

Social Anxiety What it is and what helps

The alarm is reacting to being judged. You can retrain it by going, staying and looking outward.

🔗 WHAT SOCIAL ANXIETY IS

Social anxiety is a strong fear of being judged, humiliated or evaluated badly in social situations. Anxiety evolved to protect us from predators and from social rejection, like being banished from the tribe.

Nothing is wrong with who you are. An alarm that fires too easily is meeting situations that set it off.

🔗 HOW IT KEEPS GOING

Your attention turns inward, so you picture how you look as far worse than anyone else sees. Then you go but hide: rehearsing lines, avoiding eye contact, short answers, planning an exit.

That can make you seem distant, people pull back, and the fear looks proven. Afterward comes the replay in your head.

📖 WHAT TREATMENT LOOKS LIKE

Practice ladder

List 10 to 15 avoided situations, rate each from 0 to 100, and start at 30 to 50.

Look outward

Practice listening, and give yourself an outward job in conversations.

Drop the hiding

Swap each safety habit for its opposite, like eye contact and one extra sentence.

CBT with exposure is the main treatment. A therapist can help if you get stuck.

☀️ EACH PRACTICE STEP

- **Before:** write the fear and how sure you are, as a percent
- **During:** stay 20 to 45 minutes, or repeat short ones several times
- **After:** write what a camera would have recorded

Judge a practice by what you did, not by whether the anxiety dropped.

🔗 OUTWARD ATTENTION

For 2 weeks, spend 5 minutes a day listening, and say "inward" to yourself when your attention drifts to you.

In conversations, take an outward job: get curious about the other person.

☀️ REFRAME THE ENERGY

A racing heart feels almost the same in fear and in excitement. Telling yourself "I'm excited" instead of "I'm scared" gives that energy a better job.

Your body isn't malfunctioning. It is getting ready for something that matters to you.

👤 CONNECTION COUNTS

Find something in person that feels safe: volunteering, a support or therapy group, a faith community, a sports club. Seeing people regularly, and feeling that people are rooting for you, has a big effect.

Quality time matters. Isolation feeds depression.

Swaps and habits. Check one or two to start with.

- ☐ Hold eye contact and add one sentence to each answer
- ☐ Stop rehearsing lines and planning exits
- ☐ Skip drinking to loosen up. It is a safety habit
- ☐ Stop asking whether you seemed awkward
- ☐ Don't wait to feel ready. Waiting is avoidance

- ☐ Make a small, harmless mistake on purpose
- ☐ Keep the replay to 10 minutes of set worry time
- ☐ Vary the people, places and times you practice
- ☐ Join an in-person group, team or volunteer shift
- ☐ Keep up real connection. Social media doesn't count

❓ IF A STEP ISN'T WORKING

If a step isn't easing after about 2 weeks, look for a hidden safety habit, a step that is too big, or too little practice. If everything rates 80 or above, write smaller versions.

Keep deliberate mistakes harmless and legal.

📖 BOOKS AND APPS

Managing Social Anxiety: Workbook by Debra Hope, Richard Heimberg and Cynthia Turk.

When Panic Attacks by David Burns also covers shyness.

MindShift CBT, a free app.

Source. Adapted from Psychofarm's social anxiety guide (CBT after Clark and Wells) and podcast conversations on anxiety.

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