

# Life in the Trenches: Trauma & Attachment

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## Session 3. Trauma & Attachment

In this session, we apply the ABC-X model to discuss stressors from children's trauma and attachment-related issues.

### Learning Objectives:

- Review ABC-X Model
- Identify the stressors of children's trauma and attachment issues.
- Describe the type of stressor that these are in their family.
- Discuss the supports available to the family.

## Program Specifications

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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

Citation: Melton, K. & McAninch, N. (2020). *Life in the Trenches: Foster & Adoption Family Stress Management*. Waco, TX: Baylor University.

## Program Outline

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### Introduction:

In the past couple of sessions, we have learned a tool to help us think about common foster and adoption stressors. Today, we are going to discuss the common stressors of trauma and attachment. These are both stressors that are introduced to the family by the child.

Find more resources on our website: <https://intentional.family/>

10 minutes **CONTENT**

### **Section 1.1 Review: Caring for Vulnerable Children Is Beautiful & Challenging**

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*The purpose is to remind the participants that the F/A journey is both deeply meaningful and extremely challenging.*

- **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

### **Section 1.2 Review: ABC-X Model**

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*The purpose is to quickly remind participants of the ABC-X model discussed in Week 1-2*

- **ABC-X Model**
  - To help us understand this stress, for the last couple of weeks we have talked about a theoretical model in family studies, called ABC-X model of Family Stress. This is a tool that helps us understand why some families are able to stress, while other families have difficulty and sometimes end up in crises. 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,
    - ▶ 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.

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### **Section 1.3 Introduction to Stressors: Trauma & Attachment**

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*Purpose of this section is to briefly overview trauma and insecure attachment of the child.*

- **Child's Trauma**
  - Trauma is the emotional response to a terrible event.
  - It is not the trauma that is the source of F/A family stress, but rather the trauma-related response and behaviors are what often are the source of family life stress.
  - Many of our kids are in the situation of being in foster care because they have experience one or more traumas in their life. Their trauma may have come from being exposed to alcohol or drugs in utero, physical abuse sexual abuse , exposed to domestic violence, neglected, a medical trauma, experiencing loss of a loved one and the list goes on and on.
  - All of these trauma experiences can affect a child's brain development. These changes to the brain can ultimately influence children's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and decision-making process that often don't make sense in our day-to-day context.
  - For each child, these behaviors are different, but they include such things as regularly having prolonged temper tantrums lasting over an hour, children banging their head against the wall or pulling their hair out when they become upset or when children quickly become aggressive with other peers even though they we're old enough to know this behavior was not OK. These children may also hoard food in their room even though they're being fed more than enough. They made lie cheat and steal; even when they're caught red-handed they end up never owning up to these problems or showing any remorse. And sometimes the children may show no emotions at all even when they are experiencing something terrible. ... of course there are many other behaviors...
  - All of these behaviors from the trauma can become stressors to our family life.
  
- **Optional: Secondary Trauma**
  - Although we are talking about the child's trauma, it is also important to consider that as the caregiver of someone who has experienced trauma, we may also experience secondary trauma.
  - Secondary trauma is indirect exposure to trauma through a firsthand account or narrative of a traumatic event.
  - Of course, this can be an added stressor.

5 minutes    **PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY**

Find more resources on our website: <https://intentional.family/>

*The purpose of this activity is to identify have participants connect to and personalize the content.*

- Have you ever experienced stress from \_\_\_?
- Currently, is \_\_\_ a stressor for your family?
- What is your personal experience with this stressor?

5 minutes     **CONTENT... *continued 1.3: Introduction to Stressors...***

- **Insecure Attachment**
  - Attachment is the emotional bond between parent and child.
  - Attachment is essential because it serves as a blueprint for relationships with others. Attachment between a child and a caregiver is important; it begins when the child is a baby. The caregiver responds to the baby's cries and comforts the baby; the baby develops trust the baby starts to learn from a caregiver how to self regulate. Babies also learn that caregivers are a secure base. An infant who experiences consistent, nurturing love and affection from caregivers learns that their needs will be met. Trust is formed, and a secure attachment is likely to develop.
  - In many cases, with the children that we serve, a caregiver might have been distant, misattuned, emotionally unavailable, unresponsive, or intrusive. These behaviors can cause children to experience considerable distress and lead children to develop insecure attachment issues.
  - Often children's survival instincts kick in, and they believe "I can trust no one but myself, I'm responsible for my own survival." These children often have trouble trusting caregivers such as foster/adoption parents. These children can be severely inappropriate in social relationships, which can manifest in two very different ways: First, they can make excessive attempts to receive comfort and affection from any available adult, even relative strangers. OR, on the other hand, they may have extreme reluctance to initiate or accept comfort and affection, even from familiar adults, especially when distressed." Other behaviors that we may see are they have difficulty relaxing, sleeping, or playing with peers.
  - When children have difficulty forming a secure attachment, then stress levels can rise for the child and the family.

5 minutes     **PARTICIPATION ACTIVITY**

*The purpose of this activity is to have participants connect to and personalize the content.*

- Have you ever experienced stress from \_\_\_?
- Currently, is \_\_\_ a stressor for your family?

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- What is your personal experience with this stressor?

5 minutes **CONTENT**

**Section 1.4 Applying the ABC-X Model**

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*The purpose of this section is to apply the ABC-X model to trauma and attachment. The facilitator will describe the types of stressor (A) and then lead the group into a discussion about supports—i.e., resources (B) and perceptions(C).*

- **Classification of Stressor: Trauma & Attachment**
  - For both trauma and attachment, the source is **internal**— in that it comes from a member of the household, the foster or adopted child.
  - At first the specific behaviors may seem unpredictable AND to non-foster/adoptive kids these behaviors do seem unexpected, but all of us have received training and know that trauma and possible insecure attachment are **predictable** and expected stressors of the foster/adoption journey.
  - Often time trauma and attachment are **ambiguous** stressors because we don't have all the facts about how the child received trauma and if the child was neglected.
  - This stress is **volitional**—we all chose to bring a vulnerable child into our home. For kinship adoptions, this might have felt more like a forced choice. But in the end, a choice was made.
  - The duration of the stress is **chronic**— trauma and insecure attachment are not stresses that go away overnight. The healing journey for our children is long road that we get to walk alongside them.
  - And finally, the density of the stress is **cumulative** in that often these stressors tend to pile up with similar or other stressors. Which often leaves families feel feeling worn down.
- **Supports: Resources & Perceptions**
  - In week 2, these concepts of resources and perceptions were discussed in great detail to identify the nuances
  - This week, we will summarize all of these concepts into three types of supports: **Emotional supports** help us feel like we are not alone. **Tangible supports** help us meet our daily needs. And **informational supports** help us understand how to handle our situation better.

10 minutes **DISCUSSION ACTIVITY**

Find more resources on our website: <https://intentional.family/>

- What supports have helped you manage the stressors of trauma and attachment in your foster/adoption journey? If you are willing, share a little context about trauma and attachment stressors that you have encountered.
- During our discussion, I would like for us to consider the *type of support* as well as the *source of the support*– did the support come from within us, from a family member, our community, or from God.

### **Section 1.5 Conclusion: A message of Hope**

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*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

*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**

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Presentation Slides/Notes Handout:

- PPT Handout
- Handout of Supports: Trauma & Attachment

Activities Handouts:

- N/A

### **Additional Resources**

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Highly recommend facilitators and interested parents invest in a personal copy of the book, *Replanted*.

Hook, J. R., Hook, J. N., & Berry, M. (2019). *Replanted: Faith-Based Support for Adoptive and Foster Families*. Templeton Foundation Press.

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## Program References

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**Hook, J. R., Hook, J. N., & Berry, M. (2019). *Replanted: Faith-Based Support for Adoptive and Foster Families*. Templeton Foundation Press.**

*Supporting Resources:*

Hill, R. (1949). *Families under stress: Adjustment to the crisis of war separation and reunion*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.,

Boss, P., Bryant, C. M., & Mancini, J. A. (2016). *Family stress management: A contextual approach*. Sage Publications.