

Subjective Units of Distress Scale (SUDS)

The Subjective Units of Distress Scale (SUDS) is a short-hand means for clients to monitor and report on their level of anxiety or distress. Repeated SUDS ratings allow both the client and therapist to monitor changes over time. This is very useful when, for example, teaching of an anxiety management strategy or during exposure sessions.

In preparing the client for using the SUDS, a description along the following lines is often helpful:

“As you learn to manage your anxiety, and as you start to confront difficult situations or memories, it is useful to have a means of measuring your level of anxiety and distress. This helps you to learn more about your own reactions and allows you to report how you are feeling to your therapist in a short-hand way. We suggest that you use a SUDS scale ranging from 0 to 100 - a kind of fear thermometer - where 0 is feeling perfectly relaxed and 100 is the worst anxiety and distress you can imagine. It is useful to get into the habit of rating your anxiety. That way, you become more in touch with your feelings and have a better chance of controlling them. Without some kind of measure, people tend to think in black and white terms - either you are anxious or relaxed - when, in reality, there are many shades of grey. Using the SUDS scale will help you to keep your distress level in perspective; for example, you may be feeling anxious, but it's only 40 - you can handle that.”

Subjective Units of Distress Scale

The Distress Thermometer - Subjective Units of Distress (SUDS)

Try to get used to rating your distress, fear, anxiety or discomfort on a scale of 0-100. Imagine you have a 'distress thermometer' to measure your feelings according to the following scale. Notice how your level of distress and fear changes over time and in different situations.

