

# Social Media vs. Social Anxiety



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In the last issue of TILT, I wrote about how clients can use their smartphones and tablets to cognitively avoid their discomfort during exposure therapy for anxiety. In this article, I want to talk about how to integrate social media when you are helping clients overcome social anxiety.

According to the [Pew Research Institute](#), approximately 66% of Americans use various social media channels (mostly Facebook). People who are shy or socially anxious may spend more time observing their news feeds, rather than actively commenting, posting, retweeting, or liking what they see. I take full advantage of this fact

when designing behavioural experiments with my clients who are working on meeting new people or developing deeper connections with their friends and family.

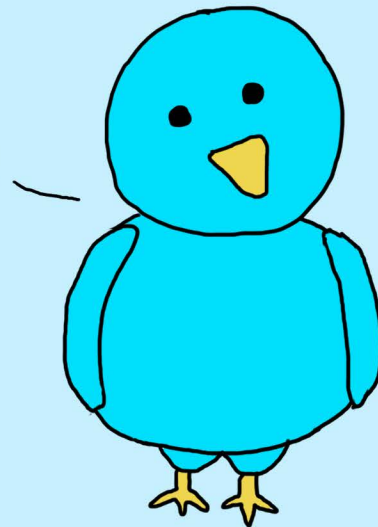
First, it is important to use a technique called [Assertive Defense of the Self](#) developed by Christine Padesky, where we generate and then role play a list of possible assertive responses to feared critical remarks. Once clients feel confident that they could cope with criticism or negative remarks, then we develop a plan to connect with others both off and online.

Here's a sample social anxiety hierarchy:

10 - Post a video on Youtube.

A critical, inner twitter bird is just one symptom of social media anxiety disorder.

If you tweet that, everyone will think that you're a twit!!!



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9 - Friend someone on Facebook.

8 - Post a status update on Facebook.

7 - Checking in on Facebook to tell people where you are having coffee.

6 - Comment on an acquaintance's status update.

5 - Comment on a friend's status update.

4 - Post on someone's wall.

3 - Retweet a tweet.

2 - Like someone's post.

1 - Share someone's funny photo.

0 - Read through one's newsfeed.

You follow the same basic rules as you would with any anxiety hierarchy, letting the client tell you how anxious they would feel from 0-10 and then planning behavioral experiments around the easier items. In the beginning, I usually stick to situations that are rated less than 4 out of 10 on an anxiety scale to ensure success and build confidence.

As a therapist, I love the extra options that using social media gives me when helping my anxious clients feel less anxious.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR/ ILLUSTRATOR:

*Christine Korol, Ph.D. is a cartoonist, psychologist in private practice in Calgary, Canada and the host/producer of a podcast on [WiredToWorry.com](http://WiredToWorry.com) that provides free online anxiety and stress reduction education videos.*