



**COMMON LANGUAGE for PSYCHOTHERAPY (clp) PROCEDURES**  
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**COPING CAT TREATMENT**

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Definition: The therapist helps anxious children to recognize signs of anxiety, to relax, and to modify anxious self-talk and thinking, followed by self-monitored exposure tasks in and out-of session to help them better manage their thoughts, feelings and behavior when anxious.

Elements: The therapist and youth together create a personalized FEAR plan (e.g. Case Illustration below) to use in anxiety-evoking situations. Its steps include answers to: Feeling frightened?; Expecting bad things to happen?; Actions and Attitudes that can help?; Results and Rewards. The child memorizes these coping steps by their acronym FEAR and then practises them during planned exposure tasks to feared situations in session and as homework. Exposure tasks are graded from imagined slightly-frightening situations to moderate and then very frightening real ones. Though done in a supportive environment, the tasks should challenge and evoke anxiety. With this graded exposure children habituate to and apply coping strategies in anxiety-evoking situations and develop a sense of mastery rather than anxious expectations.

Application: In 16 individual or group sessions over 16 weeks for children aged 7-13, helped by a workbook whose exercises parallel therapy sessions to aid involvement and skill acquisition. Also done in 6 computer-guided and 6 therapist-guided sessions over 12 weeks using *Camp Cope-A-Lot: The Coping Cat CD Rom*.

Related procedures: Graded exposure, role play, cognitive restructuring, problem-solving.

1<sup>st</sup> Use? Kendall PC (1994) to convert taunts that frightened children are "scaredy cats" into a coping version.

References:

1. Kendall PC (1994) Treating anxiety disorders in children: Results of a randomized clinical trial. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*; 62, 100-110.
2. Kendall PC, Hedtke K (2006) *Cognitive-behavioral therapy for anxious children: Therapist manual (3rd ed.)*. Ardmore, PA: Workbook Publishing. [www.WorkbookPublishing.com](http://www.WorkbookPublishing.com)
3. Kendall PC, Khanna MS (2008) *Camp Cope-A-Lot: The Coping Cat CD Rom* - available too as *Coach's Manual CD* (2008) and *Go-to-Gadget workbook CD* (2008). Ardmore, PA: Workbook Publishing Inc. [www.WorkbookPublishing.com](http://www.WorkbookPublishing.com)
4. Kendall PC, Hudson JH, Choudhury MS, Webb A, Pimentel SS (2005) Cognitive-behavior treatment for childhood anxiety disorders. In ED Hibbs & PS Jensen (Eds.), *Psychosocial Treatments for Child and Adolescent Disorders: Empirically Based Strategies for Private Practice, 2nd Edition*. American Psychological Association.

Case Illustration (Kendall et al 2005)

Sample FEAR plan from session 9 for Bill aged 10 who feared giving a class presentation and getting lost when going to new places.

*Feeling frightened?* “Well, I have butterflies in my stomach and my palms are sweaty”

*Expecting bad things to happen?* “I’ll mess up”; “The other kids may make fun of me”; “I’m going to look stupid and they’ll laugh at me.”

*Actions and Attitudes that can help:* “I can practice beforehand to make sure I know what I’m going to say”; “I didn’t mess up the last time I gave a report and the teacher said I did a good job”; “Even if I mess up, it’s not a big deal anyway because everybody messes up sometime”; “I can laugh too.”

*Results and Reward:* “I was nervous in the beginning but I felt okay by the end”; “Nobody laughed”; “I think I did a pretty good job and I tried really hard”; “My reward is to go to the movies with Mom and Dad this weekend”.

Typical use of the FEAR plan: In session 7 Bill and the therapist prepared for an exposure task (walk around a shopping mall for 10 minutes alone while the therapist waits outside) to challenge Bill’s fears that he’ll get lost in new places.

*Therapist:* Are you feeling nervous now?

Bill: I don’t know. Not really.

*Therapist:* How would you know when you were starting to get nervous?

Bill: My heart would start beating faster.

*Therapist:* (recalling Bill’s common complaint) What about your breathing?

Bill: I might start breathing faster.

*Therapist:* And what would you be thinking to yourself?

Bill: I might get lost or I don’t know where I am.

*Therapist:* And what are some things you could do if you start getting nervous?

Bill: I could take deep breaths and say everything is going to be OK, there are tons of adults here.

*Therapist:* That’s good, but what if you were unsure where you were or got lost?

Bill: I could ask somebody.

*Therapist:* Yes, you could ask somebody. Might it be a good idea to ask one of the guards or policemen? How are you feeling? Are you ready to give it a try?

The therapist and Bill agreed on several side-trips that Bill would do alone between then and the next session within the mall, varying in distance, duration, and familiarity. Bill wrote his exposure experience (including his FEAR Plan) into his workbook. During one trip, Bill had to ask a guard for directions in order to feel comfortable doing this in future, if needed.