
HNA Prompt Sheet: Worry and Fear

'Worry and fear' are frequently identified as problems by people completing an HNA. After discussion and exploration with the healthcare professional, these feelings may be directly related to the present, to practical problems and situations that need a practical response. Equally, some people find themselves caught up in an unhelpful mental process of 'what ifs' about possible future problem scenarios, trying to 'solve' these by thinking, but ending up anxious and overwhelmed.

Have you considered?

If the person marks their distress as being 5 or over and related to worry/fear, or is clearly significantly distressed in a way similar to the description above, consider the following:

- Warm, active listening
- Often, people can better gain perspective of excessive worries once they have spoken them out aloud and having them summarised back in a kind, understanding and normalising way.
- Engaging existing strengths and skills.
- People often describe having a tendency to worry, and have usually managed it by themselves. Under pressure, it's easier to engage existing skills that have worked before than trying to learn new ones. Explore how the person managed their worries previously, and how they could apply those skills now.
- Considering a range skills, methods and tools to manage worry.
- Positive self-talk – guide the person to find the strong, confident and resilient part of themselves and use that to hold onto positive, balanced and reassuring self-talk, e.g. 'I have managed difficult things before, one day at a time.'
- Relaxation and relaxed breathing techniques can be effective, and need to be demonstrated by and practiced with the healthcare professional for best effect. Advise the regular use of relaxation CDs or mobile apps (e.g. Stop, Breathe & Think) to develop a regular practice – 'learn it *before* you need it!'
- Group activities and classes, whether specifically for relaxation, art, yoga etc. or as general support groups, can provide added social companionship and normalisation and be very helpful for some people.
- Demonstrate the Worry Tree tool, which can help a person slow down their thinking, pause and consider which thoughts are actual problems that can be dealt with, and which ones are 'what if' hypotheticals that it's best to leave aside.
- Complementary therapies can offer a soothing, stress relieving experience.
- Physical exercise has good evidence for overall stress management, and can be often be encouraged on fitness-for-treatment grounds as well.
- Good quality sleep can help people have a clearer mind – <http://rmpartners.cancervanguard.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/RMP-HNA-Insomnia-prompt-sheet-May-2018.pdf>
- Follow-up by a Level 2 key worker (e.g. CNS or AHP).
- Wherever possible, it's highly advisable that the key worker revisits these discussions and suggestions. If the intense worry remains, and none of the above first-line interventions have been useful, further Level 3/4 assessment needs to be considered.
- Consider referral for Level 3/4 psychological support.
- If the person is overwhelmed with worry, cannot hold onto reassurance, is losing sleep and appetite, feeling low or hopeless, or having trouble coping with or attending treatment, seek advice or make a referral through your local psychological support team.

Services which may be able to help

- Your local Level 3/4 psychological support team or professional (e.g. counsellor, psychologist, psychiatrist, psychotherapist etc.).
- Independent cancer information and support centres, such as Maggie's Centres, The Haven, The Mulberry Centre and Paul's Cancer Support Centre, will typically offer access to complementary therapies, support groups and other supportive resources.
- Hospital-based cancer information centres, e.g. Macmillan or Dimpleby information centres, can advise on local clinical or social resources, as well as support from a knowledgeable associate.
- Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services are the general (non-cancer) primary care psychological therapies services in every borough. They provide prompt, self-referral access to psychological therapies for common problems like mild to moderate anxiety and depression. They may also provide groups or interventions for people with long-term health conditions. <http://www.qualitywatch.org.uk/indicator/improving-access-psychological-therapies-iapt-programme>

Patient information

Macmillan Cancer Support: <http://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/your-emotions/dealing-with-your-emotions>

Prostate Cancer UK: <http://prostatecanceruk.org/prostate-information/living-with-prostate-cancer/the-emotional-impact>

NHS Choices: <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/cancer/Pages/coping-with-cancer-diagnosis.aspx>