

Anxiety Workshops (2018) – “It’s okay to not be okay”

Summary Report

Purpose

The Anxiety Support program developed by the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) is based on the principals of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). The programme aims to support pupils to gain a clearer understanding of their worries/anxieties and the impact that these have on aspects of their learning and wellbeing. More specifically, students are supported by the group facilitators to identify the key “triggers” to their anxiety; gain a better understanding of how their anxieties influence their behaviours and emotional state (e.g. avoidance, withdrawal, panic attacks, dizziness, feeling sick, etc.); and introduce pupils to key strategies to help them cope better with their anxieties.

Aims

The program aims to: 1 - Make pupils aware of their own anxiety signals, 2 - Introduce the concept of negative thinking and how to transform these thoughts into helpful, positive ones, 3 - Examine their current coping strategies and build on them and 4 - Enable pupils to set their own goals to manage their anxiety.

Measures

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Anxiety Groups program the EPS used a self-report questionnaire measure called the SPENCE Children’s Anxiety Scale (SCAS) (Spence, 1994).

The SCAS is designed to identify symptoms of 6 Forms of Anxiety: Social Phobia (SOC), Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Panic Disorder/Agoraphobia (PAG), Personal Injury Fears (PIF), Separation Anxiety (SEP) and Generalised Anxiety (GAD). This was filled in by pupils both pre and post intervention to establish whether there were any changes in their anxiety levels after the intervention.

Additionally, focus groups were held with the young people who participated in the workshops to capture their views on the helpfulness / effectiveness of the intervention.

Results

The following results are from a sample of 15 children who completed the anxiety group sessions in 2018. **Figure 1** shows that the average SCAS scores for the group were lower post intervention. On average, pupils' reported that their anxiety levels decreased by a score of 6.2 (9.4%) after taking part in the workshops.

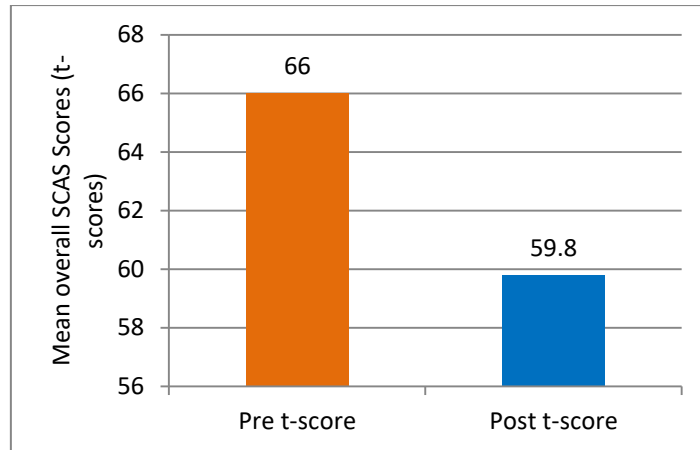


Figure 1: Overall difference in SCAS Scores

Figure 2 shows the overall difference in SCAS scores for each child. 80 % of students (12 out of 15) indicated a decrease in their overall levels of anxiety as a result of participating in the workshops.

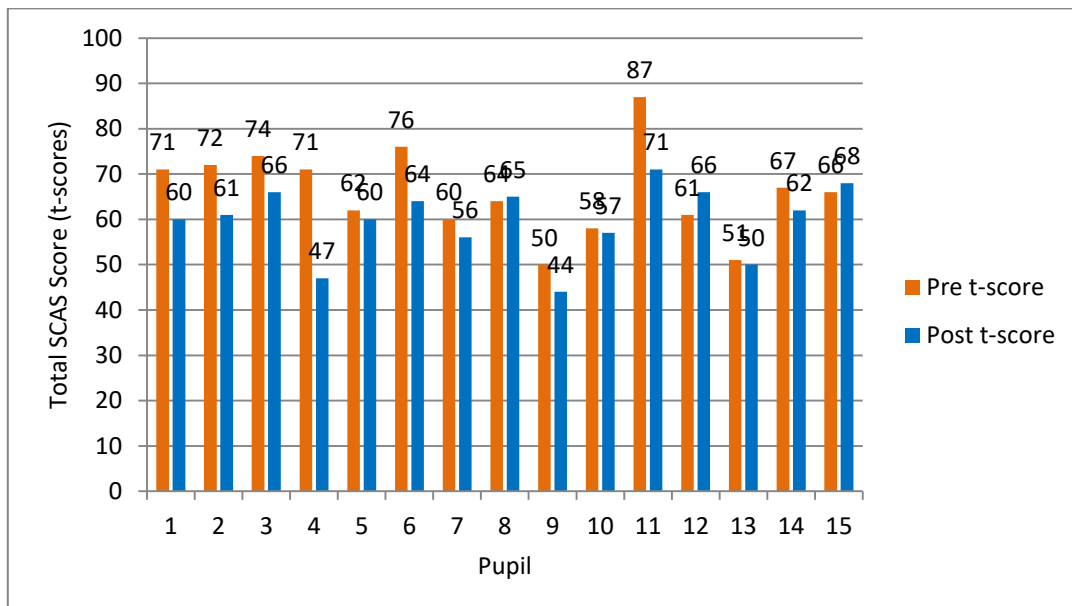


Figure 2: Difference in SCAS Scores per pupil

Figure 3 shows differences in SCAS scores for each sub-type of anxiety. With the exception of the PIF (Personal Injury Fears) sub-scale, the mean scores for all other sub-scales were lower post-intervention.

Qualitative data from the focus group reinforced the positive impact that the workshops have had on the young people, with themes emerging around building their confidence, developing knowledge and strategies around their anxiety and improving their attendance. The pupils felt that the groups provided them with a safe space to talk and gave them a chance to build trusting relationships with the other group members who were having similar experiences. Pupils also made constructive suggestions as to how the workshops could be improved in the future e.g. starting the workshops earlier in the school year. (See **Figure 4**).

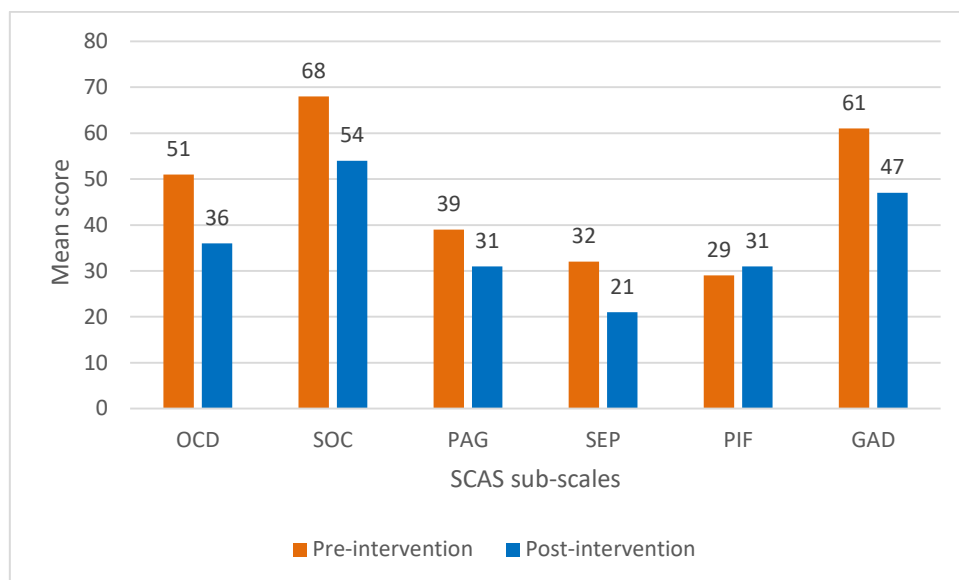


Figure 3: Difference in SCAS Subscale Scores

Final Thoughts

Overall, 80% of pupils involved in the evaluation of the workshops reported reductions in their anxiety as a result of participating in the Anxiety workshops. This reflects that, whilst anxiety is still present for these young people, the program provides them with skills and strategies to cope on those occasions where anxiety becomes overwhelming, or interferes with their daily lives.

The anxiety group workshops are currently running again (early 2019) in several secondary schools across West Lothian.

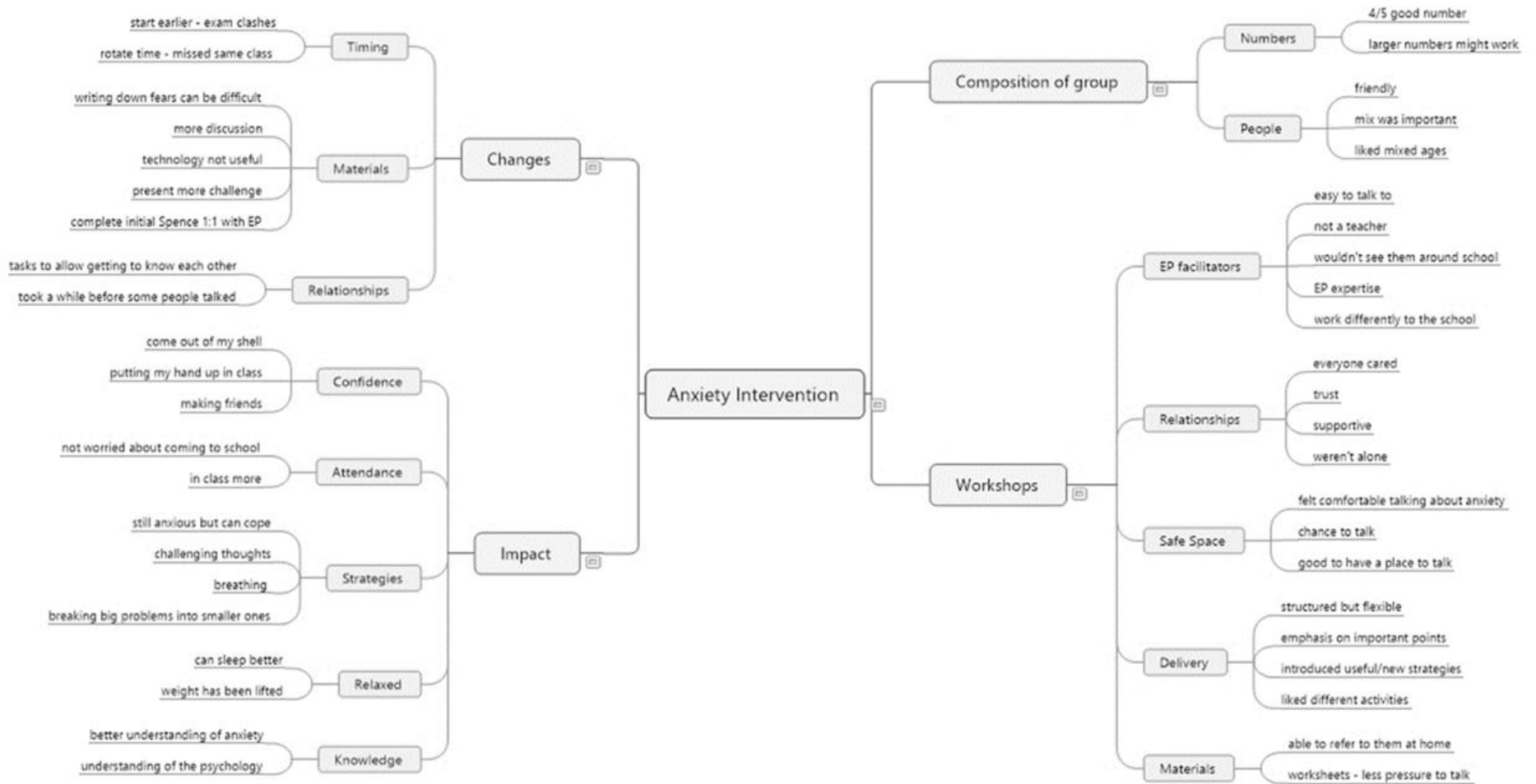


Figure 4: Themes and subthemes emerging from focus group