

Five tips for overcoming social anxiety

Social anxiety is a very common disorder. The causes are many, but most people can overcome social anxiety without professional counseling. If you have social anxiety, the effects can be very unpleasant. You may feel isolated, self-conscious or nervous in group settings and may even experience physical symptoms as well. Some people get sweaty palms, trembling hands or feel discomfort or nausea in the stomach. There are several proactive steps you can take on your own that may help in overcoming social anxiety. Let's take a look at five effective methods.

If you experience such a great degree of discomfort that you aren't able to begin in a 'live' setting, try a virtual setting. Let's say you love travel or gardening. There are hundreds of thousands of forums and message boards related to these topics. Get online and search out several. Give yourself a chance to look them over and get a sense of the participants. Look for a friendly group. Sign up and start posting. The first step in overcoming social anxiety is to socialize. Even if you're not face-to-face, you're still interacting with other people.

Don't stop here! Once you've become comfortable in this virtual group, it's time to widen your horizons. Your virtual experience shows that you are interesting to other people and can have lively exchanges and make friends. Overcoming social anxiety requires that you recognize that you have valuable information and good personality characteristics to share. Join a live support group in your community. When you go to your meeting, remember that the participants are just like you and the group leader knows just how to draw people out in non-threatening ways. Have fun!

When you feel comfortable in your support group, invite one or two members with whom you have developed a rapport out for coffee or a walk in the park. You'll soon find it's not nearly as scary as you once supposed. You may even find yourself talking easily and enjoying being in the company of others.

Now for perhaps the biggest step in overcoming your social anxiety: host a lunch or dinner in your home. Your party doesn't need to be large, just three or four people will do. By now, your level of confidence has grown. No more sweaty palms or heart palpitations at the mere thought of such an event. You've got enough experience and support in successfully interacting socially to take this big step.

All along the way, keep a journal of each of these steps towards overcoming social anxiety. Write down your thoughts, list positive interchanges and things

that people seem to like about you. Believe me, the list may become long. Your journal may also become a cherished keepsake of your successful journey. Good luck!