Your child’s self-confidence plays a major role in his or her success in school...and on into adulthood. Social anxiety is one of the most devastating destroyers of self-confidence. Negative symptoms often start during adolescence. Symptoms can come on suddenly, or can be an intensification of pre-existing shyness. If left untreated, your child’s future may be inhibited by a fear of interacting with others. You could be about to take one of the most important actions to help your child. Contact Fred Hillebert at Hagerstown Counseling for details.

Cognitive–Behavioral Group Therapy (CBGT)

CBGT is the most effective form of therapy in the treatment of social anxiety. In the CBGT group, the therapist acts as a teacher and a coach. The CBGT model helps the members to identify negative beliefs and thoughts relating to their social performance. The therapist then works with group members to create a list of feared social encounters. During group sessions, members have opportunities to engage in role plays, that simulate the feared encounters. Members choose challenging social experiments to do between sessions. A workbook is included and written homework is assigned. Social skills and relaxation techniques are taught.

GROUP THERAPY for SOCIAL ANXIETY

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Social anxiety, also known as social phobia, is an extreme fear of being observed, humiliated and/or negatively judged by an individual or group. The fear of humiliation begins with thoughts that a mistake will be made in public, or that others will notice the physical reaction to observation, such as blushing, sweating, shaking, or a trembling voice.

Teens with social anxiety tend to avoid most areas of social performance, including class presentations, eating in public, and test taking. Occasionally, an adolescent will be able to perform publicly in a role, for example, a musician, but will be terrified when expected to “be himself”.

The socially anxious teenager is painfully aware that his or her reactions to being observed are unusual and excessive.

As a way to cope with social anxiety, teens often withdraw from others, appear aloof, report physical illness, and may refuse to go to school.

Finally, socially anxious teens may find acceptance from peers who value antisocial behaviors, such as drug use and juvenile delinquency.

Isn’t my child just shy?
Shyness is a personality trait that relates to how quickly one adjusts to new social situations. A shy child may be slow to warm up to a new social environment, but eventually becomes comfortable. Teens with social anxiety avoid almost any social interaction, including familiar ones such as lunchtime in the cafeteria.

Is it really such a bad thing?
Yes. Research shows that, in teens, social anxiety often shows up before depression. It is not clear that one causes the other, but the lowered self-esteem created by social anxiety sets a fertile ground for depression. Drug and alcohol abuse often follows social anxiety. Many teens attempt to cope with the stress of social anxiety by using mood altering drugs. Social anxiety is the leading reason why teens refuse to go to school. While common wisdom blames school refusal on drugs, often it is social anxiety that leads to drug use and school refusal. Treating the drug use without treating the social anxiety is a recipe for failure. Teens with untreated social anxiety are more likely to drop out of high school. As adults, people with social anxiety are more likely to have problems keeping jobs and becoming financially independent. Untreated social anxiety makes meeting a potential marriage partner more difficult.

Don’t kids grow out of it?
Most don’t. Without professional help, social anxiety is very likely to continue throughout your child’s life, effecting his or her choice of careers, level of confidence, and overall happiness.

Can Therapy Help?
Yes, but only in a group format. Individual therapy yields disappointing results. The reason is that the one-to-one format with a therapist is easier for the teen to handle than meeting with his or her peers. The proven cure for social anxiety is repeated and prolonged professionally guided exposure to the feared situations. Group therapy provides the immediate exposure necessary to facilitate the most rapid change.

Who I Am
My name is Fred Hillebert. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and a Licensed Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor in the State of Maryland. As a therapist, I have worked with middle- and high school-aged youth, both in my office and at the schools. I have an excellent track record of working with the adolescent, the parents, and the school.

The Details
Each new group runs for three months, meeting twice a week for the first two weeks and then once a week thereafter. Group sessions are 90 minutes long. Each student receives a 90 minute private assessment that requires parental attendance and input. During the run of the group, the therapist will hold two group parent meetings without the attendance of the student. The therapist is available for one private session with the student and/or parent(s), should that be necessary. The cost of the program is $685, which includes a workbook and handouts for participants. Payment can be divided