



## Ben's story

### The Commonwealth Psychosocial Support Program | Case Study | Ben – 13 yrs old

*Ben was referred to CPSP in March 2021, from Headspace Meadowbrook. His primary presenting concerns were around anxiety, low mood, anger (mostly expressed physically), suicidality & lack of engagement with education. Secondary to these, Ben has experienced historical trauma from the passing of his Grandfather three years previously, witnessing his younger brother attempt suicide & DFV towards his Mother and siblings by his biological father. Ben lives with his two younger brothers and Mother & visits his Father most school holidays.*

*At the initial visit Ben had a steak knife and was stabbing cutting boards and benches with the knife; he then attempted to light items on fire with a lighter. During the initial appointment, Ben engaged well with Practitioner at times, but found it challenging to focus on tasks or questions & repeatedly left the shared living area where the visit was taking place. Mum & Ben were observed to have a very hostile relationship, both physically & verbally. Both would swear and react to each other quite quickly.*

*Ben had been suspended from school multiple times, (2 days to 2 weeks duration) due to verbal threats & physical altercations with his peers or staff. Mum was very concerned about the amount of time Ben was being suspended from school, as it was impacting his mental health and family relationships. Mum had to stop working due to the amount of time Ben was at home on suspension.*

*The aggression between Mum and Ben was one of a number of concerns that had brought the family to the attention of child protection services. Mum and the family were being supported through an Intensive Family Support program, which attend the home fortnightly. The main focus for IFS was parenting support; Ben did not engage well with the support worker.*

*Other services involved are CYMHS for Ben's brother. Ben himself was not receiving any support from services at the time of the referral, but was on the waitlist for counselling through Headspace.*

### Action Plan

Ben, with the support of Mum and the CPSP Practitioner, was able to set the below goals following two assessment sessions:

- **Improve behavior at school to decrease possibility of suspensions**
- **Develop strategies to better manage mental health**
- **Improve relationships with siblings and Mum**

Ben built a strong relationship with his CPSP practitioner; he engaged well in each session, was present and focused, and worked hard on the skill-building tasks or activities during sessions.



### EDUCATION ACTIONS:

The CPSP undertook advocacy on Ben's behalf with his school. Meetings with the school determined what support was available, and discussion of the kinds of strategies that may assist him. These included:

- Access to the school Chill Out space, where he could use meditation & the weighted blanket
- Access to support staff, in particular a Teacher Aide that Ben has a strong relationship with
- Ongoing collaborative communication around Ben's needs

### MENTAL HEALTH ACTIONS:

The CPSP Practitioner undertook a tailored psychoeducation with focus on anger, anxiety and trauma responses. This enabled Ben and his Mum to better understand his reactions to certain situations, and then learn skills and situational strategies to deal with these reactions. Skills and strategies included meditation, positive self-talk, and calming strategies to better regulate emotions.

In addition, Ben required intervention relating to his low opinion of himself. The CPSP practitioner undertook work designed to enhance his self-confidence and belief in his own worth.

Given Ben's level of psychological distress, a referral to outreach clinical support was made whilst waiting for counselling at Headspace.

### HEALTH ACTIONS:

CPSP Practitioner encouraged Mum to book appointment and attend Pediatrician appointment to review Ben's medication.

### RELATIONSHIPS ACTIONS:

To strengthen the relationships between Ben, his siblings and his Mum, the CPSP Practitioner undertook some relationally focused work with the family unit. This included negotiating and acting on shared understanding of personal boundaries (personal belongings, personal information, personal space) and identifying ways other than verbal and physical aggression to resolve disputes or communicate dissatisfaction.

Additionally, the CPSP Practitioner worked with Mum on her parenting, in particular her reliance on aggression to manage Ben's behavior. The CPSP Practitioner modeled positive parenting language and behavior, improving Mum's ability to praise, acknowledge and celebrate Ben's efforts and achievements.

## Outcomes

Since receiving support through CPSP Mum, the school & Ben have reported a significant decrease in behavioural concerns at school. Ben has received significantly fewer suspensions, and the suspensions have been of shorter duration. Ben is now much more able to self-regulate when feeling angry or frustrated, and will quite often use the school Chill Out space or a distraction task. When peers have encouraged Ben to leave class or attempt to distract him, Ben is able to ignore and redirect his attention back to task more often than not. Teachers have acknowledged that Ben has been less disruptive in class and able to complete tasks. Following incidences where it has escalated



to a point that support teachers have had to provide support, Ben is able to self-reflect and talk through what he & supports could do next time to prevent and incident requiring. Teachers are more confident in identifying when Ben requires support to self-regulate or be redirected from the situation.

Due to Ben's significant improvement with behavior, he has been selected for a the 'Sub Base 31'\* program at school, which is only available to 6 participants at one time. Ben has also re-engaged in sports and been selected for the Rugby program at school.

There have been similar improvements at home. Ben is less reactive physically when feeling angry or frustrated and is able to verbalise what he needs prior to becoming heightened most times. Ben's confidence and belief in his ability has increased. Ben and his family are now able to identify the most effective strategies to use to help him regulate his emotions. There are fewer physical fights between Ben and his brothers and they are now working more as a team and help out around the house.

Following assessment with a clinical mental health professional, Ben received a diagnosis of generalised anxiety. Clinical intervention allowed Ben and him Mum to better understand why Ben sometimes reacted the way that he did, and how Mum could best support Ben when he was heightened. Due to the use of the weighted blanket at school and the positive outcomes following use, Mum was able to purchase one for home. Ben has been able to incorporate the weighted blanket in to his night routine, which has enabled him to settle faster.

Mum has also engaged in her own clinical supports to build her capacity to support the family with their needs.

### **Closure**

*Ben is now preparing to cease work with the CPSP. He and his mother are confident of maintaining their progress.*

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<https://www.accoras.com.au/CPSP>**