

News Release

For Immediate Release

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REPORT HIGHLIGHTS PRACTICAL AND EFFECTIVE INTERVENTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ANXIETY

VICTORIA – A report released today offers several practical and effective interventions to assist families and practitioners helping young people with anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

The report, by Simon Fraser University's Children's Health Policy Centre and sponsored by the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY), recognizes the increased mental health challenges young people are facing at this time. Given physical distancing measures currently required, researchers looked at innovative anxiety interventions that could be provided using virtual or self-directed methods.

“Our current public health crisis has caused significant disruptions in the lives of all children, youth and families in B.C.,” said Representative Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth. “It was important to undertake ‘rapid research’ during this time to see what can be done to assist the greatest number of children with anxiety, given the restrictions we are living with. We know it is crucial to address anxiety symptoms and disorders early to ensure they don’t persist into adulthood – help cannot wait until the pandemic is over.”

Nearly 45,000 children in B.C. were estimated to have anxiety disorders, before COVID-19, according to Dr. Charlotte Waddell, director of the Children's Health Policy Centre. “Our new report confirms there are many effective ways for practitioners, caregivers and families to address this anxiety during these challenging times,” she said.

Rapid Research Review on Effective Approaches for Reducing Childhood Anxiety found that cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) is most effective at preventing and treating childhood anxiety and can easily be adapted for both virtual and self-directed delivery. When CBT is not successful, the report found that the medication fluoxetine can help, and can be prescribed and monitored virtually. Adaptation details and resources for practitioners and caregivers are found in the report, including a program that has been enriched to be culturally meaningful for Indigenous children and youth in B.C.

“These are innovative techniques to address a key mental health issue during a pandemic. However, I am mindful that COVID-19 is affecting some children and families disproportionately, and that these virtual approaches leave some children out,” said Charlesworth.

“First Nations, Métis, urban Indigenous, children with special needs and children with complex mental health, developmental and behavioural needs do not always have access to, or the ability to

use, technology. Despite the limitations, the importance of this report is that it contributes to the body of knowledge about effective interventions for some children with anxiety and provides practical and useable information.”

“A crucial message from our report is that CBT can make a meaningful difference in the lives of children – from preschoolers to older teens,” said Dr. Christine Schwartz, Adjunct Professor with the Children’s Health Policy Centre. “When children receive CBT as part of prevention or treatment, they learn skills they can apply for life, well beyond the pandemic.”

The Children’s Health Policy Centre is conducting rapid research on behalf of RCY on a number of issues affecting children and youth in B.C. during the pandemic. The next report will focus more deeply on populations disproportionately affected by the public health crisis.

Rapid Research Review on Effective Approaches for Reducing Childhood Anxiety can be found at www.rcybc.ca/reports

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