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APA News Release

Date: April 9, 1998
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Social Phobias Found to Be Common Among Adults and Children, Says New Book

Phobias Range From Fear of Eating and Drinking In Public to Fear of Initiating Conversations and Using Public Restrooms

WASHINGTON - Social phobias -- the presence of extreme fear and/or avoidance of social situations -- is common in adults and children and is extremely debilitating, according to a newly released book, *Shy Children, Phobic Adults: Nature and Treatment of Social Phobia*, published by the American Psychological Association (APA).

"Children and adults suffer significant difficulties as a result of social phobia," said authors Deborah C. Beidel, Ph.D., and Samuel M. Turner, Ph.D., of the University of South Carolina. "Those with social phobia are plagued by the persistent fear that they will do something to embarrass themselves, say something stupid or otherwise appear inept or inferior to others that will result in others developing negative impressions of them."

Social phobia is a much more prevalent condition than once thought. Approximately, eight percent of adults and five percent of children suffer from social phobias at some time in their lives, according to the research cited in the book. Social phobia is the third most common mental disorder in the United States, with substance abuse and depression being more common.

"It is common for most people to feel some degree of anxiety or apprehension on a first date, attending a new school or going to a job interview," said Drs. Biedel and Turner. "Similarly, it is not uncommon for many people to feel butterflies in their stomach before speaking before a large group, but most adjust and feel comfortable once they begin. However, those with social phobia do not adjust and their nervousness actually increases, sometime to the extent that they are unable to verbalize. They can show signs of nervousness such as shaking, sweating, blushing or stammering and stuttering. The majority of social phobics show nervousness in most social situations including attending meetings, socializing informally, going out to dinner or attending parties."

"Children suffer both emotionally and developmentally from social phobia. They tend not to play with other children, do not develop normal friendships, appear unhappy, do not engage in organized activities such as sports teams and birthday parties and in extreme cases, may refuse to attend school. As a consequence of their social inhibition, these children do not develop the essential social skills necessary for normal social discourse. They frequently report feeling shy and sad, and in extreme cases may show some signs of depression," say the authors.

Social phobias run in families. Research suggests that genetics likely play a role in the development of some cases of social phobia. However, environmental factors play an equally important role. Some people develop social phobias because of traumatic social experiences - mind going blank when delivering a class presentation. Social phobia can

also develop from observing others with social phobia, and particularly significant others like parents, react to social situations with trepidation.

The authors discuss the latest research on effective psychological and pharmacological treatment for social phobias. They present numerous case studies drawn from case files which describe the syndrome of social phobia, how it can affect virtually every aspect of functioning and how it can be treated effectively.

Book: *Shy Children, Phobic Adults: Nature and Treatment of Social Phobia*, by Deborah C. Beidel, Ph.D., and Samuel M. Turner, Ph.D., University of South Carolina, 334 pages, \$39.95.

(Book Available to Press From the APA Public Affairs Office)

Both authors can be reached at (803) 852-4190

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