

Guidelines for Supporting Students with Social Anxiety

Background

Social Anxiety or Social Phobia is an excessive fear of social situations, particularly:

- those with many people
- with strangers
- in enclosed spaces
- stressful situations
- where they are the centre of attention
- in hot or bright places

Funding and Support

The College's Counselling Service and the psychiatrist and psychologist associated with the Health Centre are two professional support mechanisms available to students with Social Anxiety.

Many students with special psychological needs, such as Social Anxiety who are UK residents have extra disability funding from their LEA via the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA). This can fund a Student Helper employed through the ESO as a mentor who can meet with them regularly and support them getting to and staying in lectures etc.

Non-UK residents are eligible to apply for Student Helper support via the College-based fund; the International Students' Disability Support Grant.

Common Symptoms

- Physiological
 - Avoiding or leaving places they do not feel comfortable
 - Overheating and Sweating
 - Panic attacks – shortness of breath and shaking
 - Possible passing out
 - Wringing of hands
 - Dry mouth
 - Needing the toilet or general breaks
 - Stammering/stuttering
 - Extra sensitive to noise, light and touch
 - Blushing
- Emotional
 - 'Mind going blank'
 - Speech block
 - Not showing expected social skills (e.g. seeming aloof, making it obvious they do not want to be there)
 - Not performing to expected level (e.g. short answers to questions, less articulate than usual)
 - Being hyper-aware of own difficulties (sometimes worsening them)
 - Needing as few people to know as possible
 - Not wanting to cause a fuss or access help and support
 - Not being able to cope well with negative interaction
 - Disorientation

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Suggested Strategies - General

- Joining in teaching sessions and completing of assessments required may take longer for a student with social anxiety so allow extra time
 - Be aware of the common symptoms but encourage the individual to disclose to you their particular difficulties (via e-mail if easier for them)
 - Be discreet
 - Limit the length of the interaction to the absolute essential
 - Do not sit too close to the student
 - Do not make a fuss about their disability or the changes you have made to allow for difficulties!
 - Offer glass of water during meetings
 - Limit the people in the room to those considered essential
 - Deal with the student relatively quietly
 - Allow more time to respond to you
 - Do not fill in 'awkward silences'
 - Structured and regular interactions (rather than ad hoc meetings)
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Suggested Strategies – Teaching

- Open windows to enable the room to get air and keep the room cool
 - Keep background noise to a minimum (e.g. buzz from the OHP, clicking of pens)
 - Explain at beginning of lecture what the structure and main points will be; providing a written summary in advance if possible – this will help the student in preparing for what is coming up
 - Summarise regularly and build in regular stopping points to check understanding
 - Say if something specific should be noted
 - During group discussions and oral sessions have a strict 'one at a time' rule and use names; this lessens the possibility of others talking over the student
 - If student is expected to give presentations, be extra supportive, allow the student to do a shorter presentation or to less people
 - Build up teaching session participation gradually but not too slowly
 - Allow the student to sit at the back of the lecture theatre or seminar room or near the door
 - Ask clear, concise questions, re-phrasing if needed
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Suggested Strategies – Materials

- Provide lecture notes in advance via e-mail or on the Intranet; the student can prepare themselves before lectures, so that the content is not entirely unfamiliar to them when it is delivered
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Suggested Strategies - Assessments

- To be sat in a separate room
- Rest breaks in exams (e.g. toilet breaks, time to calm down)
- Allow leniency with assignment deadlines
- Allow submission of assignments by email