Managing social phobias

What is a social phobia?
A phobia is a persistent and excessive fear. A social phobia is to fear social or performance situations where embarrassment may occur.

University life puts you, as students, in a position of having to mix with new people you don’t know. For some this can be a terrifying ordeal that results in the avoidance of situations in order to cope. This is known as “general” social phobia and can lead people to withdraw from social events.

The other type of social phobia is a “specific” social phobia. This is a fear of a specific event where, perhaps as part of the requirements of your course, you may have to give a presentation. At its worst it can be impossible to speak at all in this situation.

If you have a social phobia you may:
- worry a lot about making a fool of yourself in front of other people
- feel very anxious before going into the situation that you fear
- find yourself going through in great detail all the embarrassing things that could happen to you.
- experience a dry mouth, sweat, blush, stammer or fear loss of control of your bodily functions
- experience panic attacks
- avoid mixing socially

Panic attacks
Panic attacks can be extremely frightening and if you experience them, you may fear having a heart attack, a stroke or that you may black out. You may experience shortness of breath, nausea, feel faint and feel your heart thumping in your chest. Panic attacks can leave you feeling quite ill for a few days after.

How does social phobia affect you?
It can be very depressing to suffer from a social phobia. You may end up withdrawing from most social situations making you feel worse and the problem may start to impact on your relationships with family and friends. In severe cases you may suffer from agoraphobia where you are unable to go out at all.

Different people find different things helpful, either one thing or a combination, so it’s worth trying out all the help available until you find what suits you.
- Self help. If you are naturally shy then assertion or self-confidence classes may help you which are usually held at adult education colleges
- Book to see a university Counsellor to discuss your issues and explore options that might help
- Talk to a friend you can trust – sharing your suffering can sometimes help when you get a good response
- Contact your GP who may be able to refer you for services available on the NHS. GPs can also prescribe drug treatments
- Try reading some of the books listed on the back of this leaflet
- Access self-help organisations such as Anxiety UK
Self-help organisations

Anxiety UK
www.anxietyuk.org.uk
Tel: 08444 775 774
The anxiety disorders charity offers support and guidance if you have an anxiety condition or a phobia.

www.socialphobia.org
A website which offers education around social phobia/anxiety and discusses effective treatments.

www.rcpsych.ac.uk
The Royal College of Psychiatrists is the professional body responsible for education and training, setting and raising standards in psychiatry.

Useful Books
Free Yourself from Anxiety: a self help guide to overcoming anxiety disorders
By Emma Fletcher and Martha Langley

By Edmund J. Bourne

The Hell of Social Phobia: one man’s 40 year struggle
By Terry Cunningham

The 21 day self-confidence challenge: an easy and step by step approach to overcome self-doubt and low self-esteem and start developing solid self-confidence: volume 9 By 21 day challenges

Counselling at the university
Counselling provides a safe, confidential environment for you to see an experienced counsellor and is available on all sites. More details about counselling can be found at www.brighton.ac.uk/current-students by email at counselling@brighton.ac.uk. Alternatively please contact or visit us at your site of study:

Eastbourne:
Trevin Towers Student Centre, Eastbourne
01273 643845

Falmer:
Student Services, E Wing, Checkland Building
01273 643584

Grand Parade:
Student Services, First Floor, Grand Parade
01273 643187

Hastings
Student Centre First Floor, Room 108, Priory Square Building 01273 644643

Moulsecoomb: The Manor House, Moulsecoomb Place 01273 642895

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