

# Social Anxiety Facts and Falsehoods

Social anxiety is not shyness or a personality trait. Learn why it's often misunderstood and found in adults with ADHD.

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## Q: What Is Social Anxiety Disorder?

Social anxiety disorder (SAD) is when you constantly worry about being negatively judged by others. You may find it difficult to eat or talk in public, or to use public bathrooms. You may find it impossible to attend social events. As with other anxiety disorders, you may know your fear is irrational but feel powerless to stop it.

## Q: How Common Is Social Anxiety?

Studies show that 2%–13% of the U.S. population experience SAD. It is the most common type of anxiety disorder in teenagers and more common in women. It often starts in childhood or early adolescence.



## Q: Do More People with ADHD Have Social Anxiety Disorder?

Some evidence suggests that, like other anxiety disorders, SAD occurs more frequently in children and adults with ADHD.

## Q: Is Social Anxiety a Personality Trait?

SAD and shyness are not the same. Shyness is considered a personality trait. People who are shy may experience nervousness or anxiety when faced with a social or interpersonal situation, but they accept their shyness as part of who they are. Those with SAD may be shy or outgoing. They view SAD negatively and often berate themselves for feeling the way they do.

## ADHD and Social Anxiety: Overlapping Symptoms

People with SAD may experience one, few, or all of the below symptoms, which can overlap with or mirror ADHD symptoms.

- Self-conscious in front of other people
- Extreme fear of others' judgment
- Worries for days or weeks before an event
- Avoids situations requiring social interaction
- Uncomfortable in social situations
- Keeps conversation with others to a minimum
- Difficulty making or keeping friends
- Panic attacks (shaking, blushing, nausea or sweating) when in a social situation
- Difficulty talking to others

## Social Anxiety: True or False

### People with SAD Are “Wallflowers.” FALSE

Some people with SAD may stay in the background; others may be extroverts. Symptoms of SAD occur when an individual's triggers (public speaking, eating in public crowds, etc.) are activated.

### SAD Elevates the Risk of Depression. TRUE

Teens with SAD often experience depression. Some research has found that if you have SAD, you are six times more likely to have dysthymia or another mood disorder. You are also at a higher risk for substance abuse.

### Effective Treatment Exists for SAD. TRUE

Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) may help people understand their triggers. It teaches techniques (thought logs, mindfulness, and relaxation exercises) to help control anxiety. Some medications may also help control anxiety.

### SAD Isn't Serious. FALSE

SAD can interfere with your ability to make friends, maintain relationships, and participate in social activities. You may miss school or work. You may get lower grades because you fear answering questions or talking in class.