

Missing Out Because You're Anxious

Objective

To identify where you are missing out and practice tolerating situations that make you anxious.

You Should Know

When you are at school or out with friends, do you worry that you will do something to embarrass yourself? Do you think other kids will think you're dumb or awkward? Are you worried that other kids judge you? If you go out of your way to avoid situations where you might experience discomfort, you might have social anxiety.

Social Anxiety Disorder, also called social phobia, occurs when certain social or performance situations (for example, attending a party or giving a presentation in class) are avoided because you're afraid you will be judged or embarrassed in front of other people. You might be so afraid of being negatively evaluated that it interferes with your ability to live a normal life. You might begin to avoid everyday social situations, like going shopping, speaking up in class, using a public bathroom, or attending school activities.

It's normal for you to be nervous before or during certain activities. For example, you might be nervous just before attending a dance or during a class presentation. Sometimes you might think you are anxious when you are actually excited.

When you have Social Anxiety Disorder, usual, expected, and normal social situations almost always trigger intense fear or anxiety. Your fears are out of proportion to the situation. You might know that your fears are unreasonable and that other teens don't feel the same way. You might feel alone and believe that no one understands you.

Most teens become a little nervous in social situations, like dating or presenting in class. If you have social anxiety, you might often feel anxious, and you avoid situations that make you uncomfortable. You might be missing out because you'd rather avoid feeling self-conscious and distressed.

What to Do

Here are some common situations that you might avoid. Mark each statement that applies to you.

- Working with a group of peers to complete a class project.
- Writing on a whiteboard or chalkboard at the front of the classroom.
- Walking through crowded hallways.
- Using public bathrooms.
- Talking to people you don't know.

- _____ Starting or joining conversations.
- _____ Speaking to adults.
- _____ Participating in physical education class or sports.
- _____ Performing on stage in front of a crowd.
- _____ Asking a group of friends to get together or inviting them to a party.
- _____ Asking someone out on a date.
- _____ Reading aloud in front of the class.
- _____ Eating in front of other people.
- _____ Entering a room where other people are already seated.
- _____ Attending parties, dances, or other school activities.
- _____ Answering questions in class.
- _____ Asking teachers questions or asking adults for help.
- _____ Going to the mall or other crowded places.

Do you avoid any of the situations you checked off to the point that you feel you're "missing out"? Describe.

Based on your answers above, describe situations in the following chart that commonly make you feel fearful, self-conscious, and distressed. Rate how uncomfortable thinking about the situation makes you, where 1 = just a little uncomfortable to 10 = extremely anxious.

Then, choose at least one situation to practice. See how many minutes you can spend each week tolerating the situation. See if you can increase the time you spend each week participating in activities that make you feel anxious.

Situation	Rate your discomfort

Choose at least one situation from your list to practice: _____

See how many minutes you can spend each week tolerating the situation. See if you can increase the time you spend each week participating in activities that make you feel anxious.

Date	Details (what happened, who were you with?)	Rate your discomfort	How Did You Feel After the Activity?	Minutes Spent

Total Minutes Spent: _____

Reflections on This Exercise

What strategies did you use to tolerate situations that make you anxious? Describe.

What was it like to try those strategies? What did you notice inside yourself? What did you notice about the situations? Did it become easier over time?

Make copies of the chart and practice other activities that typically make you anxious. After one month, write down your thoughts.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 1- = extremely helpful)

Is there anything in particular you learned from this exercise?
