SOCIAL

ANXIETY

Post Lockdown

As the term ends and lockdown eases, many of us may be feeling pressured to get outside and enjoy meeting up with others more.

For some, however, this may not be an exciting prospect. Especially if you are experiencing social anxiety.

Here we'll cover:

- **What is social anxiety?**

- **Symptoms of social anxiety.**

- **What does the pandemic have to do with it?**

- **How to manage it.**

- **Support**

What is Social Anxiety?

Social anxiety usually means experiencing symptoms of anxiety associated with seeing or speaking to people. Social anxiety can affect anyone to varying degrees.

This can be experienced as a temporary issue for many, however severe or prolonged cases may indicate Social Anxiety Disorder or a Social Phobia.

Whether this is a short or longer-term issue, support is available.

Some symptoms of Social Anxiety

- Feelings of dread leading up to an event.

- Feeling increasingly self-conscious about your appearance.

- Fear of looking visibly anxious. For example, blushing, finding it hard to speak, being seen as 'awkward'.

- General avoidance of social events.

- Avoidance of group messages, or replying.

- Physical symptoms of anxiety such as a rapid heart rate, nausea, sweating, etc.

- Panic attacks of fear of having a panic attack.

- Ruminating over what you said/did after a social event.

What does the pandemic have to do with it?

The pandemic may have created anxiety or may have made it even worse for those who have pre-existing mental health problems or disabilities. This may be caused by:

- Fear about the virus.

- Feeling out of practice when it comes to having conversations.

- Finding social interaction more exhausting than before.

- Worry about the accessibility of public spaces and venues

- Generally feeling sad after a very difficult year.

How to manage it

Take your time

If you are not feeling ready to spend time in public spaces or group settings just yet, please take your time. It may be easier to take small steps, only meeting one or small groups of friends or peers that you feel comfortable with.

Joining online will likely still be an option for many events too.
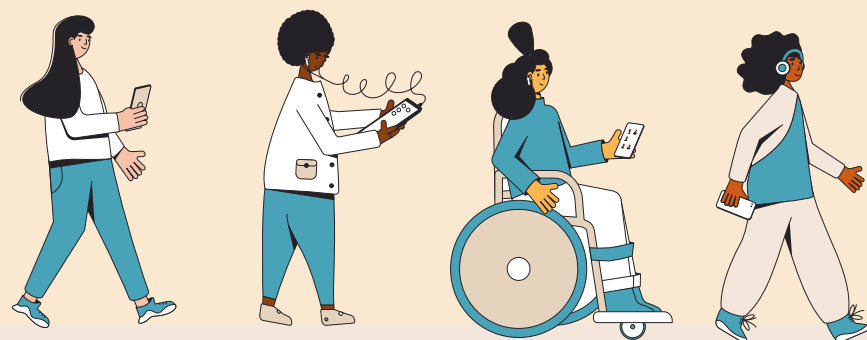
Socialise on your terms

Regardless of your reason for feeling anxious, it's important that you socialise on your own terms and do not feel pushed into anything that makes you feel uncomfortable. Feel free to suggest activities that you would be more comfortable with.

How to manage it

Consider why you feel anxious

Where possible, think about whether there are any triggers you can avoid - such as very crowded spaces.
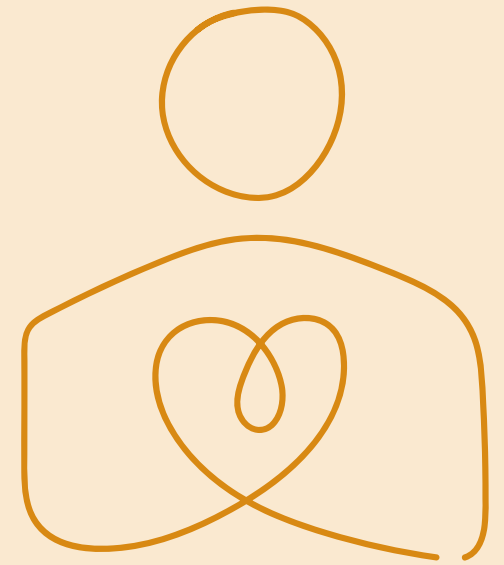
Talk about it

Tell a friend or someone you trust how you are feeling. It can be common to assume that you are the only person feeling anxious about this transition, however, it is likely that you are not.

Assistance

If possible ask a friend or trusted person to meet you before the event so you can attend together. let friends know that you may be leaving quickly when you are anxious and may not be able to say goodbye.

How to manage it

Look after your general well-being.

- Prioritise your basic self-care including, sleep, hydration, food, and hygiene.

- Set aside dedicated well-being time to do calming activities such as reading, playing music, watching your favourite shows, etc.

- Consider trying mindfulness meditation. There are many free sessions of various durations on **YouTube**.

- When experiencing symptoms of anxiety, try breathing exercises and techniques such as the **5-4-3-2-1 method**.

Support

As with any mental health concern, please consider:

Talking to your **GP**.

Contacting the **Student Counselling Service** and taking a look at their workshops, groups, and resources such as **Silvercloud**.

Talking to a member of the department such as your Personal Tutor or the **Student well-being advisor**.

In some cases, intense or prolonged Social anxiety could indicate **Social Anxiety disorder or Social Phobia**. Always consult your GP if you think this may be the case.