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Leading local care, improving lives in Manchester, with you

Healthy Schools MANCHESTER

Understanding Anxiety

Parents and Carers

Support provided by Zain Iqbal

(Mental Health Lead)



Powered by:

NHS Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust

NHS Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

Manchester Health & Care Commissioning

THE MANCHESTER PRIMARY CARE PARTNERSHIP

Content of today's session

- Definitions of Mental Health and Wellbeing
- What is anxiety?
- Understanding the anxious brain
- Identify the signs and symptoms of anxiety
- Anxiety based school avoidance
- Why deal with anxiety
- Cycle of worry
- Goal setting/Small steps
- Five ways to wellbeing
- Self-care
- Further support

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Important to note…

There may be topics and case studies in today's session that may relate to your own experiences of mental health and wellbeing.

Some topics can lead to past experiences/trauma resurfacing.

Please feel free to take a break at any point.



Mental Health is a topic we all have experience in.

Whether this is managing our own Mental Health or supporting someone else's, we all have some understanding of it.

However, it can mean different things to different people as we view and perceive the world through our unique intersectional lens.

So what does Mental Health mean to you?



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The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines Mental Health as…

'A state of wellbeing in which the individual realises his or her abilities, can cope with the stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community'.

However, this is not an exhaustive definition and as we've just discussed, Mental Health and Wellbeing and our unique definitions of it need to be taken into consideration.

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Many people think of Mental Health as being binary or black and white.

Either you have good mental health and wellbeing or you have poor mental health and wellbeing.

However, this truly is not the case!

Mental Health is better seen as a spectrum/continuum and reflecting as to where we sit on this continuum at a given time allows us to understand how we are feeling and what we and others can do to support us.

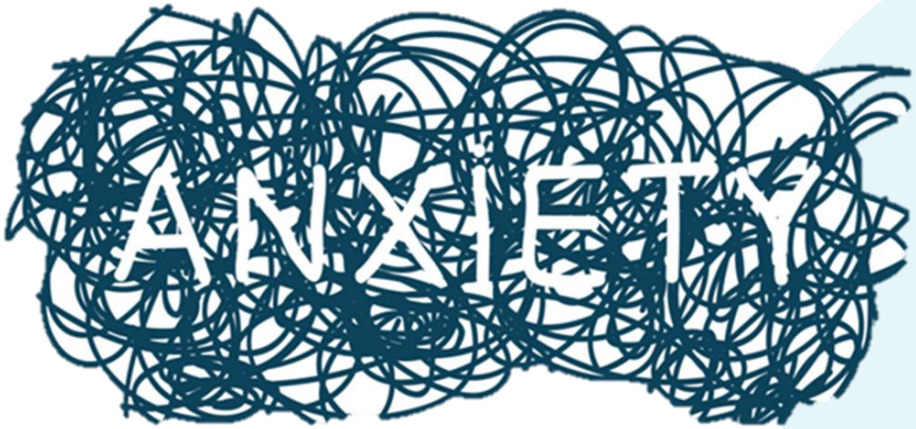
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Healthy	Responding/ Reacting	Injured	Ill
• Normal mood fluctuations • Ability to take things in ones stride • A good sense of humour • Good performance • Feeling in control • Normal sleep patterns • Being physically well • Having good energy levels • Being physically and socially active • Self confident • Comfortable with others • Limited use of drugs/alcohol or gambling	• Irritable/Impatient • Nervousness, sadness and increased worrying • Procrastination/ forgetfulness • Trouble sleeping • Intrusive thoughts • Muscle tension and headaches • Low energy levels • Decreased activity or socialising • Less confident • Feeling uneasy around others • Regular but controlled used of drugs/alcohol or gambling	• Anger • Anxiety • Continuous sadness • Feelings of hopelessness • Negative attitude towards life • Poor performance or a workaholic • Poor concentration and decision making abilities • Restless or disturbed sleep • Increased aches and pains • Increased fatigue • Unconfident in tasks • Avoidance and withdrawal • Increased and hard to control use of drugs/alcohol	• Anger outburst or aggression • Exessive anxiety or panic attacks • Depression, self harm or suicidality • Excessive insubordination • Inability to perform duties, control behaviour or concentrate • Inability to fall asleep or stay asleep • Physical illness • Chronic fatigue • Complete isolation • Avoidance of tasks altogether • Drugs/Alcohol abuse and addiction • Gambling problems and addiction

What is anxiety?

Felt by all

Natural response



Past, present or future

Physical and psychological impact

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Developmental Anxiety



Strangers, loud noises and discomfort



Fear of animals/insects, the dark, separation from parents, monsters, thunder and lightning, sleeping alone, ‘bad’ people



Real world dangers (fires, death, news events, crime, fear of not getting it right, teasing)



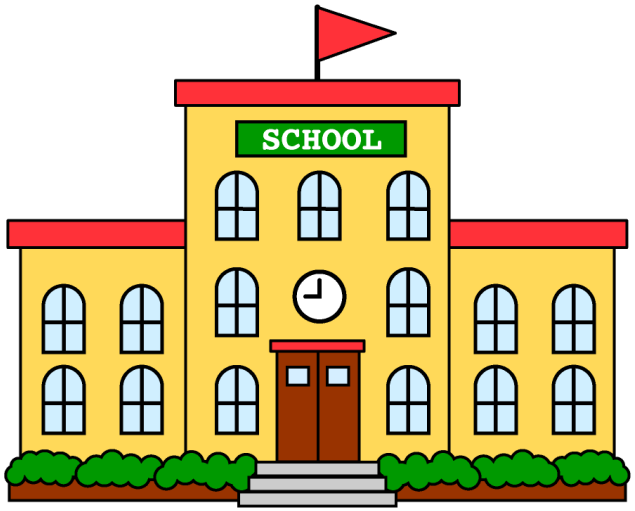
Social status, social groups, performance, relationships

Anxiety in School

Transition

Relationships

Social times



Travel to/from school

Changes

Bullying

Exams/assessments

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When does anxiety become an issue?

"We all get anxious at times, but some children seem to live a life of anxiety, where it's not short-term and it's not just an occasional thing."

Paul Stallard, Professor of Child and Family Mental Health at the University of Bath

Children tend to feel anxious about different things at different ages. Many of these worries are a normal part of growing up.

Anxiety becomes a problem when it starts to get in the way of everyday life, for at least 2 months.

If a CYP is unable to participate in activities and events that a child of that age should be able to and it is limiting their opportunities, we should begin to consider whether this is normal developmental anxiety or not.

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Understanding the anxious brain

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Understanding the anxious brain

"Anxiety can often be traced to over reactivity in the amygdala, a small site in the middle of the brain that, among its many other functions, responds to novelty and threat.

When the amygdala works as it should, it orchestrates a physiological response to changes in the environment. It is there to help keep us alive.

But in people born with a particular brain circuitry…the amygdala is hyperreactive, prickly as ***a haywire motion-detector light that turns on when nothing's moving but the rain****."*

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Understanding the anxious brain

"But having all the earmarks of anxiety in the brain does not always translate into a subjective experience of anxiety.

The brain state does not make it a disorder. Two people can experience the same level of anxiety, but one who has interesting work to distract her from the jittery feelings might do fine, while another who has just lost his job spends all day at home fretting and might be quicker to reach a point where the thrum becomes overwhelming. It's all in the context, the interpretation, the ability to divert your attention from the knot in your gut. These variations also happen when someone grows up from an anxious infant to someone either fretful or tranquil."

Identifying signs and symptoms of anxiety

There are signs and symptoms to look out for that can help us spot anxiety in young people earlier –

- Feeling constantly agitated, tense or restless
- Being sensitive to criticism or extremely self-conscious
- Being withdrawn and isolating themselves
- Big changes in eating habits
- Having a lot of trouble sleeping (when trying to actually sleep)
- Poor concentration and ability to perform tasks
- Excessive worrying – uncontrollable and often irrational
- Constant worry and fear that a person goes over and over
- Increased apprehension and nervousness
- Phobias – very strong, irrational fears
- Social difficulties – a fear of social situations and interactions that often lead to avoidance
- Panic attacks – characterized by a sudden overwhelming fear, dizziness, tight chested, racing heart, chest pains, sweating, shaking/trembling, tearful, nausea

Anxiety Based School Avoidance

For many young people who struggle with anxiety, it can lead to ABSA/EBSA. This is a term used to describe children and young people who experience persistent challenges in attending school due to negative feelings, such as anxiety.

Four main reasons for school avoidance:

1. To avoid uncomfortable feelings brought on by attending school, such as feelings of anxiety or low mood.

2. To avoid situations that might be stressful, such as academic demands, social pressures and/or aspects of the school environment.

3. To reduce separation anxiety or to gain attention from significant others, such as parents or other family members.

4. To pursue tangible reinforces outside of school, such as going shopping or playing computer games during school time.

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Anxiety Based School Avoidance

There are many factors for ABSA and we will refer to these as push and pull factors. Push factors increase a CYP's ability to attend school, and pull factors are those that reduce it (and therefore make it more likely the CYP will stay at home)

Push

- Friends at schools
- Good social network
- Positive transition
- Good relationships with peers and teachers
- Sense of belonging
- Motivated to achieve
- Resilient and positive mental health
- Needs met

Pull

- Games and freedom at home
- Less sensory stimulation
- Friendship difficulties
- No sense of belonging
- Dislikes competition
- Relationship breakdowns
- Dislike of certain lessons
- Doesn't see school as important
- Negative thought cycle

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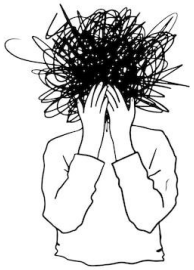
Anxiety Based School Avoidance

Further to this, parents and carers can often unknowingly or naively contribute to this. This could be…

- Wanting to protect children from fears
- Concerns that a child may behave in a way that staff can't cope
- Worried what other parents will say if their child is emotionally challenged at school
- Parent sickness impacting on ability to get child to school
- Parents own separation anxiety
- A lack of trust in staff and school
- Assuming they know best for their child and no other adult should intervene
- Own poor experiences of school

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Avoidance cycle

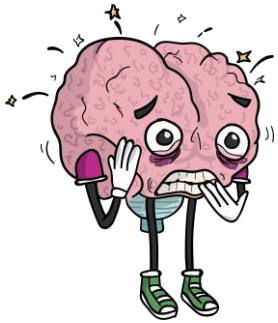


Anxious thoughts create negative feelings and excessive worry which makes us uncomfortable

Avoidance of the situation so that we aren't uncomfortable can stay in our safe space



Relief from anxiety as avoidance allows us to feel calmer



You've begun to train your brain to avoid things that make you anxious. The next time the same situations comes up you will have more worry.

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Why deal with and challenge anxiety and anxious behaviours?

Anxiety can be very unpleasant to experience, and it can limit the things you want to do. By not challenging anxiety we can normalise anxious thoughts and behaviours, which in turn stops young people from achieving all the incredible things they have the potential to do.

Left untreated, anxiety can last a long time and may lead from one anxiety condition to another. For example, someone who has generalised anxiety might develop panic attacks, which could become more severe and regular and lead to prolonged school absence. Anxiety can also have a significant physical impact. Some people may drink too much or misuse recreational drugs to deal with anxiety, which in turn will lead to further problems.

The cycle of worry

Unsupported and unchallenged anxiety can lead to a vicious cycle. Our anxious thoughts create negative feelings, which create unwanted behaviours, which then create physical symptoms. Each of these impacts the other and the cycle gets worse.

Thoughts

"I can't keep on top of the constant changes"



Feelings

Uneasy
Out of control
Worried

Behaviour

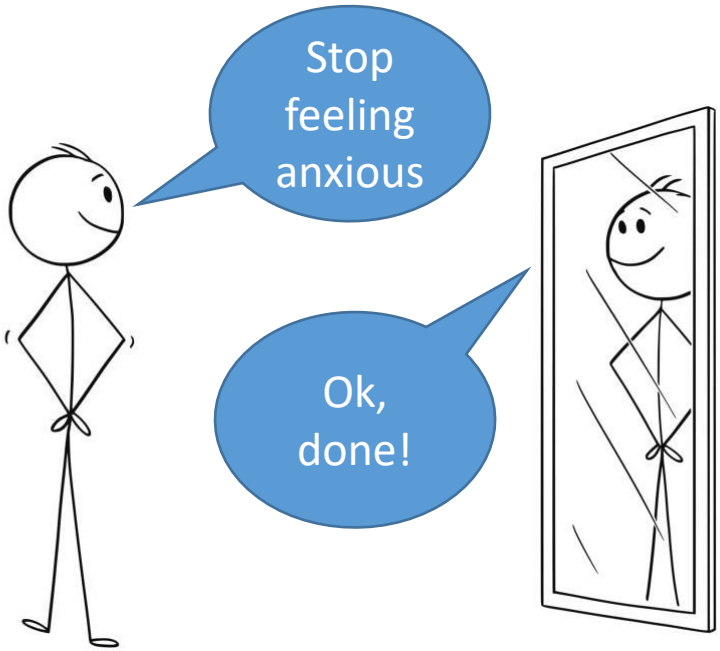
Irritable
Short tempered

Physical

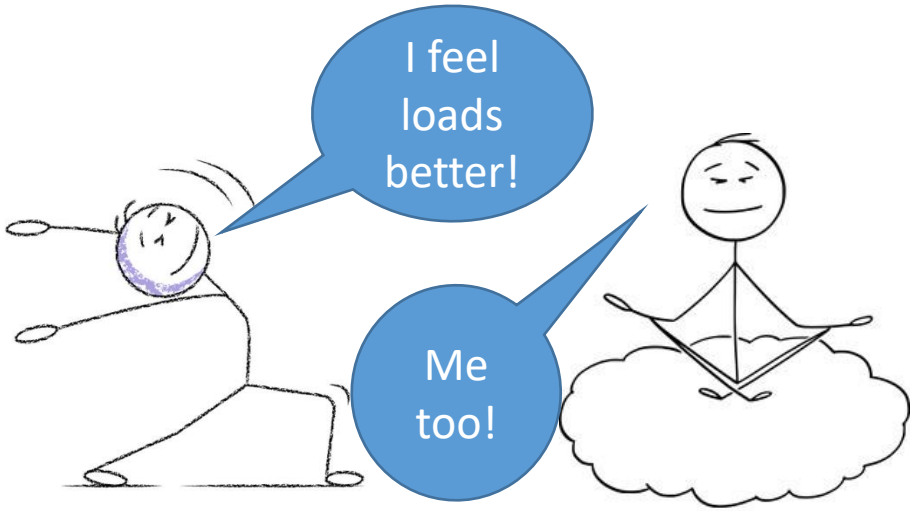
Poor concentration
Forgetful
Knots in stomach

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Breaking the cycle



All four of aspects of the cycle feed into one another and it's not as simple as changing your thoughts, feelings, behaviour or controlling your physical symptoms.



Physically doing something (that we already know will be good for us) is the only way to break the cycle. It's important to think about ways we can break the cycle for young people and support them in doing so.

Challenging negative thoughts

As mentioned before, it's important that we break both cycles. Avoiding something that makes us anxious will make us more anxious and our thoughts/feelings/behaviours/emotions will continue to feed into one another.

Challenging the negative thoughts that young people have is an important part of starting to break these cycles. Listen to what young people have to say about their worries and try to identify things that you can positively challenge so they can see things in a new way.

- *Do you think you're having any unhelpful negative thoughts? What is it?*
- *Why do you think you are having this thought?*
- *How does having this thought make you feel?*
- *What evidence is there that makes you think this thought could happen?*
- *Is there evidence that could show you that this thought could not happen?*
- *If a friend had this thought, what would you say to them? Why are you not saying this to yourself?*
- *What's a more realistic way of thinking?*
- *What could help you stop thinking this way?*

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Goal setting and small steps

Once negative and anxious thinking has been sensitively challenged, we can move on to goal setting. This is an evidenced based proven method of breaking these cycles and tackling our anxiety.

Step 1 – What do we want to achieve? Is it realistic? Is it concrete and specific?
Step 2 – Break the main goal into smaller steps
Step 3 – Identify the obstacles
Step 4 – Schedule in when we will achieve the smaller the steps
Step 5 – Carry out the steps (Don’t wait for motivation to come. Take action and motivation will follow)
Step 6 – Reward yourself for achieving milestones
Step 7 - If things to don’t work out, revisit and review then try again

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Five ways to wellbeing

Another helpful and low-level way to start breaking the cycle, elevating our mood and achieving mood is practicing one of the five ways to wellbeing.

These are five simple strategies that can add significant wellbeing into our lives which help us then feel motivated to do more and overcome our anxieties.



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Connect with friends, family and those that mean a lot to us. Talk to them, listen to them, be there and feel genuinely connected.



Exercise makes us feel good and improves health. Go for a walk, a jog or a run. Play a sport or go for a swim. Physical activity clears our head and helps our physical and mental health.



Try something new, maybe painting or drawing. Learn to play an instrument. Pick up a new language. Bake some bread. When you achieve something, it feels good and learning new things will make you confident to tackle challenges.



Give to others what you can. This could be a smile, a thank you, volunteering your time or if possible donating money. Seeing how you can make someone's day a bit better is very rewarding and makes you feel great for doing it.



Everything you do and experience is beautiful. Show gratitude in all that you do. Savour each moment, be aware of what's happening and the world around you. You will start to see the things that really matter.

Self-care

We must also prepare and support our children and young people to look after themselves. This is called self-care. It is an important part of building resilience and looking after mental health and challenging anxiety.

By giving young people the skills and ability to look after themselves, they can get through tough times by using strategies and initiatives they can do themselves. This could include any of the things from our five ways to wellbeing but here are some more examples…



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Self-Help

Similar to self-care, self-help is allowing children and young people find the help they need themselves. There are multiple ways to do this but here are some NHS approved apps and resources they can access.



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CALM HARM

A free app to help teenagers resist or manage the urge to self-harm



MOVE MOOD

A free app to help teenagers with low mood and depression

CLEAR FEAR



A free app to help children young people manage the symptoms of anxiety



WORTH WARRIOR

A free app to help young people manage low self-worth, poor body image and related eating disorders

YOUNGMiNDS

childline
ONLINE, ON THE PHONE, ANYTIME
childline.org.uk | 0800 1111

Support from school

If you are noticing changes in your child's mood, behaviours, self-esteem, resilience, wellbeing or ability to cope and are unsure what to do to support then the best place to first go to is the school.

It's important to remember that the school and the professionals there are highly skilled are on your side. They are not against you or your child but want to help and support to the best of their ability. By taking the time to talk to the staff at school you and the school can share concerns and work together to make sure you have a consistent approach at home and at school. Working together as one team is the greatest strength you can have.

School's have direct access initiatives and programme that can provide further support and resources, but they often cannot do this if children are off school for long periods of time, or they do not have the support of parents and carers.

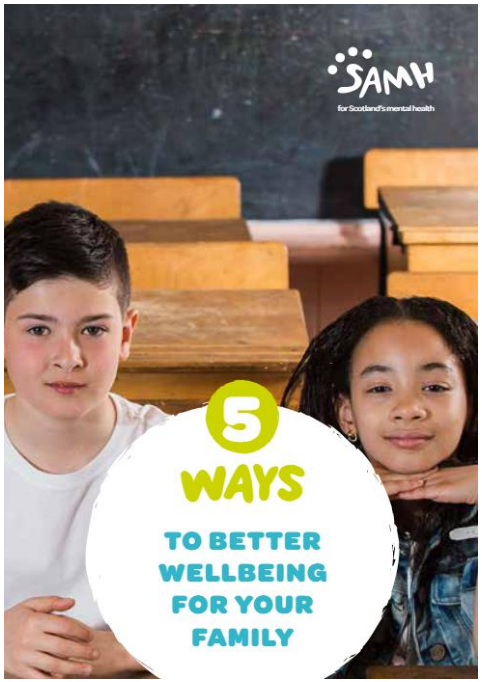
Speak to your child's form tutor or head of year for any support.

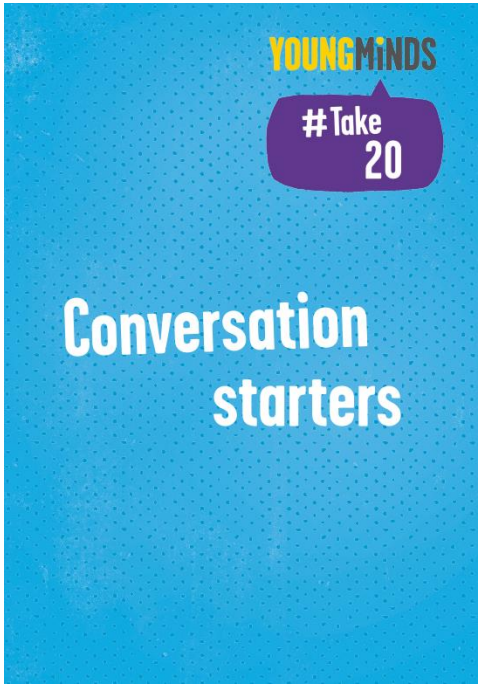
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Further support

YOUNGMiNDS
fighting for young people's mental health

Parents' A-Z mental health guide







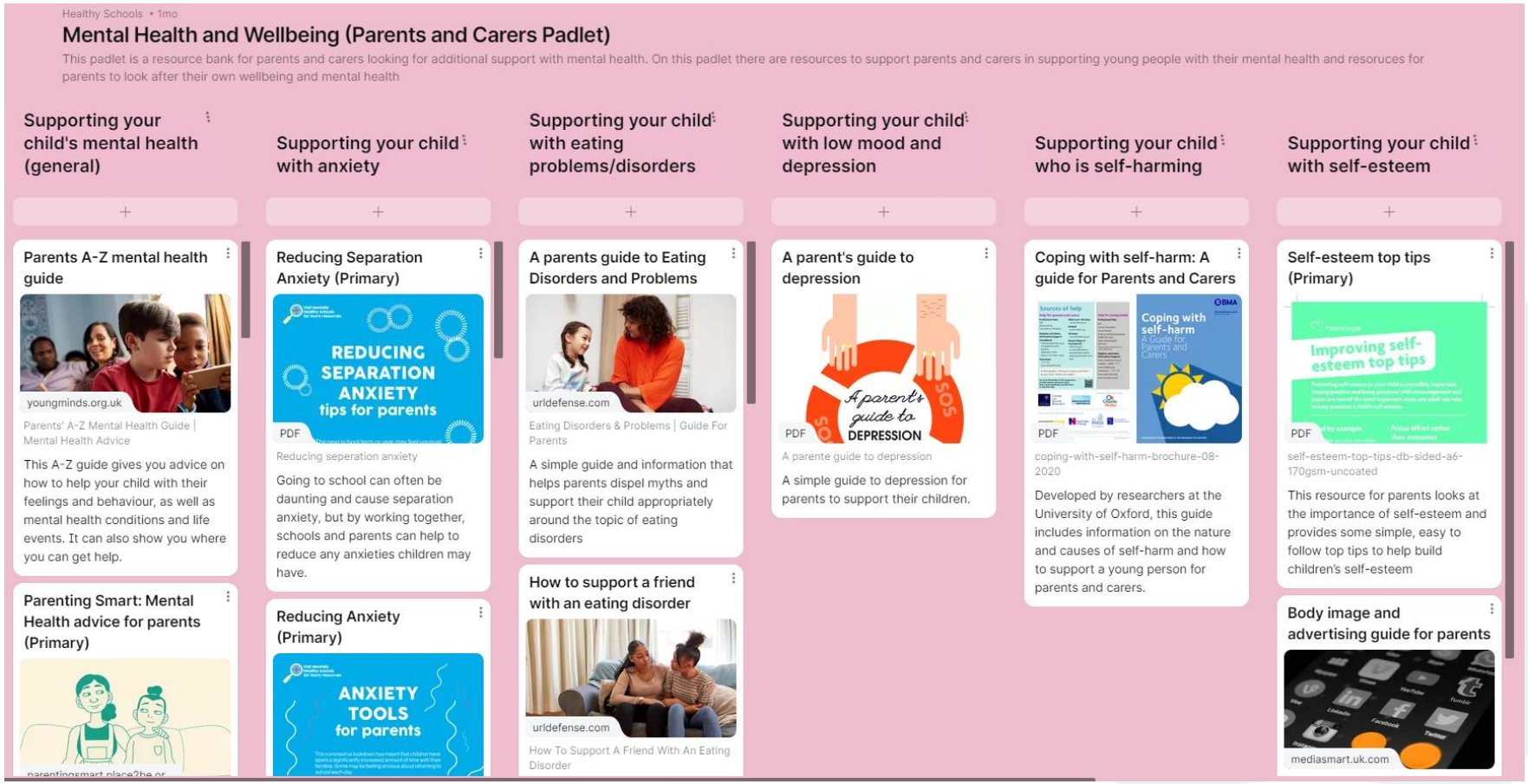
Place 2Be

Parenting Smart

Parenting advice from our child mental health experts

Practical tips to support children's wellbeing and behaviour

Further support



https://padlet.com/healthyschools/mental-health-and-wellbeing-parents-and-carers-padlet-vnqylifkyn01oh1i

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Further support

Manchester Parent Carer Forum works to represent the ‘voice’ of parents and carers of children and young people aged 0-25 with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

SPACE (Supporting Parents And Carers Endeavour) Group is a parent-led group that aims to offer unique support sessions for parents/carers of children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND).

Sessions are normally held at St George’s Community Centre (M40 7NY), 11am-1pm on a Friday (fortnightly during term-time).

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Thank you for listening and joining in!



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