

# UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL ANXIETY AND CULTIVATING SOCIAL COURAGE



## Understanding Social Anxiety and Cultivating Social Courage Grades 8-12 Health & Physical Education and Career Education

### Purpose of the Lesson:

Social anxiety is an extremely common mental health challenge. The students in your class are constantly navigating new social situations and this might bring about anxiety. Understanding what social anxiety is and how they can combat it is a great way to ensure students don't end up isolating themselves due to social anxiety. Use this lesson as a preemptive step to support students who might be experiencing social anxiety. It can also aid in socially competent students' understanding of their socially anxious peers, which can foster empathy and facilitate community building.

### Curriculum Competencies:

#### Health Education

- Propose strategies for developing and maintaining healthy relationships (Grade 8/9)
- Develop skills for maintaining healthy relationships and responding to interpersonal conflict (Grade 10)
- Analyze the potential effects of social influences on health (Grade 10)
- Create strategies for promoting the health and well-being of the school and community (Grade 8/9)
- Describe and assess strategies for promoting mental well-being in self and others (Grade 8/9)
- Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use for others (Grade 8/9)
- Evaluate and explain strategies for promoting mental well-being (Grade 10)
- Explore and describe factors that shape personal identities, including social and cultural factors (Grade 10)

*After Grade 10, Health Education splits off into different subject areas. This lesson is still applicable for Grades 11 and 12.*

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### Curriculum Competencies: Career Education

- Use self-assessment and reflection to develop awareness of their strengths, preferences, and skills (Grade 8/9)
- Demonstrate respect, collaboration, and inclusivity in working with others to solve problems (Grade 8/9)

*After Grade 9, Career Education splits off into different subject areas. This lesson is still applicable for Grades 10, 11 and 12.*

### First Peoples Principles of Learning:

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

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## Video

[Social Anxiety in the Modern World](#) - Dr. Fallon Goodman | TEDxUSF

### Guiding Questions:

- According to this video, what is the root cause of social anxiety?
- How are social media and social anxiety connected?
- What are some examples of social situations where one might feel anxious?
- Have you ever experienced social anxiety?
- What does social anxiety feel like for you?

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## Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

**Preparation:** Queue up video/set up projector

**1. Have the students watch the video “Social Anxiety in the Modern World”** - This video can be found [HERE](#).

**2. Pause the video and use the Guiding Questions to spark discussion.**

**3. Define social anxiety for your students. Read this definition out to your students:**

“Social anxiety is more than shyness. It's a fear that does not go away and affects everyday activities, self confidence, relationships and work or school life. Many people occasionally worry about social situations, but someone with social anxiety feels overly worried before, during and after them” (NHS). Explain to them that feeling nervous in social situations is extremely common, but when this nervousness becomes consuming to the point where you choose to avoid certain social situations, or social situations all together, you might be experiencing social anxiety.

**4. Brainstorm with your students why someone might feel social anxiety.** Have your students think about a time when they have experienced nervousness in a social situation. Write these examples down on the board to better contextualize the experience of social anxiety. Even students who don't experience chronic social anxiety will likely have been nervous in a social situation before. This will help to bridge the gap for students who might not be able to relate to the experience of social anxiety completely. Then discuss why they were nervous in these situations. As stated in the video, the throughline for most experiences of social anxiety is a fear of rejection.

# SUPPORTING EACH OTHER THROUGH SOCIAL ANXIETY



## Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

**5. Explain to your students that rejection is a normal part of the human experience.** As stated in the video, we all experience rejection of varying degrees on a regular basis. Rejection is extremely scary and can make us question a lot of things about ourselves. What rejection should not be, however, is a reason to socially isolate and avoid other people. If this is a response your students are having to rejection, they may have social anxiety.

**6. Define social courage for your students.**

Read out this definition to them: “Social courage is the courage to expose yourself to social situations where you may be vulnerable to embarrassment, ridicule, or discomfort. People who have social anxiety might need this type of courage” (Helpful Professor). Combating social anxiety takes a great deal of social courage.

**7. Explain the curriculum connections to your students.** Inform them that they will practice cultivating social courage for the active part of this lesson. When we are faced with a potentially anxiety-inducing social situation, we will need to muster up social courage. Social courage is the opposite of social isolation, so cultivating this kind of courage will help students avoid isolating when they feel anxious about a social situation. Have your students come up with some things they can do when they need social courage.

Examples may include:

- Bringing a friend along so you have a familiar person there
- Preparing some conversation topics in advance so you don't feel at a loss for what to say or ask
- Dressing comfortably so you feel good physically going into the situation

**8. Lesson Closure.** Have your students reflect on ways they can be allies for people with social anxiety. If we notice someone else may be socially anxious in a situation, we can step in and support them to feel more comfortable. We all feel those social nerves from time to time, so we can all relate to what it might feel like to be socially anxious. Going out of your way to ensure someone feels comfortable in a social situation could make a huge difference for them.