Mental Health Packet

Helpful Tips & Information for Families

- What is Anxiety
- What is Worry
- Symptoms of Stress
- Stress Management Tips
- Suicide Risk Factors
- Safety Plan Form

For more information, contact HCRS at (802) 886-4500
Supporting families since 1967 across Windsor and Windham Counties
www.hcrs.org
What is Anxiety?

Anxiety is a mental and physical reaction to perceived threats. In small doses, anxiety is helpful. It protects us from danger, and focuses our attention on problems. But when anxiety is too severe, or occurs too frequently, it can become debilitating.

### Symptoms of Anxiety

- uncontrollable worry
- excessive nervousness
- sleep problems
- muscle tension
- poor concentration
- increased heart rate
- upset stomach
- avoidance of fear

### Types of Anxiety

**Generalized Anxiety:** An excessive amount of anxiety or worry in several areas of life, such as job responsibilities, health, finances, or minor concerns (e.g. completing housework).

**Phobias:** A very intense fear of a specific situation or object, which is out of proportion to its actual threat. For example, a fear of giving speeches, or of spiders, could be considered a phobia.

**Panic:** An extreme anxious response where a person experiences a panic attack. During a panic attack, the individual experiences numerous physical symptoms, and is overwhelmed by a feeling of dread.

### How Does Anxiety Grow?

Anxiety drives people to avoid the things that scare them. When a “scary” thing is avoided, there is an immediate but short-lived sense of relief. However, the next time a similar threat arises, it feels even scarier. This creates a harmful cycle of avoidance, and worsening anxiety.

### Anxiety Treatments

**Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)**

CBT is a very effective treatment for anxiety. During CBT, the unhealthy thinking patterns that create anxiety are identified, and challenged. Oftentimes, CBT will also include components of exposure therapy and relaxation skills.

**Exposure Therapy**

During exposure therapy, the therapist and their client create a plan to gradually face anxiety-producing situations, thus breaking the cycle of avoidance. With enough exposure, the anxiety loses its power, and the symptoms diminish.

**Relaxation Skills**

Various techniques—such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, and mindfulness—provide immediate relief from the symptoms of anxiety. With practice, relaxation skills will become a powerful way to manage anxiety in the moment.

**Medication**

Medication can help control the uncomfortable symptoms of anxiety. However, because medication does not fix the underlying problems of anxiety, it is typically used in conjunction with therapy. The need for medication varies greatly, case-by-case.
What is Worry?

Worries are unpleasant thoughts that you can't get out of your head. They're like annoying bugs that keep buzzing around and won't leave you alone.

It's normal to have worries—everyone has them from time to time. It's only a problem when your worries get in the way of other parts of your life, or if they make you unhappy. What do you worry about? Circle your worries in the lists below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arguments or Fights</td>
<td>Following Rules</td>
<td>Fitting In</td>
<td>Getting Hurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upsetting Family</td>
<td>Grades</td>
<td>Making Friends</td>
<td>Being Embarrassed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family’s Safety</td>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>Being Teased</td>
<td>Appearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting in Trouble</td>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>What to Talk About</td>
<td>Money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Seeing a Family Member</td>
<td>Tests</td>
<td>Bullies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When you worry, your body goes through a number of changes. These changes can be uncomfortable, and for some people they're scary. Circle each of the worry symptoms that you've experienced:

- Fast Heartbeat
- Sweating
- Feeling Sick
- Shaking
- Feeling Hot

The good news about worry is that it can't hurt you. Worrying might be uncomfortable, but you can learn to control it with a little practice. Is there anything you already do that helps you control your worry?

To control my worry, I...
**Symptoms of Stress**

**Stress** is one way that our bodies respond to the day-to-day struggles and demands of life. A little bit of stress can be healthy—it keeps us alert and productive. However, when we experience too much stress, it can result in serious physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms.

### Acute Symptoms

**Acute Symptoms**
symptoms that occur before or during a stressful situation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Emotional / Cognitive</th>
<th>Behavioral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asthma</td>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Nail biting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headaches</td>
<td>Irritability</td>
<td>Constant thoughts about stressors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migraines</td>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Restlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back pain</td>
<td>Loss of motivation</td>
<td>Teeth grinding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweating</td>
<td>Difficulty concentrating</td>
<td>Disrupted sleep, diet, and exercise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nausea</td>
<td>Mood instability</td>
<td>Interpersonal conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigestion</td>
<td>Decreased sex drive</td>
<td>Social withdrawal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest pain</td>
<td>Memory problems</td>
<td>Substance use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatigue</td>
<td></td>
<td>Procrastination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chronic Symptoms

**Chronic Symptoms**
symptoms and consequences of long-term stress

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heart disease</th>
<th>Depression</th>
<th>Sleep disorders</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety disorders</td>
<td>Memory impairment</td>
<td>Weakened immune system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin diseases</td>
<td>Substance use</td>
<td>Poor diet and exercise habits</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stress Management Tips

_keep in mind that stress isn’t a bad thing._
Stress motivates us to work toward solving our problems. Reframing thoughts to view stress as an acceptable emotion, or as a tool, has been found to reduce many of the negative symptoms associated with it. The goal is to _manage_ stress, not to eliminate it.

_talk about your problems, even if they won’t be solved._
Talking about your stressors—even if you don’t solve them—releases hormones in your body that reduce the negative feelings associated with stress. Time spent talking with friends and loved ones is valuable, even when you have a lot on your plate.

_prioritize your responsibilities._
Focus on completing quick tasks first. Having too many “to-dos” can be stressful, even if none of them are very big. Quickly knocking out the small tasks will clear up your mind to focus on larger responsibilities.

_focus on the basics._
Stress can start a harmful cycle where basic needs are neglected, which leads to more stress. Make a point to focus on your basic needs, such as eating well, keeping a healthy sleep schedule, exercising, and other forms of self-care.

_don’t put all your eggs in one basket._
People who are overinvolved in one aspect of their life often struggle to deal with stress when that area is threatened. Balance your time and energy between several areas, such as your career, family, friendships, and personal hobbies.

_set aside time for yourself._
Personal time usually gets moved to the bottom of the list when things get hectic. However, when personal time is neglected, everything else tends to suffer. Set aside time to relax and have fun every day, without interruptions.

_keep things in perspective._
In the heat of the moment, little problems can feel bigger than they are. Take a step back, and think about how important your stressors are in a broader context. Will they matter in a week? In a year? Writing about your stressors will help you develop a healthier perspective.
Suicide Risk Factors

Demographic Factors:
- Male
- Between 25-44 years of age
- Older people
- Living in rural areas
- Members of minority groups (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders)
- People with sexual identity conflicts
- Immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers
- Homelessness

Groups at Higher Risk:
- Previous history of attempts or self-harm
- History of mental illness, particularly depression, schizophrenia, other psychotic illnesses, personality disorder
- History of sexual or physical abuse or neglect
- First presentations of mental illness
- Victims of domestic violence
- Alcohol and other substance abuse; co-morbidity
- Serious physical illness or disability
- People in prison or police custody

Current Personal Risk Factors:
- “At risk mental status” (e.g., hopelessness, despair, agitation, shame, guilt, anger, psychosis)
- Recent interpersonal crisis, especially peer rejection or humiliation
- Recent major loss or trauma or anniversary
- School failure
- Recent prescription of SSRI (adolescents)
- Impulsivity
- Lack of meaning or purpose in life
- Poor coping skills
- Alcohol intoxication
- Drug withdrawal state
- Chronic pain or illness
- Impending legal prosecution
- Family breakdown, child custody issues
- Lack of social support network
- Unwillingness to accept help
- Cultural or religious conflicts

Reference: NSW Health, Framework for Suicide Risk Assessment and Management:
Safety Plan

Step 1: Recognise the warning signs of a developing crisis (my thoughts, mood, situation, behaviour). This is when my safety plan should be used:

1. ____________________________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________________________

Step 2: Coping strategies (things I can do on my own to help comfort myself and help me not act on my thoughts, urges to harm myself):

1. ____________________________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________________________

Step 3: What are some of my reasons for living?:

1. ____________________________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________________________

Step 4: Social support from others or places I can go to help take my mind off things:

1. Name: ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________
2. Name: ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________
3. Place: ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________
4. Place: ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________

Step 5: Family members or friends who I can ask for help to resolve a crisis:

1. Name: ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________
2. Name: ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________
3. Name: ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________

Step 6: Mental health professionals or agencies I can contact during a crisis:

1. Clinician: ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________
2. Clinician: ___________________________ Phone: ___________________________

Step 7: What can I do to make my environment around me safe?:

1. ____________________________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________________________