

# XENOPHOBIA

## SYMPTOMS

- Avoiding situations involving people from national, religious, ethnic or cultural backgrounds (strangers) different to your own.
- Physical reactions such as sweating or tingling when in the presence of or thinking about strangers.
- Coping mechanisms such as making derogatory remarks about strangers, to make your own condition appear 'normal'.
- Making jokes about strangers to hide your nervousness or anxiety.
- In extreme cases, verbal abuse or violent acts towards strangers or individuals not suffering from xenophobia.

## TREATMENT

It is normal to feel embarrassed or unsure of how to interact with strangers. However if these feelings become overwhelming, last for more than two weeks or result in harm, consult a doctor.

The following techniques can help overcome Xenophobia:

- Gradually increasing your exposure to strangers can help diminish your anxiety.
- Imagining normal situations where strangers are present while practising relaxation techniques.
- A role-model or sympathetic mentor can help with encouragement and advice on appropriate reactions to situations involving unfamiliar people.

## CAUSES

Xenophobia is an irrational fear of strangers or foreigners and foreign things. It is also commonly known as "racism", but can also apply to fear of people from other religions, nationality, culture or ethnicity.

### Peer Pressure

Most individuals are reasonable and ethical people. However, when in groups each person may feel pressured to agree with and act on what they think is expected of them by the group. It is possible for each member of the group to have reasonable beliefs, yet still act unreasonably if each thinks the group expects xenophobic behaviour. Be the first of the group to reject xenophobia. You will probably find everyone else is relieved to be able to agree with you.

### Upbringing

If you were raised in a family or culture that suffered from xenophobia, chances are, you have xenophobia too. Sometimes we have been so deeply trained it doesn't even occur to us to question what we are doing. If you are reading this, you have already taken the first and most difficult step to curing xenophobia - asking the question, "Am I xenophobic?"

### Low Intelligence

A phobia is an 'irrational' fear, so it sometimes occurs simply due to poor reasoning skills. In most cases this is easily corrected through education. There is plenty of information about different nations, religions and cultures on the internet, at educational institutions and special purpose centres. You can also find information on how to overcome phobias and about critical thinking and reasoning.

### Empathetic Deficiency

Empathy is a natural human emotion enabling us to imagine how others feel and modify our behaviour to optimise overall well-being. A minority of sufferers have difficulty putting themselves 'in someone else's shoes', or may even enjoy causing suffering. This is known as 'psychopathy'. Another possibility is the feeling that it is you who are being persecuted and silenced for your beliefs about what is unfamiliar to you. This is known as 'psychosis'. Psychopathy and psychosis are serious conditions. If you think you may have these problems, see a trained psychologist immediately.

#### For more information:

- <http://www.google.com.au/search?q=xenophobia>
- <http://psychcentral.com/disorders/x34.htm>
- <http://psychcentral.com/disorders/x34t.htm>