

Life in the Trenches: Parenting & Family Systems

Session 4. Parenting & Family Systems

In this session, we apply the ABC-X model to discuss stressors related to parenting and welcoming children into our family life.

Learning Objectives:

- Review ABC-X Model
- Identify the stressors of parenting and family systems.
- Describe the type of stressor that these are in F/A family.
- Discuss the supports available to F/A family.

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

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

Program Outline

Introduction:

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 parenting and welcoming children into our family life.

2 minutes **CONTENT: Introduction**

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

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

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

- **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

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
 - ▶ (X) the likelihood of a family crisis occurring.

2 minutes **CONTENT: New Material**

Section 1.3 Introduction to Stressors: Parenting & Family Systems

Purpose of this section is to briefly overview parenting and family systems stressors.

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

- **Parenting**
 - Parenting is one of the most important roles we will have in this lifetime. But as we all know parenting is difficult (which is why there are thousands of parenting books out there).
 - As parents, we have two primary roles to nurture our kids and to provide them with structure.
 - In the nurture role, you take care of your children’s basic needs, such as food, medical care, shelter, clothing, etc., as well as give love, attention, understanding, acceptance, time, and support. You listen to your children, are patient, and have fun with them. You make time for your kids, show an interest in them and their activities, and encourage them to pursue their passions. Through your words and actions, you communicate to your children that they are loved and accepted.
 - The other part of your job as a parent is to provide “structure” for your children. In this role, you give direction, impose rules, use discipline, set limits, establish and follow through with consequences, hold your children accountable for their behavior, and teach values. You provide the guidance that helps your children to change, grow, and mature. Responsible behavior, in line with your children’s maturity levels, is taught and expected.
 - For foster and adoption families, our sources of parenting stressors are sometimes very similar to the same parenting issues to those not on this journey, but there are also some distinctions.
 - The choice to be on this journey may have stemmed from infertility issues. And some of the emotional pain that comes from infertility is not “solved” through fostering and adoption.
 - There may be stress from figuring out how to parent children differently—when we want to treat everyone fair—especially, how we treat our biological and adopted children.
 - You may be at differently life stage than your friends— this is especially noticeable when grandparents are also parenting OR could be when everyone has teenagers and you have toddlers.
 - It can just be difficult to connect with other parents who have children our own age, but just don’t get that we have to parent a little different.

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?
- What is your personal experience with this stressor?

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

- **Family System**
 - The family system is very complex, but can be quickly summarized as how a family operates and relates to one another
 - In many ways families are similar and in many ways families are different. We can probably most quickly understand these similarities and differences based on comparing the R's that guide our family.
 - We use the term "the R's" to point to the Roles, Rules, Routines, Rituals, Recreation, and Resource Management of families.
 - All families, even those not on the foster/adoption journey have stressors that come from the family system, BUT specific stressors for F/A families might include:
 - the R's of the bio family or even prior foster placements that are very different from your family. The child might say, "My mom use to let me... " or in my last placement, "I was allowed to.."
 - at the time of placement in what we will refer to as Onboarding the child to your family culture and teaching them about the Roles, Rules, Routines, etc, of your family.
 - when the child leaves your home—which might be for various reasons or other placement options.

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?
- What is your personal experience with this stressor?

5 minutes **CONTENT: New Material**

Section 1.4 Applying the ABC-X Model

The purpose of this section is to apply the ABC-X model the stressors. 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: Parenting & Family Systems**
 - *Caveat:* Each person may perceive or experience these stressors differently. These stressors have been analyzed at a very general

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level. Your personal experience may be very different from what I describe. Each of you is the expert on your specific situation.

- *Source of the stressor*: parenting and family system stressors are primarily **INTERNAL** in that it comes from a member of the household,
 - *Type of stressor* predictable, clear, and volitional
 - Primarily, **PREDICTABLE** in that it is well established and typical for parenting to be tough and a large inconvenience to our selfish nature, we also know that introducing new individuals to the family to require a season of transition (so typically, these stressor are predictable)—yet, there are some experiences of parenting, such as parenting at a different life stage or even infertility—these are **unexpected** as they are not a part of the typical trajectory in life
 - While, parenting and family stressors often feel ambiguous—and like we do not have a good handle on family life, these stressors are primarily **CLEAR** stressors, in that we can clearly identify that these are parenting issues or family system stressor—this is why the more we know more about good parenting and family life, the easier it becomes to pinpoint the issue.
 - These stressors are also typically **VOLITIONAL**, as we chose to be parents and chose the foster/adoption journey; an exception would be infertility or even unexpected pregnancy—which would be examples of nonvolitional stressors.
 - *Duration and density of the stress*: primarily, parenting and family systems stressors are **CHRONIC** as parents will always worry about their children even when they leave our home. And that this means as a whole the density of the stressor is **CUMULATIVE**. Yet, there will be instances that we can clearly pinpoint, such as the onboarding during a new placement, and that might also suggest that different pieces of these stressors can be **ACUTE** and **ISOLATED**.
- **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: F/A Supports**

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- What supports have helped you manage these stressors 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.

1 minute **CONTENT: Conclusion**

Section 1.5 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

Cultural and Ethical Considerations based on Population:

- *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).*
- Single vs Couples

Program Resources

Presentation Slides/Notes Handout:

- PPT Handout
- Handout of Supports: Parenting & Family Systems

Activities Handouts:

- N/A

Additional Resources

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

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

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

Program References

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.