

Parent-led therapy could be cost-effective first port of call for anxious children

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Credit: University of Reading

A short course of parent-led therapy for anxious children could save the NHS and society at least one fourth of current costs and provide quicker access to treatment, as a paper finds that the treatment provided cost-effective improvements compared to more expensive alternatives.

The new research published in *Lancet Psychiatry* found that a group of [children](#) who received a course of parent-delivered CBT with an estimated total cost of £1494 saw improvements in their anxiety at a similar level to a child-focused [treatment](#) costing 25% more.

Professor Cathy Creswell, School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences, University of Reading said:

"This study is an important step towards understanding how we can best treat and support everyone who experiences mental health difficulties. Through trialling cost-effective therapies like the parent-led CBT in the study, we have shown how they not only have a clinical impact but are also extremely useful as a cheaper, early intervention that could be used in some cases instead of more expensive treatments, enabling more people to access treatments that work more quickly."

"Anxiety disorders are among the most common mental health disorders and have a greater economic burden than any other mental health condition. As half of all lifetime cases emerge before age 12 years, the focus on early intervention in children could represent a significant saving – not just in healthcare interventions but also on the broader societal [costs](#) including the cost of family care provision."

The study found that the outcomes of both treatments tested (parent-led CBT and solution-focused brief therapy) were similar to those achieved after more intensive (child-focused) CBT approaches, and the authors of the paper recommend that the treatment could be used as an early [intervention](#) that could result in fewer children needing more intensive CBT.

Dr Mara Violato, Health Economics Research Centre at the University of Oxford said:

"Evidence on the cost-savings and benefits of alternative therapies to reduce anxiety difficulties in children is rare, yet much needed in times of shrinking of the NHS budget. In our study we have shown that parent-led CBT is good value for money because not only achieves the same clinical outcomes as therapist-led interventions, but also produces savings - to the NHS and the broader society - of about £450 per child treated by mainly reducing treatment costs and saving days off school, work, and leisure time for children and their parents."

More information: Cathy Creswell et al. Clinical outcomes and cost-effectiveness of brief guided parent-delivered cognitive behavioural therapy and solution-focused brief therapy for treatment of childhood anxiety disorders: a randomised controlled trial, *The Lancet Psychiatry* (2017). [DOI: 10.1016/S2215-0366\(17\)30149-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(17)30149-9)

Provided by University of Reading

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