

# Building Your Social Comfort Toolkit: Practical Steps for Social Anxiety

## Materials Needed

- Whiteboard or large sheet of paper
- Markers or pens in different colors
- Index cards or sticky notes
- A notebook or journal for Dain to write in
- Worksheet: "My Social Comfort Plan" (template provided below)

## Lesson Plan

### I. Introduction (10 minutes)

#### Hook: The "Awkward Moment" Meter

Let's start with a quick thought experiment. Imagine you walk into a room for a new club or group activity. You don't know anyone. On a scale of 1 (totally cool) to 10 (I want to teleport out of here), how comfortable do you feel? It's completely normal for that number to be high sometimes. That feeling is what we're going to talk about today—not as a problem, but as something you can build skills to manage, like learning a new level in a video game.

#### Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Describe the difference between your Comfort, Stretch, and Panic Zones.
- Demonstrate one grounding technique to use when feeling overwhelmed.
- Use the "Catch It, Check It, Change It" method to challenge an anxious thought.
- Create a personal, step-by-step plan for navigating one social situation that feels challenging.

### II. Body (35 minutes)

#### Part 1: Mapping Your Zones (I Do, We Do - 10 minutes)

**Educator (I Do):** "Let's map out how we approach new things. Imagine three circles, one inside the other." (Draws three concentric circles on the whiteboard).

- "The center circle is your **Comfort Zone**. This is where things feel easy and automatic—like talking to your family or playing your favorite video game. No stress here."
- "The middle circle is the **Stretch Zone**. This is where growth happens! It feels a little uncomfortable or challenging, but it's manageable. Think of trying a new food or learning a tricky new song on an instrument. It takes effort, but you can do it."
- "The outer circle is the **Panic Zone**. This is where things feel way too overwhelming. Our brain kind of shuts down, and we just want to escape. The goal is *never* to force yourself into the panic zone."

"Our goal today is to build tools that make it easier and safer to step into your Stretch Zone, because that's where you build confidence."

**You & Educator (We Do):** "Let's brainstorm together. What's one activity for you that's in your Comfort Zone? How about one that feels like it's in your Stretch Zone? You don't have to share something in your panic zone unless you're comfortable. The key is just understanding the difference for yourself." (Discuss and write down Dain's examples in the appropriate circles).

## **Part 2: Tool #1 - The 5-4-3-2-1 Grounding Technique (I Do, We Do - 5 minutes)**

**Educator (I Do):** "When you feel that panicky feeling starting, your mind is usually racing about the future or the past. A grounding technique pulls your focus back to the present moment, which can calm your nervous system. It's like hitting a reset button. We're going to learn a simple one called 5-4-3-2-1."

"Here's how it works. Wherever you are, you silently notice:"

- **5** things you can **SEE** around you. (e.g., a pen, a crack in the ceiling, a blue chair)
- **4** things you can **FEEL** physically. (e.g., your feet on the floor, the texture of your shirt, the cool air)
- **3** things you can **HEAR**. (e.g., the hum of a fan, a bird outside, your own breathing)
- **2** things you can **SMELL**. (e.g., your coffee, a pencil, the clean laundry smell on your shirt)
- **1** thing you can **TASTE**. (e.g., toothpaste, water, or just the inside of your mouth)

**You & Educator (We Do):** "Let's try it right now, together. Take a deep breath. Now, let's go through the steps. What are 5 things you see?... What are 4 things you can feel?..." (Guide Dain through the entire process calmly).

*Formative Assessment Check-in:* "How did that feel? This is a great tool to keep in your back pocket. You can do it anywhere without anyone even knowing."

## **Part 3: Tool #2 - Challenging Anxious Thoughts (I Do, We Do - 10 minutes)**

**Educator (I Do):** "Social anxiety often comes with a loud inner critic that loves 'what if' scenarios, like 'What if I say something stupid?' or 'Everyone thinks I'm awkward.' We can learn to be a detective and investigate these thoughts instead of just accepting them as facts. The method is called **Catch It, Check It, Change It**."

1. **"Catch It:** Notice the anxious thought. Just see it without judgment. For example: *'Everyone is staring at me and thinks I don't belong here.'*"
2. **"Check It:** Investigate the thought like a detective. Ask questions. Is this 100% true? Is there any evidence *against* it? Are people more likely just focused on their own conversations? What's a more realistic possibility?"
3. **"Change It:** Rephrase the thought into something more balanced, helpful, or realistic. It doesn't have to be super positive, just more neutral. For example: *'Some people might glance my way, but most are probably busy with their own stuff. I can just focus on finding a seat for now.'*"

**You & Educator (We Do):** "Let's try one together. Imagine you have to give a short presentation to a small group. A common thought is: *'I'm going to mess up completely and everyone will laugh.'* How could we 'check' that thought? What's a more balanced way we could 'change' it?" (Brainstorm together. Write the original thought and the new, 'changed' thought on the whiteboard).

## Part 4: Building Your Social Comfort Plan (You Do - 10 minutes)

**Educator (You Do):** "This is where you become the architect of your own plan. We're going to take what we've learned and apply it to a situation that feels like it's in your Stretch Zone. It should be something small and achievable, not a huge leap."

"Here are some ideas, or you can choose your own:"

- Asking a question in a group or co-op class.
- Ordering your own food at a café.
- Starting a brief conversation with someone new at a homeschool event.
- Giving a compliment to someone.

"Now, use the 'My Social Comfort Plan' worksheet to break it down. I'm here to help if you get stuck."

### Worksheet: My Social Comfort Plan

#### 1. The Stretch Zone Goal (Be specific and small):

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#### 2. Anxious Thought I Might Have (Catch It):

(e.g., "They'll think my question is dumb.")

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#### 3. A More Balanced Thought (Change It):

(e.g., "It's okay to ask questions. Others might have the same one. My job is to learn, not to seem perfect.")

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#### 4. My Action Steps (1-3 tiny steps):

1. Take a deep breath before I raise my hand.

2. 

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3. 

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#### 5. My In-the-Moment Tool:

*(I will use the 5-4-3-2-1 technique if I feel overwhelmed / I will remind myself of my balanced thought.)*

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**Success Criteria:** A great plan has a very specific goal, identifies a realistic anxious thought, includes a balanced alternative thought, and lists 1-3 very small, concrete action steps.

### III. Conclusion (5 minutes)

#### Recap and Reflection

**Educator:** "Great work today. We've added three major tools to your Social Comfort Toolkit:"

- **Understanding Your Zones:** Knowing how to stay in your Stretch Zone, not your Panic Zone.
- **Grounding:** The 5-4-3-2-1 technique to bring you back to the present.
- **Thought Detective Work:** The 'Catch It, Check It, Change It' method.

**Dain:** (Share your finished "My Social Comfort Plan"). What's the most helpful thing you think you learned today? Is there one tool that feels like it will be the most useful for you?

#### Reinforce Takeaways

**Educator:** "Remember, managing anxiety isn't about never feeling it. It's about building confidence that you can handle it when it shows up. Every time you step into your stretch zone, you're building that skill and that confidence. Be patient and kind to yourself in the process—it's a journey, not a race."

### Differentiation and Extension

- **Scaffolding for Struggling Learners:**
  - Provide pre-written examples of anxious thoughts and balanced thoughts for the worksheet.
  - Start with an even smaller goal, like simply walking into a room and standing there for one minute before leaving.
  - Focus on mastering just one tool (e.g., grounding) before moving on to the more cognitive-based ones.
- **Extension for Advanced Learners:**
  - Create a "ladder" of stretch zone goals, from easiest to hardest, to work on over time (this is called an exposure hierarchy).
  - Research and present on another type of grounding technique (e.g., holding ice, mindful breathing) or cognitive tool (e.g., behavioral experiments).
  - Write out helpful scripts for starting conversations or asking questions to have ready.