

Editorial

Interventions for anxious and depressed students

This issue reports three research projects in child anxiety intervention. Each project has generated an empirically based training package for practitioners (viz., Friends, Facing Your Fears, and Resourceful Adolescent). There are several fascinating features of this work, three of which are noted. Firstly, anxiety problems (e.g., maladaptive worry and avoidant behaviour) that used to be treated as transitory phenomena are the target of this concerted effort. Australian research has contributed to our improved understanding of child anxiety, the processes involved, and its developmental significance. Normal developmental fears have now been distinguished from more severe and intense fears that sometimes develop into adult psychopathology. Thus, childhood anxiety and depression cannot be ignored without peril to child, family, and, in the longer term, society. Models of social-cognitive skill building disseminated in these programs provide more resilient alternatives for anxious and depressed children and youth.

Secondly, parallel programs for parents accompany student programs. Large scale field trials have been conducted. Training of families and of school psychologists, counsellors, and teachers has taken place around Australia. Parenting strategies provide alternatives to classical and operant conditioning that maintain internalising behaviours in children and in their parents. The international literature on prevention and early intervention in developmental mental health has being made more accessible to parents and to professionals in schools and other settings that cater to youth.

Finally, group training is a feature of these programs. Making these programs widely available is needed for this high-frequency developmental issue. The programs take a contextual systemic approach to treatment of anxiety and depression. The testing of group-based delivery models of training draws on the dynamics of fellowship and the motivation of common cause: Normalisation of anxiety experiences, peer learning and modelling, and family support networks become part of the learning environment. The role of peers and schools in developing buffers for anxious children and in supporting more positive coping strategies also becomes salient in a preventative and early interventionist framework.

This contextual systemic approach also has direct application to practice in anxiety and depression. This type of research has provided an empirical methodology for effective training that requires specialised practitioner skills in working with groups. Private practitioners who work in group modes can compare approaches developed in these research trials with their own. Those who work with individual children may be encouraged to explore parent

training and group work in their therapeutic procedures. In school-based practice, there are implications arising from the argument that school-based training in resilience building is more effective when incorporated within the curriculum.

In addition to the papers on three programs of intervention in child anxiety and depression, this issue includes a complementary report on how school staff identify the need for preventative and other intervention in the population of school students. This study appears to indicate a higher staff awareness of internalising problems among students than projected in previous research (Spence & Dadds, 1995). This finding may suggest an emerging synergy between Australian research on child anxiety intervention and Australian school practice. Skill-building programs with a strong local research base and good concrete instructional materials for community use may be absorbed quickly. Families and schools with needs for these psychological resources and training opportunities may become sensitised quickly to their availability and may become more likely to articulate and prioritise concerns when real opportunities to help children emerge.

This issue also contains an article that marks this publication's new status as a college journal from 1988, its fifteenth year. Alison Garton, the APS Executive Director, presents a personal reflection on the history of The Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist. During the formative years of AEDP in Western Australia, Alison was one of a small band of editorial devotees. Despite sometimes tough times, the early editorial teams persevered in the knowledge that they were engaged in a worthwhile endeavour. Alison's analysis gives an insight into that endeavour. Subscribers will be aware that she was very kind in her reference to the scheduled issue publication dates, which have tended to be honoured more in the breach. I hope that each issue is a pleasant surprise when it does arrive. As the 34th APS Annual Conference (Hobart) will include a "meet the editor" session, I am motivated to confirm the goodwill of subscribers.

Spence, S. H., & Dadds, M. R. (1995). Preventing childhood anxiety disorders. *Behaviour Change*, 13 (4), 241–249.

Fiona Bryer
Editor

