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Dear Parent/Caregiver,

My name is Carly McMorris and I am an Assistant Professor in School and Applied Child Psychology Program at the University of Calgary. Together with health practitioners from Alberta Health Services (AHS) and the Neurodevelopmental Disorder Integrated Brain Health Initiative, we are conducting a research study investigating the effectiveness of Facing Your Fears, a group intervention for Albertan children, youth and caregivers with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) who are experiencing anxiety. We would like to invite you and your child to participate.

**What is the purpose of the study?**

Anxiety is a common (40-70%), debilitating condition for children and youth with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), and can cause significant interference with daily functioning. Facing Your Fears (FYF) is a well-established and evidence-based treatment that has shown to significantly improve anxiety symptoms in children and youth with ASD. Although research has consistently shown that anxiety symptoms decrease in children and youth after participating in Facing Your Fears, little is known about the impact this has on the family and school environment. Our aim is to develop a better understanding of how participating in FYF not only impacts the child’s anxiety, but also how it influences the caregivers (e.g., stress, quality of life, and mental health) of children and youth with ASD, and school outcomes (e.g., engagement, school attendance, etc.).

**What would your participation involve?**

Participation involves four different components: 1) a pre-screening phone interview (20 minutes); 2) an in-person screening assessment and pre-treatment evaluation (2-3 hours); 3) participation in the 14-week intervention (Facing Your Fears) plus a booster session; and 4) completion of post-treatment evaluation measures and assessment (2-3 hours). During the screening/pre-treatment assessment, your child will complete an assessment (approximately 2 hours) of their thinking and language skills, anxiety, and quality of life. At the same time, you will be asked to complete some questionnaires about your family’s quality of life, and your child’s anxiety. We will also request that your child’s primary teacher participate by completing a package of brief questionnaires which will be delivered to them by mail.

 All participants will receive a parking pass for all screening, intervention and post-evaluation sessions. Additionally, your family will receive a $50 gift card and a small prize as an honorarium for your completion in the screening/pre- and post-evaluation measures. Your child’s teacher will also receive a $20 gift card at both time points for participating. All appointments will take place at the Child Development Centre (CDC; 3820 24th Ave NW, Calgary, AB T3B 2X9).

**Are there any risks to participating?**

This study has been approved by the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Research Ethics Board, and there are minimal risks involved. Of note, the screening process will determine eligibility for the group intervention program. There is a chance that you and your child may not be eligible to participate in the Facing Your Fears intervention, which may be frustrating or disappointing to some families. Screening/pre- and post-evaluation measures will be scheduled on a day and time that is convenient for you and your child. Lastly, given that your child will be challenging some of his/her worries through exposures as part of the intervention, you and/or your child may feel a bit distressed. Facilitators will try to provide as much support and resources during and after the intervention diminish any stress.

**Why participate? Are there any benefits?**

It is our intent to provide skills, understanding, and effective tools to help children and families with ASD manage anxiety. Your participation will provide further evidence for the effectiveness of Facing Your Fears in reducing anxiety in children and youth with ASD. This study will also describe the caregiver and academic outcomes of children and youth with ASD and anxiety following participation in Facing Your Fears, filling a significant gap in the current research. In addition, you will receive a written summary with information about your child’s performance by a psychologist on the measures of thinking and language skills, and anxiety. This report can be shared at your discretion with support services and schools to help develop programs and strategies that optimize your child’s learning potential.

Of course, participation is voluntary and you choosing to participate will not in any way affect your involvement or relationship with the University of Calgary or Alberta Health Services (AHS). Additionally, all data collected during our study will be kept confidential. Finally, you may withdraw your child from this study and discontinue the intervention at any time.

If you consent to be contacted, someone from **our research team will call you within the next 2 weeks** to schedule the pre-screening phone interview**.** In the meantime, if you have any questions or would prefer not to be called, please contact:

Dr. Carly McMorris, at camcmorr@ucalgary.ca, 403-220-5457

Stephanie Howe at sjhowe@ucalgary.ca, (403)441-2842

Or fyfcalgary@gmail.com

Sincerely,

Carly McMorris, PhD.

Registered Psychologist

Assistant Professor; School and Applied Child Psychology

Werklund School of Education; University of Calgary