



Healthfocus

What's New at Healthfocus?

We are pleased to announce that our new website is now available by going to www.healthfocuspsychology.com.au.

Please take the time to have a look as information is available on our location, psychologists and commonly asked questions.

As Christmas is fast approaching we thought we would let you know our availability over this period. We will be closing on Wednesday 24th of December and re-opening on the 5th of January.

A new program that is now available for download is called **Smiling Mind**. It is modern meditation for people of all ages. It is a unique web and App-based program, designed to help bring balance to your life – give it a try today!

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Self Esteem in Children

I have thoroughly enjoyed my first 12 months of work at Healthfocus. A trend that has become highlighted in the psychology area relating to working with parents and children is the re-emerging emphasis on encouraging self esteem in children.

Sometimes in our quest to be the best parents we can be, we may take on misguided information, believing the best way to foster self esteem is to make sure that for most of the time

our children are feeling good about themselves, We may praise and reinforce our children, with little regard for what they actually do. The downside of this can be children who have a sense of over-entitlement and strong self-interest that we didn't quite intend upon. Observing what seems to work best is the recognition that "ideal" self esteem is promoted by a few of the following. Lets work together to support a balanced and contented generation of children.

- *Allowing our Children to experience failure and encouraging them to learn lessons*
- *Demanding accountability from our Children.*
- *Allowing opportunities to demonstrate competence whilst loving them regardless of the result.*

Monique Armstrong – Burgin

What does Trauma really mean?

The word trauma is often used in everyday language, with people claiming that they were traumatised by the loss of something or feeling upset about something in their lives, but real psychological trauma is much more complex. In order to have a trauma reaction, the person would usually undergo a trauma event, which is an event where the person experienced or witnessed potential or actual harm to either themselves or someone else (e.g. someone being injured or killed). In this type of event, the brain or the mind becomes overwhelmed and goes into a state of dissociation, which people often described as going "into shock" or feeling numb.

The really interesting part about this is that the mind compartmentalises the experience of trauma often into sensory experiences which the emotions then attach to. As evidence of this, there are MRI studies where people are asked to talk about their trauma experience, which show in the brain a compartmentalisation. Most importantly is that MRI scans of trauma patients taken after undergoing psychological treatment show the brain can return to a "normal" MRI scan. I like to think of it as all the talking therapy, the exposure therapy, relaxation training and psychological techniques help knit the mind back together.

Often specific visual memories, auditory memories and/ or memories associated with the sense of touch, or even smell or taste transport the person back to the original distress arising from the original event against their will. And it is this that the person usually tries to disconnect from or avoid at any cost. Psychological treatment offers a gentle approach to gradually inviting the person to talk about, remember and learn how to soothe their anxious, intrusive or irritable symptoms.

Research regarding PTSD treatment shows that the earlier that a person undergoes psychological treatment the quicker and more successful that the psychological treatment is likely to be.

Lisa Irving

Behavioural Approach to Anxiety

In this news piece, I will aim to summarise some concepts of Behavioural Activation which can be used practically to improve mood and decrease anxiety levels.

Jacobson, Martell & Dimidjian (2001) defined Behavioural Activation Treatment (BA) as a systematic and structured attempt to increase the level of meaningful activity in a person's life, thereby helping patients to gain contact with sources of positive reinforcement for behaviours that correspond with clinical improvement. The way that escape and avoidance behaviours reinforce depression and anxiety has been explored in recent behavioural models of depression and anxiety (Hopko, Robertson, and Lejuez, 2006; Turner & Leach, 2010).

Sometimes, when one feels depressed and/or anxious, it may be difficult to find motivation to complete a task or to face a challenging situation, and it may be easier to avoid such activities and tasks. Unfortunately, though avoidance in the short term can bring relief, it begins a process of reinforcement of avoidance of activities that can end up limiting the ability to engage in activities in the longer term. Increasingly, it can become more and more difficult to undertake an avoided activity the next time, which may in fact increase depression and/or anxiety, especially if the individual finds him or herself in a challenging situation (that could not be avoided).



Based on the BA model of depression and anxiety (note that there are different variants of BA covered in research literature), practical strategies to help improve mental health conditions include:

- (1) Understanding factors maintaining mood and anxiety symptoms (e.g. limited/avoided social activities, challenging family dynamics, difficulty staying in work)
- (2) Properly identifying what matters in the individual's life (goal setting), considering different facets/key areas for the self: e.g., family, social, health, education, careers, and study.
- (3) Setting short and long term goals, in terms of observable behaviours, for example, for someone suffering from social anxiety, it may be appropriate to begin with scheduling a short 15 minute walk once a week with a close family member, and then gradually extending to include **longer walks with other people in a social circle, and incrementally including a visit to a local shopping centre along the way**. In a BA approach, less focus is placed upon the "thinking" and the "feeling", and special focus is placed on targeted "doing".
- (4) Scheduling and allocating time for each activity (e.g., going for a walk for 15 mins twice a week on specified days, and if suited, gradually increase the frequency), with the aim of gradually creating or returning to a healthy routine in life.
- (5) The key point in Behavioural Activation is to directly focus on activation, to address avoidance behaviours and to increase experiences that are pleasurable, productive, and improve life context.

I hope that the information provided here will assist in understanding how modern behavioural approaches can be part of a treatment plan for individuals with depression and anxiety.

Yong Lee



