

Overcoming Social Anxiety Step by Step

The Social Anxiety Institute

The Social Anxiety Institute, Inc. Copyright © 2000-2056.
This material may not be reproduced or redistributed in any fashion.
Thomas A. Richards, Ph.D., Director

Table of Contents

Welcome	1
How and When to Practice	3
Slowing Down Deliberately: Slow Talk	4
Automatic Negative Thought Stoppage # 1	7
Distraction Suggestions	10
Rational Coping Thoughts for Anxiety	11
The ANTs Handout: Automatic Negative Thought Stoppage #2	13
The Annual ANTs Convention	16
The Fighting Paradox	19
Bears Attack & Maul, Bees Swarm & Sting	21
How to <u>Temporarily</u> Cut Down Feelings of Anxiety	23
Therapy Reminders	24
Attitudes	25
How You See Yourself & The World	26
Two Competing Neural Pathways in Your Brain	28
Beliefs are Very Potent	31
De-Stressing Strategies	33
The Social Anxiety "Automatic" Cycle	34
Turning the Tables on ANTs, Part One	36
Accepting Myself As I Am Right Now	39
Turning the Tables on ANTs, Part Two	41
Turning the Tables on ANTs, Part Three	43
<i>Turn The Tables on the ANTs</i>	46
<i>Stay Rational</i>	47
<i>If You Say "I Hate This"</i>	48
<i>No! I don't HATE to do that</i>	49
<i>I used to hate (public speaking)</i>	50
<i>Your brain hears and believes everything</i>	51
Changing Brain Chemistry Permanently	52
Mingling	54
Conversations	57
The Deserving Statements	59
Feelings, Feelings, and More Feelings	61
Worry... Leads to More Worry	63
Here's How We Handle Those Bullying Liars	65
Loosen Up and Let Stress Go	66
Self-Statements: Moving in a Positive Direction	68
Brainwashing	70
Poisonous Thoughts	71
Focusing - And how it keeps us away from anxiety	74
"I Can't Do It" Thinking	76

Power Statements (Rational Questions to Ask Yourself...)	78
Expectations Are Killers: Stay Away At All Costs	80
The Profound Concept	82
Vicious Circles and How to Shrink Them	84
Anxiety is a Paradox: Act Against Your Negative Feelings	86
Should We Be Living in a Hostile World?	88
The Good, the Better, and the Beautiful	90
Stay Out of the Twilight Zone: Move Into the Peace Zone	92
Acceptance is an Active Experience	94
Seeing the Present	96
Determined Slow Talk	98
At The Crossroads	99
The Paradox of the Rain	101
A "Balance Sheet" for Facing Anxiety	103
The Power of "Acting"	105
General Anxiety Hierarchy	108
Behavioral Group Activities	109
Ways to Decrease Self-Consciousness	110
Individual Hierarchy Suggestions	112
More Individual Hierarchy Suggestions	113
Letting Go of the Negative Past	115
What to do When the ANTs Come Crawling	117
Stay Away from Perfectionism and Pressure	119
The Perfectionism Pit	121
Have a Rational Talk With Yourself Every Day	123
A State of Mind	125
Now That You Know: Attitude is Everything	126
I Am the Sculptor	128

Addendums:

Extra Therapy not Included in Audio Series

Paying Attention to the Anxiety Monster	131
Put Yourself in Someone Else's Place	132
Bookmarks	133
The Joys of Beating Myself Up	134
Now that you've finished your audio sessions	135
Keep on Going and Do Not Give Up	136

WELCOME to the handout booklet
that accompanies the audio series
Overcoming Social Anxiety: Step-by-Step

To Everyone who has purchased this series:

As explained in all our descriptions of the audio series, this program was designed from the very beginning to provide as complete a cognitive-behavioral approach to social anxiety treatment as possible.

Thus, we felt an audio series, coupled with this booklet, would provide the most information and therapy possible in helping people overcome social anxiety.

The twenty tapes or CDs are prepared as if you were coming in to The Social Anxiety Institute for regular, weekly visits. Hence, it is important to take one week (7 days) for each audio session. It is essential that you practice the therapeutic material over and over again until it becomes "automatic" in your brain. Thus, spending seven days per session is necessary.

If you speed through the course, your brain will not be able to process all the material properly and deeply enough, and you will be doing yourself a great disservice.

Each cognitive method or concept builds on itself, so that it is important you have the foundational methods and concepts "cemented" into your mind before you move on. If this is not done, then cognitive-behavioral therapy is not effective.

Please congratulate yourself for taking this big step, and please follow the directions on the audio sessions. These are not rules that I thought up out of the clear blue sky. Rather, they are what research and all our clinical knowledge (since 1994) tells us about the most effective, and most expedient, way of overcoming social anxiety disorder.

As I mention in the series itself, a special section on The Social Anxiety Institute website is being set aside for this audio series. In this section, which you will be able to access with a special password, you will find written therapeutic additions to this series, a page of questions and answers concerning the series, and a page of "errata", since I am sure I have made many errors (I never seem to "grow out" of this one!)

The Social Anxiety Institute, Inc. Copyright © 2000-2056.
This material may not be reproduced or redistributed in any fashion.
Thomas A. Richards, Ph.D., Director

The *Social Anxiety Institute* website is at www.socialanxietyinstitute.org Notice that the URL ends in ".org".

In addition, our other internet sites are still operational and accessible to you. They are:

The *Anxiety Network*, which covers social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, and generalized anxiety disorder. It is found at www.anxietynetwork.com

The *Social Anxiety Network* is found at www.social-anxiety-network.com

The non-profit *Social Phobia / Social Anxiety Association* website is located at www.socialphobia.org

If you have questions as you go through the series, sequentially, there will be an e-mail center from the Social Anxiety Institute site where you can write to me directly. We will include your question and an answer in the question and answer series for everyone to read.

Also, your password, which you will receive when you order the series, will allow you to access this area of the website at no charge, plus you will be able to find people in your local area who would like to work on this series together, and help each other overcome social anxiety.

In many areas of the world, there are already enough people for a social anxiety therapy group, given the number of people who are members of the SP/SAA and the daily Social Anxiety Mailing List Digest.

Additional audio and video productions on social anxiety will soon become available, and through use of your password, you will be able to purchase additional therapeutic items at a discount.

Please listen carefully to audio session number one, as it will explain to you all the basic information you need to know before fully starting the comprehensive cognitive-behavioral therapy series.

My very best to you,

Thomas A. Richards, Ph.D.
Psychologist
Director, Social Anxiety Institute, Inc.

The Social Anxiety Institute, Inc. Copyright © 2000-2056.
This material may not be reproduced or redistributed in any fashion.
Thomas A. Richards, Ph.D., Director

How and When To Practice

1. It is important that you become familiar with the strategies you're learning *before* you start to use them in real-life situations. Therefore, when a strategy or method is being learned and is new to you, it's always best to practice it when you're feeling relatively OK, and when you're alone.
2. The therapy you're learning doesn't need to be beat into the ground. Take a determined, but gentle, approach to it. Thirty minutes a day (this can be split up if necessary) is usually adequate. But keeping this thirty minute a day "practice time" on a consistent basis is essential to changing your thoughts, perceptions, and feelings.
3. Reading over your papers and notes every day is an excellent way to keep on reminding your brain what you're doing. This allows the therapy to sink in to your brain a little more deeply each time.
4. You may want to try wrapping up your other handouts in slow-talk. Not only does this kill two birds with one stone, it has the tendency to *strengthen* the new methods and strategies you are learning, and allows them to gradually take over and become automatic.
5. Cognitive-behavioral therapy has been demonstrated to be the therapy that works best for the anxiety disorders. CBT is not difficult to do, nor is it intellectually challenging, but it does take *persistence*. The mind cannot change in just a few weeks' time. We are looking for a permanent change and this will not occur unless we are persistent, consistent, and do not give up.
6. The most essential aspect to this therapy is that if we want a permanent brain change, we have to PRACTICE and be PERSISTENT in that practice. No one learns new habits, material, or thought-patterns overnight. This is a process that takes time for everyone.
7. Contrary to popular belief, medication does not permanently change "brain chemistry". It may help temporarily and can be a positive thing if people realize that the drug is not "curing" them. The only way to permanently change neural pathways in the brain is by reconditioning your brain to think, believe, and act differently.

SLOWING DOWN...DELIBERATELY:
SLOW TALK ("CALM" TALK)

Strategy: Slow talk is nothing more than slowing your speech down very slightly. You are slowing down enough that you notice the change in your speaking rhythm. The change is so slight, however, that other people will not notice you have slowed down.

It is important to be as calm as possible while you are in the process of learning new ways of thinking and new strategies of acting. Remember that it takes 45-55 days of repetition before your brain starts to automatically use these strategies.

And notice that the only way your brain is going to be able to use these anti-anxiety strategies is if you are consistent and persistent and drop down these techniques into your brain over and over again...for the entire course of therapy.

The first benefit you may discover from using this technique is that it will be easier to remain calm and at peace while you do your therapy. The more you can *slow talk* the therapy into your brain, the easier and deeper it will get in.

As you become more *familiar* with the strategy and feel like you can use it in public, you will find it has great practical value in *slowing you down so that you can begin to control your anxiety level*. If you stay in slow talk mode, there is not much chance you can speed up, get the adrenaline pumping, and then become socially anxious. So, slow talk can *prevent* us from getting as socially anxious as we used to get.

Another benefit that people usually notice is that there is a *slight relaxation* while you're using slow talk.

Generally, as a deliberate result of slow talk, the muscles loosen up and are less tight, and many people feel a calmness or relaxation in the shoulders and upper back area where we tend to carry around much of our stress.

The more you have the ability to use slow talk, *the more you will feel in control of situations*. Slow talk is not something we want to do all the time, but while we are getting better, we want to be able to use

this tool as an option to help us lower our social anxiety whenever we need to.

In public situations - the use of slow talk makes it easier to sound and be less anxious, and helps the words to come out more logically and clearly. High anxiety over real-world situations like this can be controlled by slow talk.

Now, please don't jump the gun. In your first week of practicing this technique, do not move this out into real-world settings yet. It is much more important to practice slow talk when you are by yourself. *It is important to get it down deeply into your brain. It is important that you feel comfortable in doing it.* You need to feel OK with slow talk before you ever try it out in a public situation.

So, generally, this first week, we ask you to practice slow talk for about *ten* minutes a day. You can read anything you want, but it generally helps to read something positive or inspirational. It isn't important what you read, the therapy is doing the slow talk. You are practicing the slow talk, not the material you choose to read.

One of our women worked in a large advertising agency where concepts and ideas were important, and she felt that no one paid her ideas very much attention. Every time she had a good idea, she would excitedly and quickly blurt it out, expecting other people to be excited, too. Instead, they just looked at her like she was weird, and they ignored her.

When this woman starting using slow talk, she brought it to work with her. By this time, she was feeling comfortable with the process, and although some anxiety was involved, when it came her turn to share her new ideas, she switched over into slow talk and calmly and rationally gave her ideas to the assembled group. What happened next surprised her a great deal...

Once you learn to slow talk, you no longer will feel rushed and anxious, you can move on into your message, making sure you're staying calm and focused, and present a talk that everyone understands. In public, social situations like this, slow talk can be a very effective and powerful tool in decreasing anxiety and increasing clarity.

Almost everyone I've worked with has been able to pull a lot out of this technique. But keep in mind *it takes practice first* - when you're

alone. When you do start to use this in public, we want to start out small - talking to one person, such as a friend or relative for example. We do not want to use slow talk in a #10 gut-wrenching anxiety situation until we are ready for it.

It is important that we do things slowly, on a small scale, *feel the success* behind it at this point, and then move it up gradually to other situations.

And remember this is just one technique. We will be continually *adding to these methods* with each and every handout. Then, each and every technique will have the "synergistic" effect of strengthening the others.

The more you practice, the more results you will see.

Automatic Negative Thought Stoppage #1

The hardest part of this process for some people is in noticing you're having automatic negative thinking, or ANTs, as we call them. Automatic negative thoughts are just there...they appear out of nowhere...and many times we are in the cycle of negative thinking before we are ever consciously aware of it.

So this week we are going to attempt to catch these ANTs as much as we can.

The second step is to make a statement to yourself. It is much better if you can make this an out loud, verbal statement, because it is stronger and more powerful when you do that.

The importance of making this verbal statement is to notify your brain that you do not like these automatic negative thoughts and beliefs -- these ANTs -- and that you do not intend to keep thinking this way the rest of your life.

This may sound strange to you, but unless you notify or "tell" your brain you don't like these negative thoughts, your mind will just continue to stream, move, and race on. By telling your brain you do not like these unhealthy negative thoughts, it will help your brain to realize you're having them more often - and when you notice you're having these negative thoughts, then you can do something about them.

The verbal statement you make to yourself should be something like this:

"Hey, wait a minute! I'm having those thoughts again that are not good for me. These thoughts are not healthy or helpful. They always lead me in the wrong direction. I'm going to break up those negative thoughts by finding some interesting distraction that I can do."

Some people say "Stop!" and see a bright red stop sign in their heads. Other people are not so visually oriented, so we say, "Wait a minute!" Both of these methods work. Use either one you want. You are telling your brain these automatic negative thoughts are *not helpful* and *not healthy* for you and you don't want to have them. Instead, you have decided to think and go in a better, more healthy direction.

Notice the statement is *rational* and it is *true*. You are making a statement that your brain can comprehend, act on, and believe. We never make Ia-Ia statements in CBT like, "When I wake up in the morning I'll be the happiest person in the whole world." If you make a statement like that, good luck! It's too much, too big, your brain can't comprehend and believe it, and when you wake up in the morning, you'll be the same old you - just another day older.

We must always stay realistic and rational. But as we make rational statements, they will change our thought processes, and as long as these statements are realistic, *your brain will accept them and act upon them*.

So catch yourself in automatic negative thinking mode this week several times if you can. When you've made your "stop" statement, then it's important you find something distracting to do to keep your mind OFF the thinking that is negative. Just saying stop is not enough. We need to find something interesting or something engaging to DO to get our mind off the negative thinking track.

We call these ways of keeping the ANTs away - distractions. We will want to use distractions for many weeks until we can stop the negative thinking by our thoughts alone. But for now, distractions are very important.

On your handout, you have a list of possible distractions. *You need to find several that will work for you*. Because everyone is different, and has different interests and likes, it is important to find an activity that will take your mind completely off your automatic negative thinking.

Look over the list and see if you can find an activity or two that may help you do this.

If not, anything in your own daily life that is positive and engaging to you will work. Sometimes just doing household chores can work.

But you need to find something to break up and stop those ANTs. The more you break these thoughts up and the more you stop these runaway ANTs, the more we are putting a permanent dent in the vicious cycle of automatic negative thinking.

One distraction that seems to work well for everyone is singing. Now I know this sounds strange at first, but there is a physiological reason that singing is one of the better distractions. If you are singing or humming along to a tape or CD that you enjoy, you are using a completely different part of the brain than when you are thinking or speaking.

The idea here is to pick out some of your favorite music, -- music that is positive and has lyrics to it, and sing along with it to block out the unwanted ANTs. If the singing portion of your brain is more active, then the thinking portion of your brain is less active.

The more ANTs try to bother you, the more you should try singing as a distraction. If you can't sing because you can't get away from other people, try humming under your breath. Humming along to a song in your head keeps you in a more relaxed and peaceful state and doesn't allow the automatic negative thinking to come in and get you going again.

Regardless of which distractions you choose, it is important to find several that work for you. In addition to some of the suggestions on the handout, the therapy itself can be used as a distraction, provided that it is not pressuring in any way.

You may have realized that we don't want to use distractions for the rest of our lives, and thankfully, we don't have to. We are only using distractions now, during therapy, to begin to stop our automatic negative thinking, and to stop dwelling on these unhealthy negative thoughts.

Distraction Suggestions:

1. Exercising
2. Listening to music
3. Reading a good book
4. Swimming
5. Gardening
6. Surfing the internet
7. Talking to a positive friend
8. Watching a video tape - something funny
9. Walking around the block
10. Playing with or walking your pets
11. Going for a ride in the car
12. Sit down, de-stress, and slow talk to yourself
13. An interest or hobby you enjoy
14. Singing or humming along to music

A distraction can be ANYTHING that works for you - to temporarily get your mind off automatic negative thoughts (ANTs).

We need to stop our old thinking - block it off - as we learn to slowly develop new thinking habits (this is coming up...)

If we stop using the *old* anxiety neural pathways in our brain, then they eventually have no choice but to *wither up and die*.

STOP that old, automatic negative thinking *any way you can* because it is poison...

Find as many distractions as you can to help you with your automatic negative thought stoppage.

Remember, there is a *physiological reason* that singing along to a favorite CD or humming a song under your breath is a very effective distraction strategy for everyone...

RATIONAL COPING THOUGHTS for ANXIETY

Purpose: to put a stop to the thoughts that lead to anxiety, and to replace those thoughts with realistic, rational thoughts. When these self-statements are practiced and learned, your brain takes over *automatically*. This is a form of conditioning, meaning that your brain chemistry (neurotransmission) actually *changes as a result of your new thinking habits*. Pick only two or three statements that YOU like.

First, use *thought stoppage*. Be gentle but firm about it. "*STOP! These thoughts are not good for me. They are not healthy or helpful thoughts, and I have decided to move in a better direction and learn to think differently.*" (You are reminding your brain each time you make this statement)

Then, pick two or three statements that seem to help you, and repeat them to yourself OUT LOUD each day. (You don't have to believe them fully yet - that will happen later).

When Anxiety is Near:

General Statements

1. I'm going to be all right. My feelings are not always rational. I'm just going to relax, calm down, and everything will be OK.
2. Anxiety is not dangerous -- it's just uncomfortable. I am fine; I'll just continue with what I'm doing or find something more active to do.
3. Right now I have some anxious feelings I don't like. They are really just caused by adrenaline, however, and I can slow them down by calming myself. I will be fine.
4. That picture (image) in my head is not a healthy or rational picture. Instead, I'm going to focus on something healthy like _____.
5. I've stopped my negative thoughts before and I'm going to do it again now. I am becoming better and better at deflecting these ANTs and that makes me happy.

6. So I feel a little anxiety now, SO WHAT? It's not like it's the first time. I am going to take some nice deep breaths and keep on going. This will help me continue to get better.

Statements to use when
Preparing for a Stressful Situation

1. I've done this before so I know I can do it again.
2. When this is over, I'll be glad that I did it.
3. The feeling I have about this event doesn't make much sense. This anxiety is like a mirage in the desert. I'll just continue to "walk" forward until I pass right through it.
4. This may seem hard now, but it will become easier and easier over time.
5. I think I have more control over these thoughts and feelings than I once imagined. I am very gently going to turn away from my old feelings and move in a new, more rational direction.

Statements to use when
I feel overwhelmed

1. I can be anxious and still focus on the task at hand. As I focus on the task, my anxiety will go down.
2. Anxiety is an old habit pattern that my body responds to. I am going to calmly and nicely change this old habit. I feel a little bit of peace despite my anxiety, and this peace is going to grow and grow. As my peace and security grow, then anxiety will have no choice but to shrink.
3. At first, anxiety was powerful and scary, but as time goes by, it doesn't have the hold on me that I once thought it had. I am moving forward gently and nicely.
4. I don't need to fight my feelings. I realize that these feelings won't be allowed to stay around very much longer. I just accept my new feelings of peace, contentment, and calmness.
5. All these things that are happening to me seem overwhelming. But I've caught myself this time and I refuse to focus on these things. Instead, I'm going to talk slowly to myself, focus away from my problem, and continue with what I have to do. In this way, my anxiety will have to shrink up and disappear.

The ANTs Handout:
Automatic Negative Thought Stoppage #2

The ANTS thoughts are always *wrong*. They always *lie*. They can never *tell the truth*.

The ANTS thoughts have *no authentic power over me*. That's why they're so scared I won't believe them. Their only hope is that I'll listen to them, believe them, and give them my power and attention. (They feed and fuel themselves on my own old negative beliefs.) If I don't accept and believe these old ANTs fears, they have no choice but to go away.

The ANTS voice is magnified by my anxiety, fear, and depression. To keep me feeling this way, the ANTS voice exaggerates, catastrophizes, puts me down, makes me feel guilty, robs me of my self-esteem, and makes my future look hopeless. These are all lies and it's time I stopped believing them.

I must never listen to the lying ANTS voice. I know better. They always lead me in the wrong direction. They are a voice of negativism and defeat. They want to pull me down in the mud with them. I choose not to let them do this.

Even worse, The ANTS thoughts are *bullies*: They have no real power to use against me. They try to build on my own old feelings of depression and anxiety to pull me down.

If I catch on to what the ANTS are doing, and the lying ANTS thoughts feel they are losing, then they try to put on more pressure. They tell me that anxiety, fear, embarrassment, catastrophe, and humiliation loom around every corner. Thinking about making a public presentation brings on stark, gut-wrenching fear... (The ANTS love this one!) I can almost see them dancing in glee!

And the ANTs thoughts *love my anxiety and fear!* Because *if I believe it*, they have me trapped, entombed, and immobile. If I believe all these ANTS lies, I'll be stuck forever in my anxiety and depression. I'll never get any better. And all because I'm believing false, inaccurate, irrational, lies from the past.

I must never listen to the lying ANTs voice.

The ANTS thoughts would love to prevent me from getting any better. All bullies like to see this happen to their victims.

But I don't have to listen and believe those ANTS thoughts! I do not choose to be a victim. I know better than that.

What can I do? I can say, *"Oh, it's that lying ANTS thought again. It's trying to frighten and depress me. It's telling me more lies. I refuse to believe them. I've got better things to do than listen to a bullying liar."*

Don't try to argue or fight against the ANTS thoughts. (Notice that "arguing" is coming from the negative emotions.) The ANTS are good at arguing... they love the pain and misery they can cause me.

Instead, I choose to refute and ignore these lying automatic negative thoughts. These lying ANTS thoughts can't keep on talking forever. If I don't pay attention to them, they have to shrink and shrink and shrink and shrink.....

What those ANTS thoughts hate worst of all is when I IGNORE them! *They hate it when I won't listen and fall meekly into place like I used to do... Now I know better. I'll not give in to lying ANTS thinking anymore.*

But remember: Since they are *pathological liars*, and since their enjoyment comes from making me miserable, they don't like to give up. They may try a few new ways to throw a roadblock in my path, to scare me, or to confuse me about my progress. This is simply the ANTS way of trying to hold on to me and to keep me as one of its disciples...

Instead, I'll say to those thoughts: "Oh, it's you again. You can't fool me anymore. I know this is just another one of your tricks to try and increase my anxiety. Well, you can try all you want... I don't care. I'M NOT GOING TO LISTEN TO THESE LYING ANTS THOUGHTS AGAIN!"

And then, I'll move on to my strategies and distractions, read over this handout, *and I won't let them upset me anymore*. I know that if I let them upset me, I am giving them strength and power. But if I don't let them upset me, and I realize they don't have any power of

their own... they will have to shrivel up into nothing and eventually go away for good.

The ANTS voice cannot tell the truth.

The ANTS voice is a loud and nasty bully: all gruff, bluff and no power.

The ANTS voice is only there to scare me. I won't let it happen anymore.

The ANTS voice exaggerates everything that is negative. It lies to me.

My ANTS voice has no real power over me - unless I decide to believe it.

My ANTS voice constantly lies, and liars are loud and like to be heard.

My ANTS voice hates it when I ignore it and say, "SO WHAT?"

Who cares? Those ANTS thoughts couldn't tell the truth even if they tried...

THE ANNUAL ANTS CONVENTION
Overheard at the ANNUAL ANTS CONVENTION...

Once a year, the ANTS from all around the world gather to visit each other and to show off how much each of them has grown *bigger* and *bolder* during the past year.

The Annual ANTS Conventions are like sales meetings, whereby the ANT that has made the most "sales" or "commissions" by increasing peoples' automatic negative thoughts receives *recognition, is greatly honored, and highly praised*.

The ANTS whole mission and goal in life is to *fuel the negative thinking* that leads to anxiety, panic, social phobia, agoraphobia, generalized anxiety, obsessive actions and compulsive behavior and the related depression that goes along with anxiety.

So, at the convention, the ANTS discuss new methods and strategies to rip us down, tear our self-esteem to shreds, and make us feel completely *hopeless* and *helpless* about our anxiety. The ANT that comes up with the trickiest and most cunning plot to do this is always given a "*special reward*" and allowed to plague the people who have fully given in to ANTS thoughts, so that their lives are ruined and totally filled with fear and anxiety. They are kept on a very short and tight leash by the ANTS masters.

Let's listen to some of this year's convention conversations:

Young ANT #1: "Hey, I've got another person convinced that he's no good, that he's not as important as other people, and who doesn't think he has any control over his own life. I've even got him scared to go out in public!"

Young ANT #2: "Ha! Another one of our victims trapped? I love it! (Clapping with glee.) What shall we give him? Panic attacks? Social anxiety? Obsessive-compulsive thoughts and behavior? Agoraphobia? (A special gleam appears in the ANTS' eye:) *Or maybe all of the above.*"

Young ANT #1: "As long as he keeps believing us and giving in to us, we can give him as many problems as he'll take. Two problems are better than one, I always say..."

Young ANT #2: "Oh, man! I'm excited now! Maybe I'll win that award next year! I need to keep practicing my negative and irrational

thinking and learn how to pass it on to others. Practice makes perfect, they always say..."

Young ANT #1: (snorting in pleasure) "But our victims never learn that *practicing* is important to change thoughts, do they? They start out *practicing* and being *persistent*, but they always *quit* before they really get any better. *Then, we've got them trapped.* One more defeat makes them feel totally worthless and helpless and then they really give up!"

The young ANTS continue to chortle in evil glee.

Just then, an older and wiser ANT enters the picture and overhears the conversation between the two young, immature ANTS.

Older and Wiser ANT Voice #3: "Stop your incessant bragging. You sound just like children! Don't you know that we derive our very existence from the lies we tell people that they believe? Every time you push too far there's a chance they'll get wise and then we will lose control. If the person ever fully realizes what we're doing to him, *we're the ones who aren't going to have any power left...*"

The younger ANTS shudder in horror at this statement.

ANTS #1: (slowly and meekly) "You mean like our friend, the Destroyer? When that woman he was working on got some help and realized what was happening to her, she practiced and practiced and practiced..." (ANTS #1 shudders violently at the thought).

ANTS #2: (hesitatingly) "But what happened? What did this woman do anyway? And where is the Destroyer now?"

Older and Wiser ANT #3: "She realized what was happening to her, caught him at it, and used peaceful, calming strategies and methods on him! And she wouldn't give up! Then she started "slow talk" and the "determination factor" and *she actually practiced these abominations* until they sank deep down into her brain and became automatic!

Older and Wiser ANT #3 begins perspiring, his heart beats faster, and he starts getting dizzy, "*Oh, my God! I don't think I can go on...*"

Finally, he pulled himself together and continued to speak in a very serious, low voice: "The Destroyer began to shrink and shrink, but the more he tried to bring back the anxiety, the fear, and the worry, the worse it got. She stood her ground, ignored him, and turned the other way. She refused to pay any attention to him. Finally, he had no

toehold left, and he had to leave her. He ended up on the old insect farm for ruined and defeated ANTS: exhausted, defeated, and so very tiny and weak that he'll never leave the institution until he continues to shrink further and further and finally dies. That nasty, vicious anxiety woman killed the Destroyer for good just by changing her thinking habits and refusing to listen to him anymore."

(Older and wiser ANT #3 looks from immature ANT #1 to ANT #2, shaking his head).

"Are you two learning anything from this at all?"

ANTS #1: (Scared, weak, trembling, and much more sober now).

"You mean, we have to be careful not to get caught. If our person realizes what we're up to and stops believing in what we tell them, then... we're... we're..."

Older and Wiser ANT #3:

"...DOOMED! You'll spend the rest of your days on the dying ANTS farm with the Destroyer, feeling more and more miserable all the time, and continuing to shrivel up and shrink. *The good news is that you won't have to put up with the institution for very long.* You'll grow so small and tiny and insignificant that you'll eventually just fade away into absolute nothingness. *And no one will ever remember that you even existed...* "

The Fighting Paradox

Here are the five "negative" behaviors I used on a regular basis to try to overcome my social anxiety. (They do not work, but I didn't know any better):

1. I INSISTED that I shouldn't feel this way. Why should I be afraid of meeting other people or going to parties? WHY should I be uncomfortable at restaurants and other public places? Why should I feel out of place and awkward? I shouldn't, I told myself - and kept on insisting that it just wasn't right!
2. I FOUGHT the feelings of fear and anxiety by using ANGER: "I'm going to get over this today, damn it!" I'm sick and tired of living this kind of life. I want to feel free and happy and at peace. I hate feeling weak, impotent and afraid!" And then I would punch a pillow, kick a door, or slam something to the ground in anger.
3. I BEMOANED the fact that I had social anxiety. "Why must I have this stuff anyway? No one else I know has this. They can do whatever they want. I can't even make friends. I have no one to talk to about this. It'll never get any better. I'll always be an outcast - I'll never have any friends! I'll be anxious, miserable, and fearful until the day I die!"
4. I USED the "Fairness" Argument: "It's not fair that I have this! I didn't do anything wrong. It's just not fair that I'm the only one in the whole wide world who has to suffer with this!"
5. I USED the "Deserving" Argument: "This anxiety is so awful. I don't deserve to go through this. I never did anything wrong. I've never hurt anyone. I'm a nice person. What did I do to deserve this awful stuff?"

Now, these are all very normal human reactions to dealing with the incredible emotional pain that social anxiety causes. When you have a problem as severe as this, it is natural that you want to get rid of it at any and all costs.

Unfortunately, using these lines of reasoning is similar to *throwing gasoline on a raging fire*.

RESISTING THE ANXIETY, fighting the anxiety, battling the anxiety, attacking the anxiety, and getting aggressive with the anxiety -- just brings the social anxiety on STRONGER.

This is why we call the solution to social anxiety a "paradox". The things you normally expect to do to get over social anxiety, only end up making the problem worse.

Aggression (i.e., any negative emotion) only fuels and sets fire to anxiety.

My aggression, struggling, and pressuring only made the anxiety worse.

The more I fought it, the tighter its hold on me grew. That is why overcoming anxiety is counterintuitive; that's why we call it a paradox.

That which you resist, persists. The more you use a negative emotion to fight another negative emotion (i.e., anxiety), the farther and farther you fall into the vicious cycle and trap of social anxiety.

Remember how Dorothy vanquished the wicked witch of the West. Remember how Mr. Spock saved the Enterprise crew from the alien energy source.

That which you resist...persists.

Bears Attack & Maul, Bees Swarm & Sting

Finally, you've gotten away from it all, and you're on that camping trip you've been planning for months. You found just the right place to set up camp, dinner over the open fire was great, and as far as you can see, the sky is filled with beautiful shimmering stars. All of a sudden, out of nowhere, you hear a loud, rustling noise...

You look up to glimpse a grizzly bear entering your campsite. You do a double-take, because a grizzly bear is the last thing you expect to see. But there it is.

Now, any sane person would be afraid. The adrenaline would immediately start pumping throughout your body, your thoughts would begin to race, and undoubtedly you would be sweating.

But what is the safest thing to do?

The adrenaline tells you to run, escape, get out of there, move as quickly as you can toward safety.

But another voice inside you is more rational. It says, "Hold on. Slow down. Wait a minute. If I run, if I try to escape, if I move too quickly, I will be attracting the grizzly bear's attention. Since I don't want to aggravate the situation, I think it might be better if I stand perfectly still."

If you listen to your first voice and turn and run away in fear, the bear will likely run after you...and he won't be in a friendly mood.

Instead of running, escaping, avoiding, and fleeing out of fear,

Have you ever played "dead"?

Do you see the analogy? When anxiety comes to attack us, drag us down, create panic, intensify our worst social fears, speed up our racy and obsessional thinking...these feelings should serve as a red flag.

IF A BEAR ENTERS YOUR LIFE, the worst possible thing you can do is run. The bear will catch you, claw you, maul you...and YOU will be the worse for it. If you stand your ground and don't run, the bear is likely to leave you alone.

By the same token, if a swarm of bees is buzzing around your head, the worst possible thing you can do is to make the bees mad. If you panic, throw your arms into the air, and flail them around, the bees will zero in on you, fly right on to your skin, and sting you mercilessly.

So, what do you do when anxiety tries to attack and hurt you?

PLAY DEAD. Do not respond. Do not panic. SLOW DOWN. Take your time. Use your rational statements:

Say to yourself: "If I stay calm, then anxiety will not be able to sting me... "

You already know the more you FIGHT, BATTLE, STRUGGLE, and ATTACK, the more the bear will maul -- and the more the bee will sting.

You have control over the bear and the bee. Use the fighting paradox to take anxiety down another peg. Calm down, relax, cool it, move to the peace zone. DO NOT RESPOND TO NEGATIVITY BY REACTING NEGATIVELY.

Anxiety *likes* it when you fight back because then it has you trapped. The bear and the bee will claw and sting you if you fight them back. On the other hand, if you are calm and still, they will IGNORE you... you are not giving them any power to be able to harm you.

Don't get stung by the anxiety bee or mauled by the anxiety bear. Take it easy, slow talk, stay calm... then they will continue to have less and less power over you... and you will realize that YOU are the one who is in charge.

How to Temporarily Cut Down Feelings of Anxiety

NOTE: This is not a "cure" or even a major strategy for anxiety long-term. But it is an effective strategy for now - it's good to use - it's helpful. But, luckily, you won't have to keep doing this the rest of your life, so look at this as a tool to help you feel better now as you get the "thinking" (cognitive) strategies further and further down into your brain.

This is a another paradox: When you feel anxious, panicky, or fearful, get physically active. I know this sounds hard to do, because the anxiety makes you feel immobile, inactive, and exhausted, but think about it for a moment...

We know that anxiety is fueled by the rush of adrenaline (a hormone) in our bodies. The best way to physically get rid of adrenaline is to become *physically active* and burn it off.

If you can get up, move around, and do anything physical (keep the focus on external things, not on yourself), this helps BURN the adrenaline off.

The *fear* feelings are usually caused by another hormone called cortisol. The mixture of adrenaline and cortisol is not very much fun! Cortisol is especially controllable by physical activity. Cortisol (the fear feeling) burns off easier when you get active.

Any physical activity works: Jumping jacks, running in place, exercising to an exercise tape, running up and down the stairs, dancing around to music, lifting weights (they dont have to be heavy it's the activity that counts)..

RATIONAL STATEMENT: "I'm not going to just sit here and let my anxiety build. I'm going to get up, move around, and get rid of this adrenaline. I don't have to live with this stuff. I'm determined to keep moving forward and shrinking this anxiety for good!"

Therapy Reminders

Do not compare yourself to others.

Stop beating yourself up.

Comparisons are an ANTs best friend.

I will move forward in every way I can.

Do not compare yourself to others.

My decision is to use my new neural pathways - not the old anxiety pathways in my brain.

My anxiety is like the wicked witch of the West. She has to shrink and shrink and shrink and shrink when I use my calmness and peace against her. (She has no choice!)

I accept myself for who I am and choose to move forward with my life.

Some of the things I thought were hard to do are becoming a little bit easier all the time.

ATTITUDES

ATTITUDES are strongly-held beliefs, and we know that BELIEFS are extremely powerful. *Beliefs* are saturated with emotion. That is, beliefs may be so strong or so powerful, so emotionally charged, that they become the truth.

Those of us with anxiety usually have many, many beliefs that are not true. We usually say they are irrational. But, let's be more honest about these irrational beliefs of ours:

NOT ONLY ARE THEY NOT TRUE...

THEY ARE LIARS.

They are nothing but lying ANTs thoughts.

IF WE CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THESE IRRATIONAL LIES, WE WILL BE STUCK IN OUR ANXIETIES FOREVER.

Therefore, we must move forward. We must start believing the truth.

Your beliefs, too, must move in the direction of becoming more *truthful* and *rational*. Many times we can challenge our negative beliefs through short statements that are attitudinal in nature. For example:

WHO CARES?

SO WHAT?

WHY AM I DWELLING ON THIS?

I'M TIRED OF MAKING A MOUNTAIN OUT OF A MOLEHILL!

I'VE GOT BETTER THINGS TO DO THAN WORRY ABOUT THIS!

IT'S NO BIG DEAL!

These attitudes are already very close to being emotions. So, as deliberately and as consciously as we can, we want to be determined about these attitudes. I choose to be healthy. I choose to believe my rational thoughts. I choose to believe the truth, instead of those old, lying ANTs thoughts.

Use these "Attitude" statements against your old ANTs thinking. Practice on your tone of voice and allow yourself to feel your emotions shrinking anxiety down to size. The "Attitude" statements can do a lot towards reducing anxiety by allowing you to take the pressure off yourself.

HOW YOU SEE YOURSELF & THE WORLD

Through your perspective on life (that is, how you view things), you literally *create* the world around you.

For example, if you *expect* others to reject you, they will. If you *expect* others to like you, they will. You set up these expectations in your mind because of your beliefs, and then you automatically act on them and make what you expect to happen... happen.

What you believe, essentially, comes true.

If you expect rejection, you tend to hide, to avoid, to stay silent, to be hesitant. Other people may interpret your behavior as a lack of interest on your part, or to the fact that you are "different" or "weird".

If you EXPECT to be liked, you will be a little more outgoing, more friendly, more willing to take the initiative, and more willing to talk and be open. As a result of your actions, other people will see you as a nice, friendly person.

The negative cycle you are in may have convinced you there is something wrong with YOU. This is not true. The only thing you may be doing wrong is *viewing yourself and your world inaccurately*.

That's why the cognitive therapy we're doing is *vital*. We need to start to RE-think some things we believe about life.

What we give out - comes back.

This is not meant to be new age or eastern mysticism. It is a rational and factual statement.

What we give out - comes back. Let me explain.

If we are hesitant, others will react to our hesitation and be hesitant with us too. If we are too quiet, others may feel uncomfortable around us. If we hide and avoid too many things, others will see us as unfriendly, "weird" or "strange".

They are not reacting negatively to US as individuals... they are reacting to the way we ACT or behave.

Of course, we act the way we do because of our old beliefs and feelings... the way we have been "conditioned" to believe in the past.

As we can move away from these old ways of thinking and acting... we will be perceived differently by other people. As we are perceived differently by other people, our own view of ourselves will change as well. It will become more rational and more accurate.

Although we have all had emotionally negative events in our past that have shaped our lives, now we can more fully understand that we can REJECT the old "conditioned-in" thoughts and feelings... and we can start to CHOOSE to think and feel differently.

We all have had problems in our past. But now, we have two choices. We can dwell on our problems, wallow in the emotional mud, and ruminate about them the rest of our lives, thus guaranteeing that we will be one miserably anxious, depressed person.

Or, now that you know, you can CHOOSE to start responding to life differently. Your present starts today - this very moment. Your present and your future can be quite different than your past, if YOU decide it will be different.

You are not as down and out as you think. Look at all the good qualities and abilities you possess. See yourself truthfully and rationally.

The way you see yourself is the way you will be. In terms of how you see yourself, whatever you choose to believe about yourself, using common sense, will happen.

If you believe you can move forward, make progress, and keep getting better... you have just solved that problem... YOU WILL.

If you give in to defeat at every turn, and continue to wallow in depression and fear, this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, and you continue to set yourself up to be defeated. Therefore, it will happen.

Whatever you "set yourself up" for -- happens.

The way you see yourself and the world around you is vitally important. Let us become more rational and see the real reason others may react to us strangely.

How you view yourself... is essentially how others come to view you also. *Let's begin to see ourselves more accurately and rationally.*

Two Competing Neural Pathways in Your Brain

Setbacks happen to everyone as they recover from an anxiety disorder. Unfortunately, I have never worked with anyone who didn't experience many "setbacks" on the road to full recovery (it happened to me, too).

But please remember this - YOU CAN'T HAVE A SETBACK UNLESS YOU'VE ALREADY MADE SOME PROGRESS!

Let's put this in both *physiological and neurological* terms:

Your OLD neural pathways (the millions of nerve cells in the brain that transmit messages, thoughts, and emotions) automatically lead you toward your old responses: anxiety, fear, and the related depression.

This old pathway is tangible - it is *real*. It has now been mapped out in the brain by the very new brain scans. Since your OLD neural pathway was used for many, many years, it is normal that the thoughts and beliefs that traveled along these pathways, became ingrained, became habits, and became automatic.

However, when you began therapy, you also began to develop a NEW neural pathway. You learned new ideas and concepts. You read things that were hard to believe but were rational and positive.

As a result, literally, millions of brain cells began carrying the new messages you were learning: the methods, strategies, techniques, statements, and concepts of overcoming social anxiety. Your new neural pathway was being created.

The more you practiced, and "sunk" the information down into your brain, the STRONGER you made this literal neural pathway. The more you continue to use these NEW methods you are learning, the stronger your NEW neural pathway will become.

The more you use the NEW, and the less you use the OLD, you are literally changing the way your brain responds (automatically and habitually).

That is how we get over anxiety disorders - your brain starts automatically using the NEW pathways.

The brain operates in much the same way as the rest of the body. It operates under the "use it or lose it" principle. If you use your new, positive pathway it grows stronger. If you ignore and do not use the old anxiety pathway, it grows smaller.

So, to some extent, we want to use what we know is best for us to continue growing our new neural pathway, and we want to avoid and stay away from the triggers that lead us down the old pathway,

BUT RIGHT NOW you have two competing neural systems in your brain concerning anxiety situations.

The *old* neural pathway is not entirely gone yet, so there is always the possibility that we might experience a "setback".

The worst kind of setback from your perspective is after you've felt good for a few days or a few weeks and the anxiety has been deflated and seems to be under control.

Naturally, you think you've got anxiety pretty much licked. THEN - out of the clear blue sky - and without warning - BOOM! The anxiety floods back in (pretty strongly) and you are left feeling defeated, deflated, and questioning your progress.

What is *actually* happening is that through some old association or remembrance, your *old* neural pathway got stimulated, and the *old* consequence happened: you had anxiety - but this time it occurred when you may not have been expecting it (which makes it worse, of course).

NOW THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT - Let's look at the reality here - What is *really* happening?

This "setback" is actually a sign of progress. It is a GOOD experience in the long run, not a bad one. It is important that you begin to view it in this way.

Your old neural pathway somehow got stimulated or triggered, and your new neural pathway did not have enough time or strength to respond.

That is perfectly normal. It is a natural part of recovering from an anxiety disorder.

Now, as you begin to view it that way, you start to respond by using your new thoughts, strategies and methods. You must call anxiety's bluff --- what really happened was a last ditch attempt at pulling you back into "anxietyland", to get you to believe that you are totally hopeless, that the therapy doesn't work for you, and that things will just stay bad forever.

But, since you are developing that *new neural pathway* of yours, it is IMPOSSIBLE for you to be pulled back permanently. Your new brain pathway does not die out unless you totally give up. Even if you have a setback, your new neural pathway is there and will continue to grow.

You can save weeks and months of mental torture, though, by getting RATIONAL with this. This "setback" (as painful as it was) happened because of your two *competing neural pathways*. It is a totally normal experience that we all go through as we move forward.

Here are some statements that fit the experience of having a setback:

"I turn my back on my OLD lying ways of thinking and deliberately choose the new, positive direction I am moving. That anxiety response was a last ditch attempt by anxiety to grab me back - I could actually say that my anxiety panicked! It is already scared it has lost me..."

THE BEST NEWS is that when these types of "setbacks" begin occurring to you, *you are definitely making progress*. And when you don't respond to the old neural pathways, they will have no choice but to shrink to the place where they can't cause you the emotional pain and torment they did in the past.

These setbacks you have *and your response to them* are a sign that you are in the process of conquering the lying anxiety beast!

Look at it rationally and congratulate yourself.

As we learn to deal with social anxiety realistically, and deliberately choose to get back on the horse again, refuse to wallow in the mud, and choose to continue on, *we have taken another step away from social anxiety and toward healing*.

BELIEFS ARE VERY POTENT

Henri was raised in the Caribbean, where his mother taught him from a very early age the culture, art, and religion of voodoo. Henri sat in the circles when religious chants and ceremonies were being held. He heard the blessings and the curses made by the shamans and voodoo priestesses. And Henri saw with his own eyes that when the leader made a prophetic announcement, it was *accepted as the truth* by everyone.

As his belief system grew, Henri became more and more convinced of his beliefs. It was part of his life. It was part of his daily conversation. He lived with these thoughts every moment of the day. Everyone believed them. No one challenged them. *It did not occur to Henri that there could be anything different.*

As a young man, Henri was so strong in his beliefs that he could not be convinced that the shaman was ever wrong. To him, the shaman's words always came true. He knew it. He believed it. He had seen it happen over and over again. The shaman was always right.

Henri's belief system was very strong. Whenever our beliefs are as strong as this, they are unshakable.

For example, if we believe we have anxiety and that we'll always have anxiety, then we always will - UNLESS our belief system changes.

Henri saw and believed, and his convictions grew stronger over time. He reinforced his belief system by going to the ceremonies, talking to his family, and conversing with his friends who also believed. Every thing Henri did and said *reinforced his belief* in the power of voodoo. To Henri, it WAS the truth.

Westerners have always had a hard time understanding the "*voodoo curse*". When shamans put a "death curse" on an enemy, it has been known to come true. When victims know they have been cursed, and they are a believer, life becomes an agitated, anxious wait for the inevitable doom that is to occur: death.

Interestingly enough, when an autopsy is performed on the person who was cursed, there is no logical reason for the death. What do you

think is normally found? Fear! The person has literally scared himself to death. The adrenaline and cortisol levels have gone berserk and flooded the body to such an extent that they cause physical damage, usually creating a massive heart attack.

But where did this fear come from? *A strong belief!* In this case, a strong FALSE belief, but it was a belief nevertheless.

The power of belief is stronger than anyone realizes. There are many other true stories like this throughout human civilization and culture. *Belief is a very potent thing.* We live our lives based on our beliefs.

Therefore, it is important to develop beliefs that are rational, healthy, strong, positive, and life enhancing.

A strong belief always has a powerful effect. It is important that we learn to turn the tables on the ANTs, so that we can begin believing the truth, instead of believing an ANTs lie.

DE-STRESSING STRATEGIES

Don't take life so seriously.

Lighten up and take it easy.

This is NOT a life and death experience.

This is NOT an either/or, black and white, situation.

Take a deep breath --- let go and just relax!

The world is not going to end over this...guaranteed!

There is humor in almost everything...even this.

Carry your worries out to ridiculous lengths and laugh
about them.

Don't listen to anxiety feelings - they are ANTs lies.
Listen to the TRUTH.

All you can do is your best - and then forget about it.

The way I feel today is not going to influence the fate of
the world today, tomorrow, or next week, let alone in the
millennia to come.

It's NO BIG DEAL!

Your worry is not going to make the situation better...it
will only make you feel worse...

I am who I am and I'm human. So is everyone else. We all
make mistakes.

The Social Anxiety "Automatic" Cycle

Those of us with social anxieties are *TOO AWARE* of our nervousness and fears. As a result of these negative, strong, inner anxieties, we tend to be afraid that *everyone else* can notice and is aware of our fears, too.

Of course, when we believe "everyone is looking at us" or "everyone is noticing that we're strange", we are just adding pressure to the situation.

If I think others see me as being nervous, then I TRY not to be nervous. That's MORE pressure I'm putting on myself. The more we TRY not to be nervous, the more nervous we get. Notice that this is another paradox.

By using negative emotions, such as pressuring ourselves or trying to NOT be nervous, we ADD pressure to the situation... and then what happens? We become nervous, we sweat, we turn red, we feel anxious, we shake.

Why are we doing these things? Because we've pressured ourselves NOT to do these things... This is counterintuitive and is another paradox. But it is true.

This should remind us of the fighting paradox, because that is essentially what it is. Pretty soon, if we keep on worrying and pressuring ourselves, we find ourselves trapped in that negative "automatic" cycle of fear.

Although this can be difficult to believe at first, *our fears and anxieties are nowhere near as apparent to other people as they are to ourselves*. In fact, we are blowing our anxieties way out of proportion in our own minds. This adds even more pressure.

Most all people with social anxiety have a very difficult time believing this because the emotions of fear and anxiety are so very strong. ("If I feel this scared" they reason, "then everyone must notice it.")

Especially, when someone exhibits physiological effects that accompany their fears, then the fear of other people noticing it... is very powerful.

For example, people with social anxiety who

blush,
sweat excessively,
stumble with some of their words,
exhibit facial and neck twitches or movements,
have wet or clammy hands,
are self-conscious about other body parts they think are ugly or
unusual,
or think that others can "hear" their heart's rapid beating,

assume that these internal, physiological events are noticeable to everyone. It is many times the case that these physical manifestations are noticeable to *no one else*.

It is the anxiety that exists inside us that makes us feel that everyone is noticing our fear and embarrassment. But it is not true.

In some cases, our physiological responses ARE noticeable to other people. Some responses are impossible to hide.

Yet, these symptoms are never as bad as we make them out to be, and other people never notice them as much as we think they do.

So, even if our nervousness shows, we have overexaggerated its importance to other people, because it seems so big and emotionally powerful to us. A substantial body of literature exists to support this.

SO WHAT ARE WE ACTUALLY DOING TO OURSELVES? We are beating ourselves up over our own internal anxiety - many times that no one else notices anyway.

This may, in part, explain why it is so difficult for us to explain our problem to other people -- and why other people, including therapists, have such a difficult time understanding social anxiety. We look normally, we talk normally, and no one usually notices our fear and anxiety.

In the cases where they do, it's usually something small and insignificant, that the other person doesn't even think about very much. However, we feel it strongly -- we know it's there - it is very powerful and emotional to us...

...but it isn't as noticeable to other people at all.

We need to start seeing ourselves more rationally.

Turning the Tables on ANTs, Part One:
Establishing New Realistic and Rational Thinking

The brain is NOT like a computer. It is made up of billions of nerve cells that conduct electricity and release chemicals. Every time you REPLACE an ANTs thought with an accurate, rational thought, you are *literally, physically, altering the circuitry of your brain*. And the rational, positive thoughts are always stronger than the old negative ANTS' thoughts.

Only YOU can change your brain chemistry and neural pathways -- by not accepting those poisonous ANTS thoughts and feelings. You must choose to *focus, believe, dwell on, and take in rational, accurate thoughts and attitudes*.

Most of us have spent years and years being controlled by ANTS - but now it's time to *change our brain circuitry* for good. There's only one way to stop these automatic negative thoughts -- and that is by surrounding ourselves with rational, accurate, realistic thinking.

NEW STEP: If I can have worrying and anxious ANTS thoughts, then I can also have *peaceful* and *calming* thoughts.

None of us were born with social anxiety. None of us chose social anxiety. All of us would gladly give social anxiety up this very moment if we could. Since you weren't born with social anxiety and the automatic negative thoughts and feelings that accompany it, this means that *you can learn to think and feel differently*. It means that, although it is not our fault we have social anxiety, at this stage *there is no one who can get us out of this trap but ourselves*.

Put another way, you are not responsible for having social anxiety. But, *you are the only one who can be responsible for your healing*.

Even at this point, you can choose some things. You can choose to stay stuck in the social anxiety maze or you can choose new thoughts and feelings instead. *Therefore, I think I'll choose those new rational thoughts instead!*

NEW CONCEPT: Turn *that ANTS thought around*.

OK, this sounds good. But, how do you change those ANTs thoughts around?

If you're worried about a situation, *TURN THE THOUGHT AROUND:*

For example, If I'm worried about an upcoming event, I take the exact same worry and turn it upside down.

"You know, this is really not as bad as I make it out to be. I exaggerate it in my mind. I blow it way out of proportion. Now I'm deliberately going to focus on something else. I know it does absolutely no good for me to worry."

Or, say this to yourself:

"What good does it do to worry anyway? Worrying or anticipatory anxiety is an ANTS thought that can't do anything but lie to me. Since I know those ANTS are lying to me, this event may actually turn out to be a little *better than I expected*. I'll be OK - I've always made it through alive. I've gone through events like this before and I haven't died yet."

Remember: If you can build up negative things in your mind - you can more easily build up RATIONAL thoughts in your mind. The positive, rational thoughts are always more *accurate, strong, and powerful* than the old ANTs lies.

Notice, when you act, you need to move your thoughts "up" a little.

For example, say to yourself, "*This is not as horrible an event as I once feared. This is an event I've had difficulty with in the past. But I'm a different person now. This event may still cause some anxiety, but it will be a little better than it was before.*"

Notice, we are being very rational with our thinking. It is perfectly fine to say, "I have had problems with talking to strangers before." Your brain knows this and it is a rational statement.

But we do not want to leave it there. We must continue. "*BUT, I have made some progress and things are a little easier for me now, so maybe this time talking to others won't be quite as bad as I think it will be.*"

So, you see, I am deliberately choosing to think rationally, but I am not yet ready to go positive. So, I am going neutral.

You can add all the neutral words you want to this statement so that it will be a true statement that your brain will accept.

You can always say, *"Talking to others has caused me anxiety in the past, BUT I have been learning some strategies that will make this easier. I am going to slow down, take a deep breath, use slow talk, and focus on what the other person is saying to me. I may have some anxiety, but perhaps it will be easier this time. Maybe it will be more manageable than it was in the past. Maybe by slowing down I will feel more comfortable and in control."*

This *neutral* statement you just made to yourself is very rational, and begins the process of changing your automatic negative thinking into automatic rational thinking.

But we can not make the leap all at once. We can't go from years of negative thinking, to positive thinking with just a few statements or handouts.

We must stay rational with our brain. So, turning the tables on the ANTs, part one, means that we stay rational and at least make our thoughts neutral concerning anxiety-producing events.

ACCEPTING MYSELF AS I AM RIGHT NOW

Healing begins when I accept myself.

I accept myself for who I am and what I am.

I accept myself for who I am because acceptance is the golden pathway to healing.

I accept myself just the way I am today.

I am a human being and there are parts of my life I want to change.

There are parts of my life that cause me trouble and difficulty.

Nevertheless, this does not change the inner "me".

I accept myself just the way I am today.
By accepting myself I am opening the door to healing.

Therefore, I relax. I take a deep breath and peacefully relax.

I am a good person. There is nothing wrong with the "me" inside the "intrinsic" me.

I accept myself, problems and all, because the more I accept, the stronger I become.

Acceptance is a powerful process. When I accept myself, I have opened the door for change.

When I let go and accept, there is a metamorphosis, a healing power. that begins to flow in my life.

As I accept myself for who I am, everything else that is good, powerful, and positive fits naturally and completely into place.

So, I accept myself the way I am today.

As I accept myself, I will begin to change and grow.

Acceptance opens the floodgates of healing and power.

Without acceptance, there is only the struggling and the fighting of the past.

I accept myself for who I am, because as I accept myself, I become a new person.

There is healing in my acceptance. There is power in my acceptance.

My acceptance allows the flow to surround me with its natural healing and power.

I accept myself because I deserve it. I accept myself just as I am so that I can move forward in peace, calmness, strength, and confidence.

Acceptance is the key and the core of my progress. I accept myself and allow this natural pathway to emerge. I accept myself so that I can move forward.

Acceptance is my strength and power. I accept myself and allow myself to change.

Turning the Tables on ANTS, Part Two Or Keep Turning Those Thoughts Around

Many of the tasks we're working on in real life are things that we have found to be anxiety causing in the past (big surprise here!) But now we're *actively* working on doing these things, and it is essential that we TURN AROUND our beliefs and thoughts WHILE we are doing them.

Why? Because you can expose yourself to anxiety-causing situations over and over again - and it still never reduces the anxiety. In fact, I was exposed daily to very large social fears that emotionally crippled me -- and facing my fears only made things worse.

Why? Because I didn't face my fears in the appropriate way. I never knew how to do that. I only set myself up for defeat and failure.

For many years I thought if I met a big anxiety-causing situation, stuck with it, and conquered it, I would be over my social anxiety. So, sometimes I tried this.

You know what happened.

That big anxiety situation was too strong for me. It was too intense. There was too much anxiety for me to handle, and so I crashed and burned.

My feelings about myself plummeted, I became depressed, and I was surer than ever that I would never get over this dreadful traumatic social anxiety.

By facing my fears in this way, I was handling the situation incorrectly, although I didn't know it at the time. I should have been facing one small situation, learning to be successful at it, and then moving on to the next small situation. After a while, all the small situations in which I became successful, turn into bigger situations, and my anxiety begins to diminish and no longer be in control.

Many of us ARE exposed to anxiety-causing situations every day of our lives. It may be on the job, a social occasion, college classes, or some other necessary responsibility (things we usually can't avoid) - but simply exposing ourselves to the fearful activity is not enough.

Exposure, by itself, done in the wrong way, means the anxiety NEVER goes away - even if we've performed that fearful activity every single day of our lives for twenty years! That explains why "facing your

fears" or "flooding" yourself with fearful anxieties does not work for people who have social anxiety.

We do need practice and systematic exposure. And we do need to gradually work up to meeting our fears. But the biggest mistake we - and many times - therapists make, is to force a person to meet their fears before they are ready.

Everything we do in this series is leading toward overcoming social anxiety.

So, why haven't I suggested that you go out and make a speech in front of a hundred people yet? Answer: Because most of you are not ready to do that yet. But you may be ready to talk to that one person you've never talked to before.

The secret to this "face your fears" analogy is that you can only face one fear at a time, and it needs to be a small fear to start with. We must always move up the pyramid or hierarchy slowly and in a deliberate, well-planned-out manner.

For example, if I don't feel I can introduce myself to a small group, I may be ready to introduce myself to one new person, depending on the situation and circumstances.

By taking each new step slowly as it comes along, and repeating it, I am working against my anxiety in a positive, permanent way.

I always tell my people during their first appointment, "Go ahead and avoid things for now." Why? Because they are not ready for big anxiety steps. They need to get the cognitive strategies in their heads first, before they move out into the real world. And when they do move out into the world, it needs to be slowly and within the boundaries of common sense. Success builds upon success; it never builds upon failure.

In case you're wondering, people do eventually face their fears slowly, and in order, until they feel successful and more confident with each one. As they feel successful and more confident, they want to move up their ladder or hierarchy, to try another anxiety-causing situation.

To turn the tables on the ANTs we must *stay rational* and we must *move slowly, but systematically, forward*.

TURNING THE TABLES ON ANTS, PART THREE

OR

Your Brain Hears and Believes Everything You Say

Everything you say is "interpreted" literally by the brain.

That is, if we remind ourselves that a particular situation makes us fearful, then we are REINFORCING the idea that when we are in that situation, we will be afraid. If we continue to reinforce our anxiety, the real life fears that we face will grow stronger.

That's why we can (and have) been exposed in the past to many highly-anxiety arousing situations - and even though we went through them time and time again - this "exposure" to a fearful situation did not make us any less fearful.

We were *still just as afraid* of the situation after we did it the hundredth time as we were when we did it the first.

In order to get over these fears, we need to begin to *change our thoughts and statements* about what we're doing behaviorally (or how we are acting).

For example, speaking in public is something most people with social anxiety find very difficult to do. But, if we constantly remind ourselves (and our brain) that we think it is horrible, scary, and anxiety-producing, then it will ALWAYS be horrible, scary, and anxiety-producing.

We are reinforcing our own fears and making them stronger every time we repeat this statement to ourselves.

We are SABATOGING ourselves and our own best interests. *Why should we do that?* It's because we've never been told this before.

For over 20 years, I sabotaged myself. I kept viewing public speaking as a horrible, traumatic experience, even though I did it fairly well. But just the thought of talking in front of a group of people brought up all my social anxiety fears.

My self-talk ran something like this: *"Oh, my God, this is horrible. I'll be standing there in front of all those people and I won't know what to say. Everyone will think I'm stupid. Then I'll really feel like a fool. My words won't make any sense. I'll blush and stutter. My voice will go*

The Social Anxiety Institute, Inc. Copyright © 2000-2056.
This material may not be reproduced or redistributed in any fashion.
Thomas A. Richards, Ph.D., Director

weak on me and then give out. Everyone will see my fear and and that will be even more embarrassing."

Because I didn't change my thinking habits -- because I didn't *turn the tables on the ANTs* -- my fears about public speaking never went away. The fear was always there. Every public presentation I gave was a nightmare. I started days and weeks ahead of time having anticipatory anxiety.

"I HATE giving a talk," I would say. "Those people won't like me. I'm scared to death. What if I open my mouth and my voice squeaks? Then I'll turn red. Then everyone will know I'm afraid. I HATE giving a talk!"

Do you see what I did? I sabotaged myself. Instead of turning the tables on the ANTs, I turned the tables on myself and set myself up for defeat.

Once I learned this, I had to begin to change my thinking. I needed to keep the statements RATIONAL, but moving FORWARD.

For example, I had to say something like this: "Speaking to a group isn't my favorite activity, and I may be a little nervous, but so is everybody else who makes a public presentation. It's not that big of a deal. I will take a deep breath, slow my talking down, focus on something specific, and remind myself that I will probably do a better job than many other people."

KEEP REMINDING YOURSELF, that despite anxiety feelings, *you can and will do fine*. After all, everyone makes mistakes, and you may too, but *SO WHAT?* All that proves is that you're human.

Everybody loses their place when reading and their train of thought when they're speaking. EVERYBODY! So, why do you think this is so catastrophic and awful? It ISN'T - *IT'S JUST HUMAN!*

It's OK to be human and make mistakes. And when we mistakes, *SO WHAT?* It really, truly, is *NO BIG DEAL!* The Earth is not going to end based on whether you think you did a good or a bad job at public speaking. In fact, *no one fifty years from now will ever know you even made a presentation... it's just no big deal at all!*

We hassle and torture ourselves and worry ourselves to death so that we can't enjoy life, and for what? Over something that isn't even important, that no one is going to remember a few years later down the road.

The Social Anxiety Institute, Inc. Copyright @ 2000-2056.
This material may not be reproduced or redistributed in any fashion.
Thomas A. Richards, Ph.D., Director

WE NEED TO THINK DIFFERENTLY, and TURN THOSE (ANTS) THOUGHTS AROUND. When you DO SOMETHING, feed your brain the rational and realistic truth. Don't get trapped with the "I'm still afraid to's..." and the "I'm scared to's"...

If you stop saying something is scary, and replace the statement by saying the situation is challenging, *eventually your brain and your behavior will come together and agree*. You have learned to re-think, based on your self-talk, added to the fact that you carried through and performed the activity.

MOST situations in life are not really scary: We have just interpreted them that way for a *long period of time and they are settled deeply in our brain*.

So now, as we continue to get better, we interpret these situations more rationally and realistically. A RATIONAL, statement and viewpoint about a situation eventually CHANGES the original ANTS feelings -- and then anxiety can no longer get in our way to disrupt our lives.

Turn the tables on those ANTs. Your brain hears everything you say.

Make sure you are telling it the truth. Make sure you are being realistic and accurate. Don't say you "CAN'T" do something, because most of the time you can.

Tell your brain the truth. Turn the tables on those ANTs. Whatever you say, your brain will hear. Whatever your brain hears, it will believe.

Now, this needs to be a common-sense belief, of course, but your brain is quite literal. If you say and repeat for years that you HATE something, your brain believes that you hate it. You reinforce this "hate" and all the anxiety you have about the social situation, every time you say you hate it.

We must turn the tables on the ANTs. Your brain will hear and believe rational thoughts just as well as it believed negative and irrational thoughts. So, let's tell it the truth from now on and turn our back on lying ANTs beliefs and feelings.

Turn The Tables on the ANTs

Or

Turn The Tables on Your Irrational Thinking

The Social Anxiety Institute, Inc. Copyright © 2000-2056.
This material may not be reproduced or redistributed in any fashion.

Stay Rational.

Go Neutral on your
thoughts.

Use "maybe",
"possibly",

"perhaps" . . .

"Maybe this isn't quite as bad as I once
thought. Perhaps I've overexaggerated a
little. It's possible I do better than I
think."

If you say...

"I HATE THIS"

or **"I'm AFRAID to
do this..."**

Your brain believes everything you say and repeat
(That's why YOU believe it so strongly - you have
been constantly reinforcing this idea to your
brain).

The Social Anxiety Institute, Inc. Copyright © 2000-2056.
This material may not be reproduced or redistributed in any fashion.

NO!

I don't *HATE* to do
that...

Maybe I can
(possibly) do
better now...

*Your brain believes
everything you
say...*

"I used to hate
(public speaking) ,
BUT maybe (just
possibly) ... it's
not quite as bad as
I made it out to
be."

Go neutral. Go conditional. Make your
brain question and re-think things
through. Break up the old irrational
thinking.

**Your brain hears
and believes
everything you
say (repeatedly) to it...**

**Let's Turn The Tables on The ANTs -
watch what you say...
it will come true...**

The Social Anxiety Institute, Inc. Copyright © 2000-2056.
This material may not be reproduced or redistributed in any fashion.

CHANGING BRAIN CHEMISTRY PERMANENTLY

When ANTs thoughts and feelings come:

STEP 1. Be honest. Call the intrusive, unwanted, negative thoughts and feelings what they really are: Pathological liars and bullies. They try to scare us but really have no authentic power over us. They are thoughts we have picked up or "inherited" from somewhere else that are not a part of us, and these feelings LIE, because there's no reason for us to feel anxious.

STEP 2. When you are honest with yourself, it won't make your unwanted negative thinking and behavior go away immediately, *but it will prepare you to change your responses.*

STEP 3. When you change your behavior, you are literally changing your brain.

Ask yourself these questions: "Why do these automatic negative thoughts and feelings keep bothering me? Why don't they just go away?"

The answer is, because of the way our brains are constructed. Our brains have been thoroughly conditioned through repeated negative thoughts and traumatic emotions. *You are not generating your own automatic negative thoughts.* They are occurring because they have been conditioned in to your brain repeatedly -- over a long period of time.

Before you began cognitive therapy, your brain had a strong neural pathway that associated many social situations with anxiety. Over time, it becomes a habit to go down pathways that bring up negative thoughts and anxious emotions. The more this happens, of course, the more the brain is reinforced to respond in anxiety-mode. Thus, the anxiety becomes an ingrained habit.

Changing your responses to these anxious feelings, and shifting to useful and constructive thoughts and behaviors, will, over time, create new, healthier brain pathways.

As the brain starts to send its messages through new pathways (or associated neurons) the anxiety feelings begin to fade and become easier to control.

STEP 4: DO SOMETHING ELSE. When you change your behavioral responses (or the way you act) by focusing your attention on something useful and constructive, you are breaking up the vicious anxiety cycle.

DO SOMETHING ELSE WHEN ANXIETY THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS OCCUR. DON'T JUST SIT THERE.

GET UP, GET GOING, MOVE AHEAD. DON'T WALLOW IN THE MIRE. REFUSE TO LET THE ANTS TAKE CONTROL. YOU KNOW BETTER. GET UP. GET ACTIVE. MOVE ONWARD AND AHEAD.

This is the no pain, no gain step. You must become ACTIVE. You cannot be PASSIVE.

Remember -- When you change your thoughts and behavior, you are also changing the neural pathways in your brain.

STEP 5. SEE REALITY FOR WHAT IT IS. Don't take your symptoms at "face value" - they don't always mean what they say they mean. They're liars! When you see reality more clearly, and can devalue the lying, unwanted thoughts and feelings, you are strengthening your new brain pathways, and putting another nail in the anxiety coffin.

MINGLING

When you attend a social gathering, have a realistic attitude. Keep in mind it takes at least two people to talk. You are not responsible for "silences" and there is nothing wrong with having "silences". IT'S NO BIG DEAL!

1. If you feel you've run out of things to say, shake hands with the person, say "I'm glad I got to meet you, Mike, please excuse me, I see a friend that I need to go rescue" or... "I need to get some refreshments" or "the smoke is really bothering me in here - I need to go outside for a few minutes and clear my eyes" or "I need to make a restroom visit" or anything at all that is legitimate to the situation. You do not need an excuse - you are just being polite.

2. Invite someone else into the conversation that is standing or sitting there alone. If you take the initiative to do this, it will make you feel better and reduce your own anxiety.

3. You never have a legitimate reason to feel uncomfortable or guilty. These are ANTs feelings. Reject them and *decide* to feel OK regardless. This may sound strange at first, but you can rationally DECIDE you will no longer feel uncomfortable or anxious.

4. Decide ahead of time that you *won't allow yourself* to be uncomfortable. Why should you have to feel out of place? There is no legitimate, rational reason for this, so why do you need to let it happen? Don't. You can stand there all alone if you want and just look around the room. That is not against the law. You are OK, there is nothing wrong with this, and you are entitled to do whatever you reasonably want in these social situations. So stay... and refuse those ANTs feelings of anxiety and uncomfortableness. Use the "attitudes" handout: SO WHAT? WHO CARES? THIS IS NO BIG DEAL!

5. Focus on other people and note their names, interests, and what they are talking about. If you forget to do this, don't beat yourself up. Just continue on. Next time you'll remember.

6. Slow your speed down as you talk. You will almost always have something to say if you use slow talk and do not speed up. Here's where all the practicing you've done in slow talk pays off.

Now you can use slow talk in public, social situations where you feel some anxiety and have it noticeably change your emotions. Sometimes it is hard to remember to do, but when you remember, you will find that slow talk will calm you down, help you remember, and there will always be something in your mind to talk about.

7. Actually, those of us with SA have years of experiences that we've never talked about or shared because we always felt we couldn't mingle. So, realistically, we have a LOT to say to others! Remember this is just small talk. You do not have to try to be interesting or funny. Just make little conversations.

8. You CAN mingle just as well as anyone else. Turn the tables on the ANTs:

For example, say to yourself: *"You know, I used to think I couldn't mingle and talk with others very well. But now I'm realizing that I am better at this than I once thought..."*

9. Decide again that you will not be uncomfortable in this situation. There is no rational reason for you to be let yourself feel this way. Whether you're in a group or whether you're alone, you do not need to feel out of place. It is fine. It is OK. People are not focusing in on you anyway. So just take it easy. It's no big deal - go with the flow and relax.

10. You can walk through the room and not talk to anyone. Try this. Why should you feel funny about this? Others do it all the time and don't think anything about it. *Decide* you're going to feel OK about doing this. There's nothing "wrong" or weird about doing it. Everybody else does it, why can't you?

11. Switch people or groups politely whenever you want. You are not "chained permanently" to the first person you talk to.

12. Don't try hanging around a new person all evening. You'll probably both not like this. Move together into another group or split up.

13. People who are conversing split up all the time. It is an accepted (almost "demanded") part of mingling. You talk with someone for a while, and then you move on. No big deal. You can say the same things to the next person. They haven't heard what you've said. Small talk is small talk. It is normal to say the same things to each person you talk to.

14. You don't want to get stuck with the same person all evening. Move on. Go to the punch bowl if you don't see anyone you know. Drink, eat. Go the restroom. Take a walk around the room or go outside. Take it easy. It's NO BIG DEAL FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE.

15. No one is watching and judging your performance. They have better things to do than focus on you.

16. Everyone is paying attention to themselves and their own conversations. They want to enjoy themselves and have a nice time. They are not focusing in on you.

17. DECIDE AHEAD OF TIME that you're OK, no matter what you do or what happens.

18. Your decision to mingle is a SUCCESS in and of itself. It needs no outside validation from anyone. You do not need to feel "great" afterwards. The victory and the movement against social anxiety was your DECISION to mingle - even if it is for a short period of time to start with. Your decision, and carrying out your decision, are what counts. When you made small talk with someone, you were decidedly moving away from social anxiety, no matter how you felt.

19. By moving ahead like this, you gradually prove to yourself that you are a "success", defined in your own terms. *There is no failure unless you give up* and stay in that dark closet.

The dark closet brings on more anxiety and fear. Moving forward -- which is NO BIG DEAL -- brightens the closet and scorches the ANTs who live there...

CONVERSATIONS

Pay attention to the other person and what they are saying. (Focus your attention externally and ignore the internal ANTs thinking).

As you listen to the other person, notice they are:

Making a statement,
Expressing an opinion,
Telling a story (such as something that happened to them) or
Talking about the future or future plans.

Respond to what they are saying by:

Commenting on their statement,
Giving your opinion of what they were giving an opinion on,
Follow-up questions to statements and stories to clarify what they mean

Questioning their plans: what they are going to do, where they are going to go, what is going to be accomplished, etc.

When you think you are stuck, ask a question of the other person. This will start them talking. Now, you can't keep doing this for hours, so listen to what they have to say (focus externally on them) so that you can make a comment or talk about something related in your own life.

Feel free to change the subject when it appears it has run out. For example:

"So, what do you think of..." or
"I never thought it would stop raining last night..." or
"I hope I studied enough for this test coming up..."

To be a friend, you have to show interest in another person. *The only way they know how to gauge that you are interested is by what you SAY (and in what tone of voice you say it).* Friendships (or relationships) based on one-way communication do not work out.

So, slow down, take that deep breath, focus externally on the other person and what they are saying, and then respond. Don't get into anxiety mode and do too much thinking. This is just a simple conversation, not a Hollywood debut. Your conversations do not have to be "right" or "perfect". *Small talk is called small talk because it is small.* It's no big deal.

As you focus externally on the other person, your anxiety will decrease. (Remember that anxiety increases as we pay attention to it and think about it).

If you learn to pay attention (externally) to the other person, and then just respond with a little thought (not by thinking too much - because overthinking and overanalyzing are killers), you will find all conversations are easier and will flow more naturally.

Take it easy on yourself. Small talk is small talk. Listen to the other person, be friendly and polite, it's no big deal.

People like it when you listen to them and comment. You will be seen as friendly because you are talking to another person. You may need to start out slowly, but that's fine.

Just take it easy, slow down, listen to the other person, and make a little small talk. If you do these things, it will be easier than you think. You will have "small talk" to share with others.

THE DESERVING STATEMENTS

Before you can comfortably express your needs, *you must believe you have a legitimate right to have those needs.* Keep in mind that rationally, you already have the following rights:

* I have the right to decide how to lead my life. This includes pursuing my own goals and dreams and establishing my own priorities.

* I have the right to my own values, beliefs, opinions, and emotions -- and the right to respect myself for them, no matter what the opinion of others.

* I have the right not to have to justify or explain my actions or feelings to others.

* I have the right to tell others how I wish to be treated.

* I have the right to express myself and to say "No",
"I don't know",
"I don't understand",
or even "I don't care."

* I have the right to take the time I need to formulate my ideas before expressing them.

* I have the right to ask for information or help -- without having negative feelings about my needs.

* I have the right to change my mind, to make mistakes, and to sometimes act illogically -- with full understanding and acceptance of the consequences.

* I have the right to *like myself* even though I'm not perfect.

* I have the right to have positive, satisfying relationships within which I feel comfortable and free to express myself honestly -- and the right to change or end relationships if they don't meet my needs.

* I have the right to change, enhance, or develop my life in any way I determine.

NOTE: When you don't believe you have these rights -- you may react very *passively* to circumstances and events in your life. When you allow the needs, opinions, and judgments of *others* to become more important than your *own*, you are likely to feel hurt, anxious, and even angry.

This kind of passive or nonassertive behavior is often indirect, emotionally dishonest and self-denying. It also keeps the anxiety and low self-esteem alive and well. So, *make "The Deserving Statements" the truth.*

If you have some trouble with "The Deserving Statements" notice again that these rights are for all human beings. If you can't feel good about yourself, then you will not only stay miserable and anxious, but you will be affecting everyone around you in a negative way also.

These are not selfish statements. These are statements we need to drop down into the core of our mind - down into the foundation of our brain. They are not beliefs that will hurt anyone else -- they will only allow you to live a happy, more productive life -- and will affect others around you in a positive, healthful way.

Feelings, Feelings, and More Feelings

Q: Why do I have anxiety feelings about so many different things?

A: They are there so that you can learn to stop thinking about them.

Q: That isn't an answer. What do you mean?

A: The anxious feelings are there so that you can stop asking, "Why are they there?", "Why do I have them?", "Will I always be like this?", "Won't they ever go away?", "Will I ever have a life?"

Q: I don't understand.

A: The more you ask, "Why are they there?" the more they will be there.

Q: And the less I notice and ask about these feelings, the less they will be there?

A: That's right. It's another paradox.

Q: But isn't thinking about something good?

A: Yes, if you're thinking about a positive event or situation. But if it's thinking that causes anxiety feelings, thinking is a red flag. If you start to feel anxious, stop thinking and start doing something. Get your mind off the ANTs lies.

Q: Won't thinking help me come to a conclusion?

A: No. Thinking about anxiety will only make you more anxious. You will come to the conclusion that there is no conclusion. And you will still be stuck in the quicksand.

Q: So, what should I do?

A: First, stop, slow down, take a deep breath, and realize that all you have to do is accept.

Q: Accept?

A: Yes, because if you accept, you are not fighting, battling, struggling, getting frustrated, trying, pushing, forcing, or attacking. Because you choose to accept, everything becomes easier.

Q: Don't fight, accept, and then what?

A: Let the anxiety go, and move on with your life. Don't sit around and ruminate. Get on with your activities and your daily life.

Q: The more I accept, the more the anxiety goes away?

A: Exactly. Calm, peaceful, acceptance has great power. The more you can accept and move on with your life, the more this anxiety feeling is no big deal. If you don't pay attention to it, it doesn't have any power over you.

So, you see, we are being reminded here of that paradox again -- the more we can accept, move on, act, find distractions, and turn the tables on the ANTs, the less anxiety will be able to bother us.

In fact, the more your strategies and statements become automatic thinking and behavior, the less and less anxiety can rear its ugly head. You are in the process of calmly and surely defeating social anxiety for good.

Worry...

Leads to More Worry and More Worry and More Worry and...

Worry is never positive. It never does any good. There is no redeeming value in worry.

Worrying is an ANT-like process. *It always leads me in the wrong direction.*

It always exaggerates.

It always blows things out of proportion and consumes my life.

It leaves a trail of anxiety and depression behind it.

Worrying only leads to more worry. More worry just fuels the fire of anxiety and causes me to worry more.

Nothing good ever comes from worrying. Most of what I worry about never happens anyway. Worry just makes things worse. Worry fuels the fire of anxiety and depression.

Worry compounds anxiety. It throws me and my progress off track. Worry is another lying ANT.

It is incapable of telling me the truth.

Worry wants me to be irrational, to expect the very worst, and to see the situation as being catastrophic. Worry is always negative. If I surrender to worry, I am heading in the wrong direction.

Worry needs to be stopped - dead cold - in its tracks. It is a lie. It never leads me in a good or healthy direction.

Worry never solves any problems. It only creates them. The more I worry, the more problems I will have.

Worrying is a negative emotion, and can only fuel other negative emotions. There is no help, no progress, and no solution in worrying.

Worry robs me of my minute, my hour, and my day. Worry keeps me living in the troubling past or the fearful future. Worry makes sure that the time I spend with it is miserable and depressing.

Worry sets me up for defeat, anxiety, stress, fear, and sickness. It never does me any good. It always wants to trip me up and knock me down.

Worry needs to be stopped. It will throw any dark filter over reality that it can find -- and it is always bad and unhealthy.

So what can I do about it? If I'm worrying about something and can do something about it, I'll DO IT.

...Stop the thinking (worrying) and start the doing...

If I have no control over what I'm worrying about, my worry will do no good anyway. It will only hurt me and depress me and pull me farther down into the vicious maze we call social anxiety.

Worrying never solves a thing. There is no solution in worry. There is only defeat. Excessive thinking (worrying) is like poison. Catch it, stop it, and move away from it. I'll say to myself: "Worry never does me any good. It is only there to hurt me and rob me of my peace. Therefore, I deliberately choose to go and do something else..."

Then, go and do something. Find a good distraction and do it. Or, as you progress, rely upon the rational statements that you are already making a part of your daily life.

Worry is a fraud and a liar. Nothing good ever comes from worry. It is time for us to put worry in its place. Kill it and stop the thinking by using any of your cognitive methods or strategies, and then move on.

Catch yourself when you start to worry and throw these worrying thoughts off like they were poison... because they ARE!

Here's How We Handle Those Bullying Liars

To remind your brain and let it sink in deeper, say: "WAIT A MINUTE! (STOP!) I'm having those automatic negative thoughts (ANTS) that I do not like. I know they are not healthy or helpful to me. I am quietly determined to move in a better direction and turn my back on these lying ANTS."

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

These ANTS are always pathological liars. They can never tell the truth. They only try to be scary, depress me, bring me down, rip up my self-esteem, increase my anxiety, and make me feel like everything is hopeless. *THEY ARE LYING TO ME AGAIN.*

I choose to move in a better direction. Therefore, these are the rational, honest answers to those lying ANTS thoughts:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Loosen Up and Let Stress Go

Letting our muscles relax and become limp is not a new technique for us, but now let's put it into a practical real-life context. WHEN YOU ARE FEELING ANXIOUS, because of anticipatory anxiety, worry, or ANTS feelings and thoughts of any kind...

just remember these two words... "Loosen Up"

If you're in public or in a social situation and you're feeling anxious, just remember these two words... "Loosen Up"

What happens when we're anxious is that our body and muscles tighten up automatically, many times without us realizing it. Technically, our physical body is preparing to meet a threatening challenge that really isn't there - but, since we think it is, our muscles become tight and rigid.

I first noticed this one Saturday morning over twenty years ago when I was driving down the freeway to the downtown city library. The library was a safe place to go for me because it was fifteen miles from my home and I knew I wouldn't run into anyone that I knew there. But as I drove down the freeway, which in those days was almost deserted early Saturday mornings, I glanced down at my hands and saw they were chalk white from gripping the steering wheel so hard. And I was doing it with both hands! I finally figured out why I went into "automatic" stress mode.

#1 - I was terribly self-conscious. Even though only a few cars drove past me, I still felt as if the nameless people in the nameless cars were staring at me. I always kept my eyes straight ahead so as to avoid the gazes I felt I would get if I looked over at the passing car, and #2 - I had been tensing up for so many years that it now had become routine. It was an ingrained habit.

As time went by, I began to notice that I tensed up quite a lot in any social situation. So, gradually, I began to catch myself tensing up, and then would take a deep breath, and deliberately let go of the tension. This helped me out a great deal. But I didn't know enough then to be systematic about it. That is what we want you to do.

By realizing this and just LETTING GO of the tension in your muscles by "loosening up" - you are calming yourself down and making the situation a little easier for yourself.

The other positive element is that as you let go and let your muscles become loose, limp, and relaxed, you are reminding and reinforcing your brain that the stress and anxiety you're experiencing is just an old, ugly, ANTS habit. You really have NOTHING to fear. The doubts and the lack of feeling confident is an old lie that you've been believing for years... BUT IT DEFINITELY IS NOT THE TRUTH!

Let that tenseness in your muscles go - release it - quiet your body down - It's time we started believing the truth instead of old ugly ANTS lies.

THE TRUTH IS THAT THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR, WE CAN HANDLE SITUATIONS WELL, AND WE DO A MUCH BETTER JOB AT COPING THAN WE EVER ONCE IMAGINED. So slow down, loosen up, and find this out for yourself.

Let me add a reminder here: As with all the handouts, it is important that you start this "loosening up" process at home, when you are alone. You must practice it at home first, when you are NOT feeling anxiety, so that it can enter your mind, and through repetition, become automatic. If you try this the first time in a public, highly anxious situation, it will not work for you and you will feel defeated. Please start the process out at home, when you're alone and feeling OK. Practice on it until you can FEEL more calm, relaxed, and less stressed. When you can FEEL this at home, then bring it out slowly into the real world.

Self-Statements:
Moving in a Positive Direction

I am a proficient and capable person in my areas of knowledge.

I am learning to accept and believe in myself -- just the way I am.

I don't have to "change" to be a good person.

I am a unique and special person, just like everyone else. There is no one else like me in the entire universe.

I have unique and special talents I can share with others to help them.

I am learning to accept all the different parts of my personality.

I don't have to prove myself to anyone. I don't have to prove myself to myself.

My feelings and my needs are important too.

It's O.K. to think about what I'd like and need. It's not being selfish to seek peace and healing for myself.

It's necessary for me to make some time for myself each day.

I have many good qualities.

I believe in my capabilities and value the unique talents I can offer the world.

I am a person who is sincere and that is a very positive quality. I trust in my ability to make progress toward my goals.

I am a valuable and important person, worthy of the respect of others.

As I continue to get better, others will perceive me as a good and likable person.

When people really get to know me, most of them will like me.

There are people who enjoy being around me. They like to hear what I have to say and know what I think. Even if this hasn't happened yet, I am moving in this direction.

Others may recognize that I have a lot to offer (even when I don't recognize this myself).

I am probably making more progress than I think.

Even though making positive steps can seem slow at the present time, something is going on all the time that's helping me to make progress.

I deserve to be loved by those people who care for me.

I trust and respect myself more now and realize I am worthy of the respect of others.

I'm learning how to receive assistance and cooperation from other people.

I'm more optimistic about my life now. Sometimes, I look forward to and enjoy new challenges.

I know what my values are and I am more confident about the decisions I make than I was before.

It's becoming easier to accept compliments and praise from other people.

I take pride in what I've accomplished, and look forward to what I am going to achieve.

Just as with all the other handouts, if something seems too hard to believe right now, add a "maybe" a "possibly" or a "sometimes" to the statement to make it more rational for your situation.

What you are doing, of course, is turning the tables on the ANTs - and we want to do this slowly, step by step, by making our statements neutral first... before we continue to move them up.

It is important that the statement be rational, so make it a little conditional if you need to right now. Add a "probably" or a "maybe" to one of the statements. That is perfectly fine. The statement will be more rational to you, and your brain will be able to accept the message better at this time.

Brainwashing

How do people develop anxiety disorders? The *simple* answer is that they are literally brainwashed over time by other people and/or environmental circumstances. When you hear negative comments, criticisms, and statements about yourself over and over again - over the course of many, many years - your brain begins to believe all the negative (and inaccurate) things that it hears.

If you are exposed repeatedly over and over again to brainwashing (even if it's subtle), *your own mind begins to think and believe what you've heard*. Yes, you've been brainwashed (conditioned) into having an anxiety disorder.

The *good news* is that since you can be brainwashed into having an anxiety disorder, you can be brainwashed (or conditioned) into getting over it. *Here we have a change in words that will bring on a change in beliefs and thoughts*.

No longer are we going to brain-wash. Through therapy, we are going to wash the brain of all the old garbage from the past, all of the old negative emotions, embarrassments, fear, humiliation, low self-esteem, depression, negative beliefs, and hurtful events.

We are going to brain-wash in a POSITIVE WAY. We are going to wash the OLD negative lies out of our brain and replace these OLD lies with new, clean, rational thoughts and feelings. *WASHING THE BRAIN* is more powerful than brainwashing.

When the old brainwashing thoughts come, challenge them. Say to yourself: *"This may be an old thought that was brainwashed into me... but now I CHOOSE to wash my brain of it. I choose to think differently. I CHOOSE to feel differently. I CHOOSE to go down a new pathway. I CHOOSE to move down the healthy pathway. I CHOOSE to wash my brain of the old lies and fill it with accuracy, truth, and validity.*

"I will not allow old brainwashing thoughts / feelings to continue to hold on to me. Instead, I deliberately *choose* to think / feel differently. I *choose* TO WASH MY BRAIN and make it clean and whole."

Notice that if we can be brainwashed into having automatic negative thoughts, that when we wash our brain, it will open up a whole new way of thinking and feeling for us. It really is more than just getting over social anxiety... it is living a brand new life that will bring you calmness, serenity, peace, and confidence. All of these emotions reside in our brain, and the therapy we are doing - is heading us in this direction.

POISOINOUS THOUGHTS

Anxious, worrying *thoughts* which lead to anxious, worrying *feelings* create the traumatic, anxiety-ridden lives of those of us who suffer from social anxiety.

It is when we become aware of this, and begin to take control of our thoughts, which lead to feelings, that we can overcome this downward spiral of negativity. This "expecting the worst to happen" syndrome - that keeps our anxieties alive - must be stopped. This is what we have typically done:

We repeatedly rehearse our failures.

We tell ourselves we can't do things.

We tell ourselves that the things we CAN do, are horrible, awful, and monstrous, and we wish we DIDN'T have to do them.

We tell ourselves we'll never get any better. "I've always been like this"...

We keep reinforcing the negative, the scary - the obsessive thoughts... the fearful feelings and then we continue to have anxiety, worry, and fear.

DO YOU SEE THE CONNECTION?

Thoughts have no power in and of themselves. YOU imbue them with your own power and your own feelings. Thoughts always require an action on your part. For example, try running your computer with just your thoughts... go to the grocery store and shop with your thoughts alone... or write a letter using only your cognitive abilities. Thinking, by itself, isn't enough.

Each and every thought requires an action to get it moving.

These original harmless, powerless thoughts, though, can create great havoc in your life if you start rehearsing them and believing them, because then you start to *ACT* on them.

If you *believe* in and act on a lie, the lie will become the truth. You have *created* it with your thoughts, and *chosen to believe it* with your actions. Therefore, you have made this powerless thought become the truth.

Here are some examples:

The Social Anxiety Institute, Inc. Copyright © 2000-2056.
This material may not be reproduced or redistributed in any fashion.
Thomas A. Richards, Ph.D., Director

Thought: "I am afraid to speak in front of other people."

Action: Avoidance. Do nothing. Worry about it.

Result: My fear of speaking in front of other people becomes stronger. There are stronger negative feelings now. It seems completely impossible to me that I can speak in front of other people.

How to change: I need to turn the tables on the ANTs and think in a different manner. I should say to myself: "If I talk to a few other people, it probably won't kill me."

I might even survive. If I drool, I drool. So what?"

Speaking in public is the biggest fear for nearly everyone, not just me. And when I speak to other people or present something to other people, I'll do OK. It's certainly not the end of the world."

Action: Carry the rational thoughts through and speak to one or two other people. Go slowly, but keep on moving. (Continuing to move, slowly but surely, step by step is very important here.)

You must challenge your ANTs beliefs, cognitive patterns, and thinking strategies. *Are they telling you the rational truth and leading you in a healthy, helpful direction?* Or do they keep you in a cycle of defeat, depression, avoidance, fear, and "expecting the worst to happen"?

Anxiety is caused by the hormone *adrenaline*. Adrenaline is a "speeding-up" hormone. It speeds up your thoughts, actions, and feelings.

What is it that adrenaline speeds up when you are surprised / put on the spot / feel self-conscious or something comes out of the blue? It speeds up your thoughts about what's about to happen.

The adrenaline is speeding up your thinking processes - and, as a result, the feelings you have invested in these thoughts. For example, if you say and believe that speaking to a few people is awful, terrifying, and horrible, then the adrenaline will take your feelings and create awful, terrible and horrible anxiety.

If you don't change your thinking / believing / acting and feeling patterns, the negative anxiety syndrome will always be rushing you towards fear.

If, on the other hand, your thoughts and beliefs begin to change, these adrenaline-tinged thoughts will move under your control. It will be

more like, "So what?? It's no big deal! This is certainly not the end of the world."

And through your other strategies (the slowing-down ones in particular) we can also learn to control and diminish the adrenaline rush. Slow-talking, using your calming keyword, loosening up and grabbing onto the healthy, rational thoughts you've patterned into your mind, will eventually put a halt to the inappropriate rush and flow of that tricky hormone, adrenaline.

THOUGHTS ARE VERY POWERFUL because they lead to beliefs -- and beliefs lead to actions.

WHICH THOUGHTS WILL YOU CHOOSE TO BELIEVE?

Those old, irrational, lying ANTs thoughts, or will you challenge them and start to believe what is rational? You can decide to go either direction. My guess and hope is that you will decide to be rational and believe the truth.

FOCUSING
And how it keeps us away from anxiety

When anxiety comes around in any form -- and this includes anticipatory anxiety --

we want our attention and our FOCUS, to be on external things, not on our internal feelings. Our internal feelings are liars when they involve anxiety.

Therefore, by focusing on the way we feel inside -- which is anxious -- we only reinforce and renew our anxiety. For example, when we

give a performance,
make a public talk or presentation, or
do anything in public socially,

we do not want to dwell on our anxiety.

Instead, we want to focus externally on something else. Anything else. Anything that is a distraction. Anything that will get your mind away from feeling anxiously and thinking anxiously.

Say, "I need to call my anxiety, which is irrational, exactly what it is -- a LIAR, and then focus away from it. Focus externally. I do not need to sit, dwell, ruminate, and scare myself to death by letting the lying anxiety grow."

I need to get active and get my mind moving in a positive direction on some external situation."

If we're following a logical progression toward becoming better, our FOCUS should be outward. Our focus should be external.

We must not get into the habit of "checking in" with our anxiety and then do things on the basis of how we feel.

Our feelings lie to us, and if we focus on them, they will only grow and make us more anxious.

Our focus should be on what we DO.

We need to DO something, even if it causes a little anxiety, whether we FEEL like it or not.

In other words, our focus should not be on ourselves and the way we feel.

We can never gauge our progress by checking the emotion that gives us pain, because if we continually check our anxiety, we will be reinforcing it, allowing it to grow, and fueling the fire.

Therefore, the correct question becomes:

Did I DO what I was going to do?

If I did, *I am successful simply because I did it.*

But more than that, the chances are VERY HIGH that you were also successful (period!) at the task.

The only person who debates your success is you - and, of course, those nasty, lying, ANTs thoughts. But remember that those ANTs will wither up and die when we STOP *focusing* on them. (They like internal attention - so take the attention away from them.)

Focus outwardly and externally - not on the way you are feeling inside - not on the lying ANTs feelings and thoughts.

"I CAN'T DO IT" THINKING
(or Another attack on healing by the lying ANTS)

Regardless of how you feel, you don't ever want to use the "*I can't do this*" explanation. Remember that your brain hears and responds to every word that you feed it. Therefore, if you say,

"I can't make phone calls, I get too flustered.!"

"I can't go to the party. There are too many people. I won't know what to say."

"I simply can't sit through that big meeting..."

"I hate it when I have to meet new people. I feel so inadequate..."

your brain picks these statements up, and sure enough, you CAN'T do these things because you've programmed it into your mind over and over again. The more you reinforce the "cant's" and the other forms of automatic negative thinking (ANTS), the more it will take to re-program your mind in a positive, healing direction.

In reality, you have lost NONE of your former abilities - what you could do in the past, you can also do now. You can also still do extraordinary things. Here is one true life example.

Diane was an agoraphobic. That is, she feared having panic attacks and felt the only place she was safe was in her home. She gave up driving and leaving the house, even though this restriction in her life was awful to her.

One day, she got a phone call at home telling her that her son had been hurt and was on the way to the hospital.

Without even thinking about it, she jumped in her car, drove the five miles to the hospital, and ran to the emergency room.

She was very externally focused. She was concerned about her son.

She never once thought of her panic and her perceived inability to drive. She was not focused internally. She was focused externally: on getting to the hospital to see her son. The only thing that was important was the safety of her boy.

She was completely and ENTIRELY FOCUSED on her child. *She had no time to focus on anything else.* Therefore, because she hadn't thought "anxiety" or "panic attack" these things did not happen.

It was only later on, after she found out that her son was fine, that she *started thinking* about it. She slowly realized what she had done, and said, "Oh, my God! I drove all that distance without having a panic attack. How did I ever do that?"

It was then that her focus shifted *internally* and she began questioning herself. Her attention was now on her fear and the ANTs that control it. Her focus on the "panic attack" started to move her mind in an *internal* direction -- and, as a result, she become scared and felt a deep emotional stirring.

If Diane had known better, she would focus again externally, say, "Wow! I put those ANTs in their place, didn't I?"

But Diane didn't know any better and, as she focused more and more inside herself, the feelings of panic and anxiety began to get stronger. The more they came on, the more she focused *internally*. It wasn't long before she was in a full-scale attack over an incident she had already performed successfully... SHE HAD ALREADY DRIVEN TO THE HOSPITAL SAFELY. She had done it because *she wasn't thinking about it.*

Of course, what she needed to do was give herself credit for getting in the car, driving to the hospital, and riding the elevator to see her son.

She could do all those things successfully - the ability to do those things never had left her.

But she didn't understand that.

"I can't do it" thinking is never helpful - and it always leads in the wrong direction.

Your brain hears everything you say and (eventually) believes it.

POWER STATEMENTS
(Rational Questions to Ask Yourself Each Day)

WHY SHOULD I LET OTHER PEOPLE'S THINKING "GET UNDER MY SKIN"?

WHY SHOULD OTHER PEOPLE'S APPROVAL MATTER TO ME?

WHY SHOULD I BE DEPENDENT ON OTHER PEOPLE'S VIEWS OF ME?

WHY DO OTHER PEOPLE HAVE ANY POWER OVER ME?

Now let's zero in and become a little more direct with our questions:

WHY SHOULD MY OWN THOUGHTS HURT ME?

WHY SHOULD I LET MY OWN THOUGHTS HURT ME?

WHY SHOULD I ALLOW MY OWN THOUGHTS TO CAUSE ME EMOTIONAL PAIN?

WHY SHOULD I ALLOW MY OWN THINKING TO "GET UNDER MY SKIN"?

WHY DO I LET OTHER PEOPLE HAVE ANY POWER OVER ME?

I need to keep heading in a good, healthy, helpful direction
-- a healing direction.

I AM FINE AND O.K. in myself - I have this security and confidence
inside me.

ANXIETY THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ARE ANTS
They can NEVER tell me the truth...
they WANT to trap and trick me...

So, ask yourself these questions every day.

WHY do we allow other people's opinions to sway us?

Why SHOULD other peoples' approval be so important to us? WHY should I stew, sweat, and drive myself crazy over what other people think and say?

Why should I beat up on myself and dwell in my own old ANTs quicksand for hours?

I need to rationally ask myself these questions each and every day, so that these questions will bounce into my mind when my thoughts start to go negative on me.

I want those "Why" questions to pop into my mind automatically, so that I can catch and then crunch those old automatic negative feelings and thoughts.

The more I question my irrational thoughts, the more they will have to go away.

EXPECTATIONS ARE KILLERS:
STAY AWAY AT ALL COSTS

We do not want to "set ourselves up" ahead of time for feelings of failure and defeat. We do not want to try to "force" or "pressure" anything into happening on a particular rigid time schedule.

For example: "Today, I will go to work, march into the bosses' office, and get that raise I deserve so much."

Maybe this is a true statement, but there are too many things *beyond your control* in this statement that have nothing to do with overcoming anxiety.

You are setting yourself up for a fall, and it is likely that you will have one.

Maybe your company no longer is giving anyone raises. They do like your work, and they do not want to lose you, but perhaps company policy dictates that no raises are being given for the next six months.

If you take this personally and allow yourself to feel defeated, you are sabotaging yourself. Don't do it. This is not something to be taken personally.

It is NOT a slap in the face to you. This would occur to anyone asking for a raise during this time.

Or, consider this irrational expectation: "Tonight I will go out and meet someone..."

This is a big, bold, unrealistic expectation. Why? Yes, you can go out and "meet" someone, but what you mean is you want to meet someone interesting that may turn out to be a friend or a lover.

The trouble is, again, *you do not have control* over WHO is going to be "out there". If you have some scruples, and are really looking for a quality person who shares your interests, you have limited your chances tremendously.

This particular expectation is usually a real killer: you expect way too much, and all of it is out of your control. You are setting yourself up for defeat if you carry this expectation out.

Instead, a healthier, productive outlook is to generally increase your social activities in areas in which you have a legitimate interest. Your interest in the activity should come *first*, and your focus should be on having a good time that evening - not on any of the people who might be there.

If your FOCUS is on slowly expanding your social activities - and not on other things - you have automatically increased your chances of reaching your goal.

Yes, this is another *paradox*. The more and more (and desperately and desperately) you seek something and "expect" something, the more and more elusive it becomes.

It can turn into a depressive nightmare, and your progress against social anxiety can be halted. So, FOCUS on moving ahead for *yourself*, healing *yourself*, expanding your social circle very gradually for *yourself*, and you will be moving in the right direction.

DON'T LET YOUR EXPECTATIONS GET THE BETTER OF YOU.

THE PROFOUND CONCEPT

One of the most PROFOUND CONCEPTS in psychology is this:

When you act (or do something),
your feelings (emotions) follow along behind.

If you wait around to *feel* good or to *feel* non-anxious, YOU'LL BE WAITING AROUND FOREVER.

Feelings *never* come before actions. Taking action always begins to create feelings and emotions.

For example, if a person is *depressed*, they must ACT by doing something.

First: get out of bed, do some small job around the house, eat, drive around in the car, or make a telephone call to someone who has a positive outlook. (This is just a first step, of course, and must be continued.)

The same is true for anxiety.

Small steps have to be made (that is, acted upon) before your FEELINGS will follow.

If you make a *small step every day* by exposing yourself to a small feared situation, FEELINGS (an "OK" feeling instead of anxiety) will gradually follow.

Anxiety is reduced only AFTER you act.

THE ACTION MUST ALWAYS COME *BEFORE* THE DESIRED RESULT.

That is, you won't FEEL better until you ACT first. Actions always must come first. Your feelings are a result of your actions. If your social anxiety makes you *avoid* things, then take one small step at not avoiding by going someplace new or doing something new, even if it is for just for five minutes.

The more you do this -- the more you take this little step -- the more your feelings will begin to change, and you will gradually feel less anxious when doing this new activity or going to this new place.

Yes, our steps must be slow and systematic. That is, if something is causing you social anxiety, then just going to it is a success.

If a meeting causes you anxiety, just going for a few minutes is a good first step. You don't have to stay for the whole thing. Stay as long as you can, but you have the option to leave whenever you wish.

You have made great progress just by going to this meeting.

You were not doing this last week or last month.

This is a new behavior on your part.

You stayed five minutes. That is five minutes longer than you've stayed before.

This is a great success in and of itself. You are moving in the right direction. You have gone to that meeting, stayed a few minutes, and survived. You are no longer avoiding the situation: you are handling it proactively, and doing it in the correct manner: step - by - step.

VICIOUS CIRCLES AND HOW TO SHRINK THEM

Anxiety is a multiplicity of vicious circles. Once you get trapped inside the circle, it is difficult to get out - if you don't know what to do.

Fear and anxiety cause *more* fear and anxiety. Anticipatory anxiety CAUSES the worst to happen. Fear and anxiety push us in, hold us back, and inhibit us.

The vicious circle grows as we pay attention to it, focus on it, and dwell on any of its parts.

When we pay attention to it, when we dwell on it, when we focus on it, the vicious circle only becomes stronger, more powerful, and dominant in our lives.

When we go along with the circle, we are giving it power... we are fueling it... we are reinforcing it... we are helping it to grow.

We need to move away from this vicious circle. But the only effective way to do this -- the only way that works -- is by doing it gently, nicely, peaceably, and calmly.

Because anxiety and fear (and the vicious circle they cause) are *paradoxes* - we must approach the solution to the circle in the appropriate way.

We do not want to fuel this vicious circle. We do not want to give it power. We do not want to help it grow and expand. We do not want it to control our lives.

Instead, by using the tools we are learning, we need to move away from the vicious circle by substituting other, more positive, activities in its place. That's why distractions and the therapy handouts are important right now.

That's why we will talk about paying attention to the good, the better, and the beautiful. That is why we will use any method available to us to stay away from the vicious circle.

Because any time we play the vicious circle's games, we only end up strengthening it.

Negative emotions fuel the vicious circle. Anger, frustration, irritation, beating yourself up, and being critical of yourself and others, all strengthen this vicious circle.

We must move away from this vicious circle.

The vicious circle can only be diminished by your calm side, your peaceful side, your "positive emotions" side.

We can and will grow this side.

But the less you play the vicious circle's games, the better, quicker, and easier it will be for you.

Anxiety is a Paradox:
Act Against Your Negative Feelings

This is one of the more difficult concepts to master, but all it really takes is getting started.

Once you get started, once you've made that first step, everything becomes easier and your positive emotions and positive feelings will follow afterwards. You will even be able to notice and feel the difference.

We tend to forget that our feelings do not tell us the truth. Stated a different way: our feelings are sometimes irrational, just like our thoughts.

We tend to realize that our thoughts can many times be irrational. Well, our FEELINGS can be irrational, too.

A good example of acting against your negative feelings is cognitive therapy for depression. When someone is clinically depressed, the *hardest thing* for them to do is to get up, get active, exercise, and move around.

Yet we all know the solution to depression... Get up, do something active, exercise, move around.

The solution to depression is NOT to stay in bed and dwell on those old negative ANTs thoughts. The solution to depression is to act against your negative, lying feelings.

If you ACT AGAINST these feelings of depression by getting up and doing something, you will feel better as the minutes go by.

Activity is the antidote to depression, but when we are depressed we don't want to be active. This is what makes it a paradox. You do something you don't FEEL like doing at the time, because you know if you do it, you will feel better.

Again, this is a real paradox and explains why both anxiety and depression are so difficult to overcome.

The solution is to do the thing you FEEL THE LEAST LIKE DOING.

Anyone who is depressed does not FEEL like getting up and becoming more active.

But it IS the solution. It works. Your feelings and your thoughts improve with activity.

It works because overcoming anxiety and depression are both paradoxes. If you are nervous and scared, the *hardest thing* to do is to get out there, go to work, be active, and keep up with your responsibilities.

But even though this is hard, what is the *solution* to anxiety? Getting out there, doing what we have to do, and facing our responsibilities.

This, of course, is another paradox. The solution is to do the thing you FEEL THE LEAST LIKE DOING.

Anxiety and depression have you trapped if you don't *act reasonably* against them. The emphasis here is on "reasonable" and rational.

Keep in mind we need to gently step-by-step work our way up the ladder. We don't choose an activity that is a highly anxiety-causing situation to start on.

Starting with an activity that frightens us to death is not reasonable or rational. We choose something that *does* cause a little anxiety and we do it because we know it will help us to get better, if we keep our thoughts rational about the activity we are doing.

So, we choose to act against our negative emotions by DOING something.

If you continue to act against your negative emotions you will continue to eat away at your social anxiety -- and the more dents you can kick in the vicious cycle -- the quicker your progress will occur.

Act against your negative emotions. Do not be passive.

Should We Be Living in a Hostile World?

If we are afraid of looking foolish, "fitting in", being judged and evaluated...

If we are afraid of having a high amount of anxiety...

If we don't think we can hide our anxious feelings and this makes us *more anxious*...

If we are so self-conscious we wear ourselves out with worry...

If our anticipatory anxiety is so strong that we dread future situations.. .

It's likely that we feel we're living in a "hostile world" where we just don't fit in.

Most of us with social anxiety feel like the cards are stacked against us. Even when we try, things don't seem to work out.

Of course, this is our old ANTs' thinking pattern still at work, still telling us that the past is the same thing as the present. But, now, we know it is not. Now we know we can change.

For example, we all know we will feel better and be healthier if we see the world as a loving, caring place... A place where we fit in and belong... A place where we are welcome and not always being judged...

Notice this is a much more rational thought than the "hostile world" thoughts we have been experiencing. It would be hard not to FEEL this is a hostile world, though, after all the negative experiences we've had, and after all the attempts that we've made toward getting better.

One way to move away from the "hostile world" view is to start paying attention to our positive emotions through our own thinking mind.

One of the best ways to do this is through any kind of relaxation or imaging technique. I can close my eyes, take a deep breath, and slowly say:

I am calm, relaxed, and feeling peaceful.

I see the beauty that is all around me. This picture is alive and vibrant in my mind and it is more beautiful than I can put into words.

I feel this gentle, kind, positive energy flowing in and around me. It is only a good and beautiful positive energy.

In this place and in this scene, I let go of all my tension and just relax.

I relax into the perfect peace and tranquillness of this place.

I feel very much at home. I feel like I belong here. This place is my place and it is a place where I fit in.

Cognitively, we need to reinterpret the world as being a good, caring, positive place for us. If we always feel "separate from" other people and the world around us, we will never get over our anxiety.

Instead, practice your calming and slowing down techniques, see your peaceful image and bring it up in your mind. After a while, the world will seem much better and brighter. Retreat to this special place every day to feel the peace and tranquillity it can bring you.

In addition, deliberately make it a point to remember the good events, the positive things that have happened to you in your life.

You may say you don't remember any, but if you search a little bit, usually you can find some events that were good and positive for you.

Think about these things and try to re-live them by running them through your mind.

Take it one step further and see your present life and your future life as becoming better. See yourself as happy and content. See yourself as the loving and caring person that you are, and notice that you are no longer worried and anxious.

Notice that you are enjoying life, interacting with other people that you like, and feeling very satisfied.

Just as we want to stop viewing the world as a hostile place, we also want to start seeing it more realistically.

There is good and bad in the world, and there are many shades of gray. But we have a CHOICE as to what we decide to pay attention to.

It is our DECISION to focus on the nice, beautiful things or it is our DECISION to focus on the dark, murky, depressing things.

In the past, we never knew we had this power. We never thought we had a choice. But, in actuality, we really do. Choose to focus on the good and nice things of the world.

The Good, the Better, and the Beautiful

Because many of us have been through such a painful and traumatic past, it is very healthy for us to dent the vicious cycle of social anxiety by learning to see the world in a better, more healthy and rational light:

Here are Simply Some Suggestions:

Sit down every day for a few minutes, allow yourself to relax with the method you prefer best, and image or imagine a beautiful place you have been. Notice all the colorful details you can see. Add the details in if this makes it stronger for you. Notice how beautiful, peaceful, and serene this place in your mind really is.

Any slowing down activity like this is helpful for us to do everyday. We need to stay still and quiet and dwell on the good, the better, and the beautiful. We need to fill our mind with healthy thoughts, with realistic thoughts, with positive thoughts. It's time we told ourselves the truth.

Go sit outside on the patio, in the backyard, at a park, or someplace else that is solitary and peaceful. FOCUS on the beautiful things you see around you: flowers, trees, desert scenery, the ocean, hills, mountains, lakes, fields, clouds, the sky.

Take a walk around the block or hike up a hill or mountain. This is great physical exercise, too, but make sure you *slow down to enjoy the beauty* that you see all around you. Specifically, FOCUS on all the beautiful, pretty, natural objects that cross your path.

While you drive around town, drive in "slow driving" mode (slow talk to yourself if necessary so that your driving is not tension-filled and stressful). Deliberately notice and FOCUS on the nice and beautiful things YOU see: beautiful yards, landscaping, an outstanding flowerbed, a unique business establishment, beautiful architecture, and all the natural physical beauty that surrounds your home.

Yes, in each and every case, the central message is to *stop and smell the roses*. This is a lesson all of us need to learn -- for our own enjoyment, peace, and tranquility.

The more we FOCUS ON the good, the better, and the beautiful, the more our minds turn toward realistic (more rational, positive) perceptions of the world.

In a sense, we all know there are good and bad things in the world, and there are many shades of gray.

THEREFORE, WE HAVE A DECISION TO MAKE:

A. We can decide to surrender to our "old" conditioning and continue to view the world as hostile and threatening, or

B. We can gradually open up to the world and deliberately focus on the nice, peaceful, gentle, beautiful things that really are all around us.

This is one more technique to help *change our thinking about ourselves* and the world. As we begin to see the world as more beautiful and manageable, we begin to see ourselves in a more peaceful and positive light as well.

You deserve to enjoy life and be happy.

You deserve to see yourself more realistically and rationally.

There is beauty in almost everything and the more and more you focus on the good, the better, and the beautiful, the more and more your perceptions of the world and of yourself will rationally change.

So, we are not fooling ourselves by focusing on the good, the better, and the beautiful. We already know there are other, more negative things in the world.

But we have spent much of our life over on the dark, depressing side, even though we never chose to do so. We don't want to spend the rest of our lives in this social anxiety trap.

So, I choose to see things differently. I *consciously* choose to focus on the nice things, the beautiful things, and the good things. Let someone else notice the depressing and negative things. I choose to see the goodness that the world has to offer. I choose to move toward health and peace. I have decided to spend my time on the good things, the positive things, and the really important things in life.

As I focus on the good, the beautiful, and the important things it not only makes me more open and happy, it allows me to see the world in a much healthier way.

STAY OUT OF THE TWILIGHT ZONE:
Move into the Peace Zone

1. When you are not feeling anxious, practice going into the "peace zone". Practice this at home, in the car, at work, when you are with other people, etc. Even though you are NOT feeling anxious at the present time, you can still choose to move into this "peace zone".

You do not have to be reading a handout to do this
You do not have to be listening to a tape
You do not have to be doing any relaxation technique

Just say to yourself, "*I choose to go into my peace zone now*", let out a long, deep breath, and focus on this peace for a moment or two. If you can visualize, visualize a peaceful place or places. Loosen up your muscles and relax.

As with everything, this won't work wonderfully the first time you use it, but the more you practice with it, the more you will have control over FEELING this peace and calmness.

2. When you ARE feeling anxious, tell yourself *you have decided to go into your peace zone*. Use the same steps as above and visualize if you can. As you already know, if the anxiety is already there, moving into your peace zone will be more difficult and take a longer period of time than if it wasn't there. But *you can do it* and FEEL it if you keep practicing at it and don't give up.

You want to be able to control your present anxiety by choosing to go into your "peace zone". Practicing this when you are not anxious makes it easier to handle when you are feeling anxious. This second method takes longer, of course. But it does happen, and you will be able to control and FEEL the peace if you gently keep going with it.

Remember, we want to FEEL the peace anywhere we are, and in any situation we find ourselves in.

So, tell yourself (choose) to go into this "peace zone". Sometimes it will work better than other times, but if you continue to do this, you are making progress whether you are aware of it or not.

The feelings will occur. They just take longer to occur in difficult situations. Choose to go in this direction. Choose to move into the peace zone.

YOU might see how "slow talk", "loosening up" and "the peace zone" all fit together. As you practice on all three methods, you will be growing a FEELING of calmness and peace.

This calmness and peace is yours; it is occurring in your brain, so accept it and enjoy it, and continue to let it blossom and grow.

Acceptance is an Active Experience

I accept who I am.
I am a good person who wants to grow and become better.
I accept what's happening in my life. I have decided not to fight it.

I know that if I accept it, instead of fight it, my negative emotions cannot grow. So, I accept, because acceptance makes my growth happen faster.

In acceptance there is peace and harmony. I am in the flow, moving in the direction I know is best for me. Fighting, battling, and struggling make my anxieties expand and explode.

So, for now, I accept, because acceptance - true acceptance - shrinks anxiety. I am moving out and ahead naturally. My attention is on the present. My focus is on the good and positive things that are happening to me today.

My mind moves in any direction that I allow it to move. It can move toward worry -- or it can move toward peace. I deliberately choose to move toward peace. Active acceptance helps me move toward peace.

I am in the flow of the moment when I accept.
I know that when I am in the flow I am moving in a positive direction. My life unfolds neatly and naturally when I am in this peaceful flow. As I stay focused in the present, I learn to actively accept more easily.

Active acceptance unleashes a great power.

I accept the peace, the tranquillity, and the flow.
I accept the present moment and the joys that are in it.
I accept that this flow is leading me in the right direction.
I sit back, loosen up, and let go.
I accept this peaceful flow in my life and choose to let it do its work.

The peace inside this flow is very strong.
I can focus on my peace and feel it flow through me.
It is an energizing, motivating, yet tranquil flow.
It helps me to accept and to live in the present moment.

All my "old" worries are in the past.
They are gone. They are over.

I am living in the present. I can accept and be in the flow.
The flow brings peace, power, and strength.
I accept this peace, power and strength.

There is no battle here.
There is no struggle here.
There is no fighting here.
Instead, I accept my peace and allow it to flow through me.

I have decided to move forward.
The old things in my past are in my past.
They are old lies, dead as doornails.
I will not pick them up again.

I will not go back to the trash dump and play around in the filth.
So, I accept my peace, my tranquillity, and the flow that it brings.
I am not only OK, I feel confident, calm, and powerful.
My power and my confidence comes from my peace.

My peace grows stronger every day.
My focus is now on acceptance, on today, on my flow.

My attention is toward the flow of the present moment.
When I am in this flow, I feel peace and power. I accept this peace naturally.

This peace is a gift.
I do not have to earn it. I do not have to plead for it. It is a gift.

I simply accept it.
It is mine.
It is mine today - right now this very moment.
In my peace, I feel the flow moving me onward and upward.
I accept this and flow along naturally with it.

This peace and this flow are mine.
They have always been mine and I accept them.

Gone are the days of questioning, fighting, battling, and struggling.
Instead, I accept and I grow.
It is simply a fact. But a very strong and powerful fact.
I accept.

As a result, my whole life is about to change.

Seeing The Present

This is an emotional brain, "peace zone" handout

We have the power to choose and to live our own realities. Because we have free will, we can CHOOSE, PICK OPTIONS, STAY WHERE WE ARE, or even LIMIT OURSELVES.

We have control of all of our own choices, because they are all internal. All of them exist inside our own minds.

I can CHOOSE to be free of the past.
I can CHOOSE to be free of my old limitations.
I can CHOOSE to be myself, a new self, a better self, a self not tied down to any feeling or emotion from my past.

I am not limited my by past, unless I choose to let it limit me.

Instead, I see myself moving ahead and moving forward. I see myself climbing the stairs of the present moment. I see each step as a movement toward staying in the present moment.

I see myself growing more happy and content with each step that I take.

The picture in my mind is peaceful and serene. It is also an image of truth and reality.

As I choose to live in the present moment, I do not need to drag along the past behind me.

The past is gone, I release it, and it is no longer a part of me.

I see it floating away, disappearing into the clouds, and setting my spirit and my self entirely free.

I am always free as I release the past, the old, the restrictions and limitations that try to tie me down.

But they are not successful.

I CHOOSE to live in the present moment and I choose this new me in this new day in the new life I am creating for myself.

I close my eyes and see the present. The present is always free and boundless.

I am strong in the present. I am healthy in the present. My strength is in the present moment.

The present is my life. It does no good to think about the past or the future because they do not exist.

So, my focus is on now - today - this very moment. My focus is on the present. I can see myself, hands extended, accepting today and the present moment.

The present moment is my moment. It belongs to me.

I see myself accepting the present.

I reject the impossibilities of the past or the fears of the future.

In the present, these thoughts do not exist. In my present, I am always free.

I can always live in the present moment. I do not need to go back to the past. I do not need to visit the future. I make my choice to live happy and content in my present moment.

The present always exists and I choose to live in the truth. The present is my reality and I choose the contentment, strength, and confidence of today.

As I focus more steadily on the present moment, I grow stronger and more at peace. The calmness overtakes me and I accept and enjoy it.

As my attention stays in the present, my peace, my strength, and my power increase.

There is no going back for me. The victory is in the present. The victory is in my peace. I choose my peace. I choose my calmness.

I choose to live in the present, where I can be happy and calm.

Determined Slow Talk

At this point, we want to combine three (3) of our previous handout concepts into ONE comprehensive strategy to make our new beliefs and actions stronger.

Here we are working on the feelings that accompany our peaceful, quiet determination. Inside this relaxation and peace are the other positive emotions: confidence, security, strength, power, assertiveness.

We want to grow those positive emotions until they are blooming boldly and brightly. What we are doing is solidifying those feelings into your emotional brain.

This is how "Determined Slow Talk" works:

1. First, we take slow talk and move it down even slower so that we can literally FEEL the determination, the strength, and the seriousness.
2. Then we use the DETERMINATION FACTOR to synergize these positive, quiet, peaceful, confident feelings of strength and power. It is easier to feel the determination and strength when you are using determined slow talk. (Again, notice that it's the *feeling* we're going after here.)
3. Third, we use the handout and/or statements you are working on and use "Determined Slow Talk" to sink them down to that emotional area of your brain where things become foundational, set it stone, automatic, and natural.

Determined slow talk has the power to allow you to FEEL the confidence, the strength, and the power of your new thoughts and behavior.

Remember, it is important that the statements, strategies, and beliefs become FEELINGS and these FEELINGS are rooted in your determination, your peace, your inner resources.

When you start to feel these things (even if it is only briefly) instead of just saying them, move on over into "determined slow talk" - because you are ready for your new thoughts to become permanently rooted in your brain... and for you to FEEL the difference!

AT THE CROSSROADS

This is an emotional brain, "peace zone" handout

As I stand at the crossroads,
Dozens of pathways lie before my eyes, each leading in a different
direction.

I am confused and don't know which pathway to take.

At first, it seems overwhelming because there are so many choices I can
make, and all these choices just make it worse.

What if I make the wrong choice? What if my decision leads me down the
wrong road? What if I mess up my life?

But then I catch myself. I know it can't be that difficult. Worry,
doubt, and confusion are not going to allow me to choose "my" pathway.

As I calm down and begin to feel a peace deep inside of me, my vision
slowly changes.

I still see the pathways and the many roads that lie before me, but
they don't look the same to me anymore somehow. Something is different.

Some of the pathways have ugly weeds growing around them, and they
narrow down into darker and darker lanes.

I don't feel right about those roads.

Other roads are clearer and I can see farther, but they don't feel
right to me either. I am not drawn to them. They do not make me feel
the peace. Something, somewhere is out of focus, out of place.

And then -- I catch myself again. This is good, I think.
I close my eyes, take a very deep breath, and accept the peace and the
direction that is already there.

It is simply a matter of acceptance. I will accept the peace, the
strength, and the confidence inside me.

As my eyes slowly open again, the pathways in front of me look very different than they did before.

I see several pathways that look pleasant, good, and positive.

Somehow, I know the old, ugly pathways are still there, but I'm not seeing them anymore. I am remaining calm... I am at peace.

But still, for a fleeting second, the old thoughts come back: "What if I make the wrong decision?"

Quickly and deliberately, I stop dead in my tracks. I know how to get in tune with my inner harmony and my inner peace.

So, I accept and allow my peace to flow over me. I see myself covered over completely in this calm, refreshing feeling.

As I open my eyes again, the pathways in front of me unfold further, but one of them is shining and stands out from the rest. This road feels right to me. It feels better, more natural, and more safe.

And, so I slowly step into this pathway, always aware of the fact that I can change my mind or take another path if I so choose.

I am never trapped when I walk down this kind of pathway.

Instead, the skies open up above me and the dawn of this beautiful brightness allows my vision to enlarge and expand.

As I walk farther along my pathway, I begin to feel even better. Bright sparks of blue flicker along the skyline above me and I feel safe and secure.

The farther I travel, the more serene and calming my path becomes.

My mind is now more alert and clear. I hear beautiful sounds and see beautiful sights. Everything opens up for me very naturally.

I accept this pathway because I choose to. I know and feel that it is right way for me. It is my pathway and it is leading me forward, naturally and gently, into even better lands.

The Paradox of the Rain

They say that into every life some rain must fall...
What they say is true, but they never say that rain can be seen as
either a blessing or a curse, and it is up to me to determine which way
I will see it.

Rain is relaxing, soothing, invigorating, and energizing, and it sets
the cycle of growth in motion.
There can be no growth without the rain.
So even though the rain may be unpleasant for a while, it is never my
enemy. It is always my friend.

I am my own worst enemy if I view the rain as being a curse.

In reality, the rain is not a curse. It is a blessing.
It is necessary for my growth... a healthy, invigorating, motivating
growth and healing.

The paradox of the rain is that, in order for it to be a blessing, I
must recognize and accept it as a blessing.

The rain may be uncomfortable at times, but it is also preparing me for
the growth to come.

The rain may be unpleasant, but eventually its drops flow down into the
"earth" to produce a beautiful "crop".

It all depends on the way I choose to see it.

The way I choose to see it affects my whole attitude and my mood.
Accepting the rain for the blessing it will become allows my progress
in the present to proceed.

Rain always brings growth. It always brings healing.
I am guaranteed of that.

The paradox is that for the rain to bring growth and healing, I must
accept it.

As I accept it, my attitude and perspective begin to change.

Rain brings wonderful changes if it is allowed to accomplish its purpose.

So many people curse the rain and grow bitter against it. These are the people who never overcome their problems and never grow in their lives.

The flower accepts the storm because it knows it will be watered.

If the flower is watered, it will grow and blossom into something very vibrant and beautiful.

My growth and blossoming is at hand. I accept it now and gladly choose to move forward.

A "Balance Sheet" for Facing Anxiety

ONE EXTREME

Complete Avoidance <----->

ANOTHER EXTREME

Flooding yourself

Notice the two extremes above. On the one side, completely AVOIDING activities and situations only makes you more fearful and anxious. The more we consistently avoid situations, the worse our social anxiety becomes.

On the other side, however, FLOODING yourself with highly anxiety-producing activities does not work in alleviating social anxiety either -- (instead it typically reinforces our feelings of inadequacy, and makes us even more anxious than we already are).

The SOLUTION to this dilemma is to:

1. Start behavioral therapy (which is what you DO in the real world) -- slowly
2. As you begin, plan to do something that is only slightly anxiety producing
3. Imagine the scene in your mind ahead of time. See yourself as handling the situation with calmness, relaxation, and peace.
4. Use the "peace zone" concept we discussed (or a real-world relaxation technique, such as "Loosening Up") to calm yourself down.
5. Use your rational statement before you do a behavioral experiment. For example, say to yourself, *"Saying hello to a stranger was something that used to cause me anxiety in the past. Things are a little easier now and I think that it may not be that big of a deal."* Here you are turning the tables on the ANTs by going neutral.
6. Repeat the "slowing down" or "peace zone" feeling, and your rational statement concerning the event several times, but keep an external focus. Be doing something. For example, think about an interesting thing coming up later in the day, or distract yourself by doing something engaging and fun.
7. Use any rational self-statement to begin changing your thought processes. Go neutral to start with and use all the "maybe's"

The Social Anxiety Institute, Inc. Copyright © 2000-2056.
This material may not be reproduced or redistributed in any fashion.

and "possibly's" that you wish. You are still challenging and breaking up your old beliefs when you turn the tables on the ANTs.

8. When you are cognitively prepared, go ahead with your experiment, one step at a time, but remember to start slowly, at the bottom of your anxiety hierarchy, with an activity that only causes a small amount of anxiety.

9. Expect some anxiety, but continue to use any strategy that lessens it.

10. Focus on the external situation. What is someone saying to you? Listen to them and their words as best you can. You are in your peace zone and there is no need to focus internally on yourself. Focus outwardly on what is happening in front of you.

11. If you find the anxiety is too strong, you have done all you can for the moment, so feel free to leave the situation.

12. Notice: YOU ARE SUCCESSFUL BECAUSE YOU TRIED, regardless of how you interpret this experiment. We must learn to give ourselves credit, and not beat ourselves up, when we stand up to an anxiety situation and actually begin working against it.

13. Congratulate yourself for carrying out this experiment. The fact that you TRIED is a victory in and of itself. This is something you were not doing last week. You are doing it this week. That is a small step and it is progress, and you did it. That is all that's important. This is a fact and it is rational. You did what you needed to do and you survived.

14. When you feel ready, move up to a SLIGHTLY more anxiety-producing situation. That is, move your anxiety hierarchy up a little bit. The situation will cause you to be a little nervous, but should not cause a high amount of anxiety.

15. If you find the situation too anxiety-producing, move down on your hierarchy. At first, it may be tricky to know where you fit on the "hierarchy", so it is fine to trial-and-error this. Regardless, however, this is another victory, not a defeat. Again, any time you TRY something, you must learn to see this as a victory. There is no way you can fail if you keep trying. The only way you can fail is if you give up and quit.

So, START SLOWLY, but MAKE A START.

MOVE very gradually into to a situation you have been avoiding.

The Power of "Acting"
(This is a big paradox - but it always works)

1. Taking control of the situation: (or "The Good Old Boy / Good Old Girl Routine"):

Act a little more friendly when you can. Be proactive and say hello to other people first. Smile more. Greet people in an assured voice rather than a hesitant one. For example, "Hey there, John!", "Here he comes...", "Did you survive the evening?", "OK, so how was the date?"

Speak a little more loudly than you usually do, but slow talk it - a "laid back" voice, approach, and attitude.

Fake it if you need to at first: the more you practice this, the less fake it becomes and the more genuine and authentic it will feel. Remember the "Profound Concept": We need to DO these things first, BEFORE we start to feel "natural" about them.

2. Look at it like you are "playing a part", or you are putting on an act:

This is not a fake or an artificial thing -- even though you don't feel "natural" about it at first. Remember when you begin "acting" in a certain way, it becomes easier and more natural, so that finally it is no longer acting at all - it is simply a normal, natural behavior on your part.

Go back and review "The Profound Concept": if you've forgotten this. The Profound Concept tells us that if we *act first*, then our *feelings will follow along behind*. We can't wait for our feelings to change before we act. We have to act first, even when we don't feel like it, and. continue to act until our feelings change. Remember, you have many cognitive strategies and statements that will help you make faster progress with the rational feelings *after* you act.

3. You can see your actions as "Pretending":

Use the pretending metaphor if you like it better than "acting" or "faking" it. These three ways of putting it are all the same thing, but go with the concept that is more practical to you. The Profound

Concept applies to all three. Act first, and then your feelings will follow.

4. HOW DO I ACTUALLY PUT THIS INTO PLACE?

If I'm anxious about running into people and "having" to talk to them, -- I should say "hello" to them first, smile, and continue walking on. Notice that if you continue walking, you will not have to engage in - conversation with them. So, when you first start, keep up your pace.

TAKE CONTROL. SAY HELLO FIRST. YOU WILL FIND THIS EASIER. It is easier because you no longer have to wait around, be hesitant, and feel worried about what they will say or not say. Instead of all this internal focusing and worrying - which we want to stay away from we should focus externally on the person, say "Hi", "Hello", "How are you?" or any kind of greeting *first*, and then they will be responding to us.

We are staying more externally-oriented this way and we do not need to start paying attention to our internal thoughts and feelings. This keeps us away from the temptation to worry and second-guess our responses.

If we *act first*, if we become "proactive", then we will feel more in control of the situation, and our anxiety will not be able to rise.

For example, if you greet someone first, you are taking the initiative and being proactive. It puts you where you want to be, and also has the added benefits of making you appear more friendly, less hesitant, less stand-offish, and more social. It would be hard for someone to feel you were unfriendly if you said "Hello" to them first.

The more you stay proactive, the more confident you will feel about taking the initiative. Then, when you decide to move up to your next step, which may be carrying on a very short conversation with another person, you will be acting AND feeling better about your social self.

Here is another example: If I am hesitant and tentative when meeting other people, or talking to them on the phone, I need to act more assured, more positive, and more in charge. Yes, this is another paradox, but we need to actually put it into place. So, FAKE IT. ACT CONFIDENTLY WHETHER YOU FEEL LIKE IT OR NOT.

When you ACT more confidently, people will respond to you in a much better way.

If I am speaking too softly and need to be a little louder, SPEAK UP, ADD SOME TIMBRE to your voice, and KEEP THIS LEVEL UP. Act upon it until it becomes natural.

In fact, just speaking louder will make you feel more confident and self-assured. Yes, I realize you don't believe this yet, but it is a paradox, and when you take that step and talk a little louder, it will make you feel less anxious and more confident.

(You can practice on all these things at home first and then in the behavioral group that you hopefully have access to. These, in fact, would be *good group activities* for many of us at this point.)

IN SOCIAL SITUATIONS: If I'm alone and feeling uncomfortable, anxious, and nervous -- feeling like I'm "strange" or the center of attention - Look over at another person who is alone and start a conversation.

Act first. Take the initiative. Be proactive. Don't fall victim to the anxiety monster.

By acting first, you will feel more in control. You will be seen as friendly. No longer do you need to be hesitant.

Stop the thinking... start the doing.

General Anxiety Hierarchy

10. Ultimate Goal:

- _____
9. _____
8. _____
7. _____
6. _____
5. _____
4. _____
3. _____
2. _____
1. _____

We start at the bottom of the hierarchy (at #1) and work up at our own pace. It is good to repeat a step or a stage - remember, because you went ahead and DID what you wanted to do, you were SUCCESSFUL.

Be rational and truthful with yourself.

Be nice to yourself for a change and pat yourself on the back.

Behavioral Group Activities
(ideas for your hierarchy)

Behavioral Therapy Group Activities:

Scripting
General Group Conversations
Circle of Death introductions - formal and informal
Circle of Death "call on you" questions
Mingling, conversations, small talk, "pass the conversation",
"walking into a conversation", ending a conversation,
"conversing across the room", the house shout
Simon Says, "pillow talk",
Impromptu skits
Impromptu presentations / talks
Karaoke / deliberately doing something foolish in public
Controversy Conversations / Stating an Opinion

Individual Activities:

Reading to the group
Presentations
Impromptu talks
Speeches
Being in charge (of a group, a meeting, a committee, etc.)
The Stare Chair, the stand stare, etc.
Taking impromptu questions
Deliberately doing something foolish in public
Being the center of attention: "birthday parties"
Paradoxical strategies (for writing difficulties)

Role-plays:

Assertion
Saying "no" to other people
Expressing an opinion
The Job Interview
Being rejected

Use of microphone, videotaping
Experiments outside SAI - in the "real" world

Ways to Decrease Self-Consciousness

If it feels like people are *watching* you, or that you are on *display*, test this out by using the

"Look-Around Technique":

Don't add to your inhibitions by keeping your gaze fixed in one direction. Instead, slowly and naturally, look around your environment to see how many people are actually staring back at you with judgment in their eyes.

As you look around *slowly*, gradually move other parts of your body as well. For example, shift from one foot to the other, reach out for a magazine with your hand, scratch your face, or clear your throat. What you will observe from watching other people will surprise you -- and will help you loosen up your inhibitions.

Do not do this only one time. The "Look around technique" needs to be done repeatedly, and in different situations and circumstances. As you do this, however, your perceptions will begin to change, and your inhibited feelings will begin to decrease.

Always plan your behavioral exercises and experiments slowly, and start at the bottom of your hierarchy. Work up as the rung you are on becomes easy or no longer challenging. But keep moving forward every day and keep moving up step by step.

Any time you have the chance to do something that you normally wouldn't do -- in fact something that you think right now would make you appear foolish -- take the chance and try out the situation.

For example, one way to slowly and gradually start this hierarchy is by deliberately clearing your voice in a room full of people... if this is a behavior you feel uncomfortable doing because of your social anxiety. By deliberately clearing your voice, and then observing peoples' responses, you will find that no one is really noticing you at all, and this will help lower your self-consciousness and inhibitions.

Other steps in this hierarchy may include speaking a little louder than you usually do when it is appropriate, talking a little longer to people

that you know, going out of your way to welcome a new person at work or in a group, sitting in a slightly different way that you have never felt comfortable about before, and stretching your body and yawning when it is appropriate.

All of these behavioral exercises have the power to begin to lower your self-consciousness and inhibition.

Pick the ones that fit logically on your hierarchy, add things that fit in your life that I didn't mention, and put them in order in terms of difficulty for your hierarchy.

Then, start at the bottom, and gradually move up - step by step. By doing these activities every day, you will soon *prove to yourself* that others are not really noticing you or judging you like you think they are.

Your self-consciousness will decrease as you look around and notice this.

Individual Hierarchy Suggestions

Here are some suggestions for individual "experiments":

1. Choose something you enjoyed while you were at a restaurant, such as the service, the food, or the atmosphere, and deliberately find a waiter / waitress, manager, owner, or chef and convey your compliments to them.
2. Borrow a small item from a neighbor or co-worker.
3. Ask someone for directions on how to get someplace you're going, even though you know perfectly well how to get there.
4. When you receive a call from a salesperson at home, say "No thank you" and then hang up. Do not wait for their response and do not let them keep talking. As you grow stronger with this, just hang up the phone when a salesperson calls and interrupts you.
5. Say something positive about yourself to someone else, in context.
6. An eye contact exercise: Make direct eye contact with a person on television, perhaps someone who is lecturing or reading the news to you. A step up would be to maintain short eye contact with people you meet in the real world at work, school, social events, or just walking down the street. A second or two of eye contact is quite normal. Practice on this until you feel comfortable in doing it.

There are many other individual behavioral exercises we could practice, and I imagine that you have already thought up some of your own. Work on one or two of these -- and more if you can -- this week.

More Individual Hierarchy Suggestions

Here are some additional behavioral exercises that you can begin doing by yourself, without a group, right where you are. Add them to last week's list and work on the ones that you know are going to help you.

1. Call a number on the telephone, and when your party answers, ask if you can speak to Mrs. Franklin. If you are told there is no Mrs. Franklin or that you have the wrong number, say "thank you" or "I'm sorry" and hang up. That was really no big deal - people call all the time and get wrong numbers. If you reach someone who is nasty or abrupt with you, remember they are in a bad mood, but they can't put you in a bad mood unless you let them. So what if someone hangs up on you... that is a normal human thing to do and it is definitely not personal. Just laugh, accept it, and go on.
2. When you're at work, in class, or at a social gathering, look for someone who is obviously alone, and go up and initiate a conversation with them. They will be grateful to you for taking the initiative and making them feel less out of place.
3. Start a conversation with a stranger at the grocery store that is limited to questions about the food and food products. (In context, you can do this at any type of store.)
4. Smile, establish two seconds of eye contact, and say "hello" to a stranger as you meet them in public, and continue walking.
5. While you're in your car, turn on the radio and sing along to songs that you know. Particularly, sing when you are stopped at a traffic light and another car is beside you.
6. When you are driving outside of your own neighborhood, wave at a stranger in their yard like you know them.

7. Return something you purchased that doesn't work or doesn't fit -- instead of just taking the loss.

8. Make it a point to wave at and acknowledge your neighbors FIRST when you see them outside. This is the beginning step. When you are feeling more comfortable, talk briefly with one of your neighbors, and gradually increase the number of neighbors and time spent talking.

9. Go in to a bookstore, find the section of books that you enjoy, and see if there is a person there reading a book. If so, ask them a question about the book or the subject matter, even if you know the answer already. You'll find that most people respond pleasantly and you will have many positive short conversations.

It is a good idea to list out on a piece of paper the behavioral assignments you are working on. They should be organized and you should do something every day. What you do and how fast you move is up to you and your ability.

The main point is to work on these behavioral activities and *do* them.

You will find that they are easier to do than they sound like as you listen to me explain them. But get going and don't let anything hold you back. Even if you have a bad day, realize that everyone has bad days and you do not need to beat yourself up over it. You're a human being and you are entitled to bad days as well as good. It's all a part of life.

LETTING GO of the NEGATIVE PAST:
EMBRACING THE POSITIVE AND HEALING FUTURE

I accept myself for who I am.

I have many good, creative talents I can use to help others and myself. That old, emotional baggage from the past can only drag me down, so I reject it.

I choose to live in the moment and be happy and content. When I am happy in the present moment, it guarantees that my future will be happy.

I give up and set free all the negativity of the past, no matter how far down in my brain it is buried.

I accept myself for who I am, knowing that I am walking the road to becoming healthier.

Any thought, memory, or experience in the past that is weighing my brain down today and causing my progress to stall -- I let it go, I set it free, I give it up. I give up anything that is buried in my past that makes me unhappy today.

I take a deep breath, loosen up my muscles, feel the calmness and peace, and set free all the negative emotions of the past. I release the negative feelings that I repressed in the past. I can see they only harm me.

I release them and let them go. I watch as they disappear completely into the air...

Negative feelings and emotions can only weigh me down and cause me problems. So I choose to move forward. I choose to move forward with a clear mind.

I release all the negative emotion of the past and I breathe in the positive power of my peacefulness. I accept this peace. I accept my calmness.

I am free from the shame, embarrassment, and guilt of the past. I fully release those negative emotions and set them free. I allow my mind to release them naturally.

I choose to move forward into my peace, my health, and my clarity of thought. As I close my eyes, I can see my old negative feelings rise above me and disappear into the air.

No longer does shame, embarrassment or guilt bind me. No longer am I a captive of these negative emotions. All they do is hold me back, make me miserable, and make my thoughts confused and irrational.

I let these negative emotions from the past go. My mind is releasing them now this very moment. As I set them free, my mind feels more and more at peace.

I choose peace, tranquility, understanding, and confidence. I choose to grow strong and healthy. I let go of the shackles that have held me down for so very long. I accept the good, the better, and the beautiful. I accept the rational truth that lies before me.

And so, I turn away from the old responses of the past, and again, I set them free. All the old negative emotions have no choice - they MUST go away. They cannot co-exist in my mind with peace and strength and confidence.

Shame, guilt, embarrassment, and feelings of failure are nothing more than ways to hold me back. I set them free. I release them. I let them go. I accept myself and my healing. I allow my mind to work in a positive manner, for my good, and for my health.

My strength comes now, in the present, as I release all my old negative emotions, and deliberately allow my mind to be saturated with rational, realistic, and healthy emotions.

As I fix my gaze toward health, I begin to feel peace, strength, confidence, power, and clarity. This feeling of peace and security is already inside me, and it will grow with time.

I am in touch with my peace, my calmness, and my tranquility. Inside my peace, there is healing and power. I accept these as part of my new life. No old, negative emotion can stand in my way. I only accept this peace, power, confidence, and healing. These emotions are much more powerful than anything from my past.

Inside my peace, I can find myself. I can find my purpose in life. I can find answers to all of my questions. Inside my quietness and my peace, I can find my new life.

So I accept them: Peace, power, calmness, strength, clarity of mind, and purpose. They are mine.

The Social Anxiety Institute, Inc. Copyright © 2000-2056,
This material may not be reproduced or redistributed in any fashion.
Thomas A. Richards, Ph.D., Director

WHAT TO DO WHEN THE ANTS COME CRAWLING

Are you depressed?

Get up, get more active, refuse to give in to ANTs fatigue, break the negative thinking cycle up by using distractions, slow talk, singing, Determined Slow Talk. Look up those handouts and do something.

Do NOT accept this ANTs depression - break the cycle.

If you break the cycle enough times, depression has to shrink and cannot be as strong.

ACT AGAINST your negative feelings.

Feel down and defeated? Remember the ANTs thoughts and feelings WANT to make you feel this way. They are deliberately trying to sabotage you.

Realize this and *refuse* to let them.

Get out your ANTS handout, the Anxiety Monster handout, decide to do some exercising, jogging, walking, or dancing.

Get busy and do something - your thoughts and feelings of defeat will disappear.

Feel like you're treading water,
that you're not making any progress?

Recognize this as a big, big ANTs lie. You *have* made progress (a lot of it) or you wouldn't be reading this handout... you would have already given up. BUT you *didn't*.

You made it this far and you can refuse to let the ANTs thoughts / feelings take control.

You have control over your own thoughts and feelings. Remind yourself of the truth -- and reject and ignore those OLD lies.

Read over the ANTS handout, the "Deserving Statements", and the "Moving in a Positive Direction statements". Listen to the Deserving Statements recording, which is on tape #19 side A.

Then, talk to yourself in Determined Slow Talk and say,

"I am moving ahead and that is just a FACT. I don't care what lies the ANTS are trying to make me think and feel. I know the truth and it is a fact. I turn my back on those lying ANTs and I'm going to move on..."

We always have a CHOICE of what we decide to run through our mind. If we're ruminating, dwelling on the past (which is already gone), torturing ourselves with negative, obsessive, scary thoughts, we are feeding the vicious cycle of ANTs feelings/thoughts.

STOP IT!

You have control. Exert this control using the method, technique, and / or strategy, which is strongest for you at this time.

Throw a few strategies together and sing at the same time.

Do anything except give in to ANTs thinking. ANTs can never tell the truth. They are always liars. They are an amalgamation of your old thinking.

Don't go down that road - don't head back down that nasty pathway.

TURN YOUR BACK on those old pathways and move forward with peaceful determination.

Decide to choose peace, calmness, clarity, strength, power, and truth. Do NOT believe lying ANTs thoughts or feelings.

Believe in the truth - believe in your present and in your future. ANTs die when you don't pay attention to them. Kill a few every day and they can't keep springing back to life.

Stay Away from Perfectionism and Pressure

I don't need to be perfect. I won't expect that of myself any longer. No one can be perfect, and besides, there is no "perfect" way of doing anything.

If I'm not doing something as well as I'd like, I will rationally and calmly accept it. By trying harder and pressuring myself to do more things in a precise and perfect way, I only make myself more miserable, and I will actually hurt my performance.

I will do what I need to do, and realize there is no perfect way to do it. I accept this calmly even if I have anxiety or if I don't understand something. There is no need to be perfect. I won't expect that of myself any longer.

There is pressure in a situation if I put it on myself. Nothing is that important. It's all small stuff.

If others disapprove -- who cares? There is no pressure because I no longer allow it. There is no pressure because there is nothing I have to do in a given situation.

I can do whatever I want. I can accept it if someone judges me to be nervous, therefore there is no pressure. There is no need to be perfect - no precise way to do things. Since there is not a precise way to do things, there is no pressure.

There is no pressure because I can do whatever I want. There is nothing I have to do. There is no exact right thing to do. There is no pressure because I can handle the consequences of my actions.

There is no pressure because other people's opinions do not determine how I feel about myself -- or whether I am a worthy human being.

There is no pressure because I don't have to be perfect. I won't expect that of myself any longer.

I put a great deal of pressure on myself when I analyze every situation for the perfect way to do it. But, I remember: Analysis = paralysis.

When I feel pressured, I'll stop the thinking and start the doing. There is no universally perfect way of doing anything, so whatever I do will be acceptable.

If after doing something, I think I could have done a better job, I'm just going to say to myself, *"Well, I learned something here, and this knowledge will help me do a better job next time. It's OK. I don't need to be perfect. I am satisfied with my efforts."*

My self esteem is not determined by how I perform at a certain task -- or whether others judge me as being intelligent, competent, interesting or good-looking.

There is no pressure because I accept it when someone judges me to be anxious. If someone judges me as a failure in a certain regard, I accept this too, because I don't need their approval to sustain my self esteem.

My opinion concerning the value of my work is more important than others' opinions. My belief about whether my attitude is good is more important than anyone else's. My comfort with how I carry myself and what I do is more important than anyone else's.

And there is no pressure because as a human being I have the right not to justify to others what I do.

Even when the "perfectionism" monster hits, this doesn't mean that I am less valuable as a person or that I should feel ashamed.

I have some more progress to make but I will keep using the methods I am learning with cool, calm, confident, peaceful determination. I will do things for my own enjoyment and growth and not for other people.

Thus there is no pressure, because if other people look down on my performance, looks, or the way I conduct myself, I can still be happy because I am doing things for my own personal satisfaction, not for other people's.

I have the right as a human being to say, "I don't know", "I'm not good at this task", "no" or "I don't care".

I'm going to avoid using words like "should", "must", "can't" and "have to" because they make situations very rigid and pressuring. I will do whatever makes me happy.

The more I try to pressure myself into doing a perfect job, the more problems I cause for myself and paradoxically the more my performance suffers.

THE PERFECTIONISM PIT

Seeking perfection only leads to frustration and defeat.

Why should I expect perfection? Why should I set myself up for frustration and defeat?

Instead, I will do my best, and then move on. I can never make anything "perfect". My best is good enough.

I can do the best I can. That is all I can ever do -- and it is always enough.

If I search for perfection, I will never find it. It will always elude me. I will be trapped in anxiety and defeat.

If I try to be perfect, the ANTs thoughts and feelings will cause me stress, doubt, confusion and turmoil.

I choose to slow down, reach my peace zone, get clarity of mind and do what I can do.

That is always good enough. I don't need to push for the impossible. I will do my best and my best is good enough.

Human beings are never "perfect". It is a futile, impossible task to even attempt. All I can do is my best -- and my best is good enough.

As I live in my peace zone, I realize that my mind can be clear, I can do what I need to do, and *then I can move forward*.

I move on and I move forward because I did what I could. I did my best under the circumstances. That is more than good enough.

I make mistakes like everyone else. It's no big deal. It proves that I'm human. It does no good to try to be Superman.

The more I pressure myself into doing a perfect job, the more problems I cause for myself.

So, I deliberately slow down, relax, calm myself and accept the peace and strength that belongs to me.

Perfectionism leads to negative, anxious thoughts and emotions. Trying to be perfect is a big ANT. It is doomed to failure and it will make me an unhappy person.

Instead, I choose to go with the truth. I choose reality. I can do what I can do. And that is enough.

I can gently, nicely, and peaceably move on.
I am not perfect. No one is perfect. It does no good to try.

I clear out my mind, settle myself down, and do what I am capable of doing. There is strength and power in this peace.

If I do what I am capable of doing, that is enough, and I can move on. Trying to be the best at something is competitive, comparative, and fuels ANTs thinking.

I choose the path of acceptance and calmness. By choosing this pathway, I feel better, get more quality work done, and am able to move on and move forward.

My peace and my calmness are stronger than my old perfectionism.

I am a human being and I can't expect and seek after perfection.

I can *accept* peace, calmness, and strength. They allow me to do what needs to be done in a time-efficient manner. I deliberately reject the striving, pressuring feelings. I deliberately accept my calmness, my peace, and my progress.

I am moving ahead in the right manner. I accept my strengths and limitations.

I am moving ahead into my peace zone.

I will get more done by living in my peace and my strength.

I accept this positive emotion and I move on in calmness and in confidence.

I am whole.

HAVE A RATIONAL TALK
with yourself EVERY DAY

Sit down, when you are alone, and talk to yourself rationally.

Use slow talk to calm yourself down and keep the emotions away, so that the rational thoughts (the things that we know are true) are in the forefront.

We are not going to be swayed by negative emotions, like anxiety. We are going to be rational -- We are going to pay attention to the truth.

Remind and congratulate yourself for all the things you are doing to get better. This is rational talk; it is just a fact. The more you slow yourself down, and become rational, the more clear everything becomes to you.

Because feelings are so powerful and strong, we must remember to talk with ourselves RATIONALLY every day.

Find a place and a time, slow yourself down, and talk to yourself rationally about what is happening in your life.

By staying in slow talk mode, in your peace zone, you will be able to keep your thinking calm and rational.

Remind yourself and reinforce the truth... constantly expose your brain to these rational (true) ideas - and this will continue to make them stronger and more permanent.

Making this a daily practice is a very good idea.

Use the "Attitudes" along with your rational talk. This will cut any irrational negative feeling down to size.

- So what? Who cares?
- I don't need to take life so seriously.
- Lighten up.
- Good grief! I've survived before and I'll survive, again.
- I don't need to blow this thing way out of proportion.

As you are being rational, remind yourself that you can be happy despite any external circumstance.

Your peace, calmness, and happiness is not contingent on waiting for something good to happen.

We can't wait around for "something better to happen" before we allow ourselves to be happy. Rationally, we must choose to be happy now. If we wait around for external circumstances to change, we'll be waiting around forever.

Take the initiative. "Act" if you need to.

Do something proactive, something that moves you forward in the direction you want to go.

Remember that you have the control, and take charge of your life.

You are fine just the way you are. You do not need other peoples' approval of you or what you do.

There isn't much in life worth worrying about anyway. What we worry about rarely comes true, and all we do is make ourselves miserable in the process.

Worry never solves anything.

Let's rationalize these areas of our lives and make it a habit to keep telling ourselves the truth.

Lighten up and let it go. Release the worry, tension, fear, and doubt. Everything will be fine.

Embrace and accept the peace that you have, knowing that as you do this, your peace will only grow stronger.

You CAN be happy in the present no matter what the old ANTs thoughts and feelings may have led you to believe in the past.

Slow down, slow talk to yourself, and see things rationally.

Choose to be happy - make a decision to be happy -- and it will begin to happen...

A STATE OF MIND

If you think you are beaten... YOU ARE!
If you think you can't do something, YOU CAN'T!
If you think you'll lose... YOU'RE LOST!
If you want to win, but think you can't, then you WON'T!

It's all a state of mind. What are you going to believe?

Success begins with a person's will.
Your mind believes everything it repeatedly sees and hears.
It's all a state of mind. What are you going to believe?
And who are you going to believe?
Those OLD negative anxiety thoughts that would love to ruin your life?
Or can you decide to slow down and be more rational and realistic?

It's all a state of mind. Who are you going to believe?

If you think you're outclassed... YOU ARE!
If you think you won't make it... you WON'T!

Your mind believes everything it repeatedly sees and hears.

You've got to think clearly to rise,
you've got to be sure of yourself,
before you can win the prize.
What are you going to believe?

Life's battles don't always go
to the stronger woman or man,
but sooner or later the one who wins -
is the one who THINKS they can.

What are YOU going to believe?

If you think you can make it... YOU WILL!
If you think you can do it... YOU CAN!
If you think more rationally and turn your thoughts around,
There is nobody, anywhere, that can ever pull you down.

It makes a BIG difference what you choose to believe!

Your brain hears and believes everything you say.

Now That You Know:
Attitude Is Everything

Michael is the kind of guy you love to hate. He is always in a good mood and always has something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, "*If I were any better, I would be twins!*"

He was a natural motivator. If an employee was having a bad day, Michael was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation.

Seeing his reaction to life really made me curious, so one day I went up to Michael and asked him, "I don't get it! You can't be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?"

Michael replied, "Each morning I wake up and say to myself, Mike, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or you can choose to be in a bad mood. I choose to be in a good mood. Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it."

Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining, or I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life."

"Yeah, right, it's not that easy," I protested.

"Yes, it is," Michael said. (Special Note: Michael obviously never had an anxiety disorder.)

Michael continued.

"Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation is a choice. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people will affect your mood. You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood. The bottom line: *It's your choice how you live life.*"

I reflected on what Michael said.

Soon thereafter, I left my job and Michael and I lost touch, but I often thought about him when I made a *choice* about life instead of *reacting* to it.

Several years later, I heard that Michael was involved in a serious accident, falling some 60 feet from a communications tower. After 18 hours of surgery, in which rods were inserted into his back, and weeks of intensive care, Michael was finally released from the hospital.

I saw Michael about six months after the accident. When I asked him how he was, he replied, "*If I were any better, I'd be twins. Wanna see my scars?*"

I declined to see his wounds, but I did ask him what had gone through his mind as the accident took place.

"The first thing that went through my mind was the well-being of my soon to be born daughter," Michael replied. "Then, as I lay on the ground, I remembered that I had two choices: I could choose to live -- or I could choose to die. I chose to live."

"Weren't you scared? Didn't you lose consciousness?" I asked.

Michael continued, "... the paramedics were great. They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the ER and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes, I read 'he's a dead man.' I knew I needed to take action."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Well, there was a big burly nurse shouting questions at me," said Michael. "She asked if I was allergic to anything. I said 'Yes'".

The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply. I took a deep breath and yelled, 'Gravity'".

Over their laughter, I told them, 'I am choosing to live. Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead'".

Michael lived, thanks to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude. I learned from him that every day *we have the choice* to live fully.

Attitude, after all, is everything. You have two choices in life right now: you can choose to be happy in the present moment, and thus be in control of your life, or you can choose to be upset by the circumstances around you - a perpetual victim to anything and everything that comes around.

These choices are yours.

I AM THE SCULPTOR

I woke up early today, excited about all I get to do before the clock strikes midnight.

I have responsibilities to fulfill today that no one else can fulfill. No one else can take my position in the world and do the things I need to do.

My job is to choose what kind of day I am going to have.

Today, I can complain because the weather is rainy, or I can be thankful that the grass is getting watered for free.

Today I can feel sad that I don't have more money, or I can be glad that my finances encourage me to plan my purchases wisely -- and guide me away from waste.

Today I can grumble about my health, or I can rejoice that I am alive.

Today I can lament over all that my parents didn't give me when I was growing up, or I can feel grateful that they allowed me to be born.

Today I can cry because roses have thorns, or I can celebrate that thorns have roses.

Today I can mourn my lack of friends, or I can embark upon a quest (even if it is slowly at first) to discover new relationships.

Today I can whine because I have to go to work, or I can shout for joy because I have a job to do.

Today I can complain because I have to go to school, or eagerly open my mind and fill it with rich new pieces of knowledge.

Today I can murmur dejectedly because I have to do housework, or I can feel honored because I have a shelter over my head for myself.

Today stretches ahead of me, waiting to be shaped. And here I am, the sculptor, who gets to do the shaping.

What today will be like is up to me. I get to choose what kind of day I will have!

So, have a GREAT DAY... unless you have other plans.

Addendums:

Extra Therapy Not Included in Audio Series

The Social Anxiety Institute, Inc. Copyright © 2000-2056.
This material may not be reproduced or redistributed in any fashion.
Thomas A. Richards, Ph.D., Director

Addendums - First edition

"*Paying Attention to the Anxiety Monster*" is a concept mentioned in the audio series, but it is not treated fully in the therapy sessions.

We do not want to pay attention to anxiety (or the anxiety monster, as we call it here), because when we pay attention to it, it grows larger and bigger.

Read over this handout yourself (it is next), and note that the main point of this concept deals with *anticipatory anxiety*:

1. If we can do something about an upcoming event, we should do it. That is, if we have something due in class or at work, and we can prepare for it, we should prepare as much as is reasonably possible.
2. If we have done everything we can to prepare, there is no value in worrying about it or having anticipatory anxiety. The best strategy is to *focus away from anxiety* - that is, focus externally on something else in the present moment that we can enjoy and become interested in.
3. Some events which we have anticipatory anxiety about, *we can't change anyway!* If we cannot change an event, there is absolutely no rational reason for us to worry, be anxious, or allow the ANTs to take over our thoughts and feelings.

What should I do?

Stop the thinking... and start the doing.

Thinking about upcoming events that cause anticipatory anxiety is disastrous to our mental health. We do not want to over-think. We do not want to analyze. We do not want to worry about events over which we can exert no control. We want to be rational.

Thinking, worrying, and dwelling on anticipatory anxiety takes anxiety and turns it into a monster. We can always defeat the anxiety monster by stopping our (negative) thinking and starting to do what needs to be done.

PAYING ATTENTION to the ANXIETY MONSTER

The more you pay attention to and dwell on your anxiety, *the more the anxiety will grow*. We all know that it's the *anticipatory anxiety* that "kills" us, so when we can bypass it, LET'S DO IT!

If you have to make a telephone call, don't think about it, just do it!

If you have to do something anxiety-arousing, stop the thinking, cut it off, and *just do it!*

You'll save yourself hours and hours of worry and emotional pain... and you'll be decreasing the amount of activity along the brain neural circuitry that leads to the anxiety monster.

WHAT HAPPENS if we PAY ATTENTION to the MONSTER?

Our "old" "conditioned-in" circuitry takes over and our *old* habits of worry, anxiety, fear, and depression are now in control.

DO NOT GIVE THEM THIS POWER AND AUTHORITY. Remember, these monsters are *pathological liars* - they have no *real* power to bring you down or make you anxious.

DON'T pay attention to the anxiety monster.

MOVE AWAY, DO NOT FOCUS on these thoughts.
Tell them to GET LOST - you have better things to do!

We tend to think way too much. We overthink. We overanalyze. We run everything through our minds a hundred times. This is not healthy. ANTs thoughts must be stopped. So whenever you can...

STOP THE THINKING - START THE DOING!

Put yourself in someone else's place

Sometimes, it helps to put yourself in someone else's shoes (to view things from their perspective) when you find that you are judging yourself.

See things from their vantage point: Would YOU pick apart, judge, or condemn yourself if you were _____ ?

If others are not tearing you up, picking you apart, and evaluating you harshly, WHY are you doing this to yourself?

Watch yourself on the videos and learn to focus on all the good things you see. There are MANY of them. Look at your poise, confidence, and your actions.

Listen to your answers. They may not be perfect, but they are already better than the average person on the street.

You are doing a good job and it is essential you give yourself some credit for it.

You need to be nice to yourself.

Beating up on yourself will only make social anxiety worse and prevent you from moving ahead.

We need to be more rational - see things more realistically - be nice to ourselves.

We are not perfect - but we are all doing a pretty good job. Begin to consider and accept this, and you can move even farther forward.

Accept yourself and let's go!

Bookmarks

STOP BEATING UP ON YOURSELF

STOP THE THINKING...
START THE DOING

ANALYSIS = PARALYSIS

SLOW TALK YOUR WAY TO CALMNESS

IT'S NO BIG DEAL!

APPROACH ALL THERAPY FROM AS MUCH
CALMNESS AND PEACE AS YOU CAN

The JOYS of BEATING MYSELF UP

After all, I've been doing it for such a long time, it must be fun, right?

When I beat myself up:

1. ... I get to feel depressed, anxious, and worthless all at the same time. *THREE* emotions for the price of one! Very economical.
2. ... I pay attention and focus on events and situations that no one else thought were very important. By deliberately noticing all the little "mistakes" I make, I create my own "Hell" all around me and get a chance to live in my own little world of pain and misery.
3. ... I'm only listening to ANTs thoughts, and I have found them to be very "truthful" and "accurate". By continuing to beat myself up, *I am guaranteeing that my ANTs thoughts and feelings will always rule my life.*
4. ... I reinforce the absolute fact that I am a failure, a loser, no good, and have nothing to offer anyone at any time. This fuels my anxiety and my deepest depression. It will mess up my life for good, and insure that I do not have a future.
5. ... I know I will continue to see things in the way the ANTs want me to see them... inaccurately, irrationally, and skewed to the negative. This is exciting... maybe I can be known as the "most depressing person on the face of the planet" if I keep this up.
6. ... I will not be allowing rational, accurate, and healthy thoughts to enter my mind. By beating myself up, I can keep these nasty rational thoughts away forever. I am learning to love anxiety, depression, fear, worthlessness, hopelessness, and failure.

Now, what are some other ways I can beat myself up?

Now that you've finished your audio sessions...
THE "ADVENTURE" BEGINS

1. You have many handouts emphasizing the methods, strategies, statements, and concepts that are a part of cognitive therapy. Continue to slowly read over each. relevant handout until you can FEEL it working. Take a rest every once in a while. Do not "kill yourself" over these handouts. A good "quiet time" or "peace zone" time of at least 30 minutes a day is about right.

2. Work on the areas in which you experience the *most* difficulty. Highlight those beliefs, methods, or concepts and continue to GENTLY get them into your mind. Use study techniques that work for you (i.e., index cards, highlighting in different colors, recording statements on a tape recorder, etc.).

3. Keep up your day-to-day behavioral "moving out". Find something you like to do, preferably social, *and do it*. Don't just make plans to do it and sit at home letting the "Anxiety Monster" laugh at you. Stop the thinking... start the *doing*. But, please, rationally think it through first, and do not overtax yourself as you begin. Keep slowly moving up (step by step). Moving up and out is essential. *You cannot sit at home and hope to keep continuing your progress.*

4. Always allow yourself to feel good when you attempt or do something. We cannot look for perfection here. If we do, it will frustrate us and it will never come. If you move out a step at a time, are nice to yourself, congratulate yourself, notice that you are moving in a positive, good, healthy, and helpful direction, then you are making greater progress than you can see right now. Even more importantly, by refusing to give up, you guarantee success.

5. Sometimes it helps to refresh yourself with the tapes or handouts first... and then use them as accurate reinforcements when you are done with an experiment.

6. You cannot be defeated if you refuse to give up. You cannot be defeated if you learn to deal with setbacks as progress. You cannot be defeated if you take one step at a time. You cannot be defeated if you move ahead and do not expect perfection. You cannot be defeated if you accept yourself and continue to gently move ahead.

7. You have more of a choice in how you see things than you once thought. ANTs are worse than pathological liars, because, if we believe them, our lives become entrapped, entombed, and immobile. We've had enough of believing those pathological liars. Now, we choose to believe the truth and *move forward*. Gently, firmly, and one step at a time.

8. This is my life. And now, as I move on, it has become a positive adventure...

Keep on Going and Do Not Give Up

In many ways, the title of this handout is the most important single thing you can do to overcome social anxiety.

That is why I emphasized -- on the website before you even purchased this series -- that repetition, reinforcement, and reprogramming your mind were the golden keys to success.

Nothing has changed, except now you have the tools. You MUST keep on going... you must keep practicing... you must get the cognitive therapy down so deeply into your brain that you could not forget it even if you tried... (Heard that one before, haven't you?)

But no "truer" statement has ever been made.

There is no pill, no injection, no magic wand, and no operation that can help you overcome social anxiety.

It is your brain -- your thinking habits, patterns, and beliefs -- that must be changed.

Do not give up when times get difficult. They get difficult for all of us. Keep going even when you feel you are not making progress. Please remember that your feelings, at this point, may not always be rational. Feelings (emotions) can be ANTs, too.

When you fall, pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and be happy with yourself for moving on. *As long as you continue to move on, you will make it to your destination.* It is only the people who fall and stay fallen who become stuck and do not reach their goals.

PLEASE -- keep on going and do not give up. When that last restriction on your life melts away, and you are free to live the kind of life you want, you will be very happy that you kept on going -- even when the times were tough.

Keep moving on. Do not give up. Do these two things and social anxiety will be a thing of the past. You really will have a new life ahead of you.