Treating Anxiety in Teens: A Proven Approach

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Treating Anxiety in Teens: Our Approach

"I am not who I want to be, but I am on the journey there, and thankfully I am not whom I used to be."

We are Anxiety Specialists

WayPoint Academy utilizes a highly specialized, therapeutic approach in treating young men whose lives have been overtaken by anxiety. We provide individualized care that transcends the generalist approach, for we recognize the devastating impact anxiety causes teens and their families.

Knowing Where to Start: Understanding Anxiety & Avoidance

Life is profoundly difficult for teens afflicted with severe anxiety, such as panic attacks, social anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), generalized anxiety, phobias, or post-traumatic stress disorder. A primary problem for virtually all individuals affected with severe anxiety is that they increasingly cling to avoidance as a sole means of coping. This pervasive pattern contributes to a chronic inability to complete tasks and goals. Tasks perceived as too challenging," boring" or not immediately gratifying are avoided, as are long-term goals that require multiple steps to achieve. Ultimately, this avoidant pattern becomes the predominant way of dealing with problems, emotions, relationships, and addressing difficulties associated with one's specific form of anxiety. This is especially evident in teens struggling with school refusal or school avoidance.

Habitual avoidance results in limited emotional resiliency and fosters a distorted view of one's abilities and self-worth. Although avoidance "protects" an individual from perceived failure, embarrassment, or rejection, it also prevents one from experiencing success. The culmination of repeated incompletions metastasizes into faulty identity development. Now, what was only an anxiety disorder is dwarfed by a bigger problem: an under-developed identity, based on a defective foundation—with no clear direction, few positive life experiences to draw from, and limited emotional endurance to withstand future challenges.

Teen Anxiety Treatment Must Include the Family

Family participation is essential in the healing process. Through family therapy, parent visits, and seminars, WayPoint Academy directs families toward making adjustments and changes to support their student's progress.

WayPoint's Mindful Completion Model

WayPoint has developed the **Mindful Completion Model (MCM)**, an innovative approach designed to reverse the debilitating effects of anxiety by replacing avoidance with acts of purposeful completion. Mindfulness involves being and remaining in the moment with intent and purpose as opposed to retreating from experiences and fears. The Mindful Completion process actively challenges long-standing beliefs based on negative experiences through strategically designed events in the here and now.

At WayPoint, we don't simply remove the stressors students have historically struggled with and then process the past during therapy. Instead, we supportively expose our students at optimal times to the very stressors that have controlled their lives. Strength and empowerment come from facing and completing challenges, and as one mindfully addresses the source of struggles, he gains experience, confidence, and emotional endurance.

Therapeutic goals for completion are strategically designed by the treatment team to address individual needs. For instance, a young man with social anxiety may have (as one of his therapeutic objectives) the opportunity to visit a crowded mall and practice relaxation techniques, while having lunch with his therapist and fellow students. Therapeutic goals are individualized; however, certain life skills apply to all students, like personal etiquette, study habits, and cooperative group dynamics.



Skill development occurs through the **8 Elements of the Mindful Completion Model**. Our model targets not only therapeutic tools, tasks, and personal responsibilities, but addresses practical life skills that promote satisfaction and enjoyment. Examples include: learning to cook, ski, or snowboard; orienteering with a map and compass; canyoneering in Utah's Escalante National Monument; organic gardening, geo-caching with family, small engine repair, and many others. The combination of these required and designed completions serves as the individual treatment plan.

Anxiety Therapy for Teens



WayPoint clinicians draw from specific methodologies designed to treat anxiety disorders. These are:

- Assessment
- The Mindfulness Model
- The Cognitive/Behavioral Model
- The Exposure Model
- The Hidden Emotion Model
- The Experiential Model
- Psychopharmacological Approaches

The essence of WayPoint Academy's specialized psychotherapeutic approach is in finding the right model for each individual student and matching it with the right intervention. Our Mindful Completion Model is designed to provide a host of therapeutic assignments and tasks that are designed to increase distress tolerance and emotional resiliency.

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Normalized School & Student Life



WayPoint provides a fully accredited, on-site, high school curriculum with small class sizes and certified, endorsed faculty. WayPoint's education philosophy meets individual student needs and provides a positive environment for learning, based on completion practices.

Because WayPoint teachers understand that avoidance and failure to complete tasks are central to adolescents' struggles with anxiety, they and members of the therapeutic staff utilize a strategic, comprehensive approach for completing educational goals.

- Small class sizes
- Normalized School
- Feel of a school while maintaining the support of a treatment program (not institutionalized)

Learn How Schools for Anxiety Are Different

Nutrition



Nutritional deficiencies are proven to be a risk factor for depression. Such risk factors include: excessive consumption of sucrose (sugar/high fructose), excessive amounts of magnesium or vanadium, amino acids imbalance, excessive consumption of caffeine, and deficiencies of folic acid, vitamin B, vitamin C, calcium, copper, iron, magnesium, and potassium or biotin.

Adolescents are notorious for their poor eating habits and are the highest consumer group of junk food. The Mindful Completion Model provides education, task completion, and promotes a mind-body-food connection. WayPoint students are directly involved in meal planning and preparation. Each student will acquire a greater understanding of nutrition, its many benefits, and will address physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being derived from food choices. Areas for completion include: maintaining a community garden, growing the food they eat, and implementing dietary approaches which clean toxins from the system.

Cardiovascular Fitness



Revolutionary science provides powerful insight into the neurophysiology of how exercise affects mood, anxiety, and learning. Research demonstrates that through systematic, strategic exercise, one can keep the brain at peak performance. Moreover, research shows that fitness has a direct effect on scholastic performance. Recent research in neurophysiology found that “exercise unleashes a cascade of petrochemicals and growth factors (insulin-like growth factor GF-1) and vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF) that can reverse this process (i.e. cognitive impairment due to stress), by physically bolstering the brain’s infrastructure.” In summary, when it comes to youth who suffer from anxiety and depressive disorders, fitness is more important than sports.

At WayPoint, cardiovascular exercise is implemented five or more days per week. Following breakfast, students participate in 50 minutes of exercise. Each student wears a heart monitor and the results are recorded, assuring that cardiovascular efforts reach clinical thresholds. Consistent completion of exercise at targeted heart-rates becomes a building block toward self-esteem and identity formation.

Life Skills

WayPoint’s Life Skills component provides students with practical skills to lead independent and productive lives. These skills offer real-world applications and are diverse in nature and range of difficulty (i.e. knot tying to table etiquette). Skills acquisition serves a crucial role within the Mindful Completion Model, as our students challenge negative personal beliefs while promoting confidence, successful outcomes, and independence.

Executive Function



Executive function is the coordinated use of specific skills for the purpose of completing a specific goal. Emerging research reveals that traditional IQ tests are weak predictors of academic success—and are very poor predictors of success in careers and relationships. Executive function is a far better predictor of these variables.

Executive skills cover a broad range of capabilities: initiating tasks, planning, organizing, strategizing, goal directed persistence, flexibility, metacognition, paying attention to/remembering details, and time management. Until recently, it was not known whether problems with executive functioning come before or after the onset of anxiety or depression, i.e. whether they are a cause or a symptom. However, recent studies support the idea that poor executive functioning is a symptom of depression and anxiety, rather than a cause.

Because of the tremendous role Executive Functioning plays in completion, developing and implementing strategies that improve these skills is a key component of the Mindful Completion Model. WayPoint has developed a unique and innovative method utilizing a culinary program as means of assessing and strengthening executive skills. Students will learn how to prepare meals of progressing complexity that will assess, challenge, and strengthen executive skills. The secondary benefit of this program is increased independence and awareness of nutrition.

Student Community

The residential community provides a setting where newly learned behaviors are field tested. Conversely, maladaptive and destructive behaviors are redirected toward positive patterns and, in extreme cases, not tolerated whatsoever.

The therapeutic milieu at WayPoint Academy consists of the following elements: code of conduct, citizenship, community jobs and chores, and community meetings.

- **Code of Conduct**—provides students with basic guidelines and expectations of behaviors that contribute to a safe and supportive environment.
- **Citizenship**—presents students with guideposts of their individual contributions to a positive, safe environment. The Citizenship System provides each student with the expectations associated with living in a pro-social environment. A merit system allows a student to lose or gain certain privileges, much like a citizenship grade in a traditional high school. Citizenship status at WayPoint isn't necessarily synonymous with achievement or therapeutic progress. It is simply a tool to recognize and reward pro-social behaviors. Thus, a student who may function at a high level of citizenship may, in fact, be deeply entrenched in the struggles of anxiety and/or depression.
- **Community Jobs & Chores**—strengthens skills as students practice newly learned behaviors. At WayPoint, students complete jobs and chores that contribute to healthy lifestyles and to the harmonious functioning of the community.
- **Community Meetings**—designed to help students learn negotiation skills, despite individual and collective differences.

Learn More About Student Life

Getting Out: Recreation, Service, & Adventure



Recreation, service, and adventure are strategically woven into the Mindful Completion Model. Activities such as geo-caching, trekking, canyoneering, canoeing, and other activities are important aspects in the comprehensive services we provide. Our location provides world class recreation, and we host seasonally driven activities in spectacular settings. Such activities are conducted during modules or classes taught by experienced instructors. Our classes help students achieve specific levels of proficiency. Like other WayPoint activities, therapies, and interventions, these recreational modules provide students with a platform for completion. These activities enhance self-confidence and self-esteem, thereby contributing to symptom relief and identity development.

A core value at WayPoint is the concept that by helping others, we ultimately help ourselves. To reflect this value, our students are given unique opportunities to assist aging veterans and underprivileged children, as well nurture animals and birds at a local wildlife rescue center. Additionally, students will participate in service projects for the National Forest Service and national parks.