

## ***Understanding Social Anxiety in Students***

By Rabbi Dovid Felt, PhD

Even once routines are established, ongoing changes—shifting expectations, new social dynamics, or evolving academic demands—can continue to intensify social anxiety. Students may avoid eye contact, hesitate to speak, stick close to adults, complain of headaches or stomachaches, or even refuse to go to school. These behaviors aren't simply "acting out" or being difficult—they're signs of real inner fear.

Parents and educators play a crucial role in noticing and supporting students with social anxiety. Recognizing that a child's withdrawal isn't laziness, but a coping strategy, is the first step. Gentle encouragement, predictable routines, and celebrating small social wins can help ease pressure. Classrooms that normalize mistakes, offer flexible ways to participate, and create safe spaces for quieter students make a big difference. Consistent communication with school counselors ensures support continues both at home and at school.

### ***Practical Tips to Support Students***

Here are some simple strategies to help children navigate social anxiety as the school year continues:

- Start small: Begin with brief, manageable social interactions and gradually take on more challenging situations.
- Teach coping skills: Deep breathing, mindfulness, and positive self-talk can help children handle anxious moments.
- Set realistic expectations: Remind children that it's okay to feel nervous and that not every interaction has to be perfect.
- Identify triggers: Notice which situations or thoughts increase anxiety and plan ways to manage them.
- Highlight strengths: Point out a child's talents and positive qualities to build confidence.
- Limit social media comparisons: Explain that online portrayals often don't reflect reality, which can worsen anxiety.
- Prioritize self-care: Encourage good sleep, nourishing foods, and enjoyable activities to help manage stress.

- Seek professional support if needed: If anxiety is affecting daily life, a counselor or therapist specializing in anxiety can provide tailored strategies and encouragement.

To learn how to bring the ***Steps for Success*** toolkit to your school, please contact Rabbi Dr. Dovid Felt, Director of School-Based Services, 516-371-3250 x 111 or [rdfelt@madraigos.org](mailto:rdfelt@madraigos.org)