

## **Summary Notes from the June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010 Teleconference on “Social Anxiety”**

### **Panelists:**

**Arto Tienaho** - Executive Director of Anxiety BC

**Dr. Kristin Buhr** - UBC Social Anxiety Treatment Program, North Shore Stress and Anxiety Clinic

**Taylor Kagal** - Co-President of Students for Mental Wellness

Moderator: **Saman Khan**, Project Coordinator, Kelty Resource Centre

### **Key points:**

#### **What is Social Anxiety Disorder?**

- Excessive fear of social and/or performance situations (situations where one is interacting with other people or being observed by others)
- Children and teens with social anxiety are overly concerned that they may do or say something embarrassing or humiliating, or that others will think badly of them
- Social anxiety causes significant distress and affects many aspects of a person's life such as developing a relationship or maintaining friendships, affecting school performance or work performance and even day-to-day activities
- Examples of commonly feared social situations include: public speaking, asking or answering questions in class, writing in front of others (e.g., chalkboard), working in groups, performing in public (e.g., singing, sports), meeting new people, talking to authority figures (e.g., teachers), going to social events (e.g., birthday parties), talking on the phone, or ordering food
- Social Anxiety Disorder is one of the most common anxiety disorder

#### **Recognizing Social Anxiety in Children & Teens**

- Avoid eye contact
- Mumble or speak quietly
- Stay on the edge of groups
- Shy and quiet around people, especially strangers
- Afraid to try new things
- Refuse to participate in events or avoid social contact
- Have few or no friends
- Spend lots of time by themselves
- Refuse to attend school
- Worry about judgment

### **Possible consequences**

- Skip school
- Grade drops
- Older teens might have trouble developing friendship, dating or attending a job interview
- Children and teens with social anxiety often go unnoticed because they don't act out – don't tend to get noticed until they begin missing school or their grades drop, or they don't advance with their peers (don't develop relationships, date, get part-time jobs).
- Some children may act out or be aggressive as a way to push people away (part of the “fight or flight” response)
- Drop in self confidence and self-esteem

### **How it develops?**

- Genetic – If someone in your family has social anxiety you are more likely to develop it. You may be predisposed to be more anxious.
- Negative life experiences, which include: being picked on or teased; critical comments from teachers or significant others; facing lots of changes (lack of support network; feeling isolated and distressed; having lots of adjustments and pressure to make new friends; depressed mood); significant transitions (e.g. going to high school, moving away from home and living on campus)

### **What can Parents/Caregivers do?**

- Get help through family doctor in order to get referral to appropriate services
- Seek effective therapy such as CBT (cognitive-behavioural therapy) - Research has shown it is effective for treating anxiety problems
- Consider self help strategies (check out AnxietyBC website - [www.anxietybc.com](http://www.anxietybc.com) ) which has information on CBT and strategies for managing anxiety
- Seek help from school counsellors, local mental health team or consult the Kelty Resource Centre ([www.bcmhas.ca/keltyresourcecentre](http://www.bcmhas.ca/keltyresourcecentre))
- Seek professional help if the child and youth's situation is serious or worsening
- Talk to your child directly and use active listening - Ask questions about what's going on for your child - be gently and supportive
- Parents/caretakers can model social skills and share their own personal experiences of anxiety
- Help your child identify overly negative thoughts and try to help them examine the evidence so that they can learn to think more realistically

- Encourage your child to face feared situations (e.g., talking to classmates) by repeatedly facing those situations until they become less scary.
- Encourage children to take small steps out of their comfort zone in order to gain confidence.
- Parents/caregivers' should focus on increasing their child's problem solving ability and enhance his/her motivation for change.
- Develop an action plan by getting your child to propose one thing he/she is willing to do to make him/her feel more comfortable in a social situation
- Teach children and teens some simple social skills like making eye contact, smiling, or making small talk.
- Get children involved in activities that emphasize participation, but not competition in order to avoid evaluation of one's performance
- When a child is resistant to getting help, parents/caregivers might need to step back, be patient, take time to plant a seed of motivation in the child and to reassess the situation continuously in order to avoid resistance
- Effective strategies include the following: experimenting, exposure, skip reviewing the performance or outcome but focusing on the experience, connecting to people who value you as a person or who are willing to share their experience in addressing social anxiety like a support group, getting inspiration from books or people who have learned to manage their social anxiety, exposing oneself to a safe and comfortable social environments in order to build up one's confidence and self-esteem e.g. Hiking for Mental Illness Group

### **Additional Resources:**

AnxietyBC provides resources related to anxiety issues and it housed online video clips, self management tips and treatment strategies including cognitive behavioural therapy

<http://www.anxietybc.com/resources/social.php>

Kelty Resource Centre is the provincial information centre for BC children, youth and families with mental health and substance use concerns.

Phone: 604-875-2084 or Toll Free 1800-665-1822

Website: [www.bcmhas.ca/keltyresourcecentre](http://www.bcmhas.ca/keltyresourcecentre)

Email: [keltycentre@bcmhs.bc.ca](mailto:keltycentre@bcmhs.bc.ca)