

# Social Anxiety Hierarchy

Gradual exposure is a well-established technique in behavioral psychology to conquer fears, phobias, and anxieties like the fear of spiders, heights, or flying on a plane.

The first step is to identify a significant fear or anxiety of yours, then break it down into “Low” → “Medium” → “High” anxiety situations. This categorization is called an “Anxiety Hierarchy.”

The ultimate goal is to safely and gradually expose yourself to these situations (starting from “Low” anxiety and working your way up), allowing you to become more “desensitized” over time.

The main idea is that with more experience and repeated exposure, these situations should become less intense and more comfortable over time.

In this worksheet, let's focus on social anxiety.

Everyone experiences varying degrees of social stress, worry, and nerves depending on the situation. For many, social anxiety hurts their ability to seek new opportunities and meet new people.

Your **Social Anxiety Hierarchy** will help you categorize different social situations based on the discomfort they evoke.

On the next page you'll fill out your anxiety hierarchy, then we'll go over guidelines and tips for how to use it to overcome social anxiety.

Let's begin!

**LOW SOCIAL ANXIETY: Identify social situations or activities that make you feel mild discomfort or nervousness.**

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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**MEDIUM SOCIAL ANXIETY: Identify social situations or activities that make you feel moderate discomfort or anxiety.**

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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**HIGH SOCIAL ANXIETY: Identify social situations or activities that make you feel high levels of discomfort, stress, and anxiety.**

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- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

## HOW TO USE YOUR SOCIAL ANXIETY HIERARCHY

Here are quick tips and guidelines:

- **Remember the main goal.** The purpose is to gradually work your way up from “Low” → “Medium” → “High” anxiety situations.
- **Teach yourself relaxation techniques.** Before challenging yourself, learn at least one relaxation technique that helps calm your body and mind. Choices include:
  - Breathing Meditation
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation
  - Grounding Tools
- **Start super small.** Start with the lowest anxiety situations. Repeat them multiple times until your anxiety becomes significantly less and you feel ready to go to the next level.
- **Practice mental rehearsal.** If you don't feel ready yet, try a “mental rehearsal” of specific situations to train your mind to be more familiar with them. Visualize the situation from beginning → end, with a positive result. Combine them with a relaxation technique before and after for maximum effect.
- **Celebrate your wins.** When you successfully complete any activity from your hierarchy, give yourself a mental pat on the back.
- **Be patient.** Growth takes time. Go easy on yourself.

Congratulations! You've completed the worksheet.