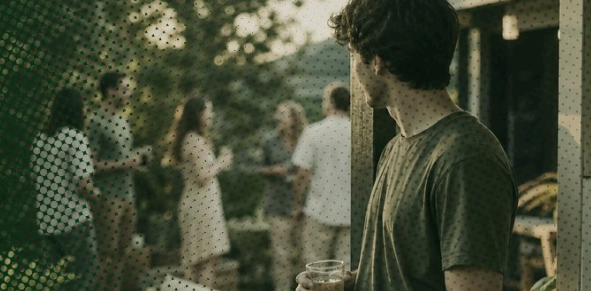
mindhealth FACT SHEET

SOCIAL ANXIETY · UNDERSTANDING & MANAGING IT

Social anxiety

Not shyness or weakness: a fear of being judged that grows when we hide from it.



The spotlight
Feeling watched or judged

In the body
Blushing, racing heart, shaky voice

In your behaviour
Avoiding, staying quiet, safety props

01 What it really is

Social anxiety is an intense fear of being judged, embarrassed or found wanting in front of others. It is far more than shyness: the worry can start days before an event and replay for days after. Underneath sits a belief that we will be exposed as boring, awkward or not good enough, and that everyone will notice.

02 Why it grows

Two habits keep it alive. We turn attention inward (monitoring our own blushing, words and heartbeat), which makes us feel more self-conscious, not less. And we lean on "safety behaviours" (over-rehearsing, gripping a drink, avoiding eye contact) that stop us ever learning we would have coped without them. Stepping out from behind these props is how the fear fades.

03 What genuinely helps

- Shifting attention outward: onto the conversation, not yourself
- CBT to test the harsh predictions about being judged
- Dropping safety behaviours, one at a time
- Gradual practice in feared situations, smallest first
- Easing the after-event "post-mortem" with self-compassion

A PRACTICAL STORY

From bracing for judgement to joining in



THE PATTERN

The self-focus loop



Watching yourself and using "props" prevents you learning you would cope. Dropping them breaks the loop.

PRACTICAL TOOLKIT

Look outward

1. Put your attention on the other person
2. Let yourself be ordinary, not impressive
3. Skip the after-event replay

Curiosity outward quietens the spotlight.

WHEN TO SEEK HELP

If fear of judgement is shrinking your work, study or social life, a psychologist can help you turn it around. Ask your GP about a Mental Health Treatment Plan for Medicare rebates.

DID YOU KNOW?

Social anxiety first appeared in the American diagnostic manual in 1980, as social phobia.

DSM-III, 1980

THE KEY TAKEAWAY

People are far more focused on themselves than on you, and far kinder than the spotlight suggests.

Need support right now? Lifeline **13 11 14** · Emergency **000** — available 24/7. More options: **mindhealth.com.au/urgent-help**

TALK TO US WHEN YOU'RE READY

Parramatta and online, Australia-wide · **Book at mindhealth.com.au**

1300 084 200

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