

Social Anxiety and Depression. What is the Relationship?

In most cases the relationship between social anxiety and depression is that the social anxiety precedes the depression. Social anxiety is the most common anxiety disorder. The onset of social anxiety disorder, unlike with other disorders, is almost always in childhood or adolescence. Also, it is generally more difficult to detect social anxiety disorder with accuracy and to treat! I have had many clients come in with other symptoms only to learn that the true issue was social anxiety.

Social anxiety usually is chronic, and it is believed that it is most disruptive during the first three decades of life. Most clinicians and researchers believe strongly that if there is early intervention to treat social anxiety, subsequent depressive episodes may be prevented or the severity of them lessened. There is a very strong correlation with social anxiety in early adolescence and later depressive episodes. Unfortunately as is the case with most mental health illness, early intervention is not a priority in our country or within our health care system.

A child or teen with social anxiety may also have an early onset of depression. If you think about being a child with terrible anxiety about social situations, and no one around you really understanding or able to help you, it is easy to see why social anxiety and depression would be so highly correlated. Parents often become frustrated with children and teens with social anxiety disorder and rather than being able to offer assistance become one more source of disapproval. Additionally, parents with socially anxious children often struggle with anxiety themselves, which further compounds the child's anxiety.

Social anxiety increases the likelihood that a person will attempt to solve their problems alone, without consulting others or seeking help. Without understanding the source of the difficulty they are having, they may be more likely to conclude that they are defective, and become hopeless and withdrawn thus contributing to the likelihood that they will get depressed.

Social anxiety ensures that a person will avoid when they feel overwhelmed. Therefore, it is likely to lead to not only the emotional isolation described above, but also to a physical isolation. This often hinders any opportunity they might have at having successful social interactions that could lead to a corrective experience. When you are isolated, your depression is more likely to be exacerbated.

Social anxiety and depression, when they occur together, complicate the course of depression. People who have social anxiety and depression are more likely to have a longer course of depressive illness, and also to exhibit more serious symptomology including suicidality.

Social anxiety affects people as they are developing their unique personality and sense of place in the world. Social anxiety impacts not only social success, but reduces educational attainment, and job success. People with social anxiety are less likely to apply for higher positions, and are more likely to miss work days and be unproductive because of their social anxiety.

In adolescence and early adulthood we are developing our social network, career, and friendships. Social anxiety also impairs the development of a strong self esteem, the belief that you can successfully set and reach goals, and the sense that you are important and loved by others.

Social anxiety and depression can feed off of one another. When a person is depressed, they are less able to effectively problem-solve. Their ability to seek social support and assistance is impaired and because they are frequently isolated and others may not fully notice.

When a person with social anxiety and depression is seeking therapy the therapist and client should carefully examine all the symptoms before determining what to treat first and how to treat it. If you think that you may be experiencing social anxiety and depression consult the checklist below.

Social Anxiety and Depression Checklist

- ✓ Do you feel sad or empty or do you notice that you are tearful?
 - ✓ Do you feel less able to enjoy the things you used to enjoy?
 - ✓ Have you experienced changes in your appetite, or noticed a loss of gain in weight?
 - ✓ Do you feel guilty worthless
 - ✓ Do you have trouble thinking concentrating or making decisions?
 - ✓ Do you think of death or wish to die?
-
- ✓ Do you fear social or performance situations where you may be scrutinized?
 - ✓ Do you fear social situations where you may be exposed to unfamiliar people?
 - ✓ Are you often concerned about embarrassing or humiliating yourself
 - ✓ Do you avoid these situations or experience incredible distress when you are forced to be in them?
 - ✓ Are you distressed about these symptoms?
 - ✓ Is your routine disturbed or your ability to work, go to school, or have social activities and relationships compromised?
 - ✓ Do you have panic attacks?

If you have symptoms from the upper and lower categories, then you may be suffering from social anxiety and depression. It is important for you to seek help

Stein, Murray B.; Fuetsch ,M.; Muller, N.; Hofler,M; Lieb,R. ; Wittchen, H.. **Social Anxiety Disorder and the Risk of Depression: A Prospective Community Study of Adolescents and Young Adults**
Arch Gen Psychiatry. 2001;58(3):251-256.

Medical Disclaimer

The information provided on this site, such as text, graphics, images, is for informational purposes only. It is not to be construed as medical care or medical advice and is not a replacement for medical care given by physicians or trained medical personnel. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified healthcare provider(s) when experiencing symptoms or health problems, or before starting any new treatment. KRISTEN MCCLURE is not to be held responsible for any inaccuracies, omissions, or editorial errors, or for any consequences resulting from the information provided.

It is your responsibility to evaluate the information and results from tools provided. If you are a health care professional, you should exercise your professional judgment in evaluating any information, and you should confirm the information contained on our website with other sources before undertaking any treatment or action based on it. If you are a consumer, you should evaluate the information together with your physician or another qualified health care professional.