

Strategies to support Mason's capacity assessment: Part 2

The next step to supporting Mason to engage in the process of decision-making is to provide information to increase his understanding of social anxiety and about the treatment proposed.

Watch how the clinician supports Mason, using a variety of tools and strategies.

Doctor:

So last week you told me on the phone that, um, you're finding it's really difficult to get to school.

Mason:

Yeah...

Doctor:

Yeah? So lots of young people I know get really stressed out about going to school. And there's lots of reasons that can happen. Could we have a talk about that now?

When the clinician asks Mason about his symptoms, he describes feeling sick in the mornings.

Watch how she supports him to identify the physiological symptoms of anxiety in more detail.

Doctor:

Do you often feel sick in the mornings?

Mason:

Yeah. Pretty much. I feel like throwing up sometimes.

Alan:

Yeah. Think it's been harder for Mason to get to school – ah - when I woke him up the other day he mentioned he had a headache.

Doctor:

Okay. So, I've drawn a body here - to help me understand where you feel sick in your body; can you just show me where you feel sick the most? So it could be your stomach, your chest, your head – somewhere else?

Mason:

Stomach.

Doctor:

Stomach. Okay. And your uncle mentioned that you get headaches as well.

<Mason nods>

Okay. Do you feel sick anywhere else in your body?

Mason:

<Points at the image>

A visual tool called a 'body outline' is used to help Mason understand and describe the symptoms of anxiety. This is an effective way of developing a shared understanding of the symptoms he is experiencing.

Watch how the clinician uses some specific questions called 'finding-out-questions' to support his ability to describe the symptoms of social anxiety.

Doctor:

Okay. So, on Monday, what part of the day did you find most difficult?

Mason:

<Playing with a fidget spinner>

In maths, I hate maths.

Doctor:

Okay. So, what made it difficult - did something happen?

Mason:

The teacher asked me a question in front of everyone. My mouth – sorta - kinda stopped. I couldn't talk. They were all staring at me.

Doctor:

That sounds really difficult. How did you feel at the time?

Mason:

Bad. Like I was going to get a heart attack.

Doctor:

That sounds really hard. So, when the teacher asks you a question in front of everybody, what were you thinking?

Mason:

They think I'm a loser. Dumb. Or something...

Doctor:

Okay. So I don't think you're dumb, I think you have something called social anxiety? Do you know what that is?

<Mason shakes his head> No?

The clinician then uses a tool called a 'word web' to visually support her explanation of the symptoms of social anxiety.

She has also used his words in her explanation of social anxiety as a way of developing a shared language.

Doctor:

So that's how anxiety can feel. So social anxiety, happens, when you are around other people. So you might feel stressed or nervous when you're around, say, teachers. And it sounds like you feel stressed around groups of people. Would that be right? Yeah?

And when you feel anxious, you just told me when the teacher asks you a question in front of people. So when you're in front of groups of people and you have to talk – yeah.

And it sounds like it happens at school quite a lot, that might be where it can happen. It might also be other places where you're around groups of people – like maybe going to, ah, the shops or playing football. Okay.

People with social anxiety also think a lot and worry a lot about what other people are thinking. So you've told me you were thinking 'they think I'm dumb', or 'they think I'm a loser'. Okay. So that's social anxiety, so far. Does that make sense?

The clinician now helps Mason to understand the nature and purpose of the treatment. She has drawn a diagram to help him understand what is involved in the treatment proposed.

Instead of using the words 'exposure therapy' she has changed her language and described it in simple terms as undertaking 'mini challenges'.

Doctor:

So I'd like to tell you now, how we can help, you get back to school, by making social anxiety a smaller problem for you. Okay?

So, if you take a look at this staircase... When we think about dealing with social anxiety, we have to face some of the things that we find difficult, but just a little bit at a time. So we do 'mini challenges'. So, if we think about what is the most difficult thing first, would that be going to school?

Mason: <Mason nods>

Doctor:

Yeah. So let's put that at the top of the staircase.

So we are just starting out, so, we're not going to jump all the way to going to school straight away. We've got to start with something much smaller. Yeah. A 'mini challenge'.

So, the first step on our stair case might be leaving the house to go to the shop up the road, or something like that, yeah?

During step three of the decision-making process the clinician checks whether Mason has remembered and understood the information provided to him about his social anxiety and the treatment proposed.

Doctor:

I want to make sure I've explained social anxiety properly. So, can you explain to me what social anxiety is? In your own words. And you can use the pictures too, if you like.

Mason:

It's kind of like being stressed out, about people, and school. Like talking in class. It makes me feel sick. I get worried that they're thinking I'm stupid, like this.

Doctor:

Okay. So Mason, do you think you might have social anxiety.

Mason:

Yeah, probably.

Doctor:

Okay.

Visuals such as the 'word web' and the staircase drawn by the clinician has been used by Mason to demonstrate his understanding of his social anxiety and the treatment proposed.

Doctor:

So we talked as well about how to make social anxiety smaller. Can you tell me about how we make social anxiety smaller?

Mason:

I have to do some easy challenges first - like this <pointing to staircase diagram>.

Which will harder – will get harder, like going to school. Like this <pointing to staircase diagram>.

Doctor:

That's right.

Step four of the decision-making process involves supporting Mason to consider the benefits and the risks of the treatment proposed. This is called the 'weighing-up stage'.

He is also supported to consider the consequences of declining treatment.

Doctor:

So, I want to talk to you about what your choices are. So you could choose to do nothing, or you could choose to do the mini challenges. So if you choose to do nothing... social anxiety, which is here <pointing to diagram> the problem of social anxiety gets bigger and bigger, like this <pointing to diagram> okay?

This visual is used to help Mason consider the consequences of accepting or declining treatment.

Doctor:

Now if you chose to do the mini challenges, this is our staircase, the problem of social anxiety gets smaller and smaller. Okay?

Now it might be difficult sometimes with the mini challenges, and if you're finding its getting hard, you can have a chat to me, and we can make the mini challenges smaller. Make it a bit easier each step of the way. Do you have any questions so far?

Mason:

Wouldn't it be easier - to just, you know, leave it?

Doctor:

Yeah, a lot of people your age say that. I totally understand. I guess, what do you think would happen if we did nothing about the social anxiety

Mason:

Well, I wouldn't have to do these.

Doctor:

Yeah, true. But what would happen to the social anxiety - would it get bigger or smaller?

As Mason seemed uncertain about the treatment, the clinician supports him to consider the consequences of not receiving the treatment for his social anxiety, by using picture cards.

Doctor

Okay. So if social anxiety got bigger, I wonder what problems there might be and what would happen. So, if social anxiety gets big, you could use these pictures to help you think about what would happen.

Mason:

I wouldn't go to school. Maybe smoke more weed.

The clinician also supports him to consider how treatment can help him achieve his goals by using pictures and images.

Doctor:

So if you do the mini challenges and social anxiety got smaller, what would you be doing? We can use the pictures again if you like.

Mason:

Probably do more stuff - like hang out with my mates at the skate park.

Doctor:

Yeah? Is there anything you'd be doing too? <Mason selects another card>. So Mason, it's your choice. You can choose to do nothing, or you can choose to do the mini challenges.

There are some good things about treatment, so, like going to school and doing more things with your friends. But there are difficult things too, like doing the mini challenges. So if you like, you can have a think about it and a talk with Alan, and get back to me.

Mason:

<Nods in agreement>

In this final stage of decision-making, the clinician asks Mason whether he has made a decision about the treatment.

She also asks him his reasons for the decision.

Doctor:

Hey you guys. So, how'd you go? Did you make a decision?

Mason:

Hmm, maybe I'll give it a go.

Doctor:

Yeah, great. So what was the main thing that made you want to give it a go?

Mason:

I want to be able to do more stuff with my mates, and I guess, go to school.

Doctor:

Alright, brilliant. So, maybe we can have a look at making another time for me to come back.