

Social Anxiety

How self-focused attention, prediction, avoidance, and post-event review can keep social fear going.

What social anxiety can look like

Social anxiety can involve strong fear of being judged, embarrassed, rejected, or visibly anxious. It may affect conversations, meetings, dating, eating in public, speaking up, presentations, or asking for help.

Common maintaining patterns

- Rehearsing every sentence before speaking.
- Avoiding eye contact, conversations, events, or opportunities.
- Monitoring your own face, voice, hands, or heartbeat during interactions.
- Using alcohol or other substances to feel able to socialize.
- Replaying the interaction afterward and focusing mainly on perceived mistakes.

Skills that can help

- Shift attention outward toward the conversation or environment.
- Test predictions through small, planned approach steps rather than waiting to feel confident.
- Drop one “safety behavior” at a time, such as over-rehearsing or hiding your hands.
- Afterward, review facts and the whole interaction instead of only feared mistakes.

Therapy can help

CBT-based exposure and behavioral experiments can be effective for social anxiety. Treatment is most useful when tailored to the situations, beliefs, and safety behaviors that maintain the fear.

Try this reflection

What do you do to prevent embarrassment that may unintentionally keep you focused on danger?

Using this resource: For education and skill-building only; not diagnosis, medical advice, or crisis care. If you feel overwhelmed, pause and seek appropriate professional support. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support; call 911 for an immediate emergency.