

## Children – Social Phobia

What is social phobia?

- Marked and persistent fear of one or more performance situations where the child is exposed to unfamiliar people or to possible scrutiny by others
- Exposure to feared situation provokes anxiety, may cause panic attack
- Feared situations are avoided or faced with intense anxiety or distress

What impact does it have on a child who has social phobia?

- School refusal
- Academic may be affected by school refusal
- Paranoid
- Trembles even before meeting people
- Cowers behind furniture
- Obvious distress
- May not be able to socialise
- Develop inferiority complex
- Cold sweat

How can parents distinguish between shyness and social phobia in their children?

Usually, when a child has social phobia, the avoidance, anxious anticipation and distress interferes significantly with the child's:

- Normal routine
- Academic functioning
- Social activities and relationship
- There is a marked distress about having the phobia

What can parents do to help their children overcome social phobia?

Parents are encouraged not to:

- Scold the child
- Belittle the child and think that it is “reverse psychology”
- Mock the child as he would probably be facing that in school
- Be frustrated with him as he would feel more frustrated
- Say that he is “crazy” as it would affect his perception when brought to the specialist

Parents are encouraged to:

- Seek treatment for the child
- Gently coax your child
- Find out if he behaves in this manner across all situations or only during certain situations. This would help the psychologist zoom in on the right treatment
- Have a chat with the school. Sometimes, a third party that can be trusted may help the child see that social interaction is not “scary”
- Have a chat with parents with young children to determine if your child’s behaviour is acceptable or over the top

If you wish to seek more help from specialists, The Therapy Room, led by Geraldine Tan, the principal psychologist, and run by a team of psychologists, is able to help with the ample experiences they have in working with children with social phobia. The psychologists in The Therapy Room specialise in art and play therapy which helps a child to verbalise his or her fear. In addition, the psychologists are experienced in conducting therapeutic interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy to help the child. It is important to remember that the phobia is not the child’s fault and social phobia can be treated. Please feel free to click [here](#) to contact us and find out more.

Similarly, in the preschool setting, how can the teacher recognise social phobia in a student and how can she help too?

If the teacher faces a child that cries all the time, hide under the table and is inconsolable, the teacher is encouraged to:

- Establish if the child has any other difficulties such as learning disabilities or other medical conditions
- Talk to the parents to find out if the child behaves in this manner only in the school environment or his behaviour is pervasive across all social situations
- Use a gentle tone
- Remove the child gently from the social situation and place him in one that is less frightening – for example, in a quiet room.