

An Attachment Focused Intervention for Strengthening Parent-Adolescent Relationships

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Challenge of Adolescence:

Neurological, Endocrine and Social Transition

- Adolescence is the second major ‘window’ of opportunity and risk in development.
- Functional levels of neurotransmitters change throughout adolescence, reaching adult stabilization levels at around age 16
- Significant transformations in prefrontal cortex.
- Increased capacity for abstract thinking & strategic response inhibition
- Rapid hormonal changes, often fluctuating levels in early adolescence

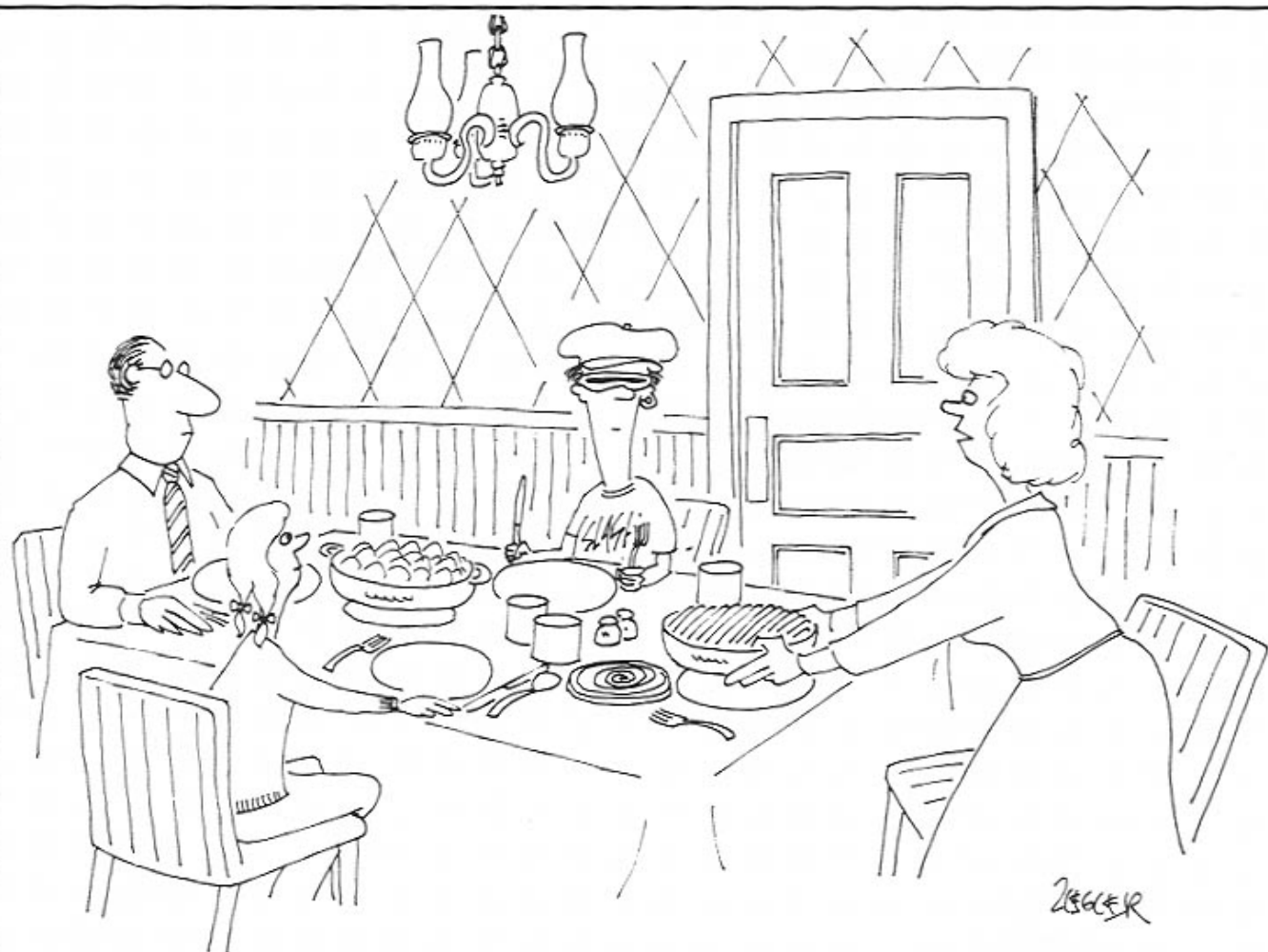
Adolescence: Cognitive- Representational Shifts

- Gradual emergence of differentiated and complex view of self and relationships
- *Imaginary audience*: capacity to represent multiple standpoints leads to sense that one is the focus of others attention
- *Egocentrism*: belief that their experiences are unique and not possibly understood by others



Family-Peer Relationship Changes

- Gradual drop in time spent with parents
- New peer and romantic relationships.
- Gradual shift of attachment functions to new relationships to serve safe haven, proximity and secure base functions.
- Normative increase in parent-adolescent relationship conflict.



"While we're at supper, Billy, you'd make Daddy and Mommy very happy if you'd remove your hat, your sunglasses, and your earring."

Attachment & Adolescence

- *The importance of attachment security is no less critical in determining adjustment through the adolescent transition than in determining development and adjustment in early life.*
- Securely attached adolescents show less anxiety, less hostility, more able to regulate feelings, including anger
- Security buffers transition to high school
- Less experimentation with drugs, risky sexual behaviors; fewer pregnancies

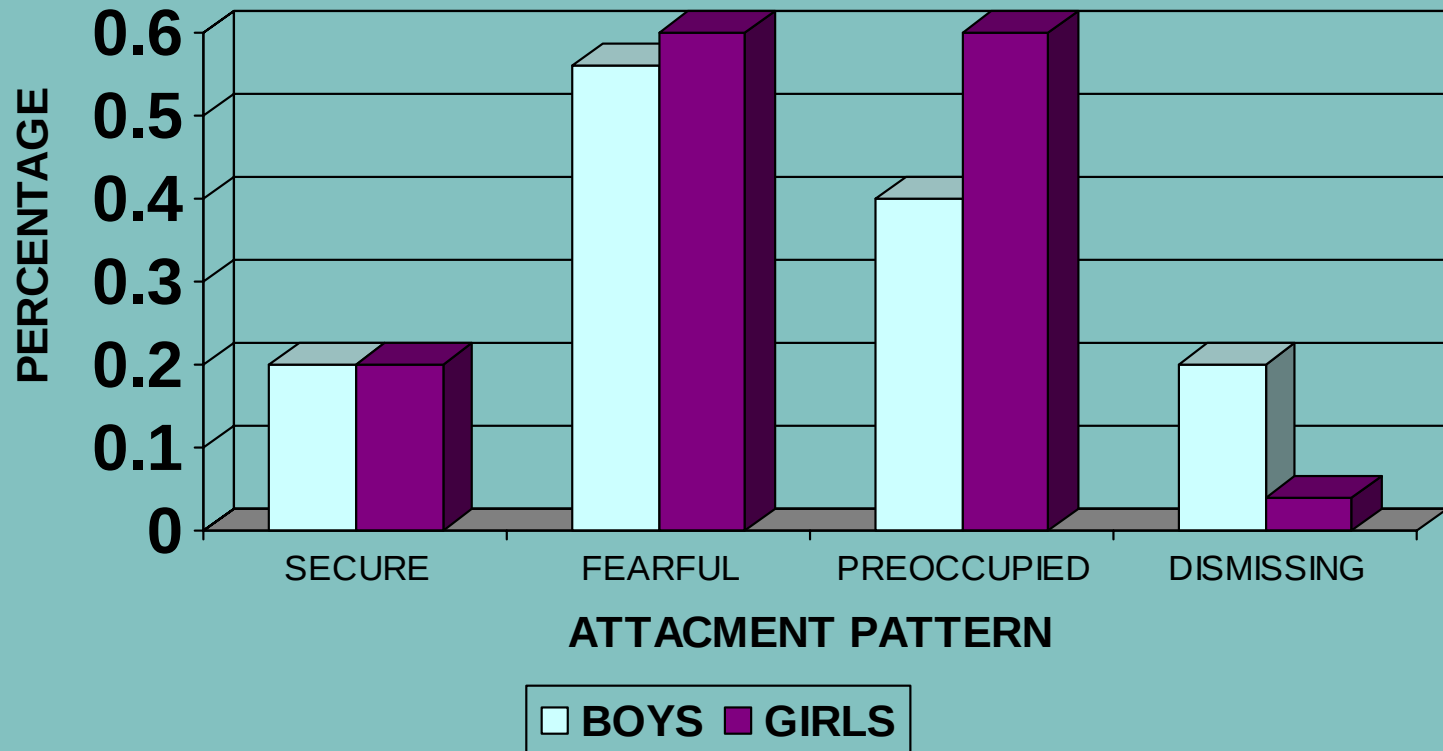
What about Parent-Adolescent Conflict?

- Maintaining connectedness with parents – preserving security – is challenged by change and conflict.
- The successful balancing between autonomy and relatedness – particularly in the context of adolescent-parent disagreements – is a manifestation of attachment security (Allen, Moore, & Kuperminc, 1997).

Adolescence and Risky Behavior

- Normative increase in antisocial, delinquent and other risk behaviors.
- Some adolescents become involved in severe antisocial and delinquent behaviour – ‘adolescent onset conduct disorder’
- Adolescents with early onset conduct disorder (diagnosed before age 10) often become even more heavily involved in antisocial and delinquent behavior
- **Associated with erosion in the parent-child attachment security**

DISTRIBUTION OF ATTACHMENT PATTERNS AMONG 45 MALE AND 45 FEMALE ADOLESCENTS



Interventions for Teens at Risk

- A host of interventions have demonstrated efficacy for behavior problems in children under the age 12 – the majority of these target parental and family functioning.
- In contrast, few programs with demonstrated efficacy for teens with severe behavior problems
 - ***Multi-systemic Therapy*** (MST; Henggeler et al.)
 - ***Functional family therapy*** (Sexton & Alexander, 2004)
 - ***Multidimensional treatment foster care*** (MTFC; Chamberlain, 2003)

CONNECT

An Attachment Focused Approach

- In contrast to behavioral approach, this relational approach is designed to enhance:
 - Parental identification and acceptance of attachment needs
 - Parental attunement and sensitivity (Fonagy & Target, 1996)
 - Dyadic affect regulation
 - Parental consistency and limit setting
 - Effective conflict resolution

CONNECT

GROUP STRUCTURE

- 10-week psycho-educational format
- Each week focuses on a key attachment principle as it relates to adolescent development and parenting.
- Manualized one hour sessions include learning content, role-plays and reflection exercises.

CONNECT – Illustrative Session

Principles

	Title	Principle	Illustrative Goals & Skill Development Focus
3	Attachment over the Lifespan	Attachment is for life.	▪Enhance recognition that attachment needs continue throughout life but are expressed differently as children develop.
4	Conflict: An Opportunity for Understanding and Connection	Conflict is part of attachment.	▪Enhance recognition and acceptance of conflict as a normative part of relationships. ▪Develop skills in regulating affect, maintaining connection and negotiating in the face of conflict.
7	Empathy – The Heartbeat of Attachment	Understanding, growth & change begins with empathy.	▪Enhance understanding of the role of empathy for children's and parents' experiences as essential to secure attachment. ▪Develop skills in empathic listening with others in conflict situations.



CONNECT – Effectiveness

Clients

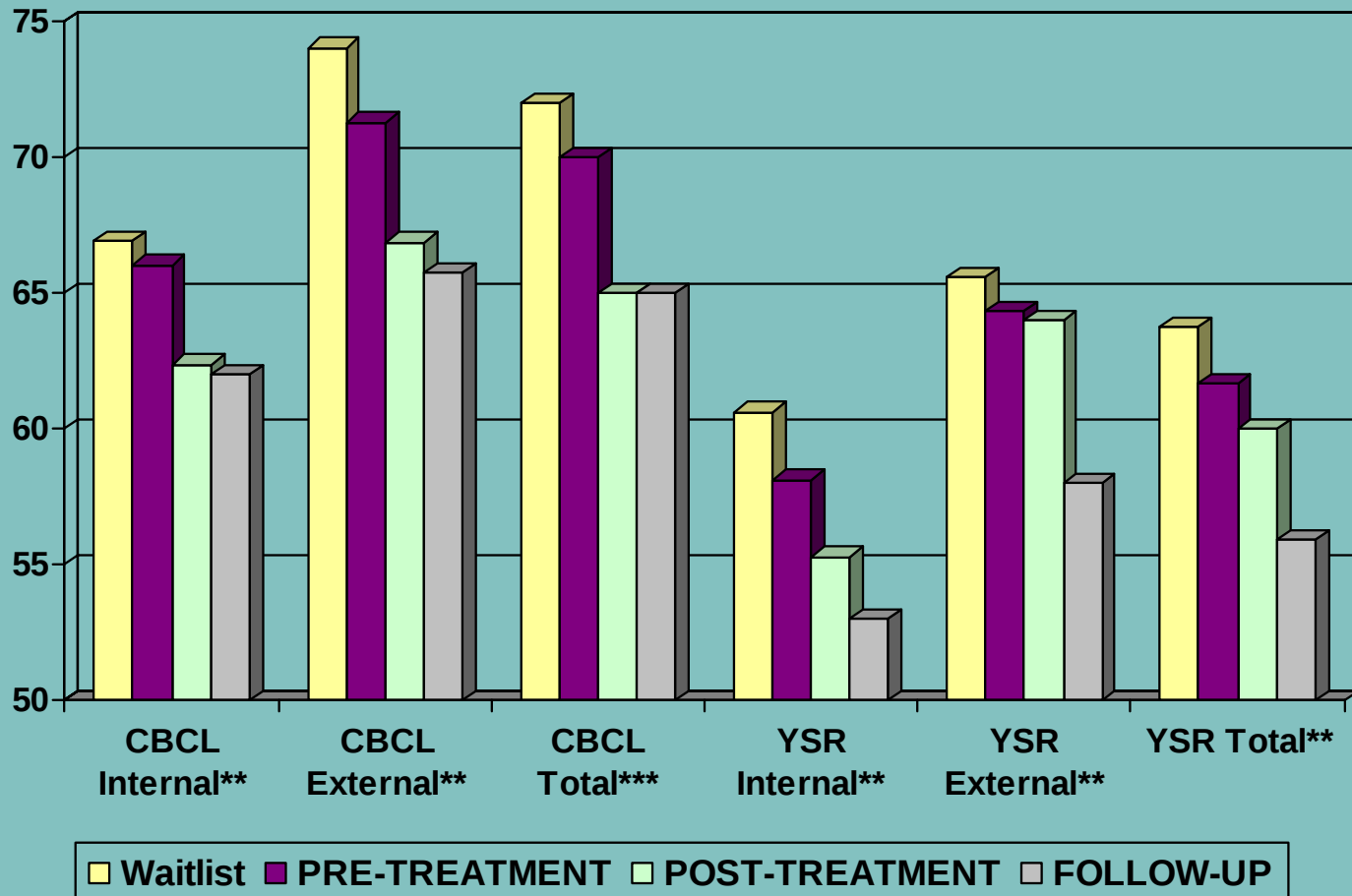
- 48 adolescents (28 boys and 20 girls; mean age 14.51) and 48 caregivers admitted for clinical service
- Severe behavioural difficulties – e.g., within six months prior to admission:
 - 21% of youth had dropped out of school
 - 59% had been placed outside their biological parents' home for some period of time
 - 49% had threatened to kill or seriously harm themselves
 - 61% had threatened to kill or seriously harm someone else.

CONNECT – Preliminary

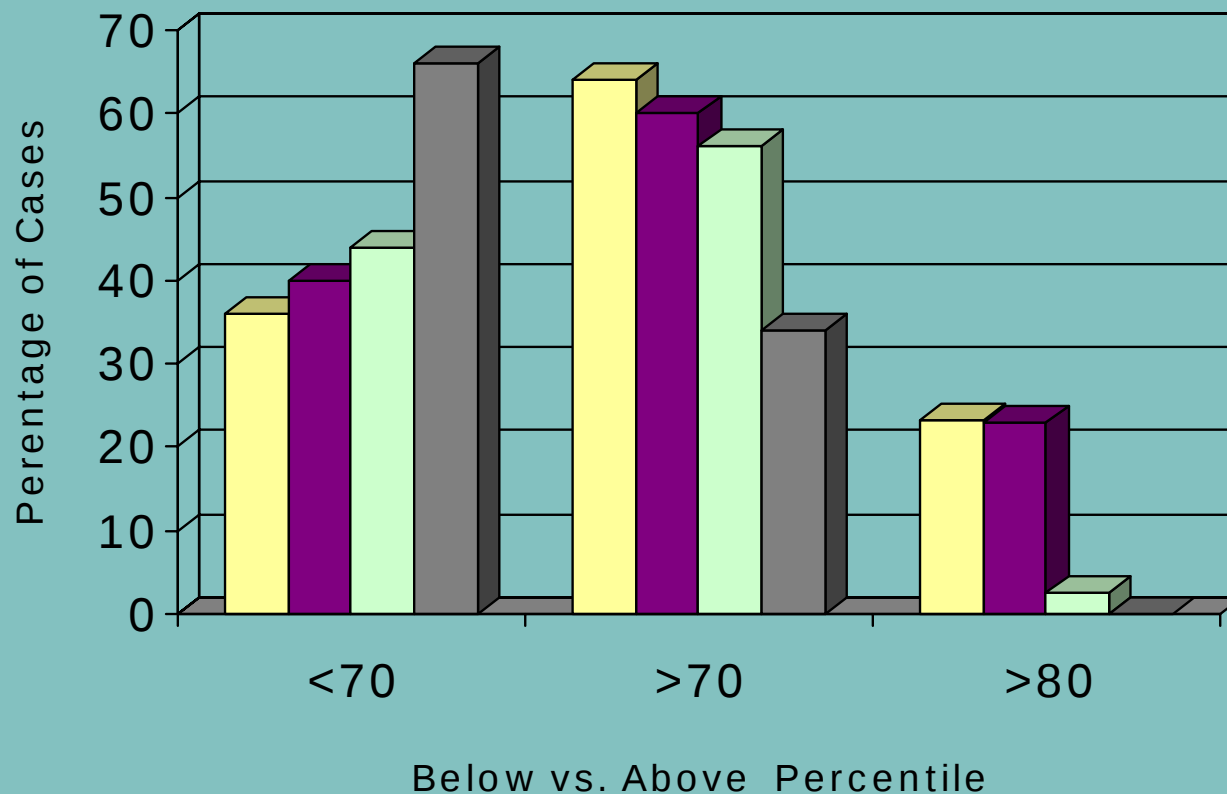
Evaluation of Effectiveness

- Waitlist-control design
- Measures administered at:
 - Waitlist: beginning of four month waitlist period
 - Pre-treatment
 - Post-treatment
 - Follow-up (6 to 12 months)

PRE-TREATMENT – POST-TREATMENT – FOLLOW-UP Youth Behaviour – Parent Report (CBCL) & Youth Report (YSR)

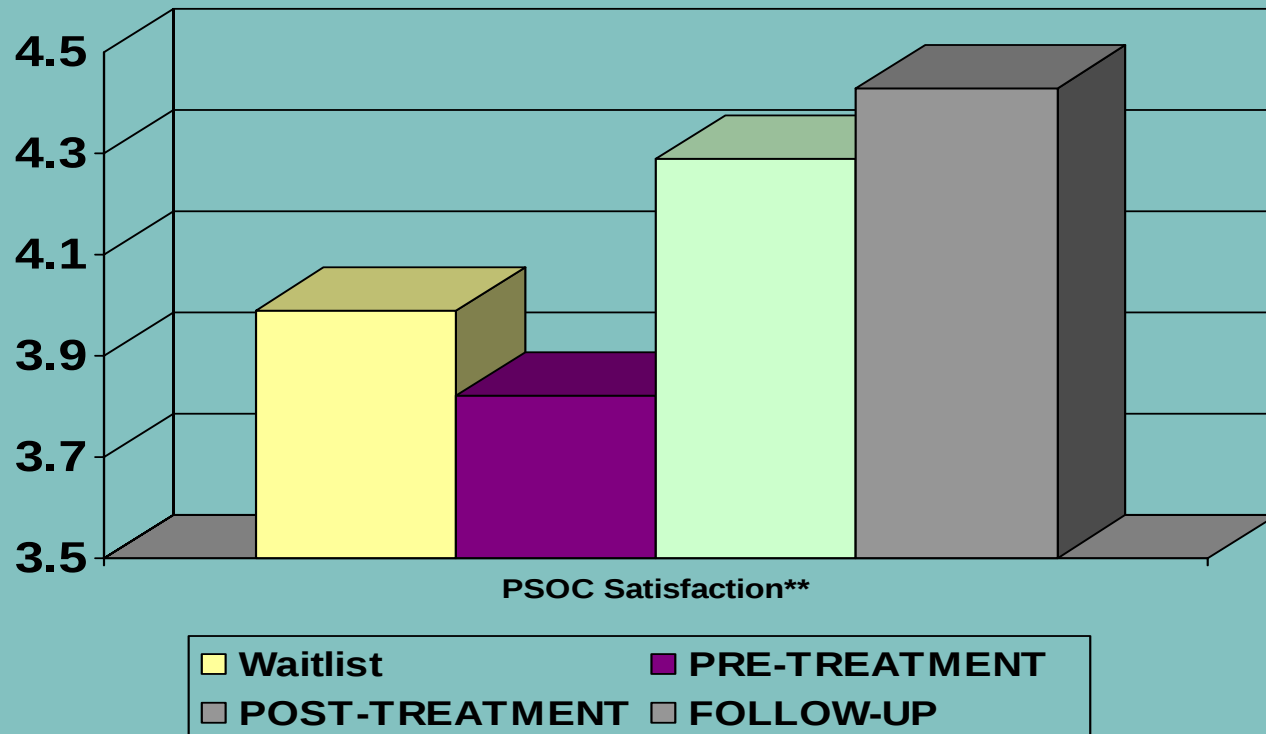


Clinical Significance: Percentage of Cases in Clinical Range on CBCL Total Score



WAITLIST PRE-TREATMENT POST-TREATMENT FOLLOW UP

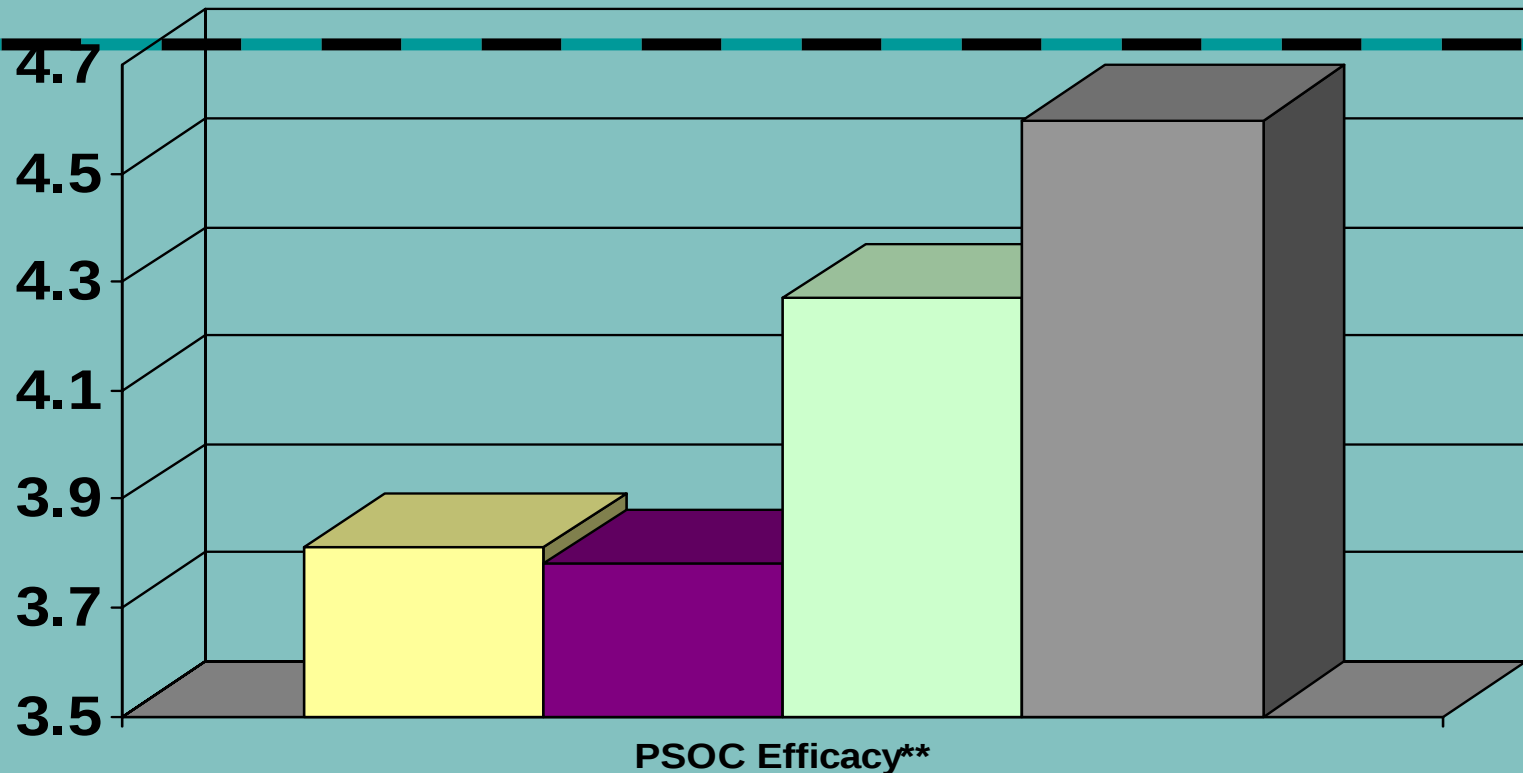
PRE-TREATMENT – POST-TREATMENT – FOLLOW-UP Parent Report of Parental Satisfaction (PSOC)



Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC ; Johnston & Mash, 1989.)

PRE-TREATMENT – POST-TREATMENT – FOLLOW-UP

Parent Report of Parental Efficacy (PSOC)



Waitlist

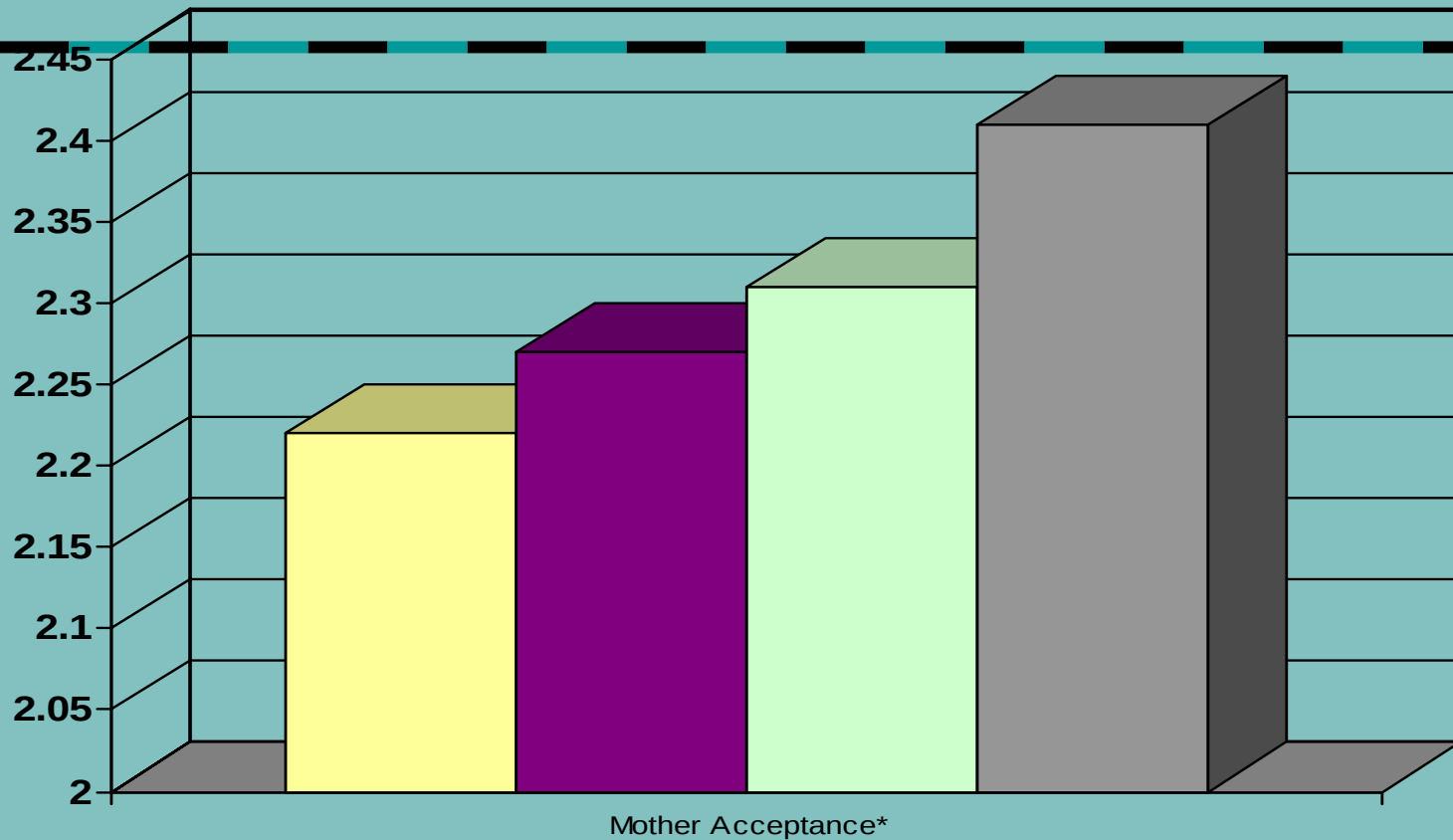
PRE-TREATMENT

POST-TREATMENT

FOLLOW-UP

Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC ; Johnston & Mash, 1989.)

PRE-TREATMENT – POST-TREATMENT – FOLLOW-UP Youth Report of Maternal Acceptance

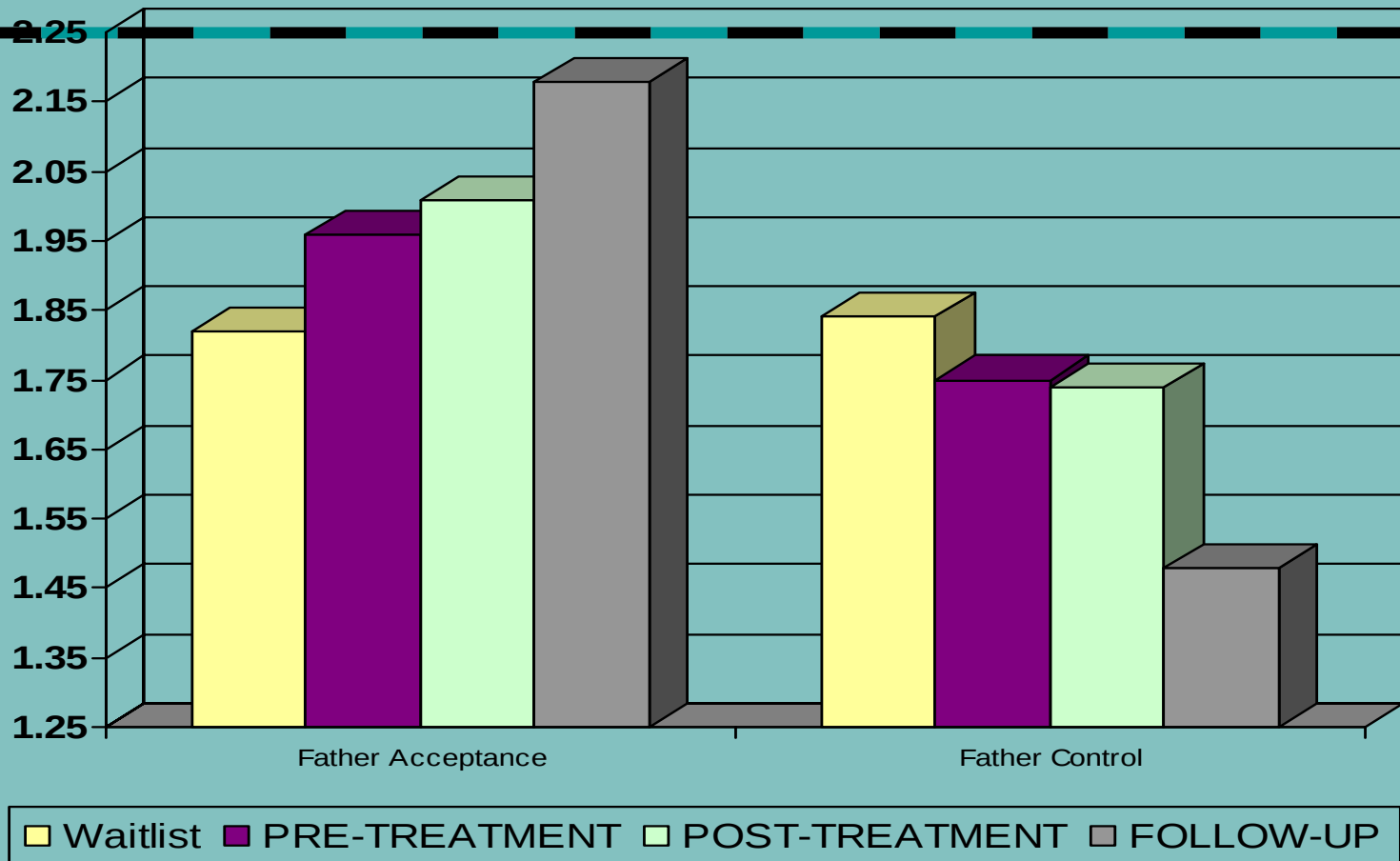


Waitlist PRE-TREATMENT POST-TREATMENT FOLLOW-UP

Child Report of Parental Behavior Inventory, Shaefer, 1965

PRE-TREATMENT – POST-TREATMENT – FOLLOW-UP

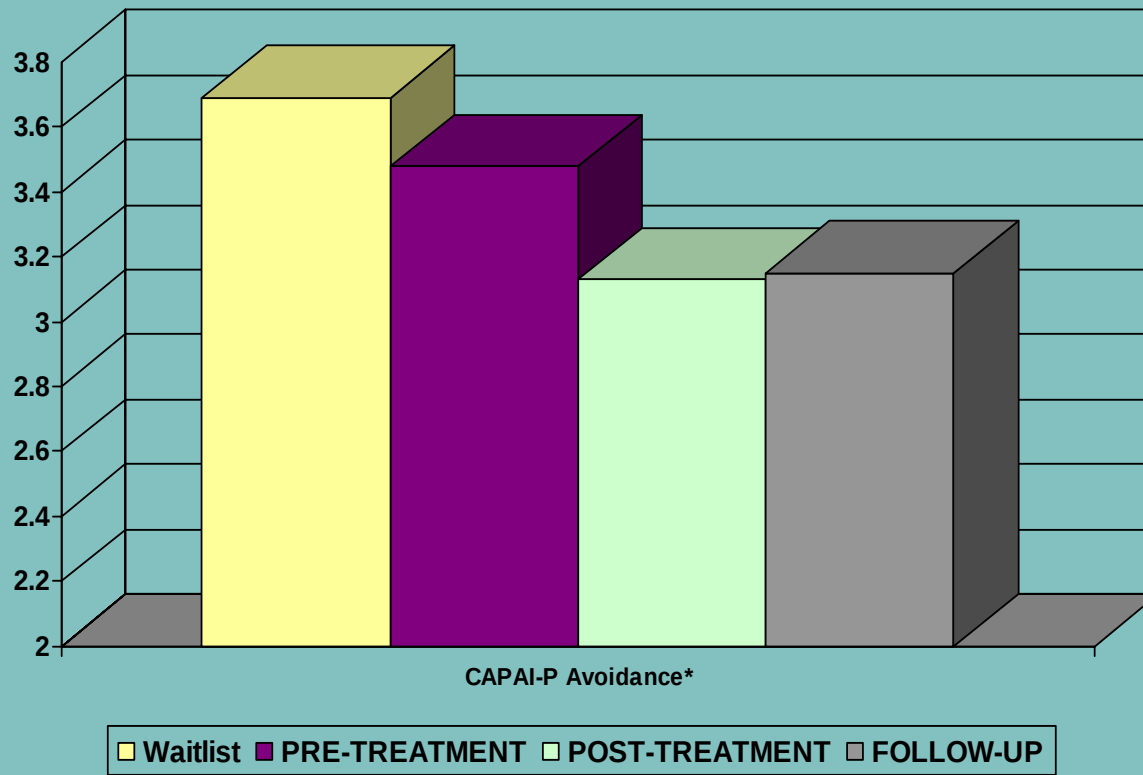
Youth Report of Father Acceptance and Control



Child Report of Parental Behavior Inventory, Shaefer, 1965

PRE-TREATMENT – POST-TREATMENT – FOLLOW-UP

Parent Report of Youth Attachment Avoidance (CAPAI-Y)



Comprehensive Adolescent-Parent Attachment Inventory, Moretti, Holland & McKay.



“CONNECT” Caregiver Feedback

Parents rated the group as:

- ⌘ 88% rated it as helpful or very helpful in enhancing their understanding of their child
- ⌘ 87% caregivers said they applied from the group to parenting their child
- ⌘ 48% some improvement in relationship; 22% reported major improvement.
- ⌘ Perceived efficacy of parenting rated as somewhat (64%) or greatly (14%) improved.



Limitations and Next Steps

- Retention at follow-up
- Program specific effects
- What components account for effectiveness?
- What processes underlie change?
- Importance of ecological perspective on intervention for children and families