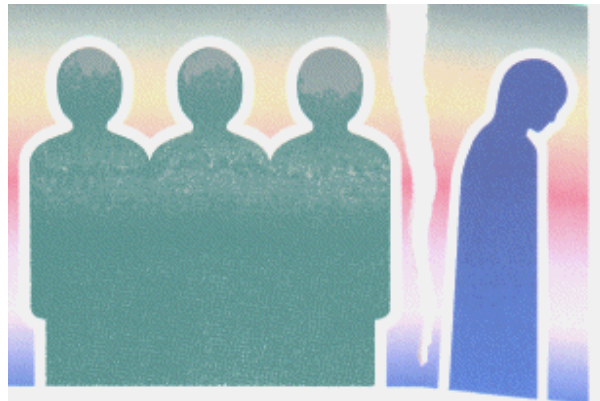


Overcoming
Social phobia



Patient self-help guide
“Theory book”
by
J.W. Beek

Acknowledgments

This guide represents the efforts of a number of people. I would first like to express my sincere gratitude to Loes Marquenie, Jan Willem van der Does, Desiré Oosterbaan and Richard van Dyck from the "Readers' Group", together with Pien van de Kieboom, Philip Spinhoven and Louise Prisse, for their helpful corrections and additions. Many of the ideas expressed below, owe their existence to several years of close collaboration with my colleagues at the Anxiety Clinic. I also thank Tilly Rijckhof for her secretarial support. Special thanks are due to Saskia Struijk for her considerable contributions in terms of both content and practical assistance.

J.W Beek, Amsterdam, September 1995

Over the past few years our knowledge of social phobia has increased enormously and a enormously of new treatments have been developed that offer significant benefit to sufferers of this distressing condition.

In order to help ensure psychiatrists, family doctors and patients all take advantage of the progress that has been made, The World Psychiatry Association has recently launched an educational programme to increase awareness of social phobia and its treatment.

I am therefore extremely grateful to Mr. J.W. Beek, Prof. Richard van Dyck and to F Hoffmann-La Roche Ltd. for allowing us to use Overcoming Social Phobia in the educational programme.

This valuable self-help guide use established principles of behaviour therapy to steer sufferers of social phobia through a series of exercises and assignments that help them come to terms with their anxieties.

I am confident that this approach will be of major benefit to many sufferers of what is a distressing and debilitating disorder.

*Prof. J.A. Costa e Silva
Chairman of the WPA Social Phobia Task Force*

Foreword

Although fear in social situations has for a long time been recognized as an aspect of various psychiatric conditions, it is only in recent years that social phobia has been defined and investigated as a distinct disorder. The establishment of specific diagnosis criteria for social phobia has contributed to the development of specific therapies and has greatly stimulated research about this disorder.

In recent years effective treatments for social phobia have been shown to produce long-term improvement. The important principles involved are behaviour therapy involving exercises in the fear-provoking situations - known as "exposure in vivo" -, the training of social skills and the application of cognitive therapy.

This latter approach implies that the patient learns to recognize and correct negative thoughts, which were previously an obstacle to effective performance in social situations. Usually these therapies are provided in intensive therapeutic sessions with cognitive or behavioral therapists. But because these treatments are so time-consuming, at most specialized centers for treatment of anxiety disorders, there are lengthy waiting lists.

A recent development is that the effective ingredients of behaviour therapy and cognitive therapy are being made available in the form of self-help instructions and exercises. Evidence is growing that this type of help may be effective for a considerable number of patients. After all, it is not through the contact with the therapist that the condition will improve, but by practicing with effective techniques.

The self-help manual requires much less time on the part of the therapist and still permits the patient to profit from the effective elements of treatment. This may contribute to shorter waiting lists and allow therapists to devote their time the more complicated treatments. A self-help programme can be compared to a correspondence course: the knowledge transmitted may be on the same level as in an ordinary course, but extra discipline and motivation from the student is required.

In recent years the effectiveness of medication has been established. The new drug moclobemide appears to combine mild side effects with good efficacy. In this manual it is assumed that the combination of this medication with cognitive-behaviour exercises is the treatment of choice.

The contribution of each treatment modality to this combined therapy could be as follows: the medication helps to lower the general level of anxiety, while the exercises contribute to the development of an effective behavioral repertoire in specific situations.

In part because of the use of medication, it is necessary to use this manual while also consulting a psychiatrist, who should be familiar with the principles of cognitive behaviour therapy for social phobia. The therapy can, however, be much less intensive than the usual cognitive or behaviour treatment.

The preparation of this manual is the result of ample experience by the author in the Anxiety Disorders Clinic at the Psychiatric Center Amsterdam and the Vrije Universiteit at Amsterdam. It is hoped that this manual will contribute to overcoming a disabling handicap and to eliminating limitations and complications in the social and medical fields.

Prof. R. van Dyck
Psychiatrist

Director Psychiatric Outpatient Clinics, Department of Psychiatry
Vrije Universiteit at Amsterdam

1. Introduction

1.1. Aim of this guide

Social phobia is a common, disabling and often stubborn disorder. There are, however, various ways in which a social phobia can be overcome.

Many people realize that to conquer a phobia it is necessary to do precisely those things of which one is afraid. If you have a fear of heights, the best way to lose it is gradually to seek out increasingly frightening (higher) situations. Much can be achieved with this "common-sense approach", sometimes even including a complete cure.

Behaviour therapy is a form of treatment that owes much to this "common-sense approach" and supplements it with a whole range of valuable scientific insights. The result is a number of rules and guidelines. These tell you exactly how to prepare and perform exercises, when and for how long you should practice, and when you can move on to the next stage.

Behaviour therapy is the most effective form of treatment in phobias. In the last few years it has emerged that many phobias can also be treated by self-help programs. In such programmes, sufferers learn to apply the principles of behaviour therapy themselves. The assignments and exercises are described in writing, and carried out without the aid of a therapist.

In social phobia a fairly detailed guide is very important, because both the disorder and its treatment are more complex than in other phobias. In fear of heights it is relatively easy to devise increasingly difficult steps. Things are less simple in social phobia, since it involves what others do or say, and that is never entirely under your control. Also it is more necessary in social phobia to change all kinds of anxiety-provoking thoughts about what others are thinking.

Nevertheless, it is possible with good preparation to get a firmer grip on the phobia. This guide has been written to help you achieve this.

The guide has been designed to enable you to work independently on reducing your anxiety. Only minimal support is required from a professional therapist. He or she will check with you how you are progressing with the guide, and offer answers and advice on any questions or problems you may have.

1.2. For whom is this guide intended?

This guide can be used by most people with a social phobia. However, the method is not suitable for everyone. The guide will probably not be particularly effective if any of the following points applies to you:

- You are too depressed to pursue normal activities or maintain an ordered daily structure.
- You consume a great deal of alcohol to suppress your anxieties (more than 3 units daily) and can't manage without it.
- You are addicted to tranquilizers such as oxazepam, diazepam, etc.
- You have been diagnosed as having a serious physical disorder.
- You see no advantages in overcoming your anxiety, or even disadvantages (e.g. having to return to a boring or difficult work situation).
- You haven't the time and energy to devote to the programme (1 hour a day is optimal, a minimum of 2 hours a week is essential).
- You want to read about your problems but don't see the point of practical exercises.
- You object to the detailed recording of problems, progress or exercises.

If any of these points applies to you, you should talk the matter over with your professional adviser. You can then decide together what form of treatment might be more suitable for you.

1.3. Theory Book and Workbook

This guide consists of two books. In the one you're reading now, the Theory Book, a whole range of theoretical topics are discussed. You will often see a note telling you not to read any further. You must then first perform an assignment in the other book, the Workbook.

In the Workbook you will find some questions designed to check whether you have understood the theory correctly. There are also assignments for you to perform, as well as a variety of forms you can use to record how the exercises have gone.

Answering questions and performing assignments are an indispensable part of the guide. If you expect to overcome your social phobia simply by going over the theoretical points, you will be disappointed.

To achieve a good effect it is important that you work through the programme conscientiously and in small steps. Many exercises must be repeated a number of times. If you rush through the programme too quickly, there is a danger that the result will not be satisfactory.

1.4. Contents of the Workbook

You will shortly be taking a look at the Workbook. It consists of two parts.

The first part contains a number of pages with daily reports. Once you have started the programme you fill in each day what you have read and which assignments you have done. Here you just say what you did, not how it went. Each week you also state how many hours you have spent on the programme.

In this way you can always see for yourself how you are progressing. Your professional adviser will also be able to quickly check how the programme is going

Example of two completed daily reports:

Date	Reading Repetition	Reading	Assignment Repetition	Assignment	Remarks
3/8	2	1.3, 1.4	3, 4, 5	2	Didn't know everything in 3. Repeat tomorrow
4/8	3.1-3.6	2.1-2.3	6, 7	3	

The second part of the Workbook consists of the assignments and exercises. In it you will also find forms that you use during or to report on the exercises.

In the Theory Book you are always told when you must perform an assignment. It is important that you complete this assignment from the Workbook before reading on in the Theory Book. Sometimes an assignment extends over several pages. When you have finished one assignment and reach the title of the next, carry on again in the Theory Book.

Read on from the point where you were given the assignment.

1.5. How long does the programme last?

The duration of the programme naturally depends on how much time you can devote to it. For optimum effect you should spend 1 hour a day for 5 days each week.

You will then get through all of the Theory Book and Workbook in about 4 months.

Of course you can spend less time each week, but it will then take you longer to complete the programme.

If you can only devote less than 2 hours a week, the chance that you will obtain real benefit from the guide is slim, because you will then spend too long on the programme. Under these

circumstances we recommend you start the programme only when your life situation has changed enough to allow you to devote more time to it.

1.6. Look for a helper

Your social phobia can be overcome. But this will not happen by itself. There will be times when you feel you have come up against a brick wall. Sometimes it will be hard for you to find the motivation to carry on. A do-it-yourself programme does not mean that you have to do everything entirely on your own. In fact, before you start on the programme it is a good idea to choose a helper. This can be your partner, a member of the family or a good friend. If this would be too much work for one person alone, you can also ask two helpers.

What can a helper do?

- monitor how you're carrying out the programme - read and discuss the guide with you
- discuss in detail how exercises/assignments have been performed - help in preparing exercises
- do certain exercises with you
- motivate you at difficult moments

You can ask your helper to do any or all of these jobs. He or she must have enough time and be sympathetic, patient and tenacious. A know-it-all, or someone who finds your problem unimportant, is not suitable. You need to have confidence in your helper.

If it is not possible to find such a helper, you can still work through the guide on your own. However, we strongly advise you to do your utmost to find a helper. The guide will then be more effective.

If you cannot find a helper, we recommend that you let someone know you are following this programme. You can then, for example, arrange to talk to each other (if necessary, on the phone) about how the programme is going. Even this more limited assistance can help you carry out the programme more effectively.

Be your own professional adviser by meticulously planning and reporting on the exercises in the Workbook.

Do this regularly and in detail, even if it seems excessive for some of the exercises. Write your reports in such a way that another person could follow what you did.

1.7. He or she?

As in many books, when we use the word "he", this should be understood as referring equally to a man or a woman.

1.8. To work!

Now that you understand the layout of the guide, and have arranged a helper, there is no reason why you shouldn't make a start.

We begin by giving you a little information on social phobia and its treatment. Afterwards you make a record of your starting situation. Then it's time to start the actual programme for overcoming your anxiety. First you work on changing negative thoughts. Next you learn to relax. Then there are some suggestions about different social skills. After this preparation you will go on in gradual stages to practise dealing with all kinds of difficult situations.

Good luck!

2. Information about social phobia and social anxiety

2.1. What is a social phobia?

Someone with a social phobia is nervous in the company of other people. Above all, he is scared of what others will think of him. He tries to make a good impression but doubts he can. For this reason he avoids situations in which others could reject him, or stays in the background in such situations. Sometimes the fear of rejection centers on a specific physical phenomenon (e.g. trembling hands, blushing, vomiting, and sweating) or physical feature (e.g. baldness or a pockmarked face). In some cases the phobia is confined to one specific situation (e.g. meeting strangers, speaking in public, phone calls, going to the toilet away from home).

More often there is a general fear of rejection by others in various situations. The person is then afraid of all kinds of criticism about his appearance, behaviour or character.

An example of this more general social phobia is provided by Mr. T, who is afraid that his colleagues will make jokes about him not being "macho", to which he won't dare to respond. He also can't face going into a café for a cup of coffee because he thinks his hand will shake when he drinks it. And nothing would induce him to ask the way in the street, for fear of appearing nervous.

Not everyone with a social phobia is afraid of the same sort of rejection. One person may worry that others will find him ugly, while another fears being thought nervous, clumsy, stupid or shy. At issue in all cases is a negative opinion that others might have about the person with social phobic. The expectation is that the other person will notice something and disapprove.

Some people with a social phobia are mainly afraid of the consequences this might have on further contact. Others are less worried about possible reactions: they find it bad enough if they fail to meet their own standards in the presence of others.

If the fear of rejection is strong, someone with a social phobia will avoid situations in which the risk of rejection is high. This means he is forced to stay at home (even if he's "crawling up the walls"), instead of going to a party. Also he may find it hard to shop in places with personal service, and so never goes to the shop on the corner. At work he perhaps avoids raising questions at staff meetings because he is too afraid of being looked at and judged. Another example of avoidance is always going out during work breaks because it is too stressful to eat in the canteen. Often a whole variety of excuses must then be invented because one is ashamed of this fear.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIAL PHOBIA

- **Fear of contact with other people**
- **Fear of disapproval**
- **Avoidance of social situations**
- **Impairment of daily life (school, work, social contacts)**

Someone with a social phobia doesn't just avoid certain situations. In the situations themselves one can also try to minimize the risk of being noticed and criticized. This too is called avoidance.

Thus you can dress inconspicuously, never initiate a conversation, avoid eye contact with others, give brief answers. With impeccable work you can ward off criticism by colleagues or the boss. If a host is constantly running around with tidbits, he never has to get involved in a conversation.

Some people with a social phobia behave in company in an overly animated or hearty manner. In this way they try to hide their anxiety or forestall or squash possible negative reactions. Those around them often can't imagine that they feel anxious in the presence of others.

Almost everyone occasionally experiences feelings of anxiety or tension in social settings. This is

usually associated with a "difficult situation", such as having to criticize a colleague, refusing a request or speaking in front of a large group of people. One may then be nervous about being criticized oneself. But as long as the anxiety is not so severe that such situations are avoided, we are certainly not talking about a social phobia. Also a social phobia represents a major handicap to daily life (e.g. at work or in social relations) and is very worrying to the sufferer. If the problem is not so severe, we speak of social anxiety or shyness.

It is not always easy to draw a clear line between shyness or social anxiety and social phobia.

Take, for example, Mrs. D. In retrospect she now feels she has always been a little shy and withdrawn, or at least since starting secondary school. That was just the way she was - she thought - and would probably pass. No one said anything about a social phobia, just shyness.

But as soon as she started nursing, the anxieties became much more prominent. During breaks in the staff room, but also in contacts with patients, she became increasingly tense and blushed more and more. She tried to avoid social contacts as much as possible, but that was of course impossible in her profession. Also she never dared to say "no". for fear of conflicts.

2.2. More information about social phobia

HOW COMMON IS SOCIAL PHOBIA?

It has been estimated that 3 to 13 percent of people suffer from a social phobia during some period of their lives. The percentage suffering from a social phobia at any one time is 1 to 2.5%.

Shyness is much more common. Studies have shown that 80-90% of people say they have felt shy at some time in their lives. And 30-40% consider themselves shy at the present time.

WHAT ARE THEY MAINLY AFRAID OF?

Speaking in public is the situation feared by the greatest number of people, followed by talking to strangers. Other fears - such as eating, drinking or writing in the presence of others-are less common.

WHEN DOES A SOCIAL PHOBIA ARISE?

Social phobia generally appears between the ages of fifteen and twenty. Naturally, youngsters of this age are often considered merely shy. Many are very tense if they have to give a talk, or on their first date. Usually this passes when one has become accustomed to such situations.

In a true social phobia, strong avoidance gets in the way of this familiarization process. If no treatment is given, this usually becomes a lasting disorder. Certainly the problem may recede for a time, for example, while someone with a social phobia is in a relationship.

Take, for example, Mr. B. Actually he'd been rather shy since childhood. But he started dating at secondary school and married at twenty. He functioned reasonably well both at home and at work. However, after divorcing at thirty he seemed to find it very hard to establish relationships or go to parties on his own. He was extremely worried about getting tongue-tied.

For years his wife had done much of the socializing for him. Now he was on his own it was apparent that he was avoiding all sorts of situations, suggesting the existence of a social phobia.

WHAT KIND OF PERSON DEVELOPS SOCIAL PHOBIA?

Social phobia is about equally common in women and men. It is seen in people with all levels of education and in all occupations. In short, a housewife may be afraid she won't be able to make

conversation at the children's school, a headmaster is sometimes anxious about talking to staff, and a teacher may be frightened of meeting parents.

HOW DOES A SOCIAL PHOBIA ARISE?

The development of social phobia has not yet been fully explained. It is unlikely that a particular negative experience (trauma).

Various possible factors have been suggested.

A social phobia can arise through imitation. If parents avoid social situations, this may be copied by children.

Another factor could be that a person has learnt too few social skills due to problems in his upbringing. You don't know how to behave, and that causes anxiety.

An upbringing with little love, combined with an overprotective attitude, is considered by some to play a role.

Biological factors have also been investigated, and it has been claimed that an inherited predisposition for chronically increased tension may be of importance.

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF A SOCIAL PHOBIA?

Studies have shown that people with a social phobia are more lonely, have fewer dates and are less likely to be married.

Educational problems are also often mentioned, since fear of study groups or public speaking may cause a person to abandon his entire education. People with a social phobia are also less successful in their work.

Alcohol may be consumed in excess in an effort to reduce anxiety. This alcohol abuse can lead on to other disorders which further undermine self-confidence.

Episodes of depression are more common in people with a social phobia.

2.3. The treatment of social phobia

Research has shown that two forms of treatment may well be of value in social phobia: drug and behaviour therapy.

DRUG TREATMENT

Drugs exist that are helpful in depression (antidepressants). A certain class of antidepressants (known as reversible inhibitors of monoamine oxidase-A or RIMAs, e.g. moclobemide) is also effective in social phobia, particularly in generalized social anxiety. Physical symptoms of tension can be reduced with drugs known as beta blockers (such as propranolol or atenolol). These are often prescribed for occasional use in situations where it is feared that physical symptoms may occur (e.g. fear of trembling when giving a speech or musical recital).

The chances of achieving lasting positive effects by the use of antidepressant drugs are increased by supplementary behaviour therapy.

In anxiety disorders in general, a combination of medication and behaviour therapy appears to offer the best prospects of success.

BEHAVIOUR THERAPY

Behaviour therapy is a form of treatment that is strongly oriented towards reducing symptoms. A careful investigation is always made to determine how the symptoms have arisen and what keeps

them going. Treatment is then given according to a structured plan. The behaviour therapist chooses methods and techniques that studies have shown to be effective in combating such symptoms.

Patients are given assignments that must be completed at home. Between sessions the patient records all kinds of information and does practical exercises. Step by step, increasingly more difficult situations are practised.

Three aspects must be distinguished in the behaviour therapy of social phobia:

- a. Dealing with anxiety-provoking thoughts
- b. Acquiring social skills
- c. Practising overcoming avoidance: confronting anxiety-provoking situations

These three approaches have proved effective both separately and in combination.

a. Dealing with anxiety-provoking thoughts.

Dealing with anxiety-provoking thoughts is also known as cognitive therapy (cognition = thought). The first step is to track down negative thoughts (e.g. "I'm sure to get the shakes" or "they're bound to find me boring" or "it'll be a disaster if he doesn't like me").

These thoughts are then examined to see whether they are justified. If possible, they are replaced by more realistic, and often more positive thoughts.

b. Acquiring social skills

It has been shown that some people with a social phobia become anxious because they have defective social skills. The risk of rejection is greater if someone does not know how to initiate a conversation or turn down a request. Acquisition of social skills is usually carried out in groups. Social behaviour options are discussed, demonstrated and practised by role-playing.

c. Overcoming avoidance

Behaviour therapy cannot be successful unless avoidance is overcome. A highly effective approach is the use of "exposure exercises". In this case, the exposure is to situations that arouse anxiety. Usually a start is made with something easy, which is then followed by increasingly difficult situations. Someone with a social phobia will practise, for example, by going to a party, returning a defective article to a shop, or drinking something (even if with shaking hands) in a café. The anxiety these exercises at first arouse will gradually decrease. When exercises are performed, it is often found that the expected unpleasant events do not occur. The next situation can then be tackled with increased confidence.

Another key element in virtually all anxiety and phobia treatments based on behaviour therapy is the use of relaxation exercises. These reduce physical tension, making other exercises less difficult.

An important point in all three forms of behaviour therapy is that independent activity is required of the patient. He must write down, read and select things. As a result he is more focused on, and aware of, his symptom during the treatment. This may well lead to a period of dejection or increased symptoms. However, this passes when it becomes clear that the treatment is having positive results.

Also the patient has to do exercises that at first cause anxiety. This takes a lot of energy. Patients who invest the most energy in the treatment achieve the greatest progress. Many people think it is necessary to think and talk a lot about past experiences that could be at the root of the social phobia. However, studies have shown that the energy and effort required are more profitably invested in practical exercises. In contrast to treatments based on talking about the past, behaviour therapies are known to produce good results in social phobia.

ONCE YOU HAVE READ THIS INFORMATION, DO ASSIGNMENT 3

2.4. Determine your own starting level

Before you start tackling your phobia, it is important to find out exactly how great the problems are. After working your way through the guide for a few months, you can then compare the severity of your symptoms at that time with the present situation.

First you complete a test (the Liebowitz Scale) that measures how much anxiety and avoidance you display in a variety of situations.

NOW TAKE THE WORKBOOK FOR ASSIGNMENT 4

You now have the starting score for the test. After a while you'll do the test again. This will give you an indication of whether the approach has already had an effect.

Next you can do a small test that accurately reflects your personal circumstances. It is called the Five Situation Test and can be found in the Workbook.

ASSIGNMENT 5

You now have the starting score for the Five Situation Test - another test you'll be repeating in the future.

2.5. Overcoming your social phobia

As already mentioned in section 2.3, there are four ways to fight a social phobia. Of these, the most important is to practise dealing with social situations of gradually increasing difficulty. You are going to have to resist the tendency to avoid such situations. You then learn to confront your anxiety and overcome it. This is the best and most effective way of tackling the problem. In chapter 6 it will be explained to you how you can make a graduated plan for achieving this.

But before you begin the battle with your anxiety, you need to be well prepared - to have the right "weapons". The battle will still be a hard one, but there's a better chance of winning it.

First you're going to learn how you can change your anxious thoughts about all kinds of difficult situations into more realistic and less anxiety-provoking ones.

If you approach situations with more rational thoughts, you are less anxious. There is then a greater chance that you will achieve what you want in these situations. You'll learn about identifying and changing your thoughts in chapter 3.

You then learn how to relax. This will be in chapter 4. Once you have learnt how - with a little practice - you can quickly relax, you will be able to use this skill during later exercises.

You will learn another way of preparing for battle against your anxiety in chapter 5. Here you'll find a range of suggestions for behaviour in social situations. We'll be discussing how you initiate a conversation and keep it going, as well as some particularly tricky situations, such as turning down a request.

The various preparations could be practised in a different order from that given here. For example, chapter 4, which contains the relaxation exercises, is quite self-contained. So there is no reason why you shouldn't make a start on it while you're still working on chapter 3. Similarly, you could work on chapter 6 even if you haven't quite finished chapter 4. However, we strongly suggest that you start with chapter 3, and complete it before going on to chapter 6.

A fair amount of time has been allocated for these preparations. Try not to go through this too quickly. Remember that time spent on good preparation will be amply rewarded during the later exercises.

You can now make a start on overcoming your social phobia.

3. Changing negative thoughts

3.1. The ABC of emotions

Imagine you are lying in bed at night and suddenly hear a thud in the living room. How would you feel? You might well be frightened. But that's not necessarily the case. If you overturn a vase, you might instead feel irritation because you've been kept awake and have to go and clear up the vase. Feelings don't automatically follow on from events. We think something about the events and this causes the feeling. This thinking is not always a slow and fully conscious process. In the above scenario, for example, we think almost automatically and instantaneously of a burglar. Yet this intermediate thinking stage is crucial in determining the ultimate feeling.

Thus in schematic terms, we have:

A event

B thought

C feeling

Another example:

Let's say you've arranged to meet a friend. He was supposed to have been there at 8 p.m. and it's now half past eight. How do you feel?

Different people may respond with a wide variety of emotions: irritated, very angry, slightly worried, extremely anxious, upset, etc. It depends on their thoughts at the time. For example: "He's always really punctual. Something must have happened. Maybe he's had an accident" leads to a feeling quite different from the one provoked by "He can't be bothered to be on time, even though he knows I hate waiting. I'm not important enough to him".

Thus your thoughts about the event "he's late" determine what feeling you have at that moment.

3.2. Distinguishing events, thoughts and feelings

It is not always easy to make a clear distinction between events, thoughts and feelings.

Events must be able to be perceived (seen and heard). They are observable facts.

For example: "the visitors look at me when I come in", "paying at the supermarket", "my neighbour calls me a profiteer". You can check if you have described an event objectively by asking yourself whether a camera could record it.

Thus, "I can see they're not interested in me" is impossible. A camera can't photograph interest. You can see that the others are looking out of the window, yawning, leafing through newspapers. You can conclude, rightly or wrongly, that they aren't interested. However, this conclusion is not an observable event, but a thought. From the same observation you could conclude that the others are too tired, or that something outside has attracted their attention.

The thoughts engendered by events are not directly observable. "My neighbour is angry" is an interpretation. It is a conclusion you draw from the observation "calling names", or perhaps "scowling".

"They'll laugh at me" and "no one likes me" are also thoughts because they can't be recorded with a camera. These thoughts do not always follow logically from the facts. A person's previous experiences can determine how the facts are interpreted. When someone is used to being

complimented for his conversational skills, and the person he's talking to yawns, this is blamed, for example, on a bad night's sleep. If someone has less positive experiences, he may conclude from the same event that he is a boring speaker.

Feelings and thoughts are likewise regularly confused.

"I feel you don't like me", "I feel I'm going to make a mistake tomorrow" are examples of thoughts packaged as feelings. In this case, anger and anxiety may well be the feelings that result from these thoughts.

The table below lists the four basic feelings. Next to each of them is the kind of thought that may lead to such a feeling.

Feelings and thought processes	
Feeling	Thought
Sad	losing something or somebody; considering yourself inferior.
Angry	someone treats you dishonestly or takes advantage of you your plans are thwarted
Nervous	expecting something unpleasant or disastrous
Happy	expecting or noticing something pleasant

It is important that you become good at distinguishing events, thoughts and feelings. Later that will enable you to tackle them more effectively when you need to.

NOW DO ASSIGNMENT 6

3.3. A schedule for analyzing thoughts

From now on you are going to learn how to distinguish events, thoughts and feelings by filling in a schedule. This will help you in so-called "thought analysis". The schedule is shown below.

DATE

EVENT

FEELING

THOUGHTS

You see that you first write down a FEELING, then THOUGHTS.

This reflects the order of thought analysis. Events and feelings are usually readily apparent; identifying thoughts takes a little more effort.

For example, "I blushed and could have died of shame". First you write down the event and feeling. Blushing (a physical phenomenon) is the event and the feeling is shame. Next you can think about what thoughts actually led to that feeling. In this example, "she thinks I'm after something; I'm sure she finds me a total idiot".

The schedule is then completed as follows:

DATE 16th August
EVENT I blushed when I was with Barbara
FEELING anxiety, shame
THOUGHTS she thinks I'm after something I'm sure she finds me a total idiot

Another example:

"I feel awful. I had a date with Keith and totally forgot about it. He must have been really worried. He's going to be furious with me."

The completed schedule will then look like this:

DATE 13th May
EVENT I forgot the date with Keith
FEELING anxiety, shame
THOUGHTS he must have been really worried he's going to be furious with me

NOW DO ASSIGNMENT 7

Anticipatory anxiety is anxiety you feel as a result of thinking about a situation in the future. In this case it is a little harder to distinguish between events and anxiety-provoking thoughts. Suppose you're thinking about having to give a talk tomorrow at work. At that moment it is not a fact but a thought.

You might be inclined to do a thought analysis as follows:

DATE 12th December
EVENT I'm sitting on a chair at home
FEELING anxiety
THOUGHTS I have to give a talk

However, this analysis misses the essential thought that makes you anxious. So it's not particularly useful.

In fact, you're reacting while sitting on a chair with your thoughts and feelings as if the event was already taking place. It is therefore important that you write the event on which the anticipatory anxiety and anticipatory thoughts are based next to **EVENT**. In other words:

DATE 12th December
EVENT (thinking about) giving a talk
FEELING anxiety
THOUGHTS I'll dry up they'll laugh at me

In short: When thinking about something that's going to happen, write down what's going to happen next to "EVENT". You can add "thinking about", if you like, but it's not absolutely necessary.

NOW DO ASSIGNMENT 8

3.4. Analyzing your own feelings and thoughts

The aim is that you should also learn to distinguish in yourself between events, feelings and the thoughts that have led to these feelings. You can do this by repeatedly taking a moment with one of your own feelings to fill in the schedule.

For example:

You feel tense. You investigate what event (it could also be thinking about an event) preceded this feeling. For example: "meeting my girlfriend's parents".

You then try and remember what thoughts you had between this event and the feeling of tension. For example: "maybe they'll think I'm not good enough".

The schedule then looks something like this:

DATE	1st July
EVENT	meeting my girlfriend's parents
FEELING	anxious, tense
THOUGHTS	they'll think I'm not good enough

NOW DO EXERCISE 9

We're now going to take the schedule a little further.

The first aim is to indicate the intensity of the feeling. You do this on a scale of 0 to 100. 100 is the strongest level of feeling you can imagine, while 0 means the emotion is completely absent. If the person in the above example feels somewhat, but not extremely, tense, he could write 50.

Secondly, you must say for each thought how plausible, how probable you find it. Next to each thought you write a number ranging from 0 to 100%. A hundred percent means definitely true, nought percent is totally implausible.

For instance, the person in the above example could think there is only a small chance that his girlfriend's parents won't like him. He might then write 10% next to the thought.

The schedule would then look like this:

DATE	1st July
EVENT	meeting my girlfriend's parents
FEELING	anxious, tense (50)
THOUGHTS	they'll think I'm not good enough (10%)

When filling in your thoughts, you should formulate them as statements and not questions. In other words, not "will they think I'm weird?" but "they'll think I'm weird". The point is to set out the negative possibility. This is what causes the anxiety. If they don't find you weird, then it's not such a problem.

Also use the absolute form. In other words, not "maybe they'll think I'm a bit weird" but "they'll think I'm weird".

You can take account of the "maybe" and "a bit" with the number you write after the thought. For example: "they'll think I'm weird (25%)". In this way you express the fact that you aren't 100% sure they'll think you're weird. You qualify the thought by indicating its plausibility with a number.

NOW GO TO ASSIGNMENT 10

Using the schedule can help you to identify more thoughts.

Take, for example, the following already completed schedule of someone who is due to take a driving test tomorrow.

DATE	13th December
EVENT	(thinking about) driving test
FEELING	anxiety, panic (80)
THOUGHTS	I'll be so nervous tomorrow I won't be able to tell right from left (20%) I'll fail my test (25%) they'll laugh at me at home (10%)

It's important to identify the thoughts that fully account for the feeling, and intensity of feeling. In this example the feeling of anxiety follows clearly from these thoughts, but the intensity 80 seems very high. It may be that there are still other thoughts that remain to be discovered.

For example:

"If I fail the driving test now, I'll never pass" and "If they laugh at me, I'm a failure".

These thoughts make an intensity of 80 easier to understand. It's therefore important to be persistent in examining your thoughts.

This dogged pursuit of one's thoughts is not always easy. It can be facilitated by:

- asking yourself questions such as: "and what might happen then? and what then? and what then?", "what's the worst that could happen?" and "what's the very worst thing about it?"
- picturing to yourself how it could all turn out; we sometimes call this "watching the whole disaster movie".

Many people have a tendency to avoid this kind of self-examination. And, of course, what emerges is usually not especially pleasant. However, you must overcome this tendency if this approach is to succeed. Only when negative thoughts are clear and concrete is it possible to challenge them. In the long run you will then be more successful in countering these thoughts.

You are now able to fill in the whole schedule. When you experience a feeling, you can analyze what event and what thoughts the feeling is connected to. When you fill in a schedule, always check if you have done it properly by going through the following points:

1. Was the event something concrete and observable (or a thought about such a thing) rather than an opinion, idea or feeling? Could it be photographed by a camera?
2. Is the feeling a basic feeling like sadness, guilt, shame, anger, frustration, anxiety/tension, as described at the start of chapter 3? Could it be a "disguised thought", such as "the feeling that he doesn't like me"?
3. Are the thoughts statements rather than questions? Are they framed in absolute terms?
4. Do the thoughts logically explain not only the feeling but also the intensity of the feeling. If not, there must be other thoughts that contribute towards the intensity of the feeling. Always try and go as far as you can in tracking your thoughts down.

ASSIGNMENT 11

NOW DO ASSIGNMENT 12

NOW DO ASSIGNMENT 13

3.5. Daily thought analysis

You have now reached a point where you can begin analyzing your thoughts and feelings using the schedule. From now on you will be spending half an hour on this each day.

You will be concentrating on those feelings and thoughts that are related to your social phobia. Usually you begin with a feeling - for example, tension or anxiety. You record this feeling in the schedule, together with an indication of how strong it was. You then write down what event was taking place or what you were thinking about. Next comes the most difficult part. You must try to remember what thoughts may have been going through your head. You track down and describe as many of these thoughts as possible until they exactly match and logically explain the intensity of the feeling.

You will find yourself becoming increasingly proficient as you become more experienced in applying the technique.

Sometimes thoughts always seem to go in the same direction. There is nothing wrong with this. In fact, it is important to discover what themes constantly recur in your thoughts.

Remain very discriminating, since apparently similar thoughts often turn out to be quite unlike each other on closer examination. "They'll think I'm stupid" is not the same as "they'll think I'm pathetic". "He won't want to see me any more" differs from "he's scared to be seen with me".

For some people this daily recording of feelings and thoughts can lead to a temporary increase in anxiety, tension or dejection. These exercises force you to focus on negative feelings and thoughts, and on the things you can't yet do. This is unavoidable. But keep in mind that you will soon be learning to develop counter-thoughts to be used against these negative and irrational thoughts. For this it is essential that these negative thoughts are first clearly exposed.

NOW DO ASSIGNMENT 14

3.6. Rational and irrational thoughts

Thoughts about things we experience often occur in an instant. We hear a sound and immediately draw a conclusion. In retrospect, however, it often turns out that the conclusion was not correct.

Your friend from 3.1 - who failed to show up at the arranged time - didn't have an accident. Or arrives with a fantastic gift, that unfortunately took a little more time.

In fact, we often draw overhasty conclusions on the basis of insufficient evidence. Irrational thoughts are thoughts that have not been properly considered. They are inadequately supported by real facts. For example: "all the guests can see my cup is shaking", whereas it later turns out that no one noticed. Or: "they didn't come, so they don't like me", when in fact the Post Office lost the invitations.

Rational thoughts are realistic thoughts. They follow logically from real events. If someone is always sending you little presents, telling you how wonderful you are, and says he wants to see you often, then "he's in love with me" is a rather rational thought. If the hostess at a party comes towards you with her hand outstretched when you enter the room, it is also a rational thought if you assume that she wants to shake hands and welcome you.

Rational thoughts are certainly not always positive thoughts. If someone is criticizing you, it is not rational to assume that he admires you enormously at that moment. However, it would also be irrational to think that the other person can't stand you. Something about you is obviously being criticized; and that conclusion is as far as rational thought can take you.

It has been found that certain "logical errors" are relatively common. For example: "excessive generalization". This means drawing a conclusion for all times and all places from a single event. For example: "you never say anything nice to me", "they're always gossiping behind my back", "I

never do anything right".

Another example is looking at things through "mud-coloured glasses". This means paying much more attention to negative events, and even magnifying them, while positive aspects of the matter are insufficiently acknowledged. Take, for example, someone talking about a presentation he gave yesterday: "It didn't go well. I just lost the thread. There were hardly any questions. And one of the slides was upside down." This person pays no attention to positive facts, which could be mentioned in almost every case.

3.7. Challenging thoughts

Once you have become proficient in using the schedule to analyse your thoughts, it can be further developed. From now on a fourth step will be added, called "challenging thoughts". In this you say why certain thoughts are irrational, and what thoughts would be more appropriate.

There are basically two ways in which thoughts can be challenged:

by careful consideration (3.7) or by having new experiences that show that the thought is not correct (3.8).

First consider if the thought is truly rational and adequately supported by the evidence. You do this with the aid of a number of standard questions. Ask yourself these questions at each thought that you want to challenge.

They will help you adopt a good FIGHTING ATTITUDE TOWARDS YOUR OWN THOUGHTS. Eventually you will be able to ask other questions you have thought of yourself and that are useful to you.

- 1 If I look at my own experiences up till now, is this thought true?
- 2 What have I observed others experiencing in a similar situation?
- 3 Have I ever heard or seen anything on the radio or TV, in a book or magazine, or from other people that suggests this thought is true?
- 4 Is there any evidence to suggest that this thought is incorrect?
- 5 Would others (you can think of somebody specific) think the same about it?
- 6 If it concerns the judgement of others: "Would I think the same thing if it were the other way round?"
- 7 If someone else thought this and I wanted to reduce his anxiety, what concrete facts would I mention that contradict this thought?
- 8 Can I come up with another thought based on the same events, perhaps one that causes less anxiety? If so, why couldn't it be true? (This thought can be written next to NEW THOUGHTS).

Having answered these questions, and any other questions and objections you have thought of yourself, you can consider whether there is enough evidence to call the thought rational. Often there is too little supportive evidence or too much evidence to the contrary. The thought is then irrational, and thus perhaps understandable but not true.

You then look for a new thought that accords with the facts.

For example:

DATE	17th April
EVENT	the woman next door talks to me
FEELING	anxiety (80)
THOUGHTS	1. I'm going to blush (95) 2. she'll think I'm an idiot if I blush (80)

CHALLENGING THOUGHTS

1. I do blush a lot, but certainly not every time I think I will. I didn't blush the other day when I spoke to the other neighbour.
 2. I've already blushed in the presence of this neighbour and I didn't get the impression then that she thinks I'm an idiot.
- The neighbour always says very nice things about T., who also blushes.

NEW THOUGHTS

1. It's certainly possible that I'll blush, but there's also a reasonable chance I won't blush at all.
2. Even if I do blush with the neighbour, that won't make her think I'm an idiot. It probably makes no difference to her.

You notice that challenging thoughts and conceiving new ones take up more space than the original thoughts. You can also be generous with the space you use to write down these thoughts.

From now on you are going to question your thoughts when completing the daily schedules. You can now begin to practice challenging your thoughts. They often appear quite logical and ordinary. It will take a bit of effort to look at your own familiar thoughts in a different way. You will find that here too practice makes perfect.

You will be given more information about common logical errors in social phobia and how you can devise rational counter-thoughts to deal with them.

You can now practice examining each thought with the eight questions on page 23.

3.8. Behavioural experiments

Sometimes doubts remain even after thought analysis. "Maybe it's not very likely on the basis of previous experience, but in this case ... "

The second way to change irrational thoughts is have new experiences that show the thought is not correct. You can conduct tests to obtain information about whether or not your thoughts are irrational. These are called behavioural experiments.

First, for example, by asking others: "did you notice anything?", "what did you think when T. blushed like that?", "what do you think of?" and so on.

Another way is to try out something and then look at the reactions to see if the thought was true.

If, for example, you think people will make snide remarks if you're the first to leave a party, the best way to check this is by leaving a party early for once. If you still find this hard to do yourself, you can ask a friend to leave before you as an experiment, so you can observe what the reactions are.

Before the behavioural experiment you should make a detailed prediction of how you think it will turn out. In the above example: "they'll make remarks like 'has your mother put a curfew on you?', or 'you're a real live wire', or something like that".

Another example: A person thinks no one will speak to him at a coming party if he doesn't initiate a conversation himself. He thinks this because he's convinced the other guests won't find him interesting. A possible behavioural experiment would be not to initiate any conversations at the party (but stand around watching) and see whether no one really says anything to him.

After the experiment you compare your prediction with what really happened. If your prediction was wrong, you use the result of the experiment to challenge your Irrational thoughts when doing thought analyses.

From now on it is important that you consider after each thought analysis whether a behavioural

experiment is possible that could provide information about the thought.

In the blushing example described in 3.7., the person could check in a mirror if he's red. He could also ask the neighbour if she'd noticed before that he blushed, and what she thinks about the fact that he blushes. Because of your phobia you may not yet be able to carry out all possible experiments. In the meantime, though, it is useful to think about them. Because only when the outstanding questions have been answered can you know for sure if your thought is true.

ASSIGNMENT 15

3.9. Common logical errors and irrational thoughts in social phobia

From now on the aim is to increase the quality of your thought analyses. We are therefore going to discuss some common logical errors in social phobia. You can include the examples of counter-thoughts and behavioural experiments that apply to you in your daily thought analyses.

While there are certainly differences between people with a social phobia, logical errors can probably be classified into 5 basic types.

You can check yourself which logical errors are relevant to you.

1. You think a particular behaviour (trembling, blushing, not getting your words out) is going to occur.
2. You think a particular behaviour or characteristic of yours is noticed by others.
3. You think others have a negative opinion of this behaviour.
4. You think others therefore have an entirely negative opinion of you or consider you inferior.
5. You think it's awful if someone has a negative opinion of you as a person or considers you inferior.

NOW DO ASSIGNMENTS 16 and 17

LOGICAL ERROR 1: THE PROBABILITY OF A PARTICULAR BEHAVIOUR OCCURRING

Some people with a social phobia are nervous that they will display a particular form of behaviour for which they might be criticised. Possible behaviour they think may occur includes:

- shaking of the arms, legs or head
- blushing
- being tongue-tied, saying nothing
- a quavering voice
- sweaty hands, armpits or forehead
- perspiration and body odour
- passing urine or faeces

Sometimes the thought is accurate and the person is well able to predict if the dreaded phenomenon will occur or not. Often it turns out that the feared phenomenon occurs much less often than expected. For example, many blushers assume they turn red whenever they feel warm, even though this is by no means always the case.

It is therefore important for you to determine if you can accurately predict whether or not particular physical phenomena will occur.

Consider whether any of the ways of thinking described above applies to you. If so, you must do the following when filling in the schedules:

- Make sure you have a similar thought clearly described in your thought analysis. For example: "my hands will shake", "I won't be able to say a word", "the sweat will be running down my forehead".
- In challenging thoughts, assess whether or not your prediction about what will happen can be relied on. Check if there is enough evidence or support for the thought by using the familiar questions from 3.7.

ASSIGNMENT 18

Conduct possible behavioural experiments for this kind of thought. See the Workbook on how to do this.

ASSIGNMENT 19

LOGICAL ERROR 2: THE PROBABILITY OF OTHERS NOTICING YOUR BEHAVIOUR

A second possible logical error is to think that a certain phenomenon (see above) or physical feature (for instance, being too fat, having a large nose) will definitely be noticed by other people. This is connected to the tendency shared by many people with a social phobia to put a negative interpretation on the reactions of others. It could also be that the phenomenon has been noticed on one occasion, which the person has then generalised to "always".

In fact, other people often notice much less than you expect. Because you concentrate so much on these negative events, you fail to see other more positive aspects. You are also less aware of what others pay attention to. People around you are focused much more than you think on quite different things.

Think, for example, how seldom people notice that you have been to the hairdresser, shaved off your beard or bought new glasses.

If you believe the thought described above applies to you, do the following when filling in the schedules:

Make sure you have a similar thought clearly described in your thought analysis. For example: "if I go red, X will see it straight away", "if my hands shake, the cashier will see it immediately".

In challenging thoughts, assess whether or not your prediction about what will happen can be relied on. Check if there is enough evidence or support for the thought by using the familiar questions from 3.7. and any queries of your own.

ASSIGNMENT 20

- Conduct possible behavioural experiments for this kind of thought. See the Workbook on how to do this.

ASSIGNMENTS 21 , 22, 23 and 24

LOGICAL ERROR 3: THE PROBABILITY OF OTHERS HAVING A NEGATIVE OPINION OF YOUR BEHAVIOUR OR CHARACTERISTIC

People with a social phobia often think that if something is conspicuous, it will be negatively judged. They are afraid that people will find it weak or stupid.

In fact, there is often no real evidence for this idea. They never hear others saying "what a sweaty person you are!", or see them holding their noses.

Deducing that others will see something in a negative light is sometimes called "thought-reading". And unless you're telepathic, this is a rather unreliable enterprise.

It seems that people with a social phobia read mainly negative thoughts from others and almost never positive ones. Other people's reactions are also frequently viewed through "mud-coloured glasses".

It often turns out that trembling, blushing or not saying much is occasionally noticed, but that people find it unimportant or sometimes even endearing (or a human trait they can identify with).

Other people probably judge far less negatively than someone with a social phobia judge himself!

If you believe the thought described above applies to you, do the following when filling in the schedules:

- Make sure you have a similar thought clearly described in your thought analysis. For example: "he finds blushing stupid", "if I don't say much, she'll think I'm really boring".
- In challenging thoughts, assess whether or not your prediction about what will happen can be relied on. Check if there is enough evidence or support for the thought by using the familiar questions.

ASSIGNMENT 25

Conduct possible behavioural experiments for this kind of thought. See the Workbook on how to do this.

ASSIGNMENT 26

LOGICAL ERROR 4: THE PROBABILITY OF SOMEONE REJECTING YOU COMPLETELY AS A PERSON BECAUSE OF A "PECULIARITY"

We now come to a situation in which there is a possibility that you display a certain behaviour (e.g. trembling), that this behaviour is noticed by one or more people, and that they take a negative view of it. People with a social phobia then often make the logical error of assuming that others reject them entirely. In this way they generalise from one negative aspect to the whole person.

However, it often turns out that others don't generalise as much as you expect. Someone with a social phobia dwells on that one negative point, while those he interacts with also consider all other positive aspects in their general assessment.

If you believe you sometimes think in this way, do the following when filling in the schedules:

- Make sure you have a similar thought clearly described in your thought analysis. For example: "if they see I'm tense, they'll think I'm no fun", "if they give me a funny look when my hands shake, it'll prove they think I'm a complete neurotic".
- In challenging thoughts, assess whether or not your prediction about what will happen can be relied on. Check if there is enough evidence or support for the thought by using the familiar questions.

NB: When challenging thoughts, also ask yourself how you think about someone else as a person. It could well be that you like or admire someone, even though he has a particular nervous characteristic. Why then should others generalise in your case? Perhaps you're applying double standards, and are harder on yourself than on others.

ASSIGNMENT 27

- Conduct possible behavioural experiments for this kind of thought. See the Workbook on how to do this.

ASSIGNMENTS 28 and 29.

Many people with a social phobia think that a general judgement is made about them on the basis of a single and often negative trait. We have already described this tendency as generalisation. For example, a person criticised for a few typing errors may think that others consider him totally unsuited to the job. Another may feel that his popularity depends on how well he can tell jokes. They are thinking in only one dimension, for instance, how much someone blushes, or their ease or lack of ease with words. This single dimension is then seen as determining how others judge a person in general. Often it is an unjustified conclusion if you think that others value you less on account of a single aspect, for example, sweating during a conversation. Other people's opinion of your worth depends on more than that. Aspects such as kindness, intelligence, honesty, trustworthiness, etc, also play a role in determining how much a person is valued.

To counteract this kind of one-dimensional thinking, you must practise thinking in a multidimensional way. The one-dimensional thinking of someone with a social phobia is also often accompanied by a tendency to idealize others without good cause because of a single positive aspect. This way of thinking too must be challenged by learning to discover additional dimensions.

ASSIGNMENT 30

Sometimes people with a social phobia think: "Other people find me stupid, but they don't say anything or show it in their reactions. They stay friendly, carry on phoning, but all the same.

The question you have to ask when challenging thoughts is then: "If I don't notice anything, then what's the problem?".

LOGICAL ERROR 5: SUPPOSE SOMEONE REJECTS YOU AS A PERSON BECAUSE OF A PARTICULAR BEHAVIOUR OR PECULIARITY

Let's start with a thought experiment that sums up the preceding logical errors.

Imagine you are in the company of 100 people. The phenomenon you are afraid of actually occurs (e.g. your leg shakes). You already know that this happens less often than you expect (point 1). When it occurs, by no means everybody notices it- let's say 20 of the 100 people (point 2). Of these 20, not all judge it negatively, but only perhaps half of them: 10 people (point 3). Of these 10 people, 20% judge you negatively as a person because of it (point 4).

This means that in this group of 100 people, there will be 2 who reject you as a person, 8 who don't find the characteristic positive but probably still have a good opinion of you, and 10 who notice the characteristic but are indifferent to it. The remaining 80 don't notice the behaviour at all.

You see that the number of negative reactions may be considerably smaller than you expected. But there will probably always be a few people around who may judge you negatively as a person.

People with a social phobia then often commit a fifth kind of logical error. They expect that rejection by another person will lead to serious consequences. Sometimes they expect that others will gossip and want nothing more to do with them.

Others may expect no concrete repercussions from those around them, but hate the idea that they have failed to meet their own standards. Such standards may be expressed in words such as

"everyone has to like me" or "I can't bear criticism".

If you believe you sometimes think in this way, do the following when filling in the schedules:

- Make sure you have a similar thought clearly described in your thought analysis. For example: "if they don't like me, they'll never visit", "they think I'm a nervous wreck and will tell everyone else", "if he thinks I'm worthless, then I really am worthless".
- In challenging thoughts, assess whether or not your prediction about what will happen can be relied on. Check if there is enough evidence or support for the thought by using the familiar questions.

If you mainly think about the practical consequences of rejection, such as being cold-shouldered, these questions are a good way to check whether your thoughts accord with reality.

On the other hand, you may be less worried about how people will treat you than by the thought of failing to meet a particular standard. For example: "everyone has to like me", "I mustn't do anything wrong", "if someone criticises me, it's a catastrophe".

In this case the question of what your experiences have been until now is not so relevant. You then need to ask yourself whether your standards may not be too demanding. You may find the following thoughts helpful in the struggle:

"There will always be people who dislike certain things about you, and those don't like you at all.

And if you try to please them, then others won't like you.

To return to our gathering of 100: surely the opinion of 2 "fault-finders" doesn't outweigh the more balanced judgement of the other 98?"

It is sometimes a good idea to be a little more conceited. If you are yourself convinced that you are valuable, nice or whatever, you will be less inclined to concur with the negative judgement of others.

Sometimes people are so affected by another person's negative opinion because they actually agree with it themselves. For instance, you consider yourself lazy, and if someone else considers you lazy, this reinforces the idea that there is something wrong with you.

If someone finds you stupid, boring, selfish, etc, but you are sure it's not true, that they've got it wrong, that may perhaps cause a feeling of irritation but not anxiety.

If a negative judgement by others affects you deeply because you agree with it, it is important that you try to work out how you have become convinced over the years that you score so badly in a particular dimension. You should also discuss this with your helper or other acquaintances.

ASSIGNMENT 31

Conduct possible behavioural experiments, for this kind of thought. See the Workbook on how to do this.

ASSIGNMENTS 32 and 33

The five common logical errors in people with a social phobia have now all been explained.

Each time you complete the THOUGHTS section of your daily thought analyses you should stop and ask yourself whether you might be committing one or more of these logical errors, even though they have not been specifically mentioned.

You must then separately challenge each of these five thoughts.

3.10. Other exercises for challenging irrational thoughts

1. People with a social phobia often have a negative image of themselves. As well as being due to

negative and irrational thinking, this can also lead to further negative thoughts, for example, assuming too readily that others have a similar image.

A useful way to break this pattern of seeing the world in a negative light is to practise discovering positive aspects.

You can do this by keeping a **POSITIVE DIARY**. In it you write each day a number of positive actions or qualities. You should write without qualification or equivocation, with no "ifs or buts", though certainly always the truth. It can be taken for granted that you've already had plenty of experience in identifying your own shortcomings. You now need to spend a little more time learning how to stop and take a look at your positive sides. For example:

22/3/95.

I cooked a delicious meal
I have strikingly attract me eyes
I bought a birthday card for Aunt Dot
I phoned Barbara and arranged to meet

23/3/95

I visited the neighbour
I bought only special offers at the health- food shop
my new trousers suit me really well

At first you may find it difficult to write about yourself in this way. All the more reason to practise harder paying yourself compliments.

Make sure you don't make one of these common mistakes:

- writing negative things
- qualifying positive things
- mentioning only major achievements

ASSIGNMENT 34

2. It has already been mentioned that many people with a social phobia think that others have a negative opinion of them. People often speak too little of the things they find good about each other, and most of us are readier with criticism than praise. "No news is good news" is a common viewpoint.

In a situation in which satisfaction or dissatisfaction is not clearly expressed, people who think negatively can easily assume that the judgement of others is negative.

A useful exercise is to ask several acquaintances what they find positive about you. This often takes some doing, because you and others are not used to talking about such things. Nevertheless it can be an invigorating experience. If you make a careful note of the comments about you, you can use them again in your positive diaries.

ASSIGNMENT 35

3. After keeping the positive diary for a while and conducting interviews about your positive points, you can set about formulating a positive **WATCHWORD**. For example: "I can be quite pleased with myself; I have a lot of good qualities". This must not consist of "empty" phrases. The qualities must have been specified in the previous assignments. It has been shown that regularly making a conscious effort to recall something good about yourself helps to build up a positive self-image.

ASSIGNMENT 36

4. Social skills

4.1. Introduction

Sometimes social anxiety is maintained because a person is unsure of how to behave in social situations. This chapter will give you some tips. You will also be doing a number of exercises that help to break down what may well have become a rigid pattern of behaviour.

4.2. Non-verbal behaviour

It is not just what you say that's important. It's also the way that you say it. You can say the sentence "I'd rather not" quietly, while looking at the ground. Saying the same sentence loudly, while looking at the other person, increases the chance that he will stop what he's doing.

So during social contacts always pay attention to the following points:

EYE CONTACT:

Look at the other person when you start to speak and from time to time while you're speaking. When you're listening look at the other person even more, but don't stare.

FACIAL EXPRESSION:

Your facial expression must match what you are saying. So don't smile when you're telling someone something you're angry about.

POSTURE:

Adopt an open, relaxed posture; turned towards the other person. Don't slouch; sit or stand upright. Keep your legs and arms relaxed, not stiffly folded.

WAY OF SPEAKING:

Remember to speak loudly and clearly (not too fast). Articulate well and vary your tone.

It may be difficult for you to alter your non-verbal pattern based just on the suggestions above.

So you're going to do a number of practical exercises:

NOW DO ASSIGNMENTS 43 TO 49

4.3. Starting a conversation

A conversation doesn't start with speaking. Even before the first word is spoken, nonverbal contact must be established. You have already read in section 5.2 how important it is to make eye contact.

When embarking on a conversation there is a tendency to think that it will go well only if you talk about really interesting subjects. In fact conversations usually start with quite ordinary everyday questions. That's what we mean by "small talk".

For example:

- Cold/wet/hot weather we're having, eh?
- Who do you know: the host or the hostess?
- They've got a lovely garden, don't you think?
- Have you got the time?
- Could you give me a light?

- What brings you here?
- Have you got a long journey?
- It's crowded here, isn't it?
- Do you know many of the people here?
- etc, etc

Most people know that questions like this are an invitation to begin a conversation. They are a way of finding out if the other person also wants to talk. Once you've started a conversation with somebody, you can then go on to talk about other things. In this way the other person does not feel immediately assailed by more personal questions. If you like, they can come later.

ASSIGNMENT 50

4.4. Keeping a conversation going: listening skills

Many people worry that at a certain moment they "won't have anything more to say". They often have the mistaken idea that good contact is only possible if they are "good talkers".

In fact, being able to listen well is much more important. Many people find it very pleasant to be with someone who is a good listener.

It is important that you shouldn't always be desperately looking for "something to say". For that reason we suggest that you first practise listening. You can do this by asking questions and showing interested reactions (and don't forget non-verbal behaviour).

1. ASKING OPEN OR CLOSED QUESTIONS

Open questions are questions that begin with who, what, where, when, how, etc.

For example: What do you think of the food? What are your hobbies? What do you do for a living?

Closed questions are questions you can only answer with yes or no.

For example: Do you like the food? Do you enjoy gardening? Do you work in an office? Closed questions do not invite extended answers, whereas someone asked an open question can answer in as much detail as he likes. Open questions are much better for keeping a conversation going. A person who regularly asks open questions is also more ; , likely to be thought of as nice to talk to.

ASSIGNMENTS 51, 52 and 53

2. PURSUING THE SUBJECT

Once you have started a conversation with someone, you can keep it going by sticking to the topic under discussion. If it's food, then you could ask about other dishes or cooking or a passion for visiting restaurants. Try to keep the conversation on something the other person also seems interested in.

Don't suddenly veer off onto another subject but follow the line of the conversation.

So if you're talking, for example, about foreign food, you could ask if the person has eaten in other countries, has often been abroad, what he thought of it, etc.

You needn't just listen and ask questions. After a while you can also say something yourself, for example, more about what you think about the subject, or what you've experienced in connection

with the subject. Don't always wait until the other person asks you questions. If it comes up in the conversation, just mention, for example, your ideas about cooking and eating out. The other person can then pick up the thread again.

3. OTHER LISTENING SKILLS

Apart from asking questions, you can show your interest in other ways and so encourage the other person to carry on talking.

Everyone knows the "mmm" a listener uses to show interest without interrupting the speaker.

When the speaker pauses, the listener can also inject a word or two, such as "really?", "I see", "that's great", "that's nice", etc.

Sometimes a few of the speaker's words can be repeated: "three hours long!"

Another effective option is to sum up the key point in the other person's account. For example: "So after all those rows you'd had enough."

ASSIGNMENTS 54 and 55

4.5. Ending a conversation

Some people are afraid they won't be able to get away from another person once a conversation is underway.

Just as when starting a conversation, there are also well known and frequently employed stock phrases for ending one:

- It was nice talking to you. I'd better go and find John now.
- That's really interesting, but I'm dying of thirst/hunger. I'm just going to get a drink/bite.
- It's been really nice talking to you, but I want to have a word with the host or hostess.

The first part can also be omitted:

- I'm just going to get something to drink
- I need a breath of fresh air on the balcony
- I'm just going to have a word with Charlie
- I have to go to the loo

When ending a conversation, people sometimes make the mistake of looking at the other person for too long or asking another question. Both actions are typical of listening behaviour, and as such signal a willingness to continue the conversation.

ASSIGNMENTS 56 and 57

4.6. Paying and receiving compliments

In many people the words "social skills" and "assertiveness" conjure up the idea of being critical of others and embracing conflicts. But an important social skill is paying compliments. People with a social phobia often find this difficult. They would rather not commit themselves, because this could lead to all kinds of reactions (including positive ones) they think they won't be able to cope with.

Others are usually quick enough to comment when a person does something wrong, but often forget

to compliment someone for doing something well, even though rewarding each other's positive behaviour has a greater effect.

If you pay compliments more often, people will be glad to talk to you.

Model for paying a compliment

a. Express a personal opinion:

"I think you look great"

"I think you sing beautifully"

"I think you've repaired that brilliantly"

b. Mention the positive aspect:

"I think you look great"

"I think you sing beautifully"

"I think you've repaired that brilliantly"

c. Say what you're complimenting: something about a person or something he's done:

"I think you look great"

"I think you sing beautifully"

"I think you've repaired that brilliantly"

This model gives you an idea of how you could compliment somebody. Of course you may often want to pay a less extravagant compliment. These too can be greatly appreciated. In any event a compliment that follows this model leaves no ambiguity.

ASSIGNMENT 58

You're now going to practise paying compliments using this model. At first this may well seem somewhat artificial and insincere. Nevertheless it is very important to practise this kind of skill. It certainly won't come naturally at first. Not many people are "naturally" good at it. But after practising for a while you'll find this new habit becoming increasingly spontaneous.

The idea that good practice leads to a change in behaviour that will later come more naturally also applies to the social skills to be discussed in the following sections.

And don't forget to compliment yourself now and then.

ASSIGNMENT 59

Receiving compliments

People with a social phobia often find it difficult accepting compliments. They try to argue their way out of them. For example, after being complimented on a new article of clothing: "it was only something cheap"; or for singing well: "my voice wasn't really up to it"; or for a speech: "I almost lost it a few times".

It is pleasanter, both for yourself and for others, to accept a compliment graciously and to enjoy it.

What does an "ideal" way of receiving compliments look like? Model for receiving a compliment

a. First accept the compliment (thank you, nice of you to notice, etc).

b. Then give your own opinion on the substance of the compliment. But try not to put yourself down in the process, even if you don't completely agree with what has been said.

For example:

"Thank you very much. I think it looks good too".

"Nice of you to say so though I'm not completely satisfied myself"

ASSIGNMENTS 60 and 61

4.7. Asking for something

People with social anxiety often avoid asking for things. This can be for various reasons: they expect a refusal, or think that others will find it too forward or selfish (see chapter 3). Their "requesting skill" may therefore be poorly developed. What's the best way to ask for something?

Model of the "ideal" request:

1. Consider in advance exactly what you want from the other person.
2. Speak for yourself, using a positive statement, for example:
 - I'd like
 - I want
 - I'd be grateful if
 - I want to ask you if.....
 - I'd prefer it if

You see that statements are used here rather than questions. Questions can sometimes make a refusal more likely, despite the fact that you are very eager that your request be complied with. Compare "Could you just move out of the way?" with "I want you to move out of the way". And "Will you stop making such a mess?" with "I want you to stop making such a mess".

3. State clearly and concretely what you want the other person to do:
 - I want you to call me if you don't manage to collect it.
 - From now on I'd like you to ring before ten o'clock.

4. Don't use any words that weaken your request: actually, perhaps, a bit, rather. For example; don't say "Actually I'd rather you didn't ring after ten. Could you perhaps make it a bit earlier?"

5. Don't explain too much about why you're asking for something. In fact, you needn't offer any explanation at all. Never give more than two reasons. In other words, not: "Because otherwise I get so nervous, and last time was a complete write-off, and you just don't do things like that with friends, and I always ring anyway..... etc"

6. Ask the other person to react.

Examples:

"I want to ask you to help me move some sand for the garden this evening. Will you do that?" "I'd like to go out this week, to the cinema or something like that. Do you want to?"

This model is appropriate for situations where it's important to you that someone clearly understands that you want something. Often an ordinary question is quite adequate. and this kind of "official request" might sound too severe. In many situations you can be much briefer:

- "Will you mind the baby this evening?"
- "I'd like to pay the bill"
- "Half a pound of mature Gouda, please"

And don't forget that even with a well-formulated request the other person always has the right to refuse.

ASSIGNMENTS 62 and 63

4.8. Refusing something

If someone asks you for something and you don't dare say "no", then you're doing something you don't want to do. People with a social phobia often find it hard to say "no". They are afraid of negative reactions, or that people won't like them any more. As a result they do things against their will more often than other people. This sometimes leads to frustration and annoyance. Afterwards they are extremely displeased with themselves.

You can challenge the thoughts that make you scared to refuse a request with the aid of chapter 3.

Exactly how to say "no" is described below.

Model of an **"ideal refusal"**:

1. Take the time to prepare yourself properly. Decide what you want.
2. Refuse in clear and personal terms, using a positive statement. The other person must understand that you've said "no", and not think there is any point in persisting.
3. Give no more than one reason for your refusal. In fact, anyone has the right to say "no" without giving any reasons at all.
4. Don't use any words that weaken your refusal actually, perhaps, a bit, rather. Compare "actually I'd rather not" with "no, I don't want to".
5. You can (but don't have to) make counterproposals.

For example:

Stephen: "I've wanted to read that book for ages. Can I borrow it?"

Harry: "No, Stephen, I don't lend my books any more. I've lost too many of them. Perhaps you'd like it for your birthday?"

Sally: "Could you pick me up from work?"

Adrian: "I don't want to come into town during the rush-hour. Why don't you come to my place first?"

Ted: "Do you fancy going out to eat?"

Paula: "No."

It is often not easy to turn someone down and there is no reason you shouldn't express this.

For example: "I'm very sorry, but

If you sometimes fail to say "no" straight away, even though you're not sure you want to agree to the request, you can always ask for some time to think it over.

For example: "I don't know yet. I'd like to think about it. Can I call you this evening?" This gives you time to prepare for saying "no" later on, if necessary. If you've already said "yes", it's much harder to go back on this afterwards.

ASSIGNMENTS 64 and 65

4.9. Reacting to a refusal

People with a social phobia sometimes fail to express their requests and wishes because they expect a refusal, to which they don't know how to react.

The "ideal model":

1. Say something about your feeling (letting off steam).
2. Show understanding for the other person's viewpoint.
3. Possibly offer an alternative proposal.

Example (following on from 5.8):

Stephen: "Pity. I really fancied reading it now. Of course you shouldn't do it if you don't feel good about it. What about if we write something down as proof that I've borrowed it?"

Sally: "That would be a bit of a pain, because I'd have to travel for so long. But I can understand it if you think it'll be too packed. If I could finish work a bit earlier, would you pick me up then?"

Ted: "Shame. Perhaps you'd like to another time?"

This reaction is ideal if, for example, you have asked a friend or acquaintance and believe they have a perfect right to refuse. At other times you can't agree with a refusal, for example, when dealing with a shop assistant or official. You then say that clearly and keep on repeating your request with slight variations in the wording (the "broken gramophone record").

For example:

"I'd like to put my name down for the new housing development. Have I come to the right place?"

"You can do that here, sir, but only in the morning."

"But they told me on the phone it could be any time during office hours. So I'd like you to register me now, please."

"Then they gave you the wrong information, sir. We'll be happy to sort you out tomorrow."

"I can't take another half-day off. One of your staff gave me incorrect information. So I want you to make an exception and register me now."

"I really can't do that."

"But it's your fault I'm here, and the easiest way to solve the problem is to let me register."

"Just this once, then."

ASSIGNMENTS 66 and 67

4.10. Expressing criticism

It is important to have a good way of expressing criticism in your "behaviour repertoire". It's a means of influencing others to move in the direction you desire. It also provides a vent for your feelings.

People with a social phobia find it hard to criticise others because they fear being thought of as unpleasant, or being totally rejected as a person, or that it will provoke aggressive reactions they can't deal with.

Many people with a social phobia therefore have little experience in expressing criticism.

What does **good criticism** look like?

1. Consider in advance exactly what you want to say.
2. Speak for yourself.
3. State clearly and concretely what your criticism is and what it refers to.
4. One item of criticism at a time.
5. Don't use any words that weaken your criticism: actually, perhaps, a bit, rather.
6. Give no more than one reason for the criticism.
7. Suggest how it could be done differently.
8. Invite the other person to react.

For example:

"I find it really annoying that you're an hour late. I've been sitting here waiting the whole time. Would you please be punctual next time?"

"I hate it when you sit in front of the box the whole evening. It's impossible to have a proper conversation. I suggest you turn off the TV by ten this evening. What do you say?"

"I don't think it's very good that you arranged to meet Keith and Vera without discussing it with me. I was looking forward to a free evening. I want you to call them and tell them I can't come and arrange to meet them later in the week. Will you do that?"

The ability to express criticism is very important if you are to develop and maintain satisfactory social contacts. It is impossible for every interaction to proceed without any differences of opinion. If you can't express criticism, there is a good chance you will build up a great deal of irritation, after which the only remaining possibility is to end the relationship or let it peter out of its own accord. Expressing criticism is a difficult social skill.

At first you may find it a little too difficult, especially if you have little experience criticising others and have perhaps bottled up a lot of critical feelings.

Remember that many people you know won't be accustomed to receiving criticism from someone who previously never expressed it. Their reactions won't always be positive little by little, however, both they and you will get used to this new way of behaving.

ASSIGNMENT 68 AND 69

4.11. Reacting to criticism

Unfortunately, expressing criticism sometimes ends up in a tiresome conversation.

Not everyone is capable of reacting well to criticism.

Often people will put the ball back in your court ("but didn't you recently?"), shift the blame from themselves ("I didn't have any choice, because") or try arguing their way out ("there's plenty you could do while you're waiting", "I can relax occasionally, can't I?", "I thought you liked Keith and Vera").

Such reactions cause tension on both sides, and do not resolve the situation. Model for an **"ideal way of reacting to criticism"**

1. Say something about your feelings (letting off steam).
2. Sum up what the other person has said to make sure you have understood the criticism correctly, if possible, showing understanding for the other person's viewpoint.
3. Give your own opinion about the criticism.
4. Accept the other person's counterproposal or offer an alternative proposal.

Examples (refer to criticisms in section 5.10)

"I'm awfully sorry. So you were very annoyed? I can well imagine. I won't be late next time or I'll ring."

"Oh dear, I didn't know you missed a good talk so much. But I find channel-hopping so wonderfully relaxing. Can't I watch TV for a while and then we'll chat?"

"I'm sorry about mucking up your evening. I wanted to surprise you but you'd obviously rather have a free evening at home. I'll ring them. When would you like to go over?"

Remember that you are most likely to succeed in reacting well to criticism if you have effectively challenged your negative thoughts, as discussed in chapter 3. If criticism about a small point makes you think the other person rejects everything about you, it's naturally much harder to react in the "ideal" way.

ASSIGNMENTS 70 and 71

4.12. A final word on social skills

In this chapter you have been presented with very many suggestions about how to behave in all kinds of social situations. If you've done all the exercises, you will have taken many of them to heart.

But it will take longer than this programme to apply these skills in a more automatic fashion. It is therefore important that you regularly look back over this chapter to brush up on any points you may have forgotten.

5. Overcoming avoidance

5.1. Learning to relax

In this chapter you will gradually begin to confront some difficult situations that you may have avoided for some time. At first this is likely to cause you a degree of tension. Some of this is unavoidable. However, you can greatly reduce the tension by actively relaxing your body. There are many ways to do this. Some people watch something light on television, others listen to music or read a magazine. There are also a number of commercially available progressive relaxation audio tapes which may help you to reduce your physical tension.

5.2 Confronting your anxiety

Now that you are able to keep your thoughts rational, can relax quickly and effectively, and have mastered a large number of social skills, you are ready gradually to begin confronting more and more situations that cause you anxiety.

Your fear of all kinds of social situations may have decreased because of the work you have done on thoughts and skills. But you probably still get quite nervous if you think about confronting difficult situations.

Research on the treatment of anxiety has shown that confronting anxiety-provoking situations by means of so-called exposure exercises eventually leads to a reduction in the anxiety. In other words, you must "go through the anxiety".

This part of the Theory Book is shorter than the previous chapters. This does not mean it is less important. In fact it is the most important chapter in the book, for which the previous chapters were, in a way, merely preparations.

Chapter 6 is short because its structure is less complex. You will be working according to a simple principle: "Practice makes perfect" (admittedly combined with "No gain without pain").

To ensure you derive the maximum benefit from the exercises, there are a number of rules that must be followed. These are explained below.

5.3. Making practice cards

If exposure assignments are to be carried out effectively, you must be well prepared. The best method is to work with a large number of cards on which it is clearly marked which exercise it refers to. On each card indicate with a number from 0 to 100 how much tension performing this exercise is likely to cause.

For example:

Drinking coffee during work break
with at least 5 people there

70

Saying hello to my neighbour if I meet her in the street

30

You should make all sorts of cards. Some must be very difficult and others less so. In the future you will work through them in approximate order of difficulty.

Arrange the cards by subject. Several cards can be made for each subject. These are then sorted according to increasing difficulty.

For example:

Subject: drinking coffee

1. Drinking coffee from a plastic beaker with visitors at my house (40)
2. Drinking coffee from a plastic beaker when visiting family (50)
3. Drinking coffee from a cup and saucer with visitors at my house (65)
4. Drinking coffee from a cup and saucer when visiting family (75)
5. Drinking coffee from a cup and saucer at work (80)

Subject: doing something at a meeting

1. Asking for information at a staff meeting at work (40)
2. Saying I don't agree with something at a staff meeting at work (60)
3. Asking for information at a meeting with management present (70)
4. Saying I don't agree with something at a meeting with management present (80)

The cards of all the subjects together describe everything you're still afraid to do but would like to. Once you have worked your way through all the cards, you will have conquered your social phobia. It is important to think of many intermediate steps, particularly in the case of exercises that seem very difficult to you.

ASSIGNMENT 72

5.4. Planning exercises

You now have all kinds of cards sorted by subject and increasing degree of difficulty.

It is important with exposure exercises that you practise regularly, ideally every day. Most of the exercises are hard and use up a lot of your energy. To ensure that you keep on practising it's a good idea to set yourself a target for the number of exercises you'll do each week. Decide how many points you're going to score in a week. Your score for each exercise is the number you wrote at the bottom-right of the card: in other words, the amount of tension you expect the exercise to cause.

For example, you've decided at the start of the week to score 200 points that week.

If you've taken the following cards and done the exercises, then you've scored a total of 220 points, and achieved your target.

Saying something about myself at a drink after the match	40	
Asking a colleague to go for a walk with me		60
Writing a cheque at the supermarket in the shopping centre	40	
Writing a cheque at the local supermarket		60

You can also repeat one or more exercises.

ASSIGNMENT 73

5.5. How to practise

By working through chapters 3, 4 and 5 you have of course already prepared for the exercises. You must nevertheless perform a thought analysis before every exercise that makes you feel tense when you think of having to do it. You then challenge any anxiety provoking thoughts about that specific situation.

It may be that such "anticipatory" tension is related to continuing deficiencies in your social skills, for example, not knowing exactly how to say something.

You should then write down beforehand what you might say, and practise this alone or together with your helper.

You must also prepare for each exercise by picturing in precise detail the coming situation. Think about how you will behave in this situation. Be realistic and rational. In other words, don't picture everyone at the party thinking how nice you are, but rather how, after someone has ended a conversation with you, you will go and look for someone else to talk to.

When you are just about to do the exercise, make yourself think about relaxation, and try to relax as much as possible.

You must also report on each exercise. Write down on the same page how each exercise went, in other words, what you did and how much tension the exercise caused.

For a lasting result it is important to repeat the exercises. Each exercise is performed at least three times, but more will often be necessary. Only when you are accustomed to the exercise, and performing it causes you no more than minimal tension, can you consider it completed.

Make sure you maintain the results achieved.

This means that you must make earlier exercises part of your everyday life.

For example, if you started a conversation three times with a neighbour in the street and managed reasonably well, you must carry on doing this regularly.

ASSIGNMENT 74

5.6. Special exercise: "coming out"

People with a social phobia tend to conceal the behaviour or characteristic they think others reject. They try to make sure it is seen as little as possible, and certainly do not speak about it with other people. If they think they're going to sweat, they repeatedly use a paper tissue, look at the ground a lot, find an excuse to refuse the offered tea, hide their complexion under a thick layer of make-up. As a result they never notice that nothing terrible would happen if they didn't conceal the "problem". By constant avoidance they maintain a situation in which the anxiety can never abate. Concealment at all costs causes tension. And this tension sometimes becomes so severe that it causes the very behaviour they fear.

Someone who is afraid of trembling, and constantly expecting it to happen, may tremble because of the tension.

One way of breaking this vicious circle is deliberately to allow the feared behaviour or phenomenon to be seen by others, and to talk openly about it. In other words, to "come out". For example, you can let the trembling appear of its own accord, or intentionally simulate it, and say (loudly enough for others to hear): "Oh, no. There I go shaking again. It happens all the time. Damn annoying."

Because this is the exact opposite of your usual habit, it's a fairly difficult exercise. Even just thinking about this exercise sometimes leads to very negative thoughts about how people might react. On the other hand, you're probably experienced enough now to challenge such thoughts.

You've now reached the time to change this concealment behaviour that has turned into a habit.

Experience shows that once you've taken the first step, it will become increasingly easy. Usually you'll start by talking about it with friends. Gradually, as it becomes clear that people's reactions aren't as negative as expected, you can move on to less intimate acquaintances. You are now going to make a plan to talk with various people about each thing you are scared others will notice about you. You will also practise letting this behaviour be seen. Many of the assignments in chapter 3 have basically been about "coming out", and you might well think: haven't I done that already? But there are probably still improvements to be made, and you still conceal things at certain times and with certain people. So use this assignment to make further progress in this area.

ASSIGNMENT 75

5.7. Supplementary exercises

When you've been following the exercise programme for a while you can check if you're ready to do any of the "supplementary exercises" below. You can take one of the situations described, or you may be able to develop them even further for your own cards. The idea is to see if you can cope with being a little more conspicuous or plainly doing something wrong. You must, in your own eyes, make the chance of rejection by others somewhat greater.

If you can do some of these slightly more advanced exercises, you increase the likelihood that the effect on your everyday behaviour will be permanent.

- Go into a clothes/shoe shop, try on several things, then leave without buying anything.
- Ask the way to a building you're standing in front of.
- Sing or hum audibly in a busy shopping street.
- Wear an article of clothing inside out or in another unusual way.
- Go out without wearing any make-up.
- Stand in a supermarket queue with a full shopping trolley and discover you've forgotten your money or haven't nearly enough to pay for everything.
- Deliberately make your hands tremble when paying in a shop.
- Ring a busy store and ask the price of an article.
- Send something back you're not satisfied with in a restaurant.
- Turn down an invitation you could accept but don't want to.
- Stumble in the street or when entering a house.
- Borrow money, a book or something else.
- Call the waiter in a restaurant so that everyone can hear.
- Phone somebody rather too late in the evening.
- Say you don't fancy doing something and aren't going to do it.
- Draw attention to yourself by dropping something: papers, bicycle, can of peas, bottle of mineral water, etc.

Looking at these exercises, you may be thinking: "That's crazy. I don't have to be able to do things like that. I never want to do that."

However, it is important that you know from experience that you can handle the possible reactions to mistakes or conspicuous behaviour. Then you have less need to be constantly on your guard against making any mistakes.

Use the ideas in this section for new cards (continuing Assignment 72) and report the exercise on the normal exposure forms (Assignment 74).

5.8. Possible problems with exposure exercises

a. If the exercise seems too difficult and is avoided

If you don't manage to do an exercise because it causes too much anxiety, you can do the following things:

- Make new cards with intermediate tasks that are more readily achievable. When doing so, vary specific circumstances, for example. the number of people present, men or women, acquaintances or strangers. Or change your behaviour: for example, first a neutral chat, and only then a more personal conversation.
- Check if you've prepared yourself properly. Perform an analysis of your thoughts that precede the anxiety that the exercise arouses. If necessary, consult chapter 3. Decide if you've prepared well what you're going to do or say. If necessary, consult chapter 4.

b. If the tension is not decreased by practising

If the tension does not decrease after repeating an exercise many times, you should ask yourself two things:

- Is the exercise addressing the core anxiety? For example, you have taken as an exercise: "visiting the woman next door". Your greatest anxiety could be that she will ask why you've never visited before. If she constantly fails to ask this question, you may remain nervous that she will one day do so, It is then a good idea to make a new practice card: "visit the neighbour and tell her about my phobia and how I'm working on it".
- Are there new anxiety-provoking thoughts during the exercise that have not yet been adequately challenged? If so, fill in thought schedules again and challenge these thoughts. If necessary, consult chapter 4.

c. If you are disappointed by other people's reactions

Sometimes you may find with the exercises that the reactions of others are more negative than you expected. Suppose you've been clearing away the coffee cups after meetings for ages, and have set yourself the task of saying something about it. It is possible that someone could react along the lines of "what are you going on about?" or "don't be silly". This may reawaken your anxiety.

You must then investigate in your next thought analysis what thoughts make you anxious in this situation.

We often find that the possibility of negative reactions is well challenged in the thought analyses. You expect that negative judgement not to be as serious as it sounds. And usually this is the case. Gradually you move onto a much more positive thought spiral. Then if the judgement is really negative for once, you're not always

well prepared for it. You must then firmly challenge the thought that the negative reaction signifies a wholly negative judgement (see logical error 4 in chapter 3) or that someone having a negative opinion of you would be a total disaster (see logical error 5 in chapter 3).

5.9. Planning social contacts

Until now the exercises have been mainly directed towards concrete things you were previously too afraid to do.

As a result you are better able to function in everyday social situations to your own satisfaction.

Many people with a social phobia have become accustomed to having a rather smaller circle of friends and participating less often in a variety of social activities.

Because of this your exercises will lack certain initiatives that may well be important for challenging social phobia in the longer term.

Take, for example, the size of your circle of friends.

Perhaps you feel quite satisfied with your present contacts. Often the expression "enough friends" means that a person has some anxiety about expanding his contacts. We suggest you start getting used to initiating and maintaining new contacts. In this way you practise all kinds of social skills and overcome new anxiety thresholds.

There are various ways of expanding social contacts. You can start by thinking about people you already know just by sight or name. Think about people at your workplace, at your school, at your children's school, at a club, neighbours, etc.

You can intensify the contact you already have with them by taking a new step, for example, inviting them for a drink, a snack, a chat in the street, etc.

You can't know for sure how things will develop. But in this way you're regularly "keeping the door open" to people who perhaps would also like more contact with you.

ASSIGNMENT 76

Sometimes a person's circle of acquaintances is so limited that the above suggestions can't be put into practice. If you can't think of enough acquaintances for carrying out the last assignment, you are going to have to meet a few more "candidates".

You can do this, for example, by joining a club. Choose one or more clubs that reflect your interests, such as a camera club, a club for nature-lovers, sports club, amateur theatrical society or dance group. Your local town hall or civic centre may well be able to give you information on such clubs over the phone.

Other places for meeting people are the community centre or local pub.

Many people have an opportunity to meet others at work. And this includes voluntary work. Also think about activities of a club, institution or pressure group that pursue a goal that you support. For example, animal protection, Amnesty International or Greenpeace. Think about which of your new acquaintances you would like to have more contact with. There's no need to rush this. Then go back to the start of this section.

ASSIGNMENT 77

You may feel some reluctance to confront new, unknown and therefore less safe contacts. Remember that after a time these contacts will also become more and more familiar. You can then reap the fruits of your labour.

Evaluating the programme

You have now worked your way through all of the sections, and done many analyses and exercises. You have every reason to be pleased with yourself.

But you are not finished. In order to consolidate and if possible increase your improvement, you should now regularly return to the Theory Book and Workbook to read, do analyses, plan exercises and perform them.

You are now able to do this independently, without being told exactly what to do. You have already regularly discussed your progress with your professional adviser. You naturally have your own ideas about the effect your efforts have achieved.

You're now going to see if your scores on the questionnaires from chapter 2 have changed.

ASSIGNMENTS 78, 79 and 80

You will be discussing the effect of the programme with your professional adviser, A decision can then be taken on where to go from here.

There are various possibilities:

- You carry on working independently and are given a follow-up appointment for a few months' time.
- You still have too many symptoms of social phobia. A more intensive behaviour therapy may then need to be arranged. Your professional adviser will discuss the options with you, Consideration can also be given to starting or altering drug treatment.
- There may be symptoms other than those of social phobia, which require treatment. Discuss this with your professional adviser.

Work out your thoughts on the matter before you talk with your professional adviser.

Literature consulted

- Arntz A: Principes en technieken van de cognitieve therapie. DTH 1991 ;11:252-268.
- Beck AT, Emery G, Greenberg RL: Anxiety Disorders and Phobias. Basic Books, Inc, New York 1985.
- Beck AT, Freeman AF: Cognitive Therapy of Personality Disorders. Guilford Press, New York 1990.
- Bernstein DA, Borkovec TD: Progressive Relaxation Training. Research Press, Champaign, Illinois 1973.
- Bernstein DA, Borkovec TD: Leren ontspannen. Dekker & van de Vegt, Nijmegen 1977.
- Burns DD: The Feeling Good Handbook. Plume, Penguin, New York 1989.
- Butter G: Exposure as a treatment for social phobia: some instructive difficulties. Behav res Ther 1985;23 [6]:651-657.
- Diekstra RWF: Ik kan denken, voelen wat ik wil. Swets & Zeitlinger, Amsterdam 1976.
- Forest JJ: Self-help books. The American Psychologist 1988;43:599-.
- Ghosh A, Marks IM, Carr AC: Self-exposure treatment for phobias: a controlled study. Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine 1984;77:483-487.
- Ghosh A, Marks IM: Self-treatment of agoraphobia by exposure. Behavior Therapy 1987;18:3-16.
- Glasgow RE, Rosen GM: Behavioral bibliotherapy: a review of self-help behavior therapy manuals. Psychological Bulletin 1978;85:1-23.
- Greist JH, Jefferson JW, Marks IM: Anxiety and its Treatment. American Psychiatric Press, Washington 1986.
- Halliday G: Psychological self-help books: How dangerous are they? Psychotherapy 1991;28:678-680.
- Heimberg RG, Barlow DH: New developments in cognitive-behavioral therapy for social phobia. Journal of Clinical Psychiatry 1991;52 (suppl):21-30.
- Ijzermans T, Heffels A: Dat durf ik niet. Boom, Meppel 1985.
- Ijzermans T, Schouten J: Ik kon wel door de grond zakken. Boom, Meppel 1985.
- Liebowitz MR, Schneier FR, Campeas R, et al: Phenelzine vs atenolol in social phobia. A placebo-controlled comparison. Archives of General Psychiatry 1992;49:290300.
- Liebowitz MR, Schneier FR, Hollander E, et al: Treatment of social phobia with drugs other than benzodiazepines, Journal of Clinical Psychiatry 1992; 52 (suppl Nov):10-15.
- Marks IM: Fears, Phobias and Rituals. Oxford University Press 1987.
- Marks IM: Behavioral psychotherapy towards the millennium. In Cottreaux J, Legeron P, Mollard E (eds): Annual Series of European Research in Behavior Therapy, Swets & Zeitlinger, Amsterdam 1992.
- Marshall JR: Social phobia. Postgraduate Medicine 1991;90 (8):187-194.
- Marx JA, Gyorky ZK, Royalty GM, Stern TE: Use of self-help books in psychotherapy. Professional Psychology Research and Practice 1992;23:300-305.
- Matthews AM, Gelder MG, Johnson DW: Agoraphobia, nature and treatment. Guilford Press, London 1981. (Translation of Dutch manual: Overwinnen van agorafobie, handleiding voor de client)
- Matthews AM, Gelder MG, Johnson DW: Agoraphobia. Nature and Treatment. Tavistock Publications, London 1981.
- Mersch PP: The behavioral and cognitive therapy for social phobia. Groningen 1994.
- Najavits LM, Wolk KA: A survey of public utilization of self-help materials. Journal of Psychology 1994;128:617-619.
- Ost L-G: Applied relaxation. In Emmelkamp PMG, et al (eds): Fresh perspectives on anxiety disorders. Annual Series of European Research in Behavior Therapy, Swets & Zeitlinger, Lisse 1989.
- Pardeck JT: Using books in clinical practice. Psychotherapy in Private Practice 1991;9:105-119.

Ouackenbush RL: The prescription of self-help books by psychologists: A bibliography of selected bibliotherapy resources. *Psychotherapy* 1991;28:671-677.

Robinson P, Bush T, Von Korff M, et al: Primary care physician use of cognitive behavioral techniques with depressed patients. *Journal of Family Practice* 1995;40 (4):352-357.

Ross J: Social phobia: the Anxiety Disorders Association of America helps raise the veil of ignorance. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry* 1991;52 (suppl):43-47,

Saper Z, Forest JJ: Effects of type of instruction on solution of psychological self-help problems. *Psychological Reports* 1992;70:1095-1105.

Scholing A, Emmelkamp P: Sociale fobie en sociale angst: etiologie en diagnostiek. *D7H* 1991;11:143-166.

Scholing A, Emmelkamp P: Sociale fobie en sociale angst: uitvoering van de behandeling. *OTH* 1992;1 2:62-90.

Scholing Av Social phobia. Cognitive and behavioural treatment. University of Groningen 1993.

Starker S: Do-it-yourself therapy: the prescription of self-help books by psychologists. *Psychotherapy* 1988;25:142-146.

Starker S: Psychologists and self-help books: attitudes and prescriptive practices of clinicians. *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 1988;42:448-455.

Starker S: Self-help books: ubiquitous agents of health care. *Medical Psychotherapy* 1990;3:187-194. Watson JP, Marks IM: Relevant and irrelevant fear in flooding. A cross-over study of phobic patients. *Behavior Therapy* 1971 ;2:275-293.