



McMaster
Family Health Team

Ten Years of Anxiety Groups at McMaster Family Health Team

What we have learned

AFHTO 2014

How Did it Begin

- Always listen to students
- The referrals – the rationale

The First Group

- Five sessions
- About 8 referrals
- The work to make it a part of a clinic culture

Publicity

- Physicians
- Word of mouth
- Newsletter
- Website
- Mental health referrals

Contact with Patients

- The letter
- The phone call x2
- No prescreen interview
- No back-to-back repeating of group

The Evolution of the Sessions

- Where does Anxiety Come From?
- Thinking and Relaxation 1
- Thinking and Relaxation 2
- How to Manage a Panic Attack
- Self-Esteem
- Communication Skills
- Sleep, Diet and Exercise
- Goal-Setting and the Tool Box

Safety in the First Session

- Rank yourself of a scale of 1-10 in terms of anxiety
- Group goals and norms
- The power of the group
- The right to pass
- Closing
- What interested you most in group tonight?

Methodology

- Psycho educational
- Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
- Solution Focused Therapy
- Relaxation strategies
- Mindfulness exercises

Resources

- Cognitive behavioural worksheets
- The Big Bang Theory
- Video 23 ½ hours
- Anxiety and Phobia Workbook – Bourne
- SMART goal setting

Hand Outs

- Trial of giving out the hand outs as a book
- Decision to give weekly hand outs
- Use of meditation tapes
- Use of the Big Bang Theory

Staff

- Social Work
- Occupational Therapy
- Psychology

Participants

- What to do about no shows
- What to do if someone leaves a session
- Attendance requirements
- When is the group closed
- Men/Women (two men's only groups)
- Teens in the adult group
- Inclusion of seniors

Profile of Common Patients

- People with anxiety, which is having a moderate impact on their life, but are able to continue functioning in their day-to-day lives
- Individuals with severe social anxiety (individual work first and connection with leader, then involvement in group)
- People with personality disorders
- People off work due to exacerbation of anxiety symptoms

Challenges

- Showering
- Skin picking
- Assuming literacy
- Holidays and staff vacations
- Significant majority of one gender
- Teenagers
- Talkers
- Non-talkers

Group Outcome Interview Questions and Answers

- **Facilitators:** Colleen O'Neill & Lynn Dykeman
- **Date:** Fall 2013
- **How did you find out about the group?**
- Doctor (x5)
- Social Worker (x2)
- Occupational Therapist (x2)
- Newsletter

What Interested you in Coming to Group?

- Doctor thought it was a good idea
- Don't want to be the way I am
- Don't want to go somewhere and have fear
- Seen as alternative to meds
- Curious to see if it works. It has worked remarkably well, surprised me.
- Strategy to get through the work day
- Off on leave, managing anxiety. Step to getting back to work.

What Were you Hoping to Learn?

- No expectations
- Looking for new strategies
- Relaxation and coping techniques, specific strategies
- Learn how to cope with changes in daily routines that are unpredictable
- Thought medication was needed, but willing to try
- Continued growth in ways to deal with stress

What Were you Hoping to Learn? (cont'd)

- Concrete strategies/practical tools
- Ways to live with “issues”
- Reminder about previous learning and structure to apply
- Modelling from others
- Regain sense of control over life; gain understanding of what is happening
- Hoping for answer to “why did it happen”/strategies to control

What can you do Now that you Couldn't do Before?

- Talk in front of people
- Go to work
- Go to the mall
- Calm myself down
- Cope – manage uncertainty
- Able to say “no”
- Boost self-esteem
- Look at a different perspective

What can you do Now that you Couldn't do Before? (cont'd)

- Avoid “Stinking Thinking”
- Don't catastrophize, can shrug things off
- Deal with stress
- Identify triggers
- Communicate with family better; awareness of others' anxiety
- Be kinder to self' give myself credit
- Talk to intimidating people without fear

What New Skills are you Using in your Life?

- Box breathing (x7)
- Relaxation (x7)
- Breathing exercise (x7)
- Challenging stinking thinking (e.g. distortions)
- Reframing thoughts
- Affirming self
- Decreased caffeine
- Goal-setting (x10)
- Saying “no)

What Would you Tell Someone Interested in Coming to Group?

- Come!!!
- Nothing to lose
- Variety of topics
- Lots to learn
- Will change your life
- Peer support

What Would you Tell Someone Interested in Coming to Group? (cont'd)

- Connection with others
- Group dynamics
- Very inclusive!
- Validation of everyone
- Equitable
- Diverse people
- You will notice the difference

What Session was the Most Interesting?

- Understanding Anxiety
- Thinking and Anxiety (session 3)
- Self-Esteem
- Progressive Muscle Relaxation (session 2)
- Managing Panic Attacks (session 4)

What Session was the Most Boring?

- Sleep, Diet and Exercise – common sense

What Would you add to the Group?

- Incorporate strategies for how to do more exercise
- Community resources for activity
- Add in concrete strategies
- Tip of the week

Programming that did not Work

- Once a month drop-in sessions with multiple leaders
- Having a monthly reunion session
- Taking a break over Christmas

Current Anxiety Group Offerings

- Anxiety treatment group – 8 structured sessions; one afternoon group and one evening group (differences in the group)
- Teen Group – every other Monday from 4:00-5:30; drop-in, some structure
- Managing Life Stress – Aftercare group; drop-in every second Tuesday; some structure, 1:00-2:30

Occasional Offerings

- Social Anxiety Group
- Obsessive Compulsive Disorders Group



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