



SOCIAL ANXIETY IN ADULTS WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

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Social Anxiety

Social Phobia

third largest
mental health problem
in the world today

WHAT IS SOCIAL ANXIETY

- DSM 5 Definition of Social Anxiety
- fear or anxiety specific to social settings, in which a person feels noticed, observed, or scrutinized. In a adult, this could include a first date, a job interview, meeting someone for the first time, delivering an oral presentation, or speaking in a class or meeting.
- typically the individual will fear that they will display their anxiety and experience social rejection.

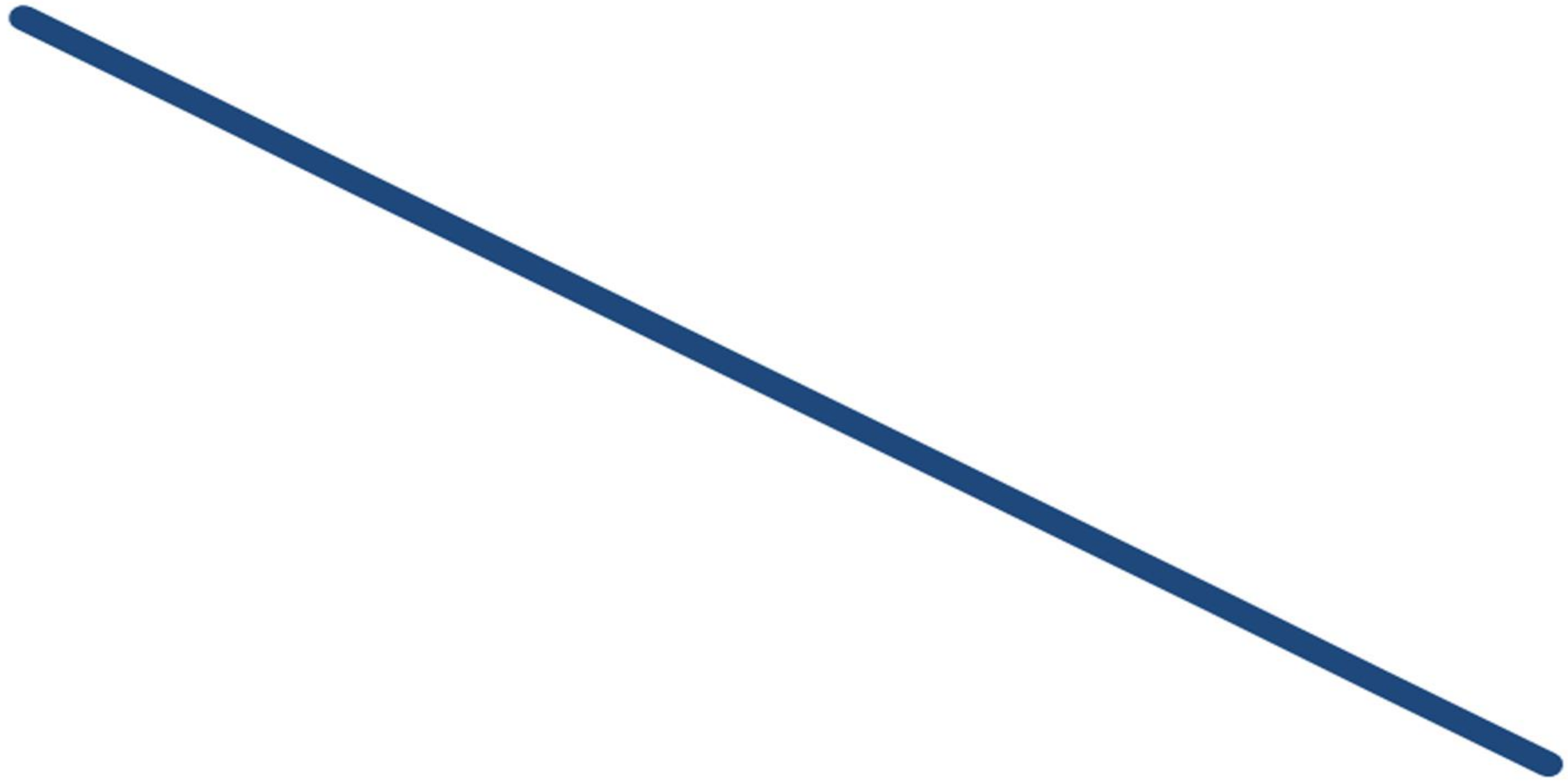
DEFINITION OF SOCIAL ANXIETY – CONTINUED

- social interaction will consistently provoke distress.
- social interactions are either avoided, or painfully and reluctantly endured.
- the fear and anxiety will be grossly disproportionate to the actual situation.
- the fear, anxiety or other distress around social situations will persist for six months or longer.

DEFINITION OF SOCIAL ANXIETY – CONTINUED

- cause personal distress and impairment of functioning in one or more domains, such as interpersonal or occupational functioning,
- the fear or anxiety cannot be attributed to a medical disorder, substance use, or adverse medication effects or another mental disorder.
- The clinician may also include the specifier that the social anxiety is performance situation specific - e.g., oral presentations (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

PERFORMANCE



COGNITIVE ANXIETY

TAKE-AWAYS FROM THE DEFINITION

- Fear of Social or Performance Situations
- Fear of Negative Judgement or Rejection
- Fear of Embarrassment
- Fear in anticipation of a negative response or outcome
- Situations are avoided or endured with duress
- Fears are exaggeration of actual threat

TAKE-AWAYS FROM THE DEFINITION – CONTINUED

- Avoidance interferes with opportunities for:
 - Developing Social Relationships
 - Advancement in Work or Academic Pursuits
 - Accessing Community Resources
 - Developing Independence
- **Social Anxiety affects almost all areas of adult life**



CHARACTERISTICS OF ASD THAT CONTRIBUTE TO SOCIAL ANXIETY

- Trouble starting or regulating conversation
- Difficulty reading nonverbal cues
- Emotion and Sensory Regulation Problems
- Trouble Processing information and responding quickly
- Resistance to uncertainty and unfamiliarity
- Poor coping with mistakes

SOCIAL ANXIETY AND DATING

- Fear of Rejection
 - Rejection means undesirable, unattractive, unlikable
 - Unable to cope with the embarrassment
- Not Knowing how to approach or express feelings appropriately
- Fear of Success - aka **What do I do now?**
 - How to set up a date
 - What to say or not say on a date
 - How to end date and beyond



BREATHE

Inhale, Exhale, Relax

MANAGING SOCIAL ANXIETY

Physical Calming – Reduce to mild level

- Deep breathing
- Muscle tension/relaxation
- Visual Imagery
- Sensory calming techniques
- Exercise
- Mindfulness Meditation
- Medication

TREATMENT STRATEGIES

- Determine What Aspects of Your Anxiety are Related to:
 - Lack of Knowledge
 - Fear of Rejection or Embarrassment

FOR KNOWLEDGE BASED ANXIETY

- Learn skills through:
 - Reading
 - Watching videos
 - Consulting with people you trust
- Practice skills in front of other people or a mirror
 - For mirror practice speak out loud
- Become familiar with person or setting prior to taking action

FOR REJECTION/EMBARRASSMENT BASED ANXIETY

- Do not overgeneralize or exaggerate scope of possible rejection
- Think of positive relationships and successes to boost confidence
- Preparation and Practice increase chances of success
- Focus on process more than result (more controllable)
- **Everyone** fails and gets embarrassed sometimes
- Develop a coping plan for failure and success



**WORRY
AND ANXIETY
LINKED TO
HIGH IQ?**

RISK

We cannot read minds or predict the future

We can make estimate potential outcomes but there is not absolute certainty

Practice and preparation can minimize risk but not eliminate it

Risk is necessary for success

FAITH

- Belief that **regardless of outcome** all will be ok
- If success:
 - Enjoy the moment
 - Look forward to preparing for next steps
- If failure:
 - May feel embarrassed but not die from it
 - No effort is ever wasted – can learn from experience
 - Rejection does not define us – our response to it does.

BOOKS ON SOCIAL ANXIETY

- Overcoming Social Anxiety Step by Step – Thomas Richards, Ph.D.
 - Good Introductory book
- Overcoming Social Anxiety and Shyness –Dr. Gillian Butler
 - Very Practical Advice and tips
- How to be Yourself: Quiet your Inner Critic and Rise above Social Anxiety – Ellen Hendriksen, Ph.D.
 - Promotes Self Confidence

BOOKS – CONTINUED

We're all Mad here: The no nonsense to living with Social Anxiety – Claire Eastman

Humorous Approach

Shrinking Violets: The Secret Life of Shyness – Joe Moran

Positives of shy and famous people who were shy