Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency (ARC): Overview of a components-based intervention model for complex childhood trauma

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Guiding Questions:

• Question 1: How do you treat childhood trauma?

• Question 2: How do we define “trauma”? 

• Question 3: What is it that we are treating?
Understanding Trauma in Childhood

• Traumatic experiences are those that are overwhelming, and leave a person feeling helpless, vulnerable, or very frightened. The experience of trauma is subjective and developmentally bound.

• Multi-layered nature of trauma:
  – Overt harm (i.e., physical/sexual abuse)
  – Lack of need fulfillment (i.e., neglect)
  – Interpersonal context (i.e., betrayal of caregiving expectations; loss, abandonment; working models)
  – Resultant developmental challenges
Multiple Layers Lead to Complex Outcomes

• Expectations of harm (from the world and from others)

• Difficulty forming relationships

• Difficulty managing, understanding, and regulating feelings and behavior

• Impacted / fragmented understanding of self

• Developmental challenges (problem-solving, agency, imagination, academic performance, etc.)

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
The Problem of Treating Complex Trauma

• Need for intervention that:
  - Can address continuum of exposures (layers of chronic and acute), including ongoing exposure
  - Is embedded in a social/contextual framework
  - Is sensitive to individual developmental competencies and deficits, and flexible in its approach
  - Addresses individual, familial, and systemic needs and strengths

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
Trauma’s Dual Influence on Development

• Prioritization of those domains of skill / competency / adaptation which help the child survive their environment and meet immediate physical, emotional, and relational needs

• De-emphasis of domains of development which are less immediately relevant to survival
“Treatment” therefore involves...

• Building / enhancing / supporting surrounding environment and relationships in capacity to support healthy child development

• Supporting youth (and their systems) in recognizing survival “strengths”, and reorganizing these toward present, goal-oriented active engagement

• Support in building / enhancing normative developmental competencies
Where does ARC come from?

- Translation of clinical principles across settings (outpatient, residential, school, home-based)
  - Or...what is it that we actually do?

- “Evidence-based practice”?
  - Or...how to fit real kids into scientific boxes

- Staying true to the inner provider
  - Or...keeping the art in treatment
Main / Overarching Domain Concept: Build safe / trauma-informed caregiving systems and safe relationships that support children / adolescents

Core Target / Goal: Help caregivers to better understand children / adolescents

Key Sub-skills:
- Parallel attunement to caregivers
- Build active curiosity
- Build mirroring skills
- Use attunement skills in support of youth regulation
- Build pleasure / positive engagement

Techniques:
i.e., Dyadic check-ins, feeling charades, etc.

Blaustein & Kinniburgh 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein 2005
ARC Potential Components

- Integration into clinical work (structured and unstructured); individual and/or dyadic application
- Caregiver support (individual or group)
- Caregiver training workshops
- Group treatment
- Milieu training, consultation, and staff support
- Milieu/systemic application
- Community-based applications

Importance of building an internal team to support integration goals
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal: Increase Emily’s ability to manage emotional arousal</th>
<th>Clinician</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Foster Parent</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Case Mgr.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clinician will support E. in identifying internal cues of distress (Affect Id), and identifying and practicing coping skills (Modul.)</td>
<td>E. will identify and practice 3 coping strategies to use when feeling unsettled (Modul)</td>
<td>FM will (a) be sure coping tools are readily available (Att. / Mod); (b) cue E. in use of tools, as appropriate (Attun); (c) Practice her own affect management so she can support E. (CAM)</td>
<td>Teacher will (a) make available “fidget” tools in the classroom (Att / Mod); (b) collaborate with E. and school counselor in allowing E. to “take breaks” as needed (Att / Mod)</td>
<td>Case mgr. will work with E. to identify community-based activities that support natural modulation (i.e., arts, sports team) (Att / Mod)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Linking trauma and targeted skills

• **Acknowledge** the client in their entirety—past experiences, current reality, strengths, vulnerabilities, possibilities, etc.

• **Validate** the adaptive nature of (often-distressing) behaviors

• **Educate** about the trauma response, triggers, and the links between past experience and current response

• **Engage** clients in understanding past, and exploring and defining present and future self templates, and in developing agentic participation in the growth process

• **Build and support** developmental skills

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
How We Address The Goals: An Integrated, Targeted Approach
ARC - 10 Building Blocks

- Trauma Experience Integration
- Executive Functions
- Self Dev’t & Identity
- Dev’tal Tasks
- Affect Identification
- Modulation
- Affect Expression
- Caregiver Affect Mgmt.
- Attunement
- Consistent Response
- Routines and Rituals

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
**Trauma Experience Integration:** The capacity to engage effectively in present life; the goal of our sequence.

**ARC – Integrated Approach**

- **Attunement**
- **Affect Identification**
- **Caregiver Affect Management**
- **Modulation**
- **Routines and Rituals**
- **Observe**
- **Modulate**
- **Consis. Resp.**
- **Express**
- **Exec Fxns**
- **Self Dev’t & Identity**

**Building the child and caregiver’s awareness of self- and other-experience:** “(self) - reflective curiosity”

**Building child / caregiver’s ability to use tools, structures, and resources to manage arousal and emotion in order to achieve a comfortable and effective state for addressing identified concerns**

**Engaging in more cognitively complex tasks that support youth in managing behavior, making active choices, connecting with others, and understanding themselves and their world.**
Attachment

**Overarching goal:** Creation of a safe environment (trauma-informed system) and safe relationships that are able to support children and adolescents in meeting developmental, emotional, and relational needs.
Our integrated goals for the caregiving system:

• To be aware, reflective, and attuned to their own experience, particularly in the context of caregiving (“Observe”)
• To have tools and supports to adequately manage that experience (“Modulate”)
• In turn, to be able to be aware, reflective, and attuned to the experience of the child(ren) in their care... (“Observe”)
• ...allowing them to support the child’s own experience and developmental competencies (“(Co-)Modulate” / “Do”)

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
We target these goals through:

- Building the caregiver’s own regulated emotional and physiological experience (*Caregiver Affect Management*)
- Supporting rhythm in the parent-child relationship (*Attunement*)
- Increasing use of attuned, regulated methods in responding to child behaviors (*Consistent Response*)

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
Supporting Goals with Structures: The Role of Routine

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
Routines and Rituals

• Trauma is often associated with chaos and loss of control; predictability helps build feelings of safety in trauma-impacted children and adults.

• Repetition is an important way that all people gain skill.

• Routines are used
  – (a) to support felt safety and modulation, through the establishment of predictability; and
  – (b) to support and reinforce key goals.

• Routines will naturally shift across time.
Caregiver Affect Management

- **The Main Idea:** Support the child’s caregiving system – whether parents or professionals – in understanding, managing, and coping with their own emotional responses, so that they are better able to support the children in their care.
## The Trauma Cycle

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Caregiver / Staff</th>
<th>Provider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognitive</strong></td>
<td>I am bad, unlovable, damaged.</td>
<td>I am ineffective.</td>
<td>I am ineffective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>People are dangerous. I can’t trust anyone.</td>
<td>This kid is causing trouble. He’s making things chaotic for everyone.</td>
<td>This family/ this parent is so difficult. They need to just do what I ask them to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional</strong></td>
<td>Shame, Anger, Fear, Hopelessness</td>
<td>Frustration, Anxiety, Helplessness</td>
<td>Frustration, anger, burnout, loss of empathy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavior</strong></td>
<td>Avoidance, aggression, pre-emptive rejection and self-protection.</td>
<td>Over-reacting, Controlling, Shutting down / Disconnecting emotionally.</td>
<td>Reactivity, control, punitive responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Behavior (Coping</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Cycle</strong></td>
<td>“I’m being controlled; I have to fight harder.”</td>
<td>“He keeps fighting me; I better dig my heels in.”</td>
<td>“I have to up the ante or this family will never do the right thing.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Caregiver Affect Management
Primary Targets

(1) Psychoeducation and depersonalization
   - Normalizing caregiver responses and depersonalizing youth behaviors / reactions

(2) Identifying difficult situations
   - Building awareness of challenging situations

(3) Self-monitoring skills
   - Increasing capacity to “tune in” to our own reactions

(4) Self-care and support
   - Building coping strategies and support systems that facilitate caregiver affect management

Blaustein & Kinniburgh 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein 2005
OBSERVE
Building / Supporting Caregiver Curiosity: ATTUNEMENT

• The Main Idea: Support the child’s caregiving system – whether parents or professionals – in learning to accurately and empathically understand and respond to children’s actions, communications, needs, and feelings.
Attunement

- What does it mean to be “in tune” with someone?
Attunement Considerations

- **Primary Goal:** To build rhythm in relationship.
- **The foundation for rhythm** is a **curious stance:** the assumption that youth behaviors make sense, and the desire to respond appropriately.

- Difficult behaviors are often fronts for unmet needs or unregulated affect; a **key attunement challenge** is therefore to identify the **function of youth behavior**

- Attunement is an ongoing process, and involves **perception** as well as **response**

- **Parallel process:** attunement to, and validation of, caregiver experience is a prerequisite for addressing caregiver attunement to youth experience

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
Attunement
Primary Targets

1) Build an understanding of youth behaviors and communications (help caregivers become “feelings detectives”)

2) Observe, validate, and put language to youth experience; use reflection to mirror child/adolescent communication

3) Use attunement skills to support youth regulation

4) Look for opportunities to build fluidity and pleasure in dyadic engagement
The Problem with Just “Doing”

- Treatment approaches often jump to the “do” stage: limit-setting, problem-solving, processing, etc.

- The challenge: in the absence of a modulated internal state and some reflective capacity, action is often neither effective nor integrated into ongoing experience.

- OBSERVING and MODULATING is doing: reflective curiosity is at the heart of capacity to live and function in present moment.

- TIMING MATTERS: Integrate “do” skills in conjunction with child and caregiver capacity to observe and modulate.
Consistent Response

- **The Main Idea:** Support the caregiving system, whether familial or programmatic, in building predictable, safe, and appropriate responses to children’s behaviors, in a manner that acknowledges and is sensitive to the role of past experiences in current behaviors.
Consistent Response: Two primary goals

• (1) Incorporate the system’s *understanding* of youth behavior into their *response* to the behavior (i.e., incorporate attunement into youth management strategies, ideally reducing the need for limits)

• (2) Build responses to behavior that are consistent, appropriate, and sensitive to trauma influences on youth responses (i.e., building consistent responses that *increase*, rather than *decrease*, felt safety)

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
Overarching goal: Support youth ability to safely and effectively manage experience on many levels: emotional, physiological, cognitive, and behavioral; this includes the capacity to identify, access, modulate, and share various aspects of experience.

Blaustein & Kinniburgh 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein 2005
Building / Supporting Youth Curiosity: Affect Identification

• *The Main Idea:* Work with children to build an awareness of internal experience, the ability to discriminate and name emotional states, and an understanding of where these states come from.
Affect Identification

- **Specific Targets / Skills:**
  - Provide psychoeducation about feelings and their important roles
  - Build an understanding of triggers and the danger response
  - Increase child’s ability to accurately identify, at an age-appropriate level, internal experience (emotions, energy/arousal)
    - **Language** for emotions and energy / arousal
    - **Connection** among feelings, body sensations, thoughts, and behaviors; understanding the links, and using these as “clues” to understand experience
    - **Context:** understanding experiences that elicit emotions and arousal
  - Increase child’s ability to accurately identify, at an age-appropriate level, emotion in other

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
Adolescent Exercise:
What do you feel....

• Listen to each piece of music....
  – What do you think the emotion of the music is? (Of the composer / singer / band / etc.)
  – How does the music make you feel?
  – What does the music do to your energy? Think of an energy word that goes with the music.
  – If this were background music in a movie, what kind of scene would be playing out?
  – Does the music remind you of anything or anyone? Make you think about anything?
Modulation

- The Main Idea: Work with children to develop safe and effective strategies to tolerate and regulate physiological and emotional experience, in service of maintaining a comfortable and effective state of arousal.

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
Target skill-building to child needs

• Challenges in “self-regulation” may present in multiple ways; in what ways is the child or adolescent currently attempting to modulate?

• Many distressing behaviors represent the child/adolescent’s attempt to cope; work to understand the function behind the behavior, and support alternative strategies.
Individual Differences: The Comfort Zone

THE ROLLER-COASTER – Comfort zone? What comfort zone?
Modulation

Specific Targets / Skills:

• Build understanding of comfortable and effective states

• Build an understanding of degrees of feelings and energy

• Explore arousal states and activities that impact them, and build a toolbox.

• Support and facilitate strategies which effectively and comfortably lead to desired state changes
DO
Expression:

• **The Main Idea:** Help children build the skills and tolerance for effectively sharing internal experience with others
Expression: Primary Targets / Subskills

• Address barriers to expression, including the role of vulnerability and shame
• Identify / establish resources for safe expression
• Create opportunities for expression via structures that support communication
• Support communication by coaching and modeling effective skills:
  – Effective nonverbal communication skills
  – Effective verbal communication skills
• Build and support forums for self-expression

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
**Overarching Goal**: Build the foundational skills needed for healthy ongoing development and resiliency, by supporting key reflective capacities, including ability to set goals and make active choices and developmentally-appropriate sense of self.
Executive Functions

• *The Main Idea*: Work with children to act, instead of react, by using higher-order cognitive processes to solve problems and make active choices in service of reaching identified goals

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
Supporting Executive Functions

• Support the client in **actively recognizing his or her own ability to make choices** and have power (agency)
• Support **active evaluation** of situations (affect identification / attunement)
• Support and build the client’s capacity to **inhibit response** (modulation)
• Support the client in **generating alternative solutions** / decision-making skills (problem-solving)

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
Self and Identity

• *The Main Idea*: Support children in exploring and building an understanding of self and personal identity, including identification of unique and positive qualities, building of coherence across time and experience, and support in the capacity to imagine and work toward a range of future possibilities

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
Treatment Targets: Facets of Identity

• **Unique Self**: Help children identify personal attributes, including likes and dislikes, values, talents, preferences, opinions, family and cultural influences, spiritual beliefs, etc.

• **Positive Self**: Build internal resources and identification of positive aspects of self

• **Cohesive Self**: Help child build a sense of self which integrates past and present experiences, and incorporates multiple aspects of self

• **Future Self**: Build child’s ability to imagine self in the future, and to build connections between current activities and future outcomes

• **Consider**: *Self, Self-in-Context, Self-in-relation-to-other*
  Blaustein & Kinniburgh 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein 2005
Trauma Experience Integration

The Main Idea: Work with children to actively explore, process, and integrate historical experiences into a coherent and comprehensive understanding of self in order to enhance children’s capacity to effectively engage in present life.

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
Children are not simply a composite of their deficits, but are whole beings, with strengths, vulnerabilities, challenges, and resources.

ARC provides a framework that seeks to recognize factors that derail normative development, and to work with children, families, and systems to build or re-build healthy developmental pathways.
Treating Traumatic Stress in Children and Adolescents
How to Foster Resilience through Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency

Available from
GUILFORD PRESS

Blaustein & Kinniburgh, 2010; Kinniburgh & Blaustein, 2005
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