

10 Misconceptions About Social Anxiety ^[1]

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Before you can do anything about social anxiety – yours or that of a loved one, you first need to understand what it really is. After all, nobody can hope to effectively deal with something they don't understand.

Social anxiety, just like many other psychological disorders, is surrounded by a cloud of misconception. Believing in one or more of those misconceptions can be detrimental to your efforts to get a handle on your anxiety. Even though, undoubtedly, we are all different and thus the experience of anxiety may differ, all of us have more in common than you may think, and so we are all at risk of being burdened by the following misconceptions. Luckily, once you know what they are, you'd have a clearer view of anxiety.

#1 People With Social Anxiety Don't Like to Talk

It might seem that way but in reality, people who experience social anxiety find it difficult to talk. Just like everyone else, they too like to share ideas and opinions. It's true that they don't talk much, but that's because some of them lack the necessary social skills required to maintain a proper conversation.

#2 People With Social Anxiety Are Just Shy

Social anxiety and shyness are two completely different conditions. The fact that you're shy doesn't mean that you have social anxiety. People act shy for various reasons. Maybe it's because they feel intimidated or they simply don't know how to react to certain situations. Shyness is an adaptive mechanism because it allows us to take a step back and think, before we act. Most of us experience a dose of shyness whenever we encounter a new situation and it's absolutely normal. Unfortunately, social anxiety is much more complex than that.

#3 People With Social Anxiety Are Antisocial

A quick search in the dictionary and you'll discover that antisocial means contrary to the laws and customs of society, in a way that causes annoyance and disapproval in others. People with social anxiety don't seek to disturb others. They just have a hard time performing in social contexts. It's not like they hate other people and want to hurt them. Actually, it's the exact opposite. They fear that others might hurt them in a physical or emotional way.

#4 Medication Is the Only Option

Medication is considered the best option, ONLY when the person deals with severe social anxiety. Even in this case, the purpose of anxiety medication is to lower the negative effects of social anxiety just enough to allow the person to function properly and start psychotherapy. Mild and moderate forms of social anxiety can be easily treated with non-drug treatments.

#5 People With Social Anxiety Are Lonely

It's true that people with social anxiety have less friends but that doesn't mean that they're completely lonely. In fact, they might seem lonely from the outside, but from their own perspective, everything is OK. For them, trusting another person is not that easy which is why, in terms of friendships and social interactions, they value quality over quantity. Having just 2 or 3 friends doesn't bother them, as long as their friendships are truly meaningful.

#6 Social Anxiety Is Essentially the Fear of Public Speaking

It's not just about public speaking. Social anxiety has something to do with almost every social context. Some people with social anxiety find it difficult to attend parties and meetings, while others can't even eat in restaurants or shop at the mall. The confusion between social anxiety and fear of public speaking is just a stereotype popularized by media.

#7 Social Anxiety Is Not That Common

According to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), about 15 million American adults have social anxiety disorder. This means that almost 1 in 16 US adults deal with this problem. One of the reasons why many believe that social anxiety is not that common is because this condition doesn't always manifest in a severe form. In addition, most people who experience social anxiety choose to avoid certain places that make them feel uncomfortable so it's almost impossible to spot them.

#8 Social Anxiety Is Just a Phase

According to another statistic provided by the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), 36% of people with social anxiety disorder report experiencing symptoms for 10 or more years before seeking help. Even puberty, which is a phase that usually lasts 4-6 years, takes less than that. There are times when we feel less confident and maybe a bit shy, but social anxiety is definitely not a phase. It might start with just a few symptoms but in time, things can get worse, unless you seek professional help.

#9 Social Anxiety Is Just an Excuse to Avoid Certain Situations

There might be people who, although they're perfectly capable of facing certain situations, choose to lead others into believing that they're socially anxious. But these are usually exceptions. Oftentimes, people with social anxiety use avoidance, but it's not because they're lazy or ignorant. It's the intense fear of social interactions that makes them hesitant.

#10 Social Anxiety Is Caused by Parenting Issues

In some cases, overprotective parents who usually don't let their children spend time with other kids are the reason why adults develop social anxiety. But this problem can also be caused by trauma, criticism from our parents or teachers, bullying, public failures, etc. In this case, we can't blame it all on the parents.

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