

SOCIAL ANXIETY DISORDER

Symptoms

These are the symptoms of social anxiety disorder required for diagnosis, per the Diagnostic Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM5).

- Marked fear or anxiety about one or more social situations in which the individual is Exposed to possible scrutiny by others.
- The individual fears that they will act in a way or show anxiety symptoms that will be Negatively evaluated (i.e., will be humiliating or embarrassing; will lead to rejection)
- The social situations almost always provoke fear or anxiety.
- The fear or anxiety is out of proportion to the actual threat posed by the social situation.

AND

- The fear, anxiety or avoidance is persistent, typically lasting for 6 months or more.
- The fear, anxiety or avoidance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, Occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
- The anxiety is not due to the side effects of a substance or other medical condition.

Things to Consider

Social anxiety is extremely common, and most people experience some social anxiety in certain situations. For example, most people feel anxious when having to give a speech or presentation in front of others; that does not mean they have an anxiety disorder. Individuals who meet criteria for social anxiety disorder experience an intense fear of being watched and judged by others in most social situations. They fear that they will do something wrong, such as say they wrong thing, talk at the wrong time, or otherwise make a 'mistake' which result in criticism, judgment, and even rejection from others.

Social anxiety is often at play when individuals fear going into public places because they believe that other people will be looking at them or judging them. Without a thorough consideration of diagnosis, this can sometimes be misidentified as paranoia; but individuals with social anxiety fear that others are judging them, not that others are trying to deliberately harm them or sabotage them in some way.

Many times, the fear of judgment experienced in social anxiety relates to criticism and rejection experienced at another point in life (e.g., a family member criticized their weight when they were a child, and their brain automatically puts them 'on guard' for the possibility that strangers in a grocery store will be judging their weight as well). In addition, the judgments that are feared in social anxiety are often the judgments that person holds about themselves; they fear that others will think they are incompetent because they view themselves as incompetent.

Treatment

As with all anxiety disorders, there are effective treatments for social anxiety. Medication for depression can be helpful for some, though others may find that they can manage social anxiety by following the strategies provided in CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy) and DBT (dialectical behavior therapy) protocols.

If you struggle with social anxiety, please know that there is hope. Explore the CBT (Cognitive Behavior Therapy) and DBT (Dialectical Behavior Therapy) articles and videos on this site, look for books at your library or on Amazon, or reach out to a professional for assistance in learning effective strategies for managing social anxiety. The good news is that there are many strategies you can learn to use simply by accessing mental health education.

If you are experiencing suicidal ideations, DIAL 988 (the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) to call, text, or chat with a trained counselor.

