

Apps for EPs and Mental Health Professionals

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I am an educational psychologist (EP) working in private practice in Singapore, previously having been based in London for over a decade. I first started using a tablet (iPad) as part of my practice about five years ago, mainly to reduce what I needed to carry around with me. Those of you who are London commuters will understand. However, I have found it increasingly useful in my day-to-day practice. An internet search shows that the numbers of apps released on the App Store and Google Play can be between 1,000 and 6,000 per day (depending on your source), so it can be a little overwhelming. Although there is a plethora of educational-, psychological- and therapeutic-based apps on the market (just search your app stores), it can be difficult to find ones that are

- a) fit for purpose
- b) user friendly and
- c) have some evidence base.

Below, I have outlined the apps I find most useful in my practice. However, these may not be suitable for every educational psychologist or mental health professional in day-to-day practice. I have grouped them by category in which they purport to address (i.e., anxiety, mindfulness, etc.). I have left some apps off the list as I assume most EPs are aware of these, such as the assessment tool Q-interactive by Pearson and productivity tools such as Microsoft Word, CamScanner, etc. The list below is not exhaustive, and there are likely to be many more useful apps that I am not aware of. It is also probable that by the time this is published there will be many more available improved versions of what is listed below.

Disclaimer: Information provided below in the “use” and “overview” sections are the author’s independent opinion. The author does not have any vested interests in the listed apps. References to the apps are for information purposes only and do not constitute endorsement. Readers should be aware that the apps listed below may be altered or removed at any time by developers.

CBT and Anxiety Management



Pacifica for Stress & Anxiety by Pacifica Labs Inc.

Cost: Free (in-app purchases)

Age: 12+

Use: Alongside- and/or post-CBT intervention to maintain management of stress, anxiety and depression in young people.

Overview: This app is easy to use for young people to track and monitor moods and access a range of suggested tools. Tools are designed by psychologists and are CBT based; they include positive self-talk, thought-tracking/journaling, healthy living (sleep and exercise) and mindfulness (breathing). The design is attractive, with a choice of backgrounds, and the easy to use functionality has options for audio recording to personalise strategies. It also has in-app closed-group chat (community). A subscription (monthly, yearly, lifetime) is required to access a wider range of CBT-based activities, which I have not accessed.



MindShift by Anxiety Disorders Association of British Columbia

Cost: Free

Age: 4+ (although I would rate this as 12+)

Use: For teens and young people to self-manage anxiety.

Overview: This app has a range of tools to help teens with sleep, social anxiety, perfectionism, performance anxiety, worry, panic, conflict and intense emotions. It offers a range of sections, including psycho-education on anxiety, recording triggers, self-checking physical symptoms and a range of tools, with the option to save favourites. It is a nice introductory app for young people with lower-level anxiety (i.e., not high risk), which they can access on their own without adult or professional support.



Self-help for Anxiety Management (SAM) by University of the West of England

Cost: Free

Age: 12+

Use: For teens and young people to self-manage anxiety.

Overview: This app allows young people to track and record how anxiety impacts on them and supports users to build their own personalised toolkit to manage symptoms. The design of this app is simple and very easy to navigate. Its colourful visuals are child friendly, so that it could be used with kids as young as nine or ten years, with adult support. It also offers an in-app closed social network function for young people to connect with other users, and it provides links to UK support

organisations, such as The Good Samaritans phone number and other UK mental health websites.



Calm Harm by Stem4

Cost: Free

Age: 12+

Use: For young people to manage and resist the urge to self-harm, as an aid alongside treatment/therapeutic support.

Overview: Developed by a clinical psychologist (Dr Kraus) and based on a DBT approach (distract, comfort, express, release), it is bright, colourful and very easy to navigate. Like other apps, it allows users to record (journal), monitor and individualise tools. It is password protected for privacy.



ACT Companion by Berrick Psychology

Cost: Free

Age: 4+

Use: For use alongside Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) with adolescents and adults.

Overview: This was developed by Dr Russ Harris (Australian psychotherapist) to be used alongside his self-help workbook *The Happiness Trap*. The app provides a number of self-monitoring tools and mindful audios, as well as a crisis tool. It can be used with adolescents to help reinforce ACT concepts, encourage practice and monitoring between therapy and post-therapy.



Pesky gNATs by Handaxe Limited

Cost: Paid

Age: 9–17 years

Use: CBT-based tools to be used alongside an online therapeutic game.

Overview: This app was developed by clinical psychologist Dr Gary O'Reilly (University College Dublin) to be used alongside The Pesky gNATS CBT programme. The Pesky gNATs programme is an inexpensive online tool for mental health professionals to use with children and young people. The app provides weekly thought tracking, mindfulness and relaxation activities or mini-games for the young person to complete between sessions with the therapist. The app is free to install, but it requires an access code that can only be provided by a registered Pesky gNATs therapist. You can find more information here: <http://peskygnats.com/>

Mindfulness



Mindful gNATs by Handaxe Limited

Cost: Free

Age: 4+

Use: Mindful and relaxation activities for primary-aged children and adolescents.

Overview: This is another app developed by clinical psychologist Dr Gary O'Reilly (University College Dublin). The Mindful gNATs app provides eight different guided mindful and relaxation tools for use with primary-aged children or older. This app can be used alongside Dr O'Reilly's free CBT workbook, available online here: <http://peskygnats.com/workbook/>



Smiling Mind by Smiling Mind (non-profit organisation in Australia)

Cost: Free

Age: 4+

Use: Daily mindfulness activities for children and young people, and programmes for educators or mental health professionals.

Overview: Developed by psychologists and educators in Australia, this app provides programmes for individual use and lesson plans for classroom use. Programmes are grouped by age (e.g., 7–9 years, 10–12 years, 13–15 years, etc.). Activities include different breathing techniques, body scanning, mindful eating, awareness using the senses, mindful movement, etc. Due to the many options for its use, it can take time to navigate your way around the app, but, once familiar, it is easy to use and a valuable resource.



Stop, Breathe & Think Kids by Stop, Breathe & Think

Cost: Free (in-app purchases)

Age: 4+

Use: Meditation and mindfulness activities for kids aged 5–10 years (adult-supported access).

Overview: Collaboration with Susan Kaiser Greenland, author of programs and books on mindfulness for kids. Kids can check how they are feeling using emojis, play mindfulness "missions" and earn rewards as they progress. This app uses a mix of visuals, stories, animations and games. Adults can add up to five children, so each will have their own profile. There are fifteen free activities and a monthly or yearly subscription for their premium offer.



Get Calm by Child Mind Institute, Inc.

Cost: Free

Age: 4+

Use: For adults (parents, teachers, professionals) to support children and young people to manage anxiety.

Overview: This is a very basic app with a few key tools developed by mental health professionals, which includes progressive muscle relaxation exercise, feelings thermometer, breathing exercise, mindfulness/senses and thought checking. It also provides some psycho-education for adults and links to useful articles on the Child Mind Institute website.



Super Stretch Yoga by The Adventures of Super Stretch, LLC

Cost: Free

Age: 4+

Use: Adult or child access, to follow interactive demonstrations of twelve yoga poses.

Overview: This app has a really fun and interactive, adult- and child-friendly design. It uses storytelling, animation and video to engage primary-aged children in simple yoga poses. You can choose one pose at a time or follow SuperStretch and his friends through a series of poses.



ReachOut Breath by Reach Out Australia

Cost: Free

Age: 4+

Use: A controlled breathing tool, for all ages.

Overview: The user holds their finger over the camera, which measures heart rate; the app then guides the user to slow down and engage more measured breathing. This app can be used by kids and teens when anxious, for panic attacks, during exams or stressful events, at bedtime or to aid relaxation.

Emotional Literacy



The Bears by Anglicare Victoria

Cost: Paid

Age: 4+

Use: A visual tool to help preschool and primary-aged children identify a range of emotions.

Overview: This is an app version of St Luke's Innovative Resources "Bears Cards". There are 48 colourful cards depicting bears expressing a range of emotions. These can be used to help elicit a child's feelings and emotions (gain a

child's views) and their understanding of different emotions (emotional literacy) or as a teaching tool.



The Zones of Regulation & Exploring Emotions: Bundle by Selosoft, Inc.

Cost: Paid

Age: 4+

Use: Adult-supported access to games that teach primary-age children self-regulation skills.

Overview: Can be used separately or alongside Leah Kuypers "Zones of Regulation" programme (<http://www.zonesofregulation.com/>). These apps provide fun and interactive games where children individualise their own character and work through examples and activities that teach children about the different zones and tools to help with self-regulation. There is a function where children can graph how they feel across a day and how they managed. There is a range of suggested tools that children can add to their "toolbox" and options for users to personalise their own tools.



Strengths Cards by Work Positive Ltd

Cost: Paid

Age: 4+

Use: To support users (young people or young adults) to reflect on their personal strengths.

Overview: This is an app version of strengths cards, consisting of two decks of 48 cards (a word version and a picture version). I find the picture version is too open to interpretation, so I only use the words cards. I use this with teens to get them to reflect on their strengths. The app allows users to scroll through the deck, keep or discard cards. You can also divide the screen up into different sections and ask users to sort the cards depending on how you want to use them. The app is basic and has limited functionality, but it is a useful tool for gathering young people's views as an aid to assessment, intervention, teaching or therapeutic support.

Social Skills



Social Detective by Skills Builder Inc.

Cost: Paid

Age: 4+

Use: Activities to teach social skills concepts based on the Social Detective Programme.

Overview: These tools can be used independently or alongside the Social Thinking Social Detective programme by Michele

Garcia Winner and Pamela Crooke. This programme is developed for children with a neurodevelopmental disorder (autism spectrum, ADHD) or the term sometimes used in the US or Australia is *twice exceptional (2e)*. It provides real-life videos, which are a little old but meet the requirements, and prompt questions to model and teach key concepts in the social detective programme. It is best used supported by a teacher or mental health professional to ensure concepts are understood and generalised. The recommended age range is 7–12 years, but this can depend on the child's cognitive level. More information on the Social Thinking programmes can be found here: <https://www.socialthinking.com/>

Assessment



NovoPsych Psychometrics by NovoPsych Pty Ltd

Cost: Paid

Age: 12+

Use: Mental health screening for use with parents, young people and adults.

Overview: This app offers a range of well-known psychological mental health screening questionnaires, which can be used with parents and teens. I use the questionnaires to further inform assessment and intervention, as screening to assess the need for further referral and to track change pre- and post-intervention (i.e., CBT). The ones I use most often are the Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (SCAS), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS), Moods and Feelings Questionnaire (MFQ), Social Interaction Anxiety Scale (SIAS) and Autism Spectrum Screening Questionnaire (ASSQ). Clients can complete the questionnaires on the iPad by simply tapping the screen. The results are automatically calculated and sent to you via e-mail. The app sends an instant report giving access to scores, sub-scales and percentiles. It can also graph results over time for the same client. Note: NovoPsych Lite is a free version; however, it only has a limited number of scales. To access the wider range of scales listed above you must pay a one-off payment. However, I feel it is worth it as it is for unlimited use.



MBST by Brian Dunphy

Cost: Free (in-app purchases)

Age: 4+

Use: Multi-Behaviour Student Tracking (MBST) is an observation tool.

Overview: The app allows you to track on- and off-task behaviour for a student, in single or multiple session. You

can also use it for interval sampling, event recording, and monetary–time sampling. It is easy to use; however, I don't use it much in day-to-day practice. It may be more helpful for research or specific behaviour cases.

Literacy



Cambugs: Letter Sounds / Phonics / First Words by Cambugs

Cost: Free (in-app purchases)

Age: 4+

Use: For teachers and parents to support early literacy (reading) skills.

Overview: Developed by EPs in Cambridgeshire, based on evidence-based research of what works. This app teaches children the initial phonemes (letter sounds), graphemes and first words, which are the first steps on their journey to becoming fluent, confident readers. It's fun and easy to use. When children learn a new sound or word they are rewarded with a "Cambug". The bugs have been designed by children for children. This free version is limited to two users. Unlimited users are available with an in-app purchase or by purchasing *Cambugs: Letter Sounds Schools*.

Augmentative and Alternate Communication (ACC)



TippyTalk by TippyTalk

Cost: Free (in-app purchases)

Age: 4+

Use: AAC tool for non-verbal or pre-verbal children.

Overview: Developed by a father of a non-verbal autistic child (although she is now verbal), it works by helping the child communicate by translating pictures they choose on the device into text messages, which are then sent to a family member or caregiver's phone or tablet. The app allows the parent or caregiver to capture images that are uniquely identifiable and familiar to the person living with the verbal disability. Read more here: <https://www.tippy-talk.com/tippy-talk/>



Talking Mats by Talking Mats

Cost: Free (in-app purchases)

Age: 4+

Use: ACC for children or adults with communication difficulties.

Overview: This is an app version of the physical Talking Mats tool. It is based on research and developed by speech and language therapists. This communication tool supports children and adults with communication difficulties to express their views using visuals.

Autism Support¹



Brain in Hand Mobile by Brain in Hand

Cost: Free

Age: 4+

Use: For individuals on the autism spectrum, to support independent living.

Overview: I have not personally used this, but it has good reviews from users and is promoted by the UK National Autistic Society (NAS). The app is for individuals on the autism spectrum and provides reminders of scheduled activities, tracks stress and anxiety (trigger points), records their own coping strategies and has an alert system (red light response) to call for help (support provide by the NAS). It is meant for use by independent individuals, such as older teens and adults. See more details here: <https://www.autism.org.uk/services/education/brain-in-hand.aspx>

Continued Professional Development (CPD)



The Psychologist by The British Psychological Society

Cost: Free (in-app purchases)

Age: 4+

Use: App version of BPS *The Psychologist* magazine.

Overview: It has the usual features: news, interviews and overviews, etc. It is free to members; you can purchase a subscription or purchase individual issues. I find this is useful for keeping up to date with what is going on in the wider profession while commuting or on the go.



Research Digest by The British Psychological Society

Cost: Free

Age: 4+

Use: App version of the BPS *Research Digest* blog.

Overview: Since 2003, the British Psychological Society's *Research Digest* has been digesting new research in psychology. This app will digest a new journal article in psychology each weekday, aiming to demonstrate that psychological science is fascinating and useful, while also casting a critical eye over its

methods. I find this useful for CPD reading while commuting or on the go.



Kindle by AMZN Mobile LLC

Cost: Free

Age: 4+

Use: Access e-books via your iPhone, iPad or tablet.

Overview: I use this to access a range of e-books, which I use in my day-to-day practice as resources or tools in my work with children, young people, educators and parents (e.g., therapeutic story books by Margot Sunderland, positive parenting books, growth mindset books, CBT resource books and resources manuals by Speech Mark and Talkabout).

¹Many of the apps mentioned above are also appropriate for use with individuals on the autism spectrum, neurodevelopmental disorders or neuro-atypical.