Social Anxiety

PSYCHOEDUCATION · SOCIAL ANXIETY IN ADULTS

When the fear of being judged starts to get in the way of life

Most people feel nervous in some social situations. Social anxiety is when a strong fear of being judged, embarrassed or seen negatively by others becomes persistent, causes real distress, and leads us to avoid or endure situations that matter to us.

More than shyness

It centres on fear of negative evaluation, and can affect work, study, relationships and everyday tasks.

Very common

It is one of the most common anxiety conditions, and often begins in the teenage years.

Very treatable

Without help it tends to persist, but well-researched treatments are effective for many people.

01 What it can look like

everyone's mix is different

Thoughts

- "They'll think I'm boring or odd"
- "Everyone can see I'm nervous"
- "I'll make a fool of myself"

In the body

- blushing, sweating, shaking
- racing heart, tight chest
- shaky voice, mind going blank

What we do

- avoiding or leaving early
- staying quiet, hiding symptoms
- over-preparing, seeking reassurance

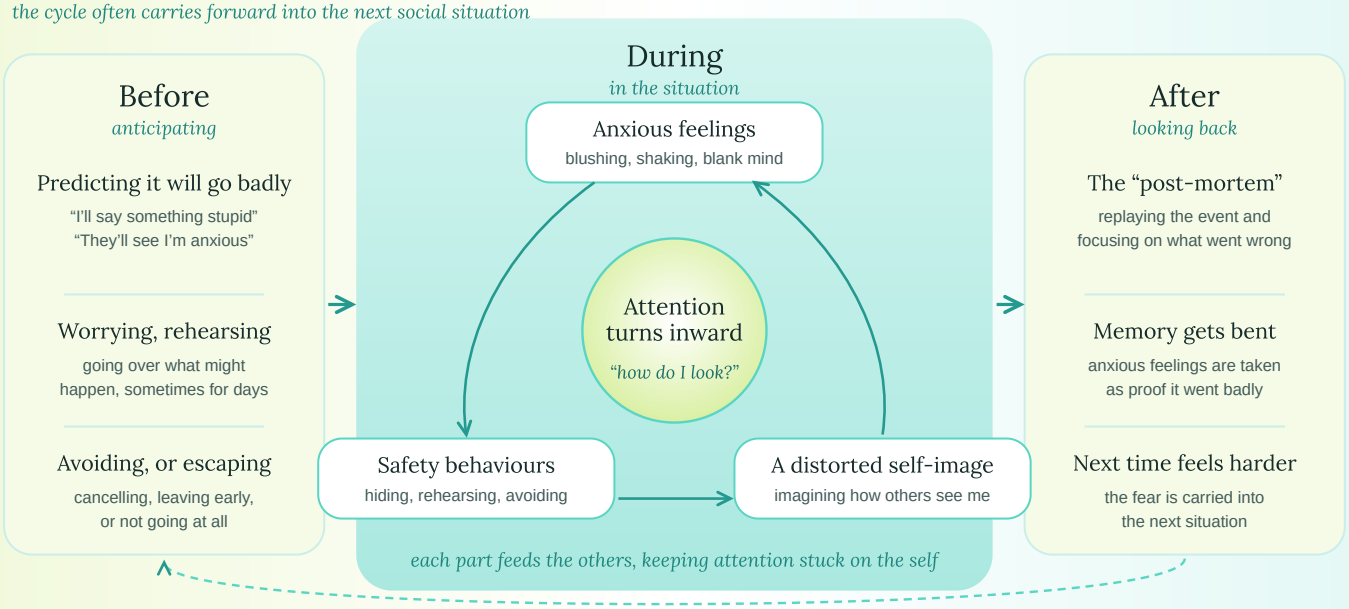
Common situations

meeting new people · speaking up · eating in public · phone calls · being watched · parties · meetings

02 What keeps social anxiety going

based on Clark and Wells' cognitive model

the cycle often carries forward into the next social situation



The key insight: in social situations, attention turns inward to how we feel and imagine we look. Safety behaviours and anxious feelings then seem to confirm the fear, and the post-mortem keeps it alive for next time.

03 Why safety behaviours backfire

helpful in the moment, unhelpful over time

SAFETY BEHAVIOUR	WHY IT FEELS HELPFUL	HOW IT CAN BACKFIRE
Rehearsing what to say	Feels like it prevents mistakes	Attention goes inward, so it's harder to follow the conversation
Avoiding eye contact	Feels less exposed	Can come across as distant, and you miss friendly signals
Staying quiet or on the edge	Feels safer than speaking	Others may read it as disinterest; confidence doesn't get a chance to grow
Hiding signs of anxiety	Feels like it stops people noticing	Gripping, covering or tensing can make symptoms and self-focus stronger
Over-preparing or leaving early	Feels like it reduces risk	You never learn the situation would have been manageable

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04 My social anxiety map

one recent situation

The situation
where, when, who was there

What I feared would happen
what people might think or do

How I imagined I looked
the picture in my mind

What I did to feel safer
safety behaviours, avoidance

What actually happened
the evidence, not the feeling

The post-mortem afterwards
what I replayed, and for how long

05 Testing it out

a small behavioural experiment

MY PREDICTION	BELIEF NOW	WHAT I'LL DO DIFFERENTLY	WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENED	BELIEF AFTER
	___ %			___ %
	___ %			___ %
	___ %			___ %

06 Stepping out of the cycle

skills used in CBT for social anxiety

Shift attention outward
Focus on the other person and the conversation, not on how you seem.

Drop a safety behaviour
Try one situation without it and see what actually happens.

Test predictions
Treat fears as guesses to check, not facts.

Step toward what you avoid
Build up gradually, starting with easier situations.

Go easy on the post-mortem
Notice replaying, and balance it with what went okay.

What the evidence suggests. Individual cognitive behavioural therapy, particularly approaches based on the Clark and Wells model, has the strongest evidence for social anxiety in adults and is recommended by NICE. Medication can also help, especially for people who prefer not to have a psychological treatment.

Worth remembering

Other people notice far less than it feels like they do. Anxiety is felt strongly on the inside but is usually much less visible from the outside. Each small step builds evidence that you can cope.

GO AT YOUR OWN PACE

Facing feared situations or dropping safety behaviours usually raises anxiety at first; that is expected and tends to ease with practice. Start small. If social anxiety is affecting your daily life, consider speaking with a qualified professional.

SOURCES

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