



Attention Training

-For Social Anxiety-



Social anxiety is a common condition that can make it difficult to engage in social situations. People with social anxiety may feel self-conscious or anxious in group settings, leading to avoidance or isolation. One way to address social anxiety is through attention training, which involves learning to focus your attention on the present moment rather than on self-conscious thoughts or fears. By practicing attention training regularly, individuals with social anxiety can learn to stay present in social situations, engage with others, and reduce feelings of self-consciousness. This training can be adapted to focus on various activities, such as conversations, public speaking, or other social situations.

Rationale

The rationale behind attention focus training is to help individuals learn how to shift their attention away from negative thoughts and feelings and focus on the present moment. We have been hard wired biologically to look for threats, but sadly in our modern day and age heightened anxiety can sometimes lead us to focus on perceived threats and not actual threats. Focus on perceived threats can make us worry about the future and what bad things might or could happen. It can be hard to get unstuck from these kinds of thoughts. When we are able to focus our attention away from the thoughts and on the task we are doing, we are then better able to check out all the information we have available in a logical way which then makes it easier to regulate our emotions and reduce stress and anxiety.

Practical Example

Let's apply this reasoning to an example. When we feel socially anxious, it happens very often that our attention doesn't stay with the actual conversation. We are focused on our own symptoms of anxiety. This can be our sweaty hands, our increased heart rate and so on. We are focusing on our self and not on the conversation. It can also be that we are scanning the environment. What could go wrong? Who is coming towards me? Is that person looking at me funny? We are focused on everything around us, but not the conversation. These types of focus can make it very likely that we will miss questions that are being asked of us, that we don't know what to say because our mind is too busy with the perceived threats and that we miss information that challenges the negative info we are focusing on. All of these can lead us to feel that we are not very socially skilled or further reinforce our anxiety that it always will go wrong. So how can we move our attention to the task at hand? Let's practice!



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Instructions

1. Choose a person you feel comfortable talking to, such as a close friend or family member, and arrange a time to have a conversation with them.
2. Before the conversation, take a few deep breaths and remind yourself that it's okay to feel anxious. Everyone experiences anxiety in social situations at times.
3. Focus your attention on the person you're talking to. Pay attention to their facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language.
4. Practice active listening by repeating back what they say or asking follow-up questions. This can help you stay engaged in the conversation and reduce feelings of self-consciousness.
5. If you notice your mind wandering or getting distracted, gently bring your attention back to the conversation. Don't judge yourself or get frustrated if you find this difficult at first. Remember that this is a skill that takes practice.
6. End the conversation mindfully by summarizing what was discussed and thanking the person for their time.

Tips

1. Start with small conversations: If you're new to attention focus training, start with a short and simple conversation to begin with, such as asking a friend about their day or discussing a recent event.
2. Use grounding techniques before if you feel the anxious thoughts are difficult to detach from. This can help to reduce your anxiety levels before the actual anxiety inducing task and can help you focus more on the task.
3. Use positive self-talk: Use positive self-talk before, during, and after the conversation. Remind yourself that it's okay to feel anxious, and that you're doing your best to stay present and engaged.
4. Practice regularly: Make it a habit to practice attention focus training regularly, even if it's just for a few minutes each day. The more you practice, the easier it will become.



Full Video Guidance available through clicking or scanning the QR code



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The following fillable worksheet can be helpful to practice your attention focus training. It is helpful to keep track of how well the focusing is going and what might make it easier or harder to do so. The first column contains the task. In the second one you can track the duration you were able to focus. The third column is to score your focus level out of 10 and finally the fourth column is to keep track of anything you noticed during (How easy or hard was it to focus? Did you get distracted often?,...)

What was the focused task?	How long?	How was your focus?	What did you notice?