


# The Mindfulness & Acceptance Workbook for Social Anxiety & Shyness

Using Acceptance & Commitment Therapy to  
Free Yourself from Fear & Reclaim Your Life



**With downloadable  
guided mindfulness  
meditations and  
printable worksheets**

## **A POWERFUL STEP-BY-STEP PROGRAM TO HELP YOU:**

- Understand social anxiety in a new way
- Stop avoiding social situations
- Speak in public – even with fear and doubt
- Start participating fully in the life you want

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# Introduction

If you have picked up this book, chances are that you are one of the approximately 20 percent of adults who experience significant fear of public speaking, or one of the 15 percent (or so) who are very anxious about meeting new people (Ruscio et al. 2008). You are not alone! If you are reading this book, it is also likely that you are not living the life you truly want, that struggling with social fear has kept you from getting the most out of your friendships, family relationships, work, and play. How did this happen, and what can you do about it?

## A New Perspective on Social Anxiety and Shyness

In this book, we walk you through a new perspective for understanding and dealing with your social anxiety and shyness. We show you how the root of your suffering may reside in four things that you do in social situations: pay attention to “social danger,” resist anxious feelings, buy into anxious thoughts, and avoid your fears instead of doing what really matters to you. We refer to this as acting in “safety mode,” and we present you with an alternative, “vital-action mode.” In this new mode of action, you will learn how to be fully present in social situations, and how to let go of your struggle with anxious thoughts and

feelings so that you can focus on what is most important to you: your values and goals. We will teach you how to do these things using principles and strategies that are part of a new psychotherapy approach called *acceptance and commitment therapy* (or ACT, pronounced as a word, not initials) (Hayes, Strosahl, and Wilson 1999).

## The ACT Approach

The goal of ACT is to help you open up to difficult thoughts and feelings while doing what is important to you. ACT teaches you how to do this through the use of metaphors and exercises, and by teaching you mindfulness and behavioral strategies. ACT has been shown to be effective for a wide range of problems, including social anxiety, depression, and chronic pain, among others (Ruiz 2010). Next, we want to say a bit about how we came to write this book.

## Our Journey to This Book

We first met in 2004, “on the job” at a hospital-based clinic for anxiety problems. Nancy was just a few years into her career as a psychologist, whereas Jan had been practicing psychiatry for almost twenty years; it seemed an unlikely match! However, we soon discovered that we shared a common passion and goal: to help improve the lives of people who were struggling with social anxiety and shyness. In Jan’s case, because of her own struggles with social anxiety, especially around public speaking, she had always felt a special connection to her patients whose lives were often tragically diminished by social fears. Nancy had devoted her clinical and research work to understanding and treating social anxiety ever since she had started graduate school in 1996.

Soon after meeting, we decided to work together by coleading *cognitive behavioral therapy* (CBT) groups for outpatients with social anxiety, an approach backed by ample research (Heimberg 2002). At the same time, we started to hear about the benefits of ACT and other mindfulness and acceptance approaches for a number of anxiety problems, including social anxiety. Intrigued, we embarked on a program of reading about and training in these new approaches. We were soon convinced of their potential benefits for our clients, and decided to develop and assess a new treatment for them: *mindfulness and acceptance-based group therapy* (MAGT) for social anxiety disorder. MAGT is a twelve-week program that is based on ACT and includes mindfulness exercises drawn from *mindfulness-based cognitive therapy*

(MBCT) (Segal, Williams, and Teasdale 2002) and *mindfulness-based stress reduction* (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn 1990), described further in the boxes. Over a five-year period, we conducted a pilot study of MAGT (Kocovski, Fleming, and Rector 2009) and also compared it to CBT in a randomized controlled trial, the gold-standard approach for testing the effectiveness of a new therapy. Our findings were very promising: MAGT was just as effective as CBT in helping individuals deal with social anxiety disorder in our study (Kocovski et al., under review). As we watched many of our study participants shift from struggling with social anxiety to living more fulfilling lives, we were inspired to make our approach available to a broader audience with this workbook. Fortunately, we are not the only ones hard at work in this area. As we write this introduction, nine studies, carried out in five different countries, have found mindfulness and acceptance-based therapies to be effective for social anxiety disorder (summarized in appendix A). That is very heartening!

Our journey to this book has involved more than our clinical and research work. We have also endeavored to apply mindfulness and acceptance strategies to our own lives, including our struggles. We sincerely hope that you will benefit from these strategies as much as we have.

Mindfulness-based cognitive therapy (MBCT) (Segal, Williams, and Teasdale 2002) is based in part on MBSR and was originally developed to prevent relapse of recurrent major depressive disorder. MBCT has since been adapted for a number of different problems (see, for example, Piet and Hougaard 2011).



Mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) (Kabat-Zinn 1990) was originally developed in 1979 for medical patients dealing with stress. It is an eight-week program in group format that consists of formal mindfulness practices, such as the body scan, mindful yoga, and sitting meditation, as well as informal mindfulness practices. It has been adapted for a wide range of problems, and there are now more than five hundred MBSR clinics around the world (Cullen 2011).

## How This Book Is Organized

We have provided you with our approach in a succinct and practical format that will allow you to get started right away on moving toward a more rich and meaningful life. The book is divided into two main parts: part 1, “Fundamentals” (chapters 1 through 6), and part 2, “Putting It All Together” (chapters 7 and 8). Part 1 contains basic definitions and an examination of how acting in “safety mode” may be keeping you from living the life you want. We then proceed to uncovering what really matters in your life and to showing you how mindfulness can help you to stay focused on what is important to you in social situations as you accept anxious feelings and defuse from anxious thoughts. In part 2, we put those skills together into an approach for taking “vital action” in social situations as you gradually step toward your valued goals. Throughout the book are case examples, metaphors, and exercises (many adapted from the materials we used with our groups in the research studies, and some that we have developed more recently) to help you to understand and implement this new approach.

## How to Use This Book

Most of the chapters build on each other, so we recommend that you read them in the order in which they appear in the book, completing the relevant exercises as you go along. An alternative is to read through the book without doing any of the exercises, and then go back and do the exercises as you read through the book again. If you would prefer to follow a specific schedule for reading the book and doing the exercises, a “Suggested Eight-Week Schedule” is included at the end of this Introduction.

To help you get the most out of this book, there are guided mindfulness exercises (audio downloads available at [www.newharbinger.com/20801](http://www.newharbinger.com/20801)), and you can download many of the written exercises there too. For exercises that can be printed from the website, you will see this mouse icon  . For mindfulness exercises that you can listen to, you will see this headphones icon  .

# The Journey Ahead

If you follow the approach in this book, social anxiety will gradually loosen its grip on your life. You will be freed up to do more things than you could do before—with your friends and family, at work and at play, your life will be about what really matters to you. However, your journey to a more vital life will take hard work, perseverance, and time; there is no point in rushing through the process. Instead, know that every moment you set aside to work with this book will be not only a step toward a more meaningful life, but also a precious gift to yourself.

## Suggested Eight-Week Schedule for the Workbook\*

Week	Things to Do
1	<p><b>Social-Anxiety Playing Field &amp; Safety Mode</b> Read, and do the exercises, in chapters 1 &amp; 2.</p>
2	<p><b>Values and Goals</b> Read, and do the exercises, in chapter 3. Note: The Values and Goals Worksheet can be revised if necessary in week 6 (see below).</p>
3	<p><b>Getting Started with Mindfulness</b> Read, and do the exercises, in chapter 4. Practice using an observer image (mountain, with or without audio, and others), 5 to 10 minutes, daily. Mindfulness of routine activities (e.g. eating, seeing, hearing, and so on), 5 to 10 minutes, daily Record all mindfulness activities in the Mindfulness Log.</p>
4	<p><b>Acceptance of Bodily Sensations (Abs)</b> Read, and do the exercises, in chapter 5. Do the Body Scan and Mindful Stretching on alternate days (with or without audio); do one session of Being With Your Anxiety, daily. Use the Abs Recording Form to track your experiences. Continue with the observer image, and mindfulness of routine activities, as in week 3 (above).</p>
5	<p><b>Defusing from Anxious Thoughts</b> Read, and do the exercises, in chapter 6. Practice defusion strategies, daily (Record in the Worksheet: Defusing from your Anxious Thoughts). Continue to do the Body Scan and Mindful Stretching on alternate days, as well as one session of Being With Your Anxiety, daily, as in week 4 (above). Mindfulness of routine activities, 5 to 10 minutes, daily</p>
6	<p><b>Pause and Practice</b> Revise your Values and Goals Worksheet (exercise 3.2) if necessary. Practice defusion strategies, daily. Abs: your choice of Body Scan, Mindful Stretching, or Being with Your Anxiety, daily Mindfulness of routine activities, 5 to 10 minutes, daily</p>
7	<p><b>Taking VITAL Action</b> First half of the week: read, and do the exercises, in chapter 7. Second half of the week: review sections of chapter 7 that require more attention. Imagining VITAL Action exercise, daily (with or without audio) Your choice of other mindfulness practices from earlier weeks, daily</p>
8	<p><b>Stepping Toward your Future</b> Read chapter 8. Revise your Goal-Choosing Worksheet; complete Goal-Stepping Worksheets for your goals. Create a schedule for your first full week of “taking VITAL action”. Loving-Kindness exercise, daily (with or without audio) Your choice of other mindfulness practices from earlier weeks, daily</p>

\*Refer to the relevant chapters of the workbook for exercises, mindfulness practices, and worksheets; some are available at [www.newharbinger.com/20801](http://www.newharbinger.com/20801).