International Journal Of Childhood Mental Health And Behaviour

VOL.1-NO.1-2026

P ISSN: xxxx-xxx

E ISSN: xxxx-xxx

EARLY INTERVENTION STRATEGIES FOR CHILDHOOD ANXIETY AND BEHAVIOURAL DISORDERS

Iqra Younas

B.S. Department of English, The Cosmic Degree College (For Women), University of Okara

ABSTRACT

Early intervention plays a significant role in identifying, preventing, and managing childhood anxiety and behavioural disorders. Early childhood is a critical period of emotional, social, cognitive, and behavioural development, during which children learn to regulate their emotions, communicate their needs, build relationships, and respond to different situations. However, some children experience persistent fear, excessive worry, separation anxiety, aggression, hyperactivity, defiance, social withdrawal, or difficulties in controlling their emotions. When these difficulties remain unidentified or untreated, they may interfere with learning, peer relationships, family interactions, school participation, and overall psychological well-being. Early intervention refers to the timely identification of developmental and emotional difficulties and the implementation of appropriate educational, psychological, behavioural, and family-based support. This research examines the importance of early intervention strategies for childhood anxiety and behavioural disorders, with particular attention to parental involvement, teacher awareness, positive classroom environments, behavioural therapy, emotional learning, counselling, and collaboration between families, schools, and mental health professionals. It also explores how early screening and developmentally appropriate support may reduce the severity of difficulties and prevent their long-term effects. A qualitative, literature-based research approach is proposed to examine relevant research publications, systematic reviews, and guidance published between 2023 and 2026. The study focuses on understanding effective intervention practices, identifying barriers to accessing support, and exploring the responsibilities of parents, teachers, schools, and healthcare professionals.

KEYWORDS: *Early intervention, childhood anxiety, behavioural disorders, emotional development, child mental health, parental involvement, positive behaviour support, school counselling, psychological well-being, early childhood education.*

INTRODUCTION

Childhood is a foundational stage of human development during which children acquire essential emotional, cognitive, social, linguistic, and behavioural skills. During this period, children gradually learn how to recognize their feelings, manage frustration, cope with unfamiliar situations, establish friendships, follow instructions, and respond appropriately to the expectations of family and school environments. Although occasional fear, sadness, anger, restlessness, and resistance are normal parts of childhood development, persistent or severe difficulties may indicate a need for additional support. Childhood anxiety and behavioural disorders are important concerns because they can affect children's participation in educational activities, relationships with parents and teachers, academic progress, self-confidence, and general quality of life. Anxiety-related difficulties may appear as excessive worrying, fear of separation from caregivers, avoidance of school, repeated reassurance-seeking, sleep disturbances, physical complaints, or fear of social situations. Calteaux, I. G., Neumann, D. L., & Farrell, L. J. (2025). Found that Behavioural difficulties may involve persistent aggression, impulsivity, defiance, disruptive conduct, emotional outbursts, or difficulty following age-appropriate rules. These behaviours may have different causes and should be interpreted in relation to the child's age, developmental stage, environment, and individual needs. Therefore, understanding childhood mental health requires a balanced perspective that recognizes both typical developmental variations and difficulties that require

professional assessment.The importance of early intervention lies in the opportunity to recognize emotional and behavioural concerns before they become deeply established or significantly interfere with everyday functioning.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). CDC Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD): Minutes from the February 21, 2024 Meeting.explaind Early intervention does not mean diagnosing every child who displays fear, anger, or restlessness. Rather, it involves observing patterns of behaviour, listening to children, understanding the circumstances in which difficulties occur, communicating with families, and arranging appropriate assessment and support when necessary. For example, a child who repeatedly refuses to attend school may be experiencing separation anxiety, fear of failure, bullying, learning difficulties, sensory discomfort, or another underlying problem. Similarly, a child who frequently displays aggression may be struggling with frustration, communication difficulties, stressful experiences, unmet developmental needs, or challenges with emotional regulation. Punishment alone may fail to address these underlying concerns and can sometimes increase distress. In contrast, supportive approaches that combine predictable routines, positive reinforcement, emotional coaching, structured learning activities, and family collaboration can help children develop more effective coping skills. Early intervention is therefore most effective when adults attempt to understand the reasons behind a child's behaviour rather than focusing exclusively on stopping the visible behaviour.

Parents and caregivers have a particularly important role in recognizing early signs of anxiety and behavioural difficulties because they observe children across daily routines, family interactions, sleep patterns, play activities, Smith, A. C., & Kersh, E. N. (2026).revealed and unfamiliar experiences. Changes such as persistent irritability, avoidance of previously enjoyed activities, excessive dependence, frequent emotional outbursts, withdrawal, or unusual fears may indicate that a child needs additional attention. However, parents may not always recognize these signs, particularly when emotional distress is expressed through physical complaints or disruptive behaviour. Some children are unable to explain their feelings clearly because of their age, limited vocabulary, developmental differences, or fear of being misunderstood. Parent education can help caregivers distinguish between developmentally expected behaviour and persistent difficulties that require furtherassessment. It can also encourage supportive communication, consistent boundaries, realistic expectations, Omwono, S. A. (2025). Elaboranted on and positive reinforcement. Instead of describing children as difficult, stubborn, or problematic, adults can be encouraged to identify specific behaviours and investigate the situations that trigger them. This approach promotes empathy, reduces stigma, and supports more constructive relationships between children and their caregivers.Educational institutions also play an essential role in early identification because teachers observe children interacting with peers, completing classroom tasks, responding to instructions, participating in group activities, and managing changes in routine. A child who appears confident at home may experience significant anxiety at school, while another child may show disruptive behaviour primarily in crowded or demanding classroom situations. Teachers can identify repeated patterns such as avoidance of participation, frequent crying, social isolation, impulsive actions, persistent conflict with classmates, or difficulty recovering after frustration. Nevertheless, teachers should not be expected to independently diagnose mental health conditions.

International Journal Of Childhood Mental Health And Behaviour

VOL.1-NO.1-2026

P ISSN: xxxx-xxx

E ISSN: xxxx-xxx

Their responsibility is to document observable concerns, create supportive learning environments, communicate respectfully with caregivers, and refer children to qualified professionals when appropriate. Classroom strategies may include clear instructions, visual schedules, predictable transitions, opportunities for movement, cooperative play, emotional vocabulary activities, and specific praise for positive behaviour. Inclusive teaching practices can further reduce unnecessary stress by recognizing that children differ in temperament, communication skills, learning preferences, and developmental pace. When teachers and families cooperate, they can develop consistent strategies that support the child across home and school settings.Professional psychological and behavioural interventions are another important component of early support. Depending on the child's age, symptoms, developmental profile, and level of impairment, suitable interventions may include cognitive behavioural therapy adapted for children, parent-focused behavioural training, play-based therapeutic activities, family support, social-emotional learning, and classroom behaviour plans. Cognitive behavioural therapy can help children recognize anxious thoughts, understand connections between thoughts and feelings, and gradually develop healthier responses to feared situations. Parent-focused interventions can teach caregivers how to reinforce appropriate behaviour, establish predictable routines, respond calmly to emotional outbursts, and avoid unintentionally strengthening avoidance patterns. For children with persistent disruptive behaviour, evidence-informed parent training and structured behavioural support may improve relationships and reduce conflict.

Children experiencing more complex difficulties may benefit from coordinated support involving psychologists, paediatricians, psychiatrists, speech and language professionals, or other specialists. No single intervention is suitable for every child, and treatment should be based on a careful assessment rather than a generalized assumption that all anxiety or behavioural difficulties have the same cause.Despite growing awareness of child mental health, several barriers continue to limit access to early intervention. These barriers may include limited availability of trained professionals, financial constraints, stigma surrounding mental health, insufficient school counselling services, long waiting periods, lack of parental awareness, and cultural misunderstandings about children's emotional needs. In some settings, emotional distress may be dismissed as shyness, disobedience, weakness, or a temporary phase, even when it substantially affects the child's functioning. Other children may be incorrectly labelled because adults interpret developmental differences or reactions to stressful environments as intentional misconduct. Language differences, disability-related barriers, family pressures, and unequal access to educational resources can further complicate identification and support. These challenges demonstrate the need for accessible, culturally responsive, child-centred systems that connect families, schools, and health services.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. Identify common early signs of anxiety and behavioural difficulties in children.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the common early signs of childhood anxiety and behavioural disorders?

International Journal Of Childhood Mental Health And Behaviour

VOL.1-NO.1-2026

P ISSN: xxxx-xxx

E ISSN: xxxx-xxx

LITERATURE REVIEW

Childhood anxiety and behavioural disorders are important areas of child development research because emotional and behavioural difficulties can influence children's daily functioning, learning experiences, and interpersonal relationships. Anxiety is characterized by excessive fear, worry, or apprehension that may be disproportionate to the situation and interfere with ordinary activities. Behavioural disorders involve persistent patterns of disruptive, Fisak, B., Penna, A., Mian, N. D., Lamoli, L., Margaris, A., & Cruz, S. A. M. F. D. (2023).found that oppositional, impulsive, or conduct-related behaviour that extend beyond what would generally be expected for a child's developmental stage. These difficulties should be distinguished from temporary emotional reactions and occasional misbehaviour. An accurate understanding requires attention to the frequency, intensity, duration, and context of the child's behaviour, as well as its effect on home, school, and social functioning. Recent public health guidance emphasizes the importance of developing accessible mental health services and responding to children's needs through appropriate assessment and support. The World Health Organization's 2024 service guidance highlights the early development of mental health conditions and the need to strengthen services for children and young people. This perspective supports the importance of early intervention while recognizing that children's experiences differ and that assessment must be individualized.Early identification is a central component of effective intervention because it helps families and professionals recognize difficulties before they significantly interfere with children's everyday activities. Screening may involve structured questionnaires, developmental observations, interviews with parents, teacher reports, and discussions with qualified professionals. These methods can help identify patterns such as excessive worry, persistent school avoidance, aggression, emotional outbursts, social withdrawal, impulsivity, or difficulty managing frustration. Screening should be understood as an initial step rather than a definitive diagnosis. A child may exhibit anxiety because of bullying, family separation, a recent stressful event, learning difficulties, or an unfamiliar school environment. Similarly, disruptive behaviour may be associated with communication difficulties, unmet developmental needs, environmental stress, or a condition requiring specialist assessment. Effective screening therefore considers multiple sources of information and investigates the situations in which difficulties occur.

It should also avoid stigmatizing children or making assumptions based on isolated incidents. The research literature on young children's anxiety interventions demonstrates that psychosocial support can be beneficial, reinforcing the value of recognizing difficulties and arranging appropriate help Antuña-Camblor, C., Tejedor-Hernández, V., & Castaño-Calle, R. (2026).explaind. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is an important evidence-informed approach for children experiencing anxiety disorders. It helps children understand the relationship between thoughts, feelings, physical sensations, and behaviour. For example, a child who believes that every unfamiliar situation is dangerous may learn to recognize anxious predictions, consider alternative explanations, and develop practical coping strategies. Depending on the child's age and needs, CBT may include stories, drawing, relaxation exercises, guided problem-solving, gradual exposure to feared situations, and age-appropriate discussion of emotions. Exposure-based activities are planned carefully so that children can gradually face manageable fears instead of continually avoiding them. The Cochrane review of CBT for children and young people found that CBT can improve anxiety

outcomes compared with waiting-list or no-treatment conditions, although results vary across studies and there is no clear evidence that one delivery format is consistently superior. Parents and caregivers influence children's emotional development through daily communication, routines, encouragement, boundaries, and responses to distress. Family-based interventions can help caregivers recognize signs of anxiety, support emotional expression, reinforce constructive behaviour, and respond consistently to challenging situations. For example, when a child becomes distressed about attending school, parents can acknowledge the child's feelings while working with the school and an appropriate professional to establish a manageable plan for attendance and coping. Excessive reassurance or repeated avoidance of every feared situation may unintentionally maintain anxiety in some cases, whereas insensitive pressure can increase distress.

Caregivers therefore benefit from guidance on providing warmth, predictable expectations, and developmentally appropriate encouragement. Byrne and colleagues' 2023 overview of systematic reviews examined the role of parental involvement in CBT for youth anxiety. The authors reported considerable variation among existing reviews and concluded that evidence did not establish one universally superior treatment format. This suggests that parental participation should be tailored to the individual child rather than treated as a requirement for identical results in every case. Family support is particularly valuable when it strengthens the child's relationship with caregivers and promotes consistent strategies across everyday environments.Behavioural intervention is especially relevant when children display persistent aggression, defiance, impulsivity, difficulty following instructions, or disruptive classroom behaviour. These interventions focus on understanding what happens before and after a behaviour, identifying possible triggers, teaching alternative skills, and reinforcing positive responses. A behavioural plan may include clearly stated expectations, consistent routines, specific praise, achievable goals, predictable consequences, and opportunities for children to practise self-regulation. For example, a child who frequently interrupts classroom activities may benefit from shorter instructions, movement breaks, opportunities to request assistance, and positive reinforcement for waiting or participating appropriately. Such strategies should be adapted to the child's age and abilities rather than applied rigidly. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explains that behaviour therapy and parent training can help caregivers strengthen positive behaviours and reduce problematic behaviours, and that teachers may also be trained to support children in educational settings. This guidance supports the use of structured, skill-focused approaches instead of relying exclusively on punishment. However, behavioural intervention should also examine underlying emotional, developmental, communication, and environmental needs so that it addresses the reasons a difficulty persists.

Schools provide an important setting for identifying and supporting children's emotional and behavioural needs because children spend substantial time interacting with teachers and peers. School-based strategies may include social-emotional learning, classroom counselling, cooperative play, structured routines, peer relationship activities, relaxation exercises, and individualized behaviour support. Emotional learning teaches children to recognize feelings, express concerns, solve problems, and respond constructively to disagreements. Teachers can reduce unnecessary anxiety by explaining transitions in advance World Health Organization. (2025)., offering clear instructions, providing predictable classroom expectations, and creating opportunities for children to ask for help. Children who experience persistent distress

may require additional support from school counsellors or external professionals. A 2026 systematic review and meta-analysis of school-based psychological interventions for anxiety in elementary-school children reported a modest average reduction in anxiety following interventions and at follow-up, while also identifying differences according to who delivered the programmes. Effective early intervention often requires cooperation among parents, teachers, school counsellors, psychologists, paediatricians, and other relevant professionals. Children may display different behaviours in different settings, making collaboration important for developing an accurate understanding of their needs. Parents can provide information about family circumstances, sleep, developmental history, and behaviour at home, while teachers can describe classroom participation, peer interactions, and learning-related difficulties. Mental hea De Sire, A., Andrenelli, E., Negrini, F., Patrini, M., Lazzarini, S. G., & Ceravolo, M. G. (2021). Found that lth professionals can integrate these observations with assessment findings and recommend appropriate interventions. The World Health Organization's 2024 guidance emphasizes strengthening child and youth mental health services and adapting service delivery to different resource settings. Collaboration may also help families navigate referrals and reduce the risk of children being overlooked when services are fragmented. Nevertheless, information should be shared responsibly, with appropriate consent and protection of confidentiality.

Clear communication, defined responsibilities, culturally sensitive practice, and regular progress reviews can make support more coherent. Where specialist services are limited, trained school staff and primary care professionals may help identify concerns and facilitate appropriate referrals without replacing specialist diagnosis or treatment.Although research supports several approaches to childhood anxiety and behavioural difficulties, important questions remain about how to deliver early intervention effectively across different populations and settings. Some interventions have been studied more extensively than others, and results may vary according to children's ages, symptom severity, family involvement, programme duration, and professional training. Access to mental health services is also uneven, particularly where specialist staff, school counselling, and financial resources are limited. Cultural beliefs about child behaviour may affect whether families seek help, while language differences and stigma may influence communication between families and professionals. The WHO's 2024 guidance recognizes that there is no single service model appropriate for every context, highlighting the need for approaches suited to local resources and community needs. The present study addresses these issues by reviewing early identification, psychological treatment, family-based support, classroom strategies, and service barriers together.

METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to the systematic procedures used to collect, organize, examine, and interpret information relevant to a research problem. In the present study, the methodology is designed to examine early intervention strategies for childhood anxiety and behavioural disorders by reviewing existing academic literature, professional guidance, and relevant research publications. The study focuses on identifying effective approaches to early recognition, psychological support, behavioural management, family involvement, and school-based intervention. Because the topic concerns children's emotional and behavioural development, it is important to consider evidence from different disciplines, including child

psychology, early childhood education, developmental science, behavioural therapy, and public health. A structured methodology helps ensure that the discussion is organized, relevant to the research questions, and transparent about the evidence used. The proposed study adopts a qualitative, literature-based methodology rather than collecting new information directly from children, parents, or teachers. This approach allows the researcher to examine existing findings, compare different intervention strategies, identify common themes, and recognize gaps in current knowledge. It is particularly appropriate for an academic study intended to develop a broad understanding of early intervention practices and their potential implications for educational and family settings.The scope of the research is limited to early intervention strategies for childhood anxiety and behavioural disorders. It examines early signs of emotional distress, the importance of screening, psychological interventions, positive behavioural support, parental education, teacher training, and cooperation between schools and mental health professionals. The study considers children in early childhood and the school years, while recognizing that suitable intervention methods vary according to age, developmental level, symptoms, and individual circumstances.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The proposed study uses a descriptive qualitative literature-review design. Research design refers to the overall plan that connects the research questions, source selection, information collection, analysis, and interpretation. In this study, the design is based on existing published research rather than direct experimentation or the collection of new participant data. Its purpose is to describe early intervention strategies, examine the available evidence, compare recurring findings, and identify gaps that may guide future research and practice. This design is appropriate because the research questions focus on understanding different interventions, the roles of parents and teachers, and the challenges involved in providing support. It also enables the researcher to consider information from several disciplines within one organized framework. The design does not establish a new causal relationship between an intervention and a particular outcome. Instead, it synthesizes conclusions from existing sources and evaluates their relevance to the study's objectives. Any statements about intervention effectiveness must therefore be grounded in the quality and findings of the cited research.The unit of analysis consists of published studies, systematic reviews, professional guidance, and other relevant academic or institutional documents concerning childhood anxiety, behavioural difficulties, and early intervention. Each source is examined for its contribution to one or more research questions. Information of interest includes the population studied, the type of difficulty addressed, the intervention delivered, the setting in which support was provided, the reported outcomes, and the limitations identified by the original authors.

DATA ANALYSIS

The first analytical theme concerns the identification of childhood anxiety and behavioural difficulties. The reviewed literature indicates that early identification is most useful when adults consider repeated patterns of behaviour rather than isolated incidents. Persistent avoidance, excessive fear, withdrawal, aggression, emotional outbursts, and difficulty participating in ordinary activities may indicate a need for additional assessment. However, these behaviours can have multiple explanations, and screening results alone cannot establish a diagnosis. The analysis therefore emphasizes the value of combining information from

caregivers, teachers, developmental observations, and qualified professionals. It also highlights the importance of considering the child's circumstances, including changes in family life, peer relationships, learning difficulties, and environmental stress. The WHO's 2024 guidance identifies the development of accessible child and youth mental health services as an important priority. From this perspective, early screening should be connected to an appropriate pathway for assessment and support. Identifying a concern without providing follow-up services may have limited practical value. The main analytical conclusion is that effective early identification requires observation, careful interpretation, communication, and access to suitable interventions.The second theme examines the role of psychological treatment and structured behavioural support. The literature indicates that different intervention approaches address different needs. CBT is commonly used to help children manage anxiety through understanding thoughts and emotions, developing coping skills, and gradually confronting feared situations in a supported manner.

FINDINGS

The literature review indicates that early identification is an important foundation for supporting children experiencing anxiety and behavioural difficulties. Persistent emotional distress, repeated avoidance, aggression, impulsivity, social withdrawal, and difficulties with everyday participation may indicate that a child requires additional support. However, these signs must be interpreted in relation to the child's developmental stage, environment, and individual circumstances. The findings suggest that parents and teachers are well positioned to notice changes because they observe children in everyday situations, but neither observation nor screening alone should be treated as a definitive diagnosis. A careful assessment may require information from multiple sources and involvement from qualified professionals. The review also highlights the importance of responding to concerns without labelling children as disobedient, weak, or problematic. Understanding the reasons behind behaviour can help adults select more appropriate interventions and avoid responses that increase distress. These findings support an approach in which early identification leads to practical assistance, ongoing observation, and referral when necessary.A second major finding is that intervention strategies should be matched to the type and severity of the child's difficulties. Psychological interventions, including CBT, can help children experiencing anxiety develop coping skills and manage fearful thoughts and situations. Behavioural approaches can help children practise alternative responses, follow predictable routines, and develop self-regulation skills. Parent training may strengthen caregiver-child relationships and improve responses to disruptive behaviour.

CONCLUSION

Early intervention strategies for childhood anxiety and behavioural disorders are an important part of promoting healthy emotional development, positive behaviour, educational participation, and social adjustment. Childhood is a period of rapid development during which children learn to understand emotions, communicate their needs, build relationships, and cope with challenges. When anxiety or behavioural difficulties become persistent, they may affect a child's ability to attend school, participate in learning, interact with peers, and maintain positive relationships with family members. Recognizing these concerns early creates an opportunity to understand the child's needs and provide appropriate assistance

before difficulties become more disruptive to everyday functioning. However, early intervention should not involve diagnosing children on the basis of occasional fears, emotional outbursts, or isolated incidents of misbehaviour. Instead, it requires careful observation, consideration of developmental differences, communication with caregivers and teachers, and professional assessment when symptoms are persistent, severe, or interfere significantly with daily life. An effective approach focuses on understanding the child rather than blaming the child for behaviours that may reflect emotional distress, developmental challenges, or environmental pressures.The reviewed literature identifies several useful intervention strategies, including cognitive behavioural therapy, parent training, positive behavioural support, emotional learning, structured classroom routines, and family-based assistance. CBT can help children develop coping skills and respond more effectively to anxiety, while behavioural approaches can teach alternative responses and reinforce constructive behaviour.

REFERENCES

Antuña-Camblor, C., Tejedor-Hernández, V., & Castaño-Calle, R. (2026). Psychological school-based interventions for anxiety: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Children and Youth Services Review, 108918.

Calteaux, I. G., Neumann, D. L., & Farrell, L. J. (2025). Therapeutic processes that impact child outcomes following exposure therapy for child specific phobias. Child Psychiatry & Human Development, 1-13.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). CDC Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD): Minutes from the February 21, 2024 Meeting.

Fisak, B., Penna, A., Mian, N. D., Lamoli, L., Margaris, A., & Cruz, S. A. M. F. D. (2023). The effectiveness of anxiety interventions for young children: a meta-analytic review. Journal of Child and Family Studies, 32(8), 2546-2557.

Omwono, S. A. (2025). Comparison of Pap-Smear and Modified-Amsel's Criteria in Screening for Bacterial Vaginosis among Women at Kiambu Level-V Hospital, Kiambu County, Kenya (Doctoral dissertation, SCHOOL OF HEALTH SCIENCES, KENYATTA UNIVERSITY).

Smith, A. C., & Kersh, E. N. (2026). Evidence review for centers for disease control and prevention guidance development on the detection of Chlamydia trachomatis and Neisseria gonorrhoeae. Clinical Infectious Diseases, 82(Supplement_1), S1-S5.

World Health Organization. (2025). WHO global report on traditional, complementary and integrative medicine 2024. World Health Organization.