

LEARN TO LIVE BULLETIN

Your guide in wellness and mental health

Managing Social Anxiety During Summer's Social Calendar

The notification from the group chat showed up on Renee's phone: an invitation to a weekend on the lake with college friends she hasn't seen in years. Renee immediately felt her anxiety spike as she started thinking about all the ways the weekend could go terribly wrong.

Does this reaction sound familiar? If so, you likely know that the summer season's focus on gatherings like barbecues, pool parties, outdoor concerts, and weekend getaways can intensify social anxiety. And sometimes the disconnect between others' excitement and our own feelings of dread can leave us feeling isolated and ashamed.



Fortunately, there are practical tools, grounded in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), that can help you overcome your social anxiety and feel capable of fully engaging in your social calendar this summer.

Step 1: Identify specific situations. If you notice yourself dreading your entire “social calendar”, try breaking it down to identify specific concerns. Is it the idea of wearing summer clothing that fills you with dread? Is it making small talk at your kid's birthday party? Or maybe you're nervous about events where you'll be around a lot of new people. Whatever it is – getting specific can help you take the next steps of addressing social anxiety.

Step 2: Explore your anxious thoughts. Try to identify any thoughts you have in relation to the specific situation you identified. This might be, “They will think I'm boring.” or “I might stumble on my words and sound stupid.” Many people are surprised that it is our thoughts about situations, not the situations themselves, that create our anxiety. We can explore this by asking a few questions about our thoughts:

- Do I know for sure that this thought is true?
- If my thought isn't true, this could turn out okay or even well. What would that look like?
- Even if my thought is true, will this moment feel like a big deal in 5 years?

Step 3: Practice Fear-facing. With social anxiety, sometimes we remain fearful of situations even after identifying problems with our thoughts. This is where *Fear-facing* comes in. Fear-facing means purposely putting ourselves in the situations we fear so that we learn at a deeper level that we don't have to be afraid. For example, if you want to be more comfortable with the summer social calendar, you could start by making a friendly comment to a stranger at a park. Then over time, you can work up to more challenging situations, like sparking conversations at a small gathering or attending your annual neighborhood barbecue.

Get Started Today

There are resources to help you reduce anxiety and build confidence so that enjoying your summer schedule feels more manageable. And you may even start to look forward to those invitations to connect with others! If you want to learn more about the tools introduced here, the Learn to Live Social Anxiety program can help. Or consider learning more about your overall mental health and wellbeing needs by taking a quick mental health assessment. Do this by scanning or visiting learntolive.com/partners and enter access code **MMHG**. Learn to Live is available to you and your family members, ages 13 and older at no cost.

