

Subjective Units of Disturbance (SUDS) Scale

A **SUDS** or a **Subjective Units of Disturbance Scale** (or a **Subjective Units of Distress Scale**) is a scale of "0" to "10" for measuring the subjective intensity of disturbance or distress currently experienced by an individual.

The individual self-assesses where they are on the scale. The SUDS may be used as a benchmark for a professional or observer to evaluate the progress of treatment.

The SUD-level was developed by Joseph Wolpe in 1969. It has been used in EMDR, Trauma-Focused Therapy (TFT), EFT, CBT, Anxiety Disorders and for research purposes.

Basis

There is no hard and fast rule by which a patient/client can self assign a SUDS rating to his or her disturbance or distress, hence the name subjective.

Some guidelines are:

- The intensity recorded must be as it is experienced now.
- Constriction or congestion or tensing of body parts indicates a higher SUDS than that reported.

The Scale

Here is one version of the scale:

10 = Feels unbearably bad, beside yourself, out of control as in a nervous breakdown, overwhelmed, at the end of your rope. You may feel so upset that you don't want to talk because you can't imagine how anyone could possibly understand your agitation.

9 = Feeling desperate. What most people call a 10 is actually a 9. Feeling extremely freaked out to the point that it almost feels unbearable and you are getting scared of what you might do. Feeling very, very bad, losing control of your emotions.

8 = Freaking out. The beginning of alienation.

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7 = Starting to freak out, on the edge of some definitely bad feelings. You can maintain control with difficulty.

6 = Feeling bad to the point that you begin to think something ought to be done about the way you feel.

5 = Moderately upset, uncomfortable. Unpleasant feelings are still manageable with some effort.

4 = Somewhat upset to the point that you cannot easily ignore an unpleasant thought. You can handle it OK but don't feel good.

3 = Mildly upset. Worried, bothered to the point that you notice it.

2 = A little bit upset, but not noticeable unless you took care to pay attention to your feelings and then realize, "yes" there is something bothering me.

1 = No acute distress and feeling basically good. If you took special effort you might feel something unpleasant but not much.

0 = Peace, serenity, total relief. No more anxiety of any kind about any particular issue.

For more information, contact Brenda B. Isen M.S.W. R.S.W, a registered social worker with over 35 years of experience in working with individuals, couples & families.

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