

Social Anxiety vs. Shyness ^[1]

Anonymous ^[2]5.8K reads

Social anxiety and shyness seem very similar, which is why people often confuse the two. Actually, this is one of the biggest myths surrounding social anxiety. While shyness is a normal reaction, social anxiety is actually a psychological disorder.

People who experience social anxiety often go through an entire array of physical, mental, emotional, and behavioral symptoms. No one really knows the true cause of social anxiety. Most experts agree that this condition is triggered by a combination of genetic and environmental factors. Nevertheless, this hasn't stopped people from fighting against social anxiety, with the help of personalized plans like the one you are using. Sadly, there are still many who believe that social anxiety is just shyness. This myth is actually preventing them from seeking help, because while social anxiety is a real problem, shyness is just a personality trait. When you confuse the two, you end up believing that your problem is just a normal part of who you are. In this article, we intend to draw a clear line between shyness and social anxiety.

A Clear Definition

Social Anxiety

Social anxiety manifests itself as an excessive fear of humiliation. People who struggle with this condition are overwhelmed by social situations, such as urinating in public toilets (shy bladder syndrome), going on dates, speaking in front of an audience, eating in public. When fear extends to any situation that involves performing an action in front of others, it becomes generalized, affecting the person's daily activities.

Shyness

On the other hand, shyness manifests as a lack of comfort or even awkwardness in situations that are new and unfamiliar to the person. Most of the times, shyness is only a temporary phase that will disappear on its own, as the person becomes more familiar with a certain situation.

What's Similar Between the Two?

If you take a closer look at the two above-mentioned definitions, you might notice that both social anxiety and shyness have the same origin – FEAR. Fear is one of the basic emotions

that keeps us out of harm's way, by signaling potential dangers.

Blushing, sweating, trembling, increased heart rate, awkwardness and the lack of comfort are specific to both social anxiety and shyness.

Up until now, these two conditions seemed quite similar, but the difference is in the details. Wait until you see the staggering amount of differences!

What's Different?

First of all, shyness occurs only when the person is facing a new situation, while social anxiety has more to do with the presence of other people. In a sense, shy people are afraid of new places and new people, but the intensity of their reaction is milder, compared to the reactions of those who experience social anxiety.

Second, the negative thoughts associated with social anxiety can occur even when the person is not facing a social situation. Just the thought of attending a social event is enough to trigger intense worrying and other anxiety-like behaviors. Shyness only occurs in the presence of a specific trigger, such as a new situation.

Third, shyness is easier to manage than social anxiety. Most people learn to overcome their timidity by gradual exposure to the same situation. Unfortunately, social anxiety is much more complicated than that.

Fourth, people who experience social anxiety tend to use avoidance more than those who are just shy. Although shyness makes you more prone to avoidance behavior, it's easier to resist the temptation, when you're not dealing with many negative thoughts and emotions.

When in Doubt

As you can see, the differences between shyness and social anxiety are not always obvious. If you are having a difficult time deciding which one is applicable to your situation or the situation of a loved one, the best thing you can do is consult a Clinical Psychologist or another mental health professional.

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