



What does social anxiety in teens feel like?

Mike, 15, has always seemed like a loner. At school he sits by himself in the lunchroom, and he has no friends, although no-one particularly dislikes him. He never initiates conversations with his fellow students, and when someone tries to initiate a conversation with him, he looks at the floor and speaks very quietly. He always seems to be on the outside looking in with the kids in his class. One night recently when he needed to call a fellow student to work on a group assignment, his mother noticed that he agonized over making the call for hours and seemed extremely anxious at the thought of it. He often gets stomach aches and extremely sweaty when called to the blackboard or asked to read in class. His parents have always just thought that he was shy, but they are beginning to wonder if something else might be going on.

Mike is suffering from social anxiety disorder. Generally speaking, social anxiety disorder is an intense fear of social and performance situations, and includes fear of initiating conversations, performing in front of an audience, unstructured activities amongst peers, inviting people to get together, and speaking in class. Teens whose lives are affected by social anxiety disorder can be severely debilitated by the disease. Some signs that your teen might be suffering with the disorder include:

- discomfort, passivity, and hesitation when the centre of attention
- avoidance of initiating conversations, performing, calling classmates on the telephone for needed information, and ordering food in restaurants
- little to no interaction with peers
- hanging out on the fringes of the group or in isolation
- sitting alone at lunch, in the library, or separating from the group during meetings
- avoiding eye contact or mumbling when speaking to others
- overly worried about negative evaluation, embarrassment, or possible humiliation
- problems when speaking in public, reading aloud, or being called on in class

When a teen with social anxiety disorder is faced with uncomfortable situations, they often experience sweating, racing heart, stomach discomfort, dizziness, and the uncontrollable urge to cry. Because their discomfort leads them to isolate and avoid certain situations, social anxiety disorder disrupts their ability to lead a normal life.