

HANDOUT 11-A

FEARED SOCIAL SITUATIONS: CHANGE YOUR MISSION

We have learned that the source of our anxiety is our Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTS). The variety of ANT most associated with social anxiety is mind reading. That is, we are anxious around other people because we are concerned about how they might be thinking of us. ("Do I fit in?" "They think I'm an idiot." "I'm boring them." "He will be annoyed if I talk to him.")

Our concern about how others view us turns every social situation into a performance. We believe that we must make other people think well of us, or at least prevent them from thinking badly of us. In other words, we are trying to control the thoughts of other people! But, can we control the thoughts of other people? Probably not, so it's any wonder that we feel anxious.

The secret of overcoming social anxiety is to change your mission. Your old mission has been "I must make them have good thoughts about me." Your new mission should be "WHAT CAN I DO TO ENCOURAGE THEM TO FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES?"

If you are willing to adopt and internalize this new mission, it can be a life-changing experience. I realize that this may be harder than it sounds. It will require you to let go of your pride and the need to impress others. Instead, you will need to be genuinely interested and concerned about the other person.

So how do we show this concern? It's not with insincere flattery. Instead, we show it by being interested and curious about them.

So the next time you are anxious around people, be aware that you are on the wrong mission. Let go of any desire to control their thoughts and focus on being polite and cordial to them. Your social anxiety will drop dramatically and you are more likely to have a positive social experience.

HANDOUT 11-D

SIMPLE CONVERSATIONAL SKILLS (FOR)

Do you avoid social situations because you are uncomfortable engaging in small talk? Perhaps your Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTS) are "I have nothing in common with these people." Or, "I won't have anything to say and I'll make a fool of myself?"

However, the truth is that you can carry on a conversation with almost anyone if you are willing to change your mission (see Handout 11-A) and let go off any desire to impress the other person. You do not need to be intimidated by their knowledge, charms, or social status. All you need is to be polite and show genuine interest in them.

A good way to show interest in the other person is to be curious and ask questions. You can ask both closed-ended questions that can be answered in a word or two ("What kind of work do you do?") and open-ended questions that might require a longer response ("How do you like that kind of work?" "How do you like your new home?")

As far as content is concerned, there are three topics that are usually safe: family, occupation, and recreation. You can remember them with the simple acronym FOR.

"What kind of work do you do?"

"How did you get into that field?"

"Are you originally from this area?"

"What brought you here?"

"What do you do for fun?"

Avoid the impulse to compete with or outdo the other person. If the other person is excited because they are about to take their first overseas trip, don't deflate them by saying "Oh, I've traveled overseas a lot." Instead say, "What are you looking forward to the most?"

Also, don't feel intimidated if the person talks about things that you can't relate to. For example, suppose I'm talking to someone who is excitedly talking about their recent trip to Italy. I might have the ANT "I've never been to Italy; I can't relate to them." If I go with this thought, I'll feel inadequate and uncomfortable. But what I should do is say, "I've never had the chance to go to Italy. What about it did you like the best?"

If you are willing to stay with this approach, you can carry on a lengthy conversation with almost anyone.

Think about any upcoming situation. Who will be there? What kind of FOR questions can you ask them?

HANDOUT 11-C

GOALS FOR OVERCOMING SOCIAL ANXIETY

What situations do you typically avoid (or if you cannot avoid them, they are extremely uncomfortable)?

What are your typical ANTS about these situations?

What strategies can you use to counter these ANTS (e.g., replacing them with more positive thoughts, mindfulness acceptance)?

What is your goal? What would you eventually want to be able to do?

What would be a small behavioral step in the direction of that goal?