

## Social Anxiety

***Has a correlation with overly high or unrealistic standards.***

Fear of situations where evaluation is possible. Person fears being negatively evaluated, including being judged for appearing anxious.

Because of this they may tend to avoid those situations or endure them with a sense of dread.

There are processes that happen BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER a feared social event.

**Before:** Anticipatory anxiety starts when person reviews upcoming event in detail. They *imagine* they will perform poorly, and that consequences will be disastrous. They often go over past social events they think went poorly. This reinforces their prediction/imagery of impending disaster.

**During:** Clients use self-focused attention to constantly evaluate their performance, monitor their anxiety levels, and form an image of how they *think* they appear to others. They also use safety behaviors such as no eye contact, staying in the back, not talking, clutching hands, drinking alcohol (often to excess) to “reduce risk.”

The safety behaviors and Self focused attention actually increase anxiety, and often lead to social skills deficits.

**After:** Post event processing. Person usually recalls how poorly they did, focusing in on negative aspects only.

**What to do now that you recognize social anxiety?** Make a list of 10 or social situations, 1 causing zero anxiety, up to 10, being the most scary. Now maybe take a look at the item that is at #3. Imagine yourself doing it.

Start by questioning your thoughts: (see questioning thoughts worksheet). Is the thought “*Everyone thinks I’m boring!*” actually true? And so on.

Next, prepare to go do number 3 on your list. Think about how you can shift your *internal* focus to the *external*. In other words, instead of obsessing on how you are performing, set a few goals for looking around you at others. Can you see the color of someone’s eyes by making eye contact, and then smile at them? Can you notice if anyone else seems nervous (I bet they are), can you see if anyone is wearing a blue shirt? And so on. Practice focusing *externally* instead of hyper aware of self.

Now it’s time for post event processing. Instead of going right to what you did bad, name three things that went well. You did it! Did you do it without some of your safety behaviors?

Great Job!

Now you can work your way up the list, KNOWING that everyone feels anxiety sometimes. We ALL have social mishaps, like telling a silly joke that nobody laughs at. Imagine yourself doing something like that on purpose!

