

7 Ways to Overcome Shyness and Social Anxiety

By David Shanley



It is estimated that nearly 17 million American adults at some point will meet criteria for social anxiety disorder or social phobia. The number of adults who struggle with shyness greatly exceeds that number. Fortunately, there are some effective strategies to overcome shyness and social anxiety and gain confidence:

1. Act confidently.

Confidence comes through action, learning, practice, and mastery. Remember when you learned how to ride a bike? It was terrifying at first, but after you just went for it and tried it, you got it, and felt confident. Social confidence works the same way.

Feeling anxious is not the problem; avoiding social interactions is the problem. Eliminate avoidance and you will overcome your anxiety.

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2. Engage.

This means participating in small talk in the checkout line and talking to strangers at bars, stores, sporting events, and the gym. Additionally, approach the individuals to whom you are attracted romantically. Talk to them. Ask them to dance. Ask them out on dates.

Life is short. Who cares if you get rejected? There are seven billion people on this planet. You're not expected to like or be liked by all of them. Take some chances and put yourself out there to meet new people.

3. Try new things, even if they make you anxious.

Join a club, a sports team, or an improv class. Pick up a new project, take on a difficult task at work, or learn a new skill. Do something to get out of your comfort zone.

Part of overcoming shyness is about developing confidence in several areas of your life and not letting anxiety, fear of failure, fear of rejection, or fear of humiliation get in your way. By practicing new activities, you are confronting your fear of the unknown and learning to handle that anxiety more effectively.

4. Talk.

Start practicing giving speeches or presentations and telling jokes or stories at every opportunity. Be more talkative and expressive in all areas of your life. Whether you're at work, with friends, with strangers, or walking down the street, you can practice talking more openly. Let your voice and your ideas be heard.

Confident people are not preoccupied with whether everyone is going to like what they have to say. They speak their mind because they want to share, engage, and connect with others. You can do this too. Anxiety and shyness are not reasons to stay quiet.

5. Make yourself vulnerable.

A fear of being judged contributes to social anxiety and shyness. The only way to overcome this fear is to make yourself vulnerable. Practice doing this with the people you are close to and can trust. You might realize the more you do it, the closer you feel to others and the more pleasure and meaning you

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get out of those relationships. This will lead to increased confidence in yourself and in social interactions.

Being vulnerable requires a willingness to let others see the real you. Be proud of who you are. Being genuine and vulnerable is often the quality that others will appreciate the most about you.

6. Practice displaying confident body language.

Make eye contact when talking to someone. Walk with your head held high. Project your voice clearly and effectively. Shake hands. Give hugs. Stay in close proximity to others.

7. Be mindful.

Mindfulness has been defined simply as awareness. Wake up. Be present to all of your thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories in any given moment. There is no part of your experience that you have to run from, escape, or avoid. Learn to appreciate yourself and the world around you, including those “panicky” thoughts and feelings, and just notice them without judgment.

When you are fully present in the moment, you will realize that social interactions are not something you need to avoid. You will perform better because you are actually paying attention to the conversation and the cues in your environment. With practice, you can continually incorporate and improve upon your social skills that you learn from the world around you, ultimately making you feel more confident.

[Shy man photo](#) available from Shutterstock

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