***A Comparison of Two School Based Interventions to Manage Anxiety in Autistic Students***

**Why is this study important?**

* Anxiety is very common in autistic students and can impact functioning across settings, such as at home, in the community, and at school.

* In school, anxiety can negatively affect student attendance, school performance, peer relationships, and extracurricular activities.
* Anxiety and emotion dysregulation often occur together. Students with anxiety and emotion dysregulation may be misunderstood by others, especially if anxiety presents as noncompliance, avoidance, behavioral outbursts, repetitive behaviors, or other behavioral difficulties.
* Left untreated, anxious children are at risk for becoming anxious adults; anxiety can lead to other difficulties such as depression, substance abuse, struggles with relationships, and underemployment.
* There are significant disparities in access to mental healthcare for individuals from low income and/or other traditionally underrepresented racial/ethnic communities. This means that many autistic students cannot access programming in the community and rely on mental health services at school.
* Anxiety and emotion dysregulation are treatable in autistic students.

**What is the purpose of the study? (April 1, 2023 – March 31, 2026)**

1. Compare the effectiveness of two school-based programs for managing anxiety and emotion dysregulation, *Facing Your Fears-School Based (FYF-SB)* and *Zones of Regulation* *(ZOR)*, for students with autism or suspected autism ages 8-14. *Note: We will be working with students who have a medical diagnosis of autism, an educational identification of autism, or suspected autism. Students with co-occurring intellectual disability will not be included in the current study because the cognitive and verbal demands of the interventions are not tailored for youth with more significant learning difficulties.*
2. Compare the satisfaction and feasibility of each program according to students, caregivers, and school providers.
3. Understand which students may respond best to which of the two programs.

**Where is this study taking place?**

* Elementary and middle schools in North Carolina and Colorado

**Who funds the study?**

* Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI)

**What are we asking for in the next 12 months?**

* Identify elementary schools and middle schools in your district to participate. We would like to prioritize schools with high rates of free and reduced lunch, and whose student body is comprised of traditionally underrepresented youth and families. Select schools where there are autistic students with IEPs.
* Choose schools with interdisciplinary school providers (ISPs) (e.g., special educators, speech/language pathologists, social workers, school psychologists) who are willing to participate. We are looking for 2-3 providers per school. Paraprofessionals can be included, but they will serve as assistants to other school providers.
* Work with the research team to schedule trainings for the ISPs to attend. The trainings will be up to 12 hours and may be delivered virtually or in person. The research team will work around the ISPs’ availability. Trainings will happen over 2 or more days, ideally during the Fall semester of 2023.
* ISPs will be trained in either FYF-SB or ZOR by an expert training team, including the developers of the interventions.
* Following the trainings, ISPs will nominate students in their schools for participation and work with the research team to see if the students qualify for the study. Once students qualify and their caregiver consents to participation, ISPs can begin to run the ZOR or FYF-SB program.
* The length of each program will be approximately 12 lessons, about 40 minutes each lesson. This can be done as part of existing IEP minutes or as separate from IEP minutes.
* ISPs will meet virtually twice monthly (20-30 minutes) for program consultation with intervention experts for up to 6 consultation appointments (or until the students have completed the program).

**Will school staff be paid?**

* Yes! ISPs will be paid to attend the training (up to $200 in gift cards).
* ISPS will also be paid to participate in consultation visits ($25 per visit up to $150).

**Is there an option for ISPs to receive professional development credit?**

* We are happy to provide any documentation necessary so that providers can receive professional development credit; however, decisions regarding professional development credit is up to each school system.

**Will caregivers/students be paid?**

* Yes! Caregivers/students will receive gift cards for completing study measures before and after the program and at follow-up (up to $40 for each time point).

**Can schools/ISPs participate in the study for two years?**

* Yes, provided they deliver the same program to a *new* group of students.

**Who are the main researchers in this study?**

* Judy Reaven, Ph.D. [judy.reaven@cuanschutz.edu](mailto:judy.reaven@cuanschutz.edu) University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus
* Brenna Maddox, Ph.D. [Brenna\_Maddox@med.unc.edu](mailto:Brenna_Maddox@med.unc.edu) University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill TEACCH Autism Program
* Katherine Pickard, Ph.D. [katherine.e.pickard@emory.edu](mailto:katherine.e.pickard@emory.edu) Emory University School of Medicine
* Please reach out to us with any questions!