

Alternatives for Families: A Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (AF-CBT)

Minu Ranna-Stewart, LICSW
Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center
minu@uw.edu

Consequences of Familial Conflict, Force, Aggression

Strained caregiver-child relationships

Traumatic reactions and symptoms

Legal problems

Removal from home

Emotional and/or physical injury

Intergenerational effects

A Behavioral Family Intervention

Addresses both risk factors for abuse and the consequences of negative caregiver behavior on children.

Families experiencing:

- Anger
- Aggression
- Child physical abuse
- Child behavior problems***
- Recent expansion – severe neglect, domestic violence, substance use, incarceration

School aged children 5-17 and their caregivers

Timing:

- When contact resumes
- When children are being placed with a new parent
- When children are returning home

Goals

- Reduce child-to-parent and parent-to-child violence
- Improve child behavior and social competence
- Enhance family cohesion and communication
- Promote self-control, coping, and anger management skills
- Lower the risk of child physical abuse or repeated abuse

Intrapersonal
and
Interpersonal
Skills for
BOTH Children
and Caregivers

Positive coping and self-control

Anger and anxiety management

Cognitive restructuring and flexible thinking

Social skills for children

Safe and effective discipline strategies

Family problem-solving and communication skills

AF-CBT is considered a **promising** evidence-based treatment.
Research shows families completing AF-CBT report:

Reduced family conflict and aggression

Improved child behavior and social competence

Increased perceptions of child safety

Lower risk of child abuse recurrence

Evidence and
Outcomes

- Short-term, lasting 6-9 months (~24 sessions)
- Separate meetings for children and caregivers for psychoeducation, skill building, and exposure exercises
- Joint family sessions for communication, clarification, and problem-solving
- Home practice assignments to reinforce skills learned in therapy
- The therapy is flexible and can be delivered in clinics, schools, homes, or community settings***

Structure and Format

1

Alliance building

2

Learning about
feelings and family
experiences

3

Talking about family
experiences and
psychoeducation

Phase 1: Engagement & Psychoeducation

Phase 2:
Individual Skill
Building

Emotion regulation

Restructuring thoughts

Noticing positive behavior

Assertiveness and social skills

Techniques for managing behavior

Imaginal exposure

Phase 3: Family Applications

Verbalizing healthy communication

Enhancing safety through clarification

- Children/youth receive direct acknowledgement*** of their experience
- What they are taking away from the therapy process
- Changes they see and would like to see in themselves and the family
- Vision for how the family will function after therapy

Solving family problems

Enhancing Safety Through Clarification – “Share and Repair”

Children/youth rarely receive direct acknowledgement*** of their experience. They can feel they are being “thrown back together” with no regard for their feelings.

- Anger – at caregivers, at DCYF, at the world!
- Resentment
- Unsafe
- Uninformed – process, decision making

They will create their own narrative:

- Risk of it being unhelpful
- Perpetuates inaccuracies
- Can worsen the current narrative

When children do not know...

Apologize and Forgive

Seeking and granting forgiveness:

- Heals wounds
- Moves a relationship forward
- Models that a child's feelings are valued

It is one of the most powerful tools for mending relationships!!!

We, **as a community**, need to make an investment in this service. It is a valuable but very, very limited resource.

Current providers in King County:

- DCFY contracted providers
- Harborview Abuse & Trauma Center (resuming on 6/1)
- Limited community mental health organizations
- Limited private practice therapists

Accessing
AF-CBT
Services