Anxiety Tips: Social Strategies [1]

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The experience of anxiety does not have to be weathered alone. Finding social outlets is a key to coping with anxiety in a healthy fashion.

No anxiety disorder or bout of anxiety can be understood and corrected in isolation. Connecting with other people has a two-fold effect on anxiety coping. First, it encourages collaboration and resource-sharing. Asking for help, both online and off [3], increases your own knowledge base and awareness of how anxiety affects your life and ways it can be managed.

Second, socialization spurs solidarity between people who may not know what anxiety disorders are and between people who are suffering/have suffered through severe anxiety in the past. Socializing is also a great opportunity to put into practice other cognitive methods that research has shown effective against overwhelming anxious thoughts and feelings.

Here you'll discover information about the effectiveness of being social while in the midst of severe anxiety. You'll also find a handful of ideas and methods for getting out of your own way and connecting with others in-action.

Finding Social Support

Humans, as the saying goes, are social animals [4]. Our best aspects as individuals are facilitated through open and deep communication with other people, and our recovery from mental hardships, including anxiety and anxiety disorders, depends on consistent socialization.

This advice may sound simple, but anyone dealing with high anxiety, fear, and stress knows that these disorders prey on your self-confidence, motivation, and interject shame and doubt into your ability to seek outside support. At its negative extreme, anxiety acts as a wedge [5] between needing help and isolating yourself from that help. People experiencing anxiety become more ruminative, internalized, and prone to inner-dialogues of guilt, fear, and hopelessness in response to the telltale physical and emotional symptoms of anxiety.

People with Social Anxiety Disorder [6], for instance, come to see even mundane social interactions as cause for alarm. Studies also show [7] that depression isolates people into self-defeating routines, and only through novel pattern-breaking (new experiences, more socialization) are these fixed tracks erased.

How Does Social Support Relieve Anxiety?

With all of these forces seemingly acting against people with anxiety, the positive benefits of social support are all the more necessary for acceptance and recovery. What are some of the positive benefits of socializing while experiencing anxiety?

- Biologically, socializing produces the hormone oxytocin [8] which activates the parasympathetic nervous system (the body's calming response). This hormone also increases the need to seek social support and assistance when in crisis. People with strong supportive networks of friends, family, or healthcare professionals receive more of a "social boost" from the chemical and other-seeking nature of oxytocin.

- Socializing takes the anxiety-sufferer out of his/her own head and problems to focus and help other people. This alone reduces many classic isolationist and withdrawal anxiety symptoms.

- Volunteering and performing altruistic acts is a great way to escape your own head. Helping those less fortunate than yourself gives you tremendous perspective not only on your own condition, but the resources and strengths you have at your disposal. It is also scientifically certified [9] to help your self-confidence.

- Being social helps you achieve some mental distance from your own distress. It also promotes gratitude, a feeling itself linked to all manner of mental health benefits [10]. Making social connections and then reflecting on their value in your life and recovery initiates the gratitude process.

- Gratitude itself also increases self-esteem and –confidence, making it easier to navigate and desire social connection.

How to Become More Social

If you're convinced that social support is a catalyst for anxiety recovery, your next question is likely "What exactly can I do to get started?" As stated, the nature of negative stress and anxiety make finding initial reserves of confidence and motivation to help yourself seek others difficult, but not impossible.

Here is a short list of everyday ways you can begin being more social. Remember: **Your recovery and coping with anxiety depends on being social!**

1. Remember that social support involves many different relationships [11], so don't limit your definition. *Socioemotional support* is the loving, sympathetic variety fostered between family and friends. *Tangible support* can include money, resources, and a safe supportive place to stay. And *informational support* includes feedback and advice given by mentors and therapists. All of these kinds of social support facilitate better coping skills and reduce the likelihood of severe anxious outcomes

2. Your community itself is a support network. Churches, non-profits, and clubs all offer

commaraderie and social bonding. Let your community bolster your self-worth and reduce your anxious symptoms

3.
Join an online support community, forum, or website with people who are experiencing the same anxieties as you. Use websites like <u>MeetUp</u> [12] and <u>Anxiety Social Net</u> [13] to find people with similar interests and experiences with anxiety. There are <u>many healthy options to choose from</u> [14], and scientific evidence agrees <u>online social support can be tremendously beneficial</u> [15].

4.
Practice your communication skills by being more assertive and confident when speaking and interacting with others. This involves paying attention to non-verbal cues (body language), being an active listener (withholding judgement, providing feedback), and keeping stress and anxiety at bay (making specific points, using calming techniques). Here is <u>a more detailed look at developing these skills</u> [16].

5.
Engage in <u>self-soothing strategies</u> [17], especially when your anxiety symptoms overshadow your will to follow through socially. Ask questions instead of assuming the thoughts and reactions of others (**mind-reading**), list your anxiety-provoking thoughts, and keep ideas of future social blunders out of the present moment [18]

6.
Use psychologist <u>Robert Ellis's ABC Model</u> [19] to reinterpret anxiety-causing events or thoughts of social incompetence. <u>The steps include</u> [20]:

- **A (Activating Event)** – What was the situation itself? Look at the event objectively. ("I didn't call my friend today.")

- **B (Beliefs)** – How/Why did you feel this situation happened the way it did? Record your reactions and thoughts to the event. ("I'm too anxious to make a phone call—I'm such a fool!")

- **C (Consequence)** – What is your emotional response to this belief? ("I'm depressed. I'm never going to make a friend.")

The goal of the ABC Model is to recognize where your faults in logic lie between steps B and C. Recognize and label the <u>cognitive distortions</u> [21] at work in your initial belief, challenge these negative beliefs bluntly and directly, and be aware of these ingrained belief patterns in the future.

7. Keep <u>a gratitude journal</u> [22]. This is another way to appreciate all the ways people in your life help you gain perspective and motivate you to get better

8. Practice <u>mindfulness and breathing techniques</u> [18], which we explore in-depth in the next section

Links

[1] https://explorable.com/e/cognitive-social-strategies

[2] https://explorable.com/users/grharriman

[3] https://explorable.com/online-anxiety-treatment

[4] http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/01/17/social-animal

[5] http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23746493

[6] https://explorable.com/social-anxiety-disorders

[7] http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2202/16/2

[8] https://www.mentalhelp.net/articles/socialization-and-altruistic-acts-as-stress-relief/

[9] http://www.helpguide.org/articles/work-career/volunteering-and-its-surprising-benefits.htm

[10] http://happierhuman.com/benefits-of-gratitude/

[11] http://psychcentral.com/lib/strategies-to-reduce-anxiety-and-stress/32/

[12] http://www.meetup.com/

[13] http://www.anxietysocialnet.com/

[14] http://psychcentral.com/resources/Anxiety_and_Panic/Support_Groups/

[15] http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3260965/

[16] http://www.helpguide.org/articles/relationships/effective-communication.htm

[17] https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/resolution-not-conflict/201205/anxiety-problems-part-ii-3-habits-help

[18] https://explorable.com/mindfulness-breathing-exercise

[19] http://psychology.about.com/od/typesofpsychotherapy/a/rational-emotive-behavior-therapy.htm

[20] http://www.dartmouth.edu/~eap/abcstress2.pdf

[21] https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/in-practice/201301/50-common-cognitive-distortions

[22] http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/ten_ways_to_become_more_grateful1/