

Safety Behaviours

Social Anxiety West Topic Session

Safety behaviours are the things you do when you feel anxious to attempt to minimise the risks you feel are there in social situations. They are behaviours that make you feel safer and therefore less anxious, but they also prevent you from gaining the valuable experiences that will help you overcome social anxiety.

They often involve forms of avoiding and hiding and examples include avoiding eye contact, hiding blushing with hair or clothes, avoiding social situations, sticking to very safe topics of conversation, letting people talk for you, tensing up to control shaking, using alcohol to boost confidence or appear more interesting, or anything that helps prevent you from facing your fears. See the other side of this sheet for more examples.

Questions

- **What are your safety behaviours?**
- **Which safety behaviours do you share with other people in the group and which ones do only you do?**
- **What are the benefits of your safety behaviours?**
- **What are the costs of them, especially in the long -term?**
- **Can you remember any times when you felt anxious but did not use your safety behaviours?**
- **What do you predict would happen if you stopped using your safety behaviours?**
- **Pick a safety behaviour that you have in common with someone else. What do you imagine would happen if they stopped using their safety behaviour?**
- **Stopping using safety behaviours is usually scary at first, but results in long-term confidence benefits. What safety behaviours are you willing to stop using?**

It is common for people to not be fully aware of all the safety behaviours they are using. Make a conscious effort to notice when you might be avoiding or hiding.

Safety Behaviours: Additional Information

Social anxiety often leads to the avoidance of feared situations resulting in social isolation, but some will decided to keep on doing the things they find difficult regardless of how much anxiety they experience. Typically, all people with social anxiety will adopt some kind of behaviour to try and help them deal with their fears. This involves behaving in ways to try and minimise the social risks they feel they are faced with. Not all of these will be relevant to you, but if you experience a significant amount of anxiety then you will probably recognise many of them. Avoiding eye contact, using alcohol to boost confidence, speaking quietly, staying on the edge of a group and being very agreeable are behaviours that are particularly common amongst people with social anxiety.

- Crossing the road to avoiding meeting someone you know
- Using alcohol or other drugs before meeting people
- Avoiding answering the door or phone
- Avoiding eye contact
- Sticking to 'safe' topics during conversations
- Giving minimal answers and say as little as possible
- Speaking quietly
- Sitting on at the back or on the edge of a group
- Tensing up to try and control shaking
- Wearing clothes or using hair to hide blushing
- Wearing certain clothes to hide sweating
- Being overly polite to people
- Always agreeing with everyone
- Saying what you think people want to hear all the time
- Rehearsing what you'll say over and over in your head
- Doing what everyone asks of you even if you don't want to
- Living with parents beyond a reasonable age
- Making excuses for anxious behaviour
- Leaving places early
- Talking excessively to fill silences
- Giving short vague answers to questions
- Constantly seeking reassurance from others
- Making yourself look busy to avoid speaking to people
- Having people speak for you
- Shopping in different places to avoid being recognised
- Making excuses for not attending social events
- Choosing a 'safe' career or remaining on benefits
- Declining promotions that are more socially involved.
- Avoiding public transport
- Missing classes/training you find difficult
- Staying close to people you know
- Asking other to do things for you
- Avoiding anything that might initiate conflict
- Meeting social needs almost exclusively through the internet