



Social Anxiety

Individuals with social anxiety struggle tremendously with social situations. They experience fear and anxiety when around other people. These reactions generally relate to fears of being judged, criticized, and evaluated negatively. Symptoms that can occur with social anxiety include the following:

Physical Symptoms

- Blushing
- Muscle tension
- Upset stomach
- Overheating
- Increase in blood pressure
- Sweating
- Clammy hands
- Pressured breathing
- Shakiness

Psychological Symptoms

- Embarrassment
- Anxiety
- Panic
- Desire to isolate
- Sadness/depression
- Difficulty communicating
- Decrease in self-esteem
- Fear of rejection



Individuals with social anxiety are usually very well aware that their fears/anxieties are not rational and do not make sense, yet they can feel tremendously unskilled and disabled by the anxiety. Individuals with social anxiety often *do* want to connect socially, talk with people, attend social events, go shopping at a mall, go to class, get romantically connected... yet the anxiety keeps them from being successful with these goals.

The anxiety reaction can certainly be problematic at the moment the social event is starting. However, many individuals with social anxiety experience *anticipatory anxiety* hours, days, weeks, or months prior to the start of the actual social event.

College could be a time for students to enjoy connecting with a diverse array of other students, eating at the dining hall, joining clubs and sports, attending parties, having an active social life, or asking a meaningful question in class. However, for college students with social anxiety, the college experience can be quite significantly affected. Meeting new people, chatting at the dining hall, giving an oral presentation in class, making eye contact with others, responding to questions, and having spontaneous conversations can lead to tremendous anxiety for those with Social Anxiety Disorder.



What is helpful?

Cognitive-Behavioral therapy (CBT), individual and/or group, can be quite successful for people who wish to get past their fears and anxieties. This treatment approach emphasizes changing thinking patterns, engaging in social behaviors to try new skills, and practicing, practicing, practicing. Pushing outside of your comfort zone while engaging in self-soothing behaviors is vital for practicing new social skills. Members of a Social Anxiety therapy group can provide support and encouragement to each other as they are working to overcome their own social anxiety. CBT can be helpful to learn skills such as acting confidently, engaging in eye contact, developing conversation starters, mastering body language, and continuing to push outside one's comfort zone.

To learn more about group therapy offered at PACS, visit our website at: <https://www.unh.edu/pacs/group-counseling> or call (603) 862-2090.

Community supports such as Toastmasters and Dale Carnegie groups can provide a forum for individuals with social anxiety to practice engaging with others in a group setting and learning how to do public speaking.

Psychiatric medication can be a helpful adjunct for individuals who have very severe and disabling anxiety. However, medication alone will not be enough, as one needs to learn and practice these necessary behavioral skills.



Resources

Stopping the Noise in Your Head: The New Way to Overcome Anxiety and Worry by Reid Wilson, Ph.D. (2016).

The Social Anxiety Institute www.socialphobia.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness www.nami.org

Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) www.adaa.org



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