

T O P I C

06

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

This topic revolves around understanding the significance of social interactions for overall well-being, emphasizing the importance of setting healthy boundaries, fostering meaningful connections, and prioritizing personal growth within relationships.



The contents herein are for informational and educational purposes only and are not intended as medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always consult a qualified healthcare professional for any medical concerns or decisions.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

THIS TOPIC IS DESIGNED AROUND THE FOLLOWING MAIN LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

01

Understand Importance of Social Connections

Gain a comprehensive understanding of the importance of social interactions for overall well-being, including the impact on emotional, psychological, and physical health.

02

Develop Boundaries

Develop the skills necessary to set and communicate healthy boundaries in various relationships, fostering respect, autonomy, and mutual understanding.

03

Prioritize Connections

Explore strategies for prioritizing social connections and enhancing interpersonal relationships through active engagement, empathy, and effective communication.

04

Identify Growth Opportunities

Identify opportunities for personal growth within relationships, such as cultivating assertiveness, empathy, and conflict resolution skills.

05

Identify Workplace Factors Contributing to Social Anxiety

Explore the physiological and organizational factors that contribute to social anxiety in the workplace and learn how they affect performance, social interactions, and stress resilience.

06

Apply Knowledge

Apply acquired knowledge and skills to navigate real-life social interactions, build meaningful connections, and foster a supportive and fulfilling social network.

COMPETENCES

THIS TRAINING CONTENT IS DESIGNED TO HELP YOU ACQUIRE THE FOLLOWING COMPETENCES:

- 01 **Interpersonal Skills:** Exhibits acceptable standards of professional conduct. Listens carefully. Develops and maintains positive working relationships with all constituents.
- 02 **Communication:** Clearly conveying information and ideas through a variety of media to individuals or groups in a manner that engages the audience and helps them understand and retain the message.
- 03 **Empathy:** Ability to understand and share the feelings of another.
- 04 **Managing Conflict:** Deals effectively with others in difficult situations; uses appropriate inter-personal styles and methods to reduce tension or conflict between two or more people.
- 05 **Resilience:** Capacity to withstand or to recover quickly from difficulties, toughness.
- 06 **Sociability:** Interact and relate effortlessly with other people. Being able to make contacts with others and develop social activities.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS FOR WELL-BEING

Given modern work environments and work-life altogether, the significance of social interactions for overall well-being cannot be overstated. Just as other methods offer profound benefits for mental health, fostering positive social connections is essential for leading a fulfilling and balanced life. Let's delve into why social interactions are crucial for well-being.

Emotional Support and Connection

Social interactions provide a sense of belonging and emotional support, which are vital for maintaining mental and emotional well-being. Sharing experiences, thoughts, and feelings with others helps individuals feel understood, valued, and less alone in times of need.

Stress Reduction

Positive social interactions act as buffers against stress, helping individuals cope with life's challenges more effectively. Engaging in supportive relationships and spending time with loved ones promotes relaxation, boosts mood, and fosters emotional resilience.



Cognitive Stimulation

Interacting with others stimulates cognitive functions such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and creativity. Engaging in conversations, debates, and collaborative activities enhances intellectual growth and broadens perspectives.

Sense of Purpose and Meaning

Social connections provide opportunities for individuals to contribute to something larger than themselves, fostering a sense of purpose and meaning in life. Belonging to social groups, communities, or causes gives individuals a sense of identity and belonging.

Health Benefits

Research has shown that positive social interactions are associated with better physical health outcomes, including lower rates of chronic diseases, improved immune function, and increased longevity. Strong social support networks contribute to overall health and well-being.

Mental Health Promotion

Healthy social interactions play a crucial role in preventing and managing mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and loneliness. Maintaining supportive

relationships and seeking social support during times of distress can improve coping mechanisms and resilience.

Development of Social Skills

Interacting with diverse individuals in social settings helps develop essential social skills such as communication, empathy, and conflict resolution. These skills are invaluable for building and maintaining meaningful relationships and navigating various social contexts effectively.


Quality of Life

Ultimately, social interactions enrich our lives and contribute to our overall quality of life. Meaningful connections with others provide opportunities for joy, laughter, and shared experiences, enhancing our sense of happiness and fulfillment.

Indeed, social interactions are integral to our well-being.



DID YOU KNOW

A photograph of a man and a woman smiling and socializing at a bar. The man is on the left, wearing a light blue shirt, and the woman is on the right, wearing a dark top with red and white polka dots. A hand is patting the man's head. The background is blurred, showing bar lights and shelves.

SOCIALIZING REDUCES LIKELYHOOD OF BURNOUT BY 50%

According to recent studies, individuals who maintain strong social connections are up to 50% less likely to experience burnout compared to those with limited social interactions. This highlights the significant impact of social support networks in mitigating the risk of burnout and promoting overall well-being.

POSITIVE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AS A WAY TO PREVENT BURNOUT

Social interactions play a significant role in both preventing and alleviating burnout, a condition characterized by emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and reduced efficacy in work or personal life. Here's how social interactions can affect burnout.

1. Social Support as a Buffer

Supportive social interactions act as a buffer against burnout by providing emotional support, validation, and empathy. Having trusted colleagues, friends, or family members to lean on during challenging times can help individuals cope with stressors more effectively and reduce feelings of isolation or overwhelm.

2. Sense of Belonging and Connection

Positive social interactions foster a sense of belonging and connection, which are essential for mitigating burnout. Feeling connected to others in a meaningful way enhances resilience and provides a sense of purpose, making individuals less susceptible to burnout.



3. Opportunities for Ventilation and Perspective-Taking

Engaging in social interactions provides opportunities for individuals to ventilate their feelings, express concerns, and gain perspective on work-related challenges. Talking through issues with trusted peers or mentors can help individuals reframe their experiences, problem-solve effectively, and reduce emotional distress associated with burnout.



4. Promotion of Work-Life Balance:

Social interactions outside of work settings encourage individuals to prioritize their well-being and maintain a healthy work-life balance, which is crucial for preventing burnout. Spending quality time with loved ones, pursuing hobbies, or engaging in leisure activities provides a much-needed respite from work-related stressors and fosters overall well-being.

5. Collaborative Problem-Solving and Support Networks:

Collaborating with colleagues or peers in a supportive environment can help individuals feel more empowered and efficacious in addressing work-related challenges. Building strong support networks within the workplace promotes teamwork, innovation, and collective problem-solving efforts, reducing the likelihood of burnout and enhancing job satisfaction.

6. Recognition and Validation of Efforts:

Positive social interactions, such as receiving recognition or feedback from colleagues or supervisors, validate individuals' efforts and contributions in the workplace. Feeling valued and appreciated for one's work fosters a sense of motivation, engagement, and job satisfaction, mitigating the risk of burnout.

OVERCOMING SOCIAL ANXIETY

Social anxiety

Social anxiety, often characterized by an intense fear of social situations, affects millions globally, making everyday social interactions feel challenging and even overwhelming. When it intersects with work-related stress, this anxiety can amplify, causing challenges in professional performance, job satisfaction, and overall well-being.

Navigating these stresses in a work context can become daunting, leading to further mental strain and often impacting career growth and interpersonal relationships. This article explores the link between social anxiety and work-related stress, backed by scientific insights, and provides simple strategies to overcome these obstacles, fostering better workplace social interactions and mitigating burnout.

The modern workplace, with its fast pace, emphasis on collaboration, and expectations of interpersonal skills, can place additional stress on individuals with social anxiety. The pressure to participate in meetings, network, or even contribute ideas in a group setting can heighten anxiety levels. For many, this results in avoidant behavior, which can be misinterpreted as disinterest or lack of engagement. Understanding how

stress and social anxiety are intertwined can help both employees and employers foster a more supportive work environment, providing individuals with tools to manage anxiety effectively, enhance social interactions, and ultimately boost their productivity and job satisfaction.



Social Anxiety and Work-Related Stress

Social anxiety, or social phobia, is an intense fear of being judged, embarrassed, or humiliated in social situations. It can lead to avoidance behaviors that prevent individuals from engaging fully in their professional environments. Meanwhile, work-related stress arises from job demands, pressure to perform, interpersonal conflicts, or fear of failure, manifesting in symptoms like fatigue, irritability, and even physical ailments.

In professional settings, the challenges of social anxiety are compounded. Typical workplace interactions — team meetings, public presentations, networking events, or performance evaluations — can be intimidating for those with social anxiety, causing them to avoid situations that might otherwise advance their careers. Work-related stress, in turn, adds another layer, with deadlines, performance goals, and team dynamics often heightening the anxiety response. Over time, social anxiety and work stress can create a cyclical effect, where avoiding these interactions leads to missed career opportunities, deepening feelings of inadequacy or isolation and further entrenching social anxiety.

Social anxiety in the workplace is uniquely shaped by both individual biological responses and

organizational dynamics. Scientific research indicates that social anxiety often intensifies under pressure to perform or meet social expectations, making the workplace a potential trigger. In these settings, anxiety is not merely an emotional response but is reinforced by the body's physiological systems that react to stressors in social situations, creating a loop that compounds work-related anxiety.

For individuals with social anxiety, the fear of negative evaluation or rejection activates several stress-related systems, including heightened activation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, which controls the release of cortisol. Elevated cortisol levels, common under chronic stress, impair social cognition and memory. This hormonal response can create a barrier to effective communication, resulting in difficulties remembering names, processing information, or responding naturally in social interactions. Over time, this can lead to a feedback loop where employees start avoiding social situations altogether, reinforcing feelings of inadequacy and further isolating them within the workplace.

Another contributing factor to workplace social anxiety involves neurochemical imbalances, particularly in serotonin levels, which play a vital role in mood regulation and social bonding. Reduced serotonin activity is associated with

social withdrawal and difficulty in forming connections, which can make workplace networking, teamwork, and even casual interactions with colleagues feel overwhelmingly stressful. This imbalance can heighten the risk of interpreting neutral feedback or constructive criticism as negative, creating a distorted view of how others perceive their professional abilities.



On a structural level, workplace hierarchy and performance metrics can amplify social anxiety. For instance, feedback sessions, performance reviews, and high-stakes presentations can create a specific type of “performance anxiety” tied to social evaluation. Employees might ruminate on perceived inadequacies or even experience “anticipatory anxiety” — the fear or worry that precedes a social event. This anticipation creates a psychological state that exacerbates stress well before the

actual event, draining cognitive and emotional resources and leaving the individual with heightened sensitivity to even minor social cues.

Finally, the workplace often demands multitasking and rapid decision-making, which can be particularly challenging for individuals with social anxiety. Research suggests that under stress, people with social anxiety experience cognitive “overload,” where the mental resources needed to manage social interactions are divided between performing job tasks and managing anxiety. This overload can lead to poorer decision-making and a reduced ability to read social cues accurately, creating further stress and reinforcing a sense of inadequacy.

Approaches to Overcoming Social Anxiety and Managing Work-Related Stress

Exposure therapy, a cognitive-behavioral approach, is widely used to reduce the intensity of fear responses by encouraging individuals to confront their anxieties in controlled, gradual steps. In the context of work, gradual exposure to feared social situations reduces the intensity of the anxiety over time and builds confidence in engaging with others.

To incorporate gradual exposure in daily work life, start with small social

interactions. For example, initiate short conversations with colleagues in low-stakes settings, like greeting someone in the elevator or sharing brief comments during lunch breaks. As you grow more comfortable, gradually progress to larger challenges, such as contributing ideas in a small team meeting or attending a networking event. Tracking progress by jotting down each interaction, reflecting on positive outcomes, and setting new challenges weekly can reinforce growth. Learning to take small, consistent steps, will help you create a routine of positive social engagement, diminishing the hold that social anxiety has over your professional life.

Additionally, consider developing a pre- and post-exposure ritual. By the way, do you know who else has notorious exposure rituals? Rafael Nadal. If you watch him closely, this famous tennis player, uses a quite few of them on the court. One of them is during breaks, as he sits down on chair to take a breath, he drinks water from one of his bottles, then he takes the second one and drinks from that one as well and he returns each bottle exactly to the same spot they were placed at.

You on the other hand, can practice deep breathing before each social encounter and reflect on the experience afterward to note any successes. Celebrating small victories, like successfully speaking



up in a meeting, builds confidence, encourages continued exposure, and desensitizes you to the fear of social judgment over time.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) Techniques

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is one of the most effective strategies for addressing social anxiety. CBT helps individuals identify and challenge distorted thought patterns, replacing them with constructive ones. Common negative thoughts in the workplace — such as *"I'll embarrass myself if I speak up"* or *"Everyone is judging me"* — can be identified and restructured into healthier beliefs, such as *"Everyone makes mistakes"* or *"My contributions are valued"*.

To leverage CBT techniques in the workplace, start by noting down anxious thoughts as they occur, especially in social situations. This might include pre-meeting nerves

or anxiety over giving a presentation. Once the thought is identified, assess its validity: What evidence do you have that your fear will come true? For instance, if you fear that speaking up in a meeting will embarrass you, recall past meetings where speaking up had no negative consequences. Then, challenge the thought by reframing it — for example, *"My team values my insights, and I can contribute meaningfully"*.

Another practical CBT strategy is to develop a set of affirmations or constructive thoughts to use in place of anxiety-driven ones. Preparing specific phrases like "I am capable of handling this situation" or *"Even if I make a mistake, I can learn from it"* can be powerful tools to counter negative self-talk. Using these affirmations before social encounters can reinforce a positive mindset and boost self-assurance.

For ongoing support, consider scheduling regular self-check-ins. Take a few moments weekly to assess challenging thoughts or situations you faced and evaluate the effectiveness of your CBT techniques. This process not only reinforces cognitive restructuring but also provides a record of progress, demonstrating tangible improvements in managing social anxiety within the work environment.





40%

roughly 20% to 40% of adults report feeling lonely frequently or chronically

7 - Day Challenge

Challenging oneself to prioritize social interactions amidst a busy schedule can yield substantial benefits for overall well-being. Despite demanding commitments, nurturing social connections offers invaluable opportunities for emotional support, stress reduction, and resilience-building. Engaging with others not only fosters new perspectives and collaborative problem-solving but also enriches life with a profound sense of fulfillment and balance. So, what do you say we give it a try?

7 DAY CHALLENGE

REACH OUT TO A FRIEND

DAY **1** Today, take a few minutes to reach out to a friend or a colleague you haven't spoken to in a while.

PRACTICE ACTIVE LISTENING

DAY **2** Give your full attention to the person speaking, maintain eye contact, and ask open-ended questions to show genuine interest.

EXPRESS GRATITUDE

DAY **3** Take the time to express gratitude to someone in your life - a friend or a mentor. Send a thoughtful message or express your appreciation in person.

JOIN A SOCIAL ACTIVITY

DAY **4** Whether it's attending a team-building, inviting colleagues for a lunch or coffee, engage with others in a shared interest or activity.

RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

DAY **5** Offer a compliment, hold the door open, or perform a small gesture of kindness to strangers or acquaintances.

SHARE A MEAL OR ACTIVITY

DAY **6** Spend quality time connecting with a friend, family, or colleague over shared interest.

REFLECT AND PLAN

DAY **7** Reflect on your experiences over the past week and their impact on you. What activities brought you joy and connection? Set goals and plan to incorporate more of them into your routine in the coming days and weeks.

QUOTE



FRIENDS ARE THE FAMILY
YOU CHOOSE.

Jess C. Scott

BEST PRACTICES

IMPORTANT FACTORS FOR MAINTAINING A HEALTHY SOCIAL NETWORK

Maintaining healthy social connections has become increasingly important for our overall well-being. Our social networks play a vital role in shaping a sense of belonging, providing emotional support, and enhancing quality of life. In this age of digital connectivity, fostering meaningful relationships and nurturing social bonds has never been more crucial. Join us as we explore the five key factors for maintaining a healthy social network and discover how prioritizing social connections can lead to greater happiness, resilience, and fulfillment in our lives.

1. Regular communication: Regularly communicate with friends, family, and acquaintances through various channels. Keeping in touch helps strengthen connections and fosters a sense of belonging.

2. Active listening: Practice active listening when interacting with others, showing genuine interest in their thoughts, feelings, and experiences. By listening attentively and empathetically, you can deepen your relationships and build trust with others.

3. Reciprocity: Maintain a balance of give-and-take in your relationships by offering support, encouragement, and companionship to others while also being receptive to receiving assistance and care when needed. Reciprocal relationships are essential for mutual support and connection.

4. Shared activities: Engage in shared activities or hobbies with friends and loved ones to bond over common interests and experiences. Whether it's participating in sports, attending cultural events, or simply spending quality time together, shared activities strengthen social bonds and create lasting memories.

5. Boundaries and respect: Establish healthy boundaries in your relationships by communicating your needs, preferences, and limits clearly and respectfully. Respect the boundaries of others and avoid overstepping or imposing your own expectations onto them. Mutual respect and understanding are crucial for maintaining healthy and harmonious social connections.



CONNECT & THRIVE

Fostering healthy social connections is essential for overall well-being, offering a pathway to greater happiness, resilience, and fulfillment.

Ready to prioritize your social connections and reap the benefits of a healthier, more fulfilling life? Join us on this journey to strengthen your social network and discover the joy of meaningful relationships. Take the first step today by reaching out to a friend, engaging in active listening, or participating in a shared activity. Together, let's build a vibrant community of support, connection, and happiness.

TRY THIS:

Take a moment today to send a heartfelt message of appreciation to someone in your social network. Whether it's a friend, family member, or colleague, let them know how much you value their presence in your life and express gratitude for their support and companionship.

BUILD YOUR NETWORK



Five ideas to help you connect better with people at work

1. Try informal gatherings: Arrange informal gatherings such as coffee breaks, lunches, or after-work happy hours to create opportunities for casual conversation and bonding outside of formal work settings.

2. Show genuine interest: Get to know your coworkers on a personal level by showing genuine interest in their lives, hobbies, and interests. Ask open-ended questions, listen actively, and express empathy for their experiences.

3. Offer help and support: Be proactive in offering help and support to your colleagues when they need it. Whether it's assisting with a project, providing guidance on a task, or offering a listening ear during challenging times.

4. Celebrate achievements: Recognize and celebrate the achievements of your coworkers. Acknowledge them e.g. via meetings, emails, or social media platforms. Express genuine appreciation for their contributions.

5. Participate in Team-Building Activities: Engage in team-building activities or exercises organized by your company to promote teamwork, communication, and collaboration among colleagues.

KEEP A HEALTHY DISTANCE



How to keep a healthy distance and disconnect from work

- 1. Define limits:** Clearly identify what you need to feel balanced and stress-free e.g. specific work hours, breaks, or uninterrupted time for focused tasks.
- 2. Communicate Clearly:** Let your colleagues know your boundaries in a polite but firm manner e.g. inform them of your preferred work hours and availability.
- 3. Prioritize Tasks:** Focus on your most important tasks first and delegate or decline additional work that exceeds your capacity.
- 4. Use Technology Wisely:** Set boundaries with communication tools by turning off notifications outside work hours and using do-not-disturb features during focused work periods.
- 5. Practice Self-Care:** Ensure you take regular breaks, maintain a healthy work-life balance, and engage in activities that help you disconnect and recharge.

Setting boundaries at work is crucial for maintaining mental health and fostering positive social interactions. Clearly defining and communicating your limits, will enhance your relationships with colleagues, as it promotes mutual respect and understanding, leading to a more harmonious and less stressful work environment. We invite you to have learn more about setting boundaries and their importance in Unit 5-Topic 4 of this training course.

ASSESSMENT

01.

How well do you understand the importance of social interactions for well-being?

☐

A- High understanding

☐

B- Moderate understanding

☐

C- Low understanding

02.

How confident are you in setting and communicating healthy boundaries in relationships?

☐

A- Very confident

☐

B- Somewhat confident

☐

C- C. Not confident

03.

How motivated are you to prioritize social interactions and strengthen your social network?

☐

A- Highly motivated

☐

B- Moderately motivated

☐

C- Low motivation

04.

How comfortable are you with engaging in activities to enhance social interactions?

☐

A- Very comfortable

☐

B- Somewhat comfortable

☐

C- Not comfortable

ASSESSMENT ANSWERS

Mostly A:

You have a strong understanding of the importance of social interactions and are confident in your ability to navigate relationships. To further enhance your social well-being, continue prioritizing meaningful connections, actively engage in social activities, and consider mentoring others in setting healthy boundaries.

Mostly B:

While you have a moderate understanding of social interactions and some confidence in boundary setting, there's room for growth. Try exploring new ways to prioritize social connections, such as joining clubs or attending networking events, and practice assertive communication to establish and maintain healthy boundaries.

Mostly C:

Your confidence in social interactions may be limited, and you might find it challenging to set boundaries or prioritize social connections. Consider engaging in some of the exercises outlined in this chapter, starting with small steps like reaching out to a friend or colleague for support. If you manage to gradually build confidence in these areas, you can experience greater well-being and fulfillment in your relationships.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

01

Prioritizing social interactions is crucial for overall well-being, as they provide emotional support, foster connections, and promote resilience.

02

Establishing and communicating healthy boundaries in relationships is essential for maintaining balance, respect, and mutual understanding.

03

Actively engaging in social activities and reaching out to others fosters meaningful connections and enhances the quality of relationships.

04

Embracing opportunities for personal growth, such as learning assertive communication and practicing empathy, contributes to stronger and more fulfilling relationships.

05

Recognizing that building and maintaining healthy social connections is an ongoing process that requires effort, intention, and continual learning.

RESOURCE LIBRARY

Discover insightful resources on social anxiety, social interactions, and relationship-building, featuring expert talks, practical advice, and valuable content on communication, emotional connections, and personal development.



SOCIAL ANXIETY IN THE MODERN WORLD

Dr. Fallon Goodman is an Assistant Professor at the University of South Florida and Director of the Emotion and Resilience Laboratory. In this TEDx talk she shares insights on social anxiety and how to manage it.

[WATCH ON YOUTUBE](#)



A MENTALIST GUIDE TO SOCIAL INTERACTION

In this interesting TEDx talk, Thomas Grudzinski (you might know him as Tom Indigo: Mentalist), shares practical advices on how to achieve better results in your social interactions.

[WATCH ON YOUTUBE](#)



SCHOOL OF LIFE

The School of Life offers valuable insights into psychology, philosophy, relationships, and self-improvement through a variety of content.

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

RESOURCE LIBRARY

Discover insightful resources on social anxiety, social interactions, and relationship-building, featuring expert talks, practical advice, and valuable content on communication, emotional connections, and personal development.



PSYCHOLOGY TODAY

The Psychology Today website offers a wealth of articles, blogs, and resources on topics related to social interactions, relationships, and personal development.

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)



THE GOTTMAN INSTITUTE

The Gottman Institute offers workshops and online courses on relationship-building skills, including communication, conflict resolution, and strengthening emotional connections.

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

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