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## Building a Strong Social Network

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Since you began this intervention, you've made considerable progress. Keeping social anxiety in check was never easy, but it was worth the effort. Now it's time to maintain that progress and turn it into something even greater. It's time to build a strong social network!

This entire social anxiety plan is an inside-out approach. We began by challenging our personal beliefs and negative thoughts which lead to a whole new mindset. At some point, we became rational enough to see that our social anxiety is triggered by our own flawed thinking. After that we switched to our dysfunctional behaviors. We scheduled exposure exercises and set up regular meetings with our friends and family. Simply put - you have been doing great and have achieved a lot! Now it is time to focus on building even further, by improving the size and stability of your social network.

The banner features the Explorable logo at the top center. Below it, three quiz cards are displayed in a row. Each card has a white border and a central image. The first card shows a pair of red roller skates on a wooden deck, with the text 'Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2' below. The second card shows a fan of colorful pencils, also with the text 'Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2' below. The third card shows a Ferris wheel at sunset, with the text 'Quiz: Flags in Europe' below. To the right of the cards is a link that says 'See all quizzes =>'.

## The Importance of Socializing

In one of our previous articles, we highlighted the importance of keeping your friends and family close. Building a strong social network requires more than that. Keep in mind that social interaction occurs everywhere. Whether we're at home, school, work or shopping, we have to socialize in order to be happy and achieve our daily tasks.

## **Expand Your Social Circle**

Expanding your social circle is about using your social skills to build healthy interactions with people that are less familiar to you. Even though your boss is not your friend, you still have to learn how to interact with him/her. Co-workers are not just people that you work with, they can also be friends. Having a big social circle comes with tons of benefits, besides social interaction. You can hear about new job opportunities, find good collaborators, promote your services (in case you own a business), receive valuable feedback and request help when needed.

## **Express Your Opinion**

Social anxiety can sometimes turn you into a people-pleaser. You avoid speaking your mind because you're too afraid that others will be offended. Meaningful friendships rely on mutual respect, meaning that each person has the right to express his/her opinion, as long as they do it in an assertive manner.

## **Seek Meaningful Relationships**

Having high standards might be a solution because it guarantees quality friendships, but it's also hard to find new people when you're constantly looking for faults in others. Remember that one of the main characteristics of social anxiety is the fear of negative evaluation. In other words, you don't want people to disagree with you. When looking for meaningful relationships, exercise openness and tolerance at first. Give people a chance to know you and from time to time, try to accept a dose of criticism. The fact that people don't always agree with your opinions doesn't mean that they hate or dislike you.

To summarize, give people a chance to know you and stop trying to please everyone. If you follow these 2 pieces of advice, you'll have more chances of finding true, meaningful friendships.

## **Remove Toxic People from Your Life**

It's one thing to be tolerant with someone, but it's another thing to let him/her walk all over you. We've already discussed the disadvantages of being a people-pleaser. When dealing with toxic people, you only have 2 options: 1) be assertive and explain to them why their behavior bothers you; 2) stop interacting with them.

If option 1 fails, go with option 2. In order to learn how to implement these 2 strategies, you can always revisit our article about assertiveness. Keep in mind that there are times when the most important person in your life should be you.

## **Find a Significant Other**

Most of us consider dating a special kind of social interaction and so it should be. Each date is an opportunity to meet someone with whom you might end up in a stable relationship.

Unfortunately, dating is a real challenge for anyone struggling with anxiety. First is the constant fear of negative evaluation, then is the constant pressure and let's not forget about the possibility of failure. While it is completely normal to feel anxious, this should not stop you from trying.

## **The Benefits of a Romantic Relationship**

Being in a romantic relationship brings a whole new level of intimacy (and we're not necessarily referring to sex), something that you could never achieve with a friend or family member. In our next article, we're going to use everything we've learned so far in order to create a dating guide for people with social anxiety.

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