

Evidence Base for Facing Your Fears (FYF)

Clinic-Based Treatment Trials

- Our research group has conducted six intervention trials on clinic-based FYF, including a pilot study for autistic adolescents, a telehealth adaptation of FYF, a randomized trial, and a multi-site treatment trial (Hepburn et al., 2016; Reaven et al., 2009; 2012a; 2012b; 2014; 2018). The results of all six studies indicated that autistic children and teens demonstrated significant reductions in anxiety following participation in FYF. Two additional studies involved the adaptation of FYF for autistic adolescents with intellectual developmental disability (IDD) and anxiety (Blakeley-Smith et al. 2021). Participants demonstrated significant decreases in parent-reported anxiety symptoms in both the pilot study and RCT.

Implementation trials

- Initial Implementation: Outpatient clinicians new to FYF delivered the intervention in keeping with manual guidelines and autistic youth displayed significant reductions in parent reported anxiety (Reaven et al. 2014).
- Multi-Site: In a multi-site implementation trial, clinicians were assigned to three different training conditions: Manual only, Workshop only, and Workshop plus ongoing consultation. Again, clinicians delivered FYF in keeping with manual guidelines and significant reductions in anxiety symptoms were apparent for all conditions. (Reaven et al. 2018). More than 200 autistic youth with anxiety have participated in our research involving clinic-based FYF.
- Community Effectiveness: Solish and colleagues (2020) in Toronto conducted a community effectiveness study across six community-based agencies. Over 100 autistic youth participated in the study and significant improvements in anxiety were reported (Solish et al. 2020). Significant reductions in anxiety also occurred in another intervention trial by the same group who delivered FYF virtually to 100 autistic youth with anxiety (Solish et al 2025).

Facing Your Fears in Schools (FYF-S)

- To maximize acceptability, feasibility, and sustainability of a school-based version of FYF, community members were engaged in a series of focus groups and provided input on how to adapt clinic-based FYF for school settings. Focus group participants included interdisciplinary school providers (e.g., special educators, school psychologists, and speech/language pathologists), as well as caregivers of autistic children with anxiety.

Evidence for FYF-S

- International pilot study: Following an in-depth collaboration with the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE), educators in schools in Singapore delivered FYF-S to

autistic students ages 13-15 years with anxiety. Results supported feasibility and significant reductions in anxiety were noted (Drmic et al., 2017).

- Pilot study: A more robust version of FYF-S was developed as described above, and the results of the pilot feasibility study conducted in Colorado indicated that FYF-S is feasible, acceptable, and effective (Reaven et al., 2021).
- RCT: A clustered randomized trial was conducted and results indicated that school providers continued to deliver FYF-S as intended. Students in FYF-S demonstrated greater reductions in anxiety compared to students who were randomly assigned to usual care (Reaven et al. 2024).

Facing Your Fears - IDD

- Pilot Study: We adapted FYF to meet the cognitive, communication, and behavioral needs of autistic adolescents with ID and to examine preliminary efficacy (Blakeley-Smith et al., 2021). FYF:IDD was successfully adapted and manualized via an iterative process incorporating stakeholder feedback and determined to be feasible and acceptable to families. Preliminary outcome measures indicated significant improvements in anxiety and mood symptoms, in addition to significant reductions in specific phobias, and lethargy/social withdrawal.
- RCT: In 2021, we were awarded a Department of Defense Autism Research Program's Clinical Translational Research Award and we recently completed a 3-year randomized clinical trial of FYF:IDD. Results were shared at INSAR in 2025 and indicated that teens randomized to FYF:IDD experienced significant improvement in their Primary Anxiety CGI rating relative to teens randomized to usual care.

Ongoing research studies

- We are currently conducting a [multi-year comparative effectiveness trial funded by the patient-centered outcomes research institute \(PCORI\)](#). In this study, participating elementary and middle schools across Colorado and North Carolina are randomly assigned to deliver either FYF-S or Zones of Regulation to students with autism and anxiety. We are interested in learning more about what type of school-based intervention program works best for which students. Stay tuned for updates!