleep and the methods you use to sleep better in order to decrease anxiety symptoms.

You Should Know

Do you have a hard time falling asleep or staying asleep? Anxiety causes sleep problems, and recent research indicates lack of sleep can aggravate anxiety. Sleep deprivation may actually play a key role in stimulating brain regions that contribute to excessive worrying and activating areas of the brain associated with emotional processing. Serotonin levels are impacted, affecting your mood. There are a variety of techniques that can help you get the sleep you need, but, of course, they only work if you are diligent at trying them and then using the ones that work best. Getting enough sleep is an important part of your overall plan to overcome your anxiety - and it's also important for your general health.

Here are some other things you can try for better sleep:

- Listen to soft music, read, take a warm shower, or meditate before going to bed.
- Exercise for at least 30 minutes each day, but not just before you go to bed.
- Write a to-do list for the following day, and then clear your head of those concerns.
- Practice deep breathing or progressive muscle relaxation before you fall asleep.
- Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and nicotine, either entirely or at least in the evening.
- Keep your bedroom at a cool temperature (60–65 degrees).
- If you are sensitive to light and sound, wear earplugs and a sleep mask or try a white noise machine to mask the sound. There are various white-noise apps available if you have a smartphone.
- If you have trouble falling asleep, get out of bed and do some light activity (like reading) in another room. Go back to bed when you feel drowsy.
- Go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Avoid eating heavy meals for at least 2-3 hours before bed.
- Make sure your mattress and pillows are comfortable.

What to Do

For two weeks, use the chart below to track your sleep and the methods you use to sleep better.

| Date | Hours Slept | Trouble Sleeping? | Methods Tried | Successful? |
|------|-------------|-------------------|---------------|-------------|
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |
| | | Yes No | | Yes No |

What else can you do to sleep better? Describe.

Did the activities help you sleep better? Describe the two activities that helped you the most.

1.

2.

Did you face obstacles or challenges to falling asleep and staying asleep? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What could you do differently to make progress in this area?

Prevent and Manage Lapses in Overcoming Your Anxiety

Objective

To increase your awareness of when you are at risk for a lapse by identifying early warning signs and planning how to respond.

You Should Know

As you start to successfully manage your anxiety, you'll see that your symptoms will begin to decrease or even disappear. However, you should know that at some point there may be a temporary reappearance of symptoms. This is called a lapse, and it's common. The more prepared you are for a lapse to happen in the future, the more likely it is that you will successfully get through it.

Lapses can occur while you are still in counseling or months after you have finished treatment. Lapses tend to happen during times of high stress, when you allow yourself to loosen up on using your coping skills or start to make unhealthy choices.

This worksheet will help you develop a plan to respond to a lapse now, so that you know what to do if and when it happens. When you manage your lapses, you are actively decreasing the risk that a relapse will occur.

What to Do

Below are tips that can help you prevent or manage a lapse.

- Lapses are normal because stress happens.
- Lapses can be clues to stressful situations that require change.
- Be patient. Remember that change takes time, and a lapse does not mean you are back at square one.
- Don't avoid your anxiety. Be honest with yourself about your symptoms and what you are doing to cope.
- Reach out to someone if you need help. You don't have to suffer through anxiety alone.
- If you see symptoms creeping up, don't give up on yourself! A lapse can be discouraging, but you always have a choice to work through it.
- Don't mask your anxiety. Be careful of behaviors that temporarily give you comfort but limit your ability to make healthy choices, such as drinking alcohol.
- Live a balanced life. Managing anxiety is not just about coping skills. A healthy diet, restful sleep, exercise, hobbies, and fun activities all contribute to an anxiety-free life.
- If you have been prescribed medication for your anxiety, keep taking it as prescribed. Talk to your parents if you're thinking about stopping.

Now, answer the following questions.

What are the people, places, thoughts, behaviors, or things that trigger your anxiety? In other words, what makes you anxious?

Write down the main symptoms you felt when you first began counseling. Try to be as specific as possible for this exercise because the longer you live without the symptoms of anxiety, the more difficult it may be to look back and remember how much anxiety once impacted your life.

Write down the three coping skills that you've found most helpful in decreasing your anxiety. Include details about why these skills have helped you or why you like using them. You'll want to revisit these coping skills if a lapse comes up.

1. _____

How did this help you?

2. _____

How did this help you?

3. _____

How did this help you?

Who can you talk to if you begin feeling anxious? _____

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What can you do differently to make progress in this area?

Appendix: Anxiety and the COVID-19 Pandemic

When the world suddenly changes because of things like the COVID-19 pandemic, it is common to experience changes in thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Feelings of anxiety, fear, or worry are typical in stressful situations.

Your adolescent clients might be experiencing the following:

- Feeling stressed, overwhelmed, frustrated, sad, angry, worried, or anxious.
- Feeling restless, agitated, on 'high alert,' or unable to calm down.
- Worrying about going to school or public spaces.
- Worrying they or their family members will get sick.
- Overthinking about the situation; unable to focus on anything else.
- Physical symptoms or other uncomfortable sensations.

All of these thoughts and feelings are common right now, and self-care will help manage some of the symptoms of anxiety.

Here are a few coping tips:

- Maintain a daily routine with consistent sleeping, eating, exercise, and study patterns.
- Connect daily with friends and family members.
- Talk to trusted loved ones about feelings or worries.
- Limit coffee or energy drinks, as these will increase anxiety and make it hard to relax.
- Look for patterns or be aware of anxiety-inducing situations. Try relaxation or distraction techniques or ask a family member or friend for help.
- Relieve anxiety with physical activity.
- Limit the amount of time spent talking about or watching/listening to the news or social media.
- Do enjoyable things to calm down and focus – like arts and crafts, listening to music, reading, journaling, watching TV or movies, or chatting with friends over Face Time or text.
- Understand many people are probably also finding this situation stressful, and they might be having a hard time. Try to resolve conflict and not take things personally.

The following worksheets address coping with anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Coping with Face Mask Anxiety

Objective

To identify ways to help you overcome fear and anxiety related to wearing a face mask.

You Should Know

Even though you want to help stop the spread of coronavirus and keep yourself safe, you might be struggling with wearing a face mask. Quite a few people say that when they put on a face mask, they worry they will have a difficult time breathing, and *their worrying actually makes this come true*. In other words, it is not the mask itself that is causing breathing difficulties, but rather the anxiety about having your mouth and nose covered that causes you to feel your breathing is restricted.

What to Do

There are also other reasons why people have difficulty wearing a face mask. Check off any of the following statements that apply to you.

- ☐ I feel dizzy or sick when I wear a face mask.
- ☐ I feel trapped or claustrophobic when I wear a face mask.
- ☐ Covering my face changes the way I look, making me feel stupid.
- ☐ Having certain materials touch my face bothers me.
- ☐ I wear glasses, and they steam up so I cannot see clearly, causing me to feel upset.
- ☐ I feel like I am being smothered by the mask.
- ☐ My breathing is shallow, and I am afraid I will hyperventilate.

You might never feel totally comfortable wearing a face mask; however, there are things you can do to make the experience easier. Here are some tips:

- Get fresh air outside before and after you put on your mask.
- Do something to relax before and after you wear a mask; for example, breathing exercises or meditation.
- Choose a face covering that hangs down your neck (a neck gaiter), rather than one that fits around your jaw.
- Keep your body as cool as possible; for example, wear loose-fitting clothing.
- Add a scent to your mask, such as lavender oil.
- Experiment with different fabric types or ways to secure your mask. Some fit around the ears, some tie behind your head. Take the time to find a face mask that is most comfortable for you.

- Choose a transparent mask or see-through face covering so your face is not obscured.
- Calm yourself by focusing on your surroundings rather than on the face mask.
- Distract yourself; for example, listen to music or podcasts through headphones.
- Remind yourself that wearing a face mask is important for your health and the health of others.
- Use calming statements to get through your anxiety, like “I will be okay,” or “I can get through this.”

Write down ideas from the above list you think will help you cope with wearing a face mask.

These tips might reduce your anxiety, but the best way to overcome your face mask anxiety is to just gradually increase your time wearing a mask—even if it bothers you. Wear a mask for five minutes, then ten minutes, then twenty minutes, then thirty minutes, then longer (especially if you expect to be required to wear a mask for longer periods of time; for example, on an airplane). This method of gradually facing your fear and anxiety, also called exposure therapy, is the best way to get over any fear.

Many people tell us that wearing a face mask will be required in some places for months or even years to come, even after the COVID-19 pandemic is over. However, the good news is that manufacturers are rushing to improve face masks, making them more comfortable and easier to breathe through.

What else can you do to reduce your anxiety and distress about wearing a face mask?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Coping with Sleep Problems During the Pandemic

Objective

To develop a habit of focusing on feelings during the day to improve your sleep.

You Should Know

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, you may be experiencing disrupted or poor sleep. You may lie awake, unable to fall asleep. You may wake up in the middle of the night and find your mind beginning to race, or you may wake up very early in the morning and lie awake for a long time. Maybe your sleep patterns have been thrown off—you are awake when you should be sleeping, and you want to sleep when you need to be awake.

What is it about the pandemic that is making it so challenging to get a good night's sleep? Researchers have identified five common pandemic-related causes of sleep problems:

Loss of structure. If you are attending school remotely or quarantined, you probably no longer need to get up as early or juggle multiple demands. When you have demands placed on you from the outside (school schedules, athletic events, and so forth), you are forced to follow a regular routine. If you have lost some of those external demands, your routine is disrupted. You might feel uprooted and out of control. Along with the disruption in routine, regular healthy habits—such as eating nourishing meals, showering each day, and exercising—begin to slip. Healthy habits support you in managing and coping with stress related to the loss of structure and routine.

Anxiety and fear of the unknown. The pandemic has created stress, anxiety, and/or fear in everyone. You might ask yourself, “Will someone I love get sick? Will I get sick and maybe even die? Will I ever return to school? Will my family survive financially?” Depending on where you live, you may still be in lockdown or transitioning in phases. The lack of answers and uncertainty about the future makes it difficult to slow your mind. You might toss and turn at night, ruminating and obsessing about the what-ifs.

Loss. Your usual social connections and activities may feel very distant. You may long for the past, when things were “normal.”

Reduced stimulation. Pre-pandemic you may have had a busy life—socializing with friends and family, going to school, shopping, attending events, or going to the gym. All these activities stimulated you, allowing you to burn energy. Now you may be using far less energy, causing you to feel restless, antsy, or jittery.

Lack of connection. Feelings of disconnection and loneliness are a real consequence of the pandemic. If you feel alone, you have lots of company!

You might believe overthinking is keeping you up at night, but it is actually your feelings. Feelings are messages from your body, and they are closely connected to the problems and challenges you face every day. Feelings are supposed to be helpful, guiding you to take action or focus on finding solutions. Feelings can inform, empower, and motivate you to do what is required to be happy and

healthy. If you ignore feelings, they will get stronger. Yes, feelings may be keeping you awake at night—but they are incredible messengers. When you are lying in bed, there is nothing external stimulating you. Feelings you have been ignoring or suppressing will take the opportunity to surface so your brain can acknowledge and process them.

What to Do

The way to sleep better during this stressful time is to acknowledge and process your feelings—but during the day, not at night. You can make a conscious effort to process them during the day, freeing your mind and body to get much-needed sleep.

For the next two weeks, spend a few minutes every day sitting quietly and focusing your attention inward to process your feelings. Close your eyes, and tune into the sensations in your body, focusing on how and what you are feeling. Sit with your feelings instead of escaping or ignoring them. Complete the following chart for two weeks, then answer the questions that follow.

| Date | Amount of time | Feelings that came up | Notes |
|------|----------------|-----------------------|-------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
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| | | | |

Describe the problems you had with sleep before starting this exercise.

Have your sleep problems gotten worse since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic? Explain.

After completing the exercise for at least two weeks, describe the most common feelings you experienced. You might ask yourself why you are having those feelings, what they mean, and what your body is trying to tell you. Be specific.

What can you do to address your feelings? Perhaps you need to set up a daily routine, make the effort to connect with people, exercise, or talk to a friend. Brainstorm ideas here.

Note: *If you feel nothing during this exercise, your feelings might be suppressed, which is sometimes the result of childhood emotional neglect. You can still get in touch with and process feelings that are disrupting your sleep. A counselor or psychotherapist can help you with this.*

Since you have completed the exercise, how is your sleep? The same, better, or worse? Explain.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Protecting Yourself from Anxiety Contagion During the Pandemic

Objective

To reduce the likelihood of pandemic-related “anxiety contagion.”

You Should Know

It is normal to experience anxiety during the coronavirus pandemic, especially when there are still so many unknowns and our lives may change from day to day. However, many teens find their anxiety levels are getting out of hand, and they have a difficult time dealing with anything else.

Studies suggest that negative emotional states are contagious, much like the virus. The more you are exposed to panicky and anxious people, the more anxiety you are likely to experience high levels of anxiety. Fortunately, studies also find that positive emotional states are also contagious. Being in the presence of people who are calm, confident, and positive can reduce your fear and anxiety. This is especially true when you are around positive people who are authority figures, or people you depend on and respect. You can fight the effects of anxiety contagion by spending more time with people in your life who make you feel comforted, safe, and calm—or just make you laugh.

Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that you limit the time you spend watching the news, reading headlines online, and visiting social media sites. Hearing about the pandemic constantly will serve to increase your anxiety, fear, and feelings of helplessness.

What to Do

This worksheet is designed to help you regain some control over your anxiety by limiting what some people refer to as anxiety contagion. Write the names of people like this below, and also note how you will communicate with them (for example, face-to-face, by phone, or by video chat).

| Your supports | How you will communicate with them |
|---------------|------------------------------------|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

If you cannot name any personal supports, consider watching webinars and videos that offer encouragement, calmness, and reassurance. Personal development websites and apps like Sounds True, Shambhala Publications, Headspace, and Simple Habit are all offering free courses and meditations to help people navigate through fear and anxiety.

Write down some resources you plan to explore:

Here are some suggestions for reducing your exposure to news and screen time featuring pandemic-related information:

- Limit your viewing time of COVID-19 news. Try reducing it to once a day—and ideally, not at bedtime.
- Unsubscribe from media alerts and breaking news on your phone.
- Pick a single news source you trust.
- Turn your phone off while sleeping.
- Look for feel-good stories that highlight the kindness, creativity, and problem-solving abilities of people around the world.

Add other ideas here: _____

Which activities were most effective in dealing with anxiety contagion?

What improvements have you noticed in your own anxiety level and mood as a result of this exercise?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

What else can you do to make progress in this area?

Reducing the Stress of Hybrid and Remote Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Objective

To successfully navigate the school year with less stress, whether you are attending school remotely or in-person through a hybrid model.

You Should Know

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of teens are returning to newly-designed classrooms with rules like social distancing and mask wearing, or they are doing virtual learning or homeschooling.

According to recent research, the changes and uncertainty caused by the pandemic have had a significant impact on adolescents' mental health due to social distancing, event cancellations, and school closures. You might be struggling to meet virtual learning expectations. Teens who never had challenges might have experienced issues, and teens who had some struggles before school closures might have experienced an increase in problems. You might be worried about the school year, and wonder how you will manage.

Here are some suggestions:

1. Familiarize yourself with your school's plan. Most schools released extensive plans for the school year, including remote and hybrid learning guidelines.

2. Communication is key. Talk with your parents or caregivers about how school is going. Watch out for the following red flags, and discuss with a loved one if you experience the following:

- Anxiety or worry that is causing a great deal of distress.
- Getting along with family members or friends becomes difficult.
- Avoidance of normal activities in and outside of school.
- Physical symptoms suddenly come up – like stomachaches or fatigue.
- Excessive crying.

You might experience overwhelm, or have problems focusing on school tasks and meeting expectations.

3. Create an at-home learning space. Set up a dedicated place for learning and school work, even if it is the dining room table.

4. Stay active and eat healthy. Kids who are doing virtual learning miss physical education classes at home, while kids who are attending school might also miss out due to social distancing. Schedule physical activity into your day – take a walk each morning or evening. Take occasional 10-minute “activity breaks;” you can do jumping jacks or dance, for example. Eating nourishing meals will strengthen your immune system.

5. Be flexible. Have a positive attitude and try to be flexible when things change. Wishing things were different than they are will lead to frustration – and research shows acceptance is important for well-being.

6. Develop routines. Create a schedule that works for you. Routine and predictability are calming during times of stress. It is okay if your schedule does not go smoothly every day. Be sure to include opportunities for fun, hands-on learning activities, and time with your family.

7. Focus on the present and practice gratitude. Focus on what you can control and what is happening in the moment. Write down what you are grateful for; research shows that gratitude is a way to enhance well-being, so even in challenging times, find ways to be grateful and accept what you can (and cannot) control.

8. Be mindful of screen time. Break up screen time into increments throughout the day.

9. Have a social life. You probably feel isolated if you're learning remotely, and if you are in school and practicing social distancing, you might feel disconnected from friends. You can plan a FaceTime or Zoom pizza party with friends.

10. Be safe. If you are attending school in-person, you might be required to wear a mask. Practice proper handwashing techniques, and remember the importance of socially distancing from other students.

11. Seek support. Support yourself by picking one daily self-care practice, or connect with a friend to vent.

What to Do

Following the above suggestions, complete any (or all!) of the following activities.

1. Create an at-home learning space. Describe what you did.

2. Set up an activity and healthy eating routine. This might include scheduling a walk five evenings/week or playing a board game with your family. Use the following chart to plan weekly activities. Make a copy if you would like to plan the month ahead.

| Date | Activity | Materials needed | Notes |
|------|----------|------------------|-------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

3. What can you do to deal with your stress and frustration?

4. Use an app, planner, or large whiteboard to outline your daily routine. Describe what you did.

5. Say, write, or draw one thing you are grateful for, one thing to do, and one thing to let go of or accept. Try this activity, and describe your experience.

6. What can you do to socialize with friends and family? Describe.

7. Create a “Calm Down Guide” to post on your refrigerator or in a place where all family members have access. Brainstorm ideas, and make a list of what everyone can do to calm themselves when they are upset or stressed. For example, you might go for a run or play a video game. Create the guide, post it, and discuss how it worked for you and your family.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you feel less stressed or anxious about school? Why or why not? Be specific.

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
