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Mental Health Packet



Helpful Tips & Information for Families

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

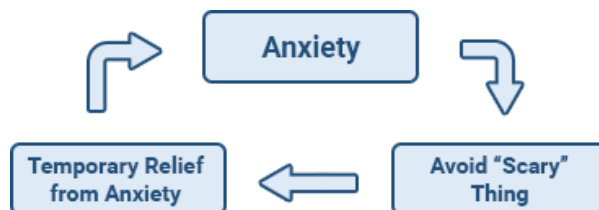
📋 Types of Anxiety

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:**

 Family	 School	 Friends	 Other
Arguments or Fights	Following Rules	Fitting In	Getting Hurt
Upsetting Family	Grades	Making Friends	Being Embarrassed
Family's Safety	Presentations	Being Teased	Appearance
Getting in Trouble	Homework	What to Talk About	Money
Not Seeing a Family Member	Tests	Bullies	_____

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 symptoms that occur before or during a stressful situation		
Physical	Emotional / Cognitive	Behavioral
Asthma	Worry	Nail biting
Headaches	Irritability	Constant thoughts about stressors
Migraines	Anger	Restlessness
Back pain	Loss of motivation	Teeth grinding
Sweating	Difficulty concentrating	Disrupted sleep, diet, and exercise
Nausea	Mood instability	Interpersonal conflict
Indigestion	Decreased sex drive	Social withdrawal
Chest pain	Memory problems	Substance use
Fatigue		Procrastination

Chronic Symptoms symptoms and consequences of long-term stress		
Heart disease	Depression	Sleep disorders
Anxiety disorders	Memory impairment	Weakened immune system
Skin diseases	Substance use	Poor diet and exercise habits

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:

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mhdao/programs/mh/Publications/framework-suicide-risk-assess.pdf>



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: _____
4. Place: _____

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: _____
3. **Kids Helpline:** 1800 55 1800 **Lifeline:** 13 11 14
4. **Crisis support chat:** <https://www.lifeline.org.au/Get-Help/Online-Services/crisis-chat>

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

1. _____
2. _____