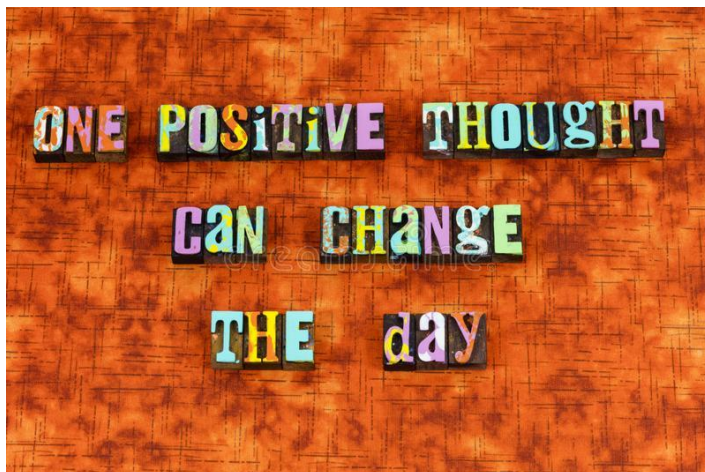




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This Pandemic is a Good Time to Face Your Social Anxiety

Are you secretly relieved that social distancing is giving you a built-in excuse? Few social demands, fewer social gatherings, cancelled group activities?

Remember how you used to feel when you were invited somewhere? All kinds of things went through your head as your discomfort grew:

How many people will be there?

I prefer one-on-one.

I'd rather be alone.

I don't like being in a group.

I don't want to go.

Most people enjoy parties, reunions, conferences, and group activities of all kinds. But there's a fairly large subset of people who feel so exquisitely uncomfortable in a group that all they can think about is:

When can I escape?

How many times have you thought, or said, one of the sentences above? If your answer is, "Many," I want to assure you that you are not alone. Being in a group requires a different level of confidence and different social skills than spending time with someone one-on-one.

Having talked with countless numbers of folks who avoid groups, I can say with confidence that most likely it's not the group itself that you're avoiding.

Actually, you're avoiding a particular feeling or set of feelings that you have when you're in a group.

Here are some of the feelings described over the years by folks who are uncomfortable in groups:

- Left out
- Trapped
- Lost
- Overlooked
- Freaked out
- Anxious
- Sad

- Ignored
- Judged
- Panicked
- Confused
- Self-conscious
- Alone
- Invisible
- Inferior

What causes these feelings? What is it about being among a number of people that would cause a person to have any of these uncomfortable emotions? Is it a result of anxiety or depression? A social phobia? Is it a weakness or a fault?

Sure, some of these can be possible. Depression can make you feel like isolating yourself, and anxiety or social phobia can make you too nervous to enjoy the company of others.

But if you're reading this looking for answers, I want you to dispose of the idea that your discomfort is a result of personal weakness or fault. Neither of those is the answer.

And now I'd like to give you a far better explanation than any of those. Chances are high that your discomfort in groups is caused by one of three factors.

3 Reasons You May Be Uncomfortable or Anxious in Groups of People

The prevailing feeling in your first group. And by this, I mean your family group. I have seen that those who grow up feeling uncomfortable in their family group often carry those uncomfortable feelings with them. So think back to when you were growing up. When your family was together did you feel ignored? Overlooked? Left out? Alone? Invisible? (All of those feelings are typically a result of Childhood Emotional Neglect or CEN). Or did you feel trapped? Inferior? Targeted? Were you constantly preparing for some unpredictable eruption of anger or erratic behaviour of a family member? Whatever your prevailing feelings were, you naturally carry them forward into your adult life. These old feelings then arise in situations that mimic the family experience. Like being in a group.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy. Research has shown that when we expect people to treat us a certain way, we can unwittingly pull for it from other people. We actually unconsciously bring it upon ourselves. In a landmark study, it was shown that children who were labelled and treated as extra smart by their teachers actually acted smarter, and did better in school, regardless of what their IQ truly was (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Since 1968 it's been discovered that self-fulfilling prophecy happens in many different ways and in interpersonal arenas of all kinds. So expect to be treated as an outsider by a group of people, and you may actually bring about exclusionary behaviour in the people around you.

The Fatal Flaw. The Fatal Flaw is a feeling that something is wrong with you. It's a sense of being different; of being missing some vital ingredient that everyone else seems to have. A surprisingly large number of people walk around with this feeling. It can lie there, under the surface, making you feel on the outside at social events both professional and personal. The Fatal Flaw can make you feel you don't belong, even when you really, really do. It has the power to make you avoid group situations.

Notice that none of these potential causes of your discomfort are a product of the group itself. The actual people in the actual group are not the problem. The problem is a feeling that you have; a feeling that you bring with you wherever you go.

And now the good news.

You can't control other people (except perhaps unconsciously, thanks to Self-Fulfilling Prophecy). But you can control your feelings. Feelings can be managed. And now, during the pandemic, while the pressure is off, it's an excellent time to start working on your discomfort!

Steps to Overcome Your Discomfort in Groups

Come to grips with the true nature of your discomfort. The people are not the problem. It's a feeling inside of you that's the problem. Is it Cause #1, 2, or 3 above? Or

is it a mixture of several? Understanding what you're truly bothered by, and why, is a powerful Step One toward resolving it.

Put words to your uncomfortable feeling. Choose them from the list above and/or add your own. Naming a feeling instantly reduces its power.

Talk with a trusted person about the feeling and how it makes you want to avoid group events. If you don't feel comfortable talking with a friend or family member, talk with a therapist about it. Sharing your feeling with another person will even further reduce its power over you.

Start exposing yourself to group situations a little at a time, with support.

Before you go to the group event, set an amount of time you will be there. Remind yourself that you have to manage your feeling while you are there. Talk back to the feeling when you feel it:

These people are fine. They're not the problem. You're an adult, and no one in this group can hurt you. You're a good person and you belong here. It doesn't matter what other people think. It's just a feeling. It's old, and you don't need it anymore. You're a person, on equal footing with everyone else here. And you matter.

Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN): Happens when your parents fail to respond enough to your emotions as they raise you.

Adults who were emotionally neglected in childhood can be quite perfectionistic and hard on themselves. But for many, it does not stop there.

Why? Because the messages of Childhood Emotional Neglect run deep. They go to the heart of the child and stay there for a lifetime. They not only damage your ability to understand and trust your own feelings, but they also damage your ability to understand and trust yourself.

The messages of CEN are like invisible infusions of guilt and shame that happen every day in the life of the child.

The First Guilt/Shame Message of Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN): No one wants to see your feelings.

When, because of emotional neglect, children receive the message from their parents that their feelings are a burden, excessive, or simply *wrong*, they take a highly effective, adaptive action. They naturally push their emotions down, under the surface so that they will trouble no one.

Believe it or not, this brilliant strategy usually works quite well. As a child, you become un-sad, un-angry, un-needy, and overall unemotional so that your parents are less bothered or burdened by you. Life becomes easier in the family, but life inside you becomes deeply lonely.

The Second Guilt/Shame Message of Childhood

Emotional Neglect (CEN): Your feelings are shameful.

As a child of CEN, you are set up to feel, on some deep level for your entire life, that you are a burden, excessive, or somehow wrong.

Because Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN) affects your relationship with your own feelings, it sets you up to feel guilty and ashamed for the very personal, inescapable human experience of having feelings.

It feels **wrong** to feel your feelings, and wrong to let others see your feelings. And it feels **right** to hide your feelings. You may even try not to have feelings at all. Yet your feelings are the most deeply personal, biological expression of your true self. They will not be denied.

Trying to deny your feelings is like the classic little Dutch boy trying to block the hole in the dike with his finger. It may feel like it works temporarily, but those feelings just keep coming and growing and pressurizing, like the water behind the dike. Being unable to control them and stop them altogether makes you feel weak and incompetent. And ashamed.

The Third Guilt/Shame Message of Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN): There is something wrong with you.

Since many emotionally neglected adults were not actively mistreated in childhood, they may remember their childhoods as fairly happy and carefree. When they look back on their childhoods for an explanation for their issues and struggles in their adult lives, they can't

pinpoint any incidents or factors to explain their current problems.

Between a “happy childhood” and inexplicable emotions, they are left with the assumption that some deep part of themselves is seriously amiss. “It’s my own fault. Something is wrong with me,” is a natural conclusion.

Signs and Signals of CEN-Induced Guilt and Shame – From the Book *Running on Empty*

- **You sometimes feel emotionally numb**
- **You have a deep sense that something is wrong with you**
- **You feel that you are somehow different from other people**
- **You tend to push down feelings or avoid them**
- **You try to hide your feelings so others won’t see them**
- **You tend to feel inferior to others**
- **You believe you have no excuse for not being happier in your life**

The Antidote For Your Guilt & Shame

I hope that as you read the Guilt/Shame messages above, you realized one glaring fact about them: THEY ARE ALL FALSE!

Now please read the three vital and true remedies below. If you absorb them and own them and follow

them, they will change how you feel about yourself and your life.

Feelings are not subject to the laws of right and wrong.

You cannot choose your feelings because they're literally wired into your biology. It is essential to accept what you feel because that must be done before you can manage what you feel.

Your feelings are a sign of your health and strength.

Your emotions are the opposite of a sign of weakness. When others see what you feel, they instantly connect with you. And when others know your feelings they have an opportunity to respond to your true self. That is powerful.

There is nothing wrong with you. The only thing wrong with you is the message of CEN that your child self internalized. And you share those same messages with millions of other people. You are an intact, healthy person who can learn and change your beliefs, learn to manage your emotions, let go of your guilt and shame, and heal.

Is it hard for you to say, "No?" Do you feel the need to explain yourself and give reasons followed by excuses followed by more reasons? Would you be surprised if told you that you do not need to give a reason? All the people of the world can be divided into two groups: those who can say "no" easily, and those who cannot.

To the folks in the first group, it's difficult to imagine why anyone would have a problem with it. Like the famous line from the old movie, *To Have or To Have Not*, "You know how to whistle, don't you Steve? You just put your lips together and blow," people in the first group might say, "What's so hard about it? Start with N, and end with O."

But for many, many people, it's just not that simple. Saying "no" for them carries enormous baggage. This is especially true for those who grew up in households which offered them little opportunity to say no. This is a version of Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN).

4 Reasons it's Hard For You to Say No

Guilt: People who struggle with this often tell me that they feel guilty for hours after saying "no" to someone, even if that person's request was unreasonable. The guilt comes from feeling that they should always be helpful and willing

and that if they are not, then they are a bad person.

Low Self-worth: This is a general sense that you are not as important as other people. Your needs, your feelings, come second. Others' needs and feelings are more deserving than your own. You don't have the right to put your own before theirs.

Lack of Skill: If you have spent your entire life always saying “yes,” then you may not know how to say anything different. The idea of saying no may feel foreign and just plain wrong. How do you do it? How do you say it?

False Belief: This is a false idea that you have to give a reason for saying no. If a friend asks you to pick up her dry-cleaning, do you have to explain to her the reasons why you can’t do it? Do you have a good excuse? This false belief often leads to long, detailed, unnecessary explanations.

4 Principles For Saying No

All of the people in your life have every right to ask you for anything. In return, you have every right to say “no.” Your guilt will dissipate if you understand and accept your true rights.

Your needs and feelings are every bit as important as everyone else’s. You are the guardian of your own feelings and needs. You have a responsibility to yourself to prioritize them.

Saying “no” does not involve skill. It only involves a willingness to make yourself uncomfortable. The more you do it, the easier it will feel; not because you learned

how to do it, but because you're getting accustomed to it.

You do not need to give a reason. An extension of your right to say "no" is that you can do so with no explanation, no excuse. "I'm sorry, I can't," "I'm not able to do it," or just simply, "No," are all it takes.

**Astronomy how my hobby helped me through my darkness
the days looking at dark skies**

Loneliness vs Being alone

I felt lonely all my life because nobody ever made me feel secure, loved, accepted, understood, or wanted.

Being Alone

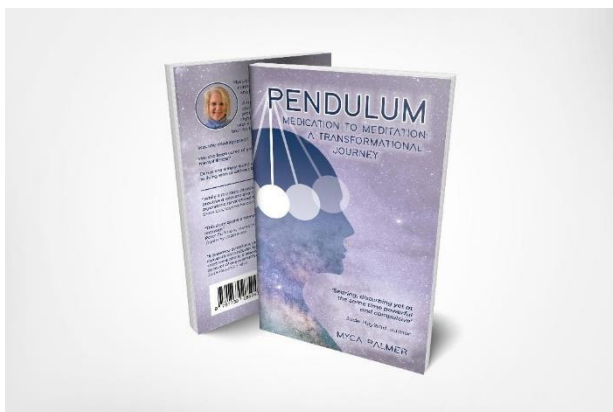
An overjoyed feeling of being lonely but also being safe

When I was a child aged 4, I was put in a coal bunker for up to two days and nights at a time for just existing and the only thing I had to focus on while in there was the lock on the door and the moon which I saw through a small window. The moon was my only friend and would watch over me and give me light when everything else surrounding me was just an empty darkness. The moon I focused on in my mind and escaped in my imagination when the bad things were

happening, I was sat on the moon in a deck chair and I was not in my body experiencing the pain. The voices in my mind tried to stop me from going to my safe world that I had created by telling me my mum would catch me and things would be much worse. I also had the moons light helping me find the food that I had hidden in the coal shining down on me so I could always find it. The moon is still especially important to me now feeding my love of Astronomy and even now giving me something to focus on when times are bad.

I was the child that never played with others laughed or run with them or had a friend or siblings and could never be part of a crowd. Inside I was screaming out loud the pain could be seen in my eyes, but no one took any notice they did they not care. Why I asked myself? Or were they too busy to care. They had their own life's too busy to notice a child in turmoil. I wanted to run up to someone who had a kind face could they help me? would they help? or would they tell my mum my darkest secrets? I felt the guilt was all my own and there was nothing I could do about it. I was with someone I trusted and loved when it began her anger was my pain. Hear my story it may disgust you even frighten you. but please listen to me because this could have been you. My sanctuary was the Sky, Moon, Planets and Stars as this was the only light I had in a life of darkness and neglect all that space to run free explore not just in my mind but this was real, outside my world of pain there were other worlds I could use my imagination to focus on when I couldn't or didn't have anything to focus on in my world of pain.

Kate Crawford



Pendulum is a memoir full of courage, grit, authenticity and wisdom which challenges the current methods for diagnosing, treating and living with mental illness. The author, Myca, was catapulted straight in to a psychiatric hospital when she first asked for help from a doctor, as an exhausted mum of three young children. The next 12 years saw her hospitalised thirteen times, given ECT, copious amounts of medication and a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. One lonely winters night in 2013 Myca

was going to end her life but instead her life was completely transformed. Within eight months of that life changing night she came off all medication, quit drinking and was discharged from the mental health service, deemed to be 'fully recovered'.

2023 is Myca's ten year anniversary off all psychiatric medication and out the system. Her memoir is a celebration of this and explores alternatives she used to heal her troubled mind. It is a great reminder that life can change in an instant, both for better or worse, and that trusting your gut instinct, or intuition is paramount to any healing.

Maastricht Interview Training for Hearing Voices & Problematic Thought Beliefs & Paranoia Is available online and face to face from the National Paranoia Network. Other training available Working through Paranoia, Making Sense of Hearing Voices & Working with Childhood Trauma It can be delivered across the world for more information and costings Email enquiries@nationalparanoianetwork.org

Online Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Groups Join our online Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Group Meetings on ZOOM

Thursday 3pm -4.30pm with Paul Meeting ID
88460268952 Password 375878

Sundays: HVN USA on ZOOM 6:30p - 8:00p USA Time
with Cindee 11.30pm – 1.00 am UK Time Meeting ID
827 5463 8654 No Password Needed

Saturdays Texas USA HVN Meeting on ZOOM 10am-
11.30 USA Time with Paul 4pm-5.30pm UK Time
Meeting ID 83079149464 No Password Needed

Monday Sheffield Hearing Voices & Paranoia
Support Group with Emma & Lyn at The Gardner's
Rest Neepsend Lane Sheffield S3 8AT 11am-12pm

**Online Hearing Voices Group in Ireland Facilitated by
Michael Ryan**

Hearing Voices Group Ireland

A group for people who hear voices or experience
paranoia and unusual beliefs, on Zoom

Facilitated by Michael Ryan

Every Sunday @ 4pm

Zoom Link <https://us02web.zoom.web/j/89201253186>

Email: vhmichael9345@gmail.com

With enquiries

Families/friends can contact
families@usahearingvoices.org

For support groups

Unusual Beliefs Group St Mungos

Every Thursday 2.30-3.30

93 Shirland Road, London W9 2EL

Contact Claire Taylor (tayloh15@lsbu.ac.uk)

'Talking Heads' Support Group runs on every first
Tuesday of the month at Brunswick Centre, Strand
Close, off Beverley Road

Hull, HU2 9DB from 3pm – 4:30pm. People with
voices/visions and unusual beliefs are welcome

Contact Dan 07816 864727

