

Sorenson Legacy Foundation Center for Clinical Excellence Extends Behavioral Parenting Training Services for Parents in Cache Valley

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The Behavioral Parenting Training Group will provide Cache Valley parents with skills to constructively handle everyday challenging situations that arise with their children.

Beginning February 6, Dallas Spencer, a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW) who recently joined the Sorenson Center, will offer a six session in-person therapy group for parents of children between the ages of four and 12. The sessions will help parents in the Cache Valley community learn how to apply a set of evidence-based parenting skills to constructively handle everyday challenging situations that arise with their children.

Spencer's expertise in behavior management training is a boon to the offerings of the Sorenson Center. He is currently completing training to be certified in Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), a specific type of parent management training. PCIT utilizes the PRIDE skills that parents will learn during the parenting training: praise, reflect, imitate, describe, and enthusiasm. "We're teaching parents techniques to help them build relationships with their children before they start addressing problem issues and challenges," says Spencer. "This way, the child has trust and a connection to their parent, who inevitably has to discipline them."

He believes that secure attachments will help children as they grow and experience the inevitable challenges that come with life. "Our relationship and connection to our primary caregivers are fundamental to how we mature and develop and form our own relationships later in life," he says.

Spencer is also available to provide additional one-on-one therapy for parents and children who need extra support. During these sessions, Spencer reviews the PRIDE skills and helps parents identify opportunities to apply them. Using one of the center's private rooms with one-way observation windows, he observes parent-child interactions. The parents wear listening devices so they can apply instructions and receive advice real-time from the therapist. With some adaptations, these services can also be provided via telehealth to anyone in Utah.

"If the child is cleaning up blocks they were playing with, we'll advise the parent to praise them for appropriate behavior," Spencer explains. But instead of saying something generic like "Good job," parents are instructed to provide a specific praise statement such as, "You're so good at putting away your blocks quietly." This is because specific praise helps children understand what behaviors are important and helps them see that their parents are paying attention to their good behaviors.

Spencer looks forward to providing these parenting tools—in group therapy or one-on-one—to families in whatever form fits them best. "Believe me, I've been there. I have three children, and I wish I could travel back in time and use some of these skills myself," he says.

"I'm excited to have Dallas as a part of our team to expand the parent training services we offer," says Gretchen Peacock, executive director of the Sorenson Center. "These services can be very impactful for families in a short period of time, and they can easily be tailored to telehealth delivery to reach families throughout the state of Utah."

Spencer has worked the past 12 years with children, youth, and adults in rural Idaho who struggle with depression, anxiety, PTSD, and substance use disorder. He received a master's in social work from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV). Spencer is an advocate for his clients and enjoys helping others discover their own strength and autonomy. In addition to the group parenting clinic, he works with USU students, the residents of Cache Valley, and the people of Utah at large via the USU telehealth system, where he provides services in both English and Spanish.



Dallas Spencer, LCSW, and Dr. Jacob Cameron are new service providers at the Behavioral Health Clinic at the Sorenson Center for Clinical Excellence.

A number of other behavioral health practitioners in the Sorenson Center are also available to see clients in person and throughout the state via telehealth. Among these providers is Jacob Cameron, PhD, who also recently joined the psychology and counseling team in the Sorenson Center's Behavioral Health Clinic.

Cameron's expertise is in Short-Term Anxiety-Regulating Dynamic Psychotherapy (or STAR-DP), a therapy that uncovers the sources of feelings or thoughts that clients are generally unaware of, which leads to increased anxiety.

"This therapy works well because a lot of us are anxious," explains Cameron. "In our modern society, we unconsciously learn to avoid certain emotions, which can impact our ability to experience a full spectrum of feelings in our everyday lives. The result of this tends to be prioritizing our thoughts to the exclusion of adaptive, core emotions. This limits the data we have access to when making decisions, engaging in relationships, and participating in daily life. The negative outcomes from this process, which usually happen outside of our awareness, can create a lot of anxiety, worry, nervousness, and fear."

STAR-DP helps clients deal more adaptively with their emotions, in connection with thoughts, and discover what is causing their anxious distress. "In doing this, people's distress most often decreases because they feel more balanced, fulfilled in their relationships, and they learn to feel more compassion for themselves and others. My favorite aspect of this treatment is witnessing people become more authentic and more connected with others," says Cameron.

The principle is in finding balance through conscious awareness. "Instead of ignoring emotions—or ignoring thoughts and relying only on emotion—we explore the past and the present to become aware of how we got where we are, and thus feel empowered to explore who we would like to be right now and moving forward" explains

Cameron. "Balance between thoughts and emotions can make the space where we all experience highs and lows feel more like a 'superpower' than a struggle."

"I operate from a holistic, humanistic approach. Human beings are multifaceted and powerful, even when they don't feel like it, and I'm here to meet them where they are," he says. "I love seeing how each client applies the work we do together in a uniquely meaningful way. Therapy is a collaborative relationship in humility, and I feel honored to do what I do."

Cameron recently completed his doctorate in Clinical Psychology at Palo Alto University in California and has experience working with adults of all ages who struggle with trauma, depression, anxiety, and identity concerns. He graduated with an emphasis in LGBTQ+ Clinical Psychology, and values attending to multiculturalism and the intersection of an individual's multiple identity variables (race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, family roles, faith, etc.). He is intentional with his practice to bring a client's personal and environmental factors into the therapeutic space for exploration. Cameron worked at a gender and sexual identity clinic in the Bay Area and did his clinical internship at Utah State's Counseling and Psychological Services program (CAPS).

To register for the upcoming parenting group or to be put on a waiting list for future groups, contact Amy at (435) 797-3401. If you are interested in participating in one-on-one sessions in person or via telehealth, both providers highlighted in this story as well as other providers in the Sorenson Center are currently accepting clients. Most insurances are accepted, and a sliding-scale fee may be utilized for self-pay patients. For more information on the variety of mental health services provided at the Sorenson Center, visit the Sorenson Center website at cehs.usu.edu/scce.