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Social Anxiety in Children: Signs & Evidence-Based Parental Strategies

Top 8 Ways Social Anxiety Shows Up

1. Fear of Judgment

Worry about being watched, embarrassed, or making mistakes; avoids anything that draws attention.

2. Avoids Social/Performance

Skips class participation, groups, teams, parties, eating or using the bathroom at school due to scrutiny fears.

3. Slow Warm-Up / Freeze

Needs long ramp-up; goes quiet or “blank,” speaks very softly, or shuts down when expected to engage.

4. Body & Emotion Reactions

Stomachaches, headaches, nausea, shaking, fast heartbeat, irritability, tears, or meltdowns around social demands.

5. Reassurance & Hypervigilance

Repeats “Did I do something wrong?”, scans faces/tones, reads neutral cues as rejection; struggles with uncertainty.

6. Starts/Joins with Difficulty

Hesitates to begin conversations, join play, or ask for help—especially in unstructured times like lunch or recess.

7. Clings to Adults

Stays close to parents/teachers/familiar peers as a buffer; harder to separate when judgment is expected.

8. Distress with New/Changing

Anxiety with new groups or transitions; needs predictability about who’s there, what happens, and peer responses.

Top 6 Evidence-Based Parental Strategies

Small Brave Actions

Use warm nudges toward tiny steps; praise effort over outcome: “Let’s pick one brave challenge today.”

Practice & Plan

Role-play and script exact words before trying independently: “Let’s practice, then you try it.”

Hold the Plan, Stay Supportive

Validate feelings while keeping expectations: “I hear you—and we’re still doing the plan, step by step.”

Challenge Worries

Check evidence and balance thinking: “Is that a fact or a prediction? What would you tell a friend?”

Test, Expose, Repeat

Run real-life experiments; choose 6/10 challenges, stay long enough for fear to drop; break, don’t quit.

Coach Social & Coping Skills

Teach “brave body,” calm breathing, clear voice; find one friendly face, plan how to ask for help/order.v



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If a child’s anxiety is interfering with daily life—or if parents feel stuck—call my practice.



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