

Advantages of Parent-Led, Therapist-Guided CBT*

(* Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy)

Research has shown that CBT is highly effective for many common childhood disorders. Childhood anxiety is one disorder that has been extensively researched. Studies show that, on average, 60% of children are free of their anxiety disorder at the end of CBT treatment.

More recent research has studied the effect of involving parents in the child's CBT treatment. These studies show that the **type** of parent involvement is critical. When parents are **involved in a way that gradually shifts the lead from therapist to parent**, 82% of children are free from anxiety one year after treatment. In contrast, if the parent involvement was limited or parents were not specifically trained to take the lead, 53-65% were free from anxiety one year after treatment.



What Are the Advantages of Parental Involvement in CBT?

Training parents to “take the lead” has significant advantages over CBT that takes place primarily between the child and the therapist. Some of the reasons for these advantages may be:



- Parents are more likely than children to recall CBT strategies and recognize when they need to be used.
- Parents are more likely than the therapist to be present at “the point of performance”—the times and places when children need to put CBT strategies into practice.
- Parents are more able (than the child or the therapist) to create opportunities to practice CBT strategies in the child's daily life.
- Parents who are themselves trained in CBT are in a position to encourage implementation of successful strategies in other settings such as school.
- Parents may be more highly motivated than children to “stick with the program” even on days when it is difficult, because they are more aware of the long-term implications of not treating the the problem.
- If problems recur after formal treatment has ended, parents are more likely than children to recall CBT strategies and put them in place.

What is Parent-Led, Therapist-Guided CBT?

In recent years, encouraged by the evidence for a strong parental role in implementing CBT strategies, new programs have been designed **in which the parent takes an even more central role in teaching CBT strategies to their children**. The children in these studies ranged in age from elementary school through middle school. In some programs the parents had some initial instruction with a therapist and then the parents, using a manual, implemented the program on their own. In other studies, the parents had weekly sessions with the therapist (either in person, by phone, or a combination of the two) to design and implement a plan of action specifically for their child. These new programs have shown very positive results for parent-delivered CBT, ranging from 61% to 95% success rate, depending on the extent of therapist guidance.

Programs that are **primarily parent-led** have additional advantages over the traditional therapist-child approach to CBT. With parent-led, therapist-guided CBT:

- The burden on the child of attending therapy appointments (including missing school and extracurricular activities) is greatly reduced.
- The overall cost of therapy is likely to be reduced, as the number of sessions is typically less and at least some of the therapist-parent sessions are shorter telephone contacts (which also reduces travel time for the parent.)
- Parents can apply the CBT concepts and strategies on a family-wide basis, potentially helping other family members as well.
- Success with the CBT program is likely to help parents feel more empowered as a parent and to help the child trust that the parent can help them with their problems.

