SESSION OBJECTIVES:

- Introduction to exposure/reality testing.
- Discussion of steps necessary for proper exposure step construction.
**DETAILED CONTENTS**

- Welcome group members.
- Begin with ‘Check-in SUDS Rating’, and then move to Calming Technique.

**Calming Technique** (20 minutes)

**Breathing Exercise:**
It is important to provide a summary of previously presented information relating to breathing. Additionally, it is suggested that group participants engage in 40 cycles of practice in-vivo. Although not designated as homework, inquire into whether practice has been occurring. Once again, it is important to speak of the importance of practicing techniques such that they become second nature.

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation:**
Before proceeding to the actual exercise, review previously mentioned difficulties in learning to relax: (1) Fear of losing control, (2) Unusual bodily sensations, (3) A wandering mind, (4) Limited success in beginning.
- Complete PMR exercise.

**Review** (40 minutes)

**Review, Monitoring Your Relaxation Level** h/o (W/S: G):
It is useful to ask clients whether they have used the relaxation tape and the monitoring handout. If not, then gentle ‘challenge can be made, with a reiteration of the ‘practice mentality’ that is important for success in the group.
- The following is a suggestion of how to raise the ‘success issue’ with group members:
  - “Does everybody remember what triple P stands for? It stands for practice, practice and more practice. Remember that in order for these new techniques to become natural and a good habit, you must do them over and over again.”

**Review, STUNT Diary #2** h/o (W/S: F):
It is important that all group participants are addressed, and that the evidence testing portion of the record has been attempted. If a particular group member is encountering difficulties in completing this section, then the help of other group members should be enlisted. If possible, ask for situations which engender the highest level of anxiety.

**EQUIPMENT/ACTIVITY**

- Welcome
- SUDS rating
- Breathing practice
- Common problems with relaxation
- In session PMR
- Use of: Monitoring Your Relaxation Level h/o (W/S: G)
- Practise, practice and more practice
- Use of: STUNT Diary (2) h/o (W/S: F)
**DETAILED CONTENTS**

- **Cognitive Therapy** –Reviewed:
  This section reviews the concept of challenging negative automatic thoughts (stuck thoughts).
  The task is to review the h/o, *Reducing the Impact of our Stuck Thoughts* (H/O: 5) which was presented in the previous session. Once again, have the group members read portions of the handout. Inquire into whether there are any questions after the discussion.

**Break Time** (5-10 minutes)

**Discussion** (30 minutes):

- **Reality Testing:**
  (this can be adapted for group members):
  The focus of the group has been on changing breathing patterns, practicing relaxation exercises and changing unhealthy thinking styles. This is likely to make a difference on the level of comfort which is experienced in social situations. The next step in this programme is *exposure*. This means facing our individual social fears, as opposed to avoiding situations that start off our distressing levels of anxiety.

- Chances are... group members are experts at avoiding situations which involve them experiencing anxiety related feelings and physiological arousal. Few individuals enjoy feeling frightened and upset. In addition, avoidance additionally involves, not thinking about social situations which are considered difficult.

- Exposure is a very powerful technique in the treatment of anxiety disorders. Sometimes group members become frightened at the thought of confronting their fears. This section requires firm yet gentle effort on the part of the therapist.

- **How Does Exposure Work?**
  (this can be adapted for the group members):
  These exercises are often presented in grades of difficulties, beginning with the least anxiety provoking. These exercises help individuals learn how to manage anxiety. People with high levels of social anxiety have unrealistic thoughts about the *chance* and *severity* of major social problems occurring. Without coming into contact with the situations which are found

**EQUIPMENT/ACTIVITY**

- **Review of Evidence Testing**

- Provide: *Reducing the Impact of our Stuck Thoughts* h/o (H/O: 5)

- **Break-Time**

- **Exposure justification and psychoeducation**

- **Avoidance**

- **How exposure works:**

- **Chance and severity of stuck thoughts**
difficult to engage in, it is impossible to prove to oneself that they are able to get through the situations without the terrible things we believe will occur.

Without Exposure
(a further discussion point):
Without exposure, individuals with social anxiety will continue to believe that they will appear a fool to others', or that they will be criticised or disliked. At first, the anxiety will be uncomfortable. Just like the old saying goes, ‘There is no gain without pain’. This is not to say that individuals with social anxiety will have to put up with huge amounts of pain. The exercises need to elicit some degree of anxiety in order to be effective.

Repeated Exposure
(a further discussion point):
By confronting these situations over and over again, it will allow individuals to become better able to handle being in situations which results in social anxiety. In the initial stages of exposure, there will be relatively high levels of nervousness experienced by individuals. By repeatedly entering into these situations, in a planned way, the individual will respond more calmly. For example, let us think back to a time when a sister, brother or friend would sometimes sneak up on us. At first our heart rate increased, muscles grew tense, and our breathing became rapid and shallow. Yet, if this were to continue time after time, it would be a situation that we became accustomed to, even if it was still a bit annoying. Similarly, social situations can lose their negative power to set off strong anxiety reactions, and it is possible to learn to cope with it in a much better fashion.

Session Activity:
Most of this session focuses on exposure. Therefore, it is essential for group members to have completed the: Situations Where I feel: Shy, Nervous or Embarrassed h/o (W/S: E). If this has not been attempted then complete in group.

Provide: Turning Your Goal Into Easier to Handle Steps h/o (H/O: 6)
DETAILED CONTENTS

Provide: Step Ladder h/o (W/S: I)

Developing the Step Ladder:
(this can be adapted for group members):
(1) Once a list of situations has been created by group members, double check that they actually involve anxiety in social situations.
The goals should be specific and vary in SUDS levels, from mild to high. By making the goals specific, it will allow individuals to move forward in the program more effectively. It is useful to remember, that anxiety up to a certain point is useful, so it would not be useful to remove anxiety all together.

(2) It is important to break each step into smaller steps so it is analogous to climbing a step-ladder in reaching the primary goal. If difficulty is experienced in breaking the goal into smaller steps it is possible to facilitate this by asking oneself: WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, FOR HOW LONG (DURATION).

It may be useful to provide an example of breaking a goal into smaller steps.

Example of goal broken into smaller steps
GOAL: “Eat meal in local restaurant”
1   Have soft drink at restaurant early in morning
2   Have soft drink at lunchtime
3   Cup of coffee and sandwich early in morning
4   Have cup of coffee and sandwich at lunchtime
5   Have full meal and stay for 20 minutes
6   Have full meal and stay until it is all eaten

(3) Rate each of the steps on the step ladder on the SUDS scale. Each step approaching the top goal, has a higher SUDS rating. The number of steps in the step ladder, depends on how difficult the major step was to achieve in the first place. Complex goals may require several more steps, such that the anxiety is broken down into easier to manage chunks.

It may be useful to use the white board for simplifying the following exercise:
Provide the following acronym which stipulates guidelines necessary for accurate goal setting: ‘PRAMS’, Personal, Realistic, Achievable, Measurable and Specific.

In order for group members to better understand the concept of a hierarchy (step

EQUIPMENT/ACTIVITY

Provide: Step Ladder h/o (W/S: I)

Steps necessary for accurate hierarchy

Steps involve anxiety in social situations

Breaking down goal into steps

Example of breaking goal into steps

SUDS rating of each step

Personal, realistic, achievable, measurable and specific
DETAILED CONTENTS

ladder) construction, it is suggested that one be constructed for each group member, within the group.

Construct Step Ladder and designate as homework greater than one hierarchy step as homework.

Goal Setting for Week  (5 minutes)

→ STUNT Diary #2 h/o (W/S: F)
→ Monitor relaxation practice
→ Work on construction of hierarchy, using: 
  Turning Your Goal Into Easier to Handle Steps
  h/o (H/O: 6) and, the Step Ladder h/o (W/S: I)
→ Set one goal as homework

Complete, My Journal - Session 5  (5 minutes)
At this point group members complete their list of homework assignments. Then allow them five minutes to jot down notes which relate to ‘Some important points I learned today’.

End group with ‘Check-Out SUDS Rating’ SUDS Rating
Handouts & Worksheets
Reducing the Impact of our 'Stuck' Thoughts

People who tend to be very shy and anxious are likely to believe and ‘tune’ in to information that supports that the object/situation/event is threatening. By tuning into this information, their anxiety holds on and won’t let go easily. The secret to overcoming anxiety is to change what you tune in to.

How do I tune into things that are not threatening? The key to reducing our anxiety, lies in what is called Evidence Testing.

Evidence Testing is all about trying to be sure about our thoughts. It is about trying to see if we are tuning out valuable information that may make us feel less anxious. Evidence testing is about asking yourself questions that will help you look for other information around you and make an informed decision about your thoughts instead of just accepting them.

Four Main Types of Evidence (and the questions to ask yourself):

1. Past Experience
   “How much has this happened before”?

2. General Rules:
   “Is this something that generally happens”?

3. Alternative Explanations:
   “What other explanations are there”?

4. Role Reversal:
   “How would you feel if you were to ‘step’ into the other person’s shoes”?
Step 1: Recognise the feelings

- Label the feeling and see how strong it is on the 0-100 scale

Step 2: Find out what your thinking

- Go through automatic thought discovery questions
  - “What am I embarrassed/nervous or shy about?”
  - “What do I think is going to happen?”

Step 3: Examine the evidence for and against the stuck thought

- Ask yourself the Evidence Testing questions

Step 4: Replace the stuck thought with a balanced thought

- Take the evidence for and against the stuck thought into account
1. Once you have a list of situations that you feel shy, nervous or embarrassed in, make sure they are situations that involve anxiety in social situations.

2. Break each goal into smaller steps so it is like climbing a ladder to get to your goal. If your having difficulty breaking your goal into smaller steps, you can make steps by changing the Who, What, When, Where, For How Long parts of it.

3. Beside each of the steps, rate each one on your SUDS scale. Therefore, as you move up your ladder, each step will have a higher SUDS rating.

Example:
SESSION 6

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

❖ Introduction to the Mini Relaxation exercise.
❖ Discuss group members attempts at constructing the steps for exposure.
❖ Review session on exposure.
Therapist’s Notes
Welcome group members.

Begin with ‘Check-in SUDS Rating’, and then move to Calming Technique.

**Calming Technique** (20 minutes)

Pre and post session, it is important to inquire whether benefits are occurring as a result of doing relaxation within and outside of session.

The reason behind the following exercise will be explained to group members later in the session. The therapist engages in the Mini Relaxation, in full view of the group participants. This is done without announcing to the group that the therapist is engaging in this exercise. Thus, the group members will at this time, not be aware the therapist is engaging in a relaxation exercise. The point of this activity is that, anxiety management can be carried out inconspicuously.

This is a form of relaxation which allows group members to utilise their relaxation skills outside of therapy in social situations with out other people knowing. It is important to describe to clients that this is a sub-component of PMR. This is to facilitate the cueing of the two relaxation techniques, so that one is not replaced by the other. The handout, *Your Mini Relaxation (H/O: 8)* is to be read prior to engaging in the exercise.

Introduction to Mini Relaxation:

This could be used with the group members:

“We are now going to do a slightly different form of relaxation which you will find quite useful. This form of relaxation will enable you to do your relaxation in two additional ways. Firstly, it can be done when you are in a room full of people, when you are out in public or even waiting for the bus. Secondly, it can be done in a very short period of time. As long as you continue doing your relaxation at home using your tape, this mini relaxation will have a similar result. The relaxation you do with your tape is a full relaxation and it relaxes all of your muscle groups. Although, the Mini Relaxation does not take as long as the full relaxation, it reminds your body of the effects of the full relaxation.”
Mini Relaxation Exercise

Could everyone place your handout on Mini relaxation in front of you. Everyone stand and allow your hands to hang by your sides and relax comfortably. Remember, ‘Lips closed, jaw relaxed, breathe slow and low’. Whilst we are doing the Mini Relaxation, I want you to breathe in for two seconds and out for three seconds. Whilst you are breathing out, I want you to say the word ‘relax’ to yourself. It is important that you are breathing from your stomach, more so than from your chest. I now want you to cross one leg over the other, keeping your feet close together and firmly on the floor…. Now, place both arms behind your back and grasp your hands together. Lightly twist your wrists as much as you comfortably can, such that the palms of your hands go from facing directly behind you to now facing the ground beneath you. Move your hands and arms away from your back… keeping your hands clasped and arms straight…. such that you can feel tension in your forearms, wrists and shoulders. You should also now be feeling tension in your legs muscles, back, neck and chest. Remember that whilst you are doing this, it is important to continue to concentrate on your breathing. Now uncross your legs and return your arms to a resting position at your sides. Notice the difference between this sense of relaxation as compared to the previous feelings of tension. Now focus on your breathing for the next 30 seconds. Take two seconds on the breathe in, and three seconds on the breathe out. Remembering to say the word ‘relax’ on the breathe out. Now repeat these steps at least three times.”

Inquire whether group participants realised this exercise was being undertaken by the therapist prior to practising it together.

Review (20 minutes)

Review, Monitoring Your Relaxation Levels h/o (W/S: G)

Firstly ask clients whether they have used the relaxation tape. If not, then gentle challenge should be made, with a reiteration of the ‘practice mentality’ that is important for success in treatment.

Anyone notice (covert) Mini Relaxation, conducted by therapist?

Use of: Monitoring Your Relaxation Levels h/o (W/S: G)
**Detailed Contents**

- **Review, STUNT Diary #2 h/o (W/S: F):**
  Prior to this component, write the STUNT Diary #2 template on the white board. Ensure members who were not addressed in last session are addressed in this session.

- **Review, Step Ladder h/o (W/S: I):**
  It is useful to spend time ensuring accuracy of each step, with other group members providing feedback. Break into groups, with the therapist circulating to provide guidelines and feedback. It is important that adequate time is allocated for this component.

**Break Time** (5-10 minutes)

**Review (continued):** (20 minutes)

- **Review of Graded Exposure:**
  Provide, Facing the Things That You Avoid h/o (H/O: 9).
  This handout reviews the previous session's discussion on exposure and the construction of fear hierarchies (step ladders). Have group members read portions of the handout and complete sections.

- **Overcoming Social Phobia Video:**
  The video's use is to reinforce the treatment techniques and therapy messages in a further medium, and provide real examples of other individuals with social phobia and their experiences in treatment. Prior to beginning the video, it should be mentioned that if a client wishes to ask a question, the video can be stopped. This will allow for key points to be made about the video in relation to their difficulties and to respond to any questions group members have. Following the video, a closing discussion ensues.

  **View:** Graded Exposure portion of “I think, they think...”

- **Summary of Video:**
  (this can be adapted for group members):
  - Graded exposure involves the acknowledgment that treatment success involves doing the things you have hated to do up until now.
  - You progress at your own rate.
  - Confront situations you fear in a step wise fashion.

**Equipment/Activity**

- **Use of:** STUNT Diary #2 h/o (W/S: F)

- **Review of hierarchy construction**

- **Break Time**

- **Review of graded exposure**

- **Provide:** Facing the Things That You Avoid h/o (H/O: 9)

- **Graded exposure portion of video**

- **Video summary**
Some important points for the hierarchy:
→ Do frequently/repeatedly and at close intervals.
→ Do continuously until comfortable.
→ Stay in situation until anxiety decreases. Wait until anxiety drops.
→ Don’t ‘bail out’, despite bad day...e.g. deliberately getting lost on way to feared situation.
→ Don’t use drugs (illicit substances) to lessen anxiety.
→ Confront situation anxious in and manage it.
→ Admit to your successes and don’t change ‘goal posts’. Take pride in your achievements.

**Goal Setting for Week** (5 minutes)

- **STUNT Diary #2 h/o (W/S: F):**
  - Monitor relaxation practice PMR tape and Mini Relaxation with *Monitoring Your Relaxation Level* h/o (W/S: G)
  - Begin working on hierarchy (no exposure diary). Designed to determine level of commitment and motivation in terms of confronting items on hierarchy.

**Complete, My Journal – Session 6** (5 minutes)
At this point group members first complete list of homework assignments. Then allow five minutes to jot down notes that relate to ‘Some important points I learned today’.

Upon completion of summary of session 6, have each group member read their summary from session 2 through 6.

End group with ‘Check-Out SUDS Rating’ **SUDS Rating**
Handouts & Worksheets
Your Mini-Relaxation
(you can do it anywhere)

- This relaxation exercise does not take as long to do as your taped relaxation exercises you do at home.
- Just because you know how to use a shorter relaxation tool, don’t stop using your taped relaxation exercises. This is because, the Mini-relaxation tool reminds you of the full benefit of doing the taped relaxation exercise. If you stop doing the taped relaxation exercise, then your body will forget how much tension you can release AND the mini-relaxation tool will not be as effective!!

STEPS for Mini Relaxation:

1. Remember...Lips closed, jaw relaxed, breathe slow and low.

2. Breathe in for 2 seconds and out for 3 seconds. Be aware of your breathing during all of the Mini-relaxation.

3. Cross one of your legs over the other leg...keeping your feet firmly planted on the ground. Try to place your feet even with each other.

4. Put both hands behind your back and grasp your hands. Now twist your hands so that your palms are now facing the floor.

5. Keeping your hands together and your arms straight, gently raise your arms toward your head.

6. Notice the increase in tension in all of your different muscles. Hold all of this for a count of 5.

7. Now...uncross your legs and return your arms to your sides. Take two or three breaths to let go of all the tension. Deepen the relaxation you have achieved, with 20-30 seconds of controlled breathing.

8. Repeat steps '2' to '7' until you feel relaxed.
Facing the Things That You Avoid

We have been working on changing your breathing patterns, practising relaxation exercises and changing your stuck to unstuck thoughts, so that you can be more comfortable in social situations.

The next step involved is... Real Situation Testing (exposure). This means facing your fears, as opposed to avoiding situations that start off your distressing levels of anxiety. So instead of only thinking through a situation in your head and doing evidence testing, you can actually experience the situation. Chances are, you are all experts at avoiding situations that start off anxious feelings in your body. This is because it is unlikely that you enjoy feeling scared and upset...so we just avoid it.

What sort of situations do you avoid, but would like to better handle dealing with?

Avoidance not only means staying away from places or situations, but also trying not to think of something that causes you to feel anxious. Remember that...trying not to think of something, actually makes it worse and you think more about what you are trying not to think of!!

What sort of things do you do your best not to think of which involve social situations?


How does real situation testing work?

It helps you learn that certain actions don't lead to people thinking poorly of you, or if it does occur it's not a catastrophe. Remember...people with anxiety in social situations tend to think the likelihood of a social disaster happening is very high, and they think that the social disaster will be quite severe.

If you don't face situations that you tend to avoid, you cannot prove to yourself that you can get through these situation without the terrible consequence you think will happen. Without facing these situations, you will continue to think that you'll look like a fool, or that you'll be criticised or disliked.

After taking the exposure step, you will learn the situation you have been dreading for so long is not so bad. Yes...at first the anxiety will be uncomfortable, yet learning to cope with the anxiety means you have to experience it.

By repeatedly exposing yourself to situations which you were previously fearful, embarrassed or felt tense in, you will become used to them. By entering into these situations, in a planned and proper way, your body will react more calmly. After a while these situations will lose their power to bring on as much anxiety as they did before you did real situation testing exercises.

If you plan these steps properly, you will build up on your confidence and this will allow you to make further steps forward. With increased confidence, you are more likely to face what you call your 'fears'...NOW!!