The Courage Room

Social anxiety: small steps toward more choice

Fear of judgment can make avoidance feel relieving in the moment. Practice can help you learn what happens and what you can handle. The goal is choice, not becoming outgoing.

1

Name what feels difficult

Is it fear of judgment, panic, low mood, sensory overload, or something unsafe? These may need different support. Discuss the pattern with your clinician.

2

Choose a meaningful goal

Pick something you value: visiting a library, sharing an idea, or joining a short conversation. Your goal does not need to impress anyone.

3

Build a manageable ladder

List possible steps and rate anticipated difficulty from 0 to 10. Choose the order with a clinician. Keep needed accommodations and medical supports.

4

Practice and notice learning

Write a specific prediction, try your agreed step, then record what actually happened. Repeat or adjust. Anxiety does not need to reach zero.

TRY IT IN REAL LIFE

Goal: borrow a book. Possible steps: browse the library briefly, ask where a book is, then borrow it. Your own difficulty ratings determine the order. Plan transport, timing, and support that fit your needs.

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Your practice page / Write, speak, or reflect privately

In the anxious moment

Feel your feet or the chair supporting you. Breathe comfortably. Turn attention toward one detail in the conversation or room, rather than repeatedly checking how you look. Afterward, record facts instead of replaying every detail.

01 My meaningful goal

02 Three possible steps / difficulty (0-10)

03 My chosen step and support

04 My prediction: what exactly might happen?

05 What happened / what I learned / next step

One thing I learned / One adjustment I will try

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Keep-close cards / Support, sources, and a next step

CHOOSE

What would I like more room for in my life?

STEP

One manageable practice, chosen with support.

NOTICE

Turn attention toward the conversation or surroundings.

LEARN

What did I predict? What happened? What can I take forward?

CARE & SAFETY

No surprise outings, forced eye contact, or flooding. Practice should be chosen and manageable. Keep genuinely useful accommodations. Quietness and enjoying solitude are not disorders.

SOURCES & SCOPE

NICE CG159: Social anxiety disorder (nice.org.uk/guidance/cg159); NHS Every Mind Matters: CBT thought record (nhs.uk/every-mind-matters).

Original educational guide. Not therapy, a diagnosis, a detox plan, or a substitute for individualized care. Adapt practice with a qualified clinician. Reviewed for this collection: November 2026.