



# Discussion Guide for Behavioral Health: Attachment and BioBehavioral Catch-Up

Accompanies the Attachment and BioBehavioral Catch-up Lesson Video

ABC helps parents provide nurturance even when the child fails to elicit nurturance or when nurturance does not come naturally to the parent.

## OVERVIEW

The Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-up (ABC) intervention is designed to help caregivers provide nurturing care and follow their infant's lead, and avoid behaving in frightening and intrusive ways. It targets key issues that have been identified as problematic among children who have experienced early adversity. It was developed by Dr. Mary Dozier, Ph.D. at the University of Delaware and has been implemented in fourteen states. The goals of the ABC intervention are to:

- Increase caregiver nurturance, sensitivity, and delight
- Decrease caregiver frightening behaviors
- Increase child attachment security and decrease disorganized attachment
- Increase child behavioral and biological regulation

## NEED FOR ABC INTERVENTION

Early adversity places young children at risk for:

- Atypical patterns of cortisol production
- Deficient ability to control inhibitions
- Difficulties controlling behavior
- Disorganized attachment

Early maltreatment or separations can negatively affect children's physiology and behavior. Disturbances to the neuroendocrine system may place children at increased risk for psychiatric disorders and physical illness. ABC helps caregivers provide a responsive, predictable environment that enhances children's capacity for self-regulation and behavioral control.

Nurturance is especially important for young children who have experienced early adversity but several things get in the way of children receiving the nurturing care they need. Children often behave in ways that push their caregivers away. Caregivers' own issues may make it more difficult to respond in a sensitive manner. ABC helps parents provide nurturance even when the child fails to elicit nurturance or when nurturance does not come naturally to the parent.

## POPULATION SERVED

The ABC intervention was initially designed for caregivers of infants aged 6 months to two years who had experienced early adversity. It has been adapted for foster parents of infants, foster parents of toddlers (from ages 24 to 36 months), high risk parents of infants, and parents adopting internationally. A new intervention, Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up for Visitation (ABC-V), has also been developed and is currently under review.

## PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The ABC intervention is delivered by parent coaches who provide in-home parent training one hour per week for 10 weeks. There are three intervention components which are based in attachment theory and stress neurobiology. The first intervention component focuses on helping parents to reinterpret a child's behavioral signals and provide nurturance, even



when it is not elicited. The second intervention component helps parents follow their children's lead when children are not distressed. The third target of intervention helps caregivers to avoid intrusive and frightening behaviors.

Session content is guided by a manual but the primary role of the parent coach to provide "in the moment" feedback about the parent-child interaction. The parent coach observes the parent's behavior and makes comments on behaviors that relate to the intervention targets. They also videotape each session and review video feedback of past and current sessions with parents to highlight their strengths.

## EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

Studies of the ABC intervention have examined outcomes including children's attachment, wake-up and bedtime production of cortisol, and children's behavior problems. Results have shown the intervention effective in helping children:

- Develop secure attachments to caregivers
- Develop more normal neuroendocrine functioning
- Exhibit fewer behavior problems

Research has also shown the ABC intervention to be effective in improving sensitive caregiving among foster mothers as well as biological mothers.

The California Evidence Based Clearinghouse has rated this program a "1 - Well-Supported by Research Evidence" on the Scientific Rating Scale based on the published, peer-reviewed research available. The program must have at least two rigorous randomized controlled trials with one showing a sustained effect of at least 1 year.

## PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The ABC Intervention is primarily implemented by agencies working with foster children and high-risk birth parents through home visitation. Home visits are provided by trained parent coaches. A full-time parent coach can visit up to 10 families per week.

Parent coaches are required to have a bachelor's degree and experience working with high-risk families, and to demonstrate their abilities to provide immediate feedback on parent and child behaviors (referred to as "in the moment" comments).

## TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

Initial training in ABC takes place in-person and lasts for 2-3 days. Training for smaller groups is at the University of Delaware. Dr. Dozier, Dr. Roben, and/or Dr. Costello travel to the training site for larger groups. Training includes theoretical and practical orientation to the intervention, practice with "in the moment" commenting and coding, review of session content, consultation concerning site-specific implementation, and planning for the supervision year.

## SUPERVISION REQUIREMENTS

Group supervision is provided by the program development team. Supervision is conducted via video conferencing using Skype or Adobe Connect. Trainees have two supervision meetings per week: general clinical supervision and "in the moment" commenting supervision. Each week, parent coaches code a segment of their own videotaped sessions and submit these to the program development team for review. Review of coding helps trainees become reliable coders and improve the quantity and quality of comments. After a year of supervision, parent coaches' adherence and fidelity are evaluated for certification. Coaches are certified for two years, after which time adherence and fidelity are reevaluated.

## DATA SYSTEMS AND TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS

To implement the program, staff must have access to laptop computers, internet, and video cameras. ABC has been implemented by state agencies and non-profit organizations in fourteen states.

