Social Anxiety

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Sections follow the student handout. Delete a section here when you delete it from the handout. The handout uses the short (quick) version of the reading.

Vocabulary: Fill in the Blank

1. go blank
2. nerve-racking / nerve racking / nerve-wracking / nerve wracking / nerveracking
3. dread
4. dwell on
5. self-conscious / self conscious / selfconscious
6. overestimate
7. scrutiny
8. rehearse
9. avoidance
10. genuine
11. cope
12. gradual
13. setback
14. persists

Word Partners

Part A. 1 e 2 f 3 b 4 a 5 d 6 g 7 h 8 c

Phrases: a nerve-racking wait; dread going to the dentist; dwell on the past; under close scrutiny; rehearse your lines; closely monitor your heart rate; a genuine interest; cope with stress.

Part B. 1 dreadful 2 gradually 3 self-consciousness / self consciousness / selfconsciousness 4 monitoring 5 avoid 6 genuinely

Comprehension Questions: Model Answers

1. *What happens to the person at the party, and why might the hours afterward be worse?*
Their mind starts to go blank and a long silence follows. The hours afterward may be worse because people replay the scene and look for proof that it went badly.

2. *How is social anxiety different from shyness, according to the reading?*
Social anxiety is a long-lasting fear of being judged or embarrassed that can affect school, work, or friendships. It is not simply shyness.

3. *How common is social anxiety, according to the reading, and when does it often begin?*
About one person in twenty-five will meet the medical definition at some point in life, and it often begins in the teenage years.

4. *How is taijin kyofusho different from the fear that many people think of as social anxiety?*
People with taijin kyofusho dread upsetting others, for example by blushing or staring, more than embarrassing themselves.

5. *Why does turning attention inward make conversation harder?*
Anxious people watch themselves instead of listening, so they follow the conversation less well and another awkward moment becomes more likely.

6. *What is the spotlight effect, and what did the T-shirt experiment show?*
It is the belief that everyone is watching closely. In the T-shirt experiment, people tended to overestimate how many others noticed their shirt.

7. *Why can avoiding situations, rehearsing every sentence, or monitoring yourself make the problem worse?*
Avoidance brings quick relief but teaches the brain that the situation really was dangerous. Rehearsing and monitoring keep attention on yourself, and in one small experiment teenagers who focused on themselves felt more anxious.

8. *Which practical suggestion in the reading do you think is easiest to try? Why?*
   Open answer. Accept any suggestion from the last part of the reading with a reason, for example: asking a genuine question is easy because it only needs curiosity; slow breathing needs no preparation; a greeting to a neighbor is a small, low-risk start.
9. *What does the writer mean by saying that, from the outside, most people are busy thinking about themselves? How could this idea help a nervous person?*
   Open answer. A strong answer says that if other people are busy with their own thoughts, they are watching less closely than the nervous person believes, so there is less to fear and more reason to listen to the other person.
10. *True, False, or Not Given: "Social anxiety usually begins after the age of fifty." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    False. The reading says social anxiety often begins in the teenage years.
11. *Yes, No, or Not Given: "The writer believes that people with social anxiety should avoid difficult situations until the fear disappears." Explain your answer using the reading.*
    No. The writer says avoidance can backfire and advises beginning with low-risk situations and working up step by step.
12. *Author's purpose: Why does the writer begin with a scene at a party? Is it (a) to show a situation that many readers can picture, (b) to prove that parties cause social anxiety, or (c) to explain how the T-shirt experiment was done?*
    (a) To show a situation that many readers can picture. The party scene makes the feeling familiar before the facts begin.

True or False

1. **T.** The question about work starts the scene in the reading.
2. **F.** The reading says social anxiety is not simply shyness.
3. **T.** The reading says it often begins in the teenage years.
4. **F.** People with taijin kyofusho dread upsetting others more than embarrassing themselves.
5. **T.** They turn their attention inward and follow the conversation less well.
6. **F.** They tended to overestimate how many others noticed it.
7. **T.** The writer says that, from the outside, most people are busy thinking about themselves.
8. **F.** Avoidance teaches the brain that the situation really was dangerous.
9. **T.** The reading says a genuine question takes the pressure off you.
10. **F.** The writer says to begin with low-risk situations.

Language Focus: Giving Advice with Should, Could, and It Helps To

Model answers. Accept any answer that uses the form correctly and makes sense.

1. If a friend feels nervous before a job interview, they should practice a few answers with someone they trust.
2. To meet new people at a party, a person could ask the host to introduce them.
3. When a conversation goes quiet, it helps to take a breath and ask a simple question.
4. If you want to speak English with more confidence, you should talk with a partner for ten minutes every day.
5. Before an important presentation, it is a good idea to check the room and the equipment.
6. You should prepare two or three main points and take a slow breath before you start.
7. They could stand up, stretch, and breathe slowly before they dial.
8. A new student should arrive early and ask one friendly person for help.
9. A person could join a club, a sports team, or a language group.
10. It helps to pause, look at your notes, and continue with the next point.

Accept should, ought to, could, might want to, it helps to, it is a good idea to, or an imperative, as long as the advice makes sense.

Notes on the Evidence

Prevalence: Stein et al., BMC Medicine (2017), social anxiety disorder in the WHO World Mental Health Surveys: lifetime prevalence 4.0 percent and 12-month prevalence 2.4 percent across countries; lifetime 5.5 percent in high-income countries and 1.6 percent in low and lower-middle income countries. One in twenty-five is a rounding of 4.0 percent. The article was read through a fetch summarizer, which gave both 28 surveys (abstract) and 26 sites (methods), so the reading gives no survey count. The reading says only that rates are higher in wealthier countries and that the reasons are not fully understood; no source consulted explains the gap, so the discussion question treats it as open. Age of onset: the NHS page says social anxiety often starts in the teenage years, and the paper reports that onset varies by country, so the reading says only "often". The data were collected before 2017.

Taijin kyofusho: described on the English Wikipedia page as a Japanese culture-related syndrome centered on fear of offending or upsetting others, for example through blushing, eye contact, or body odor. The PMC article found in search could not be opened (it returned a reCAPTCHA page), and the reading makes no claim about how common it is or about its place in diagnostic manuals. The phrase "clinicians have described" is deliberate.

Spotlight effect and transparency: Gilovich, Medvec, and Savitsky, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology (2000), as summarized by Psychology Today (June 2022). Wearers of an embarrassing T-shirt greatly overestimated how many people noticed it; participants judging a recording of someone else were nearly right. The reading gives no figures because the numbers often quoted online were not checked in a primary source. The line that most people are busy thinking about themselves is the writer's summary of this research, not a measured result.

Teenage experiment: Leigh, Chiu, and Clark, PLOS ONE (2021), as summarized by PsyPost (25 September 2021). Young teenagers (11 to 14) had two five-minute conversations with a stranger, one with a self-focus and safety-behavior instruction and one with an other-focus instruction. In the first they felt more anxious and observers rated them more critically. Limits: small sample, and self-focus and safety behaviors were manipulated together, so the effects cannot be separated. The reading says "treat it as a clue".

Practical advice: the NHS page (opened 12 October 2026) lists keeping a diary, breathing exercises, breaking situations into small steps, focusing on what people are saying, and cognitive behavioral therapy as generally the best treatment. The closing prediction exercise adapts the diary idea. Asking a genuine question, listening for one detail, and treating silences as normal are common conversation advice, not research findings. The reading gives no medication information and does not diagnose; it points to a doctor or counselor.