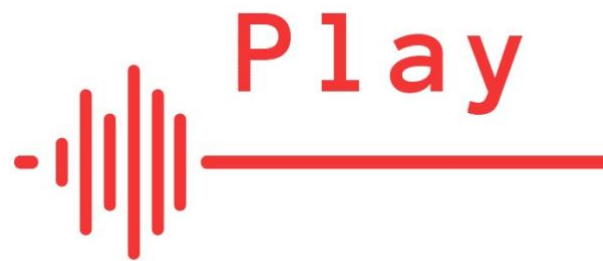


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**PLAY: “Play, Learn, fight back AnxietY**



## Scenario 8 educational material

### Tips for managing social anxiety

The following can help you to manage the anxieties you may experience around social situations:

1. Seek assistance:

If you find yourself at a crisis point or feel debilitated by experiences of social anxiety, you may need to consider availing of some professional assistance. Try to make an appointment at your university’s counselling services. If this seems like too big an ask, perhaps you might try calling a mental health helpline which may allow you to preserve your own anonymity to begin talking about the problem. Taking the first step is often the most difficult but also the most crucial in getting the help you need and deserve.

2. Celebrate your achievements:

Don’t allow your victories or progress to pass by unacknowledged. Every step forward, however small you may deem it to be, is a step in the right direction. Be proud of the progress you make and try to keep track of it. These small wins can be your fuel for further achievements at a later date

3. Try journaling:

Making regular journal entries (ideally on a daily basis) can be a really effective means through which to do this. It will enable you to document the progress you make and provides a valuable vessel through which you can express yourself in a clear, open and

uncensored manner – something which is equally important during the tough times as when you are taking positive steps.

4. Become your own advocate:

No one knows you as well as you know yourself. Inform yourself about what you are experiencing and try to let others (including tutors/lecturers) know about the challenges you face. Your experience is unique to you, so it is important that you communicate to others about it so they can better understand and accommodate for your needs.

5. Put yourself out there:

The temptation may be to avoid social situations if they result in feelings of stress or anxiety. However, it is important to retain your power and not be ruled by anxieties. Accept friends' invitations to go places and, where possible, try to do things that take you out of your comfort zone. Consider joining a club/group based around something you are good at or enjoy as this could offer a significant boost to your confidence and the level of positive emotion you experience in your life.

6. Look after your body:

Research has shown that exercise, particularly in forest or waterside environments, can have a considerable positive impact on our anxiety and stress levels, and overall wellbeing. Try to embed regular exercise into your routine. This can offer time to clear your mind and reflect on how you are feeling. Equally, be mindful of your diet and make an effort to moderate your caffeine and sugar intake.

(Adapted from <https://www.verywellmind.com/social-anxiety-disorder-tips-3024209>)

## Social anxiety

Social anxiety is a common problem that many people have to face and overcome in their lives. It refers to strong feelings of nervousness and discomfort which might arise for you in some or all of the social interactions within their life. You may feel anxious in one particular type of social situation (approaching an authority figure, giving a presentation, meeting new people) or may have a more general aversion to social scenarios.

Social anxiety does not arise out of a lack of social competence, but rather, from a stronger than average wish to be liked by others which may create an increased sense of internal stress and worry relating to whether you feel you are conducting yourself in a socially acceptable way.

Social anxiety might make you feel as if your every act and movement is being closely scrutinised in an unfavourable manner by others and might make you more sensitive to teasing/criticism, leading to you taking incidents of this nature very personally. The sense of anxiety created can impose a burden on your capacity to express yourself freely and may lead to you displaying some or all of the following signs in social scenarios:

- Jittery and nervous demeanour (e.g., shuffling feet, fidgeting hands, fast speech, mind going blank etc.)

- Excessive sweating or blushing
- Withdrawal or noticeable quietness within group settings
- Easily embarrassed/Avoid completing certain tasks out of fear of failing in front of others
- Difficulty expressing yourself clearly in the presence of other, particularly in the case of interactions with authority figures.

Social anxiety can seem overwhelming and make certain social situations appear particularly daunting and unmanageable. However, it is possible to overcome these feelings and begin to behave in a manner which will enable to feel more comfortable in expressing ourselves and ensure that we are able to do what is required to have our needs met.

Anxious thoughts are part and parcel of life and there is little use in trying to prevent them from occurring. To attempt to do so merely served to feed into these thoughts as it means that we apply a great deal of mental energy into trying to stop them from happening, but paradoxically end up focussing our attention upon them. Instead, we should try to accept these thoughts as part of our process, in just the same way that we do thoughts of happiness, sadness and anger. By doing this, we can move our attention away from thought prevention and towards the practical action we can take to ensure that we can interact successfully with others and move closer to achieving the outcomes we would like to achieve.