

Life in the Trenches: Challenges & Stressors

Session 1. Challenges & Stressors

Identifying the type of stressor can help us manage challenges and avoid crises of foster and adoption journey.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize the very meaningful and deeply challenging paradox of F/A journey
- Understand that stress impacts us negatively
- List stressors and challenges of F/A journey
- Introduce the ABC-X model of family stress
- Classify stressors based on source, type, duration, and density

Program Specifications

Length of Program: 30-45 minutes

Targeted Population: Parents in Foster/Adoption Care, Christian

FLE Approach(es):

Activity Overview: Discussion Questions, Content

Supplies List: Projector, Laptop

Program Outline

Introduction:

Today, we are going to start a new series called Life in the Trenches. The purpose of this series is to empower foster/adoption parents to manage common stressors and challenges of the foster/adoption journey. In the first two weeks, we will be learning a tool that can help manage our stress. Then in the following weeks, we will discuss the top 8 stressors and challenges of foster/adoption life.

5 minutes **DISCUSSION ACTIVITY**

The purpose of this activity is to identify the many ways that caring for vulnerable children is beautiful and challenging

- Imagine a friend just asked you about your foster/adoption journey. How would you describe it?

5 minutes **CONTENT**

Section 1.1 Caring for Vulnerable Children Is Beautiful & Challenging

Because this is the first session, this introduction is set the stage and identify the paradox that caring for vulnerable children is both deeply meaningful and very challenging. While most of this series is focused on the challenges and stressors of foster/adoption journey, we want to also highlight the good and positive side of foster/adoption work for the purpose of encouraging participants (and not discouraging).

- **Meaningful—living out Christian values through adoption**
 - Love- as it involves caring and sacrifice for a child in need.
 - Justice—as it involves meeting the needs of vulnerable children and the “least of these”.
 - Faithfulness—as it involves sticking with a child for the long haul, whether that is permanently or temporarily.
 - “being the hands and feet of Jesus”
- **Challenging**
 - At times, the challenges can feel overwhelming and leave you feeling alone, rejected, and isolated
 - F/A Stressors: Trauma, Attachment, Cultural context, Community, Service system, Family system, Parents, Spirituality
- **The Paradox:** deeply beautiful and very challenging
- **Prayer of St. Stephen Carl**
 - Parenting is hard.
 - Parenting children with trauma is harder.
 - Parenting children in the broken system of foster care is even harder.

Section 1.2 Life in the Trenches: Challenges & Stressors

In this section, we talk about stress. We begin by introducing the negative impact of chronic stress. Then we list the stressors of foster/adoption journey that will be the topics of our conversations in Session 3-#. We introduce the ABC-X model but focus on the concept of stressors. The main content is focused on the classification of stressors, which provides participants the ability to more accurately describe and assess their stressor.

- **Chronic Stress impacts individuals negatively**
 - Physical Health: back and chest pain, obesity, erectile dysfunction, headache, heart disease, high blood pressure, lowered immunity

to fighting diseases, muscle aches, nail biting, stomach problems, sleep difficulties

- Emotional Health: anger, anxiety, burnout, depression, irritability, difficulty, concentrating, restlessness, sadness, fatigue

2 minutes **PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY**

The purpose of this activity is to have participants connect with their own personal level of stress.

- On a scale of 1-5, how stressed are you?
- Is your stress negatively impacting you? How?
- Is your stress related to Foster/Adoption journey?

5 minutes **CONTENT**

- **Introduction to Challenges & Stressors of Foster/Adoption Journey**
 - Trauma, Attachment, Cultural context, Community, Service system, Family system, Parents, Spirituality

Section 1.3 Introduction to ABC-X model of Family Stress

- **Introduction to ABC-X model of Family Stress**

The ABC-X model is used for analyzing stress and helping families cope. There are three main components for us to consider how well a family is managing a specific stressful event: (A) the provoking event or stressor, (B) the resource, strengths, and assets available to a family at the time of the event, (C) the family's perceptions of the stressor, which is also described as the meaning attached to the event. It is the relationship between these 3 things help us understand how well the stress is managed AND also (X) the likelihood of a family crisis occurring.

2 minutes **PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY**

The purpose of this activity is to connect with the information that next information being discussed—the classification of stressors.

- Think of a current stressor
- Identify 6 words to describe the stressor

12 minutes **CONTENT**

- **Classification of Stressors**

The purpose is to teach participants about different ways to label, describe, and assess stressors in their life. More accurate assessment of stressors can help us to have the right response and seek out helpful support.

- **Source of the Stressor**

- Internal: begin from someone inside the family; Ex: addiction, suicide, violence, a child's behavior, disability
- External: begin from someone or something outside the family; Ex: floods, terrorism, inflation, loss of job, caseworker, Covid 19

- **Type of the Stressor- Predictability**

- Predictable: i.e., Normative Development; events expected during the life course; Ex: stressors with birth, puberty, adolescence, marriage, aging, menopause, retirement, and death
- Unexpected: i.e., Catastrophic Situation; events or situations not foreseen; Ex: a young person having a disability or an unexpected death

- **Type of the Stressor- Clarity of the Situation**

- Clear: events have the facts available; the family knows what is happening and how it will turn out; Ex: Adoption placement
- Unexpected: where the facts remain unclear; the facts about a status of a family member may remain unclear or unavailable; Ex: Prisoner of War; Foster placement, child's knowledge of birth parents

- **Type of the Stressor- Preferred or Sought After**

- Volitional: wanted and sought after; Ex: freely chosen job changes, college entrance, a wanted pregnancy or adoption
- Nonvolitional: not freely chosen; Ex: being fired, divorced, given up for adoption

- **Duration of the Stressor**

- Chronic: long duration; Ex: trauma, diabetes, chemical addiction, discrimination, prejudice
- Acute: short time; Ex: broken leg, flu, surprise home visit from a caseworker

- **Density of the Stressor**
 - Cumulative: pile up, one after the other, so there is no time to cope before the next stressor occurs; Families are often worn down by multiple unresolved stressors.
 - Isolated: One event with no other stressors; Ex: car accident

2 minutes **PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY**

The purpose of this activity is to reflect and apply with the information the information just discussed—the classification of stressors.

- Think of a current stressor
- Using the words, we just discussed—identify 6 words to describe the stressor

Section 1.4 Conclusion: A message of Hope

The purpose of this section is to wrap-up the session on a positive note and provide a message of hope in the midst of dealing with/discussing stressors.

- Values in Adoption: love, justice, faithfulness (mentioned above), AND→ Hope
 - Hope for things to get better
 - Hope for healing and growth
 - Hope for support
 - Hope for God to meet us where we are at

10 minutes **Discussion Activity**

- What are other values that we live out in the F/A journey?
- What are other F/A stressors?
- Is it Conclusion: helpful to have words to describe stressors?
- Do you need hope? How can this group support you?

Cultural and Ethical Considerations based on Population: Reminder there are many different types of fostering and adoption pathways (i.e., fostering, foster to adopt, match adoption, private adoption, embryo adoption, international adoption, etc).

Program Resources _____

Presentation Slides/Notes Handout:

- PPT Handout

Activities Handouts:

- N/A

Additional Resources _____

Program References _____

- Hill, R. (1949). *Families under stress: Adjustment to the crisis of war separation and reunion*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.,
- Hook, J. R., Hook, J. N., & Berry, M. (2019). *Replanted: Faith-Based Support for Adoptive and Foster Families*. Templeton Foundation Press.
- Boss, P., Bryant, C. M., & Mancini, J. A. (2016). *Family stress management: A contextual approach*. Sage Publications.