

Children and Adolescent Social Anxiety Disorder

Child and adolescent social anxiety disorder (SAD) involves intense, persistent fear of being judged, embarrassed, or humiliated in social or performance situations, leading to significant avoidance of activities like school, parties, or speaking up, causing distress and interfering with daily life for at least six months. Symptoms include physical reactions (sweating, trembling, nausea), emotional distress (panic, low self-esteem), and behavioral changes (avoidance, silence), often manifesting as extreme shyness or refusal to participate, requiring therapy like CBT for effective management.

Key Characteristics

- **Intense Fear:** Persistent worry about negative evaluation or appearing foolish.
- **Avoidance:** Skipping school, parties, or avoiding eye contact and conversations.
- **Physical Symptoms:** Shaking, blushing, racing heart, stomachaches, headaches.
- **Emotional Impact:** High self-consciousness, low self-esteem, depression.
- **Cognitive Issues:** Negative self-talk, catastrophic thinking about social events.
- **Duration:** Symptoms must last at least six months for diagnosis.

Common Situations & Manifestations

- **School:** Fear of presentations, asking questions, eating in the cafeteria, using public restrooms.
- **Social Settings:** Difficulty making friends, joining groups, talking to strangers, or ordering food.
- **Performance:** Extreme anxiety in sports or extracurriculars due to fear of physical symptoms or judgment.

How It Differs From Shyness

- Shyness is temporary; SAD causes significant impairment and distress, making it hard to function.
- Children with SAD often can't "snap out of it" and may feel powerless or ashamed.

Treatment & Support

- **Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT):** Most effective, teaching coping skills and challenging anxious thoughts.

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- **Medication:** SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) or beta-blockers may be used in severe cases.
- **Parent/Teacher Support:** Encouraging participation while understanding their fear, rather than forcing them into situations.

When to Seek Help

- If your child's anxiety is persistent (over 6 months) and interferes with their ability to make friends, attend school, or enjoy activities, consult a mental health professional. Early intervention is key.