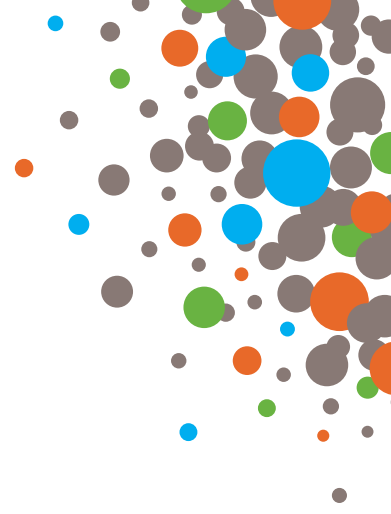




The National Centre of Excellence
in Youth Mental Health



What works in brief interventions?

Early intervention for common mental health
conditions in young people



This quick reference table summarises the current state of scientific evidence for brief (2–8 sessions) skills-based psychological interventions for early intervention, with a focus on what is helpful for anxiety and depression in young people (12–25 years old). This table is intended to complement the ‘[Brief psychological interventions for young people with common mental health disorders](#)’ evidence summary. The evidence summary provides more in-depth detail and recommendations to inform practice.

This table can help inform clinic-based psychological intervention for early intervention with young people showing symptoms of anxiety and depression. Where studies were less relevant or applicable to this context, we have noted this in the quality rating and used the term ‘extrapolated’. Results for these less applicable studies were given less weight in our evidence rating.

Evidence strength key for each brief intervention

- ★★★★ Multiple good quality studies support this approach.
- ★★★ There are a number of studies supporting this approach; however, evidence type and/or study quality may be inconsistent.
- ★★ There are at least two studies showing this approach works; however, evidence type and/or study quality may be inconsistent.
- ★ There is insufficient evidence to say whether this approach works.

What works in brief interventions?

Intervention type	Helpful for early signs of	Effect size (where significant and reported)	Evidence strength	Results
Behavioural activation	Depression (including subthreshold)	Medium to large	★	Moderate to strong effect sizes from 2x randomised controlled trials. ^{1,2} Significant difference without effect size on 2x extrapolated randomised controlled trials. ^{3,4} Inconsistent results (positive self-report results, null clinical results) from 1x extrapolated randomised controlled trial. ⁵
Physical activity	Depression	N/A	?	1x poor quality randomised controlled trial with no effect size reported and inadequate analyses. ⁶ Insufficient evidence to report evidence strength.
	Anxiety	Large	★★★	Large effect size from 3x randomised controlled trials. ⁷⁻⁹



Intervention type	Helpful for early signs of	Effect size (where significant and reported)	Evidence strength	Results
Problem-solving	Depression	Large	?	Large effect from 1x randomised controlled trial. ¹⁰ Null results from 1x randomised controlled trial. ¹¹ Significantly better outcome from 1x extrapolated randomised controlled trial without effect size. ¹²
	Anxiety	N/A	?	Null results from 1x randomised controlled trial. ¹¹ Significantly better outcome from 1x extrapolated randomised controlled trial without effect size. ¹² Insufficient evidence to report evidence strength.
Sleep	Depression	Small to large	★★★	Large effect size from meta-analysis of large randomised controlled trials. ¹³ Small effect size from 1x randomised controlled trial. ¹⁴ Null results from 1x randomised controlled trial. ¹⁵
	Anxiety	Small	★★★	Small effect size from meta-analysis of large randomised controlled trials. ¹³ Small effect size from 1x randomised controlled trial. ¹⁵
Mindfulness	Depression	Medium to large	★	Medium to large effect sizes from 3x randomised controlled trials. ^{16,17} Significantly better outcome from 1x extrapolated randomised controlled trial without effect size. ¹⁸ Null results on 1x extrapolated quasi-randomised controlled study. ¹⁹
	Anxiety	Medium to large	★	Medium to large effect sizes from 3x randomised controlled trials. ^{16,17,20} Insufficient findings from 1x extremely small cohort study with case analysis. ²¹ Null results from 1x extrapolated randomised controlled trial. ¹⁸

Intervention type	Helpful for early signs of	Effect size (where significant and reported)	Evidence strength	Results
Relaxation therapy	Depression	Medium	★	Medium effect sizes from 1x randomised controlled trial. ²² Significant improvements without effect sizes from 2x extrapolated randomised controlled trials. ^{23,24}
	Anxiety	N/A	?	Significant mean difference without effect size reported in 2x extrapolated randomised controlled trials. ^{24,25}

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Resource writers

Rebekah Anderson
Affrica McCarthy

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Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health
1300 679 436
info@orygen.org.au
orygen.org.au