



Helping families build skill sets

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According to representatives of Anxiety B.C., approximately 2,600 North Shore children are affected by anxiety disorders.

A written statement from the non-profit organization, focused on facilitating positive solutions for those living with anxiety by increasing awareness, promoting education and improving access to effective treatments, states that approximately 10 per cent of children and teenagers suffer from one or more anxiety disorders, and 80 per cent go untreated.

A recent New Zealand study featured in a 2007 issue of Psychological Medicine revealed that anxiety disorders may be a risk factor for suicide in adolescents, and that the risk for suicide goes up as the number of anxiety disorders increases. The authors concluded that effective management of anxiety in youth may be important in reducing that risk.

To help parents learn how to manage anxiety disorders in their children and ultimately reduce the risk of suicide in adolescence and young adulthood, Anxiety B.C., in cooperation with the F.O.R.C.E. Society for Kids Mental Health, is presenting a family skill building seminar on parenting children with anxiety disorders.

The free seminar will take place in North Vancouver Nov. 29 at 7 p.m. at St. Stephen's Hall, 1360 East 24th St. The seminar will teach parents how to identify if a child has an anxiety disorder and how to manage the problem at home.

The seminar will be facilitated by Dr. Kristin Buhr, a North Shore Stress and Anxiety Clinic-based cognitive-behaviour therapist.

Buhr says in the statement that anxiety is the most common mental health problem for children and teens. If left untreated, it can lead to a variety of problems including poor academic performance, difficulties with peer relationships, decreased self-esteem, substance abuse and depression. Thus, it is not surprising that anxiety could be a risk factor for suicide.

Anxiety disorders may first be presented in children and teens as an unwillingness to participate in normal activities most kids enjoy such as sports, sleepovers and even attending school, as well as in somatic symptoms such as chronic stomachaches and headaches. However, these disorders may eventually permeate every area of life.

Anxious children and teens tend to want to avoid things that cause them anxiety. Avoidance reduces distress in the short-term, but increases fear in the long-term. Gradually exposing one's self to fears is an important step in treatment, says Buhr. However, it can be difficult for parents to see their child distressed while facing fears. This helps in understanding why so many well-intentioned parents fall into the trap of encouraging avoidance.

Buhr says that parents have a tendency to blame themselves for their children developing anxiety problems. However, anxiety disorders have multiple causes, so it is important for parents to realize that they are not at fault. The good news is that parents can play an essential role in helping their child learn to better manage anxiety. Parents often struggle with knowing how to help their child and

resources are not always accessible. That means that the seminar is great news, she says, as it's aimed at providing parents with the strategies to help their child manage anxiety effectively.

Similar seminars are also being hosted in Penticton, Victoria and Burnaby.

For more information, visit www.anxietybc.com.

Illustration:

• Colour Photo: Cindy Goodman, North Shore News / North Shore Stress and Anxiety Clinic's Dr. Kristin Buhr helps promote the upcoming free Anxiety B.C. family skill building seminar being held Nov. 29 in North Vancouver.

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