

Adapting an Attachment-Based Intervention for Caregivers of Trans and Gender Nonconforming Youth: Preliminary Findings from Two Pilot Groups

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Introduction

Gender nonconforming youth and trans youth experience bullying and victimization resulting in significantly greater mental health concerns¹. In the US, trans youth report two to three times higher rates of depression, self-harm, and suicidal ideation, compared to their peers².

Caregiver support is linked to positive mental health and reductions in depression³. Interventions that support parents in understanding the challenges that their teens face and increase parental sensitivity are needed to support the well-being of teens and their families⁴. However, there is a gap in literature regarding the efficacy of parent groups, which could be a cost effective way to deliver service.

This study examined the acceptance, uptake and caregiver satisfaction of an adapted version of The Connect Parenting Program⁵ that addresses the unique challenges and concerns of caregivers of trans and gender nonconforming youth.

Methods

Participants were 11 caregivers (9 mothers, 2 fathers) of 10 gender nonconforming youth (ages 14-17). Revisions of the Connect Parenting Program were completed in consultation with a panel of mental health professionals in order to address relevant themes expressed in these families and modify experiential learning content. Pre and post treatment, caregivers completed interviews to assess clinical needs, and the acceptance, relevance, and the perceived helpfulness of the program.

Results

All parents attended at least 80% of sessions and reported feeling respected, safe, and welcomed in the group.

Parents reported being able to empathize with their teen more easily and feeling more confident in parenting:

“Helped me understand that when my child is upset/angry/appears selfish/inconsiderate, etc. she is really expressing a connection need.”

“I was pretty freaked out about what my child is going through, but I realized that he is actually the same, pretty well adjusted kid. It was reassuring. If there are issues in the future, I think I can handle them.”

Most parents indicated learning about attachment was very helpful (91%), or helpful (9%).

Connect Parenting Program

- Ten week manualized group attachment-based intervention for parents of youth at risk.
- Strength focused approach helps parents understand teens and build security in their relationship.
- Produces long term reductions in teen's emotional problems and parenting stress and improvements in parent-teen relationships^{6,7}.

- Nine principles based on the building blocks of attachment.

Table 1. Distribution of caregiver responses (N = 11) on feedback questionnaires.

	Not really	Somewhat	A great deal
To what extent do you feel the parenting group helped you to understand your child better?		27%	73%
To what extent do you feel the parenting group helped you to understand yourself better?		64%	36%
To what extent do you feel the parenting group helped you understand your child's gender identity and transition better?	9%	73%	18%
Was there a change in the relationship between you and your child as a result of applying what you learned in the group?	18%	64%	18%
Do you anticipate future change in the relationship between you and your child as a result of applying what you learned in the group?		36%	64%
Do you feel more confident in your ability to parent your child as a result of attending the group?		36%	64%

Conclusions and Future Directions

Preliminary findings support the effectiveness of this intervention. Feedback from these two pilot groups have informed further revisions of the program with the goal of co-creating a culturally adapted, safe, and helpful intervention. A third group is currently being facilitated. Changes in the attachment relationship and youths' levels of depression, self-harm, and suicidality will be assessed pre and post intervention.

References

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