

## **Social Anxiety Groups: *Overcome your social phobia***

**Social Anxiety (SA)** is the fear of social situations and the interaction with other people that can automatically bring on feelings of self-consciousness, judgment, evaluation, and inferiority. There are two types of SA – ‘specific’ social anxieties (e.g. speaking to groups) and more ‘generalised’ social anxieties (discomfort in all social situations).

If a person usually becomes anxious in social situations, but seems fine when they are alone, then ‘social anxiety’ may be the problem. The feelings of inadequacy, embarrassment, humiliation and depression that can come about from social anxiety can have a devastating and traumatic impact on individuals and their everyday lives. If this is how you feel then this group/therapy is for you.

### **How common is it?**

Social Anxiety is highly prevalent affecting 13% of the adult population in the U.K. Currently in the U.K it is the most prevalent of all anxiety disorders (Clark 2009).

### **Can it be treated?**

The good news is that cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) for social anxiety has been markedly successful. Clinical evidence indicates that CBT can produce permanent changes in people’s lives. Social anxiety **can** be overcome, although it takes both consistency and persistence. Psychological intervention is important. It is unlikely that individuals experiencing the symptoms will improve significantly without it (Heimberg et al 1995, Clark, 2009).

Exposure therapy and cognitive restructuring have been found to have greatest long term efficacy in cognitive and behavioural techniques (Heimberg et al 1995). CBGT (Cognitive Behavioural Group Therapy) has maintained its advantage and demonstrated to be more effective than credible attention-placebo groups (Heimberg et al 1995).

### **What are the benefits of group therapy?**

You probably have lots of questions about what group therapy will be like and how it can help you with your particular symptoms. You may well be questioning how being in a group of people – something you may fear the most – will help to overcome your anxiety. If you suffer with SA you may have spent a lot of time avoiding social situations that trigger your anxiety. Confidence in your ability to communicate is likely to have suffered which can lead to poor self-esteem and increased anxiety. Group therapy is a great place to build social skills and tackle that anxiety in a safe environment. Also, people with SA are often some of the loveliest people you will meet. So all in all;

- Evidence shows it is the most effective and successful treatment for Social Anxiety Disorder
- It is an opportunity to meet others with the same problem – though not everyone will have the same triggers or symptoms; it is comforting to know you are not alone.
- The group environment allows you to role play situations that would be too difficult and threatening to face in real life. This non-threatening and safe environment is great for building confidence in your social skills.

### **What can I expect from the group?**

It is a 10 session course running for about 2 hours a week, led by two experienced facilitators. There will be around 6 members in the group and the group will involve elements of psycho-education, working in pairs and working as part of a group. There will be information for you to take away and some opportunities for you to put into practice what you have learnt from each session (homework).

While it is hoped that individuals will share their experiences, the focus of this group will be quite structured and therefore, it will not be possible to have time to discuss individual's experiences in any depth.

Confidentiality is very important in groups. What you say about yourselves and your social anxiety will not be repeated outside the group. Also, the fact you have chosen to come to the group is confidential unless you choose to disclose it.

### **Will it help me?**

As stated, research shows Cognitive Behavioural Group therapy to be the most effective form of treatment for social anxiety. However, it is a proactive approach to managing your symptoms and fears, and thus it is important to know that the more that you engage with the course the more benefit you are likely to receive.

### **Where and whom?**

The groups take place at one of our locality bases and group facilitators are experienced professionals with Outlook South West. You will be contacted by one of the facilitators for an individual assessment over the phone which will take place in the two weeks prior to the commencement date.

### **Does it cost anything?**

This course is free to attend.

### **Duty of care:**

As healthcare professionals, the course tutors have a duty of care and therefore may have to act on any information relating to an attendee's own safety, the safety of others (i.e. family members, children) and where necessary, notify the appropriate authority (GP, Social Services or the Police).

### **I am interested – what do I do now?**

You will need to be referred by an Outlook South West Practitioner in accordance with the Social Anxiety referral criteria. Your GP, Outlook SW therapist or Telephone Triage therapist can put you in contact with our program.