

# Life in the Trenches: Service Systems

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## Session 4. Service Systems

In this session, we apply the ABC-X model to discuss stressors related to the service system as we journey F/A.

### Learning Objectives:

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

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 the service system (e.g., foster/adoption agencies, CPS, court, etc).

2 minutes **CONTENT: Introduction**

#### **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.*

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

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**informational supports** help us understand how to handle our situation better.

2 minutes    **CONTENT: New Material**

### **Section 1.3 Introduction to Stressors: Service Systems**

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*Purpose of this section is to briefly overview service systems stressors.*

- **Service System**
  - We all believe that every child belongs in a safe and loving family. That's why our goal for children who are neglected, abused, or orphaned is to help their families heal, when possible, and to help children find safe and loving families.
  - There is a whole industry comprised of government, non-profit, and for-profit organizations that work together for this goal, they are collectively known as the foster and adoption service system—these include foster and adoption agencies, CPS, caseworkers, lawyers, judges, CASAs.
  - For F/A families, these individuals help prepare families for their journey and help families navigate the foster and adoption regulations and laws. While they are a great support, they can also sometimes add a bit of stress to the journey. Sometimes, we even hear people say these systems are broken and overburdened.
  - Related sources of stress—
    - The Preparation: Getting Trained, Preparing the home, Home study, Licensing, etc.
    - The Child(ren): Not enough information, Saying Yes & No to vulnerable children
    - The Requirements: changes to home/life, appointments, visits, surprise visits, ...
    - The People: Caseworkers (turnover), bio family, Lawyers, Judges, CASA ...
    - The Expenses: private adoption, medical costs, etc.

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

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*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: Service 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 Stressor:* Service system stressors are primarily **EXTERNAL** in that it comes from a member of the household,
  
- *Type of Stressor:* Because of the many different situations that one can encounter I was a bit non-committal on this one, I chose to use the words predictable, unexpected, ambiguous, clear, and volitional to describe our experiences with caseworkers, CPS, and the many other service agencies.
  - Somethings with this journey are **Predictable**– you get trained, you have a homestudy, you get a placement, but sometimes the most predictable thing about this whole journey is that nothing is predictable... -Sometimes parents are given hope they'll receive a child only to have it fall through and they enter yet another stretch into the unknown . Some adoptive parents hold a new baby in their arms experiencing the joy of parenthood, only to have the agency worker take the infant and return the child to his birth mother. Judges make decisions that are fully understood. Caseworker leave in the middle of the night. Insurance works one day and doesn't work the next. There is so much that can be **unexpected** in this journey.
  - These same examples, can also illustrate how the stress is **ambiguous**, not knowing if the child will stay or for how long, or which lost aunt will show up in the middle of the night before a big hearing... these all highlight how much is unknown. And for some parts of the journey or like in some types of journeys such as match adoption, the process was pretty **clear** because rights of parents had been terminated.
  - These stressors as **volitional**, because we did choose this F/A journey
  
- *Density & Duration of Stressors:* While for long-term foster parents the system will always be in our lives as long as we are on this journey (perpetual), most of the time the service system is in our life for a defined period of time--there is a clear start and stop part (even though we do not always know when the end point is), so I am going to use the word **acute** to describe this stressor– although 3 years does not seem acute (solvable). The stress is also **cumulative** as these stressful situations with caseworkers and courtroom and bioparents can continue to add up over time are ware us out.

5 minutes **PARTICIPATION DISCUSSION: Share your experience (small group)**  
*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?

15 minutes **DISCUSSION ACTIVITY: F/A Supports**

- 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**

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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:*

- Distinct paths in foster/adoption journey: private, international, foster care, snowflake
- Single vs Couples

**Program Resources**

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Presentation Slides/Notes Handout:

- PPT Handout
- Handout of Supports: Service Systems

**Activities Handouts:**

- N/A

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## Additional Resources

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

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

## 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.