



Ely
Mental Health
Support Team



Newsletter

Spring 2024



Happy New Year!

We are the Ely Mental Health Support Team, part of the Emotional Health and Wellbeing Service. We work with staff, students, parents and carers in schools across Ely and Littleport, to support children and young people with their mental health and wellbeing.

Within each of our termly newsletters for school staff, we provide more insight into our services, as well as helpful tools and resources relating to a specific theme.

MHST UPDATES

You may have seen members of the Team popping in and out of the schools over Children's Mental Health Week. We have had a lovely time delivering workshops and assemblies to our schools. We would like to thank all the school staff who helped facilitate our activities over the week!

THANK
you

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This term's theme is:

Exam Stress
and Worries



MHST TEAM SPOTLIGHT

Strengths

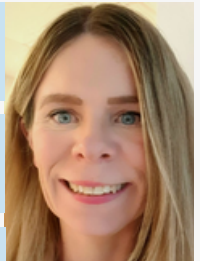
Compassionate
Connecting with
others

Weaknesses

Searching
Rightmove
Tony's Chocolonely

Loves

Sharing practical
advice and support



Lucy Burston

EMHP

Lucy joined Ely MHST in January 2023 and is set to become a qualified EMHP soon.

She originally had a career in publishing. However, during the pandemic she took the opportunity to complete some voluntary experience at Age UK, whilst working at a local hospital and as a school governor.

Lucy loves podcasts and walking in nature. At home she likes to crack on with DIY and bringing second-hand items back to life.

Introduction

Exams and assessments often cause some anxiety and stress for children and young people. While we know that some anxiety can be helpful, as it often provides a sense of motivation, it can feel overwhelming for young people if they are experiencing it to excess. This can then impact negatively on exams and day-to-day life, and can lead to problematic anxiety and low mood or depression.

Exam and assessment stress can stop young people from doing things that they are normally able to do, such as getting enough sleep, eating a balanced diet, engaging in hobbies, speaking with their peers or doing well in school.

We therefore felt it may be helpful to share with you some different resources you might be able to explore with the children and young people you work with in the lead up to the summer exam period.



Common signs of worry and anxiety in primary school children

- Mood changes (e.g. appearing quieter or louder, raising their voice, crying or irritability).
- Behavioural changes - (e.g. being more withdrawn, having outbursts or lashing out physically at others).
- Low self esteem (e.g. negative self-talk)
- Reduction in tolerance levels.
- Complaining of headaches, stomach aches or other physical symptoms
- Changes in eating habits
- School refusal or wanting to leave class more frequently (e.g. going to the toilet more often).

Zones of Regulation

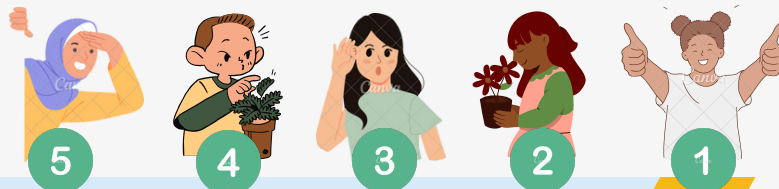
Children and young people often find it difficult to spot when they are anxious. In our Brain Buddies whole class workshops, one technique we explore is the Zones of Regulation, which can be helpful for supporting children to recognise when they are experiencing a heightened emotion, so that they can find an appropriate coping strategy before they feel out of control.

More about the Zones:

zonesofregulation.com/how-it-works

5-4-3-2-1 Grounding

Focusing on 'what if' worries maintains the cycle of anxiety, leading to heightened feelings of stress or panic. The 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique can be helpful for teaching children to focus on the moment, rather than worrying about the future. Ask them to think about: 5 things they can see, 4 things they can touch, 3 things they can hear, 2 things they can smell and 1 thing they can taste OR 1 good thing about themselves.



Common signs of worry and anxiety in secondary school children

The presentations of exam stress in secondary school children can include those listed above. Additionally, it is common for adolescents to experience:

- Not enjoying activities that they previously enjoyed
- A reduction in personal care/ hygiene (e.g. struggling to brush their teeth, shower or brush their hair).
- Changes in academic attainment, motivation, and/or attitude in class.
- Noticeable low mood
- Expressing hopelessness about the future
- Withdrawing from friends
- Tiredness/ fatigue



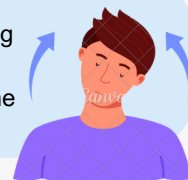
Movement

When the fight or flight response is activated by worry or anxiety, a lot of the associated physiological changes (e.g. increased heart rate and nausea) can feel uncomfortable. Physically processing this increase in adrenaline can help to calm anxiety. When full movement isn't possible, techniques like the 'palm push' can be helpful. Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) can also be a helpful technique for reducing bodily stress and improving mindfulness.



Palm Push: Place the palms of your hands together and push firmly towards each other for 10 seconds before releasing. Repeat as needed.

PMR: Choose a muscle group and focus on it. Take a slow deep breath while activating/ squeezing the muscles in this group tightly for 5 seconds. Focus on the feeling of tension. Exhale and relax the muscles. Repeat with a new muscle group.



Check in conversation starters

"I was thinking about the exams that are coming up, and wanted to check in with you to see how you were getting on."

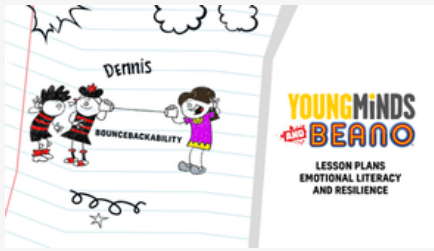
"How have you been feeling recently? I know you've got a lot on your plate."

It is important to note that there could be an increase in self-harming behaviours for students during periods of high stress, such as during exams. The following behaviours can be signs of self-harm, particularly if they seem unusual for that young person:

- Being reluctant to talk about any noticeable marks or scars
- Wearing clothes inappropriate for the weather (e.g. long sleeves when it is warm).
- New bandages without explanation
- Excessive trips to the bathroom



Anna Freud Resources



Each term, we'll be sharing some relevant resources with you from the **Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families**.

The Understanding stress lesson plan by YoungMinds & Beano can be found on the Anna Freud website. This lesson introduces children aged 3 to 11 to the concept of stress and how to cope with it.

A lesson plan for secondary school children can also be found on Anna Freud, created by Public Health England. In this lesson, students will develop helpful strategies for managing their own exam stress and learn how to be supportive of friends who may also be experiencing stress.



For students in further education, we would recommend sharing with them the advice on managing stress at important moments video by Dr Sheila Redfern. This video gives some tips on how to manage stress when waiting to hear from exam results, or applications for college, university or for a job.

The link to the video can be found here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=VGqDAUZwhas



Senior Mental Health Lead Training

DfE is offering a grant of £1,200 for all eligible state-funded schools and colleges to train a senior mental health lead. Funding is currently available until 31 March 2024.

The Anna Freud online training for senior mental health leads is CPD-accredited and Department for Education-assured. The courses will give you the knowledge and skills to implement a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing. They are fully funded by the Department for Education, meaning that eligible schools can attend the training for free. Schools can now claim a second grant if the trained lead has left the setting. Please note the senior lead will need to be available to start the training by 31 March 2024.

Who is this training for? The training courses are suitable for any staff member who is the designated mental health lead in their setting. This may include: Headteachers, Deputy heads, SENCOs, Pastoral leads, Safeguarding leads, and all others in school leadership positions.

All delegates receive a CPD certificate on completion of the course.

For more information, please go to: www.annafreud.org/training/education/training-in-schools-and-colleges/senior-mental-health-lead-training/



I have heard other schools are being offered a workshop on PACE What is it and is this something we can access?

*Our PACE workshop is an opportunity for school staff to meet with members of the Ely MHST to develop their communication with emotionally distressed children. PACE is a trauma-informed approach and stands for **P**layfulness **A**cceptance **C**uriosity **E**mpathy. The workshop guides staff in using these principles to promote experiences of safety when staff interact with children. If your school is interested, your Mental Health Lead can raise this at a Termly Planning Meeting. More information on PACE can be found here:*

<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/children-and-families/PACEforteachers.pdf>

Calendar Spotlight

There are so many events and significant dates that happen throughout the school year, and we know you'll already be aware of most of them. But each term, we'd like to spotlight a select few dates of note with you, along with some relevant information and resources that you can explore.

Feb

- **LGBT History Month**
- **5th - 11th Children's Mental Health Week**
- **17th Random Acts of Kindness Day**
- **28th Rare Diseases Day**

Random Acts of Kindness Day

According to the American Psychological Association, studies have shown that acts of generosity not only benefit the recipients, but also boost happiness and well-being for the person offering kindness.

In the run up to Random Acts of Kindness Day, you might consider:

- Assemblies on the positive effects of kindness with a challenge or invitation to practice random acts of kindness.
- Making a display with cards where pupils can write down kinds deeds they have done or witnessed which can be pinned to the display.
- Creating a compliment or 'thank you' board or box for students to express their positive feelings towards each other or staff members.
- A creative art or short story competition on the theme of 'kindness'.



March

- **Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month**
- **Women's History Month**
- **15th - 21st No Name Calling Week**
- **20th International Day of Happiness**

International Day of Happiness

Aims: To celebrate and recognise the importance of happiness in people's lives and encourage action to promote happiness and well-being.

The International Day of Happiness is based on the belief that happiness is a fundamental human right and it is a day to celebrate the power of happiness to transform lives and make the world a better place for all. Ways to engage could include:

- Spread happiness: Do something kind for someone else or share positive messages
- Reflect on your own happiness: Take time to reflect on what makes you happy, and make a plan to incorporate those things into your daily life.

April

- **Stress Awareness Month**
- **6th Education and Sharing Day**
- **10th April National Siblings Day**
- **15th World Art Day**

National Siblings Day

For National Siblings day, we would like to honour the significance of sibling relationships, while recognising the potential difficulties and obstacles that can present within sibling dynamics.

We have come across a number of parents who are struggling with sibling rivalry between their children within our service.

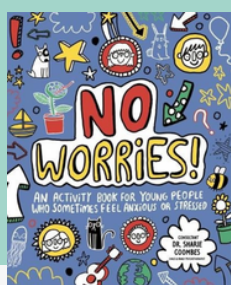
We therefore wanted to use national siblings day to highlight the following resource by Place2Be, which could be shared with any parents or carers that may be experiencing this concern.

- <https://parentingsmart.place2be.org.uk/article/understanding-sibling-rivalry>



The Worry Jar by Lou John

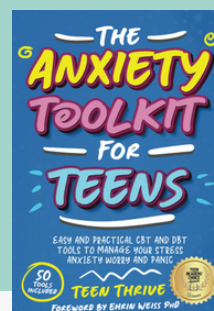
No Worries! Activity book by Lily Murray and Sherie Coombes



Helping your Child with Fears and Worries by Cathy Creswell and Lucy Willetts



The Anxiety Toolkit for Teens by Teen Thrive



BOOKS

We welcome your input in our newsletters! Send us pictures and descriptions of any events, activities and achievements you would like to highlight, to rebecca.bowman9@nhs.net with the subject line 'Ely Newsletter', and we'll feature as many schools as we can in our next newsletter. We also welcome any submissions for our FAQ section, or requests for newsletter topics.

Get involved