



4. Young Adult Program

Rationale for OnTrac – A CBT Based Group Program for Young Adults (18-35) with ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a valid, reliably diagnosed neurodevelopmental disorder, with onset before the age of 12, **that persists** into adulthood. ADHD symptoms causes disruption in multiple areas of adult functioning, including academic, employment and relationships. In addition, adults with ADHD are at significantly elevated risk for comorbid disorders including depression, anxiety and substance abuse. Prevalence studies suggest that about 4.4% of adults may suffer from ADHD. Typical struggles include:

- Poor attention; excessive distractibility.
- Physical restlessness or hyperactivity.
- Excessive impulsivity; saying or doing things without thinking.
- Excessive and chronic procrastination.
- Difficulty getting started on tasks.
- Difficulty completing tasks.
- Frequently misplacing things.
- Poor organisation, planning, and time management skills.
- Excessive forgetfulness.
- Relationship problems.

Important to note is that ADHD has many presentations. Not every person with ADHD displays all of the symptoms/issues above, nor does every person with ADHD experience the symptoms of ADHD to the same level of severity or impairment. Some people have mild, while others have severe ADHD, resulting in significant impairments.

Whilst there is no cure for ADHD, when properly diagnosed and treated, it can be well managed, leading to increased satisfaction in life and significant improvements in daily functioning. Many individuals with ADHD lead highly successful and happy lives. Accurate diagnosis and psychoeducation are fundamental to understand, accept and manage the condition.

Despite the need for psychoeducation programs for this age group - a life phase when many developmental 'firsts' happen e.g., transition from high school to tertiary education, first job, romantic relationships, parenthood - to my knowledge not many group programs exist. As such OnTrac is designed to increase knowledge of ADHD, teach cognitive behavioural strategies for the purpose of increasing adaptive thinking and reduce the risk for secondary emotional and social problems and teach practical coping skill. The program comprises three modules as follows:



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- 1) **Psychoeducation** - This component of the program provides participants with a mental scaffolding for understanding the source of their recurring difficulties. Strong emphasis is placed on understanding the impact of impaired Executive Functioning skills. With increased understanding the individual is better able to break down these difficulties into components which then become the target of their individual intervention.
- 2) **Adaptive Thinking** - In this module the old CBT view of ADHD – namely that thoughts don't play a role in ADHD, and only relevant in cases of co-existing conditions such as anxiety or mood disorders is challenged. We acknowledge that unlike with depression, thoughts do not cause ADHD, but experiences of living with ADHD affect thinking and thinking affects ADHD. Negative thinking in ADHD erodes away the pillars of self-esteem and the trust in ones' ability to bring about change in one's life. Many studies repeatedly show that emotions play a strong role in ADHD symptoms, suggesting that there is a direct link between negative thinking and ADHD symptoms. In line with the new view of ADHD 'OnTrac' gives the cognitive component of intervention for ADHD as much importance as the behavioural component
- 3) **Skills Building** - The CBT model of ADHD suggests that many of the consequences of neurobiological symptoms of ADHD are maintained or exacerbated by a lack of adequate coping skills (Safren, Sprich, Chulvick, & Otto, 2004) The objective of the skills building module is to teach compensatory executive skills such as:
 - time management,
 - planning, organising and prioritising,
 - management of distractibility and procrastination,
 - how ADHD impacts communication and social skills.

Consistent with existing research that supports a strong neurobiological basis for ADHD and in line with the treatment model proposed by (Safren et.al.) that posits that neuropsychological impairments are core to ADHD and hinder individuals from acquiring and using compensatory strategies to support their areas of need, OnTrac gives the cognitive component of CBT as much importance as the behavioural component. The main treatment components are delivered in a sequential manner – i.e., psychoeducation module followed by adaptive thinking and skills building. The sessions build on each other, with a review of what was learned in the previous sessions. The program has its own participant workbook.

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Program information:

In its current format the program comprises a six-week treatment course of 2-hours per week. If the need is identified for a more individualised intervention one-on-one therapy may be recommended.

Eligibility: The program is open to all young adults (aged 18-35) with diagnosed ADHD.

Facilitators: The facilitator is a registered psychologist, with special interest in ADHD.

Venue and time: Saturday mornings. Venue to be confirmed.

The program is offered under Medicare's Better Access Initiative, namely Group Therapy (item 80120). To obtain the rebate, participants need to obtain a referral from their psychiatrist or a Mental Health Care Plan (MHCP) from their GP stating the item number above.

Feedback will be given to the referring professional at the end of the program