



The Thrive Clinic

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Anxiety in Childhood & Adolescence Information Pack

At The Exercise Therapist, we see our clients as individuals with specific needs and considerations, rather than a grouped diagnosis. We have created a positive and welcoming environment for our clients, and provide supervision and guidance at all times. Although our exercise sessions tend to be performed in small group settings, we aim to take the time to provide clients with specific understanding and knowledge in regards to their prescribed exercises and individual benefits. Again, clients are recognised as individuals, and therefore treated based on their own strengths, weaknesses, goals, and results.

Anxiety

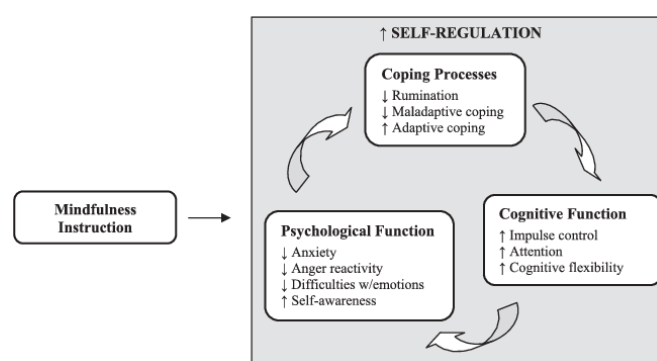
Society is seeing an increase in mental health issues, particularly amongst youth (Broderick & Metz, 2009). This is likely due to both an increased societal acceptance and recognition of mental illness as well as an increase in pressures placed on children and adolescents. Anxiety affects approximate 15-20% of youth, and is found to be the most prevalent psychiatric condition within this young population. Anxiety disorders tend to emerge earlier in life compared to depressive or substance abuse disorders. Long-term research shows childhood anxiety disorders are likely to predict the presence later in life (Wehry, et al., 2015).

Anxiety is characterised by persistent, excessive worry. There are a number of anxiety disorders including generalised anxiety disorder, specific and social phobias, obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, and panic disorder (Beyond Blue, 2016). Although different, the commonality between these disorders is that the anxiety experienced is so distressing that it highly impacts the ability for an individual to carry out daily life activities (SANE Australia).

At The Exercise Therapist, we believe prevention and management is key to improving anxiety and other mental health conditions, particularly in childhood and adolescence. We believe, with evidence from relevant research, the simple and repeatable process we have created within The Thrive Clinic is of great advantage to such clients. As Exercise Physiologists, we aim to provide clients with the tools, understanding and knowledge to assist them with managing their mental illness, using exercise as medicine combined with mindfulness practices to improve the mind body connection and self regulation.

Mindfulness

“Mindfulness instruction is intended to enhance an individual’s innate ability to be aware of what is happening internally and externally with open curiosity and without judgement” (Perry-Parish, et al., 2016, p1). Mindfulness techniques allow an individual to focus on the present moment while letting go of negative, self-critical judgements. It provides a way of regulating emotion and dealing with stress. The diagram below shows how mindfulness instruction improves self-regulation (Perry-Parish, et al., 2016):



Mindfulness Jars



“The goal is for children to learn to use mindfulness techniques whenever they need to calm themselves and refocus their energy and attention. Such refocusing can enhance concentration, memory, and learning, as well as facilitate a more productive and relaxed – less anxious and stressful – environment. Through bringing awareness to the external environment and to the internal experience of the body and the mind, children will likely benefit psychologically and emotionally, as well as gaining a general sense of wellbeing” (Hooker & Fodor, 2008, p90).

Mindfulness jars are a great visual tool for children, adolescents, and even adults to engage in mindful practice, learning to take the time to calm their thoughts and accept the present moment rather than letting the future take hold. The glitter represents the many thoughts rushing into our heads, and allows individuals to turn their focus from worrying thoughts towards the movement of the glitter as well as their breathing rate, associating a reduction in heart rate and breath rate with the stilling of the glitter in the jar. For individuals with anxiety, mindfulness jars allow one to identify and become aware of emotions, and accept them whether they are positive or negative (Hooker & Fodor, 2008). By focusing on the mindfulness jars, individuals are prompted to slow their breathing rate, and practice deeper breathing. During this time, we see a reduction in heart rate and muscle tension, as well as a greater feeling of calmness, relaxation and self-acceptance (Broderick & Metz, 2009).

Benefits of Exercise

(Broderick & Metz, 2009)

- Changes in brain structure in areas related to attention
- Enhanced performance in attentional tasks
- Increases in positive mood
- Increased immune functioning
- Improved academic achievement
- Enhanced empathy
- Reduced physical symptoms and stress
- Reduce aggression

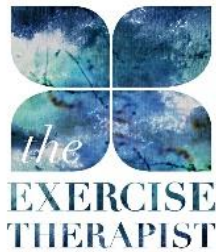
- Promote adolescent individuation

(Archer, 2014)

- Enhancing physiological health
- Raising tolerance for emotional stress
- Increasing familiarity with physical stress
- Fostering social contact
- Increasing exposure to the outdoor environments
- Diverting negative thinking
- Encouraging engagement instead of avoidance

High Intensity Interval Training: Letting It All Out!

Although more research needs to be carried out in this area, current literature is showing the benefits of high intensity interval training as a way of improving executive function and psychological wellbeing in adolescents (Costigan, et al., 2016). High intensity interval training has shown to be of great benefit to many conditions, producing responses such as increased metabolism, improved oxygen and nutrient transport, and increased neurogenesis and neurotransmission. This short duration, high intensity workout allows the client to accept the present moment, output any stresses



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and worries, and challenge themselves to the best of their ability at the given time. Following the workout, we tend to see a decrease in feelings of anxiety and stress, and an increase in feeling of calmness and relief.

Children's Breathe Easy Program at The Exercise Therapist

Aim: to allow children and young adults (aged 10-17 years) to learn how to use mindfulness practice and clinically prescribed exercise medicine to reduce stress, mild anxiety, and mood disorders. In addition, the program aims to improve focus, effectiveness of study, resilience to physical and psychological challenges and daily mindset.

The introduction of techniques encouraging children to incorporate purposeful mindfulness into their coping strategies empowers them with lifelong skills to manage stress and their mental health. The program features high intensity cardiovascular efforts on an exercise bike or rower, as well as the use of our mindfulness jars; a simple mechanic that encourages children to engage in the mind/body connection.

Children will progress through the sessions supervised by our team of Accredited Exercise Physiologists. Children are booked on 10 minute intervals into our Thrive Clinic to ensure adequate individual attention and supervision through each of the four stages of the practice. This practice process also supports and encourages self-accountability and an intrinsic focus in the children whilst being surrounded by similarly motivated peers during practice. The sessions are 30 minutes only and offer children and young adults a place to learn, discuss and experience firsthand how effective the combination of mindfulness practice and specifically prescribed cardiovascular exercises medicine is in managing our mental health and the relationship between our mind and body (not in a mung bean loving way, but in a very clinically sound and research supported based practice).