

Introduction

When the first edition of this book was published in 2012, social media was still, relatively speaking, in its infancy. It has since grown into a socializing tool that has transformed our lives and culture. As early adopters of many of the newest platforms, the teens of today face some new challenges.

Because social media posts and comments are public and can live online permanently, today's teens risk being criticized in ways that previous generations have not. The carefully chosen images and posts in social media streams can give the impression that others are always doing fun things in groups, triggering feelings of being left out or rejected. The negative judgments and social comparisons that social media can foster are directly linked to increased levels of social anxiety and depression among teens.

This new edition teaches teens how to master the negative thoughts and feelings that social media engagement can evoke. They'll learn how to adjust their expectations, both of others and themselves. They will learn how to cope with online criticism and the internalized criticism that results from it. All the insight and instruction from the first edition is still here, enhanced with new illustrations.

There is no reason to suffer with social anxiety. Help is here. If you're willing to work, this is the book for you.

Chapter 1:

Socially Anxious

Are You Missing Out?

When you are at school, at a party, or on social media, do you worry that people might think that something you say or do is stupid or dumb? Do you compare yourself to others who you think are smarter, more attractive, more popular? Are you easily shamed or embarrassed? Do you worry that others can tell that you're anxious from your physical signs, like blushing, shaking, or sweating?



Being concerned about being observed and judged by others is normal for teenagers. Feeling awkward and anxious a lot of the time is normal too. But for some teens, anxiety in social situations is a problem that is disrupting their lives. Here are five socially anxious teens who will help you understand your own shyness and what you can do about it. Alex doesn't date because he's worried he won't know what to say. Bella

avoids being the center of attention because she blushes, which will let everybody know she's anxious. Brandi is worried about being judged on social media, and she spends hours trying to perfect her posts. Lucia isn't confident she has much to contribute in conversation, so she doesn't say anything. And Chris is worried about making a mistake in a variety of situations where he may be observed. In this workbook, we'll follow along with these, and other teens, as they learn to master their social anxiety.

Here are some common social situations that can trigger anxiety. Check each one that makes you feel anxious.

- _____ Starting or joining a conversation
- _____ Answering questions in class
- _____ Inviting a friend to get together
- _____ Taking a test
- _____ Initiating a text to someone you don't know well
- _____ Entering a room where others are already seated
- _____ Writing on the whiteboard or chalkboard
- _____ Posting comments or photos on social media
- _____ Working with a group of teens
- _____ Participating in P.E. class
- _____ Creating a social media profile
- _____ Walking in the hallways or hanging out by your locker
- _____ Asking a teacher a question, or for help
- _____ Responding to a text someone sent you
- _____ Using school or public bathrooms
- _____ Eating in front of others
- _____ Writing in front of others

- _____ Answering or talking on the phone
- _____ Performing in public
- _____ Giving a report or reading aloud in front of the class
- _____ Speaking to adults (for example, store clerks, waiters, or your principal)
- _____ Talking to new or unfamiliar people
- _____ Attending parties, dances, or school activity nights
- _____ Having your picture taken (for example, for your school yearbook)
- _____ Dating

You've probably identified with several, even many, of these anxiety-triggering situations. Does that mean you have a problem? Not necessarily. The real test of your social anxiety is not whether you get anxious in social situations, but whether you go out of your way to *avoid* those situations.



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You can live with social anxiety by avoiding situations that make you uncomfortable, but if you're like most socially anxious teens, you're tired of missing out. This workbook is designed to help you get back what you're missing and reclaim your life.

To help you identify whether you suffer from social anxiety, you can take a quiz at <http://www.newharbinger.com/48015>. (See the very back of this book for more information about downloads.) Turn to the next chapter to learn how social anxiety develops and why it isn't your fault.

Chapter 2:

Why Me?

The Origins of Social Anxiety

To understand your own social anxiety, you'll need to understand where it comes from and the purpose it serves. Our social connections feel super important to us for a very good reason. They *are* super important. With few exceptions, a lone human being cannot survive for long. From our earliest recorded history, we've been social animals, building shelter from the weather, hunting and gathering food, and fighting off predators *together*, in families, tribes, and communities.

Because our relationships with others are so important to our survival, our body's central nervous system works hard to prevent us from making mistakes that could lead to criticism and rejection. In a social situation where we might bore or offend someone, we experience anxiety—delivered by our nervous system—in the form of fear, embarrassment, tension, sweating, and other sensations. The purpose of anxiety is to alert us not to take unnecessary social risks that could threaten our relationships with people we rely on to survive and thrive.



As helpful and necessary as anxiety is, for some of us, our body's nervous system is overreactive, dialed up so high that we get false alarms. Like a smoke sensor that goes off whenever you're using the toaster, your anxiety may be signaling false alarms, exaggerating the danger of you being criticized and rejected.

It would be convenient if we could dial down our nervous system to be less reactive, but the part of our brain that runs our nervous system is hardwired to be out of our direct control, with a mind of its own. Being the oldest, simplest, most primitive part of our brain, it can't reason or assess risk like the logical, rational part of our brain can. It "thinks" more like an animal, instinctively and reactively.

While it is often referred to as the "reptile brain" or the "lizard brain," I prefer to call this animalistic part of our brain the "monkey mind." Unlike reptiles and lizards, monkeys are social animals who care about belonging and will do anything to avoid getting kicked out of their tribe.



If you're avoiding social situations you wish you could engage in, but cannot because it feels like your very survival depends on avoiding them, you have an overreactive *monkey mind*. It overestimates the likelihood of others judging you negatively and it underestimates your ability to cope with negative judgments when they do occur. Which brings us to the question: Why is there a wild little beast running your nervous system, and not everybody else's?

You didn't invent this problem for yourself. There are three things that can influence how reactive your nervous system is in social situations. The first is your *genetic disposition*.



Genetic Disposition

We come into this world with predetermined traits, including the tendency toward anxiety in social situations. If you examine your family history, you will likely find an uncle or aunt, a parent or grandparent, even a sibling with shyness like you. They may not have had full-fledged social anxiety, but they were “dialed up” in a way you might recognize. Scientists haven’t discovered a specific shyness gene yet, but they have determined that, like blue eyes or curly hair, social anxiety is passed down generation to generation¹.

¹ *In addition to shyness, there are a variety of other of anxiety problems you or your relatives may have experienced. In the appendix at the end of the book, there is a list of these common anxieties.*



List any of your relatives who show anxiety in social situations.

Parental Modeling

The second factor that might contribute to your social anxiety is *parental modeling*. Do your parents rarely socialize? Are they highly invested in making a good impression? If your parents are overly cautious or reclusive, you may have learned some of your socially anxious behavior from them.



Describe any ways that your parents model anxiety and avoidance.

Upsetting Events

Almost everyone has experienced forgetting their lines in a school presentation or play. For most people, the experience is a memory to chuckle over, but for the socially anxious it may have been a traumatic disaster. They are so worried about a repeat performance that being called upon in class or doing an oral presentation is genuinely terrifying.

Your own personal *upsetting event* could have been giving the wrong answer in class, finding out you weren't invited to a party when everyone else was, hearing a rumor that you liked a classmate you really didn't, or having a mean teacher who shamed you in front of the class.



What upsetting events stand out in your memory?

You can't change your genealogy, your parents, or your past. What you *can* change is how you respond to anxiety *now*. What you do in social situations today will determine how you feel in social situations in the future. That's because your brain, even the primitive, stubborn part of it, is still learning all the time. Like its namesake, the monkey mind can be tamed.