Social Anxiety: An Attention Experiment

Who this is for: Adults planning a social-anxiety attention experiment with a therapist.

What this helps with: Explore attention's effects; separate an internal impression from observable interaction.

Why this works: When attention stays on your own performance, useful information from the conversation may be missed. A planned comparison can help you discover what changes when attention moves towards the interaction.

How to use: 1. Agree two brief, comparable conversations and a prediction. 2. Compare usual attention with attention to the conversation. 3. Review the observations together, allowing for differences between situations.

Guided example (fictional)

1. Two brief role-plays. Prediction: 'If I stop monitoring, I will lose the thread.'

2. Usual: monitored my voice. Other: listened to the person's words and responded; no forced eye contact.

3. Usual: missed a question. Other: followed the topic; still felt anxious. Second topic was easier.

4. Listening may help participation; no claim about private judgements. Repeat with comparable topics.

Your turn - one example, brief notes

1. Agreed comparison and prediction

Which two brief situations? What would make the prediction observable?

2. Attention and support plan

What will differ? Keep other responses similar where possible; retain needed support.

3. What happened in each condition?

Record participation and observable events, plus differences that affect comparison.

4. Learning and next comparison

What did you learn about attention? What remains unknown or needs a clearer test?

Reflection: What helped you follow the conversation? How did feelings compare with observations? What could we improve in the comparison?

Optional next step: Repeat the agreed comparison in another suitable situation.

Support note: Agree the task with your therapist. Retain access and sensory supports; do not force eye contact or assume anxiety means poor social performance.

Model: Clark and Wells' cognitive model of social anxiety. Original wording and layout; not a validated treatment programme.

Research: Clark et al. (2006), Cognitive therapy versus exposure and applied relaxation in social phobia. JCCP, 74, 568-578. DOI: 10.1037/0022-006X.74.3.568

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