

The differences between social anxiety and shyness

[Health & Medicine](#), [Mental Health](#)



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Introduction

Blood pounded in his ears and his heart thudded loudly in his chest. His hands trembled. His vision marred, as if he were looking through the wrong prescription glasses. His face heated up and sweat pooled in his clammy hands. His roaring heartbeat drowned out the voice of his teacher asking him if he was alright. Tears blurred his vision. His chest tightened. He couldn't breathe. He vaguely shook his head and sprinted out of the classroom, only stopping when he reached the lobby, completely exhausted and gulping down deep breaths of fresh air. While shyness is similar to anxiety, and it is easy to confuse them both, anxiety is much more severe and is an actual disorder that can leave people unable to cope with social situations if brushed off as something else.

Social Anxiety

Anxiety is characterized by hyperfocus and over-analyzing day-to-day activities. People diagnosed with Social Anxiety Disorder (SAD) will keep

revising over past actions and criticizing themselves, sometimes even imagining themselves in future situations and anticipating difficult feelings and thoughts they will feel (MacDonald, "How to Tell the Difference Between Social Anxiety and Shyness"). They even persuade themselves that everybody will notice that they are uncomfortable and will judge them for it (MacDonald, "How to Tell the Difference Between Social Anxiety and Shyness"). They have what Jenny C. calls reverse narcissism. Instead of wanting to be in the spotlight and having attention directed at them, people diagnosed with SAD have a deflated sense of self and avoid the spotlight (Jenny C, "The Difference Between Social Anxiety and Shyness"). People diagnosed with SAD aren't necessarily shy. Normally, they could come across as talkative and friendly, but underneath the surface, they could struggle with anxious thoughts that affect their social behavior, leaving them unable to cope with public activities. (MacDonald, "How to Tell the Difference Between Social Anxiety and Shyness").

Shyness

Shyness, on the other hand, is characterized by the tendency to feel awkward or tense during social meetings, especially with unfamiliar people (American Psychological Association, "Shyness"). Severely shy people may have physical signs of sickness, such as blushing, sweating, a pounding heart or upset stomach, negative feelings about themselves, worries about how others view them, and a tendency to withdraw from social interactions (American Psychological Association, "Shyness"). This definition is scarily similar to that of Social Anxiety, and it is obvious how both may get mistaken

for one another. However, shyness' symptoms dull in comparison to that of Social Anxiety. Some main symptoms that differentiate both are the severity of the fear, the level of elusion, and the impairment of functioning that it causes in a person's life (Cuncic, "Differences Between Shyness and Social Anxiety Disorder"). Also, after getting acquainted, the symptoms of shyness begin to face, while SAD doesn't. While shyness can evolve into Social Anxiety, it isn't a natural progression and many people diagnosed with SAD don't think of themselves as shy (MacDonald, "How to Tell the Difference Between Social Anxiety and Shyness").

Overcoming Anxiety

Social Anxiety Disorder is unquestionably a real life-limiting condition, not just because of the physical symptoms it creates, but also because those who are suffering from it tend to give themselves a hard time about it, only serving to reinforce levels of anxiety (MacDonald, "How to Tell the Difference Between Social Anxiety and Shyness"). They understand that their fear is unjustified on a logical level, but they cannot control it (MacDonald, "How to Tell the Difference Between Social Anxiety and Shyness"). Sadly, when social anxiety is often left untreated under the assumption that there can be no way out, it could be left to thrive for years (MacDonald, "How to Tell the Difference Between Social Anxiety and Shyness"). However, many medical officials have developed methods to help cope with the life-long illness, such as Overcoming Social Anxiety, who use parts of Dialectical Behavior Therapy and the Buddhist concept of mindfulness to teach individuals with Social Anxiety to focus on the present moment and put away

past and future worries, which is an area they struggle with (MacDonald, “How to Tell the Difference Between Social Anxiety and Shyness”). Other organizations, like the Social Anxiety Institute in Phoenix, also assist in helping people overcome anxiety.

Conclusion

To conclude, while shyness is similar to anxiety, and it is easy to confuse them both, anxiety is much more severe. It is a diagnosable disorder that affects all parts of people’s lives. It is often left untreated and that can leave many individuals without a way of knowing why they experience the symptoms they experience. But there are many places where diagnosed individuals can get the assistance they need.