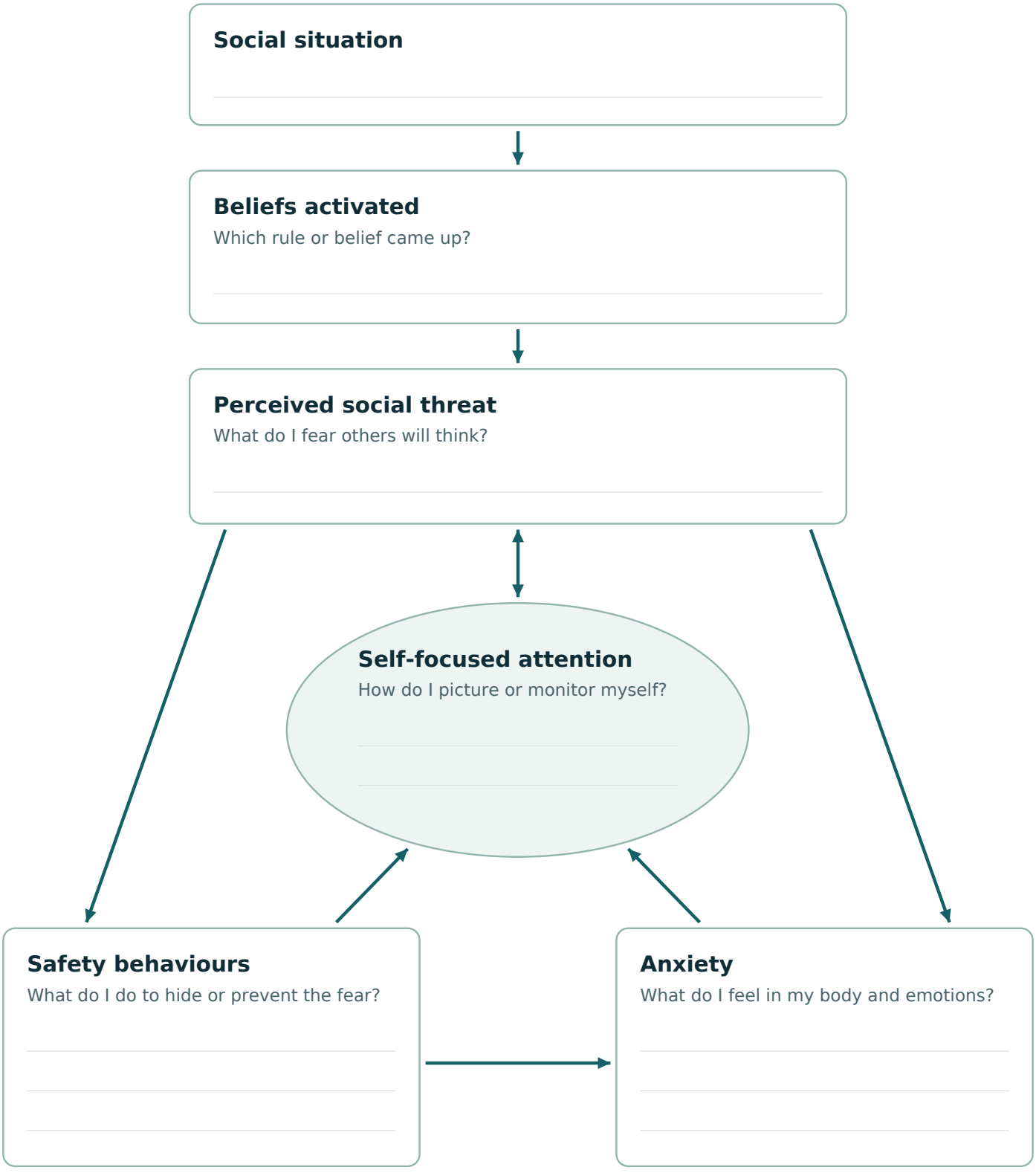
Social anxiety model

Start at the top. Follow the arrows to see how self-focus, safety behaviours and anxiety connect.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.



Informed by Clark & Wells (1995). Central self-image: the model calls this "self as a social object".

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Using this resource

Social anxiety model

What this helps with

This worksheet follows the main relationships in Clark and Wells' cognitive model of social anxiety. A social situation can bring up rules or beliefs, which shape a feared judgement. Attention then turns towards how you imagine you look to others. Anxiety and attempts to hide or prevent it can strengthen that self-image. The central oval is called "self as a social object" in the model: experiencing yourself as you imagine others see you, rather than relying on what you can observe.

How to use it

1. Start at the top with one recent, manageable social situation.
2. Add a rule or belief it brought up, such as "I must always sound interesting". Then write the judgement you feared.
3. In the centre, describe what you watched or pictured about yourself. This imagined view is not proof of how others saw you.
4. In the lower boxes, name anxiety and what you did to hide it or prevent judgement. These actions are called safety behaviours.
5. Follow each arrow and discuss whether the link fits. Safety behaviours can increase anxiety, while feelings and behaviour can feed your self-image. Anticipatory worry and replay afterwards can also matter; use the separate planning or post-event review sheet if helpful.

A fictional worked example

At a team lunch, Nia thinks, "I must always sound interesting." She fears colleagues will find her boring. She pictures herself bright red and watches her face for heat. To avoid saying the wrong thing, she rehearses sentences and says little. This makes joining in harder and can increase anxiety. The warm feeling and her silence then seem to confirm the picture of looking awkward. Her therapist helps her compare this impression with observable evidence, and plan a suitable attention and safety-behaviour experiment.

Keep in mind

Include real context. Bullying, racism, exclusion or an inaccessible setting may need practical action and support. Do not label necessary communication aids or chosen boundaries as safety behaviours. If this map feels overwhelming, complete it with a therapist rather than reconstructing every interaction.

Sources and attribution

Clark, D. M., & Wells, A. (1995). A cognitive model of social phobia. In Social phobia: Diagnosis, assessment, and treatment (pp. 69-93). Guilford Press.

NICE (2013). Social anxiety disorder: recognition, assessment and treatment (CG159).

Original material informed by the sources above. No outside organisation endorses this worksheet.

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