

News Release

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WHAT IS SOCIAL PHOBIA?

(Tampa, Florida April, 2013). The National Institute of Mental Health provides information based on a variety of topics which are available to the public free of charge and which may be also be duplicated and distributed. This article summarizes their information regarding social phobia.

What is social phobia?

Social phobia is defined as being a strong fear of being judged by others and of being embarrassed. This fear can be so strong that it gets in the way of going to work or school or doing other everyday things. While everyone has felt anxious, embarrassed or nervous at one time or another over perhaps meeting new people or having to give a public speech, individuals with social phobia worry about these and other things for weeks before they happen.

People with social phobia are afraid of doing common things in front of others. For example, they might be afraid to sign a check in front of a cashier at the grocery store, or they might be afraid to eat or drink in front of other people, or use a public restroom. Most people who have social phobia know that they shouldn't be as afraid as they are, but they can't control their fear. As a result, they sometimes end up staying away from places or events where they think they might have to do something that will embarrass them. For some people, social phobia is a problem only in certain situations, while others have symptoms in almost any social situation.

Social phobia usually starts during youth. A doctor can tell that a person has social phobia if the person has had symptoms for at least six months. Without treatment, social phobia can last for many years or a lifetime.

What are the signs and symptoms of social phobia?

People with social phobia tend to:

- Be very anxious about being with other people and have a hard time talking to them, even though they wish they could
- Be very self-conscious in front of other people and feel embarrassed
- Be very afraid that other people will judge them
- Worry for days or weeks before an event where other people will be
- Stay away from places where there are other people
- Have a hard time making friends and keeping friends
- Blush, sweat, or tremble around other people
- Feel nauseous or sick to their stomach when with other people.

What causes social phobia?

Social phobia sometimes runs in families, but no one knows for sure why some people have it, while others don't. Researchers have found that several parts of the brain are involved in fear and anxiety. By learning more about fear and anxiety in the brain, scientists may be able to create better treatments. Researchers are also looking for ways in which stress and environmental factors may play a role.

How is social phobia treated?

First, talk to your doctor about your symptoms. Your doctor should do an exam to make sure that another physical problem isn't causing the symptoms. The doctor may refer you to a mental health specialist.

Social phobia is generally treated with a type of psychotherapy called cognitive behavior therapy that is especially useful for treating social phobia. It teaches a person different ways of thinking, behaving, and reacting to situations that help him or her feel less anxious and fearful. It can also help people learn and practice social skills. Sometimes a physician may also prescribe medication to help treat social phobia. And on occasion an individual will need both psychotherapy and medication.

What can you do if you recognize yourself or a loved one in the above information? Call your EAP. If you have wondered about your being distressed in social situations, call the EAP. You can explore in a confidential setting the concerns that you have and receive assistance to changing the behaviors that are of concern to you. Remember that when you need to sort out your feelings about interacting with others or having to speak in public, help is a phone call away. The EAP can help you find a new path so that the changes you need to make can be managed. Remember that the PeopleFirstEAP is a benefit available to you and your dependents. Help is available 24-hours a day, 7 days a week.

EAP is a tool for personal and professional growth. Above all, keep in mind that concerns develop over time but the way you address them can be changed. The EAP representative will help you find the best solution for your particular situation and help is just a phone call away. Call: (813) 870-0392 (Hillsborough County, Florida), (727) 576-5164 (Pinellas County, Florida), or (800) 343-4670 (out of area toll free).

Remember that the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a benefit available to all employees and dependents of companies contracted with Wood & Associates for providing EAP services.

About Wood & Associates

Wood & Associates is an Employee Assistance Program and behavioral health consulting firm that helps employers maintain productivity, safety and behavioral health in the workplace. Wood & Associates is a pioneer in the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) industry and has served employers and employees in the greater Tampa Bay area and nationwide since 1982. The firm's diverse group of clients includes a number of major employers who also contract for its mental health and substance abuse services.

Gary L. Wood, Psy.D., founder of the Wood & Associates consulting practice, is a pioneer in the field of Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services. Since 1979, his practice has centered on providing solutions to employee and organizational problems. Wood is a licensed clinical psychologist, a member of the National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology, and a graduate of Rutgers University, West Georgia College and Mercer University.

Patricia N. Alexander earned a Ph.D. in mental health counseling at the University of Florida. Trained in critical incident stress management through the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, she is a Florida Licensed Mental Health Counselor and nationally certified counselor. Through her work experience she has addressed all types of critical incident situations, including explosions, multiple homicides, suicides, line-of-duty deaths, serious accidents and robberies. Alexander conducts training on stress management for law enforcement and businesses, and has developed peer support programs for law enforcement and industry. Alexander is an educator and consultant on a wide variety of behavioral health concerns.