

Social anxiety and small steps

Before, during and after a social situation



Wanting company while dreading the conversation can feel lonely. Perhaps you rehearse what to say, worry people will notice your anxiety, or feel drained afterwards. You deserve support. Start with one situation that matters to you and a step that feels possible.

This sheet includes words you can borrow, because talking with someone you trust, or with a professional, can make difficult things feel more manageable.

1 Choose a small and meaningful step

Examples include saying hello to a familiar neighbour, asking one question in a meeting, or joining part of a group activity. Choose a respectful setting. A smaller step can still move you towards something you value. [1, 2]

One situation and one small step I would like to try

2 Notice the prediction

Your mind might say, 'If I go quiet, everyone will think I am boring.' Write it as a prediction rather than a fact. You do not need certainty about other people's thoughts before you take a small step. [2]

My mind predicts...

3 Give attention somewhere to land

During the conversation, notice a few words the other person says or a detail in the shared task. When attention turns to monitoring yourself, gently bring it back. If you need a moment, you can pause or say you are thinking. [1, 2]

A phrase you could use

Give me a moment to think. I'd like to hear a little more about that.

Practise with someone you trust

You could try your opening line with a friend first, or tell one person about your step and how it went.

Make room for sensory and communication needs: a quieter space, breaks, written prompts or communication aids. Eye contact is optional. Choose steps that fit your circumstances; you do not have to become outgoing to connect.

This practice is for ordinary, reasonably safe situations. Bullying, discrimination, coercion or danger call for support and protection. Keep genuine safety measures and disability accommodations.

Afterwards and over time

A kinder review and a clear route to support



Review briefly, then let the event end

Notice what happened, what you managed and one thing to try next. Include neutral moments as well as difficult ones. If the review turns into repeated checking or replaying, put it aside and return to your day. [2, 3]

One thing I managed, however small

Repeat a step or adjust its size

You can return to the same step before trying more. If it was too much, make it smaller or ask for help planning it. As an optional experiment, try one short question without rehearsing every word. Keep communication aids or other supports you need. [2]

When professional support may help

If fear or avoidance limits everyday life, a GP (family doctor) or qualified therapist can help. For adults with social anxiety disorder, NICE recommends individual cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) designed for it. This sheet offers a starting point; treatment is tailored to you. [1, 3]

Asking for help can start simply

I want to take part, but worry about being judged is getting in the way. Could we talk about support? I may find it easier to bring a note.

Tell them about low mood, other difficulties or using alcohol or drugs to manage situations. [3]

Someone to talk to, day or night

Ireland: Samaritans 116 123, or text HELLO to 50808. UK: Samaritans 116 123. US and Canada: call or text 988. Australia: Lifeline 13 11 14. Elsewhere: findahelpline.com lists free helplines by country. For urgent concerns, contact your GP, an out-of-hours doctor or your mental health team. [4]

Sources and further reading

Original practical prompts informed by independent guidance.

1. HSE: [Social anxiety](http://www2.hse.ie) (www2.hse.ie)
2. Centre for Clinical Interventions: [Social anxiety resources](http://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au) (www.cci.health.wa.gov.au)
3. NICE CG159: [Adult social anxiety recommendations](http://www.nice.org.uk) (www.nice.org.uk)
4. HSE: [Urgent mental health support](http://www2.hse.ie) (www2.hse.ie)

Sources checked 3 October 2026. The organisations cited have not endorsed this resource. Support lines checked 25 October 2026.

More free information and support routes

[More about social anxiety and support](#)

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