

Coping with Social Anxiety Group Manual



Name:

The names of my facilitators are:

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Session 1: Welcome to the 'Coping with Social Anxiety' course



You may be feeling a bit anxious on starting the group, most others will too, this is completely normal!

This course has been run many times, and people who have completed it have benefitted from it in some way.

Many people even report that they are going to miss having their group sessions by the end of the course!

You will have two professionals running the sessions to ensure everyone has a positive experience.

What will be covered in today's session:

- ✓ **Introducing your facilitators**
- ✓ **Aim of today's Session**
- ✓ **About Steps to Wellbeing**
- ✓ **About the course**
- ✓ **Staying safe**
- ✓ **Ground rules**
- ✓ **What is Social Anxiety?**
- ✓ **Introduction to CBT**
- ✓ **Introduction to the Social Anxiety Model**
- ✓ **Home Task**

About **steps2wellbeing**

Steps to Wellbeing is the local NHS service for people experiencing anxiety or depression. We're a friendly team of mental health professionals, and we provide a mixture of group work and one-to-one work using different methods including face to face, telephone and video consultation.

This is a 'Step 3' group. Step 1 is your GP. Step 2 is mainly delivered by phone. Step 3 is for problems that can't be resolved at steps 1 or 2.

The main difference between a Step 2 and Step 3 group is the interactive element of the group. There will be exercises during a session that we work on as a group, this helps you to understand and start thinking about how you can implement some of the techniques to meet your individual needs and circumstances.

About the Course

The social anxiety course has 12 sessions. The aim of this course is to provide you with information, skills and techniques which will help you to understand, manage and recover from your social anxiety.

To get the most out of the course it is essential that you attend all 12 sessions. We completely understand that sometimes things happen that will stop you from attending a session. Please contact us using one of the options above to let us know before the session if you are unable to attend. If we do not hear from you we will try to call you to check you are okay and the reason that you did not attend the session.

IMPORTANT: We cover a lot of information and techniques in each session. Therefore if you miss more than two sessions you may be asked to leave the group. If this happens, we will try to offer you an alternative option.

An Overview of the Course

Week 1: Introduction session

Week 2: An introduction to anxiety and how it affects the body

Week 3: Hierarchy of exposure; Goal setting

Week 4: The focus of attention

Week 5: The role of safety-seeking behaviours

Week 6: Spotting & challenging negative thinking

Week 7: Spotting unhelpful thinking styles

Week 8: Core Beliefs

Week 9: Introduction to skills work: Presentation skills and Interview skills.

Week 10: Presentation's week – the projects.

Week 11: Practical skills, review of projects and introduction of relapse prevention.

Week 12: Online social and relapse prevention.

Staying Safe

Sometimes we can experience suicidal thoughts or thoughts to hurt ourselves. If this happens it can be difficult to know what to do. This is where having a safety plan can be very helpful.

It is helpful to have a safety plan in place even if you have not previously experienced thoughts like this.

Think of it like an insurance policy.... hopefully you never need it BUT it definitely proves to be useful if you do!

My Safety Plan

I could look after myself by (e.g. making a warm drink; eating hot food; taking a bath or going for a walk or listening to music):

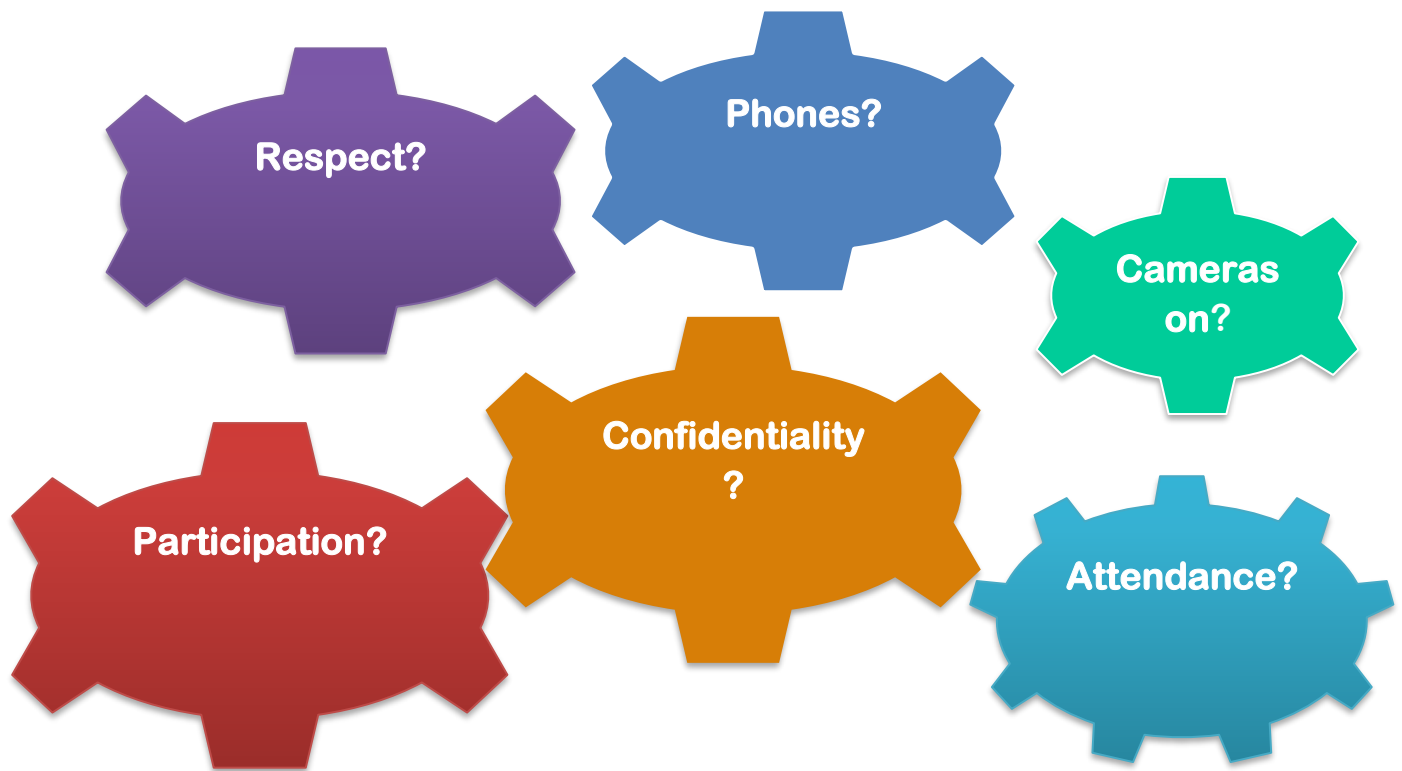
I could call these people (is there a trusted friend or family member you can talk to even if it's not about your difficulties? add their numbers as well):

I could contact these services/helplines/websites (tick the ones that apply to you):

- ☐ **The Samaritans open 24/7 – telephone number 116 123**
- ☐ **NHS Direct open 24/7 – telephone number 111**
- ☐ **The Lighthouse (Southampton Clients Only) -**
<https://www.southernhealth.nhs.uk/locations/thelighthouse/>
- ☐ **Solent mind (Southampton Clients only) -**
<https://www.solentmind.org.uk/>
- ☐ **Connections open 24/7 (Dorset Clients Only) - 0300 123 5440**
- ☐ **The Retreat (Dorset Clients Only) -**
<https://www.the-retreat.org.uk/>

Ground rules:

Every group makes up their own ground rules, and each set is therefore unique. They are agreed by all group members to ensure the group feels like a safe, effective and pleasant experience for everyone.



Our ground rules:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)

Hopes and Fears

What I hope to get out of this course is...

-
-
-
-
-
-



What fear about attending this course is...

-
-
-
-
-



What is social anxiety?

Social anxiety is an anxiety disorder where we believe:

- * other people will judge us negatively in some way,
- * Something that we do or say will cause people to judge us negatively
- * or that other people will see how anxious we feel and will judge us negatively for this.

It is therefore usually experienced in situations when we are with other people or might be observed by other people.

Some thoughts you might have include:

- ☐ I am boring
- ☐ Everyone can see how anxious I am
- ☐ I am making a fool of myself
- ☐ You might have an image in your mind of how you think you look or are coming across.

Some emotions you might have include:

- ☐ Anxiety
- ☐ Embarrassment
- ☐ Self-consciousness
- ☐ Vulnerable

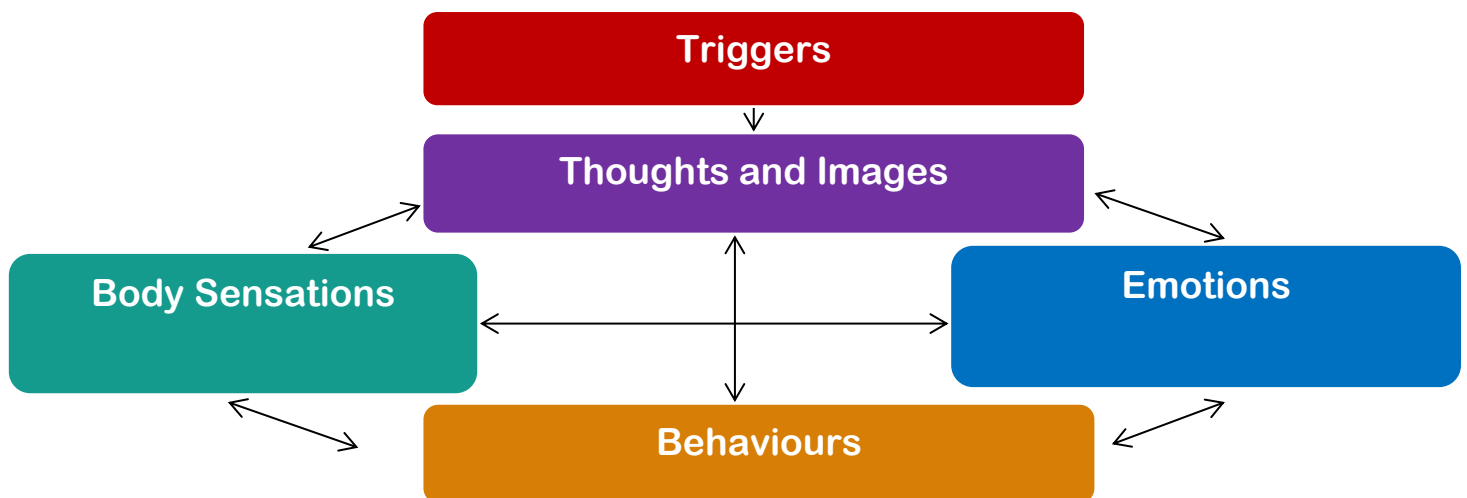
Some body symptoms you might have include:

- ☐ Sweating
- ☐ Blushing
- ☐ Heart racing
- ☐ Rapid Breathing
- ☐ Butterflies/stomach churning

Behaviours you might use include:

- ☐ Avoid social situations
- ☐ Leave social situations as soon as possible
- ☐ Avoid eye contact
- ☐ Always take someone you trust

What is cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and how does it work?

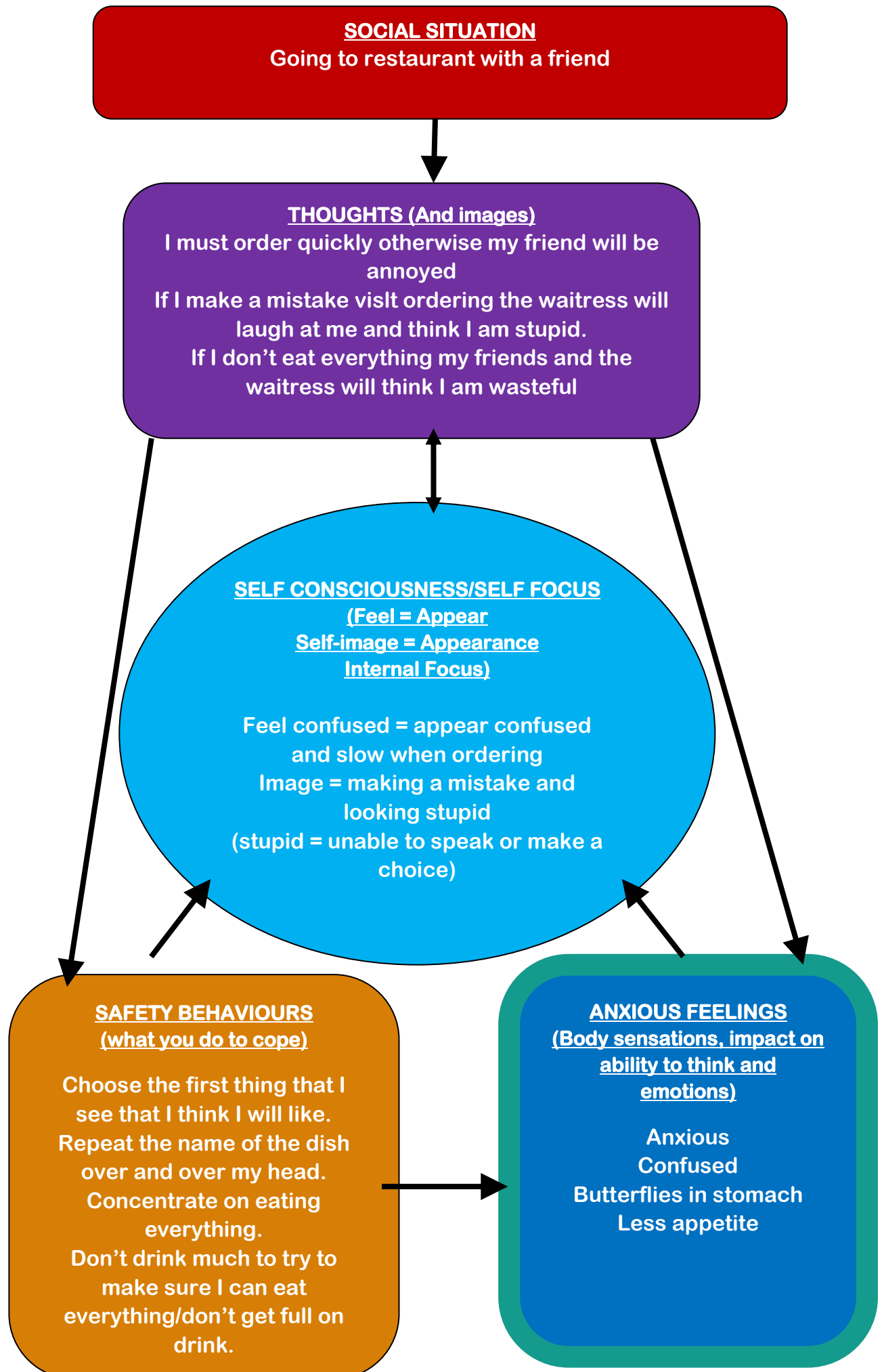


Triggers are the internal or external situations that have the potential to activate a vicious cycle. We interpret those situations with certain **thoughts**. If those thoughts are negative thoughts they may cause **difficult emotions such as anxiety**. As we become more anxious there are a series of **changes in the body sensations**. The anxiety and the body changes may make the negative thoughts more catastrophic. When people get caught in this vicious cycle they often adopt **behaviours** to try to cope.

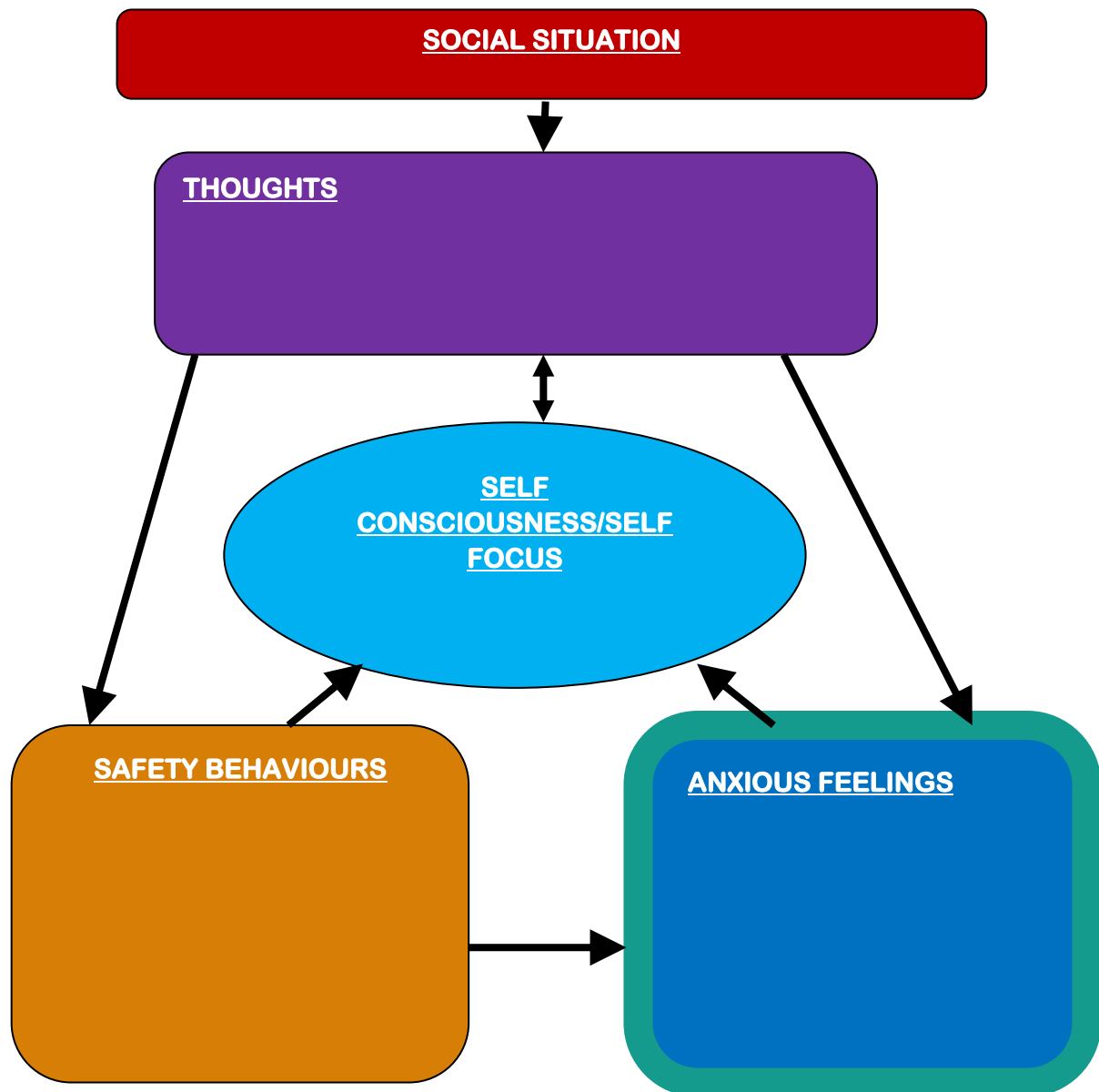
As you can see from the diagram, there are several arrows which point in both directions. This represents the essential CBT theory that our thoughts, emotions, body sensations and behaviours are all linked and impact on one another.

CBT works with this theory and provides techniques to modify unhelpful thoughts, behaviours and body sensations that might keep our vicious cycles going. Emotions are not “directly” tackled as there is not a switch to change emotions. However, if we work on the other areas our emotions can shift significantly and break the vicious cycle.

Summary: CBT works on the theory that what we do, how our body feels and how we think impacts on our emotions. By making targeted changes to these areas we can have an effective shift to our emotions.



Group Task: Match the statements to the relevant box in the chart



- 1) Julie is at a party with her friend Claire, Claire is the only person she knows.
- 2) Julie does not start conversations with anyone at the party Nobody is going to like me.
- 3) I will look like an idiot
- 4) Julie stays with her friend all night I feel anxious, I must look anxious
- 5) I must look shaky, fidgety and uncomfortable)
- 6) Julie feels sick
- 7) I feel hot, my face must be red
- 8) Julie feels hot
- 9) Julie feels vulnerable and on edge
- 10) Julie has an image of people pointing at her, whispering and sniggering.
- 11) Julie was focused internally on her body sensations and how she was coming across to others

Home Tasks:

What is the point of them?

Home tasks are an important part of CBT. It provides you with opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of your difficulties and to put skills and techniques into practice. You can then bring any questions from the home task to the next session.



Home Tasks for Session 1:

- ☐ Create your own safety plan (Page 5 of this workbook)
- ☐ Log at least one social situation this week by completing either the diary log or the blank social anxiety model (whichever one you think would most suit your learning style)

How is diary/log keeping helpful?

Diary/ log keeping is an important part of CBT and has several benefits to your recovery journey including:

- ☐ Helping you to focus on the parts of your problem you have learnt about during session.
- ☐ Boosting your self-insight as you become more self-reflective
- ☐ Helping you to capture the negative thoughts you have – you cannot move on to challenging thoughts you are not aware you have!
- ☐ Helping you to recognise behaviours that might be keeping your anxiety going and keeping you stuck in the long term.
- ☐ Helping you to identify key areas where you could implement skills to break your vicious cycles

Home Task Option 1: Social anxiety diary

SOCIAL SITUATION

What happened? Where were you? Who was there? What did you notice about the situation?

THOUGHTS

What thoughts and images went through your mind?

ANXIOUS FEELINGS

What emotions did you experience during this situation?

What body sensations did you experience?

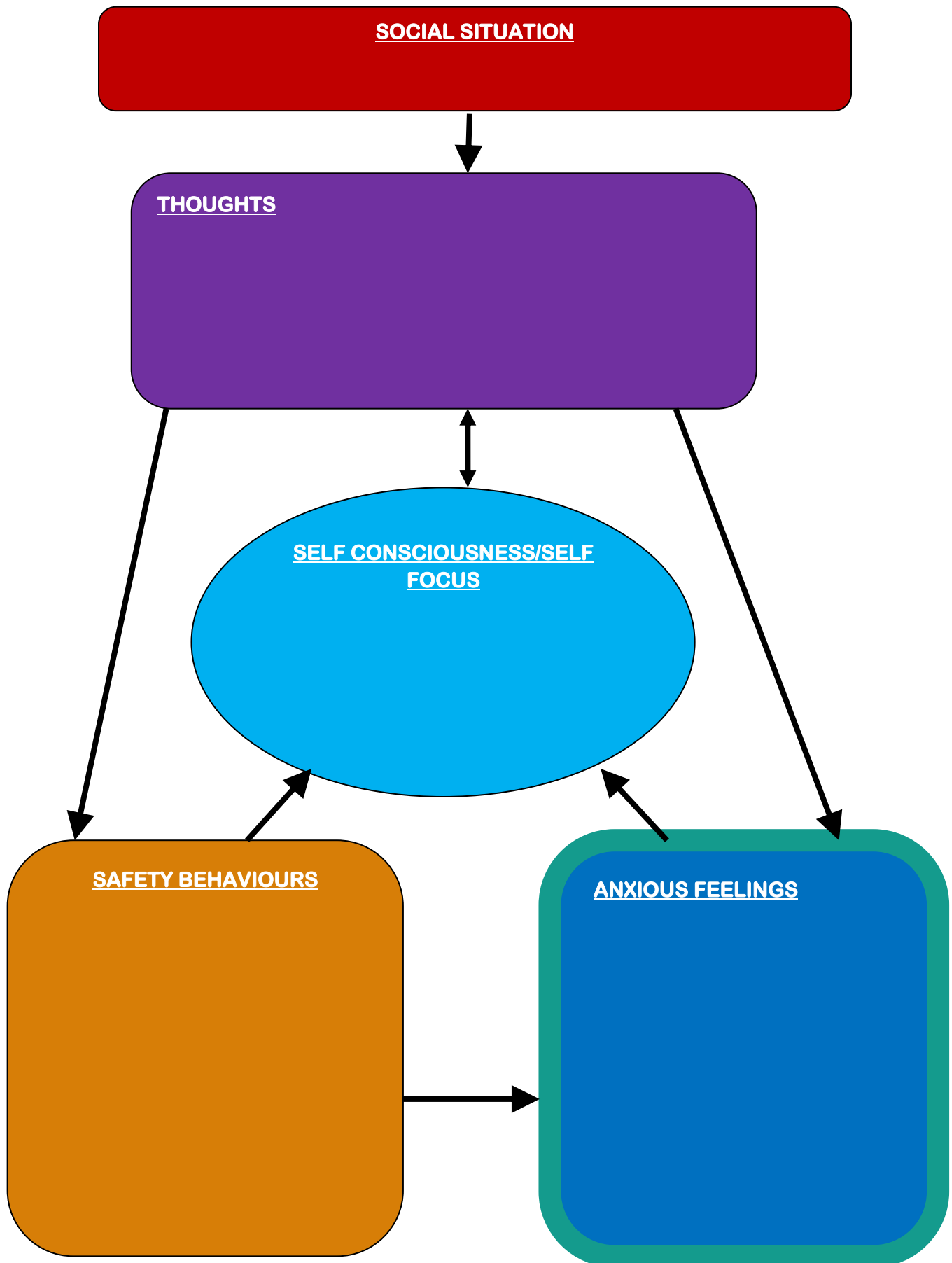
SELF- CONSCIOUSNESS/SELF-FOCUS

Were you internally or externally focused? How did you feel and how did this impact on how you believed you appeared?

SAFETY BEHAVIOURS

What did you do? How did you cope? Did you do anything differently because you were feeling anxious?

Home Task Option 2: Fill in the social anxiety model



Review:

At the end of each session we encourage you to pause and reflect on the session you just had and write down some comments. This will help you to track your recovery journey and reflect on the most important elements for you.



Session 1 Review:

What was the most important thing I learnt today?

What did I find helpful about today's session?

What is something I am going to try between now and next session?

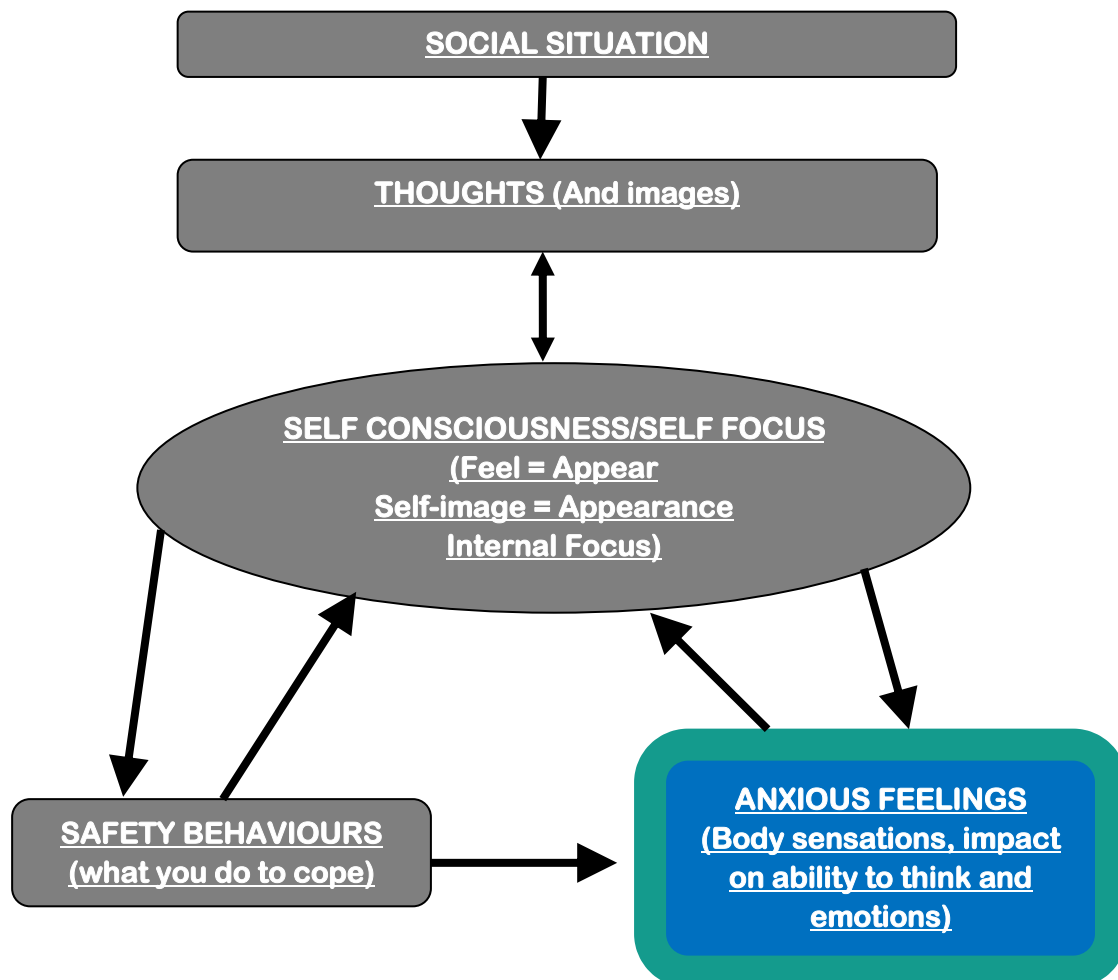
Anything else?

Session 2: An Introduction to anxiety and how it affects the body



What will be covered in today's session:

- ✓ Check In
- ✓ Recap on last session – feedback and questions
- ✓ Home Task Review – feedback and questions
- ✓ How the body responds to anxiety
- ✓ Skills to manage the anxiety response
- ✓ Home Task
- ✓ Review of today's session



Check In



0 = none/ low level of anxiety –
none or very few moments of
anxiety

5 = Moderate anxiety - anxiety has
been pretty evenly split between
difficult days and better days

10 = Very high anxiety –
experiencing intense anxiety
almost every day

Score?:

Reasons?:

Recap on last session:.

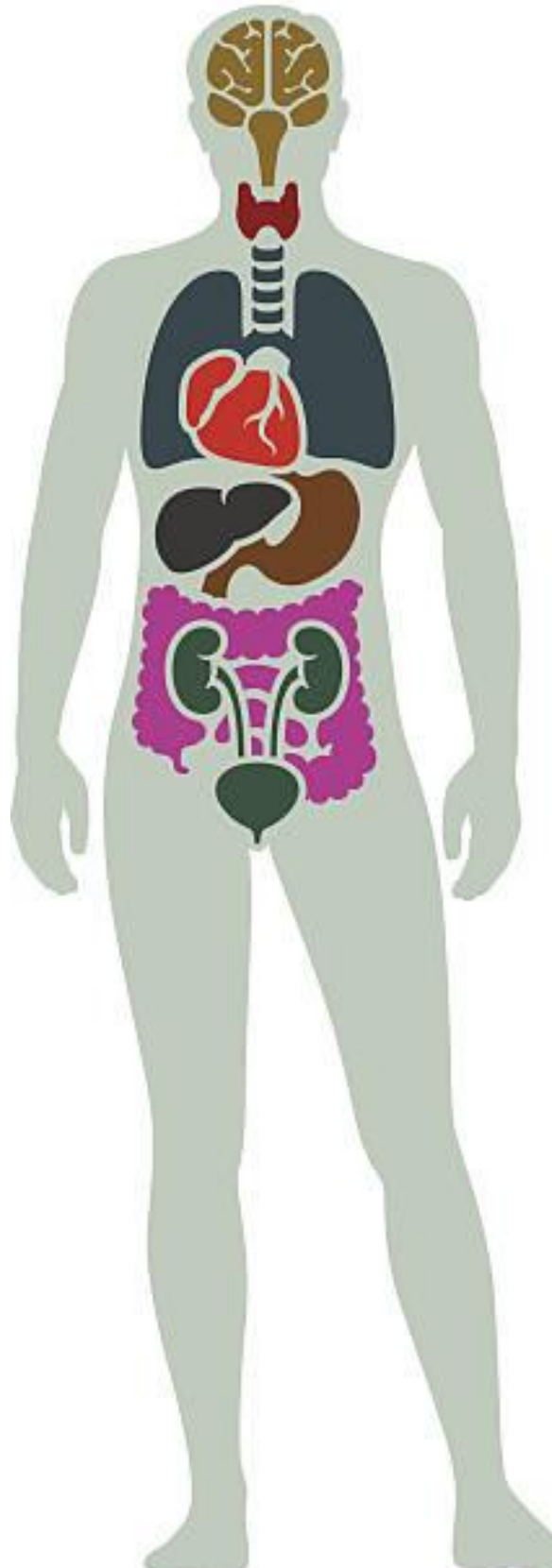
Home Task Review:

How the body responds to anxiety

Exercise: Label the diagram

On the
make a note of
body responds

diagram below
all the ways the
to anxiety.



Thoughts racing

Quicker thinking helps us to evaluate danger and make rapid decisions. It can be very difficult to concentrate on anything apart from the danger (or escape routes) when the fight or flight response is active

If we don't exercise (e.g. run away or fight) to use up the extra oxygen then we can quickly start to feel dizzy or lightheaded

Dizzy or lightheaded

Changes to vision

Vision can become acute so that more attention can be paid to danger. You might notice 'tunnel vision', or vision becoming 'sharper'

Breathing becomes quicker and shallower

Quicker breathing takes in more oxygen to power the muscles. This makes the body more able to fight or run away

Dry mouth

The mouth is part of the digestive system. Digestion shuts down during dangerous situations as energy is diverted towards the muscles

Adrenal glands release adrenaline

The adrenaline quickly signals other parts of the body to get ready to respond to danger

Heart beats faster

A faster heart beat feeds more blood to the muscles and enhances your ability to run away or fight

Bladder urgency

Muscles in the bladder sometimes relax in response to extreme stress

Nausea and 'butterflies' in the stomach

Blood is diverted away from the digestive system which can lead to feelings of nausea or 'butterflies'

Palms become sweaty

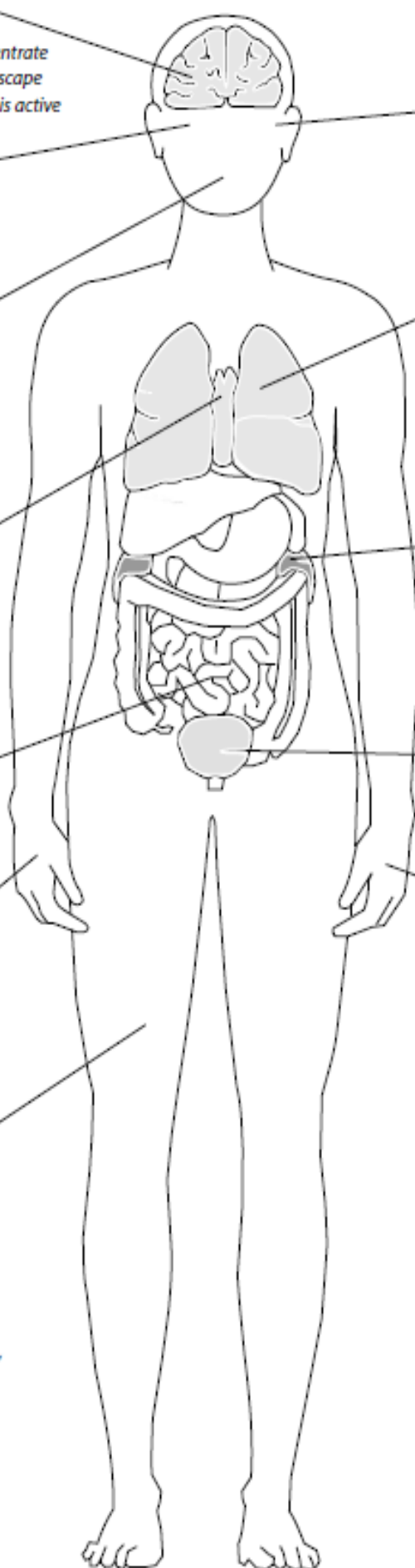
When in danger the body sweats to keep cool. A cool machine is an efficient machine, so sweating makes the body more likely to survive a dangerous event

Hands get cold

Blood vessels in the skin contract to force blood towards major muscle groups

Muscles tense

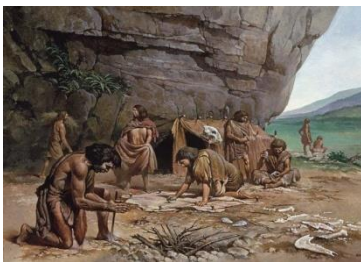
Muscles all over the body tense in order to get you ready to run away or fight. Muscles may also shake or tremble, particularly if you stay still, as a way of staying 'ready for action'



Fight or flight response

The reason we experience the physical changes we have identified is because our fight or flight response has been activated. The fight and flight response plays a crucial role in ensuring our survival and has been with us since we were early humans. This response was originally developed in order to increase our chances of survival when faced with a life threatening danger (think sabretooth tiger), and results in array of physical, cognitive and behavioural changes.

Group Discussion: Look at these two images of early humans. Out of the two images, which would be more likely to survive if a sabretooth tiger was in their camp? What makes you say that? What do you notice?



Cognitive Changes

As the main objective of the fight or flight response is to alert the person to the possible existence of danger, our attention will shift to our surroundings to search for potential threat and potential escape routes.

This accounts for the difficulty in concentrating that people who are anxious can experience. This is a normal and important part of the fight or flight response as its purpose is to stop you from attending to your ongoing chores and prioritise scanning your surroundings for possible danger or escape routes, increasing your chances of survival.

Sometimes an obvious threat cannot be found. Unfortunately, most of us cannot accept not having an explanation for something and end up searching within themselves for an explanation. This

often results in people thinking that there is something wrong with them and creates more anxiety.

An example of this occurring in social anxiety is feeling anxious during a job interview or a party and forgetting what you are going to say. This might lead you to think that there is something wrong with you, you are stupid or cannot cope. This may also result in you worrying about your performance after the situation and/or in the future when faced with a similar situation you may feel anxious at the prospect of having a similar experience.

Behavioural Changes

The two main behaviours associated with fear and anxiety are to either fight or flee. Therefore, the overwhelming urges associated with this response are those of aggression and a desire to escape, wherever you are. Often this is not possible (due to social constraints), and so people often express the urges through other behaviours.

For someone with social anxiety this might be through foot tapping, pacing, or leaving a situation early.

There is a third behaviour, freezing. When we were early humans it gave us another option if fighting or fleeing was not possible or did not give us the best chance of survival. Its purpose was to make it more difficult for us to be seen or to be less appealing to a predator.

In modern times it gives us the opportunity to stop and process what is happening, assess if the threat is real and how much of a risk it poses and stop us from paying attention to a situation which might cause us psychological distress.

In social situations this may present as going blank during a conversation or feeling unable to speak or move.

Physical Changes

When we believe that we are in danger, our whole physical system undergoes some major, temporary changes designed to enhance our ability to either run away, or be ready to fight. Physically, as soon as danger is perceived, the brain sends a message to our autonomic nervous system.

Our autonomic nervous system has two subsections: the sympathetic system and the parasympathetic system. These two subsections control the physical changes that occur in the fight or flight response. The sympathetic system is the part that activates the various areas of the body to be ready for action (fight or runaway). When the sympathetic system is activated, it causes physical changes all over the body.

To get things moving, the sympathetic system releases two chemicals from the adrenal glands in the kidneys called adrenalin and noradrenalin. These are basically messengers that serve to maintain the physical changes for a sufficient amount of time.

Important note: A common physical change people with social anxiety often mention is blushing. When adrenaline is released it causes blood vessel to open wider, this brings them closer to the skin. As the skin on the face, ears, neck and upper chest is thinner than other areas of the body, the vessels are more visible causing the blushing effect.



Group Task: Understanding how the physical changes we experience helps increase our chances of survival.

In the table below add the physical changes experienced when feeling anxious and make a note of how each symptom might help us to survive (fight or run away).

Physical Change	How could this help you to survive?

Hopefully going through this has helped you to see that the physical changes you experience are completely normal and are meant to help you to survive and are not dangerous at all.

In modern times we are less likely to be faced with life threatening situations, so then why is our fight or flight response being activated?

The best way of understanding this is to use the analogy of a smoke alarm.



A smoke alarm is designed to alert us to the danger of fire but it cannot distinguish between steam from the shower, burnt toast or a house fire. While the first two examples are not real threats the third is but the response of the alarm is the same: an irritating, uncomfortable and difficult to ignore alarm!

So, when our fight or flight system is being alerted during a social situation, think of it as an overenthusiastic smoke alarm. It is being activated by our thoughts that something is threatening rather than there actually being something life threatening.

In social anxiety this may be the perceived threat of being negatively judged or criticised by others resulting in a negative outcome for both our self acceptance and our social acceptance.

We can often feel like we become “stuck” in this state as our fight or flight response struggles to understand why it has been activated and can therefore become overloaded as the energy it is creating to fight or flight is not being used up.

So what can we do to manage this?

Skills to manage the fight or flight response

There is another system that counter balances the fight or flight response, like a see-saw called the rest and digest system.

The technical name for the rest and digest system is the parasympathetic system.



This system basically does the opposite of the fight or flight system:

- Activating normal digestion
- relaxing the sphincters in the digestive tract
- Slowing heart rate
- Slower breathing
- Relaxed muscles

Like a see-saw as one system comes on (up) the other system comes off (down)

So the trick to managing the fight or flight response is to activate the rest and digest system.

But how...?

Of all the symptoms experienced, there are two symptoms we can learn to manage which will allow us to switch off the Fight or Flight Response and turn on the Rest and Digest Response....

Any Ideas?

Breathing and muscle tension



The skills we are going to go through to manage your breathing and muscle tension, can help you to feel some immediate relief from the physical changes of the fight or flight response.

To be most effective it is important to practice them frequently and at times when you do not feel you need them. This will help to make the skills easier to learn and use when you really need them. It will also lower your overall physiological arousal baseline. This will mean that it will be harder to trigger your fight or flight response.

Breathing Exercises

Why does this work?

When we feel anxious we often notice our heart rate and breathing quicken. Our lungs and heart work together and yet we can't force our heart rate to slow down. But, if we slow down our breathing then our heart rate will also slow down too, this will then have a domino effect on the other physical changes as it helps turn off the Fight or Flight Response and turns on the Rest and Digest System.

There are lots of different breathing exercises you can try. We will go through diaphragmatic breathing (more commonly known as belly breathing) and square breathing.

Diaphragmatic Breathing

How to do it

- * Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position.
- * Place one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach. If you breathe deeply enough, there should be minimal movement in your chest and greater movement from your stomach. You might be able to notice the rising and falling with each inhale and exhale.



- 1) Inhale – breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 seconds
- 2) Pause – Hold the air in your lungs for 4 seconds
- 3) Exhale – Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 6 seconds
- 4) Repeat – practice for at least 2 minute but preferably 5 – 10 minutes.

Tips

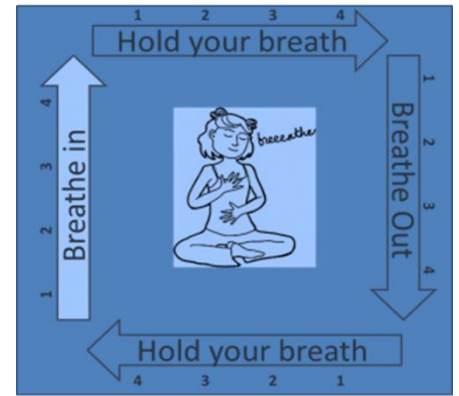
- * If it isn't working, slow down! The most common mistake is breathing too fast. Time each step in your head, counting slowly as you do
- * Counting out your breaths can help you focus on your task and stop you from focusing on the source of your anxiety. If your mind starts to wander, recognise this, then simply return your focus to counting out your breaths
- * When you exhale, pucker your lips, as if you are blowing throw a straw, to slow your exhalation. Alternatively imagine there is a lit candle in front of you, as you breathe out you are trying to make the flame flicker but not go out.

The times we use for each step are suggestions. Lengthen the time if it feels natural to do so. Or decrease the time if you feel discomfort. Aim to make the time for the exhale longer than the inhale, this helps to rebalance the levels of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the body.

Square breathing

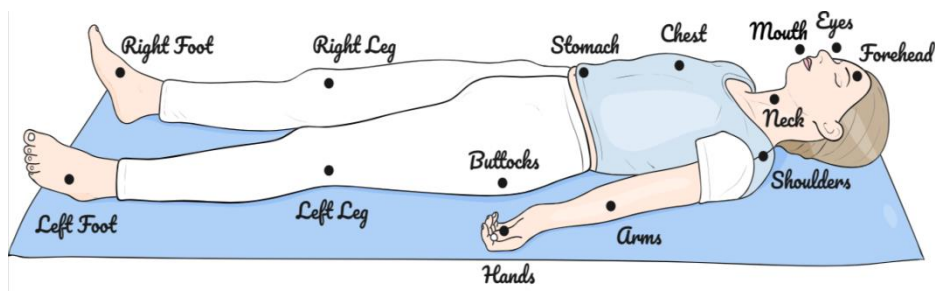
How to do it

- * Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position.
- * If possible, focus on a square in your environment e.g. a wall, a picture frame, a window. Rest your eyes on each side of a square for the steps 1 - 4 as you perform this exercise.



- 1) Breathe in as you count to 4
- 2) Hold your breath to the count of 4
- 3) Breathe out to the count of 4
- 4) Count to 4 before breathing in again.
- 5) Repeat for at least 2 minutes.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation



Why does this work?

Muscle tension is commonly associated with stress, anxiety and fear as part of a process that helps our bodies prepare for potentially dangerous situations. Even though some of those situations may not actually be dangerous, our bodies respond in the same way.

If we have experienced anxiety or stress for a prolonged period of time sometimes our bodies get “stuck” in this tense state.

Progressive muscle relaxation aims to help your muscles to “remember” how to relax again and so needs to be done regularly to be effective.

How to do it

*Make sure you are in an environment where you will not be disturbed for 10 to 15 minutes.

*Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. Shut your eye if you are comfortable doing so.

1) **Begin by taking a few deep breaths.** Paying attention to how your breath feels. Continue to take slow deep breaths throughout this exercise.

2) **Tense your feet by curling your toes and the arch of your foot.**

Hold for 5 seconds

Release the tension in your foot. Notice the new feeling

3) **Tense** the muscle in **your calves**. If this is difficult, try gently pointing your toes towards your shins.

Hold for 5 seconds

Release the tension in the calves. Notice the different sensations.

4) **Tense** the muscles of **your upper leg and pelvis** by tightly **squeezing your thighs together**.

Hold for 5 seconds

Relax these muscles and notice the tension leaving these muscles.

5) As you breathe out **tense your stomach and chest by sucking your stomach in** (like you are trying to get your belly button to touch your spine),

Try to hold for 5 seconds

Allow your body to go limp and take some slow deep breaths, noticing the feeling of relaxation.

6) **Tense** the muscles in **your back** by **bringing your shoulders together behind you**.

Hold for 5 seconds

Release and notice the different sensations

7) **Tense** the muscle in **your arms** from your hands to your shoulders. **Make a fist and squeeze all the way up your arms.**

Hold for 5 seconds

Release the tension and notice how it feels to relax these muscles.

8) **Tense your shoulders** by **lifting them towards your ears.**

Hold for 5 seconds

Release the shoulders, Focus on how this feels.

9) **Tense your neck** by **gently looking at the ceiling** – be gentle feel the tension without causing a strain

Hold for 5 seconds

Relax and bring the head back into a neutral position. Pay attention to any differences you can feel.

10) **Tense your facial muscles** by **raising your eyebrows** as if surprised and **opening your mouth wide** as if you are doing a big yawn.

Hold for 5 seconds

Relax the facial muscles, notice the different sensations

11) **Tense your entire body.** Feet, legs, stomach chest, arms, neck and face. Tense without straining. Really focus on how this feels.

Hold for 5 seconds

Allow your whole body to go limp. Pay attention to how this feels different from the tension you just had.

12) **Begin to wake your body up by slowly moving your muscles,** gently rocking from side to side, giving you arms and legs a gently shake.

Stretch your muscles gently, and open your eyes when you are ready.

Take a few more deep breaths before finishing this exercise.

Movement

When your body releases adrenaline it needs to use it up through movement. Often when become most aware of our anxiety symptoms is when we are stationary (sat down or stood with others), therefore the symptoms seem out of place for the situation.

One way to use up some of the adrenaline is to move, this can be simple short movements like walking or stretches or it can be co-ordinated movement , like exercise or dancing.

Some **quick solutions** for anxiety in the moment;

- Stretching
- Walking up and down the stairs
- Walking to another room (could be to even make a drink or go to toilet).
- Go onto your tiptoes
- 10min exercise or yoga (app, youTube etc.)

Some ideas to manage **Anxiety levels overall**;

- Running
- Dancing
- Exercise class
- Gym
- Cycling
- Swimming
- Yoga

I could try...

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-
-
-

Home Task for Session 2

Home Task 1: Identify how your body response to anxiety

Keep a log of social situations which cause you anxiety and how your body responds using the diary below

Date time	Situation	Emotions	Physical changes	Cognitive Changes	Behavioural Changes

Home Task 2: Practice skills

Practice the breathing exercises and/or the progressive muscle relaxation skills discussed today. Keep a record of the practices using the diary below.

Skill Practiced	Anxiety Before	Anxiety After	Duration	Comment



▪

Session 2 Review:

What was the most important thing I learnt today?

What did I find helpful about today's session?

What is something I am going to try between now and next session?

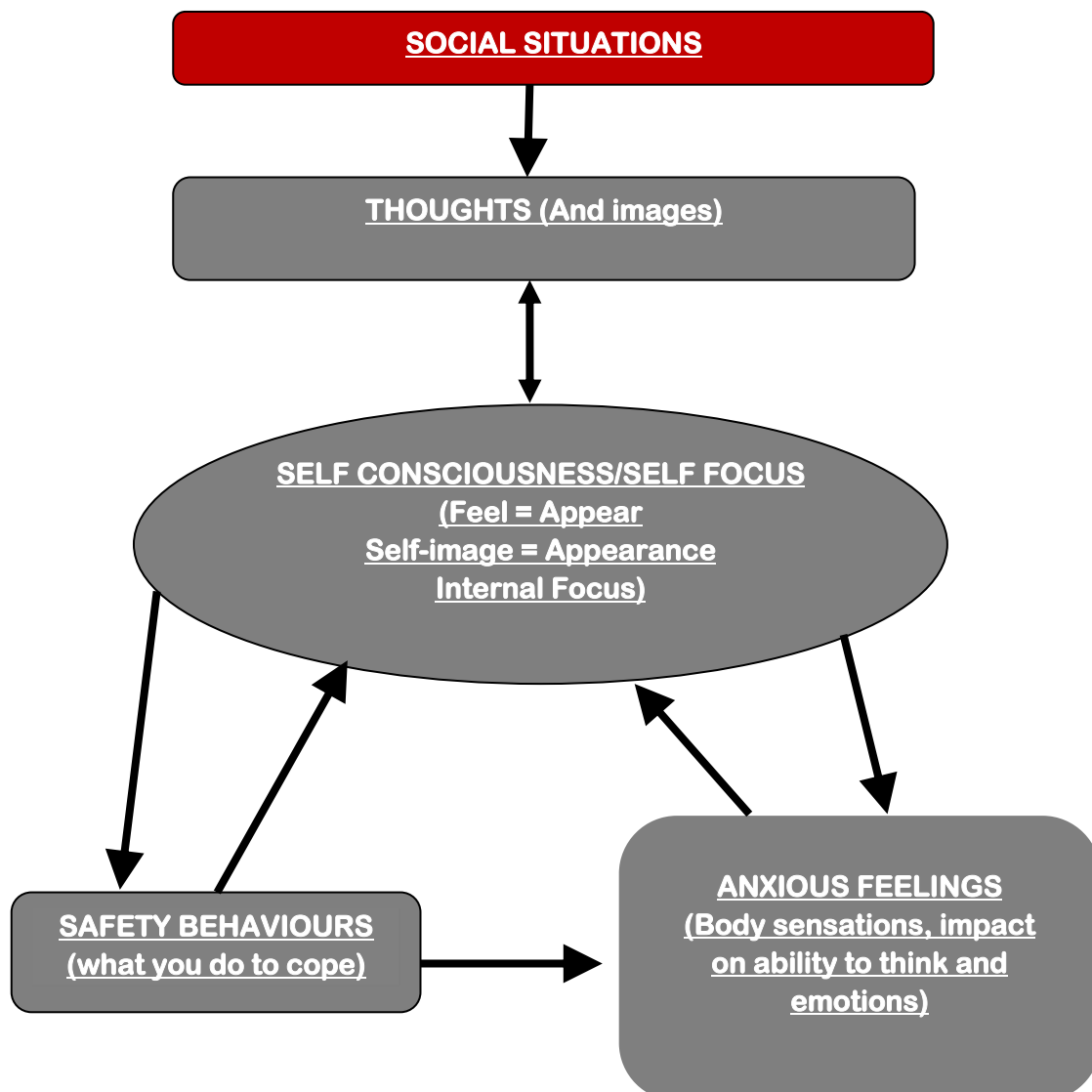
Anything else?

Session 3: Creating a hierarchy ladder and starting the climb



What will be covered in today's session:

- ✓ Check In
- ✓ Recap on last session – feedback and questions
- ✓ Home Task Review – feedback and questions
- ✓ Avoidance vs Exposure
- ✓ Identifying triggers
- ✓ Creating a hierarchy ladder
- ✓ Home Task
- ✓ Review of today's session



Check In

Doing regular “check ins” helps you to develop your ability to monitor and reflect on your anxiety, including what has potentially contributed to your anxiety increasing or reducing. When doing your check in try to give yourself a score and reasons for this score. What has helped to increase and/or reduce your anxiety at key moments over the past week?



0 = none/ low level of anxiety – none or very few moments of anxiety

5 = Moderate anxiety - anxiety has been pretty evenly split between difficult days and better days

10 = Very high anxiety – experiencing intense anxiety

almost every day

Score?:

Reasons?:

Important: We will now spend some time recapping and discussing the home task from last session. Please make a note of any feedback, questions and answers or other comments you think are important below. This can be really helpful to look back on during and after the course.

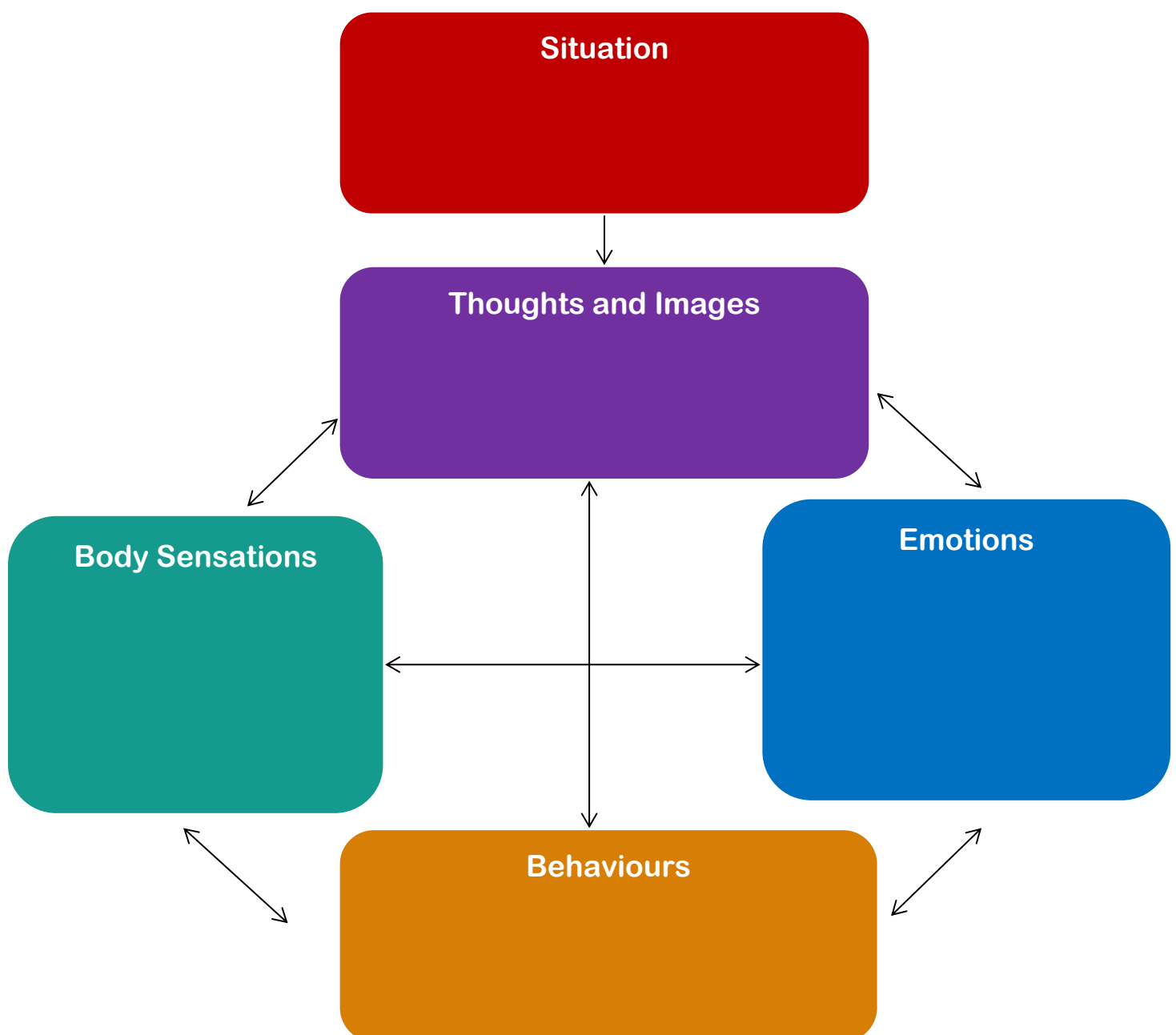
Recap on last session:.

Home Task Review:

Group Task: Bob's vicious cycle

Last session we began exploring what social anxiety is and a vicious cycle of social anxiety. This session we will look at how we can start to make changes in a structured, planned out way to begin breaking the vicious cycle.

To begin thinking about this lets start by creating a vicious cycle for Bob. Bob has a fear of dogs, what might his vicious cycle look like when he is out walking in the forest and a big dog runs towards him with no owner in sight?



Avoidance vs Exposure



If we focus on Bob's behaviours, chances are we identified some sort of avoidance or escape behaviour as this was a very distressing situation for Bob and so it is understandable that he would want to get away from the situation.

As a group discuss what might be helpful and unhelpful about Bob's behaviour.

Avoidance and its part in maintaining anxiety

Avoidance behaviours are actions we take to escape upsetting or unpleasant feelings. Avoidance can help us feel safer and less anxious in the short term, however, in the longer term it keeps us feeling anxious for several reasons.

- **We never get to test our negative thoughts**
We assume our negative thoughts are true. By avoiding situations that cause us anxiety we never discover how accurate this is or test how we would cope with the situation
- **We never get opportunities for positive experiences**
Continuous avoidance means we miss out on the possibility of having a positive outcome or discovering something we might enjoy.
- **We lower our self-esteem**
If we avoid situations we might not do things we would like to be doing and might become more self-critical as a result. We might also ruminate on opportunities we are missing out on leading to more self-criticism, anxiety and low mood
- **We find the avoidance and anxiety spreading into other areas**
As we avoid situations our anxiety can increase and our confidence reduce, this may lead us to feeling less able to cope with other situations, so we may start to avoid more and more situations

Exposure – doing things differently

In order to break the vicious cycle caused by avoidance, it is important to start approaching situations we may find difficult.

This will involve us creating a hierarchy or ladder of different situations from low anxiety (0/10) to very high anxiety (10/10) and gradually, frequently and for a prolonged period of time staying in these situations and working up the ladder.

In the short term we might find this anxiety provoking as it will involve us stepping outside of our comfort zone. In the longer term we will see that our anxiety naturally reduces if we stay in a situation long enough. This process is called habituation. With time and repetition we also open up the opportunity to develop coping strategies, build confidence and have positive experiences.

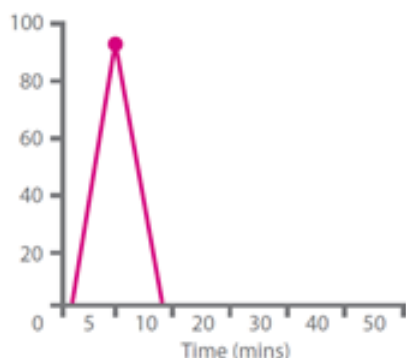
As we conquer the lower steps on the ladder the higher steps will not feel as anxiety provoking as they did when we originally made our hierarchy as we would have developed coping strategies and confidence.

In a nutshell...

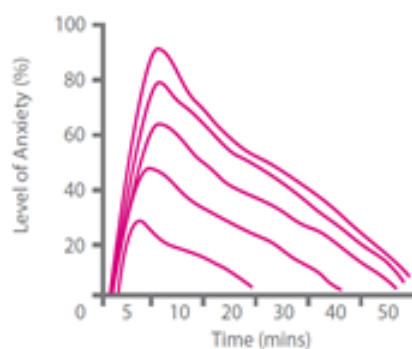
Avoidance

vs

Exposure



Avoidance leads to same fear response each time we face the situation.



Repeated exposure, reduces anxiety response over time, which is called habituation.

Identifying triggers:

Before completing your own hierarchy of fears it may be helpful to do the following questionnaire. This questionnaire will help you to understand your type of social anxiety and triggering situations.

5= very high anxiety anxious and 0= not at all (NA=not applicable, for a situation that you never encounter & don't think you will ever need to),

Going to a party or social event	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A
Speaking up at meetings	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A
Eat or drink in front of people you don't know well	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A
Start and maintain a conversation	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A
Talk on the phone	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A
Entering a room by yourself	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A

Talk to someone you find attractive	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A
Give a speech	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A
Sign your name when watched	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A
Attracting attention	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A
Making a complaint	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A
Taking clothing back to the shop	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A
Being interviewed for a job	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A
Approaching a stranger	5	4	3	2	1	0	N/A

An example using Bob and his dog phobia.

10: Taking something out of a dog's mouth.

9: A dog running towards me.

8: Touching a dog.

7: Sitting very close to a dog.

6: Sitting in the same room as a dog.

5: A loud dog in the park a long way off, barking and jumping .

4: A small quiet dog off a lead, far away, with its owner nearby.

3: A large dog on a lead, in the park.

2: A very small dog on a lead in the park, a long way off.

1: A film about a dog

0: a picture of a dog in a book

Other considerations when creating and using your hierarchy

□ Before, during and after?

It is common to experience anxiety before a social situation, during the social situation and/or to ruminate and worry about a situation after it has happened. Think about what you do to cope with the anxiety at these different times and what

you could do to experiment whether this is needed.

For example is your anxiety higher or lower if you could not go with a friend to a party or if you had to leave after your friend had left the party? Would you be more anxious if you could not talk to your colleague before doing a presentation for work or if you could not talk to them after the presentation about how you came across?

□ **This is not set in stone**

It is very common to need to make adjustments to your hierarchy as you work through it. You may find that the hierarchy needs reordering or that you need to add additional steps to achieve one of the steps

□ **Do not rush it**

It is important that at each step you spend time acclimatising and getting used to that situation or environment before moving to the next step

□ **Review how it is going**

After you give a step a go, reflect on how you think it went. Regardless of how it goes, you can learn from it. Did your predictions come true? Was the step at the right level for you or too difficult? If you were to do it again what would you do differently?



My Anxiety scale:

Try to identify how you feel at each point on the scale e.g.

- 0% relaxed muscles, breathing slow,
- 50% heart beating faster, a little tense, feeling a bit nauseous
- 100% tight throat, tight chest struggling to breathe, sweating needing the loo, feeling very nauseous.

0%	10%	20%	30%	40%	50%	60%	70%	80%	90%	100%

Home Tasks for Session 3

Part 1: Create your own hierarchy

This will be an important tool for you to plan your own therapy.

First identify the situation that you feel most uncomfortable with (this may be your goal situation); label this as step 10. Then think about situations that you are completely comfortable with label this at the step 1. Then try to identify at least 5 intermediate situations between these two extremes.

You may want to score each situation with the anxiety it currently causes you and/or how much you avoid this situation as percentages.

If you keep ticking off when you feel that you have achieved each step (i.e. that you can cope with that situation with anxiety of 30% of less), you will then know what challenge you face next.

Step	Activity/Situation	Anxiety (Rating %)	Completed
10			
9			
8			
7			
6			
5			
4			
3			
2			
1			
0			

Home Task Part 2: Time to Experiment

Once you have completed your hierarchy it is time to start experimenting!

This might feel daunting (which is completely normal), however, CBT is a doing therapy and we need to start putting our learning into action and see what happens!

Start with step 0 or 1 and work your way up SLOWLY. It may take several weeks or months to reach your step 10. You do not need to be at step 10 by the end of the course to be making fantastic steps towards managing your social anxiety.

Each time you complete an experiment use the table below to reflect on the experience and think about what your next steps are going to be. This might be repeating the experiment again or moving up your ladder.

My experiment (use your hierarchy): what does it involve, who with?	
My prediction: what do I think will happen? What will it be like?	
Anxiety before (rating as a % or out of 10)	
Anxiety after (rating as a % or out of 10)	
What was it actually like?	
What have I learnt and what will be my next step(s)?	



Session 3 Review:

What was the most important thing I learnt today?

What did I find helpful about today's session?

What is something I am going to try between now and next session?

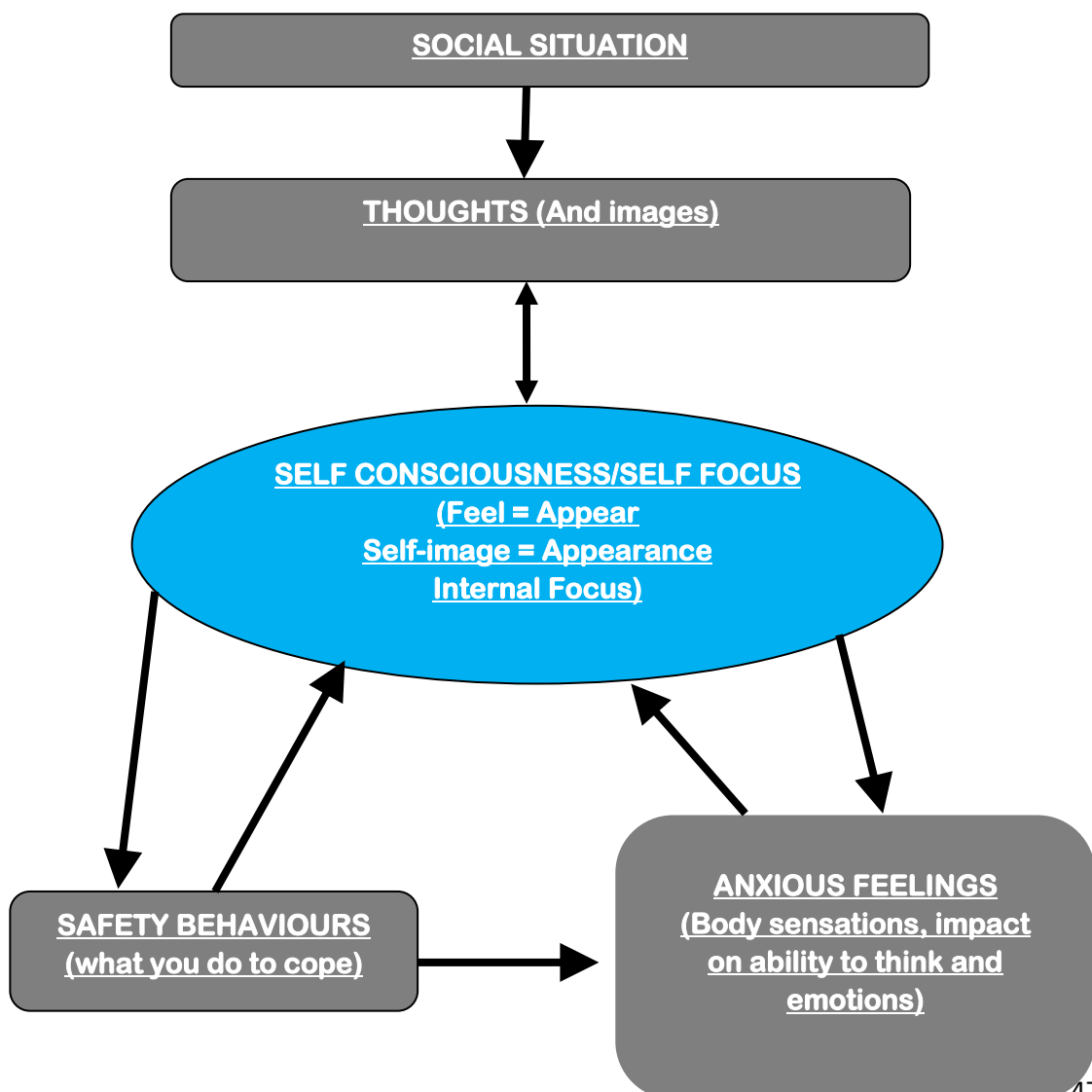
Anything else?

Session 4: The Role of Attention and How to Refocus it



What will be covered in today's session:

- ✓ Check In
- ✓ Recap on last session – feedback and questions
- ✓ Home Task Review – feedback and questions
- ✓ Focus of Attention
- ✓ Attention Training
- ✓ Home Task
- ✓ Review of today's session



Check In



0 = none/ low level of anxiety – none or very few moments of anxiety

5 = Moderate anxiety - anxiety has been pretty evenly split between difficult days and better days

10 = Very high anxiety – experiencing intense anxiety almost every day

Score?:

Reasons?:

Recap on last session:.

Home Task Review:

Internal Focus of Attention

When people focus internally, they focus on their physical sensations of anxiety, negative thoughts or images about themselves. They can also focus on signs that their environment is posing some kind of threat to them – usually in terms of negative judgements from others.

They will also assume any ambiguous or unclear information is negatively directed at them. For example, if they see other people laughing, frowning or yawning they will assume this is proof that other people are judging them negatively.



My heart is pumping so fast. They must see how anxious I am. They just said something and now they are laughing... it must be at me! They must think I am stupid and weird!

External Focus of Attention

When people focus externally, they become more focused on the task at hand. In a social situation, this would mean becoming completely absorbed by the conversation. This would include things like being focused on the topic of conversation, listening to what the other person (or people) is saying, noticing any common interests, as well as asking and responding to questions.



Group Activity: Sam's Focus of Attention

Read through the information about Sam, then answer the questions at the end.



Sam was bullied at school. However he did well at school, went on to university, and then decided to go into teaching.

He knows that he's got good rapport with the kids, and the lessons themselves are fine, but when he starts to contemplate the required observations he becomes incredibly anxious.

It's a Tuesday morning, and he has an observed lesson. As he explains to the children what they're going to do he can hear that his voice is shaking; he's intensely aware of how hot he is feeling. He's now noticing that his legs are shaking, and he can feel the intense glare of the expert observer.

He sees himself, as if from a drone floating high in the room, as a diminished stooped figure, hardly audible to the children, and mocked by the children.

He's so busy thinking about these images that he loses his train of thought several times, and stumbles on his words, and this seems to increase his sense of self-monitoring. He notices the observer speak to a child who seems distracted and he realises that he failed to notice this.

What is Sam focusing on?

How is this impacting on his anxiety?

What could Sam do differently to reduce his anxiety in this situation?

What makes up my self-focussed image?

-
-
-
-
-
-
-

Group Activity: Listen to the story

Whilst listening to the story, focus as much as you can on your heart rate, any other body sensations, any thoughts or images you have about yourself, what emotions are you experiencing? For example: Is your heart going fast or slow? Is the force of each heart pump gentle or strong? Do you feel hot or cold?



What did you notice?

Group Activity: Listen to the story

This time whilst listening to the story, focus as much as you can on the story. For example, Who are the characters? How many characters are there? What are they doing? Where are they?

What did you notice?

Were there any difference between task 1 and task 2?

Group Activity: Have a conversation about a holiday or trip

Whilst talking and listening to the other person (or people) focus as much as you can internally by focusing on your heart rate, any other body sensations, any thoughts or images you have about yourself, what emotions are you experiencing?

What did you notice?

Group Activity: Have a conversation about your favourite food or drink

This time whilst talking and listening, focus as much as you can on the conversation. What is being said? Respond to and ask relevant questions, what similarities and differences do you have with the person (or people) you are speaking with?

What did you notice?

Internal Focus and Social Anxiety

When people with social anxiety focus internally it maintains their anxiety by:

* Distracting from the task at hand

When focusing internally, you are less able to pay attention to the conversation and are less able to effectively contribute to the conversation. This is for a range of reasons including, you are more likely to miss cues that it is your turn to speak and you may miss key comments or questions which you would be able to contribute to.

Note: This can be made even worse if you use safety behaviours at the same time.



* Increasing the sense of the threat

By focusing on your body sensations (such as a racing heart) , negative thoughts linked to anxiety and looking for signs of threat in the environment you will increase the feeling that something bad is going to happen or something is going to go wrong.

* Missing non-threatening feedback

By always looking out for threats or negative feedback, we miss any positive or neutral feedback. This is simply because our brains can only take in so much information and will focus on what we tell it to focus on. This means you might miss or not remember the person that smiled at you, tried to speak to you or gave you a compliment.

* Seeing ambiguous/unclear feedback as negative

If you are focusing on the negative thought “other people will think I am boring” you will look for any evidence that this is true. So, if somebody yawns (an ambiguous/unclear behaviour) you will assume this is a sign the person thinks you are boring, when it is possible they are just tired.



Attention Training

What is attention training?

Staying externally focused during social situations can be very hard to do as we often experience a range of difficult emotions, including anxiety. So, it can be helpful to start practicing shifting our attention with non-social activities.

The aim of attention training is not to be 100% focused on the task – that is nearly impossible – instead it is to help you to become more aware of where your attention is focused and to improve your ability to refocus your attention to where you would like it to be.

How do I do attention training?

We can practice training our attention whilst doing any activity in our day to day lives for example, Hoovering, washing the dishes and even breathing!

If you notice your mind has wandered during ANY activity try focusing on your senses. For example, for each sense you could try answering the following questions:

Sight – What do you notice about the task? What objects are involved? What catches your eye? What colours are present?

Hearing – What sounds can you notice as a result of the task? What *kind* of noises do they make? Are they soft and quiet or loud and harsh?

Touch – What does the activity feel like? What areas of your body make contact with the task? What textures are present (rough or smooth? Hot or cold?)?

Smell – What smells do you notice? Do they change during the task?

Taste – What tastes do you notice? Do they change during the task? How many different tastes are there? How strong are the tastes (very strong or subtle?)

Home Task for session 4: Attention Training

Aim to practice becoming aware of when you are internally focused and then shifting your attention to an external focus each day – it does not have to be for long. You can practice during a non-social activity or during a social activity, the choice is yours. Make a note of your practice using the table below.

Situation (what, where, when who?)	
Negative Thought (thoughts or images)	
Focus of Attention (Internal or external and what you were specifically focused on)	
Anxiety Rating (e.g. 0 – 10 0 = No anxiety 10 = Extreme anxiety)	
Refocus Your Attention (What did you do to refocus your attention? What was it like?)	
Re-rate Anxiety (e.g. 0-10)	



Session 4 Review:

What was the most important thing I learnt today?

What did I find helpful about today's session?

What is something I am going to try between now and next session?

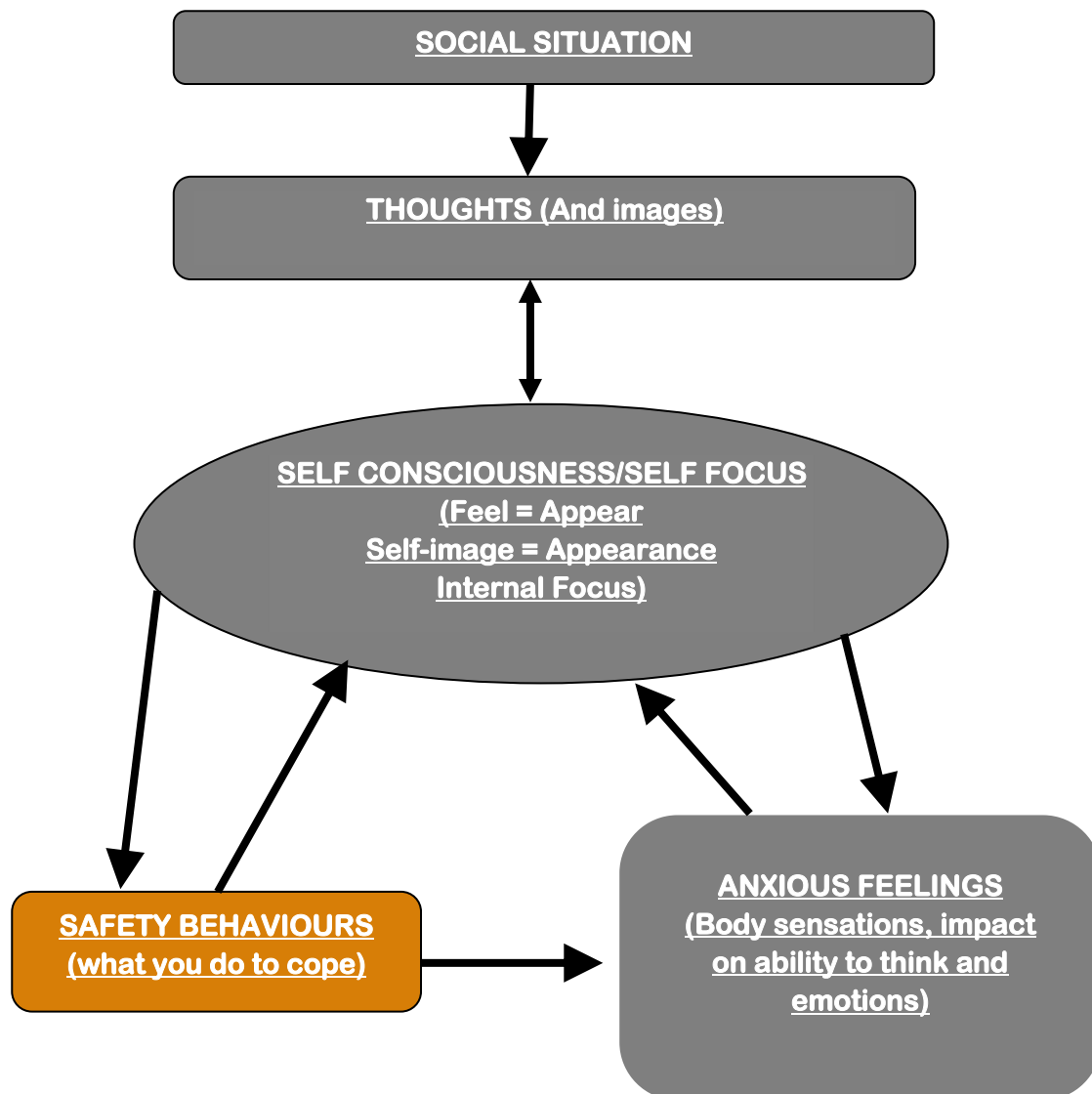
Anything else?

Session 5: Identifying and Dropping Safety Behaviours



What will be covered in today's session:

- ✓ Check In
- ✓ Recap on last session – feedback and questions
- ✓ Home Task Review – feedback and questions
- ✓ What are safety behaviours?
- ✓ Dropping safety behaviours
- ✓ Home Task
- ✓ Review of today's session



Check In



0 = none/ low level of anxiety –
none or very few moments of
anxiety

5 = Moderate anxiety - anxiety has
been pretty evenly split between
difficult days and better days

10 = Very high anxiety –
experiencing intense anxiety
almost every day

Score?:
Reasons?:

Recap on last session:.

Home Task Review:

What are Safety Behaviours?

When we feel anxious about a social situations, it is usually because we have perceived some kind of threat. For example, we might be worried that we will embarrass ourselves, other people will think we are stupid or that other people will be able to see how anxious we are.

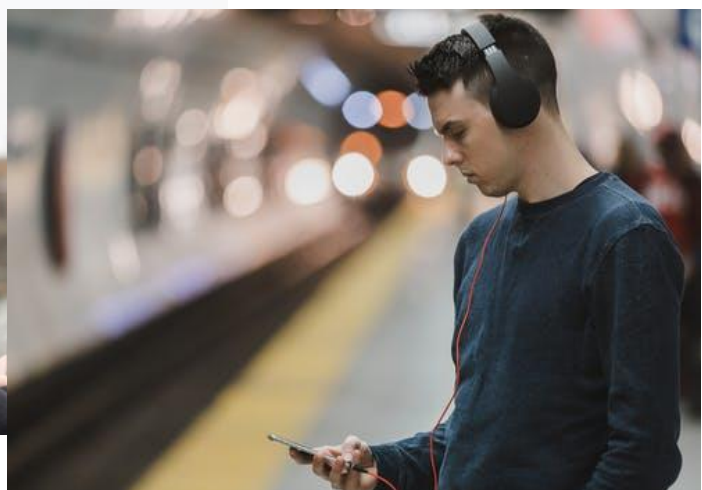
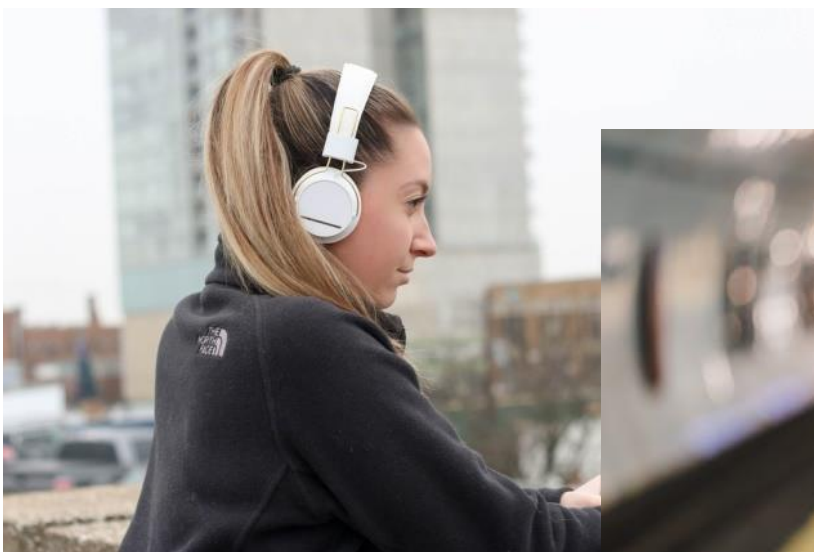
Often, people with these worries will then avoid the social situation completely, however, it is very difficult to avoid all social situations that cause us anxiety.

When we cannot avoid a social situation that causes us anxiety, we may use behaviours which help us to feel more comfortable. These behaviours are called safety behaviours.

Safety behaviours are used to try to prevent the feared prediction coming true or to help us feel more comfortable and able to cope with the social situation.

Safety behaviours may be very different from person to person.

Important: It is not what you are doing but why you are doing it that determines whether something is a safety behaviour or not!



When do we use Safety Behaviours?

We might use safety behaviours before, during or after a social situation.

For example, Jim is doing a presentation at work in front of 10 colleagues. Before the presentation, Jim tries to think about all the possible questions he might be asked and prepares several answers for each questions to ensure he has an answer and doesn't look stupid.

During the presentation, Jim does not make eye contact with anyone in the audience as he is sure that they will see he is anxious and think he is strange.

After the presentation, Jim asks several colleagues what they thought of his presentation to try to get some reassurance that it went well and to try to make sure nobody thought it was bad. He also mentally goes over his presentation, trying to pick out everything he did wrong and trying to think of ways to prevent it next time.

Task: In the table below, make a note of the safety behaviours you use before, during and after a social situation.

Before	
During	
After	

Group Task 1: Conversation using safety behaviours

As a group you are going to have a conversation. During this conversation try using all your safety behaviours (or as many as you can).

Part 1: Before the conversation, write down what safety behaviours you are going to use and your predictions on how you think this conversation will go. This might include things like how anxious you will feel, how active you will be during the conversation and what you think the other people in your group will think or notice about you.

Part 2: Immediately after the conversation make a note of how you think you did but also what you noticed and thought about the other people in your group.

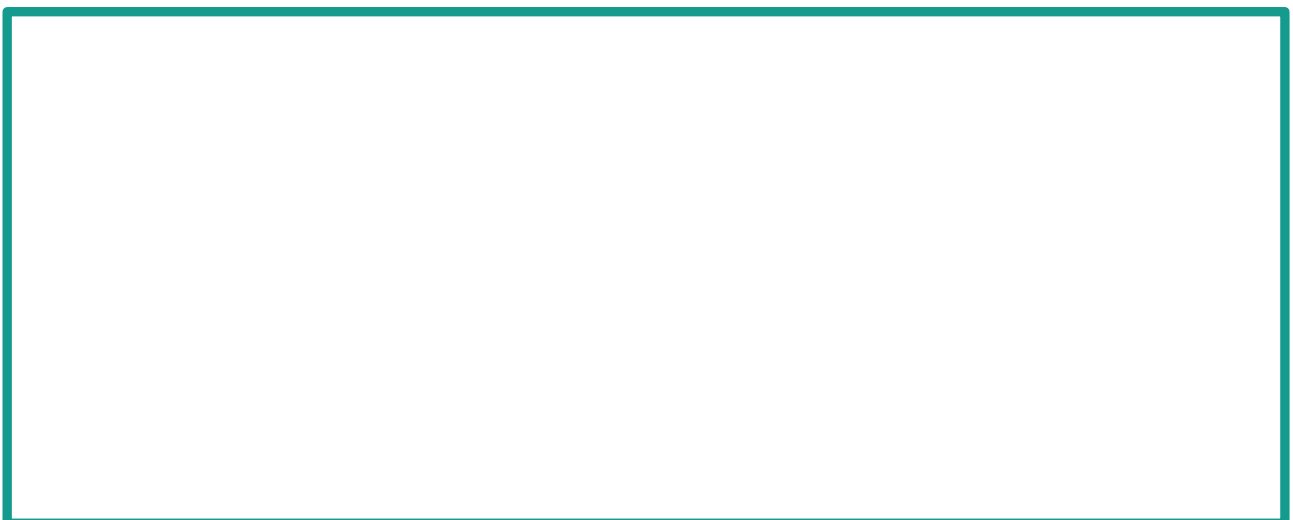
Group Task 2: Dropping your safety behaviours

As a group you are going to have another conversation. This time you are going to try to drop all of the safety behaviours you used in the previous conversation.

Part 1: Before the conversation, write down what safety behaviours you are going to drop and your predictions on how you think this conversation will go. This might include things like how anxious you will feel, how active you will be during the conversation and what you think the other people in your group will think or notice about you.



Part 2: Immediately after the conversation make a note of how you think you did but also what you noticed and thought about the other people in your group.



Part 3: Feedback and reflections

This is an opportunity to get honest feedback to help test out your beliefs, see how true they are, recognise what you are doing well, and areas you could focus on developing during the course.

In your groups, each person will provide feedback on what they noticed and thought about each member of the group. If you want to get feedback on a particular fear, this is your opportunity to ask the members of your group.

Reveal what safety behaviours you were using and trying to drop and see if your fellow group members noticed these in the conversations.

Finally, make a note of what you have learnt from this activity.

Dropping Safety Behaviours

Once you have become aware of your safety behaviours, it is important to drop them. This can be hard at first as you might be scared or unsure of how you will cope with social anxiety without them. It is possible, and quite common, for your anxiety to increase in the short term, but in the longer term it will help reduce your social anxiety.

As discussed earlier, there are many problems with using safety behaviours. The key problem to remember is they get in the way of you truly testing your fears about social situations.

The most helpful approach is to drop all of the safety behaviours you are aware of straight away. If you are not able to do this, you could try dropping them in a more gradual way – for example, starting with the safety behaviours which are easiest to drop and working your way up to dropping the harder safety behaviours.

Activity: Dropping safety behaviours

Make a list of your own safety behaviours and make a note of how you could drop them.

The Problem With Safety Behaviours

Although safety behaviours may help you to feel safer, more comfortable or more able to cope with a social situation in the short term, unfortunately they maintain social anxiety because:

∞ They can become self-fulfilling prophecies

- Sometimes the safety behaviours can actually cause the outcomes we were trying to prevent.
- For example, during work meetings you stay quiet and take notes because you are afraid of saying something wrong and annoying your boss or colleagues. In reality, your boss and colleagues get frustrated because you never contribute ideas to the meetings or discussions.



∞ If our fears don't come true we mistakenly believe this is because we used the safety behaviour

- If our fears don't come true, we believe that this is because the safety behaviours prevented them from happening.
- This can cause us to become very dependent on using our safety behaviours and cause us to become even more anxious if we are unable to use them.
- The truth might be that our fears would not have come true even if we did not use our safety behaviours, but we will never have the opportunity to discover this if we keep using them.

∞ **Safety behaviours increase our self-focused attention**

- We will explore this more next session – no spoilers this week!

∞ **Safety behaviours stop us from directly testing our fears**

- Although we have not completely avoided the situation, by using our safety behaviours we haven't truly tested our fears.
- For example, if you do not contribute to a discussion and move away from the conversation because you predict you will forget what you were going to say and people will laugh at you.
- When a similar situation comes along you are likely to act in the same way and will never discover if this prediction was correct or not.
- If you tried talking or contributing during a discussion, you would have the opportunity to learn if this prediction was true or not.
- If you then repeated this multiple times you would gather enough evidence to see whether this was true or not overall. If your prediction does not come true, or does not always come true, then you might be able to see it for what it is...a thought and not a fact.



Home Task for Week 5: Dropping Safety Behaviours

Set up one or two experiments where you can practice dropping your safety behaviours in an everyday situation.

This can be something from your hierarchy or something different.

	Experiment 1
Trigger: The specific situation in which you use a Safety Behaviour	
Prediction: What do you think will happen if you don't use the Safety Behaviour	
Experiment: How will you find out? What Safety Behaviour(s) will you drop? What will you do differently?	
Outcome: What actually happened?	
Conclusions: What does that say about you or others? What does that say about your safety behaviour? What are your next steps?	



Session 5 Review:

What was the most important thing I learnt today?

What did I find helpful about today's session?

What is something I am going to try between now and next session?

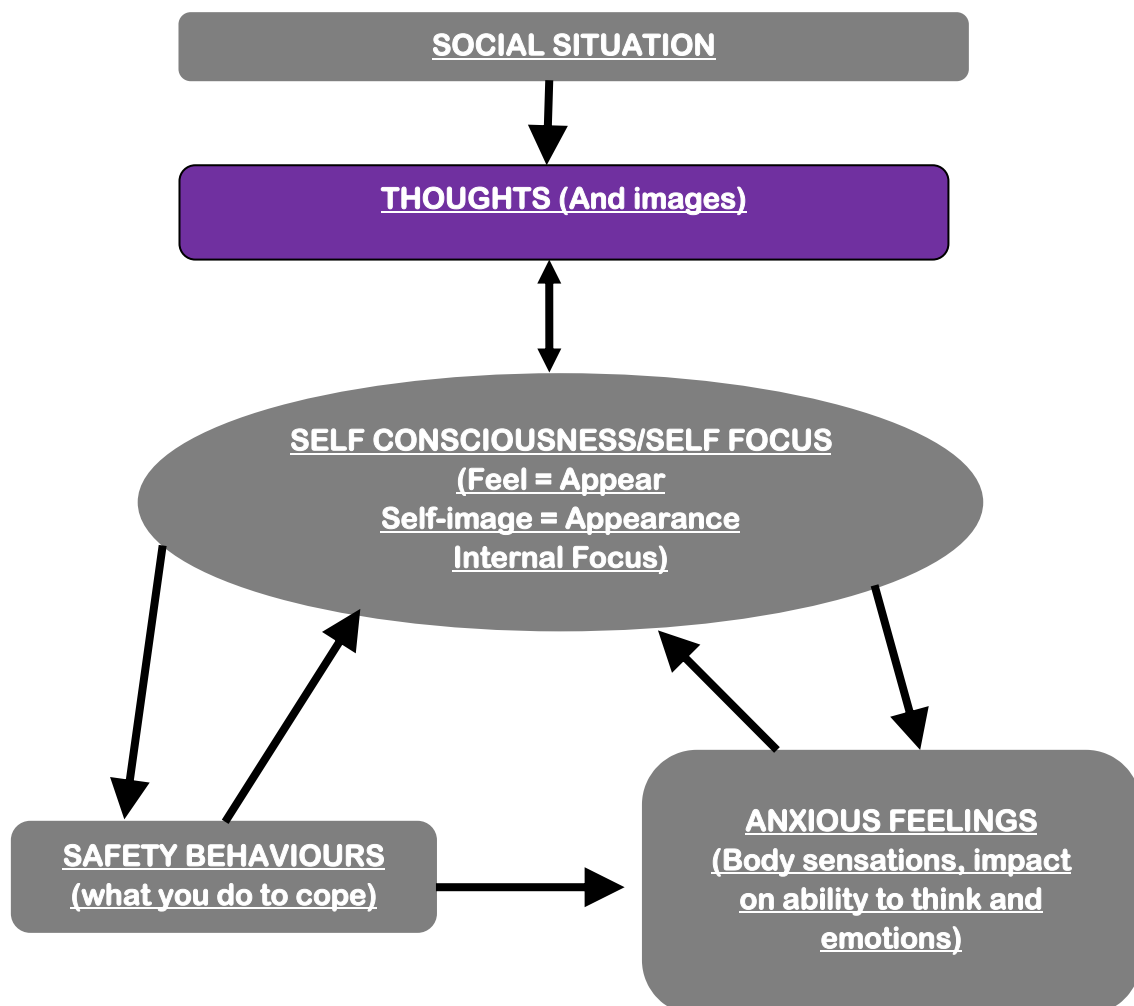
Anything else?

Session 6: Identifying Negative Thoughts and Challenging Negative Thoughts



What will be covered in today's session:

- ✓ Check In
- ✓ Recap on last session – feedback and questions
- ✓ Home Task Review – feedback and questions
- ✓ Noticing Negative Thoughts
- ✓ Thought Challenging – Taking the thought to court
- ✓ Additional Techniques
- ✓ Home Task
- ✓ Review of today's session



Check In



0 = none/ low level of anxiety – none or very few moments of anxiety

5 = Moderate anxiety - anxiety has been pretty evenly split between difficult days and better days

10 = Very high anxiety – experiencing intense anxiety almost every day

Score?:

Reasons?:

Recap on last session:.

Home Task Review:

Thought Challenging

Once we are able to identify our negative and/or unhelpful thoughts we can use a variety of techniques to help us to challenge them.

Thought challenging is about helping you to consider your thoughts more objectively and from different perspectives. This in turn helps you to see your thoughts as thoughts rather than instantly believing them, seeing them as facts or seeing them as absolutely true.

Remember Emily from last session?

We are going to help Emily to use the different techniques to challenge her thoughts.

But first a little reminder.....

Emily is 28, single, living on her own and working from home. She often feels quite lonely and her family aren't local.

A neighbour invites her to a BBQ, she wanted to cancel all day, but eventually decides to go.

When she arrives, the only person she knows, the host, is busy. She suddenly sees her neighbour, Lee, who has always been friendly and has invited her over for coffee before. Emily has helped babysit Lee's young daughter several times.

Emily goes over to Lee and they start chatting, but after a few sentences Lee says they need to get home to their daughter and leaves the party suddenly. Emily feels hurt and rejected and decides what she had to say must have seemed very boring. She decides Lee never liked her.

Thought Challenging: Taking the Thought to Court

In this technique you will take a thought and put it “on the stand” like you would in a court room, before making a verdict.

1) Pick a negative thought and put it on the stand

The thought needs to be a statement and not a question. Remember it's the thought you are putting on the stand, not you. Make a note of your emotion(s) and rate it.



2) Look for evidence that your thought IS true

The evidence must be factual evidence not your opinion. Factual evidence is undisputable, unquestionable, certain



3) Look for evidence that your thought is NOT true

4) Weigh up the evidence on both sides and make a verdict

Modify or rephrase the original thought by considering all the evidence.



Group Activity: Lets practice – Taking the thought to court

Using the information we have on Emily, and a bit of imagination, lets practice taking the thought to court.

Thought	Lee never really liked me
Emotion (0 – 100%)	
Evidence For	
Evidence Against	
New, Balanced Thought	

Thought Challenging: Reframing

Reframing your thoughts is about looking at them from a different perspective.

Questions you could ask yourself to help with this include:

What would I say to someone else who was having this thought?

What would I say to someone else in this situation?

What would someone I care about say to me if they knew I was having this thought?

What might somebody who was feeling happy, neutral or confident think about this?

Group Activity: Lets practice – Reframing

Using the information we have on Emily, and a bit of imagination, what questions could she ask herself and how might she answer to help her reframe one of her thoughts?

Thought to reframe:

Thought Challenging – Helicopter View

We tend to see life, and all the things that happen to us, through our own particular lens. We have our own point of view, and our own ‘take’ on events. If this angle is always a negative one, it can lead to anxiety or depression. In cognitive therapy therefore we are trying to help people to see things from a different point of view.

Imagine that you are walking along the side of a road and further up the road you see a car crash into the back of another one. Who do you think is to blame?

Now imagine you can hover over the same scene from above. You see that a woman has run out onto the zebra crossing without checking the road.



We sometimes call this ‘taking the helicopter perspective’.

It’s nicely illustrated on a You Tube clip for the Guardian newspaper from 1986 (‘Points of View’), which you may wish to look up. The link is below: <https://youtu.be/g9YiEu6eNOA>

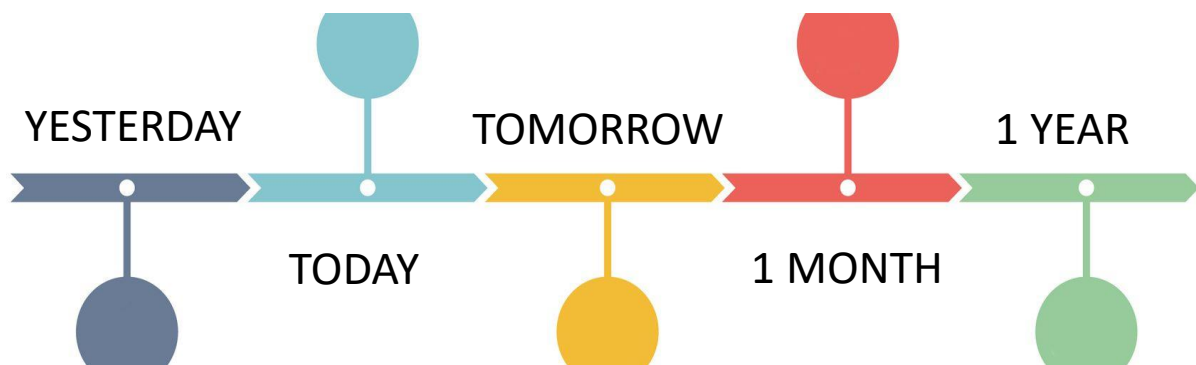
Group Activity: Helicopter View

Let’s think of alternative reasons for Emily’s upsetting thought

Upsetting thought	Alternative Reason
Lee left abruptly because he doesn’t really like me	

Thought Challenging – Time Test

Put simply, the time test is about asking the question “how much will this matter in X amount of time?”



Group Activity: Time Test

If Emily used the time test, how might she answer?

Situation/Thought	Time Test (How much will this matter in X amount of time)
Lee might have thought that what I had to say was boring	Tomorrow 1 month 1 year 10 years

Home Task for Session 6

- 1) Notice and record negative thinking when faced with feared situations
- 2) Pick one technique from today to try challenging your thought.
- 3) Come up with a new thought

Situation		
Thought (Belief 0-100%)		
Anxiety (Intensity 0-100%)		
Option 1: Take the Thought to Court	Evidence For	Evidence Against
Option 2: Reframing Option 3: Helicopter View Option 4: Time Test		
New/Alternative Thought		
Rate Belief in New/Alternative Thought (0-100%)		
Re- Rate Anxiety (0-100%)		
What did you then do?		



Session 6 Review:

What was the most important thing I learnt today?

What did I find helpful about today's session?

What is something I am going to try between now and next session?

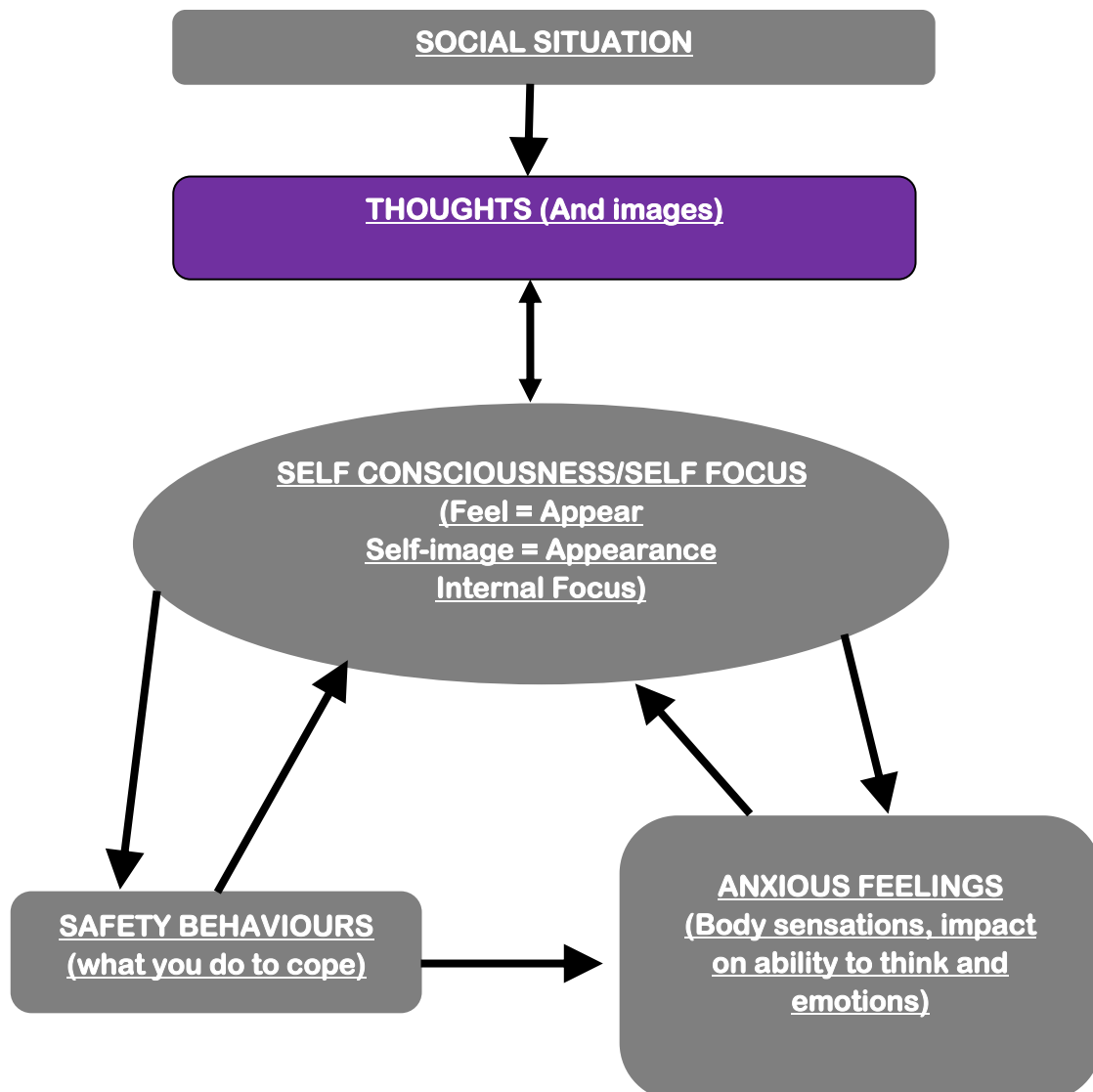
Anything else?

Session 7: Spotting Unhelpful Thinking



What will be covered in today's session:

- ✓ Check In
- ✓ Recap on last session – feedback and questions
- ✓ Home Task Review – feedback and questions
- ✓ Spotting Negative Thinking
- ✓ Unhelpful Thinking Habits
- ✓ Home Task
- ✓ Review of today's session



Check In



0 = none/ low level of anxiety – none or very few moments of anxiety

5 = Moderate anxiety - anxiety has been pretty evenly split between difficult days and better days

10 = Very high anxiety – experiencing intense anxiety almost every day

Score?:

Reasons?:

Recap on last session:.

Home Task Review:

Group Activity: Identifying Your Negative Thoughts

Imagine a friend has invited you to a housewarming party. You don't know anyone other than the host. What goes through your mind?



Write what goes through you mind here:

Thoughts and Social Anxiety

One of the useful observations cognitive behavioural therapy has noticed, is that the way we think impacts on the way we feel.

So when we experience an emotion, such as anxiety, there have usually been a number of thoughts that came first.

This means that when we feel anxious it is not just the situation that makes us feel anxious, but the way we are thinking about the situation.

Our thoughts don't just impact how we feel about a situation whilst we are in it; we might have negative thoughts about a situation before or after it has happened.

The thoughts we experience before, during and after a situation will also impact how we feel and what we do (or don't do).

Group Activity: Emily's Negative Thoughts

Read through Emily's story, then answer the questions at the end.

Emily is 28 year's old and works in marketing. She is a single woman who lives in a house on her own and works from home, so can often feel quote isolated and lonely. Her family are not local.

A neighbour invites her to a BBQ, she has wanted to cancel all day, but eventually decides to go.

When she arrives, she cannot see anyone else she knows apart from the host who is busy. Then suddenly she sees another neighbour (Lee), who has always been friendly and has invited her over for coffee before. Emily has helped babysit Lee's young daughter on a number of occasions.

Emily goes over to Lee and they start chatting, but after a few sentences Lee says they need to get home to their daughter and leaves the party suddenly.

Emily feels hurt and rejected and decides what she had to say must have seemed very boring. She decides Lee never liked her.



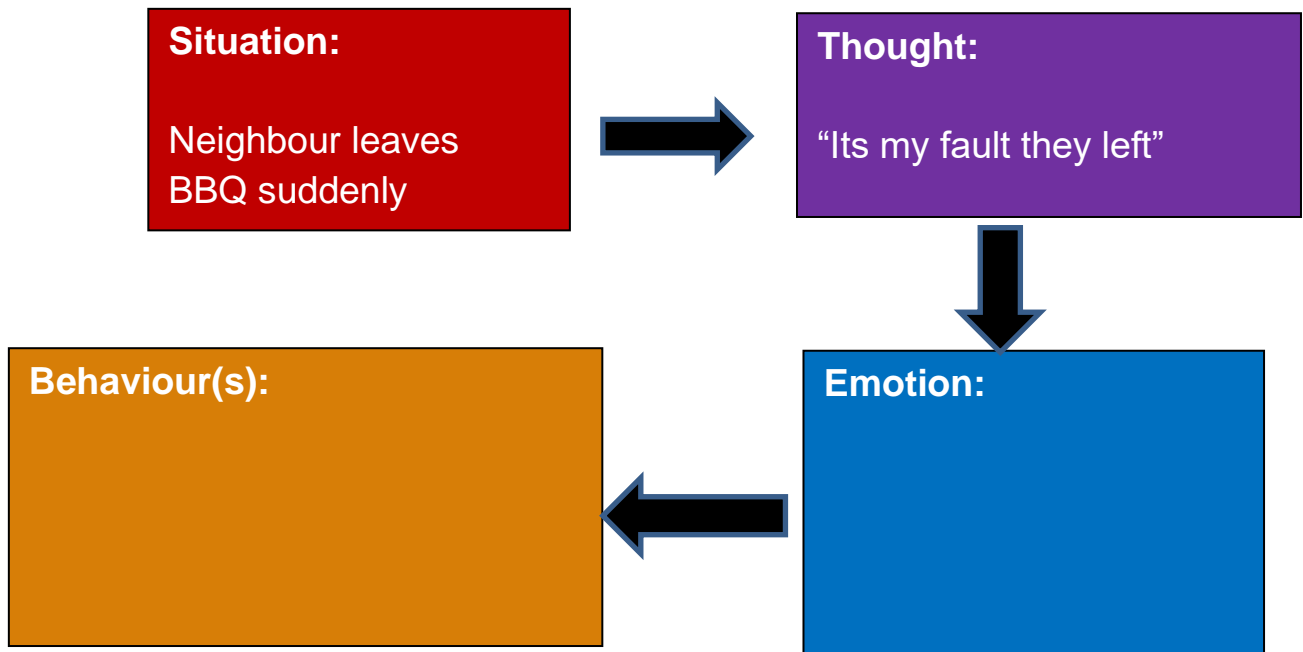
What were some of Emily's negative thoughts during the BBQ?

What negative thoughts might Emily have thought before the BBQ?

What negative thoughts might Emily have thought after the BBQ?

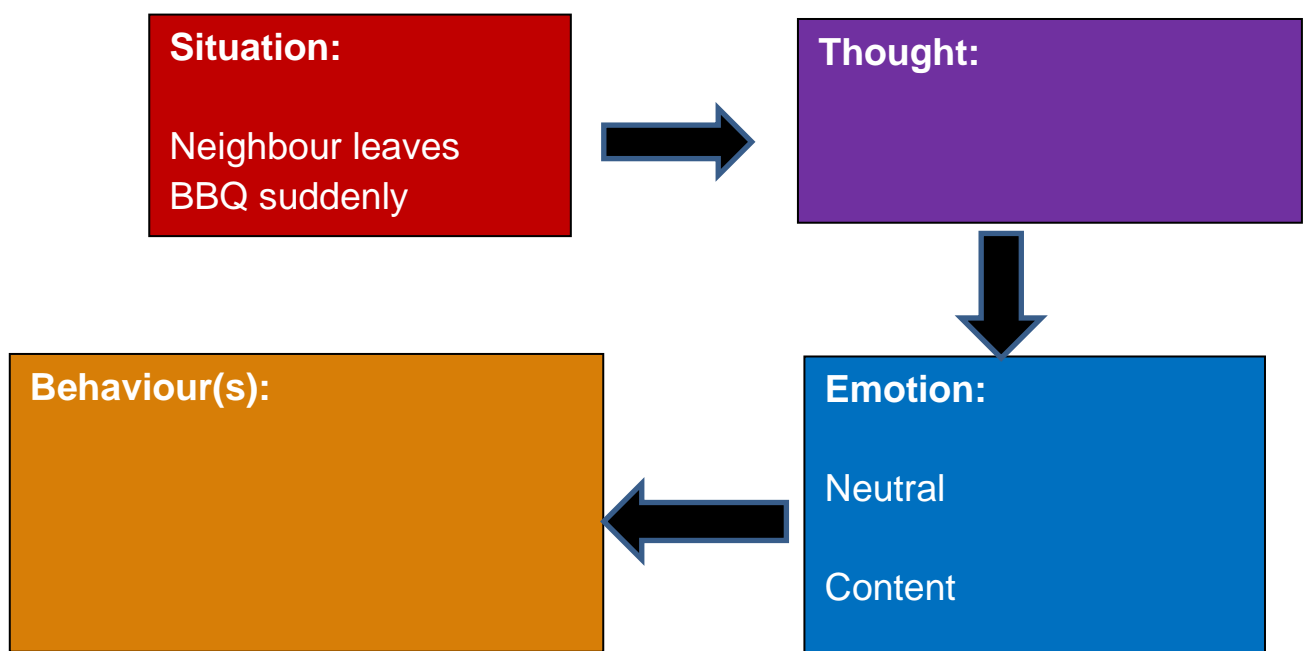
Group Activity: How our thoughts can maintain anxiety

In the cycle below, write in how we might emotionally feel if we had the thought “its my fault they left” and how we might behave in response to the thought and emotions.



Group Activity: How are thoughts can reduce anxiety

In the cycle below, write in an alternative thought that might help us feel happy or neutral and how we might then behave as a result.



Unhelpful Thinking Habits

There is also often a pattern to our thoughts, especially when they result in anxiety or low mood. These thinking patterns can become an automatic habit that we are usually unaware of.

When these patterns are used repeatedly and regularly they can cause and maintain unpleasant emotions such as anxiety. This is usually due to them being distorted, biased or unfair in some way.

We call these patterns of thoughts, unhelpful thinking habits.

It is a very important part of cognitive behavioural therapy to be able to identify these thoughts and unhelpful thinking habits. It is the first step to being able to manage and make changes to our thoughts. In future sessions we will develop this work by teaching you how to challenge our thoughts.

We are now going to explore some of the most common unhelpful thinking habits found in social anxiety. There are more unhelpful thinking habits, but this is a good place to start and helps give you an idea of how thinking habits work.

Mind Reading

This is when we assume that we know what the other person is thinking, usually about us.

We often assume it is something negative or that they are judging us in some way.



Predicting the future

Believing we know what is going to happen in the future.

This will usually be believing something bad or negative is going to happen.



Catastrophising

Imagining and believing that the worst case scenario will happen.



Mental filter

Negative Mental Filter

When we notice only what the filter allows or wants us to, usually the negatives, and ignore or dismiss anything that “doesn’t fit”.

Emotional Reasoning

Basing your view of a situation or yourself on the way you are feeling.

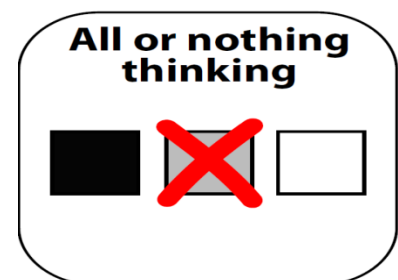
I feel bad so this is going to be bad.



All or Nothing/ Black and White Thinking

Believing that something or someone is only one extreme or the other. Not being able to see any “shades of grey”.

Good or bad. a success or a failure.



Strict Rules and Standards/ Shoulds and Musts

Thinking “I should” (or shouldn’t) and “I must” (or other similar statements) puts pressure on yourself and sets up unrealistic expectations.



Historical Reasoning

Thinking about past situations and how they went and believing all current and future similar situations are going to have the same outcome.

I stuttered once whilst doing a presentation, therefore I will always stutter when speaking in front of other people.



Group Activity: Identifying Unhelpful Thinking Habits

Read through the following scenarios and thoughts, try to identify which unhelpful thinking habits may apply (Note: there may be more than one).

1) Your friend suggests meeting for a coffee. You are aware you might arrive first.

Thought: “People will look at me and think I’m weird.”

Unhelpful Thinking Habits:



2) You went to a network event and spoke to a number of colleagues from other branches.

Thought: “I spoke too much, they must have been so bored. They probably thought I was a bit stupid’.

Unhelpful Thinking Habits:



3) You have to go and meet your partner’s family and stay at their house.

Thought: ‘I’ll do all the wrong things and embarrass myself and my spouse’

Unhelpful Thinking Habits:



4) You have just reached the front of the room to give a presentation to your colleagues

Thought: “This is going to be a disaster. People will think I’m an idiot.”

Unhelpful Thinking Habits:



5) You’re at your cousin’s birthday party where you don’t know anyone but her. She introduces you to some of her friends.

Thought: “I’m going really red, everyone will see that, I look so silly”

Unhelpful Thinking Habits:



6) You are on a first date

Thought: “Why did I ever go through with this, I’m going to dry up, have nothing to say,”

And

“No one would want to be with me long term anyway.”

Unhelpful Thinking Habits:



Group Activity: Identifying Thoughts and Unhelpful Thinking Habits

Read each situation and try to identify the thoughts that might go through the mind of someone with social anxiety, and then try to identify the unhelpful thinking habit(s).

Scenario	Thought	Unhelpful Thinking Habit
You bump into a neighbour you don't know well whilst out shopping, they seem to want to chat.		
You are a student at the beginning of a new term. You join a group of people from your course for lunch		
You are at a work meeting when your boss asks you to update the whole meeting on how you and your department have been performing over the last month		
You have been asked to do a work or college presentation, you have a week to prepare but you know it will be assessed.		
You have been called in for a job interview, you are waiting to be called in.		

Home Task for Session 7: Keeping a Thought Log

This week we would like you to keep a diary with a particular focus on trying to identify your negative thoughts and unhelpful thinking habits.

Situation (What, when, where, who?)	
Thought(s) (What went through your mind?)	
Unhelpful Thinking Habits	
Body Sensations (What happened in your body?)	
Emotion(s)	
Behaviour (What did you do or not do? Was there anything you avoided?)	



Session 7 Review:

What was the most important thing I learnt today?

What did I find helpful about today's session?

What is something I am going to try between now and next session?

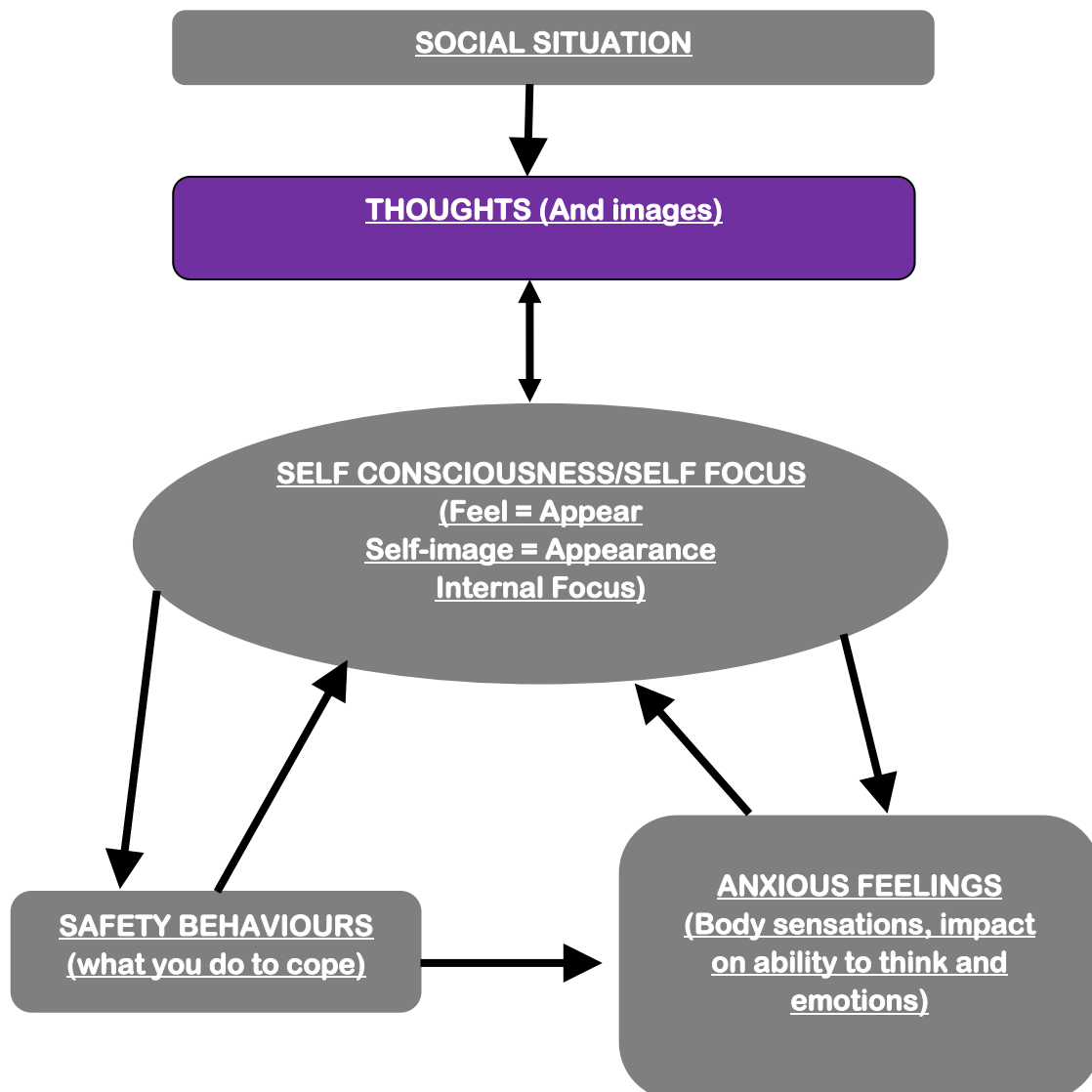
Anything else?

Session 8: Identifying and modifying our core beliefs



What will be covered in today's session:

- ✓ Check In
- ✓ Recap on last session – feedback and questions
- ✓ Home Task Review – feedback and questions
- ✓ How do we develop core beliefs
- ✓ Identifying Core beliefs
- ✓ Modifying core beliefs
- ✓ Home Task
- ✓ Review of today's session



Check In



0 = none/ low level of anxiety – none or very few moments of anxiety

5 = Moderate anxiety - anxiety has been pretty evenly split between difficult days and better days

10 = Very high anxiety – experiencing intense anxiety almost every day

Score?:

Reasons?:

Recap on last session:.

Home Task Review:

Leaves = Negative Automatic Thoughts

- * Occur automatically without any effort
- * Specific thoughts about specific situations
- * Can vary greatly depending on time and situation

Branches = Unhelpful Thinking Styles

- * Like a filter we have developed as a result of the lower parts of the tree and impact on the leaves.

Trunk = Unhelpful Rules and Assumptions

- * Often a guide on how to navigate life
- * Become dysfunctional if they become rigid or overgeneralised
- * Often conditional statements e.g. "If...Then..." or "I must..."

Roots = Core Beliefs

- * Fundamental beliefs about the self, others/the world and the future.
- * Seen as absolute truths which apply to all situations
- * Developed as a result of life events/experiences
- * Examples: "I am unlikeable", "people are judgemental", "I don't fit in"

Nutrients in the Soil = Life events

Life experiences in childhood (and adulthood) help us to make sense of the world around us.

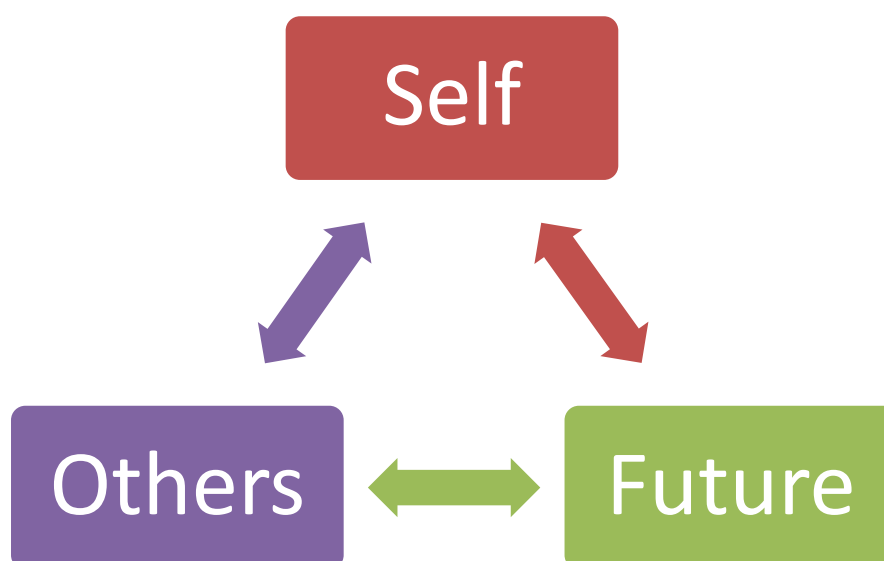


Group Activity: Sam's experience

Read through Sam's story, and then answer the questions at the end.

Sam was the younger of two brothers. His dad was very sporty and loved team games and going to cricket as did his older brother Tom. Sam was quiet, and liked reading and maths in particular, but dad was dismissive of such interests. Dad encouraged Tom in every sport he tried, but became increasingly critical and dismissive of Sam saying things like 'stuck behind your books again?' in a sneering way. Their mum, who was very quiet, never challenged this. Sam coped by building up a small circle of friends with similar interests at school, but as he became more insecure, this led to him being bullied at school.

On leaving school he joined a bank as a bank manager, and he built up a good rapport with regular customers. However as time went by the manager increasingly pressurised him to sell products such as mortgages and home insurance. Sam found this excruciatingly difficult, and said to him 'if I try this my regulars won't talk to me any more'. Sam became more and more withdrawn, and after two unsuccessful performance reviews he lost his job.



What beliefs might Sam have about himself?

What beliefs might he have about other people?

How is Sam likely to view the world?

It can feel challenging and uncomfortable to look at our core beliefs as they usually have strong emotions attached to them.

As a way to protect ourselves we develop rules to make sure that our negative core beliefs do not come true.

The issue with these rules are; that although they feel like they are protecting us, they are usually conditional, rigid and strict, often unrealistic, making it very easy to be broken.

Rules often start;

If... then... I must... or I should always...

For example:

Core belief: I am unlikeable

Rule: If I always say the right thing, then people will like me.

Core belief: I'm boring

Rule: I must always be interesting to others.

What rules might Sam live by?

Identifying your own core beliefs

I am...	Others are...	The world/future is...

Challenging and modifying beliefs

1. Challenging assumptions.

Target cognition/belief	
	<i>Rate belief in this thought (0-100%)</i>
Prediction <i>What do you think will happen?</i>	
Experiment <i>What will you do to test this?</i> <i>What safety behaviours will you need to drop?</i> <i>How would you know if prediction came true?</i>	
Outcome <i>What happened?</i> <i>Was your prediction(s) accurate?</i>	
Learning <i>What did you learn by doing this?</i> <i>How likely is it that predictions will happen in the future?</i>	Re-rate your belief in the thought.

2. Modifying beliefs

When we belief something is true, we look for evidence that supports this. This can mean that we miss or ignore some information, which may dispute the belief.

Write down evidence which is contrary to this core belief:

Core belief: _____

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

3. Search Plan

Core belief: _____

The matching pair: _____

-
-
-
-
-

Home Task for Session 8: Identify or modify core belief

My core beliefs are;

-
-
-

Situation (What, when, where, who?)	
Prediction: (What do you think will happen?)	
Search plan	
What happened?	
Learning	
Re-rate belief:	



Session 8 Review:

What was the most important thing I learnt today?

What did I find helpful about today's session?

What is something I am going to try between now and next session?

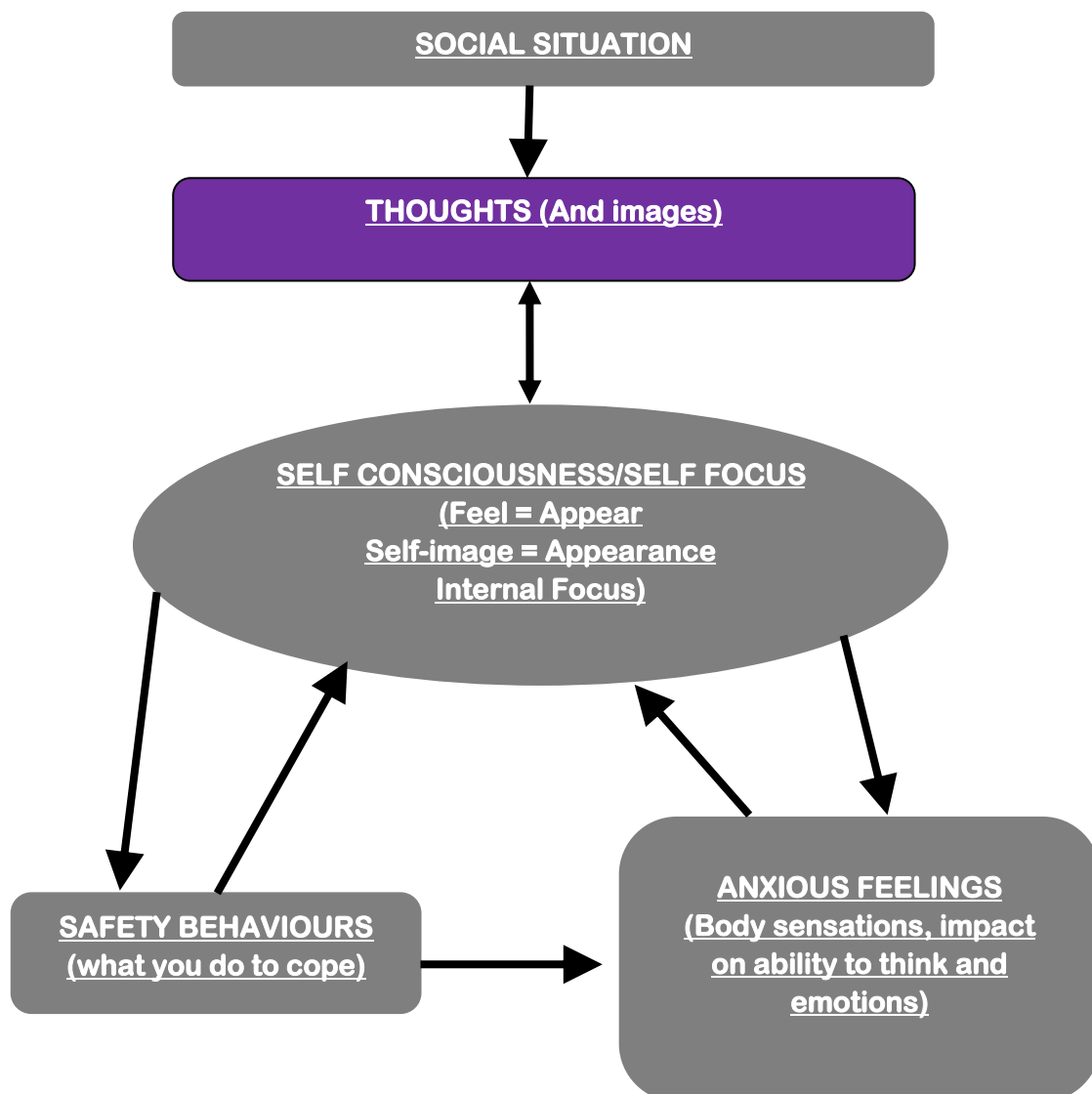
Anything else?

Session 9: Presentation and interview skills



What will be covered in today's session:

- ✓ Check In
- ✓ Recap on last session – feedback and questions
- ✓ Home Task Review – feedback and questions
- ✓ Presentation skills
- ✓ Interview skills
- ✓ Recap of skills
- ✓ Introduction to practical tasks
- ✓ Home Task
- ✓ Review of today's session



Check In



0 = none/ low level of anxiety – none or very few moments of anxiety

5 = Moderate anxiety - anxiety has been pretty evenly split between difficult days and better days

10 = Very high anxiety – experiencing intense anxiety almost every day

Score?:

Reasons?:

Recap on last session:.

Home Task Review:

Group Activity: Emily's experience

Read through Emily's story and then answer the following questions:

Emily was asked to do a presentation on how the new coffee shop in Southampton has been performing.

Emily hates presentations, and she has a memory of nearly drying up a few months previously when she last had to give a presentation.

What might Emily be thinking?

What might Emily do as a way of coping?

Interview and presentation skills

Although we may not engage in formal presentations on a regular basis, when we engage in social situations and interact with others, there is a level of presentation required. We might be presenting information about work, opinions, interests, life or past experiences.

When we experience social anxiety we might fear negative judgement and therefore predict that that sharing information about ourselves and our life, will trigger people to judge, dismiss, ridicule or reject that information and us.



Likewise, with interviews, we may only attend interviews infrequently, but this experience can trigger or heighten social anxiety as it does involve a level of assessment, judgement and appraisal of our skills and suitability for the job. When we experience social anxiety, we may misinterpret this situation as an opportunity for them to judge us as a person, rather than our skill set.



We can use skills learned in this course and through skills developed through attending interviews or giving presentations in the past, in day-to-day social interactions too.

Group activity: Identifying skills

Before:

-
-
-
-
-

During:

-
-
-
-
-

After:

-
-
-
-
-

Presentation skills



- Confident, open body language, using hands.
 - External focus of attention- on the audience.
 - Project your voice
- “act as if you’re confident”
- Use relaxation/grounding
 - Catch negative predictions beforehand and envisage positive outcome
 - Drop safety behaviours

Interview skills



- Prepare/read up beforehand
- Practice with someone
- Plan logistics
- Relaxation skills
- Use pauses/ask to repeat questions.
- External focus of attention
- Upright/confident body language
- Prepare questions to ask at the end.

Across the course we have been learning skills to work on 4 areas that are central to Social Anxiety.

Change thinking

- Spot negative automatic thoughts
- Re-examine thinking.
- Challenge... Fact or opinion?
- How much does it really matter what others think of me?
- Challenge idea you will be found out

Act differently

- Reduce avoidance and safety behaviours.
- Face fears, in a graded way.
- Gather new evidence to test predictions, by trying new things.
- Step out of comfort zone.

Reduce self-consciousness

- Internal focus of attention leads to feeling more self-conscious.
- Focussing externally allows you to take in information from the situation & people you are interacting with.
- We can learn to shift our focus of attention.

Build confidence

- Confidence is linked with our beliefs and assumptions about ourselves, others and the world.
- Start by acting 'as if' you were confident
- You can use imagery of success.
- Focus on searching for new positive information about yourself/qualities.

Personal projects

Now that we have learned all the skills in the group, we want to use these skills to try doing something that we would usually avoid doing due to social anxiety. If you need to remind yourself of what these are, refer back to the questionnaire on page 40 and your hierarchy from week 3 (page 43).

Some examples are;

Avoiding talking to/meeting new people	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Join an online group- Go to a gym/fitness class- Speak to someone at a bus stop- Speak to someone new at work- Online dating
Avoiding talking to new people/ordering food	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Order a coffee in a café- Go to dinner and order yourself- Phone up a takeaway and order food...
Avoiding speaking to people in authority/professionals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Phone up bank/mobile phone company- Ring GP/dentist and book an appointment- Talk to a policeman when you see one.
Avoiding hosting/being centre of attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Host a quiz- Invite people out to dinner/cinema- Invite a friend over to your house for dinner party.
Avoiding telephone/video calls	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Video call friend/family member- Telephone someone- Organise a quiz, movie night, bake-a-long via zoom/video

The situations that I currently avoid are;

-
-
-

Home Task for Session 9:

Prepare a 5-minute talk/presentation about something that you are interested in.

I am going to talk to the group about...

The area that I am challenging is...

The skill(s) that I am going to use are...

My project to complete by the end of the course will be:



Session 9 Review:

What was the most important thing I learnt today?

What did I find helpful about today's session?

What is something I am going to try between now and next session?

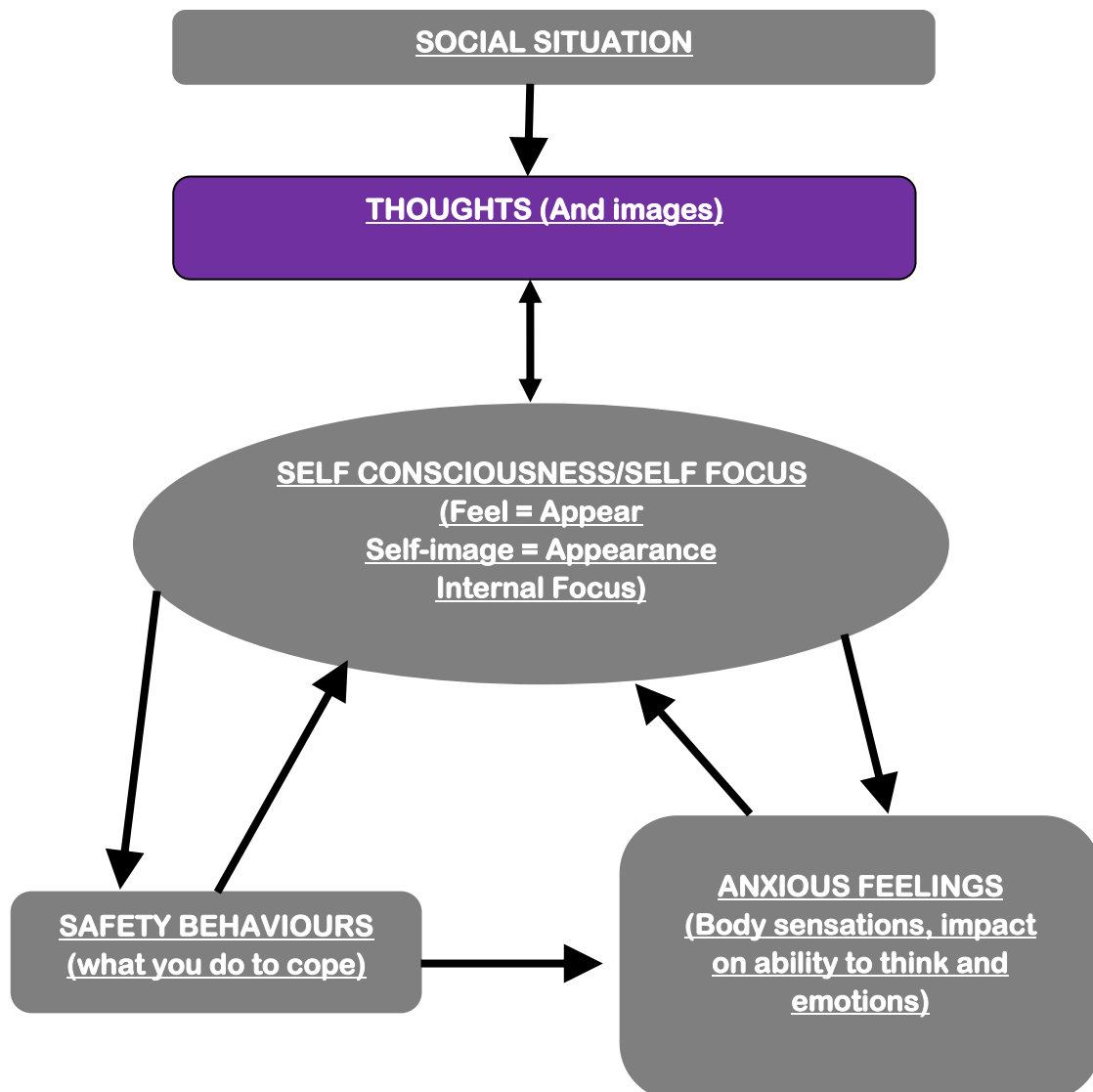
Anything else?

Session 10: Presentations week



What will be covered in today's session:

- ✓ Check In
- ✓ Recap on last session – feedback and questions
- ✓ Home Task Review – feedback and questions
- ✓ Presentations
- ✓ Check-in on projects
- ✓ Home Task
- ✓ Review of today's session



Check In



0 = none/ low level of anxiety – none or very few moments of anxiety

5 = Moderate anxiety - anxiety has been pretty evenly split between difficult days and better days

10 = Very high anxiety – experiencing intense anxiety almost every day

Score?:

Reasons?:

Recap on last session:

Home Task Review:

My Presentation

What is my prediction?

What am I trying to work on?

How did it go?

Home Task for Session 10:

Read through your feedback from the group about the presentation you gave. Reflect on how it compares to your predictions and what learning you can take forward from this feedback.

The feedback I received from presentation mentioned...

How did this match my predictions?

What did I learn from this exercise?

My project to complete by the end of the course is:



Session 10 Review:

What was the most important thing I learnt today?

What did I find helpful about today's session?

What is something I am going to try between now and next session?

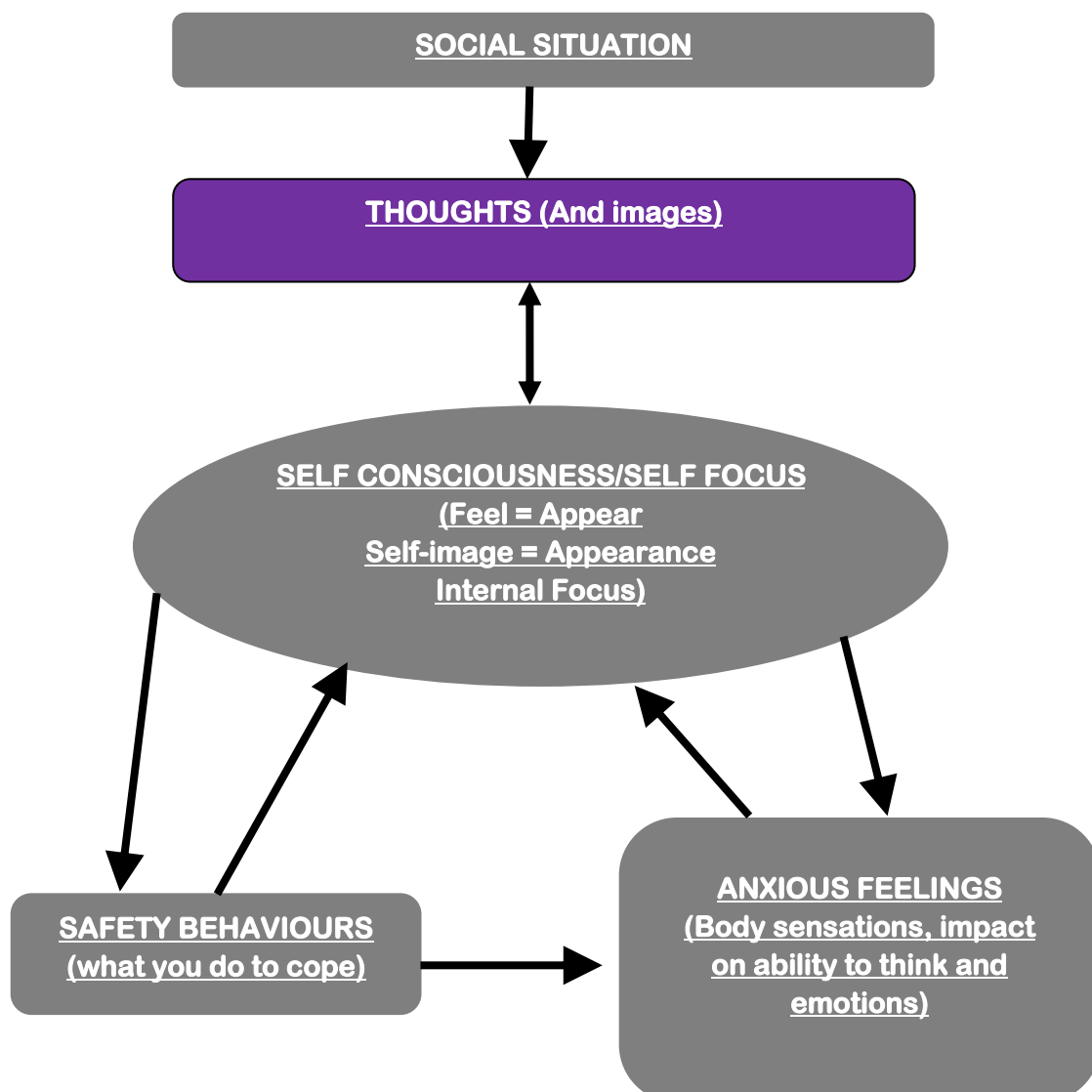
Anything else?

Session 11: Practical skills review



What will be covered in today's session:

- ✓ Check In
- ✓ Recap on last session – feedback and questions
- ✓ Home Task Review – feedback and questions
- ✓ Conversation skills
- ✓ Review of skills
- ✓ Project reviews
- ✓ Online social planning
- ✓ Home Task
- ✓ Review of today's session



Check In



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10 = Very high anxiety – experiencing intense anxiety almost every day

Score?:

Reasons?:

Recap on last session:

Home Task Review:

Conversation skills

We take on different roles in conversations. This can be described like playing tennis and the ball bouncing in each of the quarters of a tennis court.

Questioning

Open questions are the best...

'how are you doing?'

how is your son doing at Uni?

'how did your operation go?'

Responding

answering the questions.

Active Listening

Non-verbal sounds like 'uh huh' show that you are following.

Nodding and smiling also show you're engaged.

Disclosing

e.g. *telling a story of what happened to you*

talking about likes and dislikes

Recap of skills to manage Social Anxiety

- **Relaxation for physical symptoms of anxiety**
 - Fight and flight vs rest and digest
 - Square breathing
 - 5,4,3,2,1 (attending to senses exercise)
 - Diaphragmatic/belly breathing
 - Progressive muscle relaxation
- **Dropping safety behaviours**
 - Identifying what I am predicting will happen (my fear e.g. people see me sweat).
 - Work out what I am doing to try and stop that from happening (safety behaviour e.g. wear layers or dark clothes).
 - Try to engage in social situations/others without your safety behaviour and see if your prediction comes true.
 - Review how it went. What did you learn?
- **Tackling avoidance**
 - Identify places, people, tasks I avoid doing.
 - Identify the prediction that triggers anxiety, creating urge to avoid.
 - Set up 'experiments' to challenge yourself to try these activities a few times, to test the prediction.
 - Review how it went. What did you learn?
- **Focus of attention**
 - Noticing internal focus of attention (thoughts, emotions, body) and switching attention to external factors (environment, other people, senses).
- **Challenging negative thinking**
 - Thought to court
 - Time test
 - Reframing
 - Helicopter view
 - Notice and challenge unhelpful thinking styles

- Anticipatory worry (before event)
 - Catch catastrophising thoughts (worst case scenario) and ask yourself what is the most likely scenario.
 - Remind yourself of times that situations have gone well before.
 - Relaxation
 - Tackle urge to avoid or cancel.
- Post-event rumination (after event)
 - Identify one thing that went well.
 - Relaxation
 - Engage in an enjoyable or comforting activity
 - If the situation didn't go as planned, troubleshoot what you learned and what you would do differently next time.

Home Task for Session 11:

1. Reflect on the sessions so far and the progress you have made. Make some notes about which areas you have needed to focus on most and which skills you have found most helpful to manage this.
2. Look over the Therapy Blueprint document and make some notes ahead of our final session next week.

Therapy Blueprint

Between: _____ (Client) *and* _____ (Therapist)

From: _____ to _____

The problem I came to therapy for was: _____

1. How did the problem develop? What led to the problem in the first place?
Why was it a problem at this time in your life?

2. What kept the problem going? (situations, thoughts, behaviours)

3. What are my strengths? What have I coped with? What makes me resilient?

4. What were my goals for therapy? Have they been met? How?

	Achievement	
	Before /10	Now? /10
1)		
2)		
3)		

5. What were the **most important things I learned** in therapy?

6) What **setbacks** might I encounter and how might I cope with them?

SIGN OF SETBACK <i>"When I notice..."</i>	COPING STRATEGY <i>"I will try..."</i>

7) **Review:** I will have a review with myself every ____ (days/weeks/months) to review this setback plan and also the materials I have used in therapy.

How will you keep these materials? _____

8) **Sources of Support:** The people/organisations to help keep me well are:

Name	Contact details
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>
<hr/>	<hr/>

9) **Taking a break from therapy:** It is recommended you take a break of 3-6 months from therapy to give you a chance to consolidate the techniques you have learned. If you require help again you can always re-refer yourself to Steps2Wellbeing or via your GP.



Session 11 Review:

What was the most important thing I learnt today?

What did I find helpful about today's session?

What is something I am going to try between now and next session?

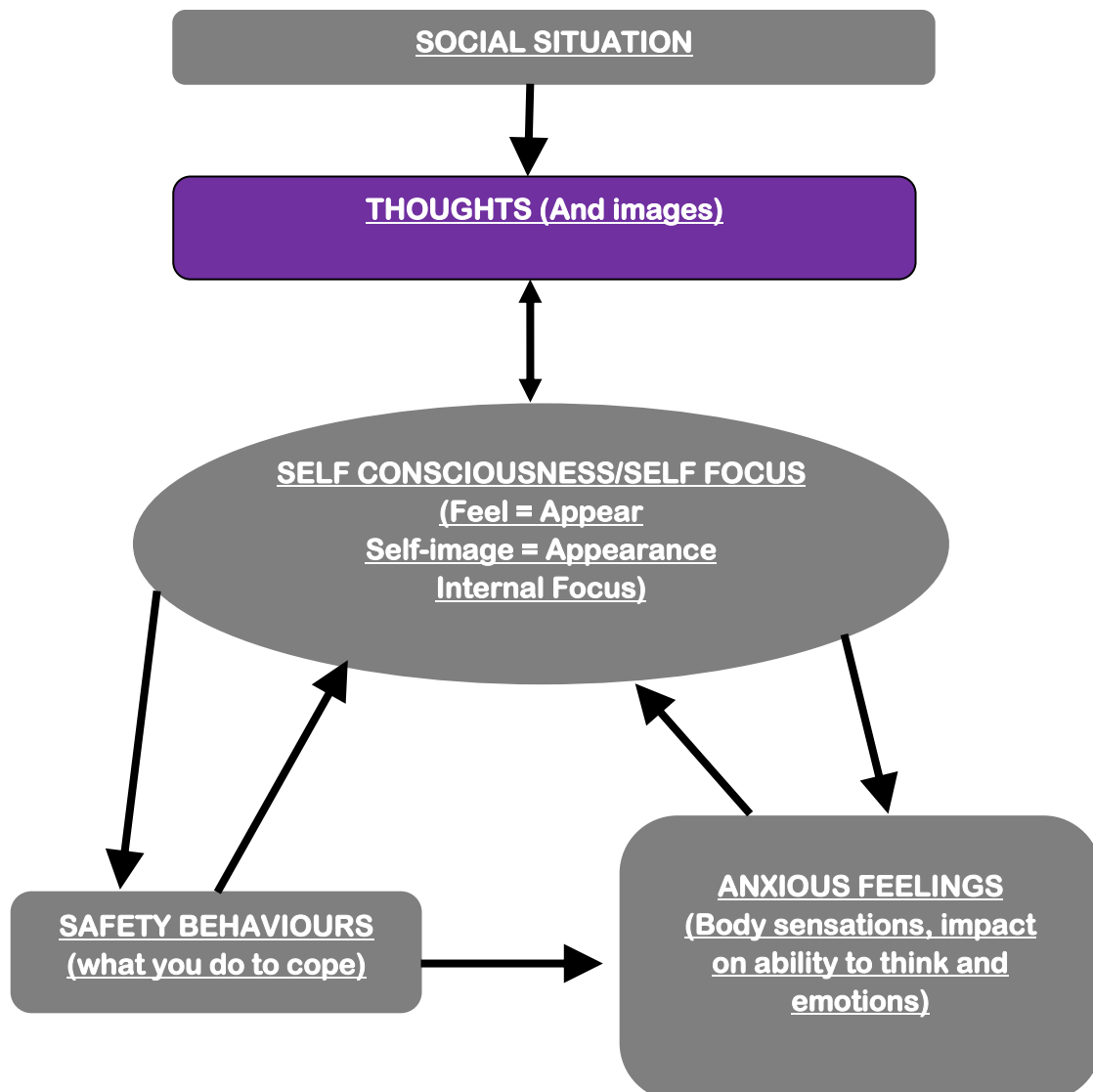
Anything else?

Session 12: Relapse prevention planning and online party



What will be covered in today's session:

- ✓ Check In
- ✓ Recap on last session – feedback and questions
- ✓ Home Task Review – feedback and questions
- ✓ Final party preparations
- ✓ Online social
- ✓ Relapse prevention
- ✓ Final reflections and goodbyes



Check In



0 = none/ low level of anxiety – none or very few moments of anxiety

5 = Moderate anxiety - anxiety has been pretty evenly split between difficult days and better days

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Score?:

Reasons?:

Recap on last session:.

Home Task Review:

Online social



What do I predict is going to happen?

What am I challenging myself to do?

How did it go?

- Did my predictions come true?
- What went well?
- What did I learn?
- What could I do differently next time?

What does it take to be our own therapist?

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

My check-ins:

What:

- ☐
- ☐
- ☐
- ☐

When:

Where:

Daily maintenance

Regular check-ins

- How am I doing?
- What is going on at the moment that might be contributing positively or negatively to my anxiety?
- Which skills can I use to cope?

At risk situations

- Challenges are an opportunity to practice skills.
- Triggers (e.g. challenges, transitions, reduced support)
- Early warnings (e.g. using safety behaviours again, avoiding, accepting NATs as fact).

Lapse vs Relapse

- **Lapse**= is part of the normal fluctuations caused by life e.g. bumps in the road, hard week, higher anxiety.
- **Relapse**= continued gradual decline in anxiety. A return to the level of problems encountered before starting therapy.

Practice leads to progress

- Set new goals for yourself
- Identify a plan to get there
- Regularly review progress
- Keep creating progress focussed goals, in the face of anxiety.

Session 12 Review:

What was the most important thing I learnt today?

What did I find helpful about today's session?

What is something I am going to try between now and next session?

Anything else?