

## ACT FOR SOCIAL ANXIETY GROUP – OVERVIEW

Adapted from group protocol Mindfulness & Acceptance-Based Group Therapy for Social Anxiety Disorder ([http://www.actonsocialanxiety.com/pdf/magt\\_for\\_SAD\\_2nd\\_ed.pdf](http://www.actonsocialanxiety.com/pdf/magt_for_SAD_2nd_ed.pdf)), including supporting material from the Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Social Anxiety and Shyness (<https://www.newharbinger.com/mindfulness-and-acceptance-workbook-social-anxiety-and-shyness>).

- 8 x 2hr sessions, in consecutive weeks
- Possibly augmented with individual coaching sessions around skills & exposure (if resources for this)

### Typical session structure:

- Mindfulness exercise: 15 minutes (including exercise and inquiry)
- Review of homework: 15 – 30 mins
- Session themes: introduction of ACT concepts with metaphors/experiential exercises (1 – 4) and ACT-consistent exposure (Taking VITAL Action; 5 – 8)
- Homework assignment: 5 -10 mins

### SESSION 1: SAFETY MODE (P.6/199)

- Ice-breaker (desert island)
- Group rules –
- Structure of program
- Introducing safety mode and costs of safety mode (examples on whiteboard from yourself, friend). Post it notes – whiteboard into four quadrants safety behaviours, focus (anonymous, we collect and put them up)
- top 3 feared situations– offer examples
- cost of outright avoidance; what are you giving up for safety –
- then vital action mode – flip to other side (we will learn more about this later on – the first skill we will get onto is getting in touch with the present moment)
- Raisin exercise; exploration of mindfulness (and components + inquiry) –
- Homework (bring some into the session): reading chapter one of the book, mindfully eating a meal (+ log); audio recording of mindful eating; top 3 feared situations

### SESSION 2: ACCEPTANCE/WILLINGNESS (P.21/199)

- The observing mountain
- Review homework
- Struggling with emotion: Polygraph metaphor, Quicksand metaphor
- Finger trap demonstration
- Mindful stretching (yoga!)
- Tug of war with anxiety monster (demonstrate: struggle – let go of the rope)
- Welcoming Uncle Leo (party guest metaphor, not inviting Leo and he turns up anyway)
- Willingness switch/struggle switch (refer to Uncle Leo metaphor) – if willingness switch is off you are caught
- Magic wand (p27 of manual)
- Homework: observing mountain (daily + log; try lake/train-track image); tug of war metaphor illustration

### SESSION 3: VALUES AND GOALS (P.38/199)

- Body scan + inquiry (emphasise - acceptance of bodily sensations is one art of vital action mode)
- Review homework
- Values and Goals: share 80<sup>th</sup> birthday exercise
- Review definitions re: values and goals (use compass metaphor – go west)
- Values cards + inquiry
- Share values and goals identified in homework sheet; identify those that are *important* and also involve a feared situation
- Choosing goals worksheet (to work on in session and as homework during 8-week program)
- Homework: Choosing goals worksheet (for social anxiety disorder); body scan (daily + log); Your anxious thoughts; optional – values card sorting exercise

### SESSION 4: DEVELOPING A DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIP TO THOUGHTS: DEFUSION (P.53/199)

- Mindfulness of breath, sound and thoughts + Inquiry
- Review homework
- Cartoons (two fish in sea; two computers with same message, different stance) + discussion
- Anxiety mind volleyball (demonstrate)
  - o What's it like being one of the participants in this games versus observing the game. Simplify and hand out the 'thoughts'
- Defusion/distancing strategies
  - o I am having the thought that...; Name what the mind is doing; Give names to your thoughts; Thank the mind; Awareness of thinking; Observe your thoughts. Get off your butts (replace BUT with AND.
- Plastic pockets exercise – being in thoughts, noticing thoughts, being open to thoughts as experiences
- Leaves on the stream exercise + Inquiry
- The Guest House poem
- Homework: Anxiety thoughts + safety thoughts example sheets; awareness of thinking exercise (daily +log); mindful hearing; summary of defusion strategies; reading Living Reporter; Defusion worksheet

### SESSION 5: BEING WITH YOUR ANXIETY & COMMENCING VALUES-BASED EXPOSURE (P.69/199)

- Remind participants of willingness/struggle switch
- Review homework
- Acceptance of feelings and thoughts (mindfulness exercise)
- Breath holding Part I: time length and note for later in session
- Being invited to a struggle with experience, link to willingness/ struggle switch
- Jumping metaphor [*all or nothing quality – no half, you can choose the level but either you are in it or not*]
- Breath holding Part II: being willingly out of breath
- Being with your anxiety exercises (interoceptive exposure)
  - o acceptance of bodily sensations (head lift; straw breathing; running on the spot for 1 minute; hyperventilation)
- Homework: mindful stretching (daily + log); being with your anxiety (choose bodily sensation that emerges when struggling with anxiety + LOG); bringing on bodily sensations of anxiety.

## SESSION 6: TAKING VITAL ACTION (P.82/199)

- Taking VITAL Action exercises (explain VITAL; Values and goals, In the present moment, Take notice, Allow experience) – link to exposure and motivations for engaging in group
- Review homework
- Physicalizing Exercise
- Being observed: enter the room with everyone else seated (each person does this)
- Making eye contact (willing to make eye contact in pairs for 5 seconds; repeat with each person the group + discuss).
  - o *Potentially also other exercises for being observed* (e.g. entering room make eye contact and smile; throwing a ball, pouring a drink, eating, writing, dancing etc)
- “Get to know you” conversations – 5 minutes + explore experience and use of safety behaviours
- Homework: VITAL action worksheet and weekly schedule (schedule in list of tasks/exposures) – complete Part I Preparing before doing the activity then Part II Debriefing after doing the activity; practice of the mindfulness activities learned (daily + log)

## SESSION 7: TAKING VITAL ACTION (CONTINUED) AND GOAL STEPPING (P.97/199)

- Imagining VITAL action exercise
- Review homework
- This session is based around activities from group members’ personal Goals worksheet; identify agreed goal and details of exercise than follow VITAL Action instructions – then discuss each group member’s experience
- Goal stepping: each group member selects one goal and breaks it down into steps using the Goal-Stepping worksheet (individual work) then schedule at least one of the steps in to do before next session
- Cultivating self-compassion exercise
- Homework: request the group to prepare a VITAL Action task for the next session; complete imagining VITAL Action (daily + log); work through each of the other goals identified and step out the process on the Goal-Stepping worksheet; for the steps scheduled in during the week – complete this with both Preparation and Debrief worksheet.

## SESSION 8: WRAPPING UP AND STEPPING FORWARD (P.132/199)

- Imagining VITAL Action exercise
- Review homework
- Do outstanding VITAL Action exercises – if there are any (as per previous sessions)
- Stepping into the Future – hand out resources and discuss with the group.
- Review content and process of the group
- Seek group feedback: what was helpful, not helpful, any suggestions for improvements
- Link group with resources for on-going use in their personal life.