

How can schools support pupils with anxiety and support wider understanding of anxiety through PSHE and beyond?

by *Dana Abdulkarim*, Assistant Principal, Oasis Academy Don Valley

In the first instance teachers and staff (all staff in schools) must develop their knowledge of MHWB including anxiety. There are lots of great platforms for this, one is [MindEd Hub](#) sign up using your professional account and then you can work through e-learning in many aspects of MH.

From this staff can develop a greater awareness and accuracy of information that will help them understand anxiety and how it can affect young people.

Pastoral staff having completed this training can look to develop 1:1 or group support to work with young people of need within their setting/ year group

Regular student voice opportunities which allow for young people to share how things feel need to be created as usual and regular occurrences.

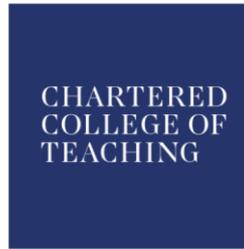
Carefully planned CPD, assemblies and taught input (via form time, PSHE and national agendas) can highlight and talk about anxiety with young people (and staff). The key thing here is normalising that we all feel anxiety and it can be very useful to understand our triggers WITH strategies to minimise the worry we feel in a healthy way.

PSHE teaching of anxiety needs to be proactive, to discuss combative techniques which are then deliberately modelled and practiced with young people ahead of them being in crisis.

For those with identified needs, offer a safe space/ adult that is consistent but ensure that young people know this is part of their care, not their first call.

Anti-anxiety teaching includes discussing the topics and themes which bring these feelings – so mapping appropriate lessons and support around revision, exam stress, post-16, transition, friends, and relationships and how these can change how a person feels are healthy. The best way to do this is to embed teaching as a proactive rather than reactive response.

Other ideas are about having a safe space for young people to reflect on 'how they are feeling' – we do this with a wellbeing journal



We also have a self-referral button (all students have iPads) that a young person can complete and share that they are in need. This is sent to our Inclusion, welfare and safeguarding team who can then triage and support.

The important thing is to make discussing how we feel, the pressure points, the ways we manage and regulate ourselves regular, open, and transparent

By not isolating MH education to one lesson/ month/ day we ensure everyone learns that checking in, checking up and then listening is always the best way to manage our emotions

Accessing and sharing support groups with young people is also beneficial, previously used [With Me In Mind – Mental Health Support Teams](#) in Rotherham and Doncaster schools. Young people are encouraged to access this, and it is shared on displays in key learning/social zones.

[Anxiety – With Me In Mind](#) guidance available here.

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Dana Abdulkarim, Assistant Principal, Oasis Academy Don Valley - Dana is a senior teacher in Sheffield, leading on PE and PSHE. In 2000 she became the first Muslim and Arab woman to compete for England Internationally with 67 caps in Rounders, she was the first to then Coach an England side of her own. In 2008 Dana was the first Hijabi Muslim Woman to qualify to teach PE in England. It is Dana's aim to inspire a lifelong passion for movement, developing wellbeing and the whole child; she aims to develop belonging and toolkits for survival in the world around us. As a prominent and visible Muslim woman, she talks nationally about change, authenticity, anti-racism, and visibility using her various sporting experiences and beyond to draw upon. Dana believes every child should thrive, not just survive. Since September 2020, Dana has been a trustee for Chance to Shine, a charity using cricket as a vehicle to develop young people. Most recently, Dana has been named as an ambassador for Sporting Heritage.