

# Understanding And Coping With Social Anxiety

Understanding Social Anxiety

Reference Book: The Shyness & Social Anxiety Workbook; Third Edition

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# Anxiety, Worry, Fear, and Panic

- Fear is related to the fight or flight system – an immediate sense of danger.
- Anxiety is future oriented feeling of dread associated with the sense that events are uncontrollable and unpredictable. A belief that something negative will happen and nothing can be done to prevent it.
- Healthy amounts of stress/anxiety are good.
- Panic attacks are seen in some people with social anxiety. This is the body's alarm system on overdrive to get you out of danger immediately.

# What is a social situation

- Any situation involving you and at least one other person – interacting with others (interpersonal situations) or can involve you being the focus of attention or being noticed by others (performance situations).
- Interpersonal Situations:
  - Asking someone out on a date;
  - Talking to someone in authority
  - Initiating or maintaining a conversation
  - Going to a party
  - Playing an interactive game online
  - Meeting new people
  - Having friends over for dinner.

# Social Situations Cont.

- Interpersonal situations cont.:
  - Talking on the telephone
  - Sending a text or an email
  - Expressing a personal opinion
  - Having a job interview
  - Interacting with others on social media (e.g. Facebook)
  - Being assertive (saying no)
  - Returning an item to a store
  - Sending back food in a restaurant
  - Making eye contact

# Social Situations Cont.

- Performance situations cont.:
  - Public speaking
  - Speaking in meetings
  - Playing sports or participating in aerobics
  - Driving in front of others
  - Having others watch you work
  - Leaving a voicemail
  - Eating, drinking in front of others or using public bathrooms
  - Shopping in a busy store
  - Introducing self to group.
  - Making a mistake in front of others (for example, falling down, dropping keys)

# What is Social Anxiety

- Discomfort or nervousness in social situations, usually because of fear about doing something embarrassing, or foolish, making a bad impression, or being judged critically by others.
- Some people social anxiety in formal settings (work), e.g., giving a presentation and meetings but are quite comfortable in more casual settings, such as parties or social events with friends.
- Others may exhibit the opposite pattern, finding formal work situations easier than unstructured social gatherings.
- Celebrities can be quite comfortable performing in front of large audiences, but they can be shy and nervous interacting with people one-on-one or in small groups.

# What is Social Anxiety cont.

- Intensity of social anxiety and range of feared social situations vary from person to person.
- For some people the fear is manageable whereas others are completely overwhelmed by the intensity of their fear.
- For some people the fear is limited to a single social situation (e.g., public speaking) whereas others experience social anxiety in almost all social situations.
- Introversion is sometimes associated with shyness but not always
- Perfectionism is also a problem.

# Social Anxiety Disorder - Introduction

- If your symptoms meet the requirement for social anxiety disorder that does not mean you are sick, have a disease or are mentally ill.
- What it means is that you are experiencing social anxiety at a level that bothers you or interferes with aspects of your functioning.
- Remember that almost everyone experiences social anxiety, shyness, or performance anxiety from time to time. See How common is Social Anxiety?
- People with social anxiety disorder experience social anxiety at a more intense level, more frequently, and in a wider range of situations.
- Fortunately, social anxiety responds extremely well to the types of treatment discussed throughout the book.



# Social Anxiety Disorder – Diagnostic Criteria

- A person must have intense fear of one or more social or performance situations to be diagnosed with social anxiety disorder.
- Note: Treatment approaches discussed in this workbook do not require that one meet the diagnostic criteria for the disorder.
- Fear must be related to concern about being negatively evaluated by others or doing something embarrassing or humiliating, leading to possible rejection.
- In addition, the fear must bother the individual or cause significant interference in their life.
- E.g., a person with a fear of public speaking but didn't need to speak in front of groups and didn't care about having the fear wouldn't meet the criteria.
- The social anxiety symptoms must exist separate from other disorders or problems.

# Social Anxiety Disorder Components

- Cognitive – Thinking
- Physical feelings
- Behaviors
- Note: People with social anxiety may be fearful of symptoms but in various research studies others were not aware of the symptoms that a person with social anxiety had. For example, people with social anxiety believe they are blushing more than they are and that people notice it more than they do.

# Social Anxiety Disorder & Physical Feelings

- Racing or pounding heart
- Breathlessness or feelings of being smothered
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Difficulty swallowing, choking feelings or a lump in the throat
- Quivering or shakiness (for example, in the hands, knees, lips or whole body)
- Blushing
- Nausea, diarrhea, or butterflies in the stomach
- Excessive sweating
- Shaky voice
- Tearfulness or crying

# Social Anxiety Disorder & Physical Feelings

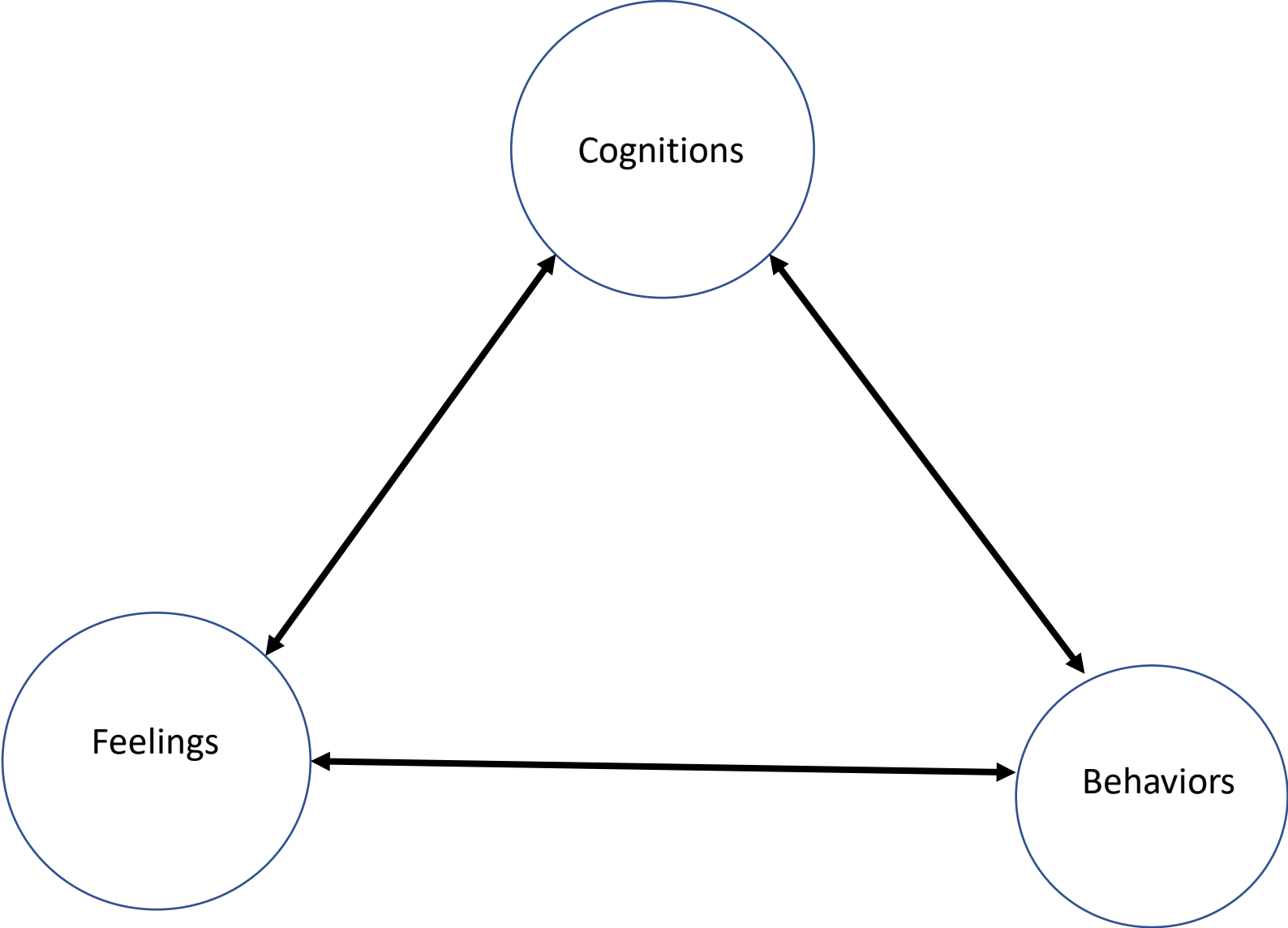
- Poor concentration or forgetting what you were trying to say
- Blurred vision
- Numbness and tingling sensations
- Feelings of unreality or of being detached
- Tightness or weakness in the muscles (for example, wobbly legs, sore neck)
- Chest pain or tightness in the chest muscles
- Dry mouth
- Feeling hot or cold

# Social Anxiety Disorder Components

- Cognitive – Thinking
- Physical feelings
- Behaviors
- Note: People with social anxiety may be fearful of symptoms but in various research studies others were not aware of the symptoms that a person has.

# Social Anxiety Disorder Additional Considerations for next session

- Social Anxiety and Thinking
- Social Anxiety and Behaviors



# How to recognize Automatic Negative Thoughts

- You suddenly notice a shift toward negative emotions
- You can't shake a negative feeling
- You are struggling to act in a way that would help you reach your goals
  - E.g., Avoidance of an action or behavior – we feel it is too far outside our comfort level.
  - Maybe you want to make more friends and connections, but you are nervous about going out somewhere or attending an event like a support group.



# Cognitive Distortions

- Personalization: You see yourself as more involved in negative events than you really are.
- All-Or-Nothing Thinking: You see things in black-and-white categories. If your performance falls short of perfect you see yourself as a total failure.
- Overgeneralization: You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.
- Mental filter: You pick out a single negative detail and dwell on it exclusively so that your vision of all reality becomes darkened, like the drop of ink that colors the entire beaker of water.

# Cognitive Distortions Cont.

- Disqualifying The Positive: You reject positive experiences by insisting they “don’t count” for some reason. In this way you can maintain a negative belief that is contradicted by everyday experiences.
- Jumping To Conclusions: You make a negative interpretation even though there are no definitive facts that convincingly support your conclusion.
  - Mind reading: You arbitrarily conclude that someone is negatively reacting to you, and you don’t bother to check this out.
  - The Fortune Teller Error: You anticipate that things will turn out badly, and you feel that your prediction is already established fact.

# Cognitive Distortions Cont.

- Magnification (Catastrophizing) or Minimization: You exaggerate the importance of things (such as your goof-up or someone else's achievement) or you inappropriately shrink things until they appear tiny (your own desirable qualities or the other fellow's imperfections).
- Emotional Reasoning: You assume that your negative emotions necessarily reflect the way things really are: "I feel it, therefore it must be true."
- Should Statements: You try to motivate yourself with should and shouldn't's, as if you had to be whipped and punished before you could be expected to do anything. The emotional consequence is guilt. When you direct should statements toward others, you feel anger, frustration, and resentment.

# Cognitive Distortions Cont.

- Labeling and Mislabeled: This is an extreme form of overgeneralization. Instead of describing your error, you attach a negative label to yourself: “I’m a loser.” When someone else’s behavior rubs you the wrong way, you attach a negative label to them. “He’s a moron.” It could also lead to prejudice against a group. Mislabeled describing an event with language that is highly colored and emotionally loaded.

# Three Column Technique for Changing Negative thoughts and beliefs

- Left Column: Write your actual thoughts that are going through your mind. Automatic thoughts or beliefs – about the situation, yourself, the world, other people.
- Middle Column: Identify which Cognitive Distortions are you using? This will likely be more than one.
- Challenges to the thoughts and beliefs. Try to come up with ways to challenge the belief, fear, or negative thought. Work toward developing positive affirmations about self and the world.
- [https://brucewhealton.com/support\\_docs/ThreeColumnTechnique.pdf](https://brucewhealton.com/support_docs/ThreeColumnTechnique.pdf)
- [https://brucewhealton.com/support\\_docs/cognitive-distortions.pdf](https://brucewhealton.com/support_docs/cognitive-distortions.pdf)

# From Thoughts to Beliefs – Downward Arrow Technique

- Best illustrated with an example.
- We find ourselves thinking “I hope I am not called upon” or we feel put on the spot.
- What is the fear and then if it comes true what does it mean – e.g., I might go blank or feel uncomfortable.
- What does that mean?
- Keep asking what does that mean if it is true?

# Core Beliefs – Or Negative Schemas

- <https://www.attachmentproject.com/blog/early-maladaptive-schemas/>
- <http://schematherapist.com/18-schemas/>