

SAFER Project

for

Problematic Social Anxiety

“Problematic Social Anxiety” is a description we use when someone suffers from symptoms such as

- acute self-consciousness, awkwardness and self-focus
- over-focus on anxiety symptoms such as blushing, shaking and sweating
- frequent embarrassment, feeling different, unwanted, negatively judged

Sometimes these symptoms are experienced in all social situations, sometimes just in specific but important ones (e.g. meetings, presentations, speeches etc).

While we all experience some social anxiety when we are in social situations which are outside our comfort zones (e.g. attending a wedding where we know nobody), the extremeness of the above symptoms in some cases, and the huge extent to which they negatively affect some people's lives, are what leads us to diagnose Problematic Social Anxiety (often called Social Phobia or Social Anxiety Disorder).

People with this problem (it is the third most common mental health problem after depression and substance abuse) can be helped to help themselves through a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy process of

Structured and Facilitated Experiential Relearning (SAFER).

This means that the learned habits of thinking and behaviour which keep the problem going can be unlearned and replaced through a structured process of

- understanding and recognizing the patterns of thinking and behaviour which keep the problem going
- identifying habitual thoughts (e.g. 'what is somebody sees me blushing'), beliefs, assumptions (e.g. “people will think I am weak”), and patterns of thinking (e.g. *Catastrophising, Mind-reading*) which can be questioned and possibly tested
- reality-testing some of these in an experiential way, through planned behavioural experiments (e.g. *going to a cafe and observing that not EVERYONE is looking at you*)

Some of this process of change through structured relearning may be carried out in a self-help context i.e. by using a relevant book, but many people need the process to be professionally facilitated i.e. they need to see a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist for a number of sessions.

This process is well-researched, and often successful, in which case it can bring the person with Problematic Social Anxiety from

Trying unsuccessfully to feel safer in social settings (or even giving up and avoiding them)

to

Actually learning to feel safer in these situations.

For further information on seeing a Cognitive Behavioural Therapist who can help with Social Anxiety, contact us at **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Ireland:**

Website: www.cognitive.ie

Email: info@cognitive.ie

Phone 087 7961427