





## credits

### Project Director & Author

Dr. Stan Kutcher, M.D., FRCPC  
Sun Life Financial Chair in  
Adolescent Mental Health,  
IWK Health Centre

### Contributed in part by

Vanessa Bruce, M.A.  
Dr. Selene Etches, M.D., FRCPC

### Final Review

Dr. Selene Etches, M.D., FRCPC  
Faten Alshazly, BSc., M.A.  
Dr. Stan Kutcher, M.D., FRCPC

### Where?

In Print Amazon.com  
Online Teenmentalhealth.org

teen  
mental  
health  
.org

**Follow:** @TMentalHealth

**Surf:** teenmentalhealth.org

**Chat:** info@teenmentalhealth.org

**Like:** fb.com/teenmentalhealth.org

**Watch:** youtube.com/teenmentalhealth1

TeenMentalHealth Speaks...  
is made possible in part by


**Sun**   
**Life Financial**

© This material is under copyright held by TeenMentalHealth.org. This material can not be altered, modified or sold. Teens and parents are welcome to use this material for their own purposes. Health providers are welcome to use this material in their provision of health care. Educators are welcome to use this material for teaching or similar purposes. Questions on other uses of this material, other than described above, can be forwarded to info@teenmentalhealth.org

**Designed and Illustrated by**



WE·US·THEM

 @WeUsThemInc

 hello@weusthem.com

# M **TeenMentalHealth Speaks...** Magazine

---

Social Anxiety Disorder  
Channel: [teenmentalhealth1](#)



## TOC

---

**7** why does mental health matter?

**8** how the brain works?

**10** Social Anxiety Disorder is more than intense shyness?

**12** who gets Social Anxiety Disorder?

**14** Social Anxiety Disorder can affect your entire life?

**16** how is Social Anxiety Disorder treated?

**17** having a good support system

**18** tips to help increase overall mental health

**21** dealing with stigma

**22** helping someone coping with social anxiety disorder



# *From the desk of Dr. Kutcher*

---

**A**dolescence is an exciting time of life. There is so much to do, so much to explore, so much to learn. All of this can be at times exhilarating, challenging, scary, painful or whatever. There will be successes and there will be failures. There will be times that we look back on and say "I wish I had not done or said that" and there will be times that we look back on and say "I see that doing or saying that was the right thing to do".

We can look at this time of life as an opportunity for emotional, social and thinking growth and see many positives. Unfortunately, in my opinion, there is a social tendency to think about the adolescent years in negative terms. And, I for one am getting a little bit tired of hearing these kinds of negative stories. Where are the positive stories?

This does not mean teens don't have their struggles. Nor does it mean that the social, personal, educational challenges faced by teens aren't also faced by adults! Everyone has their challenges. Part of growing through the teen years is learning how to successfully overcome life's challenges.

Woven into these joys and sorrows of adolescence is the reality that some of the most concerning illnesses arise during that time. They include such things as: Depression; Panic Disorder; Schizophrenia; etc. Drug misuse and even drug abuse are other challenges that arise. Unrecognized and untreated they can have negative impacts during teenager-hood and for adulthood to come.

The good news is, we have lots of effective and positive ways to help teens and families who are facing the challenges of mental disorders. This does not mean that the usual ups and downs of teen life will go away.

These Magazines will help you and your families learn about some of the most common medical illnesses of adolescence – mental disorders. I hope that this will help you and your family better understand what these are, how to identify them and what you and your family can do to help.

---





---

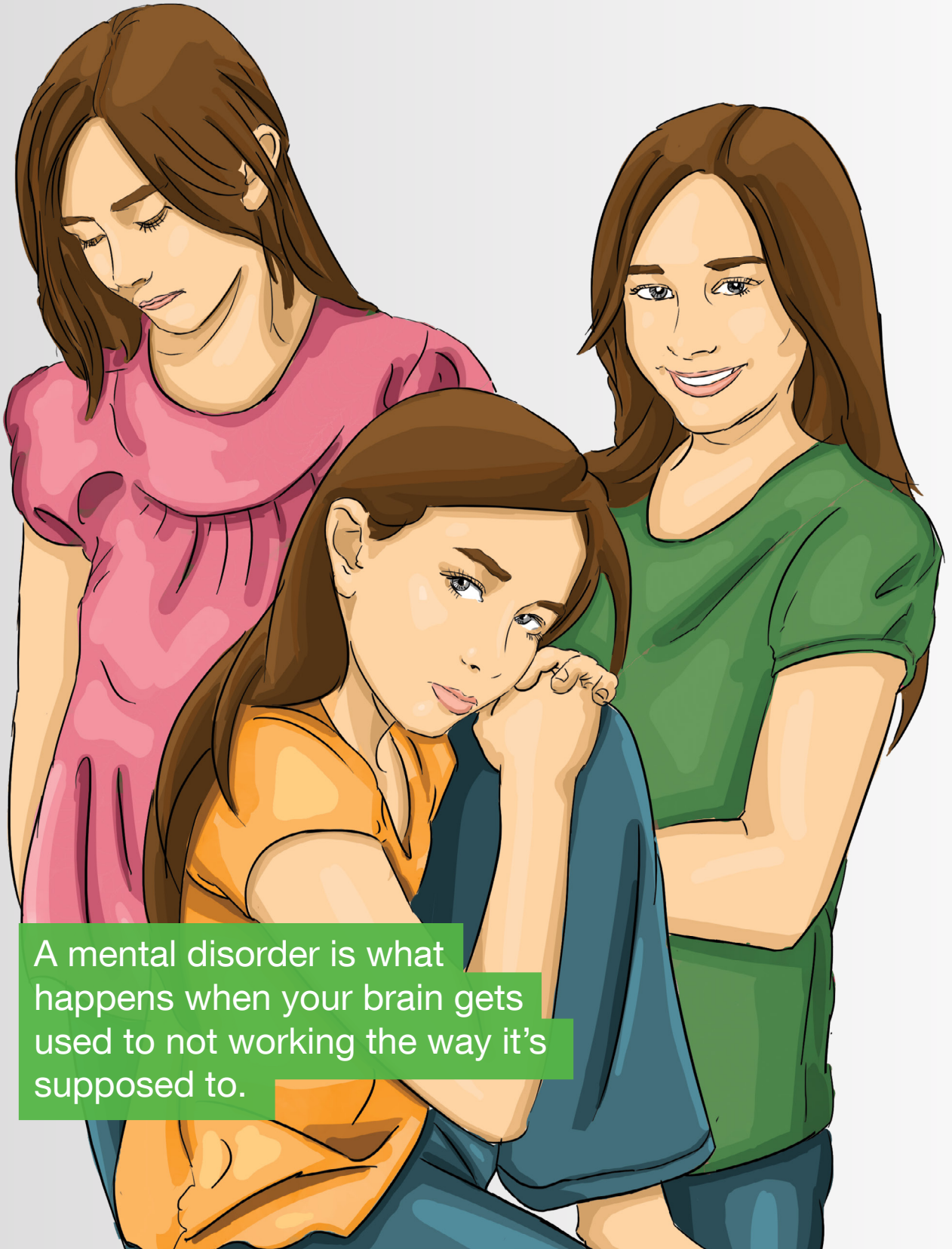
# TRANSITIONS

---





Available on Amazon.com and the Apple iBookStore. The App is free for download at the Apple App Store & online: [teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/transitions](http://teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/transitions)



A mental disorder is what happens when your brain gets used to not working the way it's supposed to.

# ? why

## mental health matters



**mental health refers to the health of your brain. It's what is going on inside your head. Your mental health affects every aspect of your life, including your school performance, your physical health, your feelings, your self-esteem, and your relationships with other people. Having good mental health makes it easier for you to cope with stress and live your life the way you want to live it. Looking after your mental health is really important.**

Many people experience mental health problems as teenagers. Mental health problems are when your brain is having difficulty working as well as it should. Usually, this happens when you are in a difficult situation, like if your parents are going through a divorce or someone you love dies. When this happens, you may need some extra help from a trusted adult (like a family member, a teacher, or a neighbour) or a counselor. Sometimes, however, our brains can work differently than usual for no apparent reason, causing us problems. For example,

they can make us feel sad all the time or feel anxious when there is no real danger. When this happens, it is considered a mental disorder.

A mental disorder is what happens when your brain gets used to not working the way it's supposed to. We get stuck in a pattern of feeling really down, or really anxious, or really distracted. Sometimes these patterns can even change the way our brain works. Just like how mental health affects all aspects of your life, so do mental disorders. Having a mental disorder can make it harder for you to do well in school, to get along with your friends and family, and to stay physically healthy. It makes it difficult to live your life the way you would like. Some people with mental disorders may end up using drugs and alcohol to cope, and other people may hurt themselves or think suicide is the answer.

Seek help as soon as you notice a problem. There are lots of people who can help you. Early treatment of mental disorders not only helps you right away, but the help you get can last your whole life.

# ? how

## the brain works

In order to understand how the brain changes when someone has a mental disorder, we need to know how it usually works. The brain has 6 different but completely linked functions:

**1 Thinking**  
Your brain is in charge of how you store and process information, whether it's figuring out a math problem, remembering to pack your lunch, concentrating during class, or planning what you are going to do this weekend.

**2 Feeling**  
Your brain also controls how you feel at any given point in time and how you express those feelings to other people.

**3 Perceiving/Sensing**  
Your brain is responsible for paying attention to what is going on around you. It does this by interpreting information from your senses - sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch. You see with your brain, not with your eyes!

**4 Physical**  
Your brain controls how your body moves and reacts – from obvious things, like being able to move your hands, to things you don't even think about, like breathing or digesting your food.

**5 Behaving**  
Your brain controls how you interact with the people around you and your environment. It's your brain that tells you what to do or say in different situations.

**6 Signaling**  
Your brain also plays an important role in protecting you from danger. It keeps track of the information from your senses in order to alert you that you may be in trouble, like if you touch a hot stove and you immediately pull your hand away. Your brain is what stopped you from being badly burned!

**discover://**


To learn more about the teenage brain, check out: [teenmentalhealth.org/understanding-mental-health/the-teen-brain](https://teenmentalhealth.org/understanding-mental-health/the-teen-brain) and [youtu.be/EGdIpaWi3rc](https://youtu.be/EGdIpaWi3rc)





When a person has a mental disorder, one or more of these brain functions are not working properly. And because these brain functions are all interconnected, when one function isn't working properly, the other brain functions will also be affected. In the case of an anxiety disorder, the brain's signaling mechanisms are not working the way they should. This makes people feel like they're in danger, even when they are perfectly safe. Social Anxiety Disorder is one type of anxiety disorder, where people feel threatened and anxious in usual social situations.

# Social Anxiety Disorder is more than intense shyness

A black and white line drawing of a wedding scene. In the foreground, a groom in a tuxedo is talking to a bride who is holding a bouquet of flowers and a glass. In the background, another couple is dancing. The drawing is simple and uses only outlines.

It's normal to feel shy in certain situations, like meeting someone new or starting a new school or job. But Social Anxiety Disorder (also called Social Phobia) is about much more than just feeling shy. A person with Social Anxiety Disorder has an intense fear of social situations where they could be judged or feel embarrassed. This can cause him or her to avoid everyday social situations, like going shopping, speaking up in class, using a public bathroom, or participating in gym class. Someone with Social Anxiety Disorder often knows that his or her fears are unreasonable and that other people don't feel the same way. This can make him or her feel really alone, like no one else can understand how he or she feels, leading to further isolation and depressive feelings.





# ? who gets Social Anxiety Disorder

Anxiety Disorders are the most common mental illness in Canada – about 10% of Canadians will have an Anxiety Disorder in their lifetime. About 4% of 15-24 year-old Canadians report having Social Anxiety Disorder/Social Phobia in the past year.

[Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey, Mental Health and Well-being, 2002]

discover://

Check out this video on Social Anxiety Disorder:  
[youtu.be/kitHQUWrA7s](https://youtu.be/kitHQUWrA7s)

Anyone can get Social Anxiety Disorder. Although it may be more common in women and usually begins during the teen years, it isn't caused by your gender, age, or anything like that. Instead, Social Anxiety Disorder is thought to be caused by a combination of your genetics (which you inherit from your biological relatives), and the things that have happened in your life.

“I start shaking.”

“I turn red.”

“I feel embarrassed.”

“My heart races.”

“I avoid other people.”

“My mind goes blank.”

“I want to cry and run away.”

“I think everyone is staring at me.”

“I get dizzy.”



how does Social Anxiety Disorder affect a person

# Social Anxiety Disorder can affect your entire life

1 When people experience symptoms of Social Anxiety Disorder...



2 They can feel self-conscious and inadequate if they compare themselves to others (e.g., "I can't do presentations as well as my classmates.")



3 They can feel like everyone is staring at them and judging them.



4 They can start to avoid social situations that make them uncomfortable or self-conscious.

5 They can feel guilty for avoiding those situations and start to feel bad about themselves.



6 These fears can get worse as they continue to avoid social situations that cause anxiety.



7 Without practice and frequent use, their social skills can suffer, making it even harder for them to feel comfortable in social situations.



8 Sometimes they may drink, smoke, do drugs, or binge eat to cope with their anxiety.



## without treatment

Symptoms continue to get worse and the person with Social Anxiety Disorder withdraws from other people, leading to negative consequences in adulthood.



## with treatment

Symptoms improve and the person with Social Anxiety Disorder feels more confident in social situations and develops positive social skills that last into adulthood.



# ? how

## is Social Anxiety Disorder treated

Social Anxiety Disorder is very treatable. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is used most often, and medication can also help in certain cases.

### 1 Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT)

CBT is a type of talking therapy that has a few different techniques that are helpful for treating Social Anxiety Disorder, including cognitive restructuring and exposure. These work by helping your brain control your anxiety better.

Cognitive Restructuring is basically a fancy way to say “change the way you think.” If you change the way you think about the situations that cause you anxiety, your feelings about that situation (i.e., your anxiety) and your behaviour in the situation (i.e., avoidance) will also change. This is something that takes practice but can really make a difference.

Exposure is exactly what it sounds like: putting yourself in situations that cause you anxiety. It's not nearly as bad as it sounds though. Your therapist would work with you to slowly build up your confidence and comfort level, starting with situations that cause only a tiny bit of anxiety and slowly working up to situations that are more frightening. Your therapist would also be there to support you and help you build tools to cope with the situations – you don't have to do it on your own.

### 2 Medication

Medication can help your brain function better. Medicines known as Serotonin-Specific Reuptake Inhibitors (also called Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors or SSRIs) are the most commonly used.

### 3 What else can help:

- ▼ Having a good support network of friends and family.
- ▼ Following the Mental Wellness tips on page 18!

#### discover://

To help make sure you get the best treatment for you, check out:

[teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/evidence-based-medicine](https://teenmentalhealth.org/for-families-and-teens/evidence-based-medicine) and [teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/med-ed-booklet](https://teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/med-ed-booklet) and [teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/communicating-with-your-health-care-provider-what-every-parent-should-ask](https://teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/communicating-with-your-health-care-provider-what-every-parent-should-ask) and [teenmentalhealth.org/images/uploads/communicating\\_with\\_healthcare\\_providers\\_student\\_version.pdf](https://teenmentalhealth.org/images/uploads/communicating_with_healthcare_providers_student_version.pdf)



# having a good support system

For someone with Social Anxiety Disorder, having a good support system of trusted people is really important.

- 1 understand the challenges that having a mental disorder creates for you
- 2 notice when you're not acting/feeling like yourself
- 3 be there for you when you need them
- 4 help you cope when you're having a rough time
- 5 hang out with you.
- 6 listen to you when you need someone to talk to
- 7 give you honest and helpful advice when you need it
- 8 remind you that you're not alone
- 9 encourage you to help you face your fears and resist avoiding situations that cause you anxiety

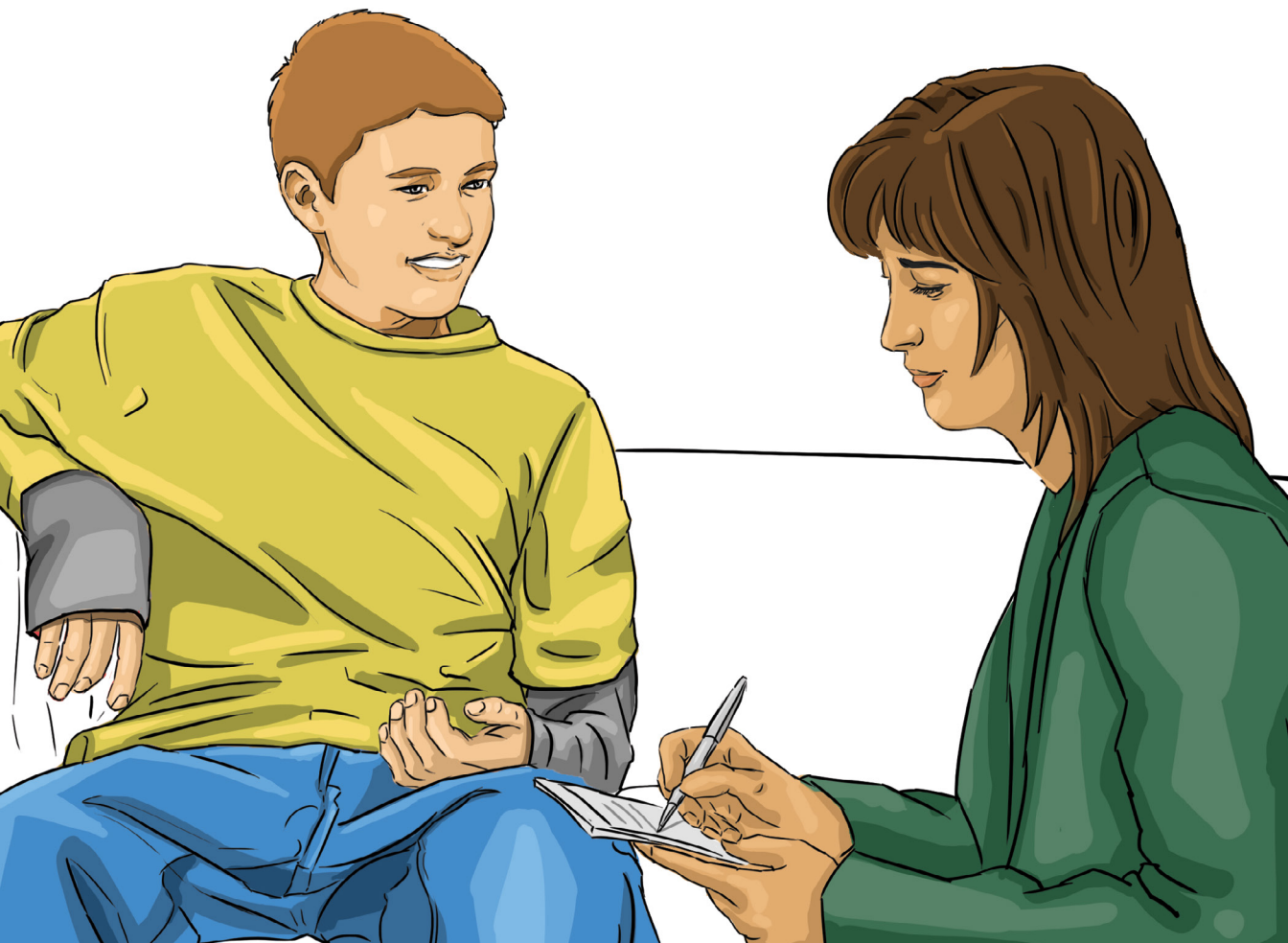
# tips

to help increase overall mental health:



- 1 Structure your day.** Give yourself something to do, even if you start small. Having some structure in your day can make a big difference in how you feel. Start with basic daily activities like showering, walking the dog, or making lunch. Keeping a daily diary or schedule can be a big help in keeping your mood stable and preventing you from feeling overwhelmed, especially if you're a visual person. Check out [teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/taking-charge-of-your-health](https://www.teenmentalhealth.org/resources/entries/taking-charge-of-your-health), a daily diary that can help you get started. This is available as an App on the Apple App Store as well.
- 2 Exercise.** Daily physical activity improves your health and mood, and helps you get rid of stress.
- 3 Sleep.** Getting 8-9 hours of sleep each night will help you feel better the next day.
- 4 Daily relaxation time.** If you feel anxious, try a relaxation technique, like Box Breathing or Hand Relaxation (see page 20). Whenever possible, try to calm yourself down without leaving the situation. If you start thinking of leaving to calm down as an escape, it can make your anxiety worse.
- 5 Eat healthy.** Eating a balanced diet gives your body the fuel it needs to help combat stress. Try not to skip meals and go easy on the junk food.
- 6 Limit caffeine.** Caffeine can make your heart race, which can make you feel worse.
- 7 Get out of the house.** Although it might seem intimidating, force yourself to go out to social places. Try to join a group or club! Every time you go out, it will seem a little less scary.
- 8 Stay away from alcohol and drugs.** Although you may feel better in the short-term, alcohol and drugs will not solve your problems. They'll only give you a false sense of confidence and may make your problems worse in the long run.
- 9 Build healthy relationships.** It's important to have a good support network of people you trust. Although it can be difficult when you have Social Anxiety Disorder, try to make friends with one or two people and practice opening up and being yourself. Start with someone less threatening to help you build confidence.
- 10 Talk.** Talk to the people in your support network about your feelings and concerns. Sharing your feelings with someone else can feel like a weight is lifted off your chest.
- 11 Stop thinking so much.** Thinking about something over and over can make you feel worse. Try not to let yourself replay negative thoughts and situations in your mind. Distract yourself, if necessary.
- 12 Be realistic.** Although it sometimes feels like it, know that not everyone is staring at you or judging you. In fact, other people are probably paying more attention to themselves than to you.

If these tips don't help, do NOT get discouraged. Just like learning to play the piano or driving a car, some of these skills require practice and patience. For more help, talk to your school counselor or visit your family doctor. Your family doctor will be able to help you find the treatment that works best for you and can recommend places for you to go if you need more help.







## Box Breathing

Box Breathing can help your heart rate return to normal, which helps you to relax. Here's how you do it: If possible, sit and close your eyes. If not, just focus on your breathing.

**Step 1:** Inhale your breath (preferably through your nose) for 4 seconds.

**Step 2:** Hold your breath for 4 more seconds. You're not trying to deprive yourself of air; you're just giving the air a few seconds to fill your lungs.

**Step 3:** Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds.

**Step 4:** Pause for 4 seconds (without speaking) before breathing in again.

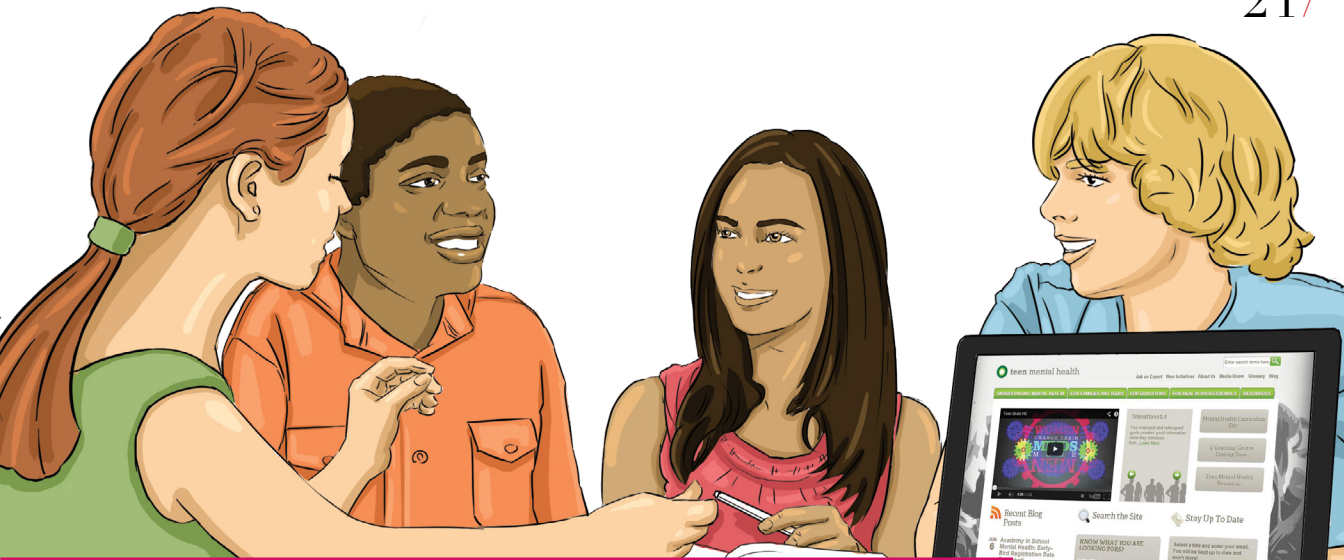
Repeat this process as many times as you can. Even 30 seconds of deep breathing will help you feel more relaxed and in control.

## Hand Relaxation

Hand Relaxation helps to get rid of the tense feelings in your body. Here's how you do it: Clench the muscles in your left hand (make a fist) really tightly for 5 seconds. Then, let go gradually (for about 15 seconds), breathing slowly and concentrating on the feeling in your hand. Then, repeat using your right hand.

With practice, you can get really good at doing Box Breathing or Hand Relaxation techniques. You can do them just about anywhere, without anyone else knowing - on the bus, in class, even when you're hanging out with your friends.





# dealing with stigma

If you have Social Anxiety Disorder, you may overhear insensitive comments about you and feel like you are being judged by other people. Remember that these people don't understand what Social Anxiety Disorder is. Although it may be hard, try not to take their comments personally. They don't realize that Social Anxiety Disorder is a medical condition that requires treatment, just like cancer or high blood pressure. Having Social Anxiety Disorder does not make you weak and does not make you less of a person than anyone else.

## What is stigma?

Stigma is a "polite" word for discrimination. It's a negative attitude people have about something they don't understand that can result in physical, mental, and emotional harm. When someone has a stigmatizing attitude, it means there is something wrong with their attitude- not with you. People make hurtful and judgmental comments and assumptions about people suffering from mental illness because they don't understand that mental disorders are just another kind of medical disorder. You wouldn't expect someone in a wheelchair to be able to climb stairs just because someone said "snap out of it!" This is just as true for mental disorders, like Social Anxiety Disorder. The best way to fight stigma is to help people better understand mental disorders.

**The best way to fight stigma is to help people better understand mental disorders.**

# helping someone coping with Social Anxiety Disorder

If someone you care about has Social Anxiety Disorder, the best and most important thing you can do is provide support without encouraging him or her to avoid social situations. In order to support someone else, you also need to look after yourself.



## here are a few pointers:

### 1 Educate yourself

Understanding what Social Anxiety Disorder is and how it affects the person you care about will help you to be a less frustrated and more supportive friend

### 2 Listen

When you listen to and acknowledge your friend's feelings, it sends your friend the message that you care. Knowing that you have people who care about you is an important part of recovering from a mental disorder.

### 3 Be patient

Sometimes it can be frustrating when your friend doesn't seem to want to hang out or do anything they used to like to do. Take a deep breath and remember that Social Anxiety Disorder is making your friend feel this way. He/she can't just "snap out of it." Getting impatient will only make the situation worse. Stay positive and be patient. Encourage your friend to participate in social events. He/she may feel like it's too frightening or stressful, but will probably feel better afterwards.

### 4 Don't blame yourself

It is not your fault that your friend has Social Anxiety Disorder. Many different factors, including his/her genetic background, environment, and life experiences are involved. No one can "make" another person have Social Anxiety Disorder.

### 5 Be Positive

Positive moods can be contagious. It's really easy for someone with a mental disorder to focus only on the negative aspects of his/her life. Sharing your positive mood may help your friend see things from a different perspective.

### 6 Don't try to change your friend

You don't have to solve all of your friend's problems or turn him/her into a different kind of person. Just be present and supportive.

### 7 Encourage your friend to seek help

Having a friend he/she can trust, like you, is so important. But someone trying to cope with a mental disorder also needs treatment. Encourage your friend to see a doctor or school counselor to get the help he/she needs. Even if the problems don't seem that bad yet, seeking help early can prevent problems from getting worse.

### 8 Be aware of suicide risk

If your friend talks about death or suicide, don't ignore it or keep it a secret. Talk to a responsible adult whom your friend also trusts (e.g., parent, teacher, coach, counselor). Let your friend know that you care about him/her and his/her life. If your friend is talking about suicide, you must take it seriously.

### 9 Put yourself first

On an airplane, they tell you to always put your oxygen mask on first in an emergency before you assist someone else. You'll be no help to anyone if you're passed out. The same goes for helping your friend. If you burn yourself out by always putting him or her first, you won't be able to help anyone. It's absolutely okay (and so important) to take time away to take care of yourself.

### 10 Have fun together

Your friend needs someone who can have fun, relax, and laugh with him/her. These are all important parts of your friend's mental health (and yours).

discover://

For more on Social Anxiety Disorder and other mental health problems, check out [www.tearmentalhealth.org](http://www.tearmentalhealth.org)

# help

These are places you can find more information about Social Anxiety Disorders and get help:

**A Family doctor**  
Talk to your family doctor about your concerns. Your doctor can help you decide on the best treatment plan for you and refer you to a good psychologist, counselor, and/or support group.

**B School Counselor or Nurse**  
Your school counselor or nurse may have helpful resources for you, including books, pamphlets, and contacts in the community.

**C Phonebook**  
The yellow pages have lists of local support groups, counselors, and youth health centres, some of which may be helpful for you.

**D Emergency**  
If you are feeling suicidal or are in crisis, go to your local hospital's emergency room immediately.

**E Kids help phone**  
The Kids Help Phone has counselors who answer phone calls and online questions from young people 24/7. You can reach them at 1-800-668-6868 or at [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

**F Internet**  
The Internet has loads of information about mental illness; just know that not all of it is accurate. In fact, the information on some websites is more wrong than right.

**G Library**  
Check your local community or school library for books to help you understand more about Social Anxiety Disorder and how to cope.

**H Health Boards**  
Many communities have a health board with information on different support groups and other resources. They are often located in community centres, malls, and grocery stores.

## discover://

**Teen Mental Health** [www.teenmentalhealth.org](http://www.teenmentalhealth.org)

**Kelty Mental Health Resource Centre** [www.keltymentalhealth.ca](http://www.keltymentalhealth.ca)

**Mind Your Mind** [www.mindyourmind.ca](http://www.mindyourmind.ca)

**National Institute of Mental Health** [www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

**Canadian Mental Health Association** [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

**Mental Health Foundation** [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

**Anxiety Disorders Association of Canada/Association Canadienne des Troubles Anxieux**  
[www.anxietycanada.ca](http://www.anxietycanada.ca)

**Anxiety Disorders Association of America** [www.adaa.org](http://www.adaa.org)

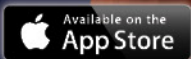
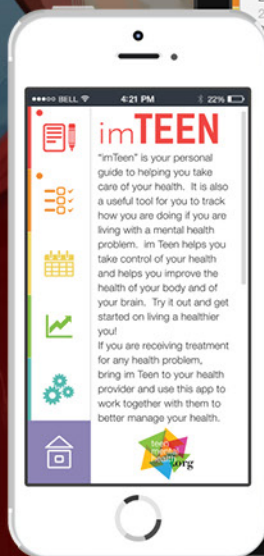


# imTEEN

Taking charge of your health



- ASSESSMENT
- CHECKLIST
- CALENDAR
- VISUAL REPORTS





# FAMILY PACK

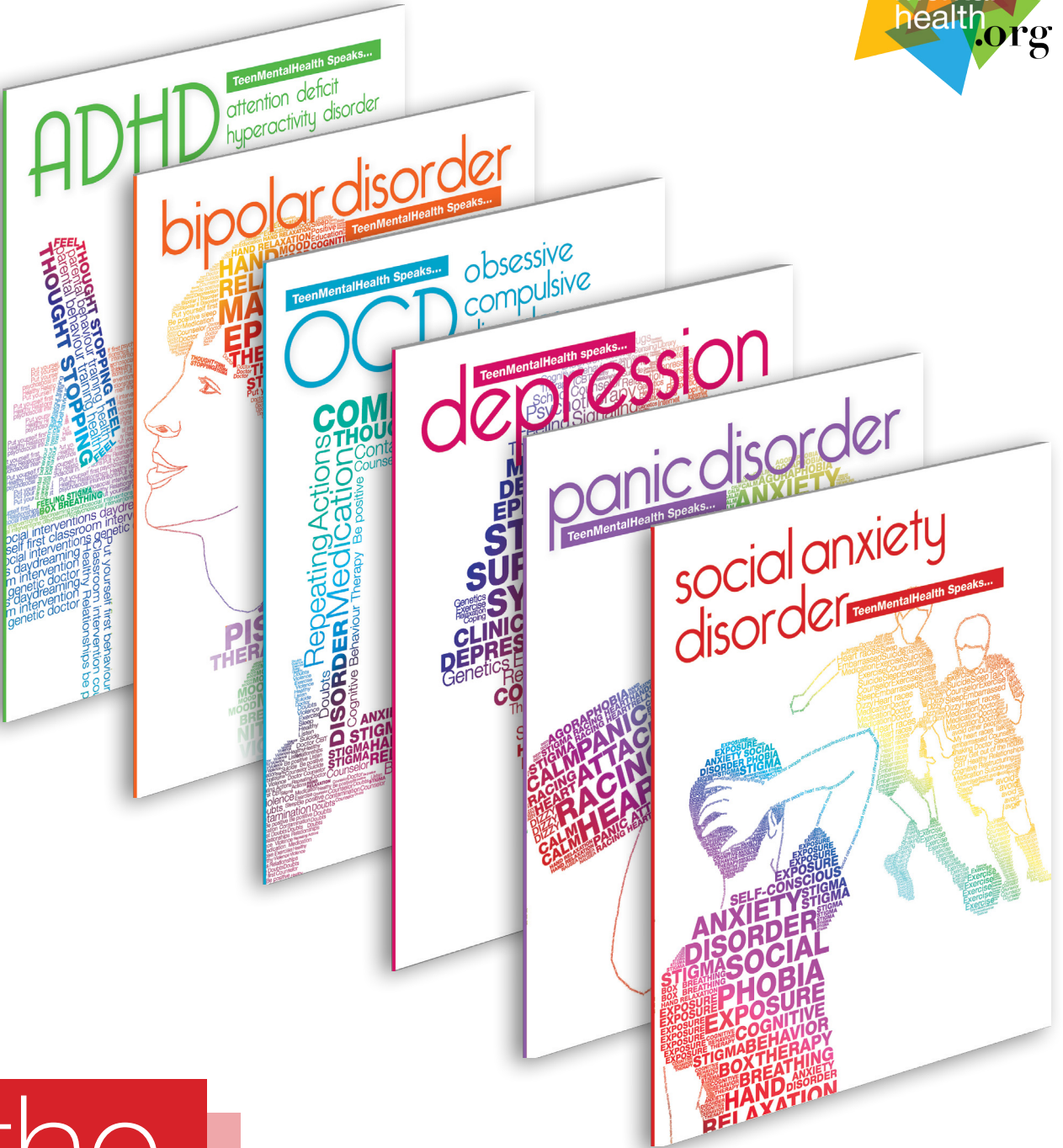
better mental health for you & your family

Support yourself and your family members in better understanding mental disorders and how to deal with them. If you have a mental disorder, are supporting a family member with one or are interested in how you can support a friend and their family, the Family Pack can help.









the  
full picture!