

## ***Tips and Techniques for Managing Social Anxiety***

<b>Technique</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Anticipated Result</b>
Practice cognitive strategies	Take 10-15 minutes before a presentation or anxiety-provoking discussion with your boss to practice identifying negative automatic thoughts, cognitive distortions, and the triggering of core beliefs. Then question the evidence and come-up with more rational responses	The regular practice of these cognitive strategies leads to more realistic perceptions of anxiety-producing events, and, over time, will replace some of the negative expectations and beliefs you have about anxiety. This happens on both an intellectual and neuronal level as new associations are made
Practice relaxation strategies	Take 10-15 minutes before a presentation or anxiety-producing event to engage in diaphragmatic breathing, visual imagery, PMR, and autogenic training	These exercises are known to reduce length of the sympathetic nervous system, “fight/flight” response by increasing parasympathetic activity and returning the body back to homeostasis
Admit nervousness	Tell your audience, whoever they are, in advance that you are feeling nervous – you do not need to go into detail	Removes the pressure to appear calm and organized throughout the entire discussion/presentation, and, in doing so, relaxes the body and mind
Redefine your audience	This is the typical – “imagine your boss in his underwear” scenario. Redefine the audience by remembering that these are just people in the room, like yourself, and do not have any special powers or abilities to perceive anxiety	By remembering that the audience is just like you, you remove the sense of judgment and evaluation that is triggered by feeling like you’re in the presence of an authority. Also, you’re reminding yourself that they cannot “sniff-out” your anxiety
Envision a positive outcome	Picture the positive outcome of this event – the laughter, the clapping, the “job well done.” Picture the scene in as vivid detail as possible using your imagination	By picturing a positive outcome you are effectively broadening the number of potential scenarios considered beyond one. People with social anxiety generally <i>only</i> picture a negative conclusion, which accounts for activation of sympathetic nervous system
Reinterpret your symptoms	Remind yourself that what you’re feeling is activation of the sympathetic nervous system and nothing else	By reinterpreting your symptoms as having a biological basis, you’re helping to normalize the experience

Invest in visual aids	As much as possible, use visual aids to draw attention away from yourself and toward other focal points in the room	Not only does this make you look prepared, but it limits the amount of time people are actually looking at you. You can then avoid sustained eye-contact and move between people who are and are not looking at you while you speak
Speak to only one person at a time	Choose one member of your audience and dedicate your whole presentation to him or her. Just assume that everyone else is not paying attention. When someone asks you a question, change your focus to that person and answer the question as if the two of you are in a coffee shop chatting away	This limits your awareness of other people and the feeling of being evaluated, or having so many sets of eyes upon you. It also simulates the feeling of talking to one person, in isolation, which is not nearly as threatening, and something you do successfully every day
Pause and reflect when speaking	When looking for words, do not rush to say anything, but instead pause and reflect on what you want to say. You can go several seconds without producing any verbal material and not appear disorganized. Many people perceive this as being “thoughtful.”	By taking the emphasis off of verbal production, you can begin to slow down your thought process and envision more carefully what you want to communicate. Since racing thoughts are associated with sympathetic nervous system activity, sometimes we need to consciously slow down
Have something small in your hands	Always keep something in your pockets to hold onto when speaking. Objects may include a coin, a paperclip, a pen, or anything small that has been predetermined for that purpose	Having a small object in your hands can serve as a lightning rod for negative energy and anxiety. It gives you something other than your anxiety to focus on, and, after being successfully used a few times, takes on the meaning of a “good luck” charm
Get to places early and plan reasons to leave when you’re done	Get to the designated speaking environment as early as possible and always come-up with some reason for leaving when you’re done (e.g., an appointment, a phone call, etc).	Arriving at the location early allows you to “feel it out,” become comfortable with the environment and plan where you’ll stand, where people will sit, etc. Also, having reasons to leave limits the amount of spontaneous conversation and allows you to end still feeling positive about the discussion

<p><b>Pump yourself up</b></p>	<p>Read an inspiring story, recall a successful moment from the past, listen to uplifting music, or remember positive scenes from a movie. Prepare these things in advance and practice them in the office 10 minutes before the event</p>	<p>Since there are limits to what we can imagine, having inspiring movies, books, or music to connect with help to reinforce confidence in ones' abilities and the likelihood of a positive outcome</p>
<p><b>Be over-prepared and practice, practice, practice</b></p>	<p>Make sure you know what you're going to say before you begin speaking. Even if you are using cue cards, memorizing some of your talk is helpful for prompting you if you get off course. Practice in front of a mirror, a friend, and/or listen to yourself in a tape recorder. Even dress for the occasion.</p>	<p>Preparation and exposure are the antidotes for anxiety. By practicing your talk and being prepared you are reducing the likelihood of negative thoughts about the outcome and giving yourself exposure to material, phrases, clothing and postures, that remind you of the event and reduce the threat</p>
<p><b>Embrace your fate</b></p>	<p>Learn to accept that this is something you ARE going to do, and there is nothing you can do to avoid it</p>	<p>By embracing your fate, you are effectively reducing the desire to engage in avoidance-based behavior and coming to terms with the event, whatever it is, as a very manageable and non life-threatening moment in time. Nothing more.</p>
<p><b>Accept rather than fight your symptoms</b></p>	<p>Learn to accept that you will blush or stammer when talking to people. Become familiar with these symptoms and treat them as though they're old friends rather than enemies. Tell yourself "it's OK" if you have them and remind yourself that everyone experiences similar symptoms at some point in their lives</p>	<p>Taking the negativity out of your symptoms is difficult, since they feel uncomfortable, but it does help you to relax and be "okay" when they appear. In contrast, resistance to these symptoms actually increased their duration and your focus on them while they are active. This can interrupt cognition</p>
<p><b>Develop mantras or rational counterstatements to be repeated before exposures</b></p>	<p>Repeat to yourself several positive and rational statements that you have developed prior to significant events, such as, "I can do this," "anxiety is not a weakness," or "I will survive and be OK no matter what happens."</p>	<p>These statements are meant to reduce the likelihood of sympathetic nervous system activity because they interpret the exposure event as less threatening. They also provide a balance to the negative statements that generally dominate thinking during these times</p>