



Action Team on Triadic Attachment and Child Health

ATTACH: Innovation and Insights

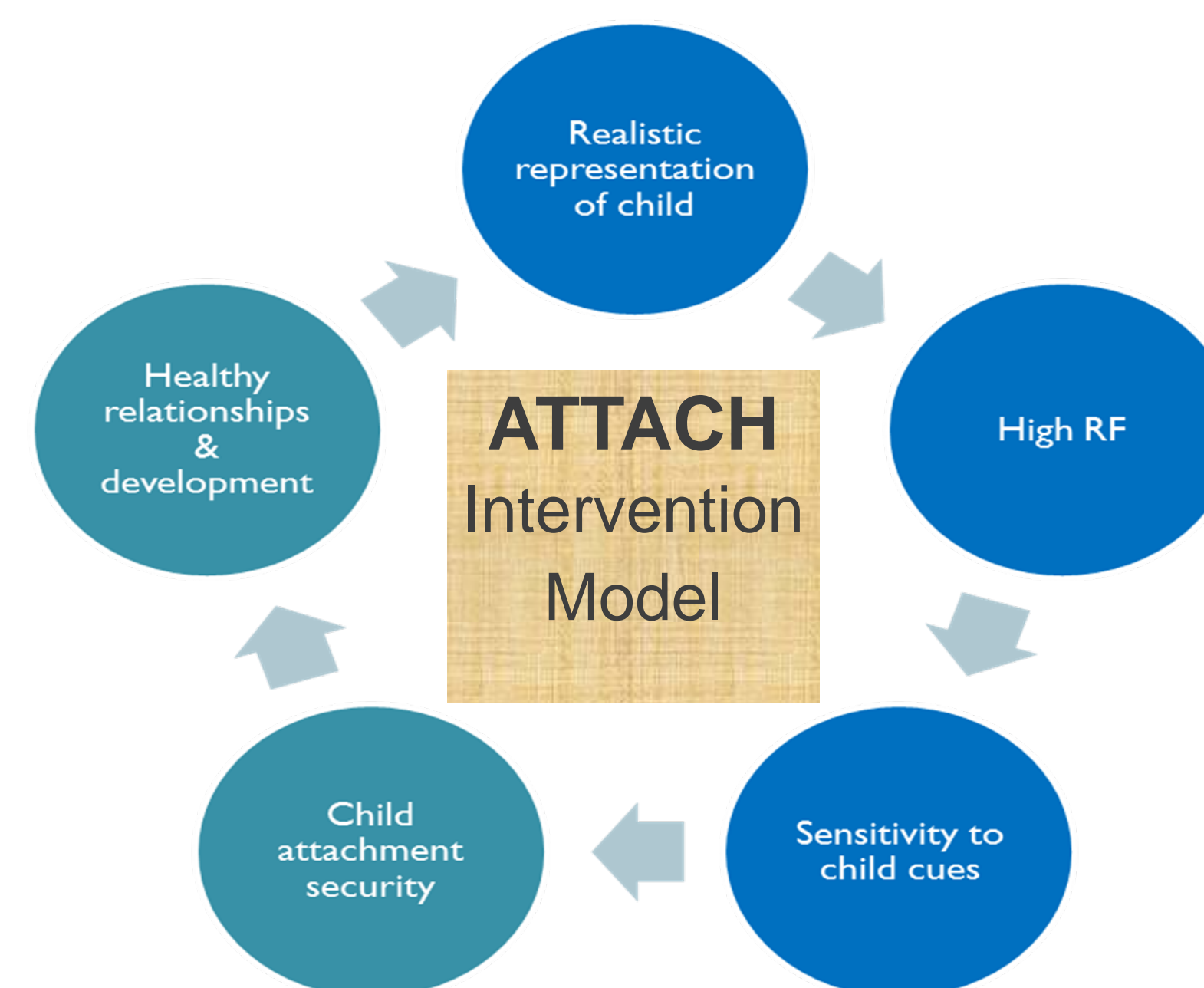
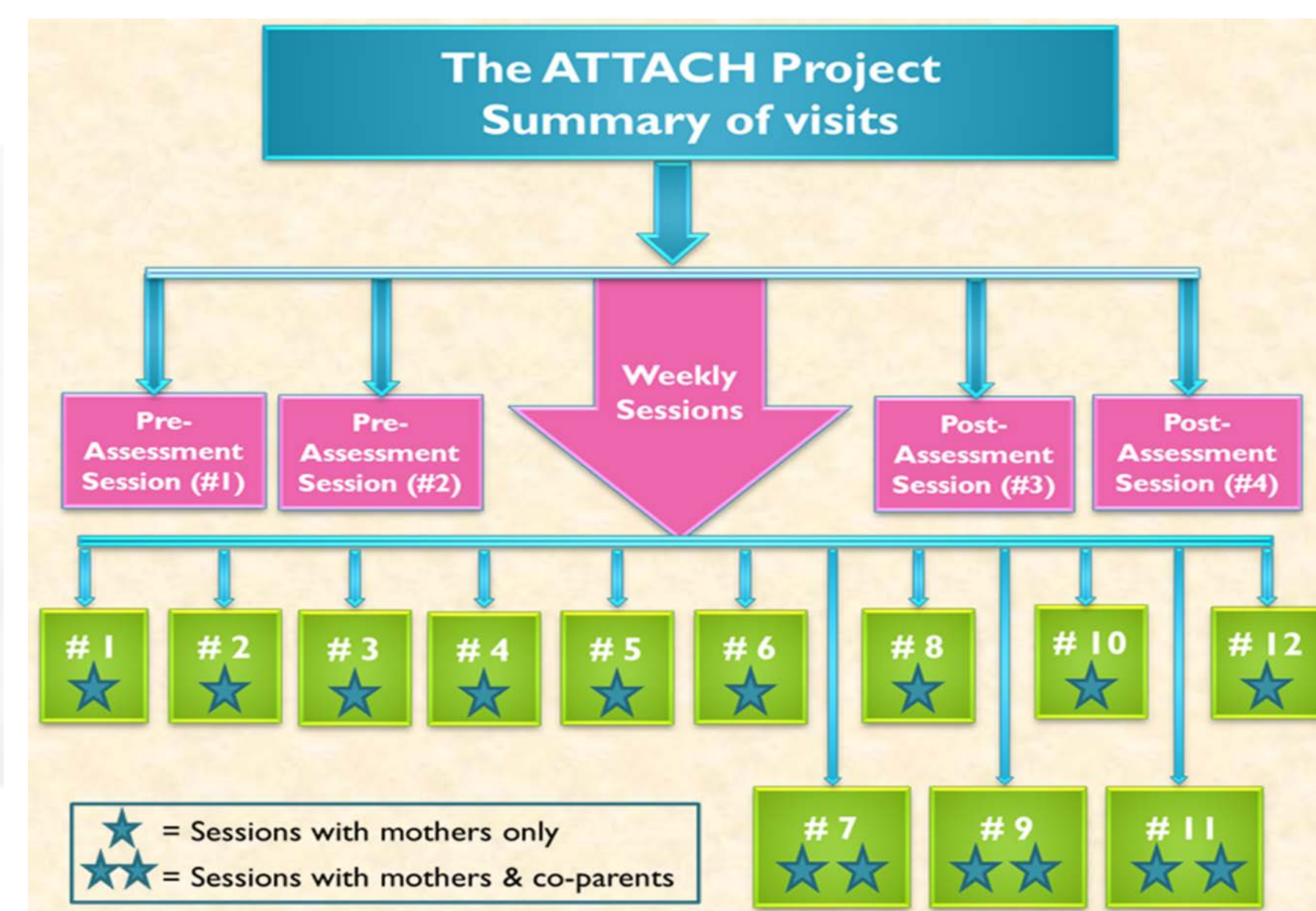
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HEADLINE STORY: ATTACH PILOT STUDY

Learning from Experience: Parents suffering from toxic stress (i.e. depression, addictions, family violence) are often unable to respond sensitively and appropriately to their infants, putting infants at risk of insecure attachment¹. Secure attachment is also influenced by parental reflective function (RF), the parents' capacity to understand and therefore regulate their own thoughts, feelings and behaviour toward their child ²⁻³. The few RF interventions that exist, focus only on enhancing parents' understanding of their own psychological representations of caregiving and capacity to recognize denied or distorted affect about their child and their relationships, but do not promote learning RF skills via practice ⁴⁻⁵. Moreover, existing interventions typically target mothers, ignoring co-parenting support persons including fathers. Building on this background, Action Team on Triadic Attachment and Child Health (ATTACH) team have developed and pilot tested a RF intervention program designed for mothers and their co-parenting support person, with the intent of being used as an add-on program to existing parenting programs (e.g. Nurturing Parenting).

Looking at the Road Ahead: The objective of this poster is to provide an overview of progress and insights from the funded *ATTACH* pilot study, designed to promote RF in mothers experiencing toxic stress. The ATTACH program was piloted in a randomized control trial with 20 families, who received a 12 week intervention that included 9 dyadic (mother and infant) sessions and 3 triadic (mother, infant, and co-parenting support person) sessions. The Parent Development Interview, Adult Attachment Interview and Nursing Child Assessment Teaching Scale were administered pre-and post-intervention to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. Attachment security was measured at delayed post-test when infants attained 11 months of age. Data are being analyzed and a second pilot will begin soon. Insights will be shared on the importance of relationships regarding the success of such community-based projects. Developing a strong therapeutic alliance between the mothers and the ATTACH RF facilitators is believed to be the main reason for very low attrition, engagement of participants in the program, support of the staff in the community agency hosting the project team, and for sustaining a very nurturing intervention team.



“What Do We Hope to Accomplish?”

- The project is community-based and employs integrated knowledge transfer to conduct the research in partnership with the Calgary Urban Project Society (CUPS), an inner city agency serving the most low-income, vulnerable families in Calgary. The sample is drawn from CUPS parents taking part in an existing CUPS parenting programs (i.e. Nurturing Parenting) which does not cover RF. If effective, CUPS will be able to offer this new add-on program to the benefit of its clients.
- In spite of the recognition that healthy child development is a critical determinant of population health, more than 25% of Canadian children remain vulnerable to cognitive and behavioral problems (Canadian Institute of Health Information, 2014). Not surprisingly, the World Health Organization has called for programs, such as ATTACH, to address persistent discrepancies in child development and to “close the gap in a generation” (World Health Organization, 2009). Understanding the association between parental RF and both: (1) maternal sensitivity/responsiveness and attachment, and (2) children's development (behavior, cognition and language) would both fill important empirical gaps and inform the implementation of effective community programs for parents and children at risk.
- The ATTACH project will enhance FOI's vision of accelerating innovation to improve environments to support children's development.

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Attachment & Reflective Function

It is the parent's capacity to reflect upon the child's internal experience that is so crucial to the development of a secure attachment and to a range of developmental outcomes.

- Arietta Slade, 2005, p. 270



“Who Do We Hope will Benefit?”

- Our psychoeducational parent training program is aimed to develop an effective, sustainable, accessible and acceptable RF-focused program suitable for adding on and filling a gap in existing parent training programs. Not only will ATTACH potentially benefit the children and parents involved by promoting healthier relationships and improving children's health and developmental outcomes, we stand to improve parenting programs nationally as well as internationally. Given that the ATTACH program fills a gap in service that we are poised to fill, we believe ATTACH has tremendous commercial potential.
- Thus, we expect this service to be of high interest to potential clients including parents, service agencies, ministries of health, ministries of social services, and municipalities with an interest in supporting vulnerable families and promoting individual and population health. We have already successfully commercialized our Lien MOMS Link program (Letourneau 2015) of telephone-based peer support for moms with depression with Innovate Calgary. We intend to commercialize the ATTACH program with Innovate Calgary if successful.
- Anecdotally we have received very positive feedback from our study participants on the ATTACH intervention. They found it to be very effective and therapeutic in their everyday lives. We are quite optimistic that their newly gained reflections will reflect in our study results!

References

1. Fonagy, P., 2014
2. Ainsworth, et al., 2014.
3. Bowlby, J. , 1982.
4. Cassidy et al., 2011
5. Suchman et al., 2014

