

# THE SOCIAL ANXIETY PANDEMIC



## HOW COVID-19 HAS AFFECTED ONLINE LEARNING

*By Marie Copsey*

March 2020, the world saw the largest threat to life expectancy in our lifetimes. This has affected not just the way we live but how we learn.

Coronavirus known as Covid-19 has contributed to those people who have pre-existing emotional difficulties impacting their social anxiety and mental health due to the risks of heightened loneliness and social isolation from social distancing, increased fears of infection, the virus' highly contagious nature and poor emotional adjustment to the inherently uncontrollable and unpredictable nature of the pandemic and its myriad stressors.



## COVID-19 MADE SOCIAL ANXIETY WORSE

I interviewed a person impacted by social anxiety, whom I asked three questions. One question was whether they had experienced social anxiety at any point. The person explained that social anxiety is more of a problem as an adult; it was more general as a teenager. The individual gave an example of being invited to a work party and expressed that it was overwhelming to be around so many people. I asked if he individual thought the global pandemic has made her social anxiety worse, better or has it been about the same. The individual explained that “COVID-19 has increased social anxiety no matter if a person has it or never experienced any anxiety before”. The individual went on to explain that “the lockdown periods of where people were told to isolate then mixing with people then lockdown came, and no one was allowed to see anyone”.

I asked the individual if she had any relatives that suffered from social anxiety, and she mentioned that she has a sister with social anxiety and one without. She spoke about her two siblings; one is very sociable and hates everything online as she craves the social environment and interaction. The other sibling is the total opposite, as she is too anxious and experiences social anxiety, but her social anxiety has worsened due to COVID-19. She expressed that she worries about the sibling with social anxiety about everything. People with social anxiety could now struggle in a workplace environment, meet people and make friends due to COVID-19.



# 34% NOT COPING WELL WITH COVID-19

According to [Mental Health Foundation](#), 34% of individuals with pre-existing mental health difficulties were not coping well or not at all compared to the 14% of the population. They also stated that, [46% of individuals](#) were more worried of the coronavirus because it may make their existing mental health condition worse.

However, there have been some benefits for those with social anxiety during the global pandemic. Some recognise how it has helped bring people [closer online](#). In care home run by Southampton City Council, they have given iPads to their residents so they can keep in contact with their family.

It has enabled people to communicate from the familiar surroundings of their home. It allows those [dating](#) to get to know people for longer before making an informed choice whether to meet up. If you find yourself suffering from social anxiety there is help. There are organisations that can help you take a breather, speak to someone or recommend strategies to help manage it. The NHS can give a general overview of social anxiety and shares some [organisations](#) like Social Anxiety UK, Young Minds and Anxiety UK who offer specialist advice.