

Social Anxiety: Facing Social Fears One Step at a Time

A Teen Guide to Understanding Social Anxiety and Building Confidence

Have you ever worried that people are judging you, felt nervous walking into a room, or replayed a conversation in your head wondering if you said the wrong thing? Maybe you avoid raising your hand in class, meeting new people, speaking up, or going to social events because it feels overwhelming.

If this sounds familiar, you are not alone. Many teens experience social anxiety. Social anxiety is more than just being shy or feeling nervous. It is when fear of being judged, embarrassed, rejected, or criticized starts to interfere with your everyday life.

The good news is that social confidence is a skill that can be learned. You do not have to wait until you feel completely comfortable before taking steps forward.

What Is Social Anxiety Anyway?

Social anxiety is a fear or worry about social situations where you feel like others might notice, judge, or criticize you.

Your brain may send messages like:

- "Everyone is looking at me."
- "I'm going to embarrass myself."
- "People will think I'm weird."
- "What if I say the wrong thing?"
- "I need to avoid this."

These thoughts can feel very real, but anxiety is not always telling you the truth. Sometimes anxiety acts like an overprotective alarm system trying to keep you safe from rejection or embarrassment.

Signs of Social Anxiety

Social anxiety can show up in different ways.

Thoughts

- Overthinking conversations

- Worrying about what others think
- Expecting the worst to happen
- Comparing yourself to others

Body Feelings

- Blushing
- Sweating
- Racing heart
- Shaky voice
- Feeling tense or uncomfortable

Behaviours

- Avoiding social situations
- Staying quiet even when you want to participate
- Looking at your phone to avoid talking
- Leaving situations early
- Asking others for reassurance

Why Does Social Anxiety Feel So Strong?

Your brain is designed to care about belonging and connection. Being accepted by others has always been important for humans.

When you experience social anxiety, your brain may treat embarrassment or rejection like a threat. This activates your stress response and makes you want to escape or avoid the situation.

Avoiding situations can make anxiety feel better in the moment, but it can teach your brain:

“Good thing I avoided that. It must have been dangerous.”

Facing fears in small, manageable steps helps your brain learn:

“I can handle this.”

Facing Social Fears One Step at a Time Worksheet

1. What Social Situations Feel Difficult for Me?

Check any that apply:

- ☐ Starting conversations
- ☐ Meeting new people
- ☐ Speaking in class
- ☐ Eating around others
- ☐ Making phone calls

- ☐ Joining groups or activities
- ☐ Asking for help
- ☐ Sharing my opinions
- ☐ Being the center of attention

Other situations:

2. What Am I Worried Will Happen?

The situation I feel anxious about:

My anxious prediction:

"I'm afraid that..."

3. What Is Anxiety Telling Me?

Anxiety says:

Now challenge that thought:

What evidence shows this might not happen?

What would I say to a friend who had this fear?

A more balanced thought:

4. Create My Social Anxiety Ladder

Instead of avoiding my fear completely, I can practice small steps.

Start with something that feels slightly uncomfortable, then slowly work toward bigger challenges.

Example:

1 = A little uncomfortable

10 = Extremely scary

My social fear:

Small step (1-3/10):

Next step (4-6/10):

Bigger step (7-10/10):

5. My Confidence Practice Plan

This week, I will practice:

- ☐ Saying hello to someone
- ☐ Asking a question
- ☐ Making eye contact
- ☐ Joining a conversation
- ☐ Sharing my opinion
- ☐ Trying something new

My goal:

Remember

Confidence does not come from never feeling nervous. Confidence comes from learning that you can feel nervous and still do things that matter to you.

Small steps create big changes.

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