

Information for the dental team on using the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) guide

Why do young people with dental anxiety need a CBT guide?

- Dental anxiety can be distressing and can result in patients delaying or avoiding dental treatment.
- Young people with dental anxiety have been found to have worse oral health and quality of life than those who are not anxious.
- There is evidence that psychological interventions and assisted self-help resources can be very effective at reducing different types of anxiety in young people.

Who should use this CBT guide?

- Young people with mild to moderate dental anxiety aged 9-16 years old (and their parents).
- It will work best with young people who want to reduce their dental anxiety and who do not have urgent treatment needs.
- Young people who have severe dental anxiety are likely to need additional psychological and/or pharmacological treatments.

Benefits of using this CBT guide

- Promotes communication between the dental team, the young person and the parent.
- Helps build good relationships based on trust.
- Helps dentally anxious young people receive the dental treatment they need.
- Helps reduce dental anxiety in young people and so cuts down the time you need to spend with these patients in the long term.
- Reduces the patient's reliance on pharmacological treatments such as GA or sedation.
- Reduces the stress for the dental team associated with treating highly anxious patients.
- Prevents dentally anxious children from becoming anxious adults.
- Reduces late cancellations or missed appointments caused by avoidance due to dental anxiety.

How to use this CBT guide

- There are guides for young people and parents. The young person's version takes between 15-20 minutes for them to work through.
- The dentist or a dental team member should offer the guides to patients who they identify as anxious. Don't be afraid to ask your patients if they feel worried about visiting you or having their treatment – it won't make them more nervous but it will show them you care and offers them a practical solution to dealing with their anxiety.

What to do at the first visit:

- Introduce the guide - dentists who have used the guide before typically say something like:
"Thank you for telling me that you are a bit worried about having treatment (or you could be more specific, eg worried about having a tooth out). It is much better that we know about this so that we can think of some ways of helping you. You might be interested in this special guide which we have made for young people just like you. It has some great tips for visiting the dentist, and other people have said that it has really helped them. All you have to do is read through it before and after having any treatment with us. There are some special pages for you to fill in, or things to think about, and then we can talk about it more at your next visit."
- At the end of the first visit remind the patient to have a look at their guide and come back with their 'Message to Dentist'.

What to do at subsequent visits

- Ask the patient how they are feeling, ask if they have had a look at the guide, discuss their 'Message to the Dentist' and what you will do to support them for example agreeing a stop signal.
- Let them know that you are happy to read though what they have written in the guide and that you want to help them feel less anxious.
- Ask your patients what things they are worried about.
- Ask young people what information they would like and if they want to see/feel the equipment.
- Make them a stress ball (you could call it a Happy Squasher) from a glove filled with flour.
- If you have time you can work through other aspects of the guide with the young person as well. For example, make a plan with the patient about what treatment you want to carry out when.
- Remind young people to bring the guide with them to future appointments.

Additional tips for the dental team on using the CBT guide

- It is important that you normalise how young people feel and let them know lots of young people overcome their anxieties about visiting the dentist.
- Make sure you are honest with young people about treatment (e.g. what it will feel like, how long it will take).
- Always finish the appointment on a high and provide lots of specific praise; acknowledging young people's achievements!