Connect – Implementing an Attachment Based Program for Caregivers of Adolescents at Risk

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Annie E. Casey Foundation
Foster/Out of Home Placements
Not Just Young Children

- 35% placements in USA for teens
- 25% are 1st time placements (Children’s Bureau, 2016).
- Behavior problems primary in 45% of placements (The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2015).
- Placements for teens unstable
Adolescence – Transitions & Turning Points
Adolescence:
Social Neurodevelopmental Sensitivity

- Reduction of grey matter volume & cortical thickness
- Pruning ‘from back to front’
- Specialization of neural networks
- Sensitive to social context


Growing Rates of Adolescent Depression

- Adolescent specific – not in adults
- Girls – 14% in 2010 vs. 23% in 2017 major depression episode
- 17% ages 10-19 have mental health disorder - WHO, 2018

Majority of Psychiatric Disorders Present During Adolescence
Tomá Paus, Matcheri Keshavan & Jay N. Giedd
Nature Reviews Neuroscience 9, 947-957 (December 2008)

Emergence and peak in mental disorders during adolescence
One in five adolescents have a mental illness that will persist into adulthood

- ADHD, conduct disorder
- Anxiety disorders
- Mood disorders
- Schizophrenia
- Substance abuse
- Any mental illness

(Kessler et al., 2005)
70% of adult mental health disorders present before age 25
75% of youth and their families experience barriers to accessing age relevant services

2019 Moretti U. Haifa
Neuroplasticity Brings Opportunity

- Faster information processing
- Capacity for representational thought increases – view the self from multiple perspectives
- Mentalizing increases
- Expanding social network

Celebrating Adolescence

“... the teen brain is not a broken or defective adult brain. It’s been exquisitely forged by the forces of our evolutionary history to be a very good teen brain.” Giedd, in Conan (2012)

Autumn Peltier, Wiikwemkoong First Nation on Manitoulin Island

Greta Thunberg’ outside of Sweden’s parliament building

“... at the very least this evidence indicates that a society substantially in the hands of young people would not necessarily be headed for disaster, and reinforces the principle that human societies have survived because of the capacities of the adolescent brain, not in spite of them”

Caregivers & Adults Matter
ATTACHMENT SECURITY BUFFERS TEENS FROM RISK

- Less aggressive and violent behaviors
- Less experimentation with substance use and risky sexual behavior
- Greater capacity for managing frustration (affect regulation)
- Better able to manage transition to high school
- Reduced risk (direct and indirect pathways) to adult mental health problems

- Protective benefit is similar across culture (Hilario, Saewyc, Johnson & Vo, 2013).
Trauma, Insecure Attachment Strategies & Miscueing

- Trauma - Bids for safe haven punished, missed or ignored
- Negative View of Self and Other Insecure Strategy
- Ruptures not Repaired
- Miscue Caregivers Chronic Dysregulation
Increased Security = Fewer behavioural problems

Insecurely Attached Teens in Care Form Secure Attachments with Foster Parents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Biological Mother</th>
<th>Foster Mothers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preoccupied</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disorganized</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Attachment Based Programs to Support Teens, Parents & Caregivers
Few Attachment Based Treatments for Teens & Parents

Attachment Based Family Therapy (ABFT)
- Diamond et al. 10-16 weeks manualized & directive therapy with youth, parent and dyad.

Mentalization Based Therapy (MBT) & Mentalization-Based Integrative Treatment (AMBIT)
- MBT - Rossouw & Fonagy; Bevington & Fuggle. Individual alone or in combination with family therapy.
- AMBIT - Systems approach supporting caseworkers of teens/young adults to promote reflective function
Need for Highly Scalable Program

Attachment focused, responsive to trauma

Strength focused – autonomy promoting.

Flexible across communities but retains treatment fidelity

Highly scalable across diverse health and education professionals and diverse communities

Clear and effective training and certification model to build community capacity
Caregiving Skills that Promote Adolescent Security

- Parental Reflective Functioning
- Relationship Repair
- Sensitivity
- Dyadic Affect Regulation
- Mutuality & Cooperation

Caregiving Skills:
- Sensitivity
- Dyadic Affect Regulation
- Mutuality & Cooperation
- Relationship Repair
- Parental Reflective Functioning

Skills that Promote Adolescent Security: Caregiving Skills

- Sensitivity
- Dyadic Affect Regulation
- Mutuality & Cooperation
- Relationship Repair
- Parental Reflective Functioning
Connect Attachment Programs

An Attachment Based and Trauma Informed Program for Parents and Caregivers
Marlene M. Moretti
In consultation with the Connect Clinical Team
www.connectattachmentprograms.org

English, French, Swedish, Italian & Spanish forthcoming

Kinship & Foster Families English, French & Swedish

English & Swedish
Emerging Programs

**Reclaiming Connections**
- Shaped through collaboration with Indigenous communities
- Recognizes trauma of colonialism, historical and continuing dislocation
- Focus on resilience and strength based in cultural, traditional wisdom and healing practices

**Transforming Connections**
- Shaped through dialogue with families & community stakeholders.
- Recognizes the impact of discrimination and marginalization experienced by transgender youth and their families.
- Supports parents in supporting their teen through sensitivity, responsiveness & communication.
**Connect Program Structure**

**Each session:**
- Structured around an attachment principle.
- Reflection exercises, role plays and skill-based practice.

**Format:** Experiential, emotion-focused learning.
- Sequenced therapeutic exercises that promote reflective function.
- Integrates caregivers’ personal experiences, with structure and safety.

**Collaborative, Strength Focused Promotes Autonomy.**
- Never prescriptive.
- Avoids “teaching the right way to parent”.
- Helps parent build an attachment toolkit for understanding, responding and repairing relationships.
Reflective Practice is an Organizational Principle

- Group acts as a “Reflecting Team”

- Role plays provide flexible, emotionally provocative yet safe context for parents to practice reflection, stepping away from their own family challenges.

- No “Hollywood” endings or “easy fixes” in role plays – focus is always on where the interaction left the relationship.
Connect Research
(http://connectattachmentprograms.org/)


California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse—Level 2


## Connect: Clinical Wait List Control Trial

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clinical Population</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
<th>Follow-Up &amp; Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Birth parents of adolescents referred to provincial mental health center for serious conduct disorder and complex mental health problems</td>
<td>Aggressive behaviour</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>Effects retained &amp; additional significant gains post-treatment to follow-up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conduct Problems</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● &gt;50% threatened or harmed others; or threatened to kill others</td>
<td>Internalizing problems (e.g. depression)</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>Similar outcomes for girls/boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● &gt;50% threatened or harmed self</td>
<td>Parenting Satisfaction and Efficacy</td>
<td>.45-.86</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Portability to Community Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clinical Population</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>~300 high risk parent-teen dyads rural &amp; urban mental health sites</td>
<td>Conduct Problems</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td>Invariant across gender, caregiver status and controlling for other services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Oppositional</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internalizing</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parenting Satisfaction and Efficacy</td>
<td>.71-.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parenting Strain</td>
<td>.70-.98</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CTS Aggression -Teen to Parent</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent to Teen</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teen Affect Dysregulation</td>
<td>.46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Högström, et al. (2016). Two-year Findings from a National Effectiveness Trial: Effectiveness of behavioral and non-behavioral parenting programs on children’s externalizing behaviors. JCCP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (item mean score)</th>
<th>Pre-Treatment</th>
<th>Post-Treatment</th>
<th>One Year Follow Up</th>
<th>Two Year Follow Up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incredible Years</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cope</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Komet</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>3.48</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connect</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Graph showing Eyberg Child Behavior Inventory (item mean score) over different time points]
Recent Randomized Trials


- Somali born parents in Sweden.
- Reductions in aggressive behavior, social problems and externalizing problems (large effect sizes)


- Reduction in externalizing behavior (large effect size) mediated through reductions in parental stress

Dave Pasalich, Australian National University. In progress.
### Shifting internal parent-child representations


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre- Post Assessment</th>
<th>Parenting Representation of Parent-Adolescent Relationship</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acceptance of parental authority</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parental monitoring</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Autonomy granting</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Secure Base</td>
<td>.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Did Connect influence you? If so, how...

**Father.**

“Quite a bit, actually. It gave me a different insight into how to deal with Sandy, how to react with him and how to see what was actually in his mind, you know, like try to see it through his eyes, and I think that helps a lot. ... it gives me food for thought whenever I see him doing something or seeing him getting upset, I try and figure out why or what's he doing, what's he thinking sort of thing. Instead of just going in and saying, don't be angry, don't be upset. That doesn't work that well, so it's helped a lot.”

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Connect: An Attachment-Based and Trauma-Informed Program for Foster Parents of Teens

- Significant reduction in problem behavior
- Significant decrease in caregiver strain
- Significant increase in family satisfaction

“I will think of the suitcase metaphor every time a kid comes through the door”

“... helped me to remember it is not all about the children it is about me as well ... how I approach the child does matter, and they helped remind me that my past get in the way at times”.
Implementation
Scalability & Sustainability
Connect Implementation
British Columbia
2006-2018
Groups: 800
Trained: 1200
Certified: 627
Connect Around the World

Canada
Delivered nationally
In British Columbia (2006 - 2018) to birth, kinship & foster parents
- 800+ Connect groups, 1200+ trained, 627 certified facilitators
- 9000+ caregivers enrolled in BC
- In progress multisite implementation trial with kinship & foster parents

USA
Delivered in 7 sites; implementation trial completed

Sweden
- Parent Groups in 27 cities, Foster Parent Groups in 18 cities
- Research findings on 350+ parents/caregivers

Italy
- Multi-site RCT in progress
- Positive preliminary evidence with ~90 parents/caregivers and teens
- 40+ trained facilitators

Australia
- RCT in progress evaluating Connect in with kinship carers, Canberra, Australia

eConnect, an active group internet-based adaptation currently in testing with launch this summer
Challenges with Connect:

- Connect has a successful track record of effectively engaging a broad range of parents from different cultures and with different needs.

- The challenges can come in how referring sources interact with and serve parents.
  - How are angry/fed-up/rejecting parents seen? How are children with serious behavioral problems seen? As hopeless or hurting?
  - Do we rescue the child or try to heal a family?
Successful Cases

● Outcomes of Connect:
  ○ Reduced stress/strain in the parent, replaced by an increased sense of confidence and hope.
  ○ Reduced behavioral and emotional problems in the children.

● Parents who have struggled with their own trauma and addictions and previously resisted other treatment or services come to appreciate how their healing can strengthen and rebuild strong relationships with their children.
Thanks to...
Generous parents, youth, practitioners and communities who have shaped Connect by sharing their experience and feedback!

For more information go to: http://adolescenthealth.ca/ or www.connectparentgroup.org or contact Marlene Moretti at: moretti@sfu.ca