

## Blush flush? <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

I have many friends, but my problem is I can't say really funny or stupid things (as jokes) without getting embarrassed! And it wouldn't be so bad but my face turns really red for like, anything! The only people I can be silly around without getting embarrassed is my two best friends, but that's all!! Do you have any advice for me? And is there any way of not blushing or hiding it? Make-up usually doesn't help!! Thanx!

~blushes too easily~

## Answer

Dear blushes too easily,

You may be happy — and even relieved — to know that you are one of millions of people who share the "red-in-the-face" blues. Lots of people feel their cheeks, ears, nose, and even neck redden with heat when they feel excited or anxious. This reaction is our body's natural response to stimulation: your heart beats faster, you sweat, and you may even feel light-headed. Because of the increased blood flow through the tiny vessels under your skin, your face gets hot and turns scarlet.

It can certainly be unnerving to have your face go red during inopportune times. Some people feel their faces flare when they are about to give a speech, meet new people, and/or ask someone out. Others find that they feel embarrassed and blush when receiving compliments, praise, and/or criticism. Still others feel the telltale burn while arguing or sharing an idea or opinion that they feel passionate about.

Knowing what brings on your blushing — telling jokes and acting silly in your case — may help you to find ways of keeping your cool. Ask yourself a few questions. For example, are you nervous about trying to be funny, and then having your jokes flop? Do you feel pressure to be "the life of the party" when you'd really rather listen and connect quietly with other people? What helps you to feel comfortable when goofing around with your two best friends? If you do tell a joke around other people, and blush, what happens? While there's no magic cure to battle the blush itself (you're right, make-up usually doesn't work), there are things you can do to help

alleviate your feelings of embarrassment:

- Relax and take some deep, slow breaths.
- When you're alone at home, close your eyes and picture yourself telling jokes with ease. Imagine your friends laughing and enjoying your company. This is called rehearsal imagery.
- Actually practice! Very few people feel totally comfortable in all situations right from the get go. Also, you may still be developing your unique sense of humor and gauging how people respond to you.

Remember, as you brave going out on a limb more often, you may find that your anxiety decreases, your confidence grows, and your red cheeks fade. It might also help to remember that your face is probably not nearly as red as you fear it is. What feels like screaming scarlet to you may look more like a radiant glow to your companions. In fact, some of them may even envy your naturally rosy hue! Also, the more you worry about it, the longer and more severe the blush will be.

If your friends tease you because of your blushing, then you may want to let them know that it's not funny to you. It sounds as though you have two very good friends who don't care one bit whether your face turns purple, green, or blue. Those are the friends who could also help you to develop and bolster your self-confidence when speaking in front of others and meeting new people. If your fear of blushing is keeping you from attending parties or a dance, or from talking with your friends and making new ones, you may want to consult with a health care provider or someone else with whom you can discuss your concerns.

Try not to let the reds get you too blue!

Alice!

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