MENTAL HEALTH MINUTE

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Navigating Social Anxiety in the Summer

Summer is a time for sunshine, outdoor activities and social gatherings, with ample opportunities to unwind and connect with others. However, for those experiencing social anxiety, these gatherings can be intimidating. There are several key reasons why social anxiety may spike during the summer:

- **Summer-onset seasonal affective disorder (SAD)**— Unlike the more commonly known "winter blues," some people experience SAD during the summer.

- **Social overload**—Summer often brings a packed social calendar filled with parties, barbecues, beach outings and other events.

- **Lack of routine**—The unstructured nature of summer can disrupt daily routines, leading to increased anxiety.

- **Fear of missing out (FOMO)**—Social media amplifies FOMO as people post and talk about their summer adventures.

Managing Social Anxiety

While summer social events can be daunting for those with social anxiety, it's still possible to enjoy the season. Consider these strategies for navigating social anxiety:

- **Plan ahead**. If you have a social event coming up, familiarize yourself with the venue and attendees.

- **Set boundaries.** It's OK to say no to events if you feel overwhelmed.

- **Focus on enjoyable activities.** Engage in summer activities that truly bring you peace and joy.

- **Practice relaxation techniques.** Deep breathing, meditation or yoga can help manage anxiety symptoms and provide a sense of calm.

- **Participate in social situations gradually.** For events or large groups of people that stress you out, it's OK to start with smaller, low-pressure gatherings and work your way up to larger events.

- **Challenge negative thoughts.** Social anxiety often stems from negative thoughts, so remind yourself of your strengths and past positive social experiences.

With a bit of effort and self-compassion, you can enjoy the summer months in a way that feels comfortable and fulfilling for you.

Taking a Social Media Break for Your Well-being

There are risks to mental health from social media use, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Such risks include depression, social comparison, cyberbullying, exposure to harmful content and sleep disruption. Social media use also has the potential to worsen loneliness, anxiety and self-worth. Despite this, many people turn to social media out of habit or to relax.

Consider the following tips for reducing social media use:

- **Find alternative sources of relaxation.** If you turn to social media to help you unwind, try exchanging it for another activity, such as walking, reading, crafting, listening to music, baking, yoga, meditating or playing with a pet.

- **Try other ways to connect.** If you use social media to communicate with others, consider alternatives, like volunteering, calling friends or family, inviting people over for dinner, joining community clubs, chatting with neighbors or taking an exercise class.

- **Seek other means of entertainment.** Engage in other forms of entertainment. For example, try listening to podcasts, reading, learning something new, or going to a local museum or art show.

Some individuals may be able to spend a weekend offline, while others will need to detox from social media for a month to notice a positive change.

Setting Boundaries

For some, quitting social media altogether may be an unrealistic goal. Focus instead on creating a healthy relationship with social media by:

- Unfollowing accounts that leave you with negative emotions

- Deleting any negative comments or messages

- Striving not to compare yourself to others

- Protecting your energy and engaging when it matters

- Prioritizing your mental health

If social media hurts your mental health, take a break and try an alternative source of entertainment, connection and relaxation. For further guidance, contact a mental health professional.