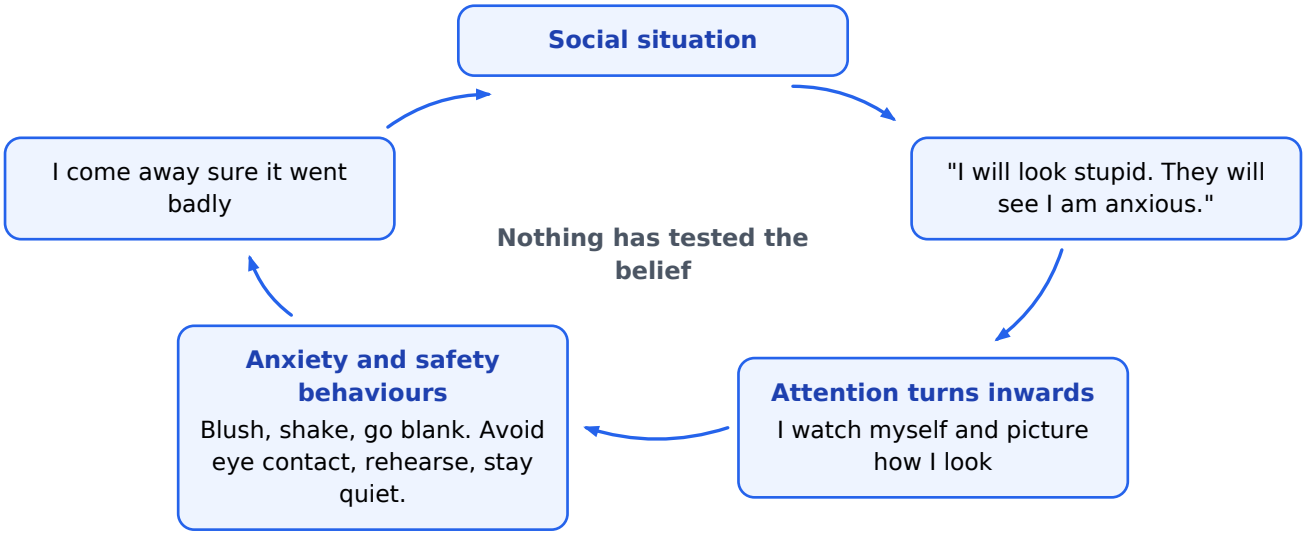
Understanding social anxiety

A fear of being judged by other people, and what keeps it going.

Social anxiety is an intense fear of doing or saying something that will lead to embarrassment, rejection or being thought badly of. It can show up in conversations, meetings, eating in front of others, phone calls, or simply walking into a room.

What happens in a social situation



Three things that keep it going

Self-focus
Attention goes on to yourself. You miss the smiles and nods that show it is going fine, and take your feelings as proof of how you look.

Safety behaviours
Things you do to avoid disaster. They can make you seem distant or tense, and stop you learning that you would have been fine without them.

Before and after
Dreading the event for days, then replaying it afterwards and picking out every flaw.

What people with social anxiety usually discover

- Anxiety is far less visible than it feels. A blush that feels obvious is barely noticed.
- Other people are mostly thinking about themselves.
- Small slips (losing your thread, a pause, a shaky hand) are common and quickly forgotten.
- People are warmer and less critical than the anxious mind predicts.

How therapy helps
We find out what you fear will happen, then test it: dropping safety behaviours, turning attention outwards, and comparing what you believe you look like with what is actually there.

Draws on the cognitive model of social anxiety developed by David M. Clark and Adrian Wells.

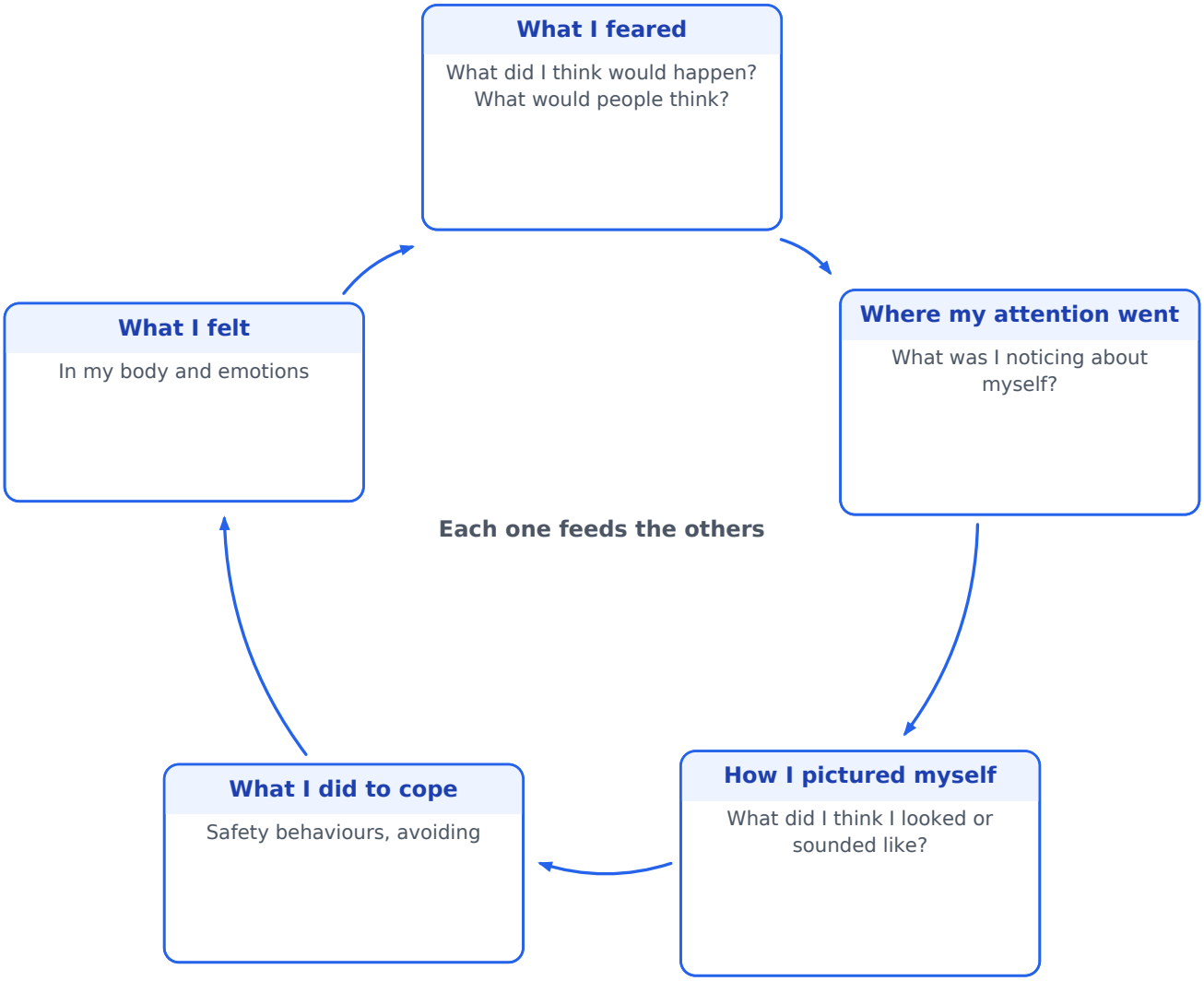
© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.

My social anxiety map

Map a recent situation where you felt anxious around people.

Name _____ Date _____

The situation



What did I notice about the other people? (If the answer is "not much", that is useful to know.)

What did I tell myself afterwards? Was it a fair account?

© 2026 Patrick O'Hare Therapy · patrickoharetherapy.com
This handout supports your therapy. It does not replace professional advice.