**One-on-one Psychoeducation:**

A therapeutic intervention for a child with anxiety

 

Billy\*, age 11, has a diagnosis of autism and experiences associated anxiety. Billy is troubled by intrusive thoughts prompting rumination about the past and future which he experiences as distressing, exhausting and debilitating. This has an impact on his learning, enjoyment of opportunities typically available to children his age and his family overall. Billy visits a local mainstream primary school and is eloquent.

**Background**

**The Intervention**

The Educational Psychologist consulted with school and parents about concerns and how a therapeutic intervention could be useful to Billy. After adults had an opportunity to share their views, Billy’s views were sought and what he hoped he could gain from one-on-one work. Billy just wanted to worry less! Together we agreed we would work on improving his ‘wellbeing toolkit’-strategies he could use when his mind was on overdrive.

The intervention took place in a quiet room in school once a week over a period of eight weeks. The Educational Psychologist drew on a number of psychological techniques including cognitive-behaviour and solution-focused approaches, positive psychology interventions and therapeutic story telling. Key strategies were introduced early on and practiced during every session. As sessions progressed Billy tweaked some of the strategies to make them his own and by the end he was ‘fluent’ in their use.

Some key strategies introduced and practiced:

* Drawing and naming the ‘Worry Bully’. The Worry Bully whispers all the ‘What ifs…’. A way to personify and separate worries from the person whilst giving space to talk about the impact of anxiety. A local artist knitted Billy’s very own Worry Bully based on his drawing for him to keep
* Soles of the Feet. A mindfulness-based activity to draw on when anger and worries become overwhelming
* Making a worry box. A container to post anxious thoughts. It gives a physical way of getting rid of worries
* Savouring positive events, gratitude, acts of kindness, humour and ‘scientifically’ questioning the plausibility of some of his worries

Learnt strategies were shared with school and parents in a feedback report and meeting to encourage continuation. Apart from increasing his ‘wellbeing toolkit’, Billy also learnt how to identify and verbalise his worries within the unconditional acceptance and safety of a therapeutic relationship. He was offered an opportunity to untangle his thoughts and also normalise some worries and fears. Billy participated with great enthusiasm and was looking forward to his weekly sessions. During the course of the intervention Billy also gained new confidence to engage in activities outside school which in turn provided him with a sense of accomplishment and feel-good hormones.

\*not real name