



AF-CBT

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

AF-CBT is a short-term, research-based intervention for families who experience frequent conflicts or behavior problems that may result in anger or ineffective discipline. AF-CBT promotes the use of positive coping and self-control skills, effective and safe discipline strategies, and useful family problem solving and communication skills that can improve children's behavior and well-being, help families get along better, and help families maintain a safe and secure home environment.

Research shows AF-CBT significantly improved children's anger, sadness, anxiety, and social competence, and caregivers' safe and appropriate behaviors.*

**Kolko, Iselin, & Gully, 2011*

AF-CBT Goals

- Maintain child and family safety
- Improve the relationship between child and caregiver
- Enhance child and family strengths
- Help families adapt to and cope with various stressful experiences



Benefits of AF-CBT

- Enhances family safety
- Improves family relationships
- Strengthens positive parenting practices
- Enhances children's coping with trauma
- Decreases behavior problems
- Improves coping and social skills in children
- Improves family coping with stressful situations



Impact of Conflict on Families

Each child and family reacts to conflict, anger, and ineffective discipline in their own way. Some common responses include:

- Strained child-caregiver relationships
- Traumatic stress reactions and symptoms
- Increased behavior problems
- Emotional and/or physical injuries
- Legal problems
- Placement disruptions

Phases of AF-CBT

AF-CBT includes specialized content and skills that are delivered in three phases.

1 Engagement and Psychoeducation

- Alliance Building and Engagement
- Learning about Feeling and Family Experiences
- Talking about Family Experiences and Psychoeducation

2 Individual Skill-Building

- Emotion Regulation
- Restructuring Thoughts
- Noticing Positive Behavior
- Assertiveness and Social Skills
- Techniques for Managing Behavior
- Imaginal Exposure
- Clarification Preparation

3 Family Applications

- Verbalizing Healthy Communication
- Enhancing Safety through Clarification
- Solving Family Problems

How will AF-CBT help my family?

It can be challenging to care for a child who struggles with defiance, aggression, or other problem behaviors. Family conflict can easily lead to caregiver frustration and use the use of harsh, but ineffective discipline. AFCBT helps families learn new, safe, and more effective ways to overcome or prevent these struggles.

In AF-CBT, the provider works with the child and caregiver separately and sometimes together. Families in AF-CBT receive several important services from one provider (“one-stop shop”). This eliminates the need to send the family to several different providers for parenting classes, anger management, family therapy, individual therapy, and trauma treatment. All of these services are offered in AF-CBT.

Who is appropriate for AF-CBT?

A family may be eligible for AF-CBT when dealing with one or more of the following:

1. A family or a caregiver and child who experience frequent conflicts, arguments, or angry feelings
2. A caregiver with concerns about use of physical force or discipline, who worries about doing something that could injure or hurt a child, or who has a history of physical or emotional abuse
3. A child (5-17 years old) who exhibits challenging behaviors (*e.g., not listening, fighting, hard to manage*) or shows trauma symptoms related to family conflict, aggression, or physical force



Bismarck • Dickinson • Jamestown
Standing Rock • Watford City
701.323.5626 | dakotacac.org



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701.852.0836 | northernplainscac.org



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