



University of Brighton

MANAGING SOCIAL PHOBIAS

CREATING A FRIENDLY, POSITIVE,

INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Student Wellbeing Team
www.brighton.ac.uk/wellbeing

HERE FOR
YOU



University of Brighton

+ What is a social phobia?

A phobia is a persistent and excessive fear. A social phobia is to fear social or performance situations where embarrassment may occur.

University life puts you, as a student, in a position of having to mix with new people you don't know. For some this can be a terrifying ordeal that results in the avoidance of situations in order to cope. This is known as "general" social phobia and can lead people to withdraw from social events.

The other type of social phobia is a "specific" social phobia. This is a fear of a specific event where, perhaps as part of the requirements of your course, you may have to give a presentation. At its worst it can be impossible to speak at all in this situation.

If you have a social phobia you may:

- worry a lot about making a fool of yourself in front of other people
- feel very anxious before going into the situation that you fear
- find yourself going through in great detail all the embarrassing things that could happen to you.
- experience a dry mouth, sweat, blush, stammer or fear loss of control of your bodily functions
- experience panic attacks
- avoid mixing socially

+ Panic attacks

Panic attacks can be extremely frightening and if you experience them, you may fear having a heart attack, a stroke or that you may black out. You may experience shortness of breath, nausea, feel faint and feel your heart thumping in your chest. Panic attacks can leave you feeling quite ill for a few days after.

+ How does social phobia affect you?

It can be very depressing to suffer from a social phobia. You may end up withdrawing from most social situations making you feel worse and the problem may start to impact on your relationships with family and friends. In severe cases you may suffer from agoraphobia where you are unable to go out at all.

Different people find different things helpful, either one thing or a combination, so it's worth trying out all the help available until you find what suits you.

- Self help. If you are naturally shy then assertion or self-confidence classes may help you which are usually held at adult education colleges
- Consider talking to a counsellor to discuss your issues and explore options that might help
- Talk to a friend you can trust - sharing your suffering can sometimes help when you get a good response
- Seek advice from your GP who may be able to refer you for services available on the NHS. GPs can also prescribe drug treatments
- Try reading some of the books listed on the back of this leaflet
- Access self-help organisations such as Anxiety UK

+ Self-help organisations

Anxiety UK

The anxiety disorders charity which offers support and guidance if you have an anxiety condition or a phobia.
Tel 03444 775 774
www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Social Anxiety Association

Education around social phobia/anxiety and effective treatments.
www.socialphobia.org

Royal College of Psychiatrists

Up-to-date and easy to read information on shyness and social phobia.
www.rcpsych.ac.uk

A full list of support organisations that can help with many issues can be found at
www.brighton.ac.uk/wellbeingresources.

+ Useful Books

- Free Yourself from Anxiety: a self help guide to overcoming anxiety disorders, Emma Fletcher and Martha Langley
- The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook, Edmund J. Bourne
- The Hell of Social Phobia: one man's 40 year struggle (Kindle edition), Terry Cunningham
- Painfully Shy: how to overcome social anxiety and reclaim your life, Barbara Markway