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**GENERALISED ANXIETY
DISORDER
&
IMPOSTER SYNDROME**



SUMMARY SLIDE OF PRESENTATION



Fear &
Anxiety



Generalised
Anxiety
Disorder
(GAD)

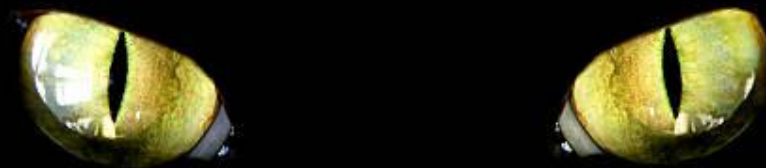


Imposter
Syndrome



What
Next?

1. Open with reminding everyone to practise self-care throughout the presentation as topics discussed may bring up person experiences.
2. We'll be looking at anxiety and generalised anxiety and how they impact the individual, society and the economy.
3. What is Imposter Syndrome and how it is linked to anxiety.
4. Consider ways forward for the future.



FEAR AND ANXIETY WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

Fear & anxiety – are they the same thing or different? Ask for thoughts.

FEAR

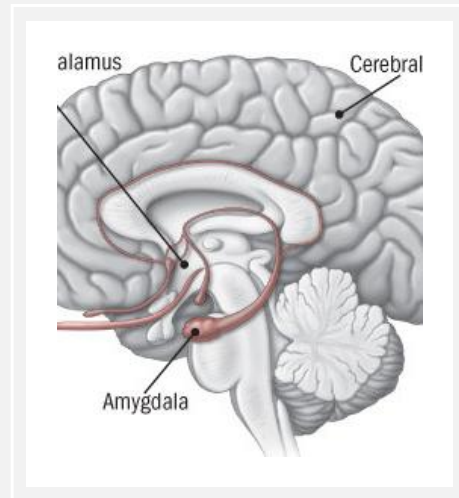
LeWine (2024)

- Reaction to danger
- Adrenaline & cortisol released
- Panic dissipates when the danger is over
- Survival

ANXIETY

National Health Service (2021)

- Anticipation of danger
- Prolonged alertness
- Chronic tension and heightened arousal
- Sustained high levels of cortisol and adrenaline linked to health problems (Alotiby, 2024).



FEAR

- Natural and healthy response to danger.
- When facing a threat the amygdala signals to the hypothalamus (command centre) that you are in danger.
- The hypothalamus communicates this to the body through the nervous system, to prepare for fight or flight.
- Once the threat is over, the hormones return to normal levels.

ANXIETY

- Every day situations cause the same hormone release
- As the threats are numerous and everyday, the cortisol and adrenaline remain raised maintaining a hyperaware state.
- This causes feelings of anxiety such as (ask the crowd) – increased heart rate, sweating, rapid breathing
- The impact of the increased hormones on the body for a sustained period has been linked to high blood pressure, suppressed immune system and changes in the brain that can predispose to anxiety and depressive disorders.

GENERALISED ANXIETY DISORDER (GAD)

- Worrying about different issues
- Affects 1 in 25 people in the UK
- Lead to depression and/or chronic stress

Causes:

- Genetics
- Stressful or traumatic experiences
- Substance use
- Chronic health conditions

Royal College of Psychiatrists (2022)



- Different to other anxiety such as social phobia, panic attacks and PTSD – worrying about a range of things instead of specific situations.
- Excessive worry is sustained for a long period of time and is impacting on your everyday life.

Causes:

- Four to six times more likely to develop an anxiety disorder if you have a close family member with GAD.
- Stressful experiences – such as traumatic or upsetting events (loss, instability, abuse). However, this is dependent on individuals' coping strategies.
- Substance use – some medications and substances can cause people to feel more anxious. E.g. caffeine, alcohol, medications and illegal drugs such as cocaine.
- Health – Managing a long-term health condition or disability can increase likelihood of GAD.

NOTE - a single gene has not been identified to cause anxiety disorders. Likely to be multiple genes that can increase your risk to GAD.

Attachment style and environment of upbringing could have an influence on anxiety and coping strategies.

Genetics, social environment & life experiences all have an impact.

SOCIAL EFFECTS OF ANXIETY

- Lack of self-care
- Difficulty in forming and maintaining relationships
- Isolation
 - resistant to trying new things
 - lack of enjoyment of hobbies/social activities
- Costing over 70 million sick days per year (Mental Health UK, 2023).



Businesses could save up to £8 billion a year in supporting staff by creating a culture of mental wellness.

Acknowledged that prevention is key to support individuals to achieve wellness and reduce the impact on the economy & society.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

- Assessed and initially treated through Primary Care (GP).
- GAD-7 (Spitzer et al., 2006) and International Classification of Diseases 11th Revision (ICD-11) (World Health Organisation (WHO), 2022)
- Medical approach has led to:
 - under diagnosis of mental health disorders
 - mild to moderate cases not referred to mental health specialists (Pilgrim, 2023)
 - reliance on the use of medication.



Both assessment tools are similar that they consider symptoms and experiences:

- Worrying about variety of issues
- Anxious/on edge
- Irritability
- Sleep issues
- GAD -7 considers the above over the last 2 weeks whereas ICD-11 looks at persistence over the last few months.
- ICD-11 is more thorough in that it takes other comorbidities into account – depression, health conditions (thyroid disease) and substance use (caffeine, cocaine, alcohol, medication).

Assessment tools used at initial appointment and at intervals to track progress. The issue with these tools is that therapy can be a driver for change. A person's score may show no improvement or possibly worse, however could be due challenging their self structure, beliefs and processes.

PROFESSIONAL HELP

- 'Stepped' approach - self help and talking therapy (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), 2020)
- Talking therapies – CBT, Person Centred, EFT, Gestalt and Integrative
- Medication – antidepressants (SSRI's & SNRI's). Other medications are available but can be addictive (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2022).



Concerns that medication is still heavily relied upon, some can be addictive and at significant cost to the NHS.

NICE recommend 'skills before pills'.

Other medications to treat anxiety:

Pregabalin (treats seizures & pain) & Benzodiazepines (sedative) – both are shown to be addictive.

Self Help

Support network

Mindfulness and meditation

Charities – online support & helplines

Self help groups/community

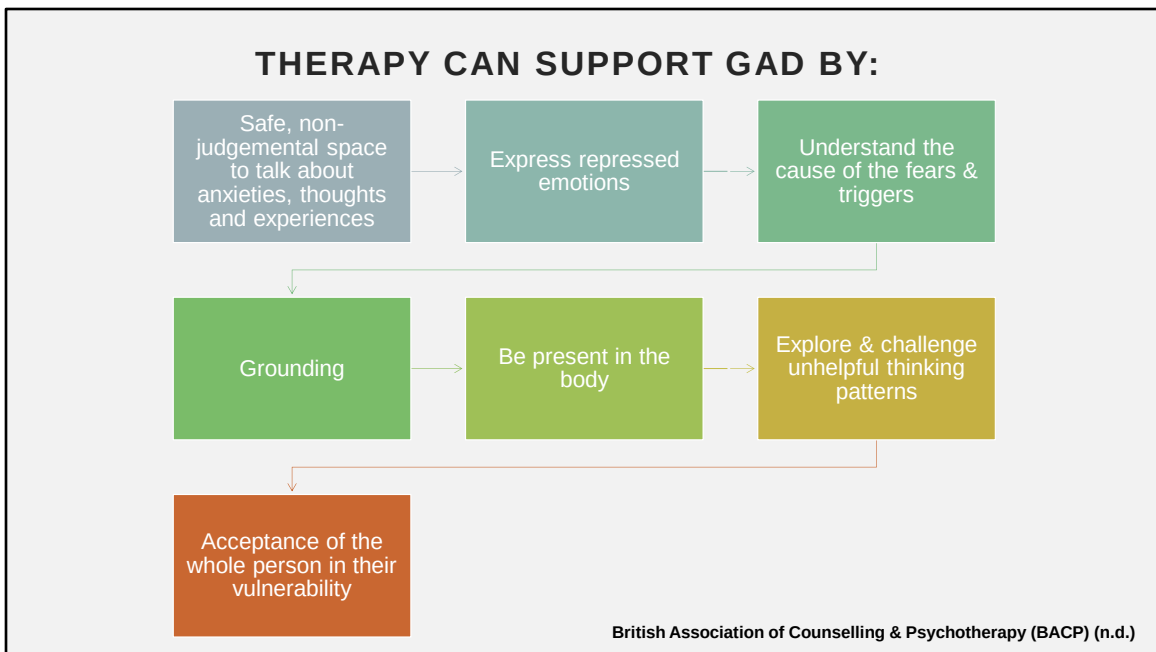
Breathwork

Lifestyle – exercise, sleep hygiene, healthy eating and stress reduction

National Health Service (2024)

Self Help

- Initially treatment options are likely to be self help info – online, leaflets and lifestyle adjustments. Patients may be directed to charities that offer self help courses.
- Self-help courses – Mind Cymru offer free 6 week guided self-help course, where each week a practitioner will send info and workbooks, and call to provide support and guidance.
- Mental Health Charities – Anxiety UK & Mind – offer info about GAD and guidance on self help.
- Self help groups – meet with other people with similar struggles. (links to support network). Helps reduce isolation and loneliness
- Breathwork to support regulation of nervous system
- Lifestyle factors can influence mental wellbeing and support the management of anxiety. Connecting body with mind.



Different therapeutic approaches demonstrated in this list.

Behavioural (CBT & Acceptance & commitment Therapy) – to explore unhelpful thinking patterns and challenge

Humanistic (PCT, EFT) – safe space to talk, being present in the body, acceptance of the whole person

When you look at different organisations (NHS, Anxiety UK etc), CBT is a favoured approach.

However, the focus is on short-term treatment, a quick fix to get people back on their feet. This leaves potential for recurrence of anxiety as the underlying causes are not necessarily addressed.



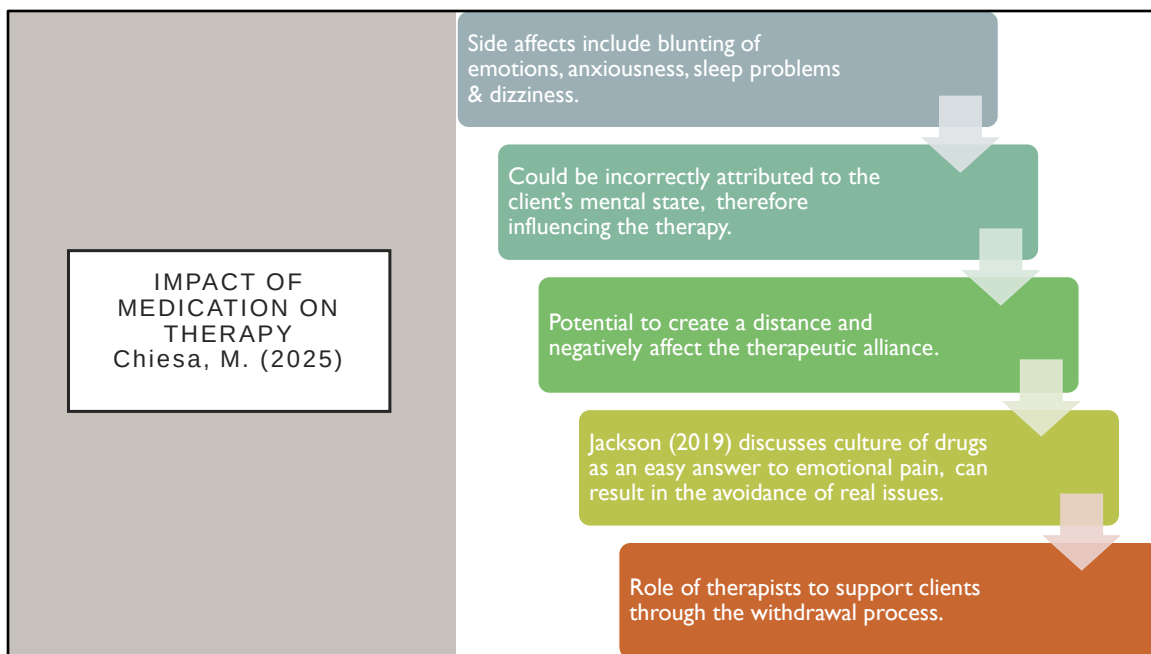
THERAPY

- CBT, hypnotherapy and person-centred counselling effective in short-term treatment of anxiety (**Tham, S.G. et al., 2022**).
- CBT considered most successful in the study.
- Post therapy data not collected to observe long-term impact.

In contrast **O'Connell Kent et al., 2020** noted:

- moderate outcomes for CBT
- adapted EFT approach for GAD suggested an effective alternative.

- A limitation of Anxiety UK study is that once therapy ended no further data was taken to consider if the improved outcomes were maintained in the long-term.
- Recent study indicates benefits of treating GAD with EFT easing symptoms and improving acceptance and resilience of individuals. Further investigations into the benefits is recommended.
- There were limitations of the study in a lack of a control or comparison group. Despite this, positive outcomes were observed with clients feeling symptoms were improved and greater self acceptance achieved.
- A larger controlled trial to compare efficacy against treatments such as CBT would be beneficial. (O'Connell Kent et al, 2020). Suggesting that the EFT approach would support resilience, offering long-term benefits.
- Leading to question
 - whether a more integrative approach would yield positive results for both short-term and long-term?
 - An integrative approach could support prompt relief of symptoms in addition to supporting client's awareness to build resilience and understanding of their own vulnerabilities and processes.
 - Alongside this, putting the client's needs at the heart of therapy, meeting them where they are and supporting where they want to go.



Side effects can be unpleasant and negatively impact on the connection/alliance within therapy. Some side effects could mimic anxiety and influence therapy.

Jackson (2019) discusses a culture of treating symptoms to avoid real issues and accepting emotional pain.

Withdrawal symptoms can cause physical symptoms but also appear as anxiety and depression. By therapists becoming more aware of medications that their clients are taking and their impact, they can offer support, that is lacking in the UK, through the withdrawal process.

Withdrawal Symptoms include:

- Sleep issues
- Stomach problems
- Mood changes
- Electric shock sensations
- Restlessness

“The right to good physical and mental health is one that belongs to all”

Welsh Government (2024)

Mental health is connected to all aspects of life; physical health, social and economic.

Better collaboration with:

- GP services
- Pharmacy
- Therapy
- Housing & Social Care
- Community
- Third Sector.

Public Health Wales Observatory (2020)

Employment and housing impacts wellbeing.

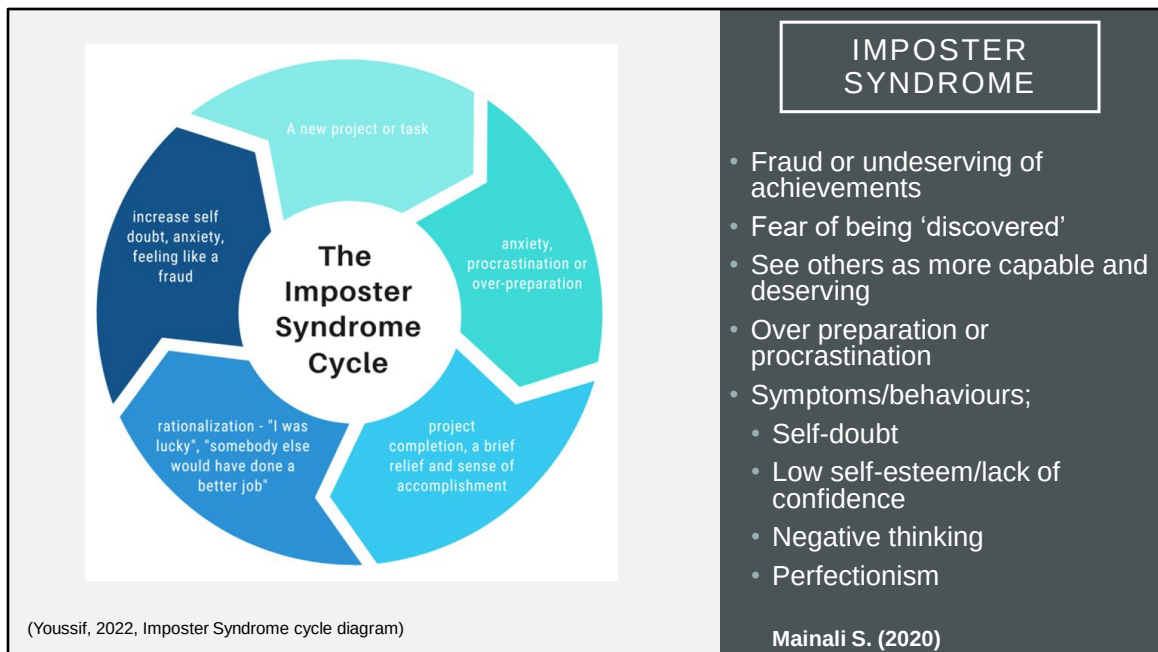


- The Welsh Government *Draft Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024–2034* proposes a person centred approach, seeking equality for all to empower people to improve their mental health & wellbeing.
- There are wider implications that can influence mental wellbeing such as economic and social conditions. **Public Health Wales Observatory (2020)** Higher positive wellbeing noted for employed & lower mental wellbeing noted for those in rented accommodation.
- A proactive approach is presented, alongside supporting those with poor mental health, promoting the development of emotional intelligence and resilience.
- By offering support across these wider issues, safety and security is provided. (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs)
- The government is recognising that mental health is not an individual issue (genetics/poor choices) and that society and culture have a responsibility. The strategy focuses on the impact of inequality on mental health and refers to wider policies and plans to address such as racism, LGBTQ, child poverty and domestic violence.
- The strategy notes that this is being developed during a period of financial constraint. Priorities will need to be made, risking that some groups may fall

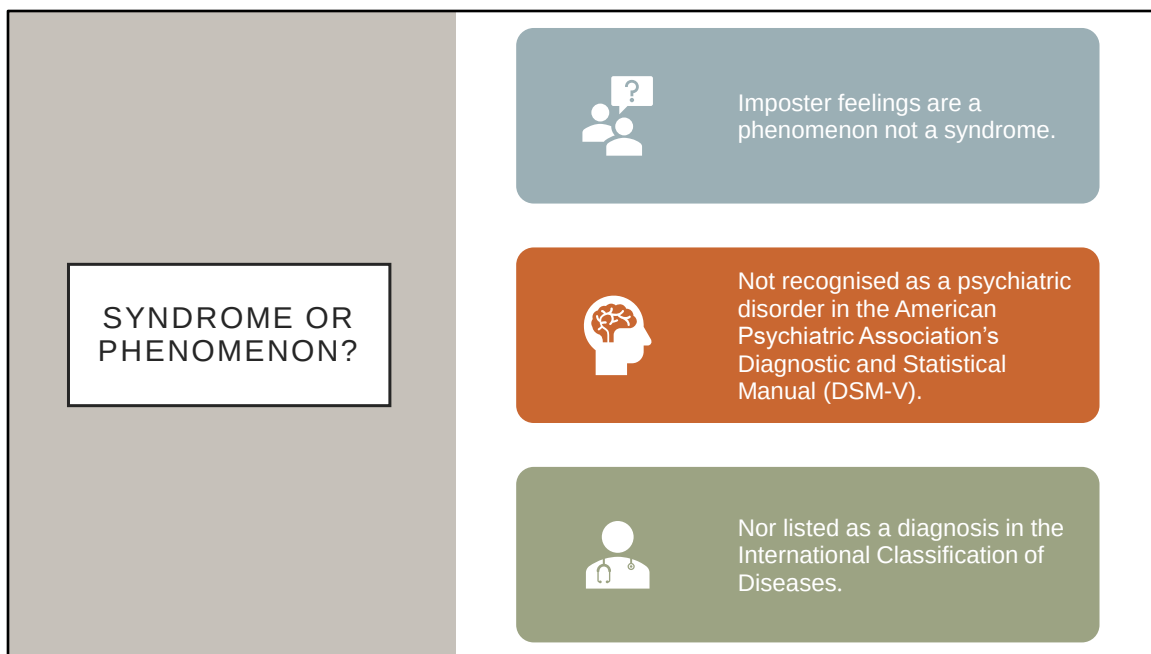
through the gaps and not received adequate support.



Now some of you may be wondering what does Imposter Syndrome have to do with Anxiety? First let's look at what Imposter Syndrome is...



- Over prepare to compensate for feelings of inadequacy
- Or Procrastinate – frozen by their fear of failure
- Unable to accept or acknowledge their abilities and any praise given
- Feelings of being a fraud and fearful they will be found out. Undeserving of their achievements/respect.



- Clance & Imes suggested that Imposter Phenomenon would be a more appropriate name as it is **not recognised as a syndrome**.
- Clance & Imes (1978) theorised that professional women were uniquely affected however later it was concluded that imposter phenomenon affects men and women.
- Likelihood during 1978 study that women were to be more affected due to culture in which the workforce was male dominated.
- In 1985 they developed an Imposter Phenomenon (IP) scale to assess the severity of IP characteristics.
- As it is so prevalent, some have asked whether it should be included in DSM-V.
- At the very least, people who present with Imposter Phenomena should be assessed for underlying mental health disorders such as GAD, anxiety and depression.

Affects up to **82%** of people.

Linked to low self esteem,
anxiety and depression.

Support and encourage growth.

Overwhelm, causing burnout and
isolation.

Culture and environment
influencing factor.

Bravata et al.(2019)



- Individual personalities are not always the cause,
- Can be linked to culture and environment.
- For example a highly competitive environment in which predominately white males may leave those in the minority feeling out of place, an imposter.
- Ironically, it is often high achievers who are affected by Imposter Phenomenon with the anxiety increasing in parallel with success.
- Both Michelle Obama & Albert Einstein alluded to experiencing imposter feelings.

Abramson, A. (2021)

Risk Factors:

- Childhood
 - Achievements are valued
 - Highly critical parents
 - Comparison to siblings/peers
- Unhealthy boundaries role modelled
- Cultural influence – self sacrifice is valued
- Early experiences
- Comorbid with anxiety & depression

Impacts:

- Job performance
- Job satisfaction
- Burnout

A lot of the research focuses on people experiencing imposter phenomenon in a work or study context. However, this phenomenon can affect self esteem at home, in relationships and as a parent. It boils down to feelings of unworthiness, not fitting in/belonging and a desire to 'prove yourself'.

For example

- a parent doubting their skills and worrying that they are good enough for their child.
- In friendship, feelings of self doubt can leave you worrying whether your friends like you or even why.
- Feelings of inferiority in relationships; not being a good enough partner.

These feelings can contribute to loneliness and isolation, feeding the anxiety.

**TREATMENT –
IMPOSTER
PHENOMENON**

Humanistic,
Behavioural &
Integrative Therapy

**Lees-Oakes & Kelly
(2023) and Rogers
(1951)**

Underlying factors – anxiety and depression

Self esteem & coping mechanisms

Increase self awareness

Connect with internal locus of evaluation

Evidence that support & challenge negative thoughts

Practice celebrating achievements

Embrace & share failure

Accepted without the 'mask'

Self-compassion

Let go of perfectionism

- Early experiences impact on self esteem & ways of coping
- Internal locus of evaluation. To know their own values and stop comparing and judging themselves by the standards of others.
- Get to know the 'imposter voice' and use strategies to challenge. (e.g. a list of achievements to refer to when negative thoughts are dominating).
- Perfectionism – understand the driver to be perfect, learn self compassion and that it is acceptable to be good enough.
- Treat anxiety and depression

Perhaps with self help, compassion and addressing anxiety/depression to support the individual alongside the Welsh Gov's ambition to develop emotional intelligence and resilience of the collective society, a positive culture and environment that will be fostered to support mental wellbeing; reducing the impact of GAD and Imposter Phenomenon on people, communities and economies.



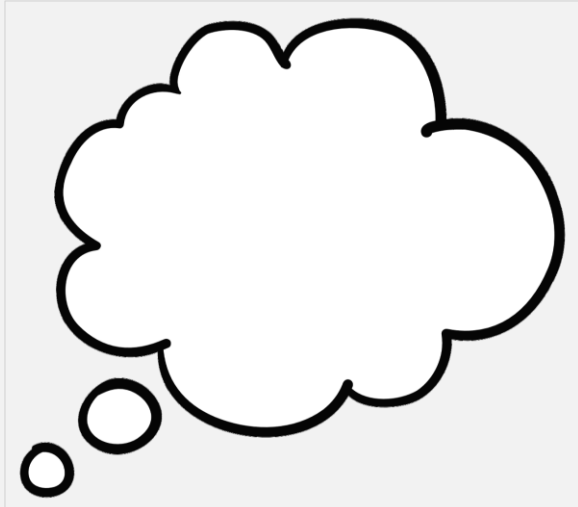
WHAT'S NEXT?

- Mental Health practitioners as a first line of treatment
- Adapt therapy model to individual needs to focus on addressing source of issues
- Multi-disciplinary approach
- Socioeconomic factors
- Improve emotional intelligence and resilience of future generations (Cooper, 2023).

- Mental Health practitioners as a first line of treatment. This would take pressure off GP's, ensure patients are assessed by specialists and potentially reduce the use of medication.
- Short-term therapy model should be adapted to individual needs and focus to address source of the issue not just easing of symptoms
- Multi-disciplinary approach – ensure no one falls through the gaps, better communication and collaboration (social care, community, GP, therapists).
- Equality – refer to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs – people experience poverty and fundamental needs are not addressed –unable to support change until these needs are satisfied.
- Proactive approach in improving emotional intelligence and resilience of future generations (Mick Cooper, 2023)

“If a thing is worth
doing, it is worth
doing badly”

Chesterton (1910)



I will leave you with this quote from G K Chesterton.

To help overcome the fear, giving the person permission to lower standards and to do something imperfectly. It is best to do something than to do nothing at all.

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