



## Help Treating Social Anxiety: 10 Therapy Tips To Overcome Social Phobia

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Social anxiety is a debilitating problem that can have an impact on a person's personal, interpersonal and work life. According to the current version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR), the prevalence rate for social phobia ranges from 3-13%. Fortunately, through cognitive behaviour therapy, psychologists have developed an excellent model for social anxiety therapy. We now have excellent interventions for the treatment of social phobia. Here is a quick Top 10 list of what you can do to overcome social anxiety.

1. Be reasonable and have clear social goals. If you have ideas like 'I have to say something intelligent all the time' or 'I want to be funny' just before talking to someone, you are setting yourself up for anxiety and failure! Such criteria are too general and unattainable and increase the pressure to perform. For example, what does intelligent mean? And about what topics and to whom? Does it mean commenting on how to split the atom using Einstein's theory of relativity, talking about ancient history, how bees pollinate flowers or the engineering feats behind the building of China's Three Gorges Dam? What appears interesting to one person may be boring to another! Instead, establish clear and measurable goals. For example, 'I will go towards a group where people are joking around and laughing' rather than 'I want to be funny' or 'I will speak to two new people'. If you follow through with your measurable goal, then it is a success!
2. Zero-percent anxiety is unattainable. If you are aiming to have no anxiety whatsoever, you are setting yourself up for failure. Don't try to move a mountain! Most people report a small level of anxiety before an important meeting or presentation or when meeting someone for the first time. Anxiety usually decreases once you start presenting or talking. If you accept a small level of anxiety as normal, social interactions will become much easier for you.
3. People with social phobia tend to want to be interesting. An important goal of social anxiety therapy is to be 'interested' and not 'interesting'. People like to talk about themselves and see that someone is listening to them. In contrast, someone who talks just about themselves appears conceded and egotistical. Think about it! If you can't get a word in and the other person constantly brags about themselves, does this make you want to keep talking to them? Relieve your social anxiety by being interested. Keep the following question in mind when socializing: 'What kind I learn about this person?'

4. Do you believe that poor social skills are an issue for you? Think again! Research shows that there is no difference between people who report social anxiety compared to those that do not when anxiety level is factored in. Rest assured then that your social skills are just as good as pretty much everyone else. Knowing that you're as good as the next person in terms of social skills should help you overcome social anxiety.

5. Don't ruminate after a social event or interaction. Research shows that people with social phobia think over and over about social events. The problem with this is that you will always find something that you could have done better. In fact we all can! Focusing in on this factor, no matter how small, will simply magnify its significance, make you think you failed and lead to social anxiety later on. It's okay to think a few times about what you could have done better. But after a few times, stop ruminating!

6. Focus outwards and not inwards. Imagine being on a stage with 20 people in front of an audience. Chances are you would be anxious. If the spotlight was suddenly put on you, your anxiety would likely skyrocket! Focusing on yourself during socializing is the same. For example 'How do I feel? What should I say? I'm trembling and he will see it. What if they laugh at me?' Concentrating on how you feel will simply increase your anxiety. An important component in the treatment for social anxiety with therapy is to learn to focus your attention outward. Each time you notice that you are focusing on yourself, redirect your attention to what the person is saying.

7. If you have negative inner self talk, challenge your thinking! Common examples include: 'I am boring', 'I am weird', and 'I am awkward'. Catch this unhelpful thinking and challenge it! Use the toolkit on 'How to change your negative thinking' in order to help you.

8. Start to challenge yourself. To overcome social anxiety, psychologists use exposure therapy. This aspect of social phobia treatment involves gradually facing your fears one at a time. Read the toolkit on 'Exposure Therapy' for the complete procedure on how to challenge yourself. Exposure Therapy is an important factor that will help with social phobia.

9. Afraid of embarrassment or humiliation? This is quite common in people with social anxiety. However, they tend to exaggerate how difficult such situations will be. Test out your fears. For example, go to a coffee shop and order a donut. Then drop it on the floor and ask for a replacement without saying 'Please'. Walk into a convenience store, order a product, leave the store and then walk back in and ask to exchange it. Want a harder challenge? Go to a restaurant and only order water. Leave once you

have finished the glass. Or sing a song for one-minute in public. Even though these might be embarrassing, was it that bad? Can you live with it? Will you see these people again? Gradually face your fears. You can also use the 'Exposure Therapy' toolkit to help you along.

10. What's the big deal? Now that you have read and hopefully tried these tips, what is the worst that has happened? Maybe a bit of anxiety and embarrassment? Is it worth it to overcome your social anxiety? Once you overcome social anxiety with these tips, think of what you will gain. If these tips are not enough, feel free to set up an appointment with me for social anxiety therapy.