SUDS Scale

Anxiety: Rating Your Distress From 0 to 100

The Subjective Units of Distress Scale (SUDS) is a simple way to rate how upset or anxious you feel, from 0 to 100. Psychiatrist Joseph Wolpe and psychologist Arnold Lazarus introduced it in the 1960s for use in behavior therapy. Subjective means that only you can judge your number. The scale works best when you tie each level to moments from your own life, so that a 50 today means the same thing as a 50 next month.

1 The scale

100 Extreme	The most distress you can imagine. You may feel panic or terror.
75 High	Very distressed. It is hard to think, and your body may shake or race.
50 Moderate	Clearly uncomfortable, but you can still get things done.
25 Mild	A little tense or uneasy. You notice it, but it does not get in your way.
0 Calm	No distress at all. You feel completely calm and relaxed.

You can use any number in between. Some people prefer a 0 to 10 scale, which works the same way.

Why does this work? *Putting a number on a feeling helps you step back and look at it. It also lets you and your therapist see changes that are easy to miss, such as distress rising and then falling during an exposure exercise, or a coping skill bringing a 70 down to a 40.*

2 How distress shows up for you

Your body and behavior give clues to your number. Write what you notice at each level.

Signs I am around 25 to 50

Signs I am at 75 or above

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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3 Your personal anchors

Write a real moment from your life for each level. You do not need to use your most painful memory for 100. Any time that felt overwhelming will do.

100: The most distressed I have felt, or can imagine feeling:

75:

50:

Example: Waiting for test results from my doctor

25:

0: When I feel completely calm:

4 Track your ratings

Write down your rating in moments that matter, then rate again after you use a coping skill or finish an exposure step.

Date and time	Situation	SUDS	What I did	After
Mon, 9 am	*Driving on the highway*	*65*	*Pulled over and breathed slowly*	*40*

SUDS ratings are often used in exposure therapy, which works best with a trained therapist guiding you. If your distress stays high most days, reach out to a therapist. If you are in crisis or thinking about harming yourself, call or text 988 to reach the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline in the US, or call your local emergency number.

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