
History of Research into Social Anxiety: Cognitive-Behavioral Group Treatment

Much of the work on the psychological treatment for Social Anxiety began in the 1980s with Dr. Richard Heimberg and his colleagues. They began researching a cognitive-behavioral group therapy program to treat social anxiety disorder. Heimberg and his research teams spent over a decade publishing journal articles on these cognitive-behavioral group therapy programs.

This provided a bare-bones outline of the type of CBT we do at the Social Anxiety Institute. This kind of therapy involves the use of role-playing to help get people get accustomed to new social situations, and to experience some perspective on what their abilities really are – what is actually rational.

The research is clear on these issues today, with tens of thousands of research articles attesting to its validity.



Richard Heimberg, Ph.D

The big problem, as we've talked about, is with the lack of available therapeutic services. It is hard to find therapists who understand social anxiety and even harder to find therapists who know how to treat it. To be fair, therapy for social anxiety is a much more complicated type of therapy than the "see a patient every hour" type of practice.

There is much less financial reward involved in this kind of treatment and there are many more headaches. That may be part of the reason that there are very few clinicians who are putting the available research into practice. Until the insurance regulations are changed, there is no way to bill insurance companies for social anxiety sessions.

This would help other people get into therapy, and would save the insurance companies money because you don't need treatment forever. Overcoming social anxiety makes you your own therapist as times goes by. CBT group therapy for social anxiety changes people's lives and is the most cost-efficient way to treat social anxiety.

Out of all the major mental health disorders, people are the most resistant or avoidant to treatment for social anxiety disorder. You and I see this is illogical, but even some people learn

the facts about how the groups are run, they hear the word “group” and their defenses go up, leaving them too afraid to even consider treatment for social anxiety.

If the demographic data are anywhere near right, for the vast majority of people, social anxiety disorder becomes a chronic, lifetime condition. They live and die with the disorder, never experiencing a day of rest or peace.

This disorder is one of the worst conditions a person can have, yet it is also one of the disorders that can be completely changed. People CAN and do get over social anxiety. Not many have heard this message and realized what this means for their life.

At some point, people begin getting accustomed to living with it. It seems like the easiest thing to do. The path of least resistance is to do nothing. They’ve been to many doctors and therapists before, and it’s never helped. So, they give up. This is a normal human reaction, but it’s very unfortunate because help is available, even if it is far and in between.

Still, it’s easier to do nothing – even if it means your entire life is ruined. People think they can always start therapy tomorrow or next week, so they’ll do it then. Or, they reason, maybe I’ll grow out of it, and figure this out on my own. They wait around thinking that in time that magically they’ll feel a little less anxious, they will have more money, they will get married, and they’ll be farther along in life.

But social anxiety prevents most of that from ever happening.

Procrastinating about therapy sets many people’s progress back, and we should encourage them to get going because their entire life is at stake. The best time for anyone to start is now.