How to Overcome Your Social Anxiety in Social Situations

by ERIC PATTERSON

How to Overcome Social Anxiety – Tips for Defeating Your Social Anxiety

Anna Jackson and Eric Patterson offer their tips and advice on how to overcome social anxiety.

You witness other people interacting with a deep sense of sadness or frustration — their conversations seem so natural, seamless, and enjoyable. Meanwhile, your socialization is an exhibition of discomfort, anxiety, and disappointment.

More times than not, though, you find yourself avoiding all contact entirely. Why start an interaction when it will certainly end badly?

If social situations and relationships create large amounts of stress, worry, and fear, it could mean that you have social anxiety. If left alone, social anxiety will grow and intensify. Your best option is to resist and battle the enemy.

What Is Social Anxiety?

Social anxiety is the fear of social situations, interacting with other people and the fear of being negatively judged by others.

Some of the most common triggers of social anxiety are:

- Meeting new people
- Being the center of attention
- Being watched closely
- Public speaking
- Making phone calls
- Being criticized
- Attending social gatherings

Social anxiety is more than just shyness. The fear and self-consciousness felt by those with social anxiety can be incredibly overwhelming.

Symptoms of social anxiety may include:

- Racing heartbeat
- Sweating
- Tremors
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea

- Dizziness

Anna's Experience With Social Anxiety

I can speak from experience when it comes to social anxiety and I can sympathize deeply with those affected by it because I know what anxiety feels like.

I remember vividly, being at a party for a friend, surrounded by people I knew and had talked with countless times before and yet I was struggling to utter even the most simple of greetings.

It felt like I had lost the ability to speak, instead of letting myself flow with the conversation, I was second-guessing everything I wanted to say out of fear that I would sound stupid or what I had to say wasn't interesting or intelligent enough.

Another thing I started to worry about was my appearance. I'd been diagnosed with Crohn's Disease nine months earlier and had been on an intense course of corticosteroids, which had some physical side effects.

My Social Anxiety Worsened

I was convinced that everyone was looking at me and judging me negatively. I left that party early, and I started to avoid all forms of social interactions.

Avoiding social situations didn't help at all; in fact, it only made my social anxiety worse and only amplified the fears that I felt over time. Along with all the mental stresses, I was going through, physical symptoms also began to present themselves.

For me, one of the worst physical symptoms was a racing heart. This would not only happen before a social situation but also alone in the comfort of my own home. Concerned with the effects my anxiety was having on my physical health, I made the decision to go and see my doctor.

There are many different treatments for social anxiety, and I believe the most important thing to remember is to find the right treatment that works for you. Discuss all treatment options with your doctor, you have a say in what you choose to try and what you are comfortable with.

14 Tips on How to Overcome Social Anxiety in Any Situation

1. Acknowledge and Assess the Problem

To begin to overcome social anxiety, you must have a solid understanding of your current status.

What situations make you anxious? Is it challenging to speak to people, meet new people, or even be out in public? How long has your social anxiety been an issue? Was there a significant event that sparked your anxiety symptoms?

The answers to these questions will illustrate just how good or bad your social anxiety is. Before treating your anxiety, it is worthwhile to consult with your doctor for physical factors contributing to your stress.

For cases of extreme anxiety or symptoms triggered by a traumatic event, the greatest tip will be to seek out professional mental health treatment from a psychiatrist or counselor. If your anxiety seems manageable, move on to step two.

2. Plan Your Goal

Now that you have an appreciation of your anxiety, you can begin planning your goal. Frequently, people make the mistake of setting overly general goals for themselves like, "I want to be completely comfortable speaking to

people.”

That might seem like a good goal, but it is impractical and impossible to measure. The majority of people experience some stress when meeting new people or speaking in groups.

You don’t have to be exceptional. You just have to improve from your present standing. Consider setting goals focused on changing your behaviors like completing a certain amount of practice each week.

3. Believe In Yourself

You have a goal — do you believe you can achieve it? Do you think change is possible? As long as you think your goal is realistic, you must trust in your ability to accomplish it.

Without a high level of confidence, the change you desire will never happen. The best way to build confidence is by adjusting your thinking patterns.

Rather than being negative and having thoughts full of self-doubt, interject thoughts that are hopeful and optimistic. Remind yourself that you are a powerful, determined person who is capable of great things. Good self-esteem is related to low social anxiety.

4. Relax

With your changing thoughts, you can now begin changing your behaviors to reduce your resting anxiety. Relaxation techniques are effective in most anxiety-provoking situations, especially with social anxiety.

Use relaxation in two ways: first, before your social event, practice relaxing your body with deep breathing, guided imagery, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, and other proven strategies to drop your overall anxiety level.

When the situation ends, perform the same techniques or others as a method of damage control. With social anxiety, your stress levels will spike. Relaxation techniques give you the power to bring them back down.

Next page: Continue reading for more tips on how to overcome social anxiety.

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5. Study Good Examples

Who do you want to be like? What style of interaction do you seek to emulate?

The plan here is not to impersonate someone you know to lower your social anxiety. Instead, the goal is to compile large amounts of information regarding how other people interact.

By paying attention to the typical interactions of others, you can learn a lot about acceptable behaviors and levels of communication in different circumstances. For a better understanding, ask these people for their own tips or tricks to reduce anxiety.

Remember, TV shows or movies rarely depict accurate interactions. Stick with real life.

6. Be Around Others

Here is the most important tip to combat social anxiety: You must be social.

No matter how much you study or how much confidence you build, you cannot improve your social anxiety alone in your living room. Participate in new activities. Visit new places. Make small talk with strangers on the street.

Of course, this will be uncomfortable, but it is the essential aspect of overcoming your social anxiety. Only through exposure can you overcome your worry. If you do not complete this step, your anxiety will continue increasing with time.

7. Work on Your Listening Skills

Good communication has a lot to do with listening and so does socialization. People with social anxiety might worry too much about what they are going to say and too little about their listening skills.

Active listening will increase the comfort of the people around as they see you engaged in the conversation and interested in what they are saying. This permits you the ability to interject something that flows naturally into the conversation rather than forcing in your rehearsed comment. Plus, when you listen, people will respond more positively to you.

8. Don’t Take Shortcuts

People professing to be your friends may offer you alcohol in an attempt to “treat” your social anxiety by increasing your relaxation and reducing your tension.

Having a few drinks to improve your interactions completely undermines the work you have invested into your goal. It only proves that you have reduced your anxiety by being intoxicated. This is not very helpful.

Examples of other shortcuts include illicit or prescription drugs that are not recommended for you, communication solely through electronic/social media methods, and using other people as crutches. What is best and what is easy are rarely the same.

9. Start Slow and Small

Think about your social anxiety like a ladder you have to climb. Jumping to the top rung will result in you crashing down to earth. Take each rung slowly and carefully.

Begin with simple social tasks like talking to a family member on the phone or meeting a friend at a coffee shop. Let them know your intentions, ask for their feedback about your progress.

With time, push yourself to new, challenging scenarios. As your progress snowballs, you will be more capable and confident in your abilities. From here, most things are possible.

Anna's Tips on How to Overcome Social Anxiety

1. Attend Social Situations

As I mentioned earlier, one of the things I did in the past was avoiding social situations and the only effect that had was to make me even more anxious of social interactions.

While it is understandable that we avoid something we find fearful, avoiding these situations stops us from gaining positive experiences from something we wish to overcome.

2. Talk

Talking about our fears and anxieties can take the weight of the world off of our shoulders. Just being able to have someone listen and be aware of our thoughts and fears can relieve tension and stress.

3. Just Breathe

Practicing breathing techniques can help to keep us calm in anxious situations.

One of the most effective breathing exercises for social anxiety is ‘abdominal breathing’:

- Place your one hand on your chest and the other on your belt line.
- Your hands tell you what part of your body and what muscles you are using to breathe.
- Take a deep breath through your nose to ensure that your diaphragm inflates enough air to stretch the lungs.
- Take a pause, you decide whatever time feels comfortable to resume.
- Open your mouth. Exhale through your mouth by pulling your belly in.
- Pause again.
- Continue and repeat the process as you wish.

4. Shift Focus

Instead of focusing on your anxious feelings in social situations, try focusing on what is around you. Take in the details of your environment, the décor, the furniture, the occasion and the people around you.

This will shift your attention away from yourself and help occupy your mind with something other than anxious thoughts.

5. Practice Relaxation

Before attending a social gathering, practice relaxation techniques such as:

- Taking a long, hot bath
- Exercise
- Listening to calming music
- Meditation and yoga
- Aromatherapy
- Massage Therapy

When we experience social anxiety, we worry and stress that we may come across as weird or annoying to others and because of this we hide away in fear of negative judgment.

We are all different; if we weren’t then the world would be an incredibly boring place.