

Social anxiety:

Kooth's factsheet for young people

Social anxiety is an overwhelming fear of social situations. It is sometimes referred to as 'social phobia'.

Social anxiety is so much more than not particularly liking social situations, feeling shy, or being naturally reserved. It can be a long-term issue that can have a real impact on someone's everyday life.



What are the symptoms of social anxiety?

Everybody is different, and experiences things in their own way. But here are just some common traits of social anxiety:

Anxiety about doing everyday activities, such as going to school, going to the shops, talking to people in person, in the classroom, and on the phone, or even getting on public transport.

Physical responses to your worry and anxiety, such as going red, sweating, increased heart rate, nausea, and shaking.

Avoidance of situations and experiences that you may find uncomfortable, such as meeting with friends, going to school, or going out to eat with others.

Having extreme anxiety or worry in the lead-up to a social situation you can't avoid, such as a family gathering, school trip, or birthday party.

Fear of being judged or watched by others in social situations (e.g. you might worry about people watching you eat or noticing any physical responses to anxiety, such as going red or shaking).

Scrutinising your performance in social situations (e.g. being overly critical or fixating on the things you think went wrong).

* Please note, the examples above could be indications of social anxiety, but equally, they might be indicators of something else too, which is why it can be helpful to get professional support.

What it's like to experience?

Social anxiety is actually pretty common, especially for teenagers. You might even know people in your school who experience it. We spoke to a few people about their social anxiety and this is what they had to say:

I was really shy when I was growing up, and when I was a teenager, I was so self-conscious. But then I started to get worried about meeting up with my friends. I'd worry I'd say the wrong thing or run out of things to talk to them about. So I had to mentally prepare a list of topics we could talk about before I met them.

ANDY

'The biggest issue for me, I think, is that I get really self-conscious about how other people are viewing me. I might feel like everyone is staring at me, or I overanalyse simple interactions and conversations, or think someone's offhand comment has a double meaning about me not being welcome there.'

ROBBIE



Ways of coping:

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1

Reach out for support

Identify someone you trust (e.g. a friend, family member, someone at school, or even your GP). It might be helpful to write down some of the things you want to share so you feel more prepared.

2

Practise a positive mantra

Repeat something to yourself that can help you feel better, comforted, or more positive. For example, "I am loved, I am appreciated, I am safe, I am enough."

3

Try practising some relaxation

Anxiety of any kind can be stressful, so helping your body to relax can be really useful.

4

See other parts of yourself too

Remind yourself that the way you feel is only a part of who you are, and that there is so much more to you than social anxiety. Thinking about your other qualities can help you to be less critical of yourself and gradually increase your confidence.

