

This case study was created as part of the Empowering Young People – Leading Change Ourselves project, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund and delivered by Potential Plus UK. It was developed by young people, for young people, as part of a wider action project focused on sharing real experiences and practical strategies for managing anxiety.

Background to Case Study

This young person is a 14 year old young person who is neurodivergent, with high learning potential. He has always struggled with “everything feeling too much”. Despite doing really well at school he describes persistently experiencing feelings of not being “good enough” and effects from anxiety that interfere with daily life.

How was anxiety making you feel and what area of your life was it mostly impacting?

Anxiety showed up in seemingly unrelated ways. I got intense stomach aches before school. I lay awake replaying old conversations convinced I had said something embarrassing and avoiding class participation despite loving to learn and often knowing the answer because “what if I sound stupid?”

In high learning potential teens anxiety often manifests in perfectionism rather than panic. My perfectionism spiralled out of control. I was spending entire weekends rewriting top quality essays just to fulfil that niggling doubt that they were inadequate. The constant “what if” thoughts felt impossible to stop: “what if I fail?”, “what if my friends think I’m annoying?”, “what if I don’t get into university?” All this at the age of 14 when all the possibilities of the world were wide open for me.

When did you start using anxiety management techniques, and who helped?

I decided I was going to get help to manage my anxiety last year. I joined the Potential Plus UK Young Leaders Programme to get comfortable with the idea of being a high potential teen with a unique but manageable set of challenges.

I also worked with my school learning enrichment team on practical strategies.

What Techniques did you use and how did they help you?

1. I learned practical strategies that would help me keep my anxiety to a tolerable level during the school week which was where a majority of my time was spent. The most effective interventions were practical, small but consistently practiced techniques
2. I discovered the joy of exercise-both going to the gym and playing team sports, especially cricket, which was a great benefit.

After six months of consistent practice, I noticed significant changes. My confidence improved-genuine confidence from knowing I could handle difficult situations.

Most importantly I developed resilience. During challenging situations like school team presentations, I used my arsenal of techniques instead of falling apart. I learnt that managing anxiety isn't about eliminating worried thoughts but responding to them differently

Long term benefits extended beyond symptom management to improved relationships, academic performance, and life satisfaction. I still get anxious sometimes but now I know what to do about it instead of just suffering through it.