Social event preparation

Compare specific observations. A difference is useful information, not a demand to feel calm or certain.

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

Event and why I want to participate

e.g. A friend's gathering; I want to reconnect.

Useful preparation

What I have noticed

e.g. Check the time and travel once.

What helps participation / what limits it

e.g. Practical details help me attend.

My preparation endpoint and next action

e.g. Finish arrangements, then return to my day.

Threat rehearsal / imagined outcomes

What I have noticed

e.g. Imagine awkward silences over and over.

What helps participation / what limits it

e.g. Rehearsal keeps me focused on possible mistakes.

My preparation endpoint and next action

e.g. Stop rehearsing; return to my day.

What I learned / what is still uncertain

e.g. I can prepare enough and attend without knowing exactly how it will go.

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Using this resource

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What this helps with

Before a social event, planning can turn into repeatedly imagining mistakes, scanning old memories or trying to script every possible exchange. This often leaves you more preoccupied when the event arrives. This worksheet separates preparation with a clear purpose from anxious rehearsal that offers no new information. You will identify what you actually need, make room for uncertainty and choose one way to participate. The aim is enough preparation for the task, not a rule against preparing.

How to use it

1. Name the event and one personally meaningful reason for taking part.
2. List practical tasks with a clear finish, such as checking the time or preparing required notes.
3. Notice repeated rehearsals, imagined disasters and old memories that are not adding useful information.
4. Choose one modest participation intention and where to place attention when replay starts.
5. Afterwards, record what helped and what needs adjusting, without a lengthy performance review.

A fictional worked example

Before a friend's birthday meal, Imran spends an hour rehearsing how to explain his job. His useful preparation is knowing the venue, travel plan and any access arrangements. He completes those tasks, then notices that another imagined conversation is making him less available to the present. His intention is to ask one friend how their new job is going and listen to the answer. He allows a little uncertainty about what he will say next. At the meal there are pauses, but also a conversation about football. Afterwards he notes that repeated rehearsal was not necessary for every exchange to happen.

Keep in mind

Some events genuinely require rehearsal or advance information, and some people need predictability or communication support. Keep those needs in the plan. This is about reducing repetitive threat rehearsal, not attending unsafe events or forcing yourself into contact you do not want.

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).

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