

Facing Your Fears: A Curriculum to Manage Anxiety

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Conflict of Interest:

Royalties:

Facing Your Fears: Group Therapy for Managing Anxiety in Children with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders

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FYF Treatment Package – (children ages 8-14)



- **Total Duration of treatment:** 14 weeks – 1 ½ hour per session
- **Modality:** varied; children alone, parents alone, dyads and large group work
- **First seven weeks:** Define anxiety symptoms, identify anxiety provoking situations, develop a set of “tools” (somatic management, helpful thoughts, emotion regulation, graded exposure)
- **Second seven weeks:** Identify goals and create stimulus hierarchy, apply “tools” across settings, in-vivo graded exposure, video activity to reinforce core concepts
- **Booster session:** 4-6 weeks post-treatment

Treatment of Choice

Cognitive-Behavioral Strategies for Anxiety: Core Components

Psychoeducation

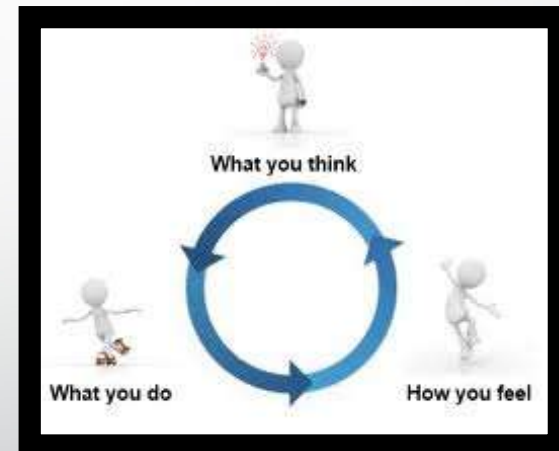
Somatic
Management

Cognitive
Restructuring

Problem Solving

Graded Exposure

Relapse Prevention



Improvement rates exceed 50% (Olantunji et al. 2010; Reaven et al. 2012; Walkup et al. 2008; Wood et al. 2015).

Components

- Define Anxiety Symptoms (enhance self-awareness)
- Increase emotion vocabulary
- Establish common vocabulary
- Identify anxious situations
- Identify physiological symptoms
- Emphasis on symptom intensity and interference



Youth Treatment Components

- Establishing a **framework** (March & Mulle, 1998)
 - Provide psychoeducation
 - Externalize anxiety symptoms
 - Compare “anxiety” time vs. “fun” time
 - Youth strengths emphasized—identity expanded beyond “anxious child”



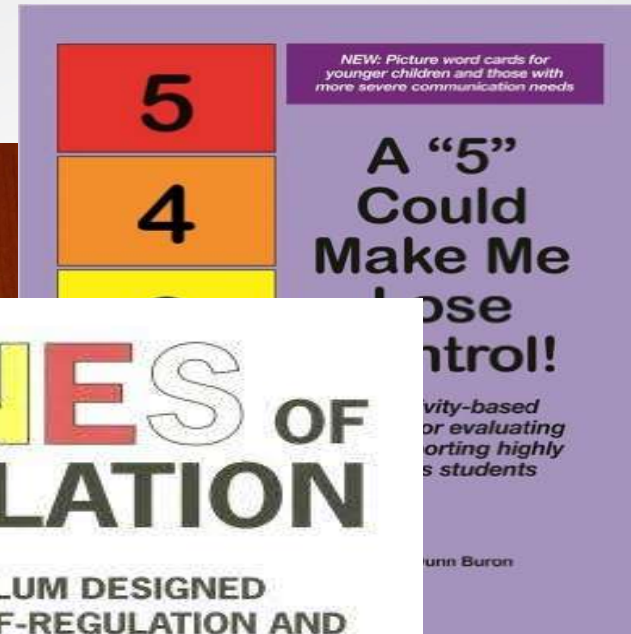
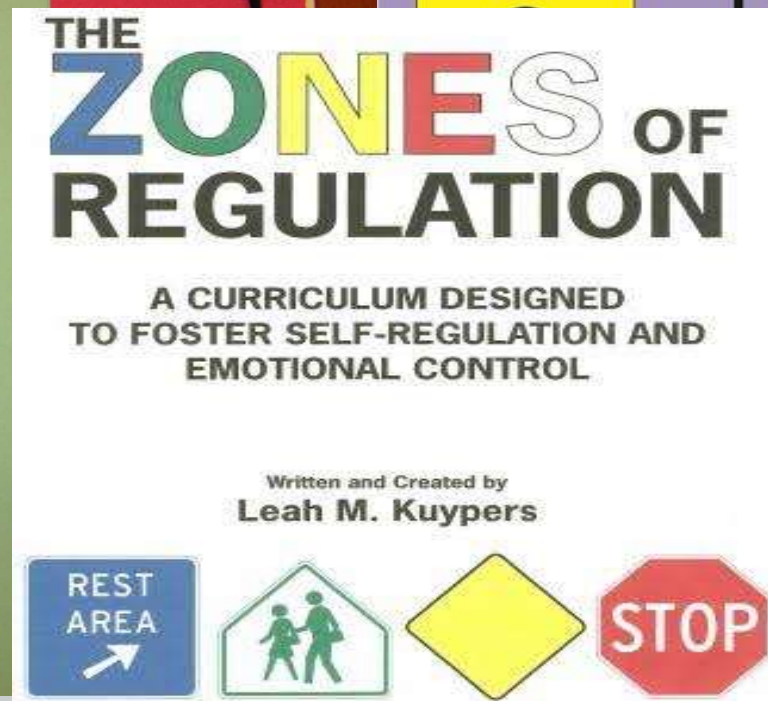
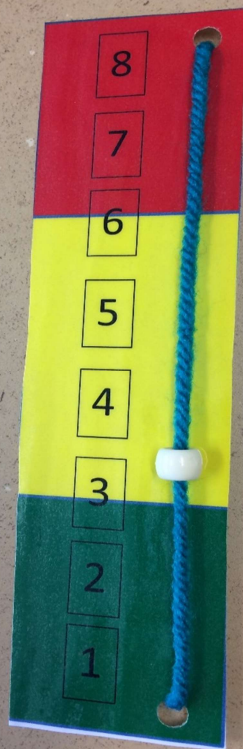
Youth Components (continued)

Psychoeducation – somatic management/cognitions

- Worry's "false alarm" (Chansky, 2004)
- Anxious feelings will pass/distress tolerance
- Emotion regulation
- "Active" minds vs "Helpful" thoughts (Garland & Clark, 1995)
- Circular connection between physiological symptoms, thoughts, and behavioral response



Measuring Anxiety



Teaching Emotion Regulation: Plan to Get to Green

- Develop a specific plan for when children are in the “red” zone
- Move one step at a time (e.g., 8-7; 7-6; 6-5, etc.)
- Establish child preferences for moving out of “red” zone
- Avoid problem solving when child is in “red”
- Create reward program for using strategies and staying in “green”



Facing Your Fears of Talking to People

While waiting for a class to start

Everyone is looking at me!

Uh oh. I'm starting to feel sick.

I'm never coming here again!

I bet they notice that my hands are shaking!

I have to get out of here!

I'm sure they are talking about me and laughing.

I never say the right thing around other people.

Will thinking these thoughts make him feel better or worse?



A group of people standing around talking



Helpful Thoughts!!

Facing Your Fears of Talking to People

While waiting for class to start

If I relax and breathe, my hands may stop shaking and my heart might stop racing.

All I have to do is say "hi." That is not too hard.

They are not really focused on me; they could be laughing about something else.

I have talked to groups of people before! I can do this.

If I say "hi," people might say "hi" back.
I won't know unless I try.

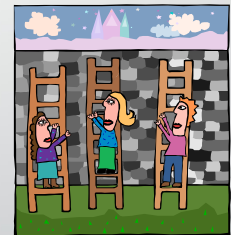
Will thinking these thoughts make him feel better or worse?

A group of people standing around talking.



Youth Components (continued)

- Creating “Steps to Success”
 - List anxiety provoking situations
 - Rank order the situations from 1-8
 - Choose situations that are mild-moderately stressful
 - Practice graded exposure in session
 - Encourage self-reward/self-assessment
- Write an Episode of “Face Your Fears”





Practicing Facing Fears

Facing Your Fears: Common Fears



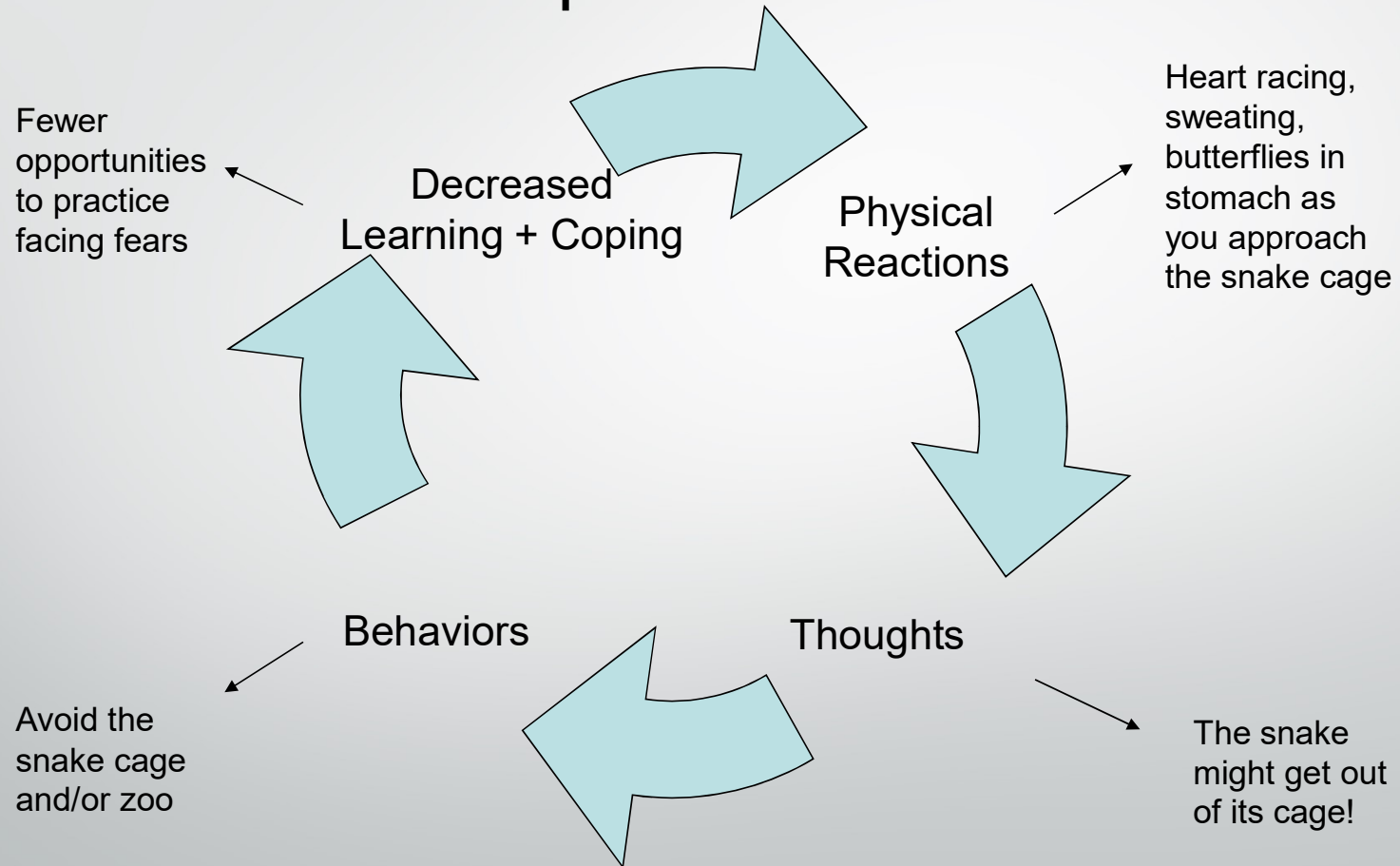
Making mistakes
Asking for help
Talking in front of the class
Separating from parents
Changes
PE – changing clothes

FYF - Parent Component

- Promote support among participants
- Provide psycho-education about anxiety disorders; learn the basic tenets of CBT
- Establish targets for graded exposure tasks
- Model brave behavior
- Encourage/reward brave behavior in their children
- Discuss parental anxiety and parenting style



Anxiety Components: A Fearful Experience at the Zoo



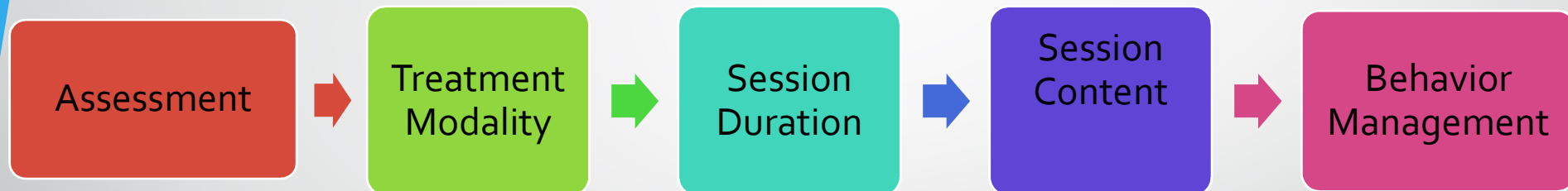


Parental Protection (Reaven & Hepburn 2006)

Adaptive Protection: a parenting approach that takes into account a child's developmental strengths and weaknesses, and supports a child to face fears and handle anxieties

Excessive Protection: parenting approach that provides excessive protection, even though the child may possess the requisite skills to handle anxieties and face fears

Adaptations for Teens with ASD/ID: Maintain Core CBT Components



Teaching Emotion Regulation: Supporting Understanding and Practice

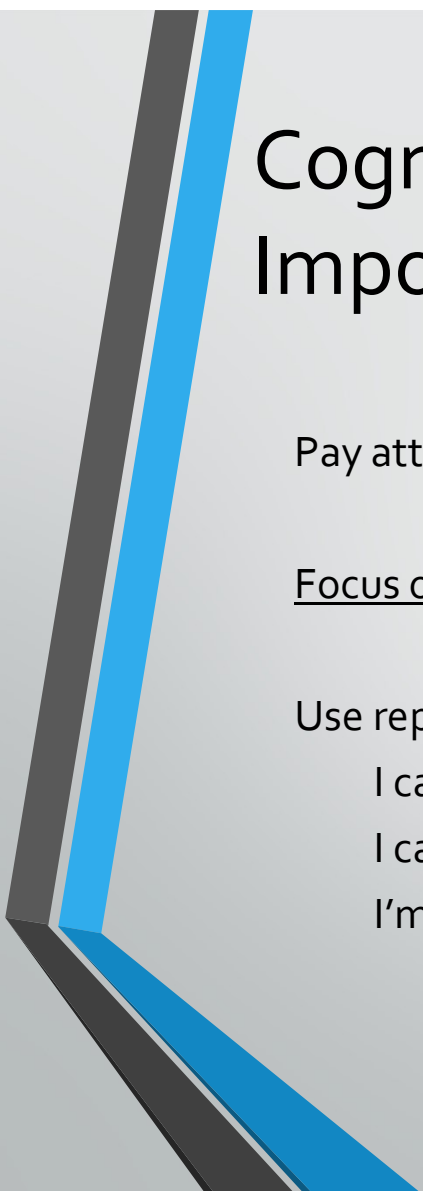
- Parents use video or pictures to support teens' understanding of red, yellow and green zones
- Parents identify teens' physical symptoms, teens sort pictures of physical symptoms into zones
- Parents develop a crisis plan for dangerous red zone behavior and model somatic management for teens
- Over the course of the intervention, parents begin to add FYF strategies for use in yellow zone





Somatic Management: Importance of Self Calming Strategies

- Many teens become reliant on caregivers to soothe them or are told to “take a break” when anxious. This does not reinforce self competence!
- Provide a range of somatic management techniques through a visual menu, emphasizing deep breathing, and daily practice
- Embed within daily routines



Cognitive Component: Importance of Replacing Negative Self-Talk

Pay attention to negative self talk, perseverative questions, and reassurance seeking

Focus on replacement not identification and challenge of negative cognitions

Use repetitive helpful thoughts designed to reinforce self competence:

I can do it

I can handle it

I'm brave

Exposure:

Importance of Daily Routines

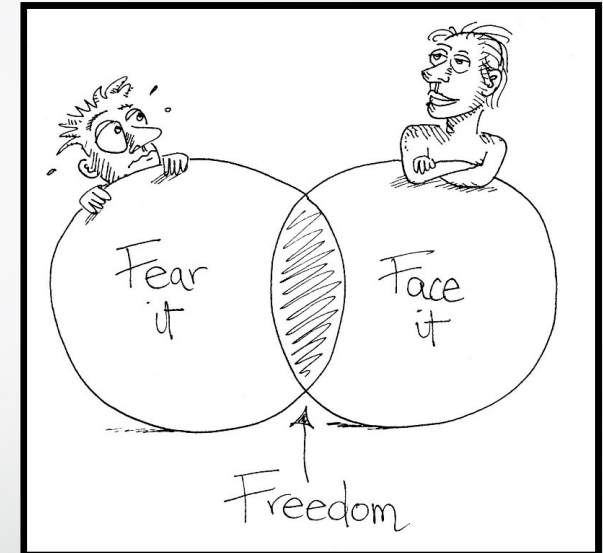
- Facing fears is similar to original FYF; decisions about fears to face should be based on degree of interference
- Youth “buy in” may be reduced, so routine and rewards are critical
- Visual schedules are instrumental in supporting engagement
- Practice “being brave” on a daily basis
- Share accounts of bravery



To summarize...

Treatment for anxiety includes:

- Paying attention to your mind
- Paying attention to your body
- Facing fears!

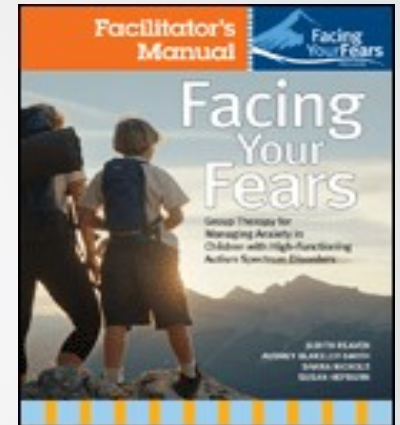


FYF Treatment Outcomes

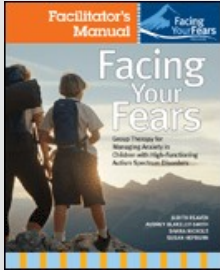
- **Clinic-Based Studies**

- Reaven & Hepburn (2003) case study
- Reaven et al. 2009;
- Reaven et al. 2012a (RCT);
- Reaven et al. 2012b (adolescents)

Significant reductions in anxiety symptoms across studies



FYF-School Based Program in Colorado



**Low income
Racially/ethnically
diverse communities**



**Denver Public Schools
Littleton Public Schools
Cherry Creek School District**



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- **Children/Adolescents with ASD and their families**
- **CBT researchers**

Thank You!!

