

Responding to the needs of a person experiencing social anxiety disorder

Ann-Marie's story

Ann-Marie is a 47 year old woman who is married to David, 53. David is a police officer and works a lot of night shifts. They have two children, Bethany and Joshua who no longer live at home. Ann-Marie has worked part-time for the last 20 years in a small accounting firm as a personal assistant.

Ann-Marie describes a small group of close friends that date from when their children were all at school together, but they keep in touch mainly through social media. She describes herself as very focused on home. She has a number of interests including quilting and art (and was talented at this at school) but does not have involvement with any groups as she feels that would require talking to a lot of people. She has always been shy and prefers to have minimal contact with people. Ann-Marie doesn't consider herself to be a social person, but she would like to be able to participate in local art and craft groups she's aware of.

As a young girl her father was very strict and often yelled at her if she didn't do things the way he liked them. One of her regular chores was setting the table for dinner every night.

She could never seem to do it right and her father would regularly criticize her. Ann-Marie was not a high-achiever at school, she never felt comfortable at school and found herself worrying about what everyone was thinking about her rather than focusing on her work. When she did focus on her work she always questioned if she was doing it right. If teachers asked her to talk to the class she became so anxious that she felt shaky and sick in the stomach, and her mind would go blank such that even when she knew the answer she couldn't reply. She experienced this as mortifying.

The one talent she could acknowledge in herself was her artistic ability, and she had one very encouraging teacher. However, she never felt there was any way she would be able to pursue this interest, for example, by attending art school.

Ann-Marie has found over the years that she feels more comfortable if she has a quiet life. Whenever she has to go somewhere that is busy like the supermarket or a function she finds herself sweating, shaking, feeling nauseous and very tense around her neck, often leading to migraines. She experiences

this even when she just thinks about going to busy places or socialising. Despite this, when her husband has work functions that she is expected to go to she puts in the effort but rarely sleeps well the night before and finds herself going over and over in her mind the things she said for at least a week after the event. She finds all of this over-thinking exhausting and often feels very low for weeks on end. Browsing on the web she once found advice about “facing your fears”, but she is demoralized that no matter how hard she pushes herself, it never gets any easier. In fact, it might even be getting harder.

At the last two functions, she has found herself drinking more than normal as it calms her nerves. Recently, David said to Ann-Marie she should go to her doctor to ask for help because he is concerned that she has become more quiet and anxious than usual. He also told her he is worried about how much she is drinking lately.