

Chapter 9

COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

PART 1: IDENTIFYING AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS

Timeline: Typically one session

Reading: Chapter 5 in Client Workbook

Photocopies needed from Client Workbook:

Figure 5.1 Learning About Your Reactions

Figure 5.2 Automatic Thoughts About Starting Treatment for Social Anxiety

Figure 5.3 Monitoring Your Automatic Thoughts

Session Outline for Chapter 5 in Client Workbook

- I. Review Self-Monitoring Homework
 - A. Graph ratings on forms in Figures 4.8 and 4.9 in Client Workbook
 - B. Discuss pattern of ratings and situational factors that influenced ratings
 - C. Review whether the two situations that were picked will work for the self-monitoring effort and adjust as necessary
 - D. Troubleshoot any lack of compliance with self-monitoring
- II. Illustrate the importance of cognition in social anxiety using parallel case vignettes with different outcomes depending upon thoughts about the events
 - A. Jerry recently moved to town to start a new job, interested in meeting new people and finding a woman to date
 1. Set up neutral circumstances

- a) Arrives home from work and see attractive woman getting her mail, apparently having just arrived home from work as well
 - b) Recognizes her as a next door neighbor but has never spoken with her
 - c) Says hello, introduces himself, indicates he has just moved in
 - d) She looks up from her mail briefly and says hello, then continues sorting through her mail
2. Jerry's thoughts that will discourage further attempts to initiate a conversation
- a) *"She doesn't want to talk with me."*
 - b) *"I'm bothering her."*
 - c) *"She thinks I'm weird or something."*
 - d) *"I'm so inept that I made a bad first impression just saying hello."*
3. Jerry's emotional and behavioral responses to these negative thoughts
- a) Feels anxious and uncomfortable
 - b) Escapes the situation
4. Outcome of escape
- a) Anger - *"She wouldn't even talk to me."*
 - b) Depression – *"I'll never meet anyone."*

B. Same neutral circumstances for Rich, except his thoughts in response to her initial brief hello are more positive

1. Rich's functional/positive thoughts are equally valid based on the circumstances

a) *"She must be expecting something important in the mail."*

b) *"Maybe she is tired from work. I'll have to try a little harder."*

c) *"She is pretty dressed up. I'll have to ask her about where she works."*

d) *"She might be a little hesitant to talk with a man she does not know."*

2. Emotional and behavioral outcome for Rich's more positive thoughts

a) Makes another attempt at the conversation by commenting on the weather and asking if it is typical

b) His attempt is met by further conversation on her part

c) Ends with invitation for further contact

d) Rich feels pleased about having made an acquaintance that could develop into something further

C. Not the event itself, but Jerry's and Rich's interpretation of the woman's initial lack of friendliness, led to different outcomes

III. The relationship between events, thoughts, and feelings

A. Albert Ellis' ABC's

1. A = Activating Event (what happened – the circumstances)
2. B = Belief (what a person thinks about the activating event)
3. C = Consequences (feelings and behavior)

B. Apply ABC's to previous vignettes

1. Activating Event = woman's initial lack of response
2. Belief =
 - a) Jerry's belief was that she did not want to continue the conversation
 - b) Rich's belief was that she probably would want to continue the conversation but was temporarily distracted or tired
3. Consequences =
 - a) Jerry continued to be alone and felt angry and depressed
 - b) Rich was excited about the beginnings of a possible friendship

C. *It is not the events themselves that make a person anxious but how one interprets the events*

D. People with social anxiety become anxious, not because of the situation itself, but because of what they believe about the situation, the other person, or themselves

E. Use another vignette to illustrate the role of thoughts in social anxiety for a commonly occurring situation

1. Vignette: Jose is 38-year-old man attending party for newly hired managers at the manufacturing firm where he works
 - a) Sees new manager at refreshment table. She has been making positive changes, and he may like to transfer to her department.
 - b) Jose's thoughts as he goes over to introduce himself
 - (1) *"I'm getting nervous just thinking about going to talk to her."*
 - (2) *"She'll think I'm too aggressive if I talk to her about the changes she has been making."*
 - (3) *"She'll think there's something wrong with me if she sees how nervous I am."*
 - (4) *"I'm going to make a fool out of myself."*
 - (5) *"I must make a good first impression or I will never get the job I want."*
 - c) Thoughts lead to physical symptoms of anxiety
 - (1) Heart beating faster
 - (2) Breathing faster – Feels like he can't get his breath
 - (3) Butterflies in his stomach
 - (4) Muscles tensing up
 - d) Additional thoughts as he approached her
 - (1) *"My mind is going blank."*

(2) *"I don't know what to say to her."*

(3) *"Maybe I should just refill my glass rather than talk to her."*

e) Behavioral responses

(1) Introduces himself and briefly talks about party, not her changes in the department or his interest in working for her

(2) Stumbles over his words

(3) Cuts the conversation short

f) Outcome of his escape

(1) Anxiety decreased

(2) Guilt and shame over not being able to handle a simple conversation

(3) Sadness and anger that he missed an opportunity to get to know the person better

(4) Feeling foolish and stupid at being so incompetent

F. Use worksheet in Figure 5.1 in Client Workbook (Learning About Your Reactions) to work through similar situation for the client

G. Consider how others might respond if they could see the negative thoughts

1. In vignette example, the manager might be

a) Sympathetic to Jose

b) Feel badly that she made him so nervous

- c) Eager to talk about the changes she has made
- d) Always on the lookout for a good new employee

2. Usually interaction partners would be sympathetic or reassuring if they knew about a socially anxious person's anxious thoughts

H. Next step is to start to question the thoughts, rather than just accepting them as if they were already established facts

IV. Automatic thoughts

A. Introduce concept of Automatic Thoughts (ATs) – *“negative or irrational thoughts about oneself, the world, or the future.”*

- 1. Socially anxious people have ATs that underlie their social anxiety
- 2. Learning to change ATs decreases anxiety
- 3. Changing ATs does not mean replacing negative thoughts with positive thoughts
 - a) Trying to suppress ATs makes them even more persistent, according to research on thought suppression
 - b) Goal will be to learn to question ATs to see if they are true or helpful

V. First step of cognitive restructuring is identifying ATs and the emotions they cause (If the client is have difficulty with this step, there is a second vignette that can be reviewed on p. 72 of the Client Workbook before proceeding to the client's own ATs)

A. Using the worksheet on Figure 5.2 in the Client Workbook (Automatic Thoughts About Starting Treatment for Social Anxiety), identify ATs about starting treatment and indicate emotions those ATs evoke

1. Help client think through material covered thus far and identify any doubts or fears about treatment in the form of ATs, e.g.,
 - a) Doubts treatment will be successful
 - b) Fears about treatment procedures, including exposures
 - c) Doubts about the rationale for treatment
2. Emphasize the importance of using their own words, without editing out emotionally laden words
3. If client has difficulty identifying ATs or is genuinely only optimistic about treatment, can suggest some typical ATs that someone might have or choose a different situation for the exercise

B. Preview the next steps in cognitive restructuring by illustrating how one might question the ATs and respond more rationally

1. Therapist should illustrate this first
2. Some clients will be able to do some of the rational responding to the ATs as well
3. Emphasize that the client does not need to believe the rational responses to the ATs at this point, just practice looking at them from different points of view rather than accepting them as established facts

VI. Assign Homework:

- A. Continue daily self-monitoring of anxiety, depression, and two situations
- B. Using form in Figure 5.3 in the Client Workbook (Monitoring Your Automatic Thoughts), identify ATs in a situation that arises during the week and the emotions they evoke
 - 1. Complete sheet when cognitions are fresh
 - a) When anticipating a situation
 - b) As soon after a situation occurs as possible
 - 2. If no situations arise, imagine one that occurred in the past and record ATs and emotions
 - 3. Read Chapter 6 in Client Workbook