



What is social anxiety?

Many young people feel shy or anxious in social situations but most of the time, this doesn't impact on their every-day lives. However, with social anxiety, you may fear being negatively evaluated and judged by others. It's also likely that you fear embarrassing or humiliating yourself and that you believe that your personal qualities, abilities or performance, may not be acceptable. Typically, these fears will have caused a problem for you for at least 6 months.

Due to the high levels of anxiety you experience in social situations, you will tend to focus on your own anxiety symptoms and behaviour, which result in feelings of self-consciousness and fears of being watched by others. You may have found that in these situations, you rely on what are called safety behaviours in an attempt to reduce the sense of threat. Common safety behaviours include such things as planning what to say, focusing on using the phone, speaking quietly, giving limited eye contact, feeling responsible for the conversation and filling in any silences. Alcohol or substances may also be used to try to cope with or mask anxiety.

Can treatment help?

The evidence-based psychological treatment for Social Anxiety is Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). Due to the nature of social anxiety, people do not always seek help early. In the case of chronic more severe social anxiety, a more intensive course of therapy may be required.

CBT Assessment and Key Treatment Strategies:

An assessment at Bristol CBT Clinic for young people will include use of standardised questionnaires that assess the severity of the social anxiety, how it impacts on daily life, what thoughts and beliefs are associated with the problem, and an assessment of other difficulties. Following the assessment, sessions focus on the following:

- Development of a shared understanding of the Social anxiety and the factors that are maintaining it over time.
- Working together to agree goals for treatment
- Identifying and working on beliefs about social situations, social performance, social skills and perceptions of others. This involves testing beliefs about the likely reactions of others once safety behaviours and avoidances are dropped.
- Addressing any traumatic memories which may be continuing to influence the social anxiety
- Devising a plan to help maintain progress and work towards longer term goals.