

Implementation and evaluation of a social and emotional learning program for children of parents with substance use disorder

Submission date 16/03/2026	Recruitment status Recruiting	☐ Prospectively registered
		☐ Protocol
Registration date 19/03/2026	Overall study status Ongoing	☐ Statistical analysis plan
		☐ Results
Last Edited 18/03/2026	Condition category Mental and Behavioural Disorders	☐ Individual participant data
		☒ Record updated in last year

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Children that have at least one parent with a substance use disorder (SUD) are at an increased risk of experiencing developmental delays and mental health problems. This study is testing the impact of a social emotional learning (SEL) program on children ages 5 to 11 years old that have a parent(s) with substance use disorder (SUD). We will look at how the program, Emotional ABCs, affects emotional literacy, coping skills, and emotional and behavioral functioning in children that complete the program versus children that do not complete the program. We will also assess the reach, adoption, and implementation of the program. Moreover, the study will examine the costs associated with implementing the Emotional ABCs in existing specialized dockets and substance use treatment programs.

Who can participate?

Children between the ages of 5 years old and 11 years old may participate, along with their adult caregiver. Children must have one parent that is involved in a specialized docket or a treatment program for substance use disorder. All participants must be fluent in English. Caregivers must be able to provide informed consent, and children must be able to provide informed assent. Children are unable to participate if they are already part of a SEL program or if they have certain medical conditions.

What does the study involve?

Participants will be randomly assigned to one of two groups. One group of children will complete the Emotional ABC's program, while the other group will not. All participants will meet with the study team three times over the course of six months. During each of these meetings, caregivers will take a survey (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire) while the child completes a series of activities with the study team. The activities explore the children's existing coping skills and ability to identify feelings. A subset of participants in the intervention group will be randomly selected to participate in an interview to explore their views of the program.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?

Children that complete the Emotional ABCs program may learn skills to help them cope with

stress. The risks for participating in this study are low. Participants may experience stress when completing assessments, but it is expected to be no more than the stress experienced in day-to-day life. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time.

Where is the study run from?

The study is run by a team within the School of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, United States of America.

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?

The first participant was enrolled in the study in October, 2025. The study will continue recruiting until February, 2027 and all data collection is expected to be complete by August, 2027.

Who is funding the study?

The study is funded by the OneOhio Recovery Foundation (USA)

Who is the main contact?

The main contact is Dr. Lindsay Sullivan, lindsay.sullivan@osumc.edu

Contact information

Type(s)

Principal investigator, Scientific, Public

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Study information

Scientific Title

Enhancing social-emotional well-being in children of parents with substance use disorder

Study objectives

1. Determine the effectiveness of the intervention in improving emotional literacy, coping skills, and emotional and behavioral functioning in children ages 5-11 with a parent with SUD.
2. Evaluate the implementation process and identify factors associated with the uptake,

implementation, adaptation, and sustainability of the intervention.
3. Determine the costs of program implementation and maintenance.

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval required

Ethics approval(s)

Approved 02/10/2025, Institutional Review Board at The Ohio State University (15 E. 15th Avenue 4th Floor, Columbus, 43201, United States of America; +1 614-688-8457; BehavioralIRBInfo@osu.edu), ref: 2025B0043

Primary study design

Interventional

Allocation

Randomized controlled trial

Masking

Open (masking not used)

Control

Uncontrolled

Assignment

Cluster

Purpose

Treatment

Study type(s)

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied

Social-emotional well-being in children of parents with substance use disorder

Interventions

The intervention, Emotional ABCs, is a skill based SEL curriculum for children ages 4-11 years old designed to empower children with requisite knowledge and skills to manage their emotions confidently and successfully. The curriculum includes sequential, short videos, and interactive activities as well as offline skill-building activities, games, and rewards that reinforce newly taught skills. The Emotional ABCs curriculum includes 10 units, each with a set of lessons, rewards, and certificates. Children in the intervention group will be instructed to complete all 10 units within 10 weeks. The program caters to learners at different levels of proficiency and was designed in a format that enables children to complete the program with minimal supervision. Prior studies show that completing Emotional ABCs significantly improved children's social emotional competence compared to those who did not complete the program, with SEL scores three times higher in those who completed the program than those who did not complete the program.

Children will be randomized into the intervention and control group at a 1:1 ratio using a block randomized design stratified by sex to ensure balanced enrollment is achieved throughout the study. Randomization block sizes will be $n = 10$ (i.e., $n = 5/\text{arm}$). This strategy will help ensure

balance on sex and study arm throughout the duration of the trial enrollment. When multiple members of a sibling group are eligible, one sibling per family will be randomly selected to participate in the study.

Children and caregivers in the control group will have no access to the Emotional ABCs online platform. Control children will receive access to the Emotional ABCs program at the end of their study participation.

Intervention Type

Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)

1. Emotional literacy measured using Emotional Literacy Checklist at Baseline, Post-intervention, and at 6 months post-intervention (or 3 months and 6 months after baseline for the control group)

Key secondary outcome(s)

1. Coping Skills measured using Draw-and-write technique, Feelings Activity, Problem Solving Vignettes Activity at Baseline, Post-intervention, and at 6 months post-intervention (or 3 months and 6 months after baseline for the control group)

2. Emotional and Behavioral Functioning measured using Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire at Baseline, 3 months and 6 months after completing the Emotional ABCs program (or 3 months and 6 months after baseline for the control group)

3. Dosage measured using Number of certificates of completion intervention children received via the Emotional ABCs online platform at Post-intervention

4. Engagement & adherence with the Emotional ABCs program measured using Number of program features viewed/accessed, number of units completed, and overall amount of time spent on the Emotional ABCs website during the active intervention period. An overall engagement and adherence score for each participant will be calculated by summing the number of program features viewed/accessed, number of units completed, and the overall amount of time spent engaging with the program. at Active intervention period

5. Caregiver engagement measured using Duration of time spent engaging in the program with the child in the last week; Frequency of engaging in the program with the child in the last week; Number of program features viewed/accessed in the last week; Details on how they engaged with the program in the last week. at Active intervention period

Completion date

31/08/2027

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria

1. Child aged 5-11 years old at time of study enrollment
2. Child must have a parent enrolled in an Ohio specialized docket or treatment program
3. Child must live with current caregiver for at least one month at the time of study enrollment
4. Adequate proficiency in English
5. Caregiver has a phone that can receive SMS text message

Healthy volunteers allowed

No

Age group

Child

Lower age limit

5 Years

Upper age limit

11 Years

Sex

All

Total final enrolment

0

Key exclusion criteria

1. Child is enrolled in another social emotional learning (SEL) program
2. Child has a history of severe or profound intellectual disability, cognitive impairment, or psychiatric disorder

Date of first enrolment

03/11/2025

Date of final enrolment

28/02/2027

Locations**Countries of recruitment**

United States of America

Sponsor information**Organisation**

The Ohio State University

ROR

<https://ror.org/00rs6vg23>

Funder(s)**Funder type**

Funder Name

OneOhio Recovery Foundation

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan

IPD sharing plan summary

Not expected to be made available