

# The 'ABCD' of thinking healthy



PATA:

Agnes Ronan: agnes@teampata.org  
Amy Whiting: amy@teampata.org

PATA Technical Assistants:

Uganda: Richard Kilonzo  
Malawi: Blessings Banda  
Tanzania: Fileuka Ngakongwa  
Zambia: Eugene Mupakile



Mzantsi Wakho:

Elona Toska: elona.toska@uct.ac.za

Camille Wittesaele:  
camille.wittesaele@spi.ox.ac.uk

Academic Advisors:

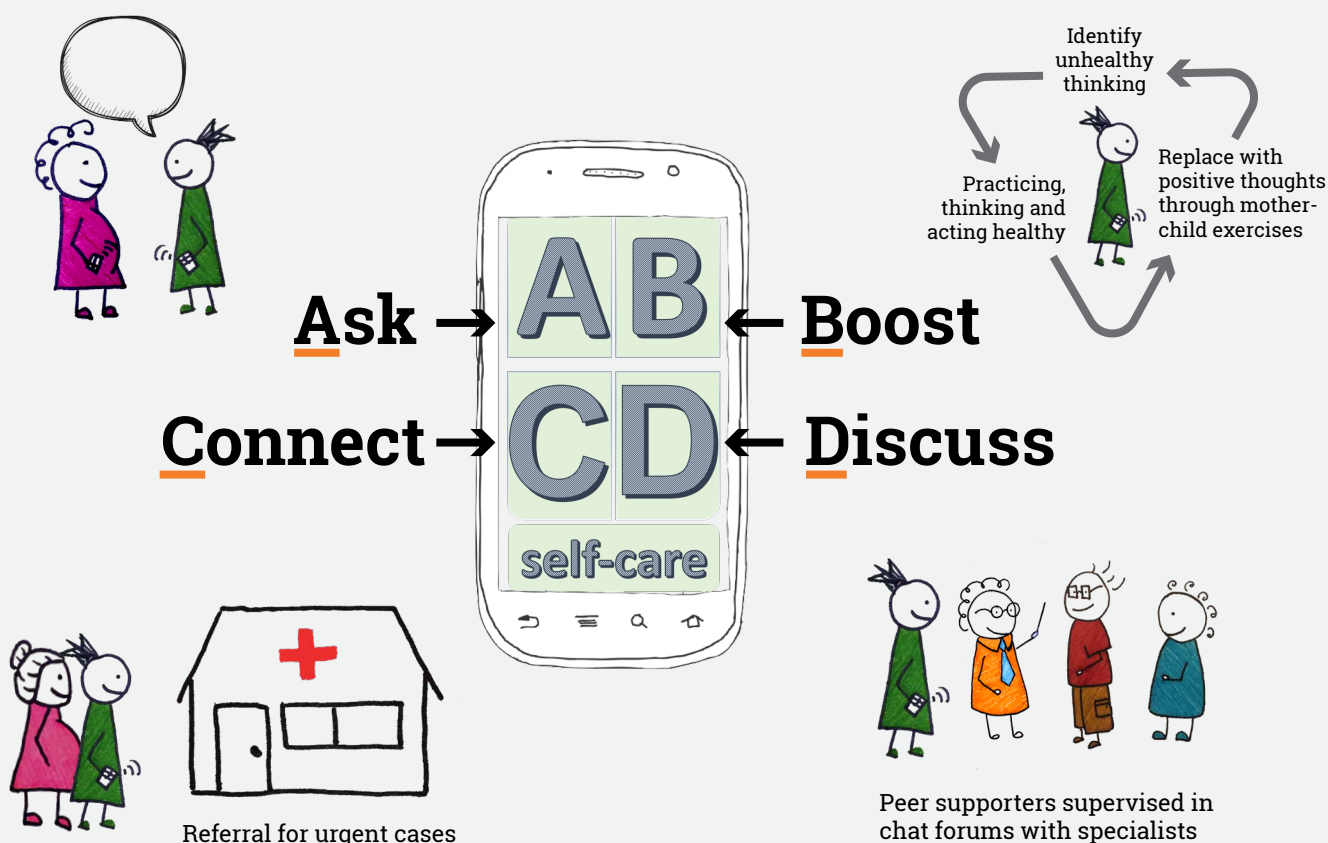
Prof Lucie Cluver, University of  
Oxford/ Cape Town  
Prof Lorraine Sherr, University College London

## Background

Living with HIV and becoming an adolescent mother present dual risks for stigma, depression and other mental health issues. An estimated two million adolescent mothers live with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa. Evidence shows that there is a gap in psychosocial support for this vulnerable group. Adolescent mothers living with HIV are asking for mental health support that is non-stigmatising, engaging and accessible.

ABCD was conceptualised as a package of care to improve access to maternal depression support provided by young peer supporters living with HIV. The tool is an adaptation from the evidence-based World Health Organization (WHO) Thinking Healthy Program. This program is a cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)-based intervention, designed for delivery by non-specialists in low- and middle-income contexts, with proven impact on maternal depression (Rahman, 2008).

The ABCD tool addresses the psychosocial needs of young mothers living with HIV across four domains: (ASK) assessing psychosocial needs of young mothers, (BOOST) cognitive behavioural therapy group sessions based on WHO 'Thinking Healthy' modules, (CONNECT) linking young mothers to professional care and online resource hub, (DISCUSS) interactive chat forums between peer supporters and professional advisors.



## Progress Update

---

### STAGE 1

#### ADOLESCENT CO-DEVELOPMENT

September 2018

ABCD is co-developed, integrating feedback and inputs from end-users (peer supporters living with HIV) and beneficiaries (young mothers living with HIV) through a consultative process from inception through to evaluation. This participatory methodology provides ethical, contextual and operational insights that need to be taken into consideration and inform appropriate adaptations of the package.

### STAGE 2

#### PROTOTYPE TESTING

November 2018

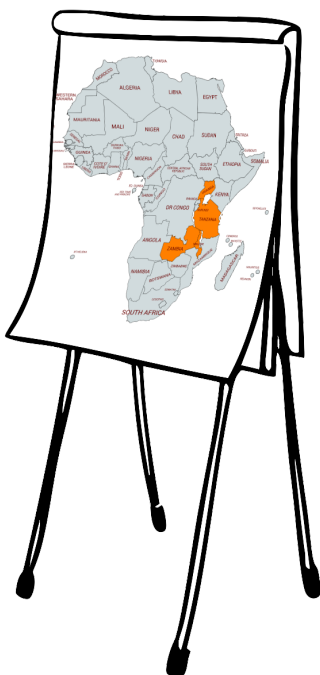
Peer supporters test mobile tool prototype and ABCD 'Thinking Healthy' content for usability and acceptability. Technical assistants and peer supporters provide feedback and suggestions for tool and content adaptations .

### STAGE 3

#### ADAPTATION & TRAINING

February 2019

The ABCD tool is adapted according to feedback from end-users and technical assistants. Peer supporters are trained to use the mobile app by in-country technical assistants. The engagement of health providers and facility counsellors in the training and piloting of the tool.



### STAGE 4

#### IMPLEMENTATION

March-August 2019

Pilot testing is conducted by 20 peer supporters in 15 health facilities across four countries (Uganda, Zambia, Malawi and Tanzania) for feasibility and acceptability in empowering and equipping peer supporters to provide structured 'thinking healthy' support groups to young mothers living with HIV and pregnant young women. The mobile training & mobile supervision tool provides a guide for peer supporters through a package of 'thinking healthy' steps ranging from: introductory check-ins (**A**sk), evidence-based CBT-informed group exercises (**B**oost), help with accessing services (**C**onnect), and the provision of on-going supervision and self-care (**D**iscuss).

**Table 1**  
Adaptations based on  
consultative process

## Ethical



- Criteria for inclusion includes age 18-24.
- Young mothers are intervention participants as opposed to research participants, data collected is based on end-user (peer supporter) feedback on ABCD tool.
- Anonymous feedback is collected after each session to reduce vulnerabilities.
- ABCD support group attendance is voluntary.

## Contextual



- WHO 'Thinking healthy' modules is adapted to sub-Saharan context in four countries.
- 'Mental health' is reframed as 'thinking healthy' and presented as psychosocial support for all eligible.
- Stigmatising language is shifted to suit context (example: 'depression' to 'stress').

## Operational



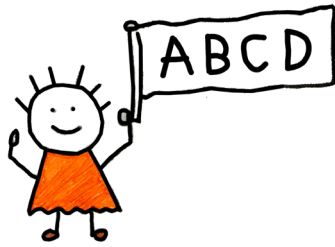
- Individual intervention is adapted to support group.
- Depression prevalence screening is altered to verbal assessment of young mothers psychosocial needs.
- Facility staff and counsellors are included in ABCD training and daily mentorship for peer supporters.

## Technical



- Mobile app language is simplified according to end-user's feedback.
- Graphic and icon is included to allow easy implementation in group context.
- Mobile app functionality is converted to offline version.

## Considerations for phase II



- **Participatory research and co-development with inputs from end users, young mothers and young pregnant women** as well as in-country technical assistants provides invaluable information to inform tool development and refinement that is contextually relevant and readily acceptable at facility level.
- Involving multidisciplinary teams in the facility opens opportunities for **integration of mobile tools into health facility systems**. Facility integration creates space for a bidirectional referral system between mobile-based support groups and facility counselling services.
- ABCD support groups could be aligned with and be integrated into pre- and postnatal facility care, contributing to a **more comprehensive package of care for this population and identification of vulnerable mothers who may otherwise be missed**.
- A mobile tool allows for **real-time content adaptations and up-to-date resources** according to context-specific differences and peer supporter needs.
- **Support groups offer a safe space to share experiences** and feelings that may impact health as well as provides a platform to share coping mechanisms and helpful parenting skills and health information.
- A mobile tool which incorporates discussion forums with professionals is a **novel approach with a clear purpose, target and structured curriculum which enhances peer supporter confidence and effectiveness as group facilitators**.

Kindly supported by:



UNIVERSITY OF  
**OXFORD**



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN  
IYUNIVESITHI YASEKAPA • UNIVERSITEIT VAN KAAPSTAD

**BILL & MELINDA**  
**GATES** *foundation*