

Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (LEND) Program  
Westchester Institute for Human Development  
University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities  
And  
New York Medical College  
*Team Project Abstract*  
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**Title:** Enhancing TF-CBT with iPad APPS for Children with Developmental Disabilities Who Have Experienced Sexual Abuse

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**Proposal Description:** The purpose of this research project is to develop a matrix to identify and evaluate APPS which may assist mental health clinicians to support the individual modules of Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT) when treating children with developmental disabilities who have experienced sexual abuse.

**Objectives:** According to the research, children with developmental disabilities are four times more likely to be victims of violence. Furthermore, these children are 2.9 times more likely to be sexually assaulted; however, it is difficult to obtain information regarding symptoms secondary to limitations with communication skills. There are several factors to consider when developing a treatment plan for children with disabilities including but not limited to:

- Speech and language abilities (i.e., expressive language and receptive language)
- Communicative intent
- Symbolic representation
- Cognitive functioning
- Social relatedness
- Memory
- World knowledge

Currently, there is paucity in treatment methods for children with developmental disabilities who have experienced trauma (e.g., sexual abuse). Research to date has been primarily anecdotal and case-study based. A previous LEND group indicated that there is a significant need for experienced mental health clinicians to implement effective therapy for children with developmental disabilities. Studies have been inconclusive about the use of cognitive-behavioral treatments for children with developmental disabilities given the difficulties with communication and cognitive functioning. As a result, our research focused on the implementation of iPad applications (APPs) to support mental health clinicians with TF-CBT, an evidence-based therapy, with individuals who have developmental disabilities and have experienced sexual abuse.

**Method:** This research was exploratory in nature in conjunction with literature reviews. No IRB approval was necessary. Mental health clinicians in Westchester County were surveyed

regarding the TF-CBT modules they would want to use APP support. A matrix and guide were developed to evaluate iPad APPs that may support mental health clinicians who service children with developmental disabilities when implementing specific modules of TF-CBT (i.e., Psychoeducation, Relaxation, Affect Regulation, Cognitive Coping, and Trauma Narrative).

**Community Partners:** Barbara Callahan, from the NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH), reported that there is a lack of funding and training for services. In addition, there is a lack of integration between OMH and the Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD). Izel Obermeyer, the Director of Assistive Technology at WIHD, reported that there is limited research in identifying effective iPad APPs that can be utilized with this population.

**Results:** Over 50 iPad APPs were identified and 21 were evaluated in seven categories and are presented in a guide. The APPs included in the guide are organized according to the corresponding module of TF-CBT. Difficulties were noted with finding APPs compatible with the Cognitive Processing module due to the increased language demands that are required in this module. Furthermore, the overwhelming number of APPs available makes in-depth analysis of individual APPs challenging. It was easiest to identify APPs that were compatible for the Relaxation and Affect Regulation modules. The number of APPs that were useful for the identification of body parts, an important part of the treatment of sexual abuse, was limited.

**Conclusion and Next Steps:** Of the 50 APPs reviewed, 21 were identified as appropriate for five TF-CBT modules. It is important to note that the APPs included in the guide should be used to supplement, not replace, the treatment. The next steps for this research project include the piloting of the use of selected APPs by clinicians who are implementing TF-CBT to treat children with developmental disabilities who have experienced trauma. An evaluation instrument will be developed for clinicians to rate the effectiveness of the APPs included in the guide.