

LEARN TO LIVE BULLETIN

Your guide in wellness and mental health

Socializing Even When You Feel Anxious

Have you noticed times when seemingly simple things like starting a conversation, attending a gathering, or even responding to a message became overwhelming? Social activities can feel surprisingly difficult when anxiety shows up. And if you've ever found yourself overthinking what to say or avoiding social situations altogether, you're not alone. Social anxiety is common, and while it can feel limiting, there are ways to navigate it with more confidence and self-compassion.



First, it's important to understand that experiencing anxiety doesn't mean something is wrong with you. Anxiety serves an important function by keeping us aware and prepared for life's demands. The problem isn't the anxiety itself, but what happens when we get stuck in it, repeating negative thought patterns or imagining worst case scenarios that disconnect us from reality. This experience may leave us with a strong impulse to avoid similar situations.

However, avoidance tends to reinforce anxiety over time, making social situations feel even more intimidating. Rather than avoiding the social situations we're anxious about, we want to gradually approach them in small, manageable ways. This might start with making some eye contact, saying hello to a coworker, or attending a gathering for just a short period of time. Each step counts, no matter how small it may seem, and will help you build confidence in social situations over time.

It can also be helpful to adjust the way you think about social interactions. When anxiety is high, it's easy to become overly focused on yourself - monitoring what you're saying, how you look, or how you're being perceived. Curiosity can be a powerful tool here. By gently shifting your attention toward the other person or the environment, you may find some of that pressure lifting. Asking questions and listening closely to others not only helps conversations flow more naturally but also takes the spotlight off you.

Another key is practicing self-compassion. Social anxiety often comes with a harsh inner critic who replays conversations and points out perceived mistakes. When you catch yourself doing this, try speaking to yourself the way you would to a friend instead. Remind yourself that it's okay to feel nervous, that you're doing something challenging, and that effort matters more than perfection.

Finally, it's important to celebrate progress rather than focusing only on outcomes. Especially at first, success doesn't mean always feeling completely calm or having flawless interactions. It might simply mean showing up, staying a little longer than you expected, or trying again after a difficult experience. Over time, these moments will add up to increased resilience and confidence.

Get Started Today

The more you practice showing up alongside the discomfort of social anxiety, the easier it will become to socialize even when you're feeling anxious. For more tools to help you navigate anxiety involving social situations, consider enrolling in Learn to Live's social anxiety program. You can start immediately or with a quick assessment by scanning or visiting learntolive.com/partners and entering access code **MMHG**. Learn to Live is available to you and your family members, ages 13 and older at no cost.

