

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL ANXIETY

Making Behavioural Changes

How Social Anxiety is Maintained

INDIVIDUALS WHO EXPERIENCE PROBLEMS WITH ANXIETY ADOPT A VARIETY OF STRATEGIES TO HELP THEMSELVES COPE.

These strategies include the following:

- avoiding anxiety-provoking situations
- attempting to distract oneself when experiencing anxiety, and
- working to please others to ensure a positive evaluation.

Each of these behaviors is an attempt to reduce anxiety. However, these methods of coping ultimately serve to strengthen feelings of anxiety and perpetuate fear.

Avoidance

Individuals who experience problems with chronic anxiety have learned to associate their anxiety with particular situations (e.g. being at a party, talking to a professor). In other words, a link between strong anxiety and certain situations becomes established. Avoiding these anxiety-provoking situations “saves” the individuals from re-experiencing anxiety. Avoidance behavior is reinforced (so continues to happen) because it is rewarded (it reduces anxiety). The problem rests, however, in the fact that avoidance behavior robs individuals of the opportunity to learn that the anxiety WILL diminish, even if they do not escape or avoid. Exposing themselves to anxiety-provoking situations provides the chance to discover that anxiety can be tolerated. More simply put, the most effective way to overcome anxiety is to face it.

“To escape criticism do nothing, say nothing...”

Elbert Hubbard

Distraction

Individuals who experience problematic anxiety often learn to cope with uncomfortable situations and physical sensations by distracting themselves (e.g. performing repetitive tasks unrelated to the situation, imagining themselves in a different situation). While anxiety is lowered in the moment, the fear is perpetuated. The more they distract, the more they believe that this is the only way of tolerating the anxiety. Again, these individuals rob themselves of the opportunity to discover that the anxiety CAN be overcome, even if they do not distract themselves. Fully exposing themselves to anxiety-provoking situations, and accepting their physical responses to anxiety helps them to learn that anxiety can be managed. The most effective way to cope with anxiety is to let it happen.

Pleasing

Individuals who struggle with social anxiety may try to alleviate their fear of negative evaluation by pleasing others. This may take the form of excessive complimenting, reassuring, and agreeing with others. Managing in this way prevents the experience of a deeper

“You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you stop to look fear in the face...do the thing you think you cannot do.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

relationship and keeps the individual focused on being evaluated. Presenting a “socially acceptable” self alleviates anxiety in the moment because it tends to elicit a positive response from others. In the long run, however, the individual continues to fear being negatively evaluated for who s/he really is. These individuals will learn that anxiety can be managed even if they do not “please” others. The most effective way to overcome anxiety is to allow it to occur.

So, a very effective way to manage social anxiety is to gradually let go of behaviors that temporarily provide relief, yet in the long run maintain anxiety. Facing your anxiety will mean entering feared situations, choosing not to distract yourself, and avoiding “pleasing” behaviors. In other words, reduced anxiety comes from fully experiencing your anxiety. This is a difficult process. Gradually, however, you will discover your strengths and gain more confidence.

Adapted from Babior and Goldman (1996)

Avoidance

SOCIAL ANXIETY LEADS PEOPLE TO CHOOSE BEHAVIORS IN SOCIAL/PERFORMANCE SITUATIONS THAT WILL PROTECT THEM FROM THE FEARED JUDGMENTS OF OTHERS.

For example:

- **Try to avoid being evaluated all together**
 - Not going to social event
 - Not completing assignments
 - Not asking professors questions
- **Avoid in subtle ways**
 - avoiding eye contact
 - avoiding certain topics of conversation
 - making excuses to leave a party early
 - drinking before a social event
 - preparing a check before arriving at the store
- **Try to ensure a positive evaluation**
 - being overly supportive in order to be liked
 - agreeing with someone despite having a different view

Treatment Philosophy

The most effective way to overcome anxiety is to face it!

STOP THE AVOIDANCE

Understanding My Avoidance

A key step toward changing anxious behavior is to identify the ways in which you try to avoid being negatively evaluated by others in social or performance situations.

I avoid anxiety by: _____

I avoid anxiety by procrastinating in these situations: _____

I avoid anxiety by distracting myself in the following ways: _____

To avoid anxiety, I manage other people's impressions of me by: _____

I believe that avoidance ultimately makes my social anxiety worse Yes No

I believe that I must approach, not avoid, social situations to overcome anxiety Yes No

Purposeful Mistakes

ONE WAY TO BEGIN TO CHALLENGE AVOIDANCE BEHAVIOR IS TO PURPOSEFULLY ENGAGE IN BEHAVIOR THAT WILL DRAW SOME ATTENTION. LET YOURSELF FEEL ANXIOUS. NOTICE THAT YOU CAN COPE AND THAT YOUR PREDICTIONS OF THE OUTCOMES OF THESE “PURPOSEFUL MISTAKES” ARE RARELY ACCURATE!

- Trip or bump into something in front of someone
- Pay for something with the incorrect amount of money
- Ask for directions to a classroom or store that is very nearby
- Have your hand tremble when paying for something
- Ask for an item that is obviously not carried by the store you are in
- Ask an obvious customer for information as if s/he worked at the store
- Ask for directions and then ask that they be repeated
- Attempt to purchase something without having enough money
- Approach and almost enter the door of a bathroom for the opposite sex
- Hum or sing loud enough for others to hear
- Enter a door inappropriately (e.g. push instead of pull)
- Walk against the flow of traffic

Markway, et al, (1992)

Creating An Exposure Hierarchy

1. Make a list of all the situations you fear and/or avoid. Order them from least to most feared (i.e., create an exposure hierarchy).
2. Begin with the first item on your list (i.e., the least-feared situation).
3. Generate a list of at least five tasks related to the feared situation, ranked least to most feared. Each task should involve only a small increase in difficulty from one to the next. In general, having more items on the list will help you progress more smoothly. In addition, these tasks (hierarchy items) should be detailed. They should describe specific behaviors in specific situations. You should have enough detail so that you know where to go, what to do and with whom you'll be interacting.
4. Select the day you will begin your program. You are likely to experience some anxiety when this time arrives. Stick to your plan, though. Remember, the most effective way to overcome anxiety is to face it. Your anxiety will diminish (often quite rapidly) when you follow through.
5. Feel anxious by engaging in task number 1.
 - Use a scale from 0-10 to mentally rate your level of anxiety in the situation.
 - 0 (no anxiety whatsoever)
 - 10 (most anxiety possible)
 - STAY IN THE SITUATION until your anxiety and urge to escape have diminished by at least half.
 - Usually, longer exposures (one or two hours) are more effective than shorter ones. If you do escape from the situation because your anxiety level is high, re-enter the situation as soon as possible.
 - If lengthy exposure is not possible or does not apply to your situation, you may need to focus on repeated exposure (i.e., keep going back!).
 - While in the situation, use supportive self-talk.
 - Breathe.
 - Pay attention to the situation rather than trying to distract yourself. This allows you to break the connection between your anxiety and the situation.
6. After completing the task, use a chart to record your peak anxiety level. Repeat daily until your anxiety consistently remains low (i.e. for several days in a row).
7. Progress through your list of tasks until you can comfortably engage in each activity. Remember, as long as you repeatedly enter the situations you fear without escaping, your anxiety will disappear.
8. Give yourself credit for your hard work. Even small steps count as progress.
9. Continue to engage in the previously feared activities to protect against a return of anxiety.

Markway, et al, (1992); Bourne, (1995); Beckfield (1994)

Chris' Exposure Hierarchy

Chris is a 20 year old, second year Arts and Science student who found it difficult to be in crowded public places for fear of embarrassment. At school, this avoidance meant not attending classes in large lecture theaters, walking away if arriving at a full classroom, not walking through Place Riel when it was crowded, not talking to classmates and staying silent during large class discussions. For Chris, being in crowded public situations resulted in feelings of panic (including increased hearth rate, shallow breathing and dizziness). There were many thoughts of being perceived negatively by others. This anxiety began to have a negative impact on Chris's academic functioning. Avoiding peers, large classrooms and classroom discussions meant missed classes, poor classroom performance and, ultimately, lower grades. When Chris decided to begin addressing social anxiety related to school, the following exposure hierarchy was developed:

1. Create a list of feared situations (least to most feared)

1. Participate in small classroom discussion
2. Walk through Place Riel when it's busy
3. Attend class in large lecture theatre
4. Participate in large classroom discussion

2. Begin with the first item on your list

1. Participate in small classroom discussion

3. Generate a list of tasks related to the feared situation, ranked least to most feared.

1. Ask someone to repeat what they said
2. Agree with what someone has said
3. Ask the professor a question
4. Raise a point that hasn't been made by anyone else
5. Disagree with what someone has said and explain why

4. Select the day you will begin your program.

November 18

5. Feel anxious by engaging in task number 1.

Chris asked a woman in her Sociology class to repeat a comment she made.

6. Use a chart to record your peak anxiety level.

After class, Chris ranked and recorded anxiety as a '5' on a scale from 0 - 10.

Repeat daily until your anxiety consistently remains low (i.e. for several days in a row).

Chris asked a man to repeat what he said in English class. She did this again in some other classes. Soon she was consistently recording an anxiety level of 2 and was ready to move to the next task on her list (agree with what someone has said in class).

7. Progress through your list of tasks until you can comfortably engage in each activity.

Agreeing with what someone had said was more challenging than Chris had anticipated. She engaged in this task seven times in different classes before feeling ready to move on.

Chris felt very anxious about asking a professor a question. Initially her anxiety level was very high (8). After the third time she asked a question, however, she noticed a significant decline in her anxiety level. After five questions to different professors she felt she could move to her next item.

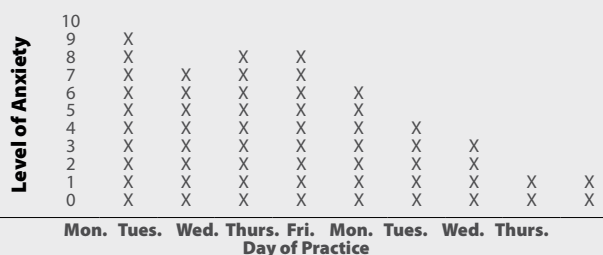
Chris' Anxiety Reduction Chart

Begin with the first item on your list

- Participate in small classroom discussion

Generate a list of tasks related to the feared situation, ranked least to most feared.

1. Ask someone to repeat what they said
2. Agree with what someone has said
3. Ask the professor a question
4. Raise a point that hasn't been made by anyone else
5. Disagree with what someone has said and explain why



Day of Practice

Chris felt extremely anxious (9) about raising a point for discussion in class. She started by commenting on something she felt interested in and repeated this strategy many times in different classes. Gradually, her anxiety began to diminish. She was feeling very pleased with her progress. See Anxiety Reduction Chart.

Chris' most challenging task came when she began to practice verbalizing her disagreement with someone in class. Since she didn't find herself disagreeing with classmates' perspectives very often, she made a point of engaging in an extended discussion on each occasion.

Once Chris completed her five tasks and felt she could comfortably participate in classroom discussions, she began to address the next situation on her hierarchy- walking through busy Place Riel.

8. Give yourself credit for your hard work.

Chris made sure she acknowledged her efforts (and regularly rewarded herself with a trip to the movies!).

9. Continue to engage in the previously feared activities to protect against a return of anxiety.

Chris made sure she kept participating in classroom discussions, walking through Place Riel, etc. throughout her university career. She noticed that a certain amount of anxiety remained for her. However, she no longer avoided feared situations.

Exposure Hierarchy Worksheet

1. Create a list of feared situations (least to most feared)

1. _____ 4. _____
 2. _____ 5. _____
 3. _____ 6. _____

2. Begin with the first item on your list (least feared situation)

1. _____

3. Generate a list of tasks related to the feared situation, ranked least to most feared.

1. _____ 4. _____
 2. _____ 5. _____
 3. _____ 6. _____

4. Select the day you will begin your program.

5. Feel anxious by engaging in task number 1 (least feared task).

6. Use a chart to record your anxiety levels.

Task _____

Level of Anxiety	10													
	9													
	8													
	7													
	6													
	5													
	4													
	3													
	2													
	1													
	0													
	M	T	W	Th	F	S	Su	M	T	W	Th	F		

Day of Practice

Repeat task until your anxiety consistently remains low (i.e. for several days in a row).

7. Progress through your list of tasks until you can comfortably engage in each activity.

8. Give yourself credit for your hard work.

9. Continue to engage in previously feared activities to protect against a return of anxiety.

Tips for Successful Exposure

- Start small and work your way up.
- Remember, some feared situations can be broken into many tasks and others can't.
- Before you start, rate your level of anxiety on a scale from 0 – 10.
- Make sure step one on the list of tasks involves some anxiety (at least a 3 on the 0-10 scale).
- Practice instead of "test" yourself. When you test yourself (to see if you experience anxiety, stay in a situation without avoiding, etc.), sooner or later you fail. When you practice, the goal is to learn and gradually improve (vs perform perfectly). When you practice despite your fear, you are succeeding. (DuPont, Spencer and DuPont, 1998).
- Changing how you think may not be enough to initiate behavioral change. At some point, you need to just go ahead and engage in the feared task anyway.
- Watch out for "impossible tasks" (setting goals that may be impossible to achieve). For example, setting a goal of giving a perfect speech without anyone noticing any nervousness or getting someone to agree to go out on a date.
- Establish exposure tasks for situations you want to change. Exposure won't work if your goal isn't the reduction of anxiety.
- Breathe. Before you enter the feared situation, while you are in it, and after you leave it.
- Expect feelings of anxiety during exposure tasks. It is normal to experience anxiety when seeking opportunities to grow and learn. Your anxiety tells you that you are doing just what you need to be doing to overcome it!
- Stay in the present by focusing on your environment. Pay attention to the details of your situation (this will give you time to initiate abdominal breathing and help settle you as you prepare to use supportive self-talk).
- During exposure tasks, silently say to yourself, "Stop!" if you notice negative self-talk. Or snap a rubber band on your wrist when you first notice negative thinking as a way to remind yourself to engage in supportive self-talk.
- Go into exposure tasks with some positive coping statements at the ready (e.g. "I can cope with this situation, even if it feels scary."). Some people find it useful to record coping statements on index cards and carry them with them in their wallet or knapsack.
- Depending on the situation, lengthy exposure may not apply; you may require repeated exposure.
- Avoid distracting yourself and/or using safety behaviors.
- During exposure tasks, remind yourself that feelings of anxiety always diminish.
- Trust your body to take care of the physical symptoms of anxiety.
- Engage in behavior that promotes relaxation (e.g. sit quietly instead of pacing).
- Ask yourself, "What can I do to help myself right now?" Pay attention to the answer.
- Accept any feelings you experience. They are a natural part of you and are neither good nor bad. Feelings can help you to understand your experience and choose appropriate behavior.
- Stay until your anxiety decreases by at least half. Longer exposures are most effective.
- Keep going back until your anxiety decreases by at least half.
- Have a back-up plan in case of difficulties with the original plan.
- You vary the context of your exposure.
- Expect to feel tired, irritable or tense afterwards.
- Commit to several large practices per week and small practices throughout the day.
- Acknowledge your efforts.
- Once you have eliminated a particular avoidance behavior, you may need to continue to approach/stay in the situation on a repeated and regular basis to prevent the anxiety from recurring.

Markway, et al (1992), Beckfield (1994), Babior and Goldman (1996) and Antony, Martin. (29 &30 Apr. 2004). "Assessment and Treatment of Anxiety Disorders in Adults and Children." Psychological Society of Saskatchewan 2004 Spring Institute, Saskatoon, SK.

Ideas for Exposure Practices

Public speaking

- Join Toastmasters
- Ask questions/make comments in class
- Take a drama class
- Make a toast at dinner with friends
- Tell a funny story to a group of friends

Writing in the presence of another

- Pay by cheque or credit card every time you buy something

Eating in the presence of others

- Invite friends over for supper
- Accept invitations to eat out
- Meet a friend for lunch in lower Place Riel
- Eat alone in a food court
- Taste samples offered in grocery stores

Making eye contact

- Ask for directions
- Ask for information about a product in a store
- Sit across from a friend in a coffee shop or restaurant

Being the center of attention

- Walk against the traffic
- Walk into class just before it's about to begin
- Talk about yourself
- Ask for help in a store
- Ask questions in class
- Walk out of the library with a book you haven't signed out to trip the alarm
- Spill your change at a checkout

Socializing and meeting new people

- Talk to the people who sit next to you in class or on the bus
- Invite friends over
- Speak to people on the elevator or in waiting rooms
- Talk to cashiers
- Accept invitations to social events
- Give compliments

Identifying Obstacles To Eliminating Avoidance

Take some time to consider what obstacles may present themselves as you work to overcome avoidance behavior.

- I don't really understand what I'm supposed to do to change my behavior.
- I think it's too difficult to eliminate avoidance behavior.
- I'm too frightened to try to stop avoiding.
- I lack adequate support.
- My other commitments (e.g., school) make it hard to focus on anxiety management.
- Someone in my life doesn't want me to change.
- I'm scared of succeeding.
- _____
- _____
- _____

Now take some time to problem solve. What can you do to eliminate or minimize obstacles?

Managing Setbacks

- Setbacks are normal and to be expected.
- Setbacks can only occur if first there has been some progress. Setbacks are signs that some change has already occurred.
- Setbacks do not mean you have to start all over. You have learned some strategies to address anxiety - get back to/keep using them.
- Setbacks are temporary.
- Setbacks are opportunities to learn new skills.
- Setbacks are signals to:
 - Examine your thinking
 - Sort out what you are feeling
 - Figure out if you are avoiding
 - Do some problem solving
 - Read some more about anxiety management
 - Review what worked in the past
 - Keep doing what works
 - Take care of your physical health
 - Ask for support

Adapted from Markway et al. (1992)

Enlisting the Help of Family and Friends

ENLISTING THE HELP OF A TRUSTED FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER CAN BE USEFUL AS YOU WORK TO BETTER MANAGE ANXIETY. HAVING THE SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGEMENT OF SOMEONE WHO CARES ABOUT YOU CAN HELP YOU TO STAY MOTIVATED TO CONTINUE TO MAKE CHANGE. HERE ARE SOME TIPS:

- Confide in those you trust and know will be supportive of you. This is not the time for unsolicited advice or criticism. Tell those you trust about your struggles and your successes.
 - Offer to provide your support person with information about anxiety and the specific strategies you are using to better cope.
 - Work to ask for and accept the support you need and deserve (e.g., will s/he exercise with you?).
 - Ask for honest (and gentle!) feedback. Your support person may be able to offer ideas about distorted thinking, avoidance behavior and emotional issues that may be perpetuating your anxiety.
 - Explain to your support person that having her/him accompany you to feared situations/when you feel anxious is often a form of avoidance and will prevent you from fully experiencing your anxiety (your goal!) and discovering your ability to cope on your own.
 - Remind your support person that anxiety difficulties take time and effort to manage. You won't simply "get over it." Patience is called for.
 - Avoid expecting your support person to become your therapist. Make sure the relationship is a balance of you both listening and sharing. Also, if you can, confide in more than one support person.
- Failure is success if we learn from it.

Mario Andretti
- Have fun together.
 - Recognize and accept that some people, however well-intentioned, will be unable to provide what you need. Seek another source of support.
 - If you discover that your relationship with your support person is contributing to your anxiety, consider how you can address this (e.g., talking with the person, getting help to leave an abusive relationship).

Information about Social Anxiety for Family and Friends

What is Social Anxiety?

Social anxiety is the excessive fear of certain social or performance situations. Generally, people who experience social anxiety fear one or more of the following:

- formal speaking (e.g. giving a class presentation, speaking with a person in authority)
- informal speaking (e.g. going to a party, meeting someone new)
- being observed (e.g. eating in public, using public bathrooms, being watched while working)
- assertive communication (e.g. expressing disagreement with someone) (Liebowitz, 1987 in Heimberg and Becker, 2002).

Social anxiety is characterized by intense and persistent worries about embarrassing oneself, or showing anxiety symptoms

(American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Those who experience social anxiety assume that they will perform poorly, that others will judge them harshly and that their performance reflects personal inadequacy (Wilson, 1996). As such, feared situations are anticipated and endured with intense distress, or (most commonly) avoided altogether (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Some people experience feelings of anxiety after the feared event is over because they believe they performed poorly and were evaluated negatively.

Individuals who experience social anxiety tend to recognize that their fear is excessive, feel upset about their level of anxiety and realize that their daily routine, social life, and academic/occupational functioning has been adversely impacted.

What are the Symptoms of Social Anxiety?

Symptoms of social anxiety can include the following:

PHYSICAL	COGNITIVE	BEHAVIORAL
Trembling	Negative self-talk	Avoidance
Sweating	Persistent worrying	Procrastination
Dry mouth	Repetitive thoughts	Social withdrawal
Trouble swallowing	Difficulty concentrating	Missed classes/exams
Increased heart rate	Going “blank”	Making excuses
Shortness of breath	Thoughts of being out of control	Increased caffeine use
Nausea	Thoughts of going crazy	Increased alcohol/drug use
Muscle tension	Thoughts of anxiety recurring	Eating more/less
Cold, clammy hands		Disturbed sleep
Dizziness		
Frequent urination		
Headaches		

What Causes Social Anxiety?

Problems with social anxiety typically begin in mid-adolescence, emerging out of a childhood history of shyness (Leahy and Holland, 2000). There are numerous possible contributors to the development of social and performance anxiety, including having a genetic predisposition, experiencing humiliating or distressing events (e.g. being bullied), and having poor social skills (Leahy and Holland, 2000).

What Can People Do To Reduce Social Anxiety?

- See a doctor or a physician to rule out any physical health problems that may be producing anxiety symptoms.
- Remember that some amount of anxiety is normal.
- Recognize that the most effective way to overcome anxiety is to face it. Believing that anxiety is “bad” and must be avoided makes it more difficult to cope. Adopting beliefs that suggest anxiety is uncomfortable but “o.k.” can assist you in performing despite anxiety.
- Think about thinking. It is important to learn to recognize negative predictions (“He’ll think I’m stupid”), harsh self-criticisms (“I’m so boring”), perfectionistic self-statements (“I have to get this right”) and beliefs about helplessness (“It won’t matter if I try”). Negative self-talk needs to be challenged using questions such as: “Is this always true?” “What are the odds of that really happening?” “Could there be another possibility?” “Is there another explanation?” “Is this helpful?” “Would I talk to a friend this way?”
Generating positive self-statements (that are affirming, encouraging and believable) is the next step (Bourne, 1995; Wilson, 1996).
- Avoidance behavior needs to be challenged, too. Avoiding anxiety-provoking situations alleviates anxiety immediately but only temporarily. Avoiding means people rob themselves of the opportunity to see that disasters rarely occur and that levels of anxiety do diminish.
- People with social anxiety need to stay in previously avoided situations until their physical discomfort lessens. Anxiety will decrease.
- People with social anxiety benefit from learning to trust their bodies. One’s body is incapable of maintaining an extreme level of anxiety for an extended period of time. Practicing abdominal breathing can help alleviate uncomfortable anxiety symptoms.
- Taking care of one’s physical health (eating well, exercising, getting enough rest, avoiding excessive use of caffeine) is essential. Problems with substance use require professional assistance.
- The support of others is critical.
- People working to overcome anxiety benefit when they give themselves credit for taking charge and helping themselves cope.
- Patience really is a virtue. Lasting change usually takes time.

American Psychiatric Association. (1994). *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.

Bourne, E. (1995). *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook*. Oakland, New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Heimberg, R. and Becker, R. (2002). *Cognitive-Behavioral Group Therapy for Social Phobia*. New York: Guilford Press.

Leahy, R. & Holland, S. (2000). *Treatment Plans and Interventions for Depression and Anxiety Disorders*. New York: Guilford Press.

Wilson, R. (1996). *Don’t Panic: Taking Control of Anxiety Attacks*. New York: HarperPerennial.

Yes, You Can!

- Decide to take charge of better managing your anxiety.
- Arrange for a medical screen to rule out any physical health problems.
- Remember that anxiety is not dangerous. Trust your body.
- Think about what may be contributing to your anxiety. Is there anything you can do about the contributing factors (e.g. reduce stress, resolve conflict with family members)?
- Make an attitudinal change. Remember, the most effective way to overcome anxiety is to face it. Accept anxiety as part of your life experience instead of seeing it as your enemy.
- Practise deep breathing.
- Challenge avoidance behavior. Work in a step-by-step way. Stay, don’t escape. Keep going back.
- Think about your thinking. Recognize that addressing fear of negative evaluation is key to managing social anxiety. Also, remember that negative predictions, harsh self-criticism and perfectionism fuel anxiety
- Challenge negative self-talk using questions like: “What are the odds of the worst really happening?” “Would I talk to a friend this way?”
- Develop self-statements that are supportive and believable (e.g. “I can be anxious and still carry on with my day. This feeling will pass”).
- Eat well, exercise and get adequate rest.
- Seek help if you abuse alcohol or drugs.
- Learn to recognize, accept and appropriately express all of your feelings.
- Discover which strategies work best for you.
- Practice, practice, practice.
- Seek and accept support from a trusted friend or family member.
- Read about anxiety management.
- Open yourself to taking risks.
- Imagine your success.
- Be patient. Lasting change usually takes time.
- Remember that some amount of anxiety is normal.
- Expect setbacks. Don’t give up.
- Give yourself credit for taking charge and helping yourself cope.

Providing Support To A Person With Social Anxiety

THE FOLLOWING SUGGESTIONS MAY BE HELPFUL FOR FRIENDS AND FAMILY MEMBERS OF STUDENTS WITH SOCIAL ANXIETY.

- Learn more about social anxiety. Read information provided to you and gather your own.
- Remember that you don't have to be an expert or a therapist to listen and show you care.
- Remember that it's not your job to cure the anxiety. Ultimately, it is up to the person experiencing the anxiety to decide to work to overcome it or not. If you believe that effort isn't being put forth/progress isn't being made, ask the person with anxiety what s/he thinks needs to happen next. However, it is unrealistic for you to become the person's motivator and monitor. Decide together on a realistic and agreeable plan.
- Be honest about what you can and cannot provide. Say no if you will feel burdened and unable to provide the assistance that is being requested.
- Be patient. Anxiety difficulties take time and work to overcome. This is not the time for unsolicited advice or criticism. Also, pressure is a poor motivator.
- Show sincere interest and optimism. Being supportive and encouraging goes a long way.
- Acknowledge the anxiety without being harsh or judgmental. "I can see that this is really difficult for you. It seems that anxiety can be so frustrating and overwhelming."
- You may have some strong ideas about what you think might be helpful. Be cautious in offering these. Respect the anxious person's effort and ability to consult with experts if need be.
- Acknowledge any progress you see, no matter how small or slow. Progress is progress.
- Offer to role-play (e.g., be the professor and listen to a dry run of the class presentation).
- Recognize that lasting change is often the result of slow, careful steps. Encourage practice in this way.
- When asked, provide honest (and gentle!) feedback.
- Be cautious about accompanying your friend to feared situations – this is often a poor anxiety management strategy that will delay a person's ability to discover s/he can cope on her/his own.
- Be aware that, in some situations, providing reassurance (e.g., "Don't worry, your speech will be fine.") may actually work against anxiety management. For an anxious person, reassurance can become a form of avoidance. How do you know when to provide reassurance? Generally, if the situation is one that the anxious person is working to no longer avoid or escape from, refrain from providing reassuring statements. Acknowledge the anxiety and the effort being put forth to address it. If the situation is such that, as a non-anxious person, you believe you would benefit from reassurance, provide it.
- Have fun together.
- If you continually feel overwhelmed by the anxious person's level of distress and unsure of how to respond, seek professional help.
- If your friend is using drugs or alcohol to cope with anxiety, encourage him/her to seek professional assistance from physician or counsellor.
- If your friend has become depressed as a result of difficulties with anxiety, encourage him/her to seek professional assistance from a physician or counsellor as soon as possible.
- Take your friend seriously if s/he talks about suicide. S/he needs to see a counselor or doctor. Get help IMMEDIATELY if s/he is so distressed that s/he cannot think of any other solution except suicide, fears s/he will harm her/himself, secures a means to self-harm (e.g., finds pills or a gun) or tells you about a plan to attempt suicide. NEVER agree to keep plans for suicide a secret. It is an act of caring to take action when your friend most needs assistance. Call an ambulance or 911, take your friend to the emergency room at the hospital, or call the Suicide Crisis Line number in the front of the phone book.

Adapted from DuPont, Spencer and DuPont (1998)

Where I'm Going From Here

AS YOU THINK ABOUT ALL THE DIFFERENT WAYS THAT PEOPLE CAN BETTER MANAGE ANXIETY, USE THIS SHEET TO PLAN YOUR NEXT MOVES! CHECK THE ITEMS THAT YOU ARE INTERESTED IN TRYING OR THAT APPLY TO YOU.

- I have made a clear decision to better manage my social anxiety.
- I will give myself credit for my efforts.
- I will review the material given.
- I will work through the handouts given.
- I'm going to use respiratory training.
- I'm going to assess how my lifestyle may be contributing to panic.
- I'm going to make changes in these areas:
 - eating
 - substance use
 - exercise
 - leisure time
 - sleep
 - support
- I'm going to work to better understand, accept and express my feelings.
- I'm going to remember that anxiety management strategies work.
- I'm going to practice what I learn.
- I'm going to avoid expecting perfection.
- I'm going to get my questions answered.
- I'm going to expect setbacks.
- I'm going to seek and accept support.
- I'm going to be more patient with myself.
- I can do this!

Trouble Shooting

- **My fear doesn't decrease, even with exposure.**
 - Ensure that you are staying in each situation as long as possible (or until your anxiety has decreased by at least half).
 - Eliminate safety behaviors.
 - Address anxious thinking.
- **My fear returns before the next exposure session.**
 - This is natural. Over time your fear will gradually lessen.
 - Be persistent and continue to eliminate avoidance behavior.
- **I'm too afraid to engage in an exposure practice.**
 - Try something less anxiety-provoking.
 - The first item on your exposure hierarchy should be anxiety-provoking, but not so scary that you avoid it. Rework your hierarchy.
- **Exposure is easy.**
 - Ask yourself if you are avoiding.
 - Rework your hierarchy. If exposure tasks don't feel difficult (i.e., involve anxiety), then you are not treating your anxiety.
- **My exposure task is difficult to create (because it doesn't happen often, for example).**
 - Be creative. Recreate as many aspects of it as you can.
 - Try imaginal, interoceptive or virtual reality exposure.
 - Eliminate avoidance behavior in other areas to increase your confidence and lower your overall level of anxiety.
- **Something negative happened during my last exposure task.**
 - Recognize that you survived your anxiety and the situation. This is good information.
 - Get back on track (i.e., go back) as soon as possible.

Antony, Martin. (29 & 30 Apr. 2004). "Assessment and Treatment of Anxiety Disorders in Adults and Children." Psychological Society of Saskatchewan 2004 Spring Institute, Saskatoon, SK.

Suggested Reading For Social Anxiety

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