GUIDELINE

Anxiety and Stress

Scope (Staff): School Health
Scope (Area): CACH, WACHS

This document should be read in conjunction with this DISCLAIMER

Background

Anxiety is a term which describes a normal feeling people experience when faced with threat or danger, or when stressed. Feeling anxious is appropriate in certain situations and usually anxiety is felt for only a limited time. In contrast, people are diagnosed with a clinical anxiety disorder when their level of anxiety and feelings of panic are so extreme that it significantly interferes with daily life and stops them from doing what they want to do. There are different anxiety disorders which affect the way the person thinks, feels and behaves. Refer to (Appendix Two)

In Australia, one in 25 young people between the ages of 13 and 17 will experience an anxiety disorder in any given 12 month period. The onset of the anxiety disorder is more common between the ages of 15 and 20, with more women than men seeking treatment. Anxiety disorders can be triggered by a series of significant life events, and may also depend upon genetic factors, personality and learnt responses.

General principles

Most young people will experience some level of non-clinical stress and anxiety during their school years. Feelings of stress and anxiety can be caused by external situations such as exams, or internal thoughts and feelings. All young people are different; some will become highly stressed about situations which do not worry others. Stress can also be cumulative.

Most young people are able to learn skills to cope with a certain amount of stress and anxiety. However high levels can be harmful, for example if the young person is experiencing a situation which is too significant to manage, or if there are too many smaller stresses happening all at once.

Stress and anxiety can lead to an inability to attend school, difficulty with academic work, skin rashes, sleep disturbances, headaches and high blood pressure. In addition, the experience of stressful life events can be a risk factor for the development of depressive symptoms in adolescents. Anxiety disorders, if not managed, cause considerable distress. For those young people who have a suspected anxiety disorder, prompt referral and treatment by a mental health professional is needed.

Community health nurses working in schools regularly encounter young people with stress and anxiety symptoms, especially around certain times of the school year such as exams and when students start school. There is evidence that community health nurses can have a positive impact on how young people adjust to the high school experience and development of coping skills or resilience through the use of
brief interventions.¹

Role of community health staff

- Explain that the consultation is confidential and private, with very few exceptions. Discuss conditional confidentiality, and explain that as a health professional, there are times when the law requires you to share certain details.

- Encourage and support adolescents to inform their parents or guardian about significant health issues. The support provided should reflect the maturity of the individual, significance of the issue, and the particular circumstances of each case. Be mindful that a young person with a suspected mental health issue is likely to make impaired judgements about the risks of their behaviours.

- Be mindful of the vulnerability of a young person who is suspected of having anxiety and whose mental health may be impaired. It is important for the young person to feel accepted and supported within the school environment.

- If a young person is highly anxious or is having a panic attack, remove the person to a quiet, safe place. Help to calm the person by encouraging slow, relaxed breathing. Assure the person you will stay with them and keep them safe until the attack stops. Focus on the person achieving a relaxed state, rather than the symptoms.⁵

- Be careful not to fuel the anxiety by being ‘over supportive’ i.e. do not focus too much on the symptoms but more on the desire for the person to achieve a relaxed state and to know they can control some of the symptoms through breath control and distraction.

- If appropriate, consult with a suitable representative within school services who may be able to assist, for example, the school psychologist.

- It is important to learn about stress and anxiety and talk about it. Educate teachers and other school staff about the risk factors and warning signs.⁴ Aim to inform all student services staff members to respond appropriately to young people who have high levels of stress or anxiety.

Process/Procedure

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| 1. Immediate response.  
  - Take the person to a quiet, safe place.  
  - Help them calm down by encouraging slow, relaxed breathing.  
  - Assure the young person you will stay with them until they feel calm. | Try to create a relaxing environment e.g. use of lighting, pictures, affirmations. Have on nurses desk a variety of fidget toys and teddies e.g. for calming, fidgeting, stroking, hugging and to avert gaze if needed. |
| 2. Explain conditional confidentiality. | Refer to guideline Confidentiality with adolescents |
| 3. HEADSS assessment with specific focus on anxiety, stress and mood. | The HEADSS Assessment: Red flags for stress and anxiety  
  The HEADSS screening tool is a structured |
- Develop a relationship while gathering information about their world.
- Identify any risk factors or warning signs for stress/anxiety (see Appendix One).
- Develop a picture of the young person’s strengths and protective factors.

framework for conducting a comprehensive psychosocial assessment of an adolescent. It provides information about the young person’s functioning in key areas of their life:
- H Home
- E Education, employment, eating and exercise
- A Activities and peer relationships
- D Drug use; medications, alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs
- S Sexuality
- S Suicide, depression, mood
- For more information on the HEADSS assessment see HEADSS adolescent psychosocial risk assessment

4. When the young person **IS** willing to talk:
   - Explore possible reasons for their stress or anxiety.

There are risk factors and warning signs for anxiety and stress (Appendix One).

5. Return to the HEADSS assessment.

6. Refer to other services if appropriate.

**Referral Options**
In the first instance, the young person should be referred to local services such as a general practitioner, clinical psychologist or Community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

7. Provide brief interventions if appropriate and monitoring.

8. When the young person **IS NOT** willing to talk:
   - Start by building a relationship.
   - If the person doesn’t feel comfortable talking to you, encourage them to discuss how they are feeling with someone else.\(^6\)
   - Talk about some common causes of stress and anxiety. (see risk factors – Appendix Two)
   - Offer the young person a chance to write or draw what they are feeling
Anxiety and stress

- Indicate who may need to be told
  - e.g. parents.
  - o Let the person know you are available to talk when they are ready.

Involve other members of school services
team e.g. year coordinator or school psychologist.

Documentation

- School Health Record CHS 409 or 410
- CHS421-A HEADSS Psychosocial Assessment Form- Initial
- CHS421-B HEADSS Psychosocial Assessment Form- Plan & Follow Up

Follow-up

- Make an appointment to see the young person again to monitor and discuss outcomes of initial assessment
- Community CAMHS has ten specialist community outpatient services based in districts in the Perth metropolitan area. The Community CAMHS services are based at: http://cahs.hdwa.health.wa.gov.au/wards__and_mhs/about_us
- Acute Services CAMHS – ART Referrals & Triage Calls. A centralised Triage / Patient Flow position will manage all referrals to Acute Services including admission to PMH 4H & Bentley Adolescent Unit (BAU).
- All phone enquiries from outside agencies regarding possible ED presentations for under 18yr olds. Please contact the triage officer in the first instance before sending them straight to ED on 04784 74956.
- The triage / patient flow role is operational between the hours of 8am to 4pm Monday to Friday. Outside of these times, the Psychiatric Liaison Nurse at PMH should be contacted through the hospital switch on 9340 8222 for all enquiries re: PMH or under 16’s. After Hours enquiries for the BAU should be diverted to the shift coordinator on 9334 3686.
- Referrals for Acute Services should be sent to Fax: 6229 3104 or booked referrals to PMH.AcuteServicesPsychiatry@health.wa.gov.au
- WA Country Health Service staff refer to local community mental health services.

Related professional development

- It is recommended that Community health nurses work with school administration and student service teams to develop a proactive suicide risk response plan. Community health nurses working in schools complete the Gatekeepers Suicide Prevention training presented by the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention http://www.mcsp.org.au.
- The Mental Health First Aid Website has information regarding courses which cover the situations of: panic attacks, acute psychotic behaviour, suicidal behaviour/thoughts and the ongoing mental health issues of depression, anxiety

- **Family Partnerships training**: is based upon an explicit framework that integrates the use of core helping skills and qualities with the processes of a goal-orientated approach. Participants are encouraged to develop knowledge, skills and confidence in the processes of engaging and relating to clients and supporting them effectively. These processes are assumed to involve the developments of a genuine and respectful partnership. This training covers:
  - The needs of parents and children
  - The parent-professional relationships
  - The processes of helping
  - The qualities and nature of communication skills needed in the helper to facilitate these processes

For more information discuss with your line manager or refer to website www.fpta.org.au

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### Related internal policies, procedures and guidelines (if required)

- Promoting Mental Health and Resilience in Schools
- Managing Suicide Risk
- Conducting a Psychosocial Risk Assessment
- Identifying Students with Mental Health Problems
- Confidentiality and adolescents

*Working with Youth – A legal resource for community based health workers,* Department of Health WA.

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### References

Useful resources

Medicare Better Access Program: GP Mental Health Care Plan. The young person’s GP will assess their mental health, work out what help is needed, set goals and choose the treatment that would be best, depending on each individual situation. Treatment may include seeing a psychiatrist or psychologist, referral to other services, or medication. Significant Medicare rebates apply for these items. Further information: www.medicareaustralia.gov.au

The Anxiety Workbook for Teens: Activities to Help You Deal with Anxiety and Worry. This workbook can show young people how to deal with the day-to-day challenges of anxiety. It helps develop a positive self-image and recognize anxious thoughts. The workbook also includes resources for seeking additional help and support. Can be found at: http://www.newharbinger.com/anxiety-workbook-teens

www.kidsmatter.edu.au. Aims to improve the mental health and wellbeing of children, reduce mental health problems amongst children, and achieve greater support for children experiencing mental health difficulties, and their families. Resources are designed for implementation in Australian primary schools.

www.mindmatters.edu.au. A resource and professional development program supporting Australian secondary schools in promoting and protecting the mental health, and social and emotional wellbeing of all the members of school communities.

www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/resources/consumers.cfm. Centre for Clinical Interventions – provides useful information for professionals and carers including worksheets, and suggested exercises or activities.

http://au.reachout.com. A website for young people to improve understanding of mental health issues and wellbeing. Also provides information on services, and opportunities to connect with other young people.

www.mhfa.com.au. Mental Health First Aid is the help provided to a person developing a mental health problem or in a mental health crisis. The first aid is given until appropriate professional treatment is received or until the crisis resolves. Website provides practical strategies and information.

www.beyondblue.org.au. beyondblue is a national, independent, not-for-profit organisation working to address issues associated with depression, anxiety and related substance misuse disorders in Australia. Website has fact sheets, information on referral and supports.

http://www.sane.org/. SANE Australia is a national charity working for a better life for people affected by mental illness through campaigns, education and research. SANE Australia produces a range of publications including fact sheets, magazines and DVD’s for people living with a mental illness, carers, professionals and students.
They also have ‘Helpline Online’ for more specific information and referral to support agencies (it is not a counselling service). Information and advice is also available by calling the SANE Helpline, 1800 18 SANE (7263) 9-5 weekdays EST. Request free Infopack 24 hours.

www.handsonscotland.co.uk The handsonscotland toolkit is a one-stop shop for practical information and techniques on how to respond helpfully to children and young people’s troubling behaviour, build up their self-esteem and promote their positive mental wellbeing.

www.bevaisbett.com Bev Aisbett has published a range of cartoon books including “Living with It”. This can assist with understanding the nature of anxiety and may help with regaining control and starting recovery.

www.Moodgym.anu.edu.au Moodgym is designed especially for young people, it is an innovative interactive program aimed at preventing and decreasing depressive symptoms. Moodgym teaches the principles of cognitive behaviour therapy. Offers services such as anxiety and depression assessments, relaxation and advice to deal with stress and relationship break-ups.

http://www.lifeline.org.au/Get-Help/Get_Help Lifeline’s section called ‘Get Help” is a national mental health information and referral service, and is an easy and accessible way for people to find resources and tools to help with a wide range of mental health issues.

www.headroom.net.au This site is dedicated to positive mental health of children, adolescents and the adults in their lives.

http://www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth/publications/head2head.cfm Head2Head magazine is published three times a year and provides an avenue for WA mental health information to all sectors of the community. The magazine is available free of charge.

Help/Information Lines
Mental Health Emergency Response Line (24hr) 1300 555 788
Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill (ARAFMI): WA (08) 9427 7100
beyondblue info line (National) - 1300 22 4636
Lifeline (National) - 13 11 14
SANE Australia Helpline (National) - 1800 187 263
Mensline Australia (National) - 1300 789 978
Australian Psychological Society Referral Line (National) 1800 333 497
Mental Health Information Service (NSW) - 1300 794 991
Kids Helpline (National) - 1800 551 800.
### Anxiety and stress

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