

COPING WITH SHYNESS AND SOCIAL PHOBIA

‘An invaluable resource for anyone who is troubled by shyness or social anxiety and who wants to know what to do about it. As well as being a self-help guide in its own right it also answers questions that sufferers often ask about what types of treatment are available and how to choose the best treatment approach. The review of Internet sites relating to professional organizations and anxiety groups provided is an excellent starting point.’

—Robert J. Edelman, *Chartered Clinical, Forensic, and Health Psychologist and a Fellow of the British Psychological Society*

‘Written by internationally recognized experts, this book summarises much of what is known about social anxiety and outlines the various treatment options. Illustrated with numerous case examples. Highly recommended for sufferers, their families, and professionals.’

—David M. Clark, *Professor of Psychology,
King’s College London*

‘In *Coping with Shyness and Social Phobia*, Ray Crozier and Lynn Alden provide an intelligent, up-to-date, and sensitive look at these two common but highly misunderstood emotional conditions. Going beyond just being providers of information, Crozier and Alden combine their many years of academic and clinical experience to offer a variety of strategies for overcoming shyness and social phobia that individuals will be able to integrate into their everyday living experiences to enhance the quality of their lives and the lives of those they know and love. Individuals who know the pains and problems of shyness and social phobia are fortunate to have as a source of social support the sense of dedication and compassion Crozier and Alden offer in this wonderful book.’

—Bernardo J. Carducci, *Director of the Shyness Research Institute
at Indiana University Southeast, US*

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Coping with Shyness and Social Phobia

A Guide to Understanding and
Overcoming Social Anxiety

W. Ray Crozier and Lynn E. Alden



O N E W O R L D
O X F O R D

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Series Foreword

This series is intended to provide clear, accessible, and practical information to individuals with a wide range of psychological disorders, as well as to their friends, relatives and interested professionals. As the causes of emotional distress can be complex, books in this series are not designed purely to detail self-treatment information. Instead, each volume sets out to offer guidance on the relevant, evidence-based psychological approaches that are available for the particular condition under discussion. Where appropriate, suggestions are also given on how to apply particular aspects of those techniques that can be incorporated into self-help approaches. Equally important, readers are offered information on which forms of therapy are likely to be beneficial, enabling sufferers to make informed decisions about treatment options with their referring clinician.

Each book also considers aspects of the disorder that are likely to be relevant to each individual's experience of receiving treatment, including the therapeutic approaches of medical professionals, the nature of diagnosis, and the myths that might surround a particular disorder. General issues that can also affect a sufferer's quality of life, such as stigma, isolation, self-care and relationships are also covered in many of the volumes.

The books in this series are not intended to replace therapists, since many individuals will need a personal treatment programme from a qualified clinician. However, each title offers individually tailored strategies, devised by highly experienced practicing clinicians, predominantly based on the latest techniques of cognitive behavioural therapy, which have been shown to be extremely effective in changing the way sufferers think about themselves and their problems. In addition, titles also include a variety of practical features such as rating scales and diary sheets, helpful case studies drawn from real life, and a wide range of up-to-date resources including self-help groups, recommended reading, and useful websites. Consequently, each book provides the necessary materials for sufferers to become active participants in their own care, enabling constructive engagement with clinical professionals when needed and, when appropriate, to take independent action.

Dr Steven Jones
Series Editor

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Is this book for you?

What is the book about?

Our starting point is that many of us feel extremely shy or anxious in social situations. We wish that we did not feel like this and we would like to change things so that we wouldn't have to feel like this. We might have tried to change in the past but found that it was hard to do so – our fears and concerns seem so ingrained that they are resistant to change.

Perhaps you feel this way about yourself. Or perhaps you see these signs in your husband, wife or partner, your child, or a friend. You wish that you could help them in some way and sense that if you knew something more about these problems you would be better placed to do so. The aim of our book is to provide you with clear and up-to-date information about what is known about social anxieties.

Perhaps you have read about social phobia or social anxiety disorder and wonder what they refer to or how they are different from shyness or lack of self-confidence. Or you read or hear

about strong claims being made about cognitive behaviour therapy and wonder if that would be helpful to you or to someone you know. What does it involve? How might it differ from other forms of treatment? Is there any evidence that it is more effective than other treatments?

Or you have followed recent debates in the media about the use of medication for the treatment of social phobia or social anxiety disorder (we will explain these terms shortly). Are drug treatments effective in treatment? Is their use appropriate? One form of medication that has attracted controversy recently is a class of drugs known as the SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors), which were developed for the treatment of depression but are now routinely prescribed for social anxiety disorder (we discuss this treatment in more detail in chapter 9). You might not be at all sure what these drugs are, how they work, or why they might be thought to have anything to do with, say, feeling nervous about going on a first date with someone you find attractive or worrying about having to persuade your colleagues at work to agree with your point of view.

Sometimes the media describe medication as a ‘pill for shyness’ or a ‘cure for shyness’ and this raises many questions in your mind. Is social phobia the same as shyness? How can a medical treatment change my everyday behaviour? And why should my nervousness about dating or my awkwardness in conversation be a medical matter at all? Isn’t it just me, the kind of person I am, my personality, not an illness that I suffer from and can get over if I take the medicine? Other newspaper reports have described a ‘breakthrough’ in science, where it is claimed that a gene for shyness has been discovered, and it is difficult to square the idea that shyness has a genetic basis with reports that it can be treated by drugs or by psychotherapy.

These are all good questions and probably you have many more good questions in mind. We – Lynn Alden and Ray Crozier – are psychologists and in this book we aim to tackle

these questions from a psychological perspective. We don't assume any prior knowledge of psychology and we will explain any technical terms that we introduce as we go along.

As psychologists we are committed to the essential role that objective evidence must play in deciding if and when treatments are appropriate and effective. Therefore we aim to support any claims we make by reference to well-executed clinical research studies and we will include enough information to enable you to check things out for yourself. We will have succeeded if we can provide you with sufficient information about shyness and social anxiety disorder that will help you to understand better problems of social anxiety – whether these are your problems or those of someone you know, or whether you have picked up this book simply because you have a general interest in this topic. If you want to seek professional help we should have pointed you in some directions that might be better for you to take than others would be.

What does the book cover?

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of the book are concerned with the nature of social anxiety and shyness. We ask what these terms mean. Shyness is a common word in everyday language that conjures up a number of images. Perhaps you think of a shy child, bashful, tongue-tied, and awkward in the company of adults. Or a child who tends to play by herself, who is always at the edge of things, never quite joining in. Or you think of an adolescent, self-conscious, easily embarrassed, blushing when spoken to. Perhaps it is an adult, quiet, monosyllabic, can't think what to say, never meets your eye, reluctant to join in social events. Or another adult, who looks forward to parties and meeting people, but is never at ease, perhaps talking too much or laughing too loudly, maybe drinking too much to keep confidence up. Whatever image you have conjured up, it will resemble the

images that most other people have in mind: Shyness is to do with awkwardness and being ill at ease with other people. This raises a number of questions:

- Isn't everybody shy?
- What is the difference between shyness and that other common type of uneasiness – embarrassment?
- Isn't shyness an attractive characteristic?
- Am I shy? Is my shyness the same as that of other people?
- Is shyness a part of my personality?
- Can I become less shy even if I have a shy personality?
- Is shyness an illness?
- Is shyness different from social phobia?
- Can shyness be overcome?

If these questions are of interest to you, then we hope that this is the book for you and that these opening chapters will provide you with helpful answers to *your* questions.

These questions might be of more than interest to you. You might be desperate to find out more about the anxiety – perhaps the panic – that you feel in particular kinds of situations. These situations aren't rare, like encountering a bear in the woods: they are everyday, routine. The thought of eating in public terrifies you. You couldn't cope with an argument at work; or with being criticized – you would brood on it forever. You have never had a boyfriend or a girlfriend because you can't bring yourself to ask anyone out.

It could be someone else's shyness that makes you anxious, your child's perhaps. You look on helplessly as he or she goes through the agonies of shyness, perhaps becoming lonely or depressed.

For some people, shyness is something they rarely think about as being of much relevance to them. Most of us are shy on at least some occasions: we know this and can cope with it. For

others, shyness is something that they would change if they could. For yet others, shyness is ‘crippling’, it prevents them from living the life they want to. When your anxieties are intense and they impede social functioning and reduce the quality of your life, you may well meet the diagnostic criteria for social phobia or social anxiety disorder. This is a recognized psychiatric disorder. Twenty or so years ago it wouldn’t have been recognized as such. It might have been regarded as symptomatic of something else, for example, of panic attacks or agoraphobia, but it wouldn’t have been thought of as a condition in its own right. No specific treatments were available at that time.

Chapter 5 examines the concept of social anxiety disorder. It explains how the concept has changed over the years. It sets out the diagnostic criteria that have been agreed upon in psychiatry. It reports findings on how common it is in the population. We see that it is one of the most common disorders along with depression and alcohol problems.

The next four chapters deal in more detail with the nature of social anxiety disorder and its treatment. Chapter 6 examines the issue of diagnosis in greater detail. It begins by posing the question: How do you know if you need treatment? It examines some of the factors to take into account when deciding whether treatment for social anxiety would be valuable for the individual: impairment of effective social functioning; extreme discomfort during social events; lack of satisfaction with life; reduced opportunities for enjoyment and happiness. The chapter introduces some of the forms of psychological and pharmacological treatments that have proved to be effective. It gives advice on how you might contact sources of treatment. It discusses factors to bear in mind when choosing a form of treatment or a therapist.

Cognitive behaviour therapy has become established as the principal psychological form of therapy for a range of mental

health problems including anxiety. Carefully designed clinical studies have demonstrated its effectiveness. What are cognitive processes and what role do they play in social anxiety? These questions are the focus of chapter 7. This chapter places cognitive behaviour therapy in the context of the identification of the factors that *maintain* anxiety. It explains that cognitive behaviour therapy places particular emphasis on the ways that socially anxious people think about themselves and social events. The chapter draws upon research and clinical observation to discuss what we know about how thinking helps to maintain anxiety symptoms and behaviours. This information helps us understand how the therapy works.

Chapter 8 describes in more detail the procedures of cognitive behaviour therapy. It emphasizes that it is a therapy based on *doing* as opposed to talking or thinking; it is based on practice and experimenting. A key element is that of changing safety behaviours. These behaviours are ways of coping with anxiety which we have developed that seem to us to be helpful but which are counter-productive in the long term. I am silent because I don't want to reveal my inadequacies. This seems to work because I am never challenged and never show myself up. But at what cost? Not only am I denying myself the satisfactions that are to be found in social relationships, I am also forgoing opportunities to learn how to deal more effectively with social situations so that I never have the chance to develop confidence in myself. Also, my belief that I have inadequacies is never put to the test. What if I have been adequate all along? What if people do like and respect me for the person I am? There are similar costs whenever I avoid social situations: evasion only removes problems in the short term and is worth little in the longer term. We trust that this chapter will give you insight into cognitive behaviour therapy and enable you to make an

informed choice about whether it would be the best treatment for you if you do decide to seek to overcome social anxiety or to give helpful advice to someone you know who wishes to do so.

Chapter 9 examines pharmacological treatments for social anxiety disorder. No new treatments have been developed specifically for social anxiety. Medications that have been developed for the treatment of depression have been successfully applied to the treatment of social anxiety disorder. The SSRIs are the principal class of drug that has been investigated. Treatments to reduce anxiety including beta blockers and benzodiazepines have proved less effective although they are used for the treatment of short-term anxieties about specific events, for example anxiety about giving a speech. The chapter discusses the benefits and limitations of these classes of drugs. It draws attention to any problems with their use including potential side effects. There is increasing public concern over what is regarded as the over-prescription of antidepressant drugs and their extension to social anxiety disorder; we discuss these important issues.

Chapter 10 focuses on anxiety about blushing. We don't devote a separate chapter to this topic because we believe that it is of special significance or because it is very different from shyness or social anxiety. We do so for three reasons: (1) many people regard their blushing as a problem in its own right and believe that they would not be anxious if only they did not blush as much as they do; (2) we hope to show that the issues raised by fear of blushing are similar to those raised by social anxiety disorder, for example, safety behaviours play a prominent part in the maintenance of anxiety in both; (3) there has been growing interest in treating anxiety about blushing through the use of surgery to prevent facial reddening from taking place. We discuss the issues raised by surgical intervention.

An overview

You will see that we cover a lot of ground in this short book. We hope that it will be relevant to your concerns and that it will help you to cope with your shyness and social anxiety by:

- providing you with information on what we know about these conditions;
- allowing you to learn about the experiences of people who are shy or who suffer from social anxiety disorder;
- drawing your attention to the forms of treatment that are available, whether psychological or pharmacological;
- discussing the benefits and disadvantages of the various treatment options;
- giving information on how to contact sources of help and support.