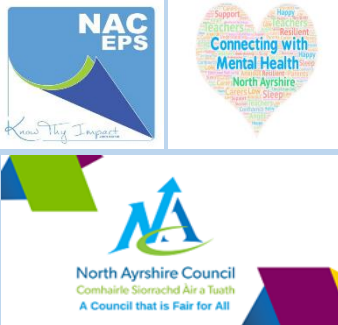


Anxiety Support for Children and Young People

*North Ayrshire Council Educational Psychology Service in partnership
with Health and Wellbeing Workstream and Nurture team*



What is Anxiety?

“Anxiety is a normal, human feeling of fear or panic. When we face stressful situations, it can set off our brain’s in-built alarm bell system, which tells us something isn’t right and that we need to deal with it. Our brain wants the difficult situation to go away, so it makes us feel more alert, stops us thinking about other things, and even pumps more blood to our legs to help us run away” (Young Minds).

Presentations of Anxiety in Children and Young People

Anxiety can be identified by internal and physical symptoms. Internally, individuals experience social fears, excessive discomfort, and negative rumination. Whereas physically, symptoms present as trembling or sweating and blushing (Tiffers & Van Zalk, 2015).

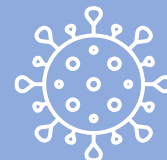
If unaddressed, anxiety can lead to (Tiffers & Van Zalk, 2015):

- Low peer acceptance
- Increased peer victimisation
- Impairment in romantic relationships
- High levels of loneliness
- Poor relationships with parents

What does Anxiety look like in children and young people?

Anxiety in North Ayrshire Council and COVID- 19

Following the return to school after COVID-19, there has been increasing concerns expressed regarding rising anxiety in children and young people. Within North Ayrshire, education staff are noting changes in pupil mental wellbeing regarding COVID-19, school, social, and general anxiety. Furthermore, Pastoral Teachers and Senior Leadership Team staff report parents/caregivers show similar concern, due to increased calls asking for help to support their child experiencing anxiety at home.



COVID-19 and the Impact on Children and Young People

Nationally

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on young people’s mental wellbeing.

Findings from LockdownLowdown (The Scottish Youth Parliament, Youthlink Scotland, & Young Scot, 2020) study illustrate the importance of addressing anxiety, as young people reported concerns regarding wellbeing, school, and financial situation. However, 40% felt extremely concerned for their mental health.

Furthermore, looking at pupils’ experiences during the pandemic SHINE and Generation Scotland (2020) found that 28% of pupils had increased feelings of loneliness during the pandemic.

What Support is Available in North Ayrshire?

Let's Introduce Anxiety Management (LIAM) practitioners are trained in delivering this individual approach to managing anxiety.

Exchange Service 5-10 years

Counselling service 10 – 18 years

Psychological services

CAMHS

Promoting Positive Relationships

Nurturing North Ayrshire

School Nurses

Curricular Resources on



Anxiety Curricular Resources.pdf

Anxiety

Continued Professional Learning Opportunities

How has COVID-19 impacted anxiety in North Ayrshire Council?

Data From North Ayrshire Council Services

Anxiety has become an increasing issue in North Ayrshire Council for children and young people. This is evident from our referral data:

- From the Inclusion Group 38% of referrals during the period of January to May 2021 were anxiety related.
- The Exchange estimate that between February 2021 to September 2021 32% of referrals were for anxiety related issues.
- The 3 most common reasons cited for attending the school counselling service (session 20/21) include anxiety (76%), low mood (63%) and stress (61%).

Looking at the period the data was captured from COVID-19 has had an impact on pupil anxiety levels in North Ayrshire.

What Works for Anxiety in Research?

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy has shown the most promise in reducing anxiety in children and young people (CBT; ref). CBT works by helping the individual link thoughts, feelings, and behaviour together and use different techniques to change behaviour. Throughout the literature there is support for applying CBT in individual and group settings:

- Individually, meta-analytic findings show CBT to be effective in 1-1 settings (Ewing, Monsen, Thompson, Cartwright-Hatton & Field, 2015; Ishikawa, Okajima, Matsuoka & Sakano, 2007). However, the environment where we deliver CBT is more important, as in clinical settings the effect size was $d=0.6$ compared with educational settings $d=0.77$ (Ishikawa et al., 2007). Implications of this in North Ayrshire imply that we will be able to help children and young people experiencing anxiety in schools using CBT approaches (e.g., LIAM).
- Delivering CBT approaches within a group setting have been effective, for example, delivery of the FRIENDS programme (Liddle & McMillan, 2010). They found delivering this intervention within the school environment to significantly reduce anxiety. This could be due to fostering a whole-school approach that nurtures open discussion of mental wellbeing.

Although CBT is effective, the evidence suggests that the context of delivery is more important, for example in schools. Within North Ayrshire we have nurturing principles and a variety of services available to support children and young people experiencing anxiety.



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