



What to do when you are ... Feeling socially anxious



3 Key Messages

1. Notice what you think, feel and do in a social situation – it can take some time but is a useful step in helping you to manage your social anxiety
2. Get out of your own head in social situations, instead focus on what is going on around you right now
3. Discover how you really come across in social situations by testing out your fears rather than basing your views on how you feel inside

1. Notice what you think, feel and do in a social situation – it can take some time but is a useful step in helping you to manage your social anxiety



- People who feel socially anxious usually have lots of thoughts about being judged negatively by other people. Thoughts can be words or pictures in your mind.
- For example, ‘I sound really stupid’; ‘everyone will look at me and I will go red’.

- It can be helpful to try to notice what you think about and what you do in social situations. Try to remember a social situation you were in recently that made you feel anxious.
- What was the worst thing you feared would happen in that situation (e.g. ‘everyone would laugh at me’)?
- How did you think other people saw you (e.g. ‘they thought I looked stupid’)?

- Recognising what makes you feel anxious in social situations and what you do in those situations can be a useful first step in breaking the cycle of social anxiety.
- It can take a bit of time to work out what we think, feel and do when we’re feeling anxious in social situations – that’s okay; keep going!



2. Get out of your own head in social situations, instead focus on what is going on around you right now

- When people are feeling anxious in a social situation, they tend to focus on their own thoughts and feelings (e.g. worrying how they look to others) and on how they feel physically (e.g. blushing).
- It is very likely that these things are much more noticeable to you than they are to others.

- Rather than focusing on yourself, it can be helpful to pay attention to what is happening around you.
- Really listen to what other people are saying and look at the people and things in your surroundings.
- Practice being focused on what is going on around you in your daily life i.e., walk to school/park/shops without headphones and focus on what you can see and hear.

- Focusing on what is happening around you, and not on how you feel or come across will help you to be part of what is happening around you right now.
- We can then use that information to judge how we look in social situations (rather than judging how we look based on our thoughts about ourselves).

3a. Discover how you really come across in social situations by testing out your fears rather than basing your views on how you feel inside

3a

It is important that you do all three steps (parts a, b & c)

- It is important to start testing out your fears by giving things a go and seeing what you find out.
- Start by making a list of the social situations you want to be more comfortable in. What do you think will happen in these situations?

- In order to make difficult social situations manageable, people often do things called 'safety behaviours.'
- A safety behaviour is something you do because you believe it will keep you safe from judgement/negative evaluation.
- For example, not looking people in the eye, talking very little, planning what you will say in advance, looking for a safe person to stick with.

- One thing people often do to help themselves feel safe is to avoid things that make them feel socially anxious.
- Avoidance and other 'safety behaviours' can stop you from learning new things about your fears, and might mean you miss out on having positive social experiences.

3b. Discover how you really come across in social situations by testing out your fears rather than basing your views on how you feel inside

3b

It is important that you do all three steps (parts a, b & c)

- Try out a couple of situations that you avoid, and that make you feel a bit anxious, and do them without **your safety behaviours.**
- Afterwards reflect on how it went? How did what happen compare to what you had predicted? What did you learn from it?
- What else might you need to do to keep learning?

- By testing out social situations and seeing what you find out you will start to build up a picture of how you really come across in social situations, and will learn they are not usually as scary as you thought they would be!
- For example, imagine going to a busy shopping centre. After 5 mins you feel like everyone is staring at you and you feel really anxious. Instead of focusing on your thoughts, look around and notice how many people are actually staring at you. Chances are it will be less people than you expected!

- Keep testing out your fears. When you feel ready, doing the things that make you feel the most socially anxious.
- **This may take a bit of time, but don't give up!**

3c. Discover how you really come across in social situations by testing out your fears rather than basing your views on how you feel inside

3c

It is important that you do all three steps (parts a, b & c)

- It can be easy to go over social situations in your head afterwards and think about the negative parts, or the things that went 'badly'.
- Rather than going over and over a situation in your head after it has happened, try to do a different activity that will focus your mind on something more enjoyable, like reading, gaming, or watching TV.
- ✂ Distracting yourself and focusing on something more enjoyable might help you to not to overthink what happened or think about it in a negative way.



What should someone do if they are struggling with their mental health?



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- If anyone is struggling at a level where it is getting in the way of daily life (e.g., causing distress, interfering with sleep, schoolwork, concentrating in lessons, socialising with friends), it is important to seek help.
 - This could be talking to a trusted friend or family member. Often a good starting point is to speak to someone at school (a school nurse, school mental health champion); this information can typically be found on the school website or by asking a form tutor.
 - Another option is to speak to a health professional, e.g., GP.
 - More information on sources of support (and other useful resources) can be found here:

<https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/youth-mental-health/>