

Practicing Being Imperfect

Objective

To increase taking social risks.

You Should Know

Many people with social anxiety have unrealistic expectations about themselves and how they should be seen in social situations. They are tolerant of other people's social mistakes, but not their own. They are afraid of looking awkward or even foolish and so they avoid many social situations where they feel like they might not be in control. As a result, they miss out on opportunities to participate in new and interesting experiences and involve more people in their lives.

People with social anxiety assume that everyone is paying attention to them and would be horrified if they make social mistakes. However, this fear is simply untrue. Most people are very understanding about social mistakes, because they make them too!

Take Marcia, for example, who went out to dinner with some co-workers and spilled an entire glass of red wine on her blouse. She was so embarrassed she hardly said a word the rest of the evening. That night she could not sleep because she thought everyone would be making fun of her when she went to the office the next day.

However, if the same thing happened to someone else, Marcia would be the first person to say, "Don't worry about it. Everyone has accidents and embarrassing moments sometimes. It's really no big deal and nobody will even remember."

People with social anxiety judge themselves much harsher than they judge others. They think that a small social blunder will be humiliating, when in fact almost everyone has awkward social moments and social mistakes are usually completely forgotten within a few hours.

Now, imagine that you could go out without worrying about making social mistakes. That can happen as soon as you truly accept the fact that no one judges you as harshly as you judge yourself. This worksheet can help you learn that no great disaster will befall you if you make social mistakes. You will then be able to take more social risks and have a more fulfilling life through socializing and interacting with other people.

What to Do

This worksheet asks you to deliberately do things in a social setting that you think would be embarrassing.

Once you do them, you will see that even social mistakes are not really so bad and in fact nobody really cares about how you look.

It is a good idea to bring a friend along with you when you try out these social experiments. Your friend can act as a coach and encourage you to “lighten up” and even see the humor in being less than perfect.

Check off at least three of the social experiments listed below, and then try them out. Feel free to add your own situations to the list. Then write down what happened.

___ Stumble on purpose.

___ Go to a movie after it has already started and ask to climb over people.

___ Jog in place in a park or at a bus stop.

___ Make a phone call and then say you have dialed the wrong number and hang up.

___ Spill your glass of water at a nice restaurant.

___ Dress casually for a formal event (or vice versa).

___ Talk to yourself out loud at a supermarket.

___ Face the wrong way in an elevator.

___ Hum softly during a staff or group meeting.

___ Appear in public with a speck of food on your face.

___ Wear mismatched socks or shoes.

___ In a class or meeting, ask a question that you are worried might make you appear stupid.

___ Take an extra-long time at a green light.

___ Do three separate transactions at an ATM while others wait.

___ Skip instead of walking down the street.

___ Pause for 10 seconds while giving a talk or speaking in public.

___ Order a messy meal when you are on a date.

___ Your own idea: _____

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

What thoughts did you have after you completed this assignment? Do you feel less anxious about the possibility of embarrassing yourself?

Practicing doing the things you fear most is considered to be the best way to overcome your fear and anxiety. Can you continue this practice of being imperfect? Who can help support you in continuing to practice this kind of activity?

Meet Your Objective

Can you take more social risks? Write down three social activities that you have been avoiding and then check them off when you have done them.

_____ Check when you have done this activity.

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Describe your experiences.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____

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

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