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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Attention: Health/Food/Lifestyle Section Editors

Anxiety disorders in teens risk factor for suicide

Almost 3,000 North Shore kids affected by anxiety disorders

Vancouver – 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.

Approximately 10 per cent of children and teenagers suffer from one or more anxiety disorders, and 80 per cent go untreated. That amounts to 2,600 children and teenagers on the North Shore.

To help parents learn how to manage anxiety disorders in their children and ultimately reduce the risk of suicidality in adolescence and young adulthood, AnxietyBC, with assistance from 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 and helpful seminar takes place in North Vancouver on Nov. 29 and will teach parents how to identify if a child has an anxiety disorder, and how to manage the problem at home.

“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,” said Dr. Kristin Buhr, the North Shore Stress and Anxiety Clinic-based cognitive-behaviour therapist who will be facilitating the seminar.

Anxiety disorders may first present 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,” said Buhr. “However, it can be difficult for parents to see their child distressed while facing fears. This helps us understand why so many well-intended 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. The great news is that AnxietyBC is offering an information seminar aimed at

providing parents with the strategies to help their child manage anxiety effectively,” added Buhr.

The AnxietyBC-sponsored Family Skill Building Seminar takes place Nov. 29 at 7 p.m. at St. Stephen’s Hall, 1360 East 24th Street in North Vancouver. AnxietyBC is also hosting seminars in Penticton, Victoria and Burnaby. For more information, visit: www.anxietybc.com.

Funding for AnxietyBC programs is provided by Fraser Health, BC Mental Health & Addiction Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, the Ministry for Children and Family Development, and other regional health authorities and foundations. AnxietyBC members play a key role in supporting the ongoing dissemination of resources and advocacy with their membership fees and donations, while the public and corporate sponsors assist AnxietyBC during its fund-raising campaigns. AnxietyBC is very grateful to all its supporters and well-wishers.

AnxietyBC is one of seven provincial agencies that make up the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information. These agencies are working together to provide high quality, evidence-based information on mental health and substance use to help individuals and families living with mental health and substance use problems live productive, fulfilling lives. Funding is provided by BC Mental Health & Addiction Services, an agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority, with additional support from the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

AnxietyBC, a non-profit organization, was established in 1999 by a group of concerned consumers, family members and professionals. Its mission is to facilitate positive solutions for those living with anxiety by increasing awareness, promoting education and improving access to effective treatments.

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