

How to get the most out of the groups

People attend our groups for various reasons, but nearly all wish to increase their confidence around other people. This guide tells you how to get the most out of the group sessions to reach that aim.

Read and apply

Read all the information we give you and apply it where appropriate. It will help you get more out of attending the groups and give you a better chance of making progress.

Set your expectations

It is important that you do not have the expectation that just attending group sessions will heal you of your social anxiety. The best way to think about the group is as a resource that can assist you in reaching your goals. It is you who must actively use that resource and engage in it if you want to see progress. It is not the group that will help you feel better, but rather *you*, using the group environment (and other resources) effectively, that will produce results.

Use multiple resources

It is recommended that you do not make the group your only resource and that you engage in other professional services and read relevant self-help literature. People who do so while also attending regularly make the most progress. We have given you some information to help you learn about other resources.

Take advantage of the opportunities

To build your confidence it will be important for you to (among other things) gradually face your fears and experience anxiety until your mind recognises that a situation is not threatening. Sometimes it can be hard to do this when most normal social situations seem too difficult and overwhelming. The group provides a variety of social opportunities at different levels and a supportive environment where it is slightly easier for you to face your fears. The more you take part in activities such as stating how you feel, reading out the names, reading the rules, attending socials, doing public speaking or initiating conversations with other members the easier it will be for you when you have to face more challenging situations outside of the group. Additionally, remember that the group is a place where people will understand if you look anxious or make mistakes.

Look to gain confidence (not anxiety relief)

Although it is great if you do feel relief from your anxiety, it is best not to make this your outcome for any individual session. If attending the group involves being different types of social situations or more social contact than you are used to, or you have been very isolated from social situations recently then you may feel more anxious during the session than you normally do. If you feel more anxious by the end of a session then this does not necessarily mean that attending the group is making your anxiety worse. All it means is that the extent to which you feel vulnerable in social situations is being revealed to you. Although exiting the situation will quickly relieve the anxiety, it will also strengthen your sense of vulnerability leaving you to experience more anxiety in the future. It is therefore best to set your sights on building confidence over the long-term rather than seeking immediate relief from anxiety. It is also best to acknowledge that building confidence involves letting yourself feel anxious and seeing a situation through to the end. Try and see the situations that you find more

challenging within the group as opportunities to build up your confidence, as that is what they are.

Avoid comparing yourself to others

It is very common for new members to feel that everyone in the group is less socially anxious than they are. What they usually do not realise is that to the other members they probably do not look very socially anxious either. People with social anxiety usually perceive their anxiety as being much more noticeable than it really is. Additionally, many people with social anxiety go to great lengths to hide their anxiety and some used to significantly struggle with it but have now made progress. It is therefore important to remember this and not compare yourself to other members. Instead, use how others look to help yourself realise how your anxiety is probably not very noticeable.

Remember that other members experience social anxiety too

Even though it is hard to tell sometimes, remember that everyone in the group struggles with social anxiety and finds social interactions difficult. Remember that while you are worrying about your shaking, someone else is worrying about their blushing or sweating, and while you struggle to think of something to say, someone else is desperately trying to keep on talking to avoid an uncomfortable silence. Members nearly always want to welcome and involve newer members, but often it will be hard for them to express this and they may find speaking to new people very difficult. Additionally, they may just not want to put pressure on them to speak before they are ready. It is good to keep this in mind, especially if you are new to the group.

Attend regularly

Nearly all new members are extremely anxious at the beginning of their first session. Some may still feel very anxious at the end of their first session or during their first few sessions. In response to higher than normal anxiety it will be tempting to leave and not return. If you decide the groups are not what you are looking for then we respect your decision, but if you are hesitant about returning due to anxiety or social fears then we encourage you to keep coming and attend regularly. It is members who attend regularly and fairly consistently who make the most progress.

Get involved

When you are new to the group just turning up will likely be enough of a challenge, but as you get used to attending it is a good idea to continue to take small steps outside of your comfort zone. Consider starting a conversation with someone you have not spoken to before or continuing socialising after a session. Maybe start attending socials and then start planning your own socials. This will help you keep the progress you have made and help you build further confidence.

Increase your social life beyond the group

It is quite possible that the group becomes a comfortable place for you where there are some familiar faces and some of your social needs can be met. This is great, but it is encouraged that you do not stop there and continue to build your social life beyond that of the group. You may feel like you have taken a lot of steps already, but it is good to keep moving forward rather than let your progress slip backwards.

We hope you get as much out of the groups as we have.