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# Foreword

When we get anxious, we often think we suffer alone. We think we are messed up and everyone else is strong and confident. This is not true. Almost everyone gets anxious about something. Some people are afraid of spiders, others worry about lots of different things, and some people get nervous when they have to give a speech or meet new people.

The good news is that we know a lot about how to overcome anxiety. A form of psychological therapy called cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can help most people overcome their anxiety. CBT is based on research about how emotions work and what people can do to feel better. CBT teaches people skills that help depression, anxiety, and lots of other issues. These skills take practice, but anybody can learn them.

That's where this book comes in. It tells and shows you what you can do to overcome social anxiety and shyness. If you fill in the worksheets and try the experiments recommended, this book can help you overcome your social nervousness and feel a lot better.

Some of the exercises will make you feel nervous. That is a good thing, because one thing we know about anxiety is that it gets smaller only when we approach it rather than avoid it. To make it easier for you, the authors describe small steps you can take to help you build your confidence.

Most books like this are written for adults. That is too bad, because teenagers often get even more nervous than adults do. That's why I was so happy when Jennifer Shannon told me she and her husband were writing this book for you. Jennifer is an expert CBT therapist who has helped lots of teens overcome social anxiety. And her husband is a really good artist, which you probably already noticed when you flipped through the book. Together, they make a great team to explain clearly what social anxiety is all about and how you can overcome it.

Small steps can lead you to good places when you have a map. If you feel nervous around people, this book is your map. Take it a step at a time, and by next year you will be easily doing things that scare you this year. Think of all the things you can do when your nervousness shrinks! Read this book and follow its tips. Your confidence is just around the corner.

—Christine A. Padesky, PhD Coauthor, *Mind Over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think* Director, Center for Cognitive Therapy Huntington Beach, California

# Introduction

**W**ouldn't it be nice if you could just flick a switch and make your shyness go away? No more worrying about what others think about you, no more embarrassment in front of other people. You could just relax and feel comfortable and confident, the way you probably think everyone else feels.

Unfortunately we can't get rid of anxiety altogether; it is part of human nature and we all have it. The oldest and most primitive part of the brain, popularly referred to as the reptile brain, is something we have in common with many other species. When the reptile brain senses danger, it activates a part of the nervous system, that causes us to experience anxious feelings. Without anxiety we would take unnecessary risks.

Our nervous systems are designed to help us know when we need to be alert in social situations. Almost everybody feels a little nervous starting a conversation with someone they don't know or asking a question in class, and teens who are shy feel anxiety during social interactions like these. Some teens are socially anxious, which means they experience such high anxiety that they avoid social situations. If you feel like your anxiety has you on the wrong end of the leash, then this book is for you.

# 1.

## Socially Anxious Are You Missing Out?

**W**hen you are at school, a restaurant, or a party, do you worry that people might think something you do is stupid or dumb? Do you think that people might laugh at you? Do you worry that you might do something that will make you feel ashamed or embarrassed? If so, you might be among the one in twenty teens who suffer from social anxiety.

Being concerned about being observed by others and negatively judged is normal for teenagers. Most everybody has experienced feeling nervous, scared, panicky, insecure, embarrassed, or ashamed in social or performance situations.

*Introducing Liz, Alex, Bella, and Brandon, four socially anxious teens who will help you understand social anxiety and learn what you can do about it.*

LIZ THINKS  
SHE'S A BORING  
CONVERSATIONALIST.



ALEX FREEZES  
UP AROUND  
ANYONE HE'S  
ATTRACTED TO.



BELLA HIDES  
HER FACE  
BECAUSE SHE  
BLUSHES.



BRANDON IS  
AFRAID TO GET  
ANYTHING  
WRONG.





*Here are some common situations that can trigger social anxiety. Check off each situation that makes you anxious.*



- ☐ Answering or talking on the telephone
- ☐ Answering questions in class
- ☐ Asking someone out
- ☐ Asking the teacher a question or for help
- ☐ Attending parties, dances, or school activities
- ☐ Blushing, shaking, or sweating in front of others
- ☐ Eating in front of others
- ☐ Entering a room where others are already seated

- ☐ Giving a report or reading aloud in front of the class
- ☐ Going on a date
- ☐ Having your picture taken
- ☐ Inviting a friend to get together
- ☐ Participating in P.E. class
- ☐ Performing in public
- ☐ Speaking to adults
- ☐ Starting or joining a conversation
- ☐ Taking a test
- ☐ Talking to new or unfamiliar people
- ☐ Texting
- ☐ Using school or public bathrooms
- ☐ Walking in the hallways or hanging out by your locker
- ☐ Working with a group of teens
- ☐ Writing on the whiteboard or chalkboard

**Y**ou probably identified with several of these trigger situations. Does that mean you are socially anxious? Not necessarily. It is normal for teens to feel anxious and awkward a lot of the time.



Many social problems resolve themselves with time and experience.

**T**he real test is not whether you feel anxious in a situation . . .





. . . but whether you go out of your way to avoid that situation.

**You** can live with social anxiety by avoiding situations that make you uncomfortable, but if that were working for you, you wouldn't be reading this book.