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Navigating Social Anxiety in Summer

Summer is a time for sunshine, outdoor activities and social gatherings, with ample opportunities to unwind and connect with others. However, for those experiencing social anxiety, these gatherings can be intimidating.

An AnxietyCentre.com poll found that nearly three-quarters (73%) of people experience increased anxiety symptoms during the summer. Experts attribute this rise to various factors, including heightened social expectations and seasonal changes.

If you find yourself feeling anxious at the thought of socializing during the summer, know that you're not alone. This article explores why social anxiety may intensify during the summer and outlines strategies to help you navigate it and enjoy the summertime in your own way.

Why Social Anxiety May Happen During Summer

It's crucial to understand why feelings of social anxiety may intensify in the summer months. Here are several key reasons why social anxiety may spike during the summer:

- **Summer-onset seasonal affective disorder (SAD)**—Unlike the more commonly known SAD or “winter blues,” some individuals experience SAD during the summer. Symptoms can include trouble sleeping, poor appetite, weight loss, agitation, anxiety and irritability.
- **Social overload**—Summer often brings a packed social calendar filled with events like parties, barbecues and beach outings. The sheer number of invitations, coupled with the expectation to be more social and active, can be overwhelming and heighten anxiety for those who already feel uneasy in social situations.
- **Lack of routine**—The unstructured nature of summer can disrupt daily routines, leading to increased anxiety. Without the stability of a regular schedule, individuals may feel more uncertain and stressed, exacerbating feelings of social anxiety.
- **Fear of missing out (FOMO)**—Social media amplifies the FOMO as people frequently post and talk about their summer adventures. This can lead to feelings of inadequacy and anxiety about not participating or enjoying summer to the fullest.

Strategies for Managing Social Anxiety During the Summer

While summer social events can be daunting for those with social anxiety, effective strategies can help manage and navigate these challenges. By implementing practical techniques and making mindful adjustments, it's possible to enjoy the season in a way that feels comfortable and fulfilling. Here are strategies to help you navigate social anxiety during the summer months:

- **Plan ahead.** If you know you have a social event coming up, plan ahead. Familiarize yourself with the venue, know who will be attending and consider bringing a friend for support.
- **Set boundaries.** It's OK to say no to events if you feel overwhelmed. Set limits on the number of social gatherings you attend and allow yourself downtime to recharge.
- **Focus on enjoyable activities.** Engage in summer activities that you genuinely enjoy. Whether it's reading a book by the beach, going for a walk in nature or gardening, prioritize activities that bring you peace and joy.
- **Practice relaxation techniques.** Incorporate relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation or yoga into your routine. These practices can help manage anxiety symptoms and provide a sense of calm.
- **Participate in social situations gradually.** Start with smaller, low-pressure gatherings and work your way up to larger events. This can help build confidence and reduce anxiety over time.
- **Challenge negative thoughts.** Social anxiety often stems from negative thoughts about yourself and how others perceive you. Challenge these thoughts by reminding yourself of your strengths and past positive social experiences.

- **Seek support.** Don't hesitate to reach out to a trusted friend, family member or mental health professional. Sharing your feelings with someone who understands can provide comfort and guidance.

Summary

Navigating social anxiety in the summer is a process. While there may be setbacks, it's important to take small steps each day to combat these feelings. Remember, you are not alone; many people experience social anxiety, and having a support system is crucial. Don't hesitate to contact a trusted friend or mental health provider for help. With a bit of effort and self-compassion, you can enjoy the summer months in a way that feels comfortable and fulfilling for you.

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