

## Dating and Social Anxiety

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For people who struggle with social anxiety, dating can sometimes be an absolute nightmare. The constant pressure of spending time in a social context while talking to another person, is overwhelming. How can others be so calm and relaxed? Well, it depends on how you perceive the situation.

Some people choose to see dating and other social activities as an opportunity, while others see it as a test. First of all, you need to adjust your mindset. Find the negative beliefs responsible for your flawed perspective and challenge them. Second, rigorous preparations and a drop of courage can increase your chances of success. Last but not least, keep in mind that each failure is a learning opportunity. Let's look at some common fears, related to dating, as well as possible solutions.

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## Fear of Failure

As we discussed in previous articles, people who struggle with social anxiety find it difficult to cope with failure. In fact, they're so terrified of failure that, most of the time, they don't even attempt to go on dates. Negative thoughts and dysfunctional beliefs help build an entire imaginary scenario, in which the person portrays himself/herself as a loser. In the end, the fact that you're not going on dates increases the risk of failing because you're missing out on valuable learning opportunities. The 'standard procedure' here is thought challenging, which can be achieved by using your journal.

## **Fear of Evaluation**

Just like fear of failure, fear of evaluation stems from our own negative thinking patterns. We fear that our date will run a careful analysis, which might reveal our deepest flaws. Besides working on the negative thoughts that are directly responsible for this fear, you should also look into your perfectionist tendencies.

## **How Does Perfectionism Trigger Your Fears?**

Here's a short example of how perfectionism might nurture your fear of failure:

Perfectionism -> I must strive for perfection (rigid thinking) -> People don't appreciate me, unless I'm perfect (dysfunctional schema/belief) -> I can't let people see my flaws (ANT) -> Fear of evaluation

## **Fear of Being Clumsy**

Social anxiety comes with a whole array of physical, noticeable symptoms. Sweating, stuttering, trembling are all part of the negative effects caused by an avalanche of negative thoughts. It's absolutely normal to feel a bit embarrassed by these unpleasant reactions. In order to avoid being awkward and clumsy, here's what you should do:

1. Don't make a big deal out of every clumsy mistake, because that will only amplify your clumsiness.
2. Focus on the date, not on what you fear about the date.
3. It's impossible to be affected by negative thoughts, as long as you don't pay attention to them.

## **Adjust Your Perspective**

First of all, ask yourself what this date actually means to you. Is it an opportunity to meet someone special, or is it just something that your friends 'forced' you to do? Is it a nightmare or a learning experience? Is it tough and challenging or just another useful experience? Your perspective shifts the entire game plan. In fact, a wrong perspective gives rise to all the negative thoughts and dysfunctional beliefs associated with your performance. Before doing anything, make sure you have the right perspective. Have an optimistic view, but be prepared if things don't go as planned. In one word – MODERATION.

## Choose a Good Location

Choosing a good location for your date gives you an extra boost of confidence. Because people with social anxiety don't always feel comfortable in crowded spaces, maybe it would be better to avoid concerts or nightclubs. Instead, look for a small restaurant/bar or an intimate café.

## Take the Time to Prepare

Preparation is about finding the right mindset and foreseeing possible obstacles, but it's also about taking care of your appearance. Just like a suitable, clothes, make-up, and hair can also boost your confidence. Taking care of your appearance also shows that you truly care about your date.

## Visualize Your Success

The purpose of visualization exercises is to increase your optimism levels. An optimistic outlook gives rise to positive emotions that will put you in a great mood. Imagine a successful date. How does it look? Visualize all the necessary steps to achieve your goal. Imagine yourself in that situation. Touch it, feel it, live it, believe in it.

## Focus on the Conversation

This is the best strategy to combat negative thoughts and an absolute 'must' if you want to succeed. The biggest advantages of focusing on your date instead of yourself are:

1. You avoid paying too much attention to your ANTs.
2. You can have a truly meaningful conversation without being disturbed by the physical and mental signs of social anxiety.
3. You get to connect with your date on an emotional level (empathic communication).

## There's No Such Thing as Failure

Practice makes perfect. The more you practice, the easier it gets. At some point, dating will be second nature to you. Until then, you just have to keep trying. Every date, whether it's a success or a failure, adds up to your experience. Failure shows us the weak points while success gives us the courage to try again in the future. Either way, going on dates is a 'win', regardless of your outcome.

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