

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Travelling the circle together, solo: An individual protocol for the Circle of Security intensive intervention

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Conflict of Interest statement

Joe Coyne is an accredited supervisor and therapist in the Circle of Security Approach, and has acted as a contracted trainer for Circle of Security International.

Abstract

Circle of Security (COS) is an approach to help parents better understand the attachment needs of their children. The COS model, which began as an intensive, individualized intervention delivered in the context of a group, has been implemented in a variety of formats, including a DVD-based format (Circle of Security Parenting [COS-P]). This article presents a return to the original intensive intervention, adapted to be delivered in an individual therapy context and incorporating clips from COS-P. This approach emphasizes the importance of retaining video review within this intervention, showing the client directly interacting with his or her own child. The application of this hybrid format is demonstrated through the case of a mother and 5-year-old child presenting with difficulty negotiating separations.

KEYWORDS

attachment, Circle of Security Intervention, separation anxiety, state of mind, video-based parenting intervention

1 | INTRODUCTION

The Circle of Security (COS) model began as an intensive 20-week intervention seeking to improve the attachment relationships of at-risk parent-child dyads (Powell, Cooper, Hoffman, & Marvin, 2014). The initial research on this model demonstrated a positive effect on children's attachment to their primary caregiver with a significant proportion of children moving from disorganized and insecure categories to either secure or organized categories (Hoffman, Marvin, Cooper, & Powell, 2006). Since the program's beginning in the 1990s, it has been implemented in various formats, including a briefer home-visiting program (Cassidy, Woodhouse, Sherman, Stupica, & Lejuez, 2011) and an intervention within a prison setting (Cassidy et al., 2010). More recently, in an attempt to make the core concepts of the model more available within the population, the COS-Parenting (COS-P) DVD-based program was developed (Cooper, Hoffman, & Powell, 2009; Coyne, 2013). The current case study illustrates a return to the original intensive protocol through the implementation of that protocol in the context of an individualized intervention.

The original protocol was designed to be delivered over a maximum of 20 weeks to small groups of up to six parents. Cooper, Hoffman, Powell, and Marvin (2005) argued that a core strength of the approach was the development within this group program of an individualized treatment plan for each dyad. This is developed from two specialized assessments: a modified Strange Situation Procedure (SSP) and a state of mind interview with the caregiver, the Circle of Security Interview (COSI). The COSI was developed by the program originators based on existing state of mind interviews, including the Adult Attachment Interview (George, Kaplan, & Main, 1985), the Working Model of the Child Interview (Zeanah, Benoit, Hirshberg, Barton, & Regan, 1994), and the Parent Development Interview (Aber, Slade, Berger, Bresgi, & Kaplan, 1985). The COSI presents the parent with a number of reflective questions over approximately an hour and comprises three related sections: a section where parents share their understanding of their child's behavior in the SSP; a section where they reflect on their daily life with their child; and a final section where they are asked to reflect on their life growing up with their primary caregiver.

Powell et al. (2014), in their detailed discussion of the original COS 20-week treatment process, which we term *COS-Intensive*, refer to conditions and clients that may be appropriate for using the model's approach in an individual treatment modality. In the following case study, we illustrate an adapted protocol that guides the delivery of the *COS-Intensive* intervention in individual formats. This is intended to advance the COS model by providing a protocol that can be examined empirically and that allows the *COS-Intensive* intervention to be more easily utilized in routine clinical settings. This COS protocol draws from the existing DVD-based *COS-P* (Cooper et al., 2009) and *intensive COS* (Powell et al., 2014) protocols, therefore functioning as a hybrid between two existing formats. It is intended to be used when the group format is not possible, either because of organizational constraints in running the original intervention, parental inability to attend a group for practical (e.g., work schedule) or clinical reasons, or when characteristics of the child or parent make it more suitable to deliver the program individually.

In the original *COS-Intensive* protocol an individualized treatment plan was used to select key moments of videotaped parent-child interactions from the SSP to illustrate to the parent in video-tape review the strengths and struggles in the attachment relationship. The primary struggle for each dyad is determined to exist on either the top of the Circle in Figure 1 (encouraging exploration), the bottom of the Circle (supporting connection), or to left of the Circle (Hands: being an available caregiver who is in charge of the relationship). This central struggle is referred to as the *linchpin* struggle and is the primary target of treatment.

This *linchpin* struggle is addressed through two *phases* of tape review where the parent watches selected clips of the relationship. Phase 1 focuses on showing the parent how attachment, as illustrated by the Circle Graphic, is visible in their relationship, and importantly, how their child can *Cue* (show their attachment needs directly) or *Miscue* (conceal their need by indirect signaling or behaving in a way that seems opposite to their need). Phase 2 tape reviews take this further and show how the parent maintains the *linchpin* struggle by behaving in a way that perpetuates the child's struggle to show his or her needs directly. A final set of tape reviews is conducted that is based on a briefer videotaped observational assessment. This second videotaping highlights areas of improvement in the relationship—for example, parents' increased capacity to meet their child's needs in relation to the key struggle—as well as areas of ongoing struggle.

In the individual protocol discussed here, retained as central from the intensive intervention, are the tape reviews and individualized treatment planning. The *COS-P* DVD is integrated to support the psychoeducational aspects of the intervention alongside additional resources, including COS animations illustrating key concepts of the model such as the importance of connection and the role of the parent's state of mind (<https://www.circleofsecurityinternational.com/animations>), and additional video relevant to attachment relationships, readily found on YouTube. These additional materials are used to support the parent's learning in the absence of being able to see the variety of relationships that participating in a group program with other parents allows.

Sections from the *COS-P* that illustrate and explain the relevant components of the Circle (Figure 1) are particularly important. It is essential to show parents that the top of the Circle relates to their child's natural inclination to gain mastery of the world through going out and exploring, and that the parent's role here is to support that exploration by watching over, providing help when needed, enjoying activities with the child, and showing delight in the exploration. The bottom of the Circle is explained as the child's need to have a safe and reliable path to re-establish connection

Circle of Security®

Parent attending to the child's needs

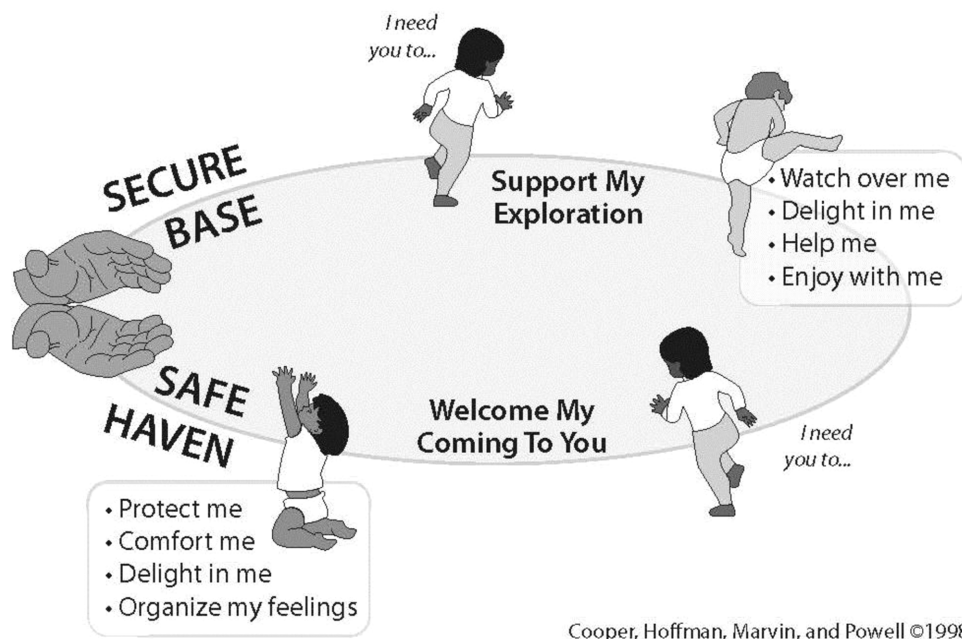


FIGURE 1 Circle of security®: Parent attending to the child's needs

when the world is too much. Here the parent needs to welcome this return for connection, offering comfort, protection, organization of feeling states, and, once again, delight in the child for who they are. Delight matters as much in vulnerability as when the child feels competent and capable. The final component of the Circle that the DVD material supports is explained to the parent as *the Hands*. This refers to the parent as a Secure Base to explore from and a Safe Haven to return to. The model considers that the qualities a parent demonstrates to establish this are through being a Bigger, Strong, Wiser, and Kind other. This provides children with a clear sense that there is a competent, capable, and compassionate person supporting them as they face the rigors of development (Powell et al., 2014).

Also retained is the general progression of the COS-Intensive intervention. The individual protocol begins with two sessions of psychoeducation, followed by the first tape review (presented two sessions in a row), which is then followed by more psychoeducation (the introduction of the concept of procedural memory, known as *Shark Music* in the COS model). After this, the second tape review is presented (twice) before another session of psychoeducation (and the second filming). Once again, the COS-P DVD is extremely important in introducing the construct of Shark Music to parents. Shark Music refers to how our own history in intimate relationships with caregivers has led each of us to be sensitive to certain emotional needs. The model proposes that when these needs emerge later, notably in the context of being a parent, our procedural (implicit) memory alerts us to the potential risk of re-experiencing unmet needs, triggering anxiety. If not managed, this anxiety leads to self-protective behaviors that can limit the ability to meet the child's needs on all parts of the Circle.

Finally, the third tape review is presented and is followed by a celebration session. A follow-up session, scheduled approximately 2 to 3 months after the celebration session, is also included. The protocol is intended to be run over 10 to 14 hour-long sessions, with the variable length based on how readily the parent responds to the intervention. The flexibility to slow the intervention down for parents struggling to reflect on their relationships is considered a key strength of delivering the model individually.

Tape reviews are the central tool in the COS-Intensive and involve selecting key moments from the SSP used in the dyad's assessment phase. These edited clips are selected using the individualized treatment plan to lead parents into a great awareness of the linchpin struggle in their relationship with their child (Powell et al., 2014). It should be noted that though the tape reviews are supplemented with additional resources, the decision was made to retain tape reviews as the centerpiece of the intervention (see below), focusing on the implicit procedural, the *hidden in plain sight* phenomena, rather than spending more time didactically presenting concepts. Hidden in plain sight is a term used in the model to refer to parents' tendency to see their relationship to their child in a way that is distorted by their own history (procedural memory) and thus overlook the attachment needs that the child is expressing. This failure to see what is present leads to patterns of insecure relating and difficulties in the relationship. The intervention approach is one in which parents are presented an opportunity through video review to see their relationship in a new way, using the COS graphic (Figure 1) as a guide. Encouraging parents to take a reflective stance and rework their understanding of the relationship in their own way requires the facilitator of the program to abstain from didactic teaching, instead of supporting parents to focus on their relationship to their child in a new way.

Individualized treatment planning allows the intervener to tailor tape reviews to meet the needs of the parent. This has always been a strength of COS-Intensive, and in the individual version there is increased ability to tailor this for the parent within the protocol itself. Concepts can be introduced as they become relevant to the parent, and can be revisited as necessary. Tape reviews can be presented for more (or fewer) sessions as appropriate. Further, the absence of other parents can increase the accessibility of the model for individuals not appropriate for a group program. The individual format may also reduce the defensiveness of some parents, who may find focusing on themselves and their parenting in a group format too challenging.

As the parent in this case did not have any other parent tape reviews to watch (as is the case in the COS-Intensive intervention), the decision was made to spend two sessions on each tape review, with all clips presented in an initial tape review session, and then revisited in the following week's session. This method has two key benefits: the parent has a chance to let the message of the tape review settle over the intervening week, and the facilitator has a chance to reflect on his or her first presentation of the tape review and adjust to the parent's needs.

2 | CASE ILLUSTRATION

2.1 | Parenting problem and client description

Liz (a pseudonym, with other identifying details of this case altered) is the mother of 5-year-old Sally. She also has a 2-year-old boy, Tom, and a 6-month-old girl, Lisa, and is married to the children's father, Robert. Liz is in her early-forties and works part-time as a pharmacist. She was referred for a COS Intervention at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) clinic by Sally's psychologist who felt that a parenting intervention that incorporated Liz's understanding of Sally's emotions and behavior was needed. The QUT clinic is a university teaching clinic where postgraduate psychologists see a range of community referrals. COS-Intensive has been run from this clinic since 2010 and the model is integrated into the training of students in the Master of Psychology (Educational and Developmental).

Sally was originally referred for support by her kindergarten for separation anxiety. Liz said that Sally had great difficulty with separation at "kindy" drop-offs earlier in the year. When discussing the COS protocol, and in particular the SSP (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978), Liz expressed concern that the separations would "undo" the work Sally had been doing with her psychologist and would increase her difficulty with separations. After further explanation of the rationale and how the assessment process was central to the intervention, Liz agreed to the process, though it was noted in the initial assessment that she had clearly prepared Sally in advance for the separations.

2.2 | Case formulation

2.2.1 | Interactional assessment: Strange situation procedure

In the first episode of the SSP, Liz and Sally were introduced to a room with a box of toys. With Liz's invitation, Sally pulled the toys out of the box and discussed them with her mother. After a minute or so of being in the room, Sally asked her mother where the therapist had gone. Liz explained that she had gone out of the room and that soon Emma (the stranger) would come into the room and she (mom) would go out of the room for a couple of minutes. (Neither Liz nor Sally had met Emma but Liz had asked the therapist for the stranger's name before coming to the clinic). As she was saying this, Liz returned to pulling toys out of the box and Sally followed her lead, also returning her attention to the box. The pair then became engaged in a game, taking photos of one another with a toy camera.

After Liz and Sally had been in the room for approximately three minutes, the stranger entered. Liz introduced herself to the stranger and the stranger replied and introduced herself. Liz turned to Sally and said, "Do you want to say hi to Emma?" Sally pushed the toy box out of her way and moved close to Liz, wrapping her arms around her neck. After further attempts to introduce Sally to Emma, Liz moved to her knees, side on to Sally and said, "Alright, so remember what Mummy said, I'll come back in, my handbag's here." Sally turned and grabbed the handbag (which contained some small toys) while Liz went on to say, "I'll leave it [the handbag] and then I'll come back. And remember what we always say with new people, you can ask Emma to play with you or you can play by yourself. How does that sound, good? I'll be back in a couple of minutes, ok?" At this point the stranger reminded Liz that she did not need to leave until the knock on the door. Liz said to the stranger, "Oh, can I just make the break?" and with agreement from the stranger, she left the room.

Sally responded nonverbally (shook and nodded her head) to the stranger during the separation but did not make eye contact with her. After approximately three minutes of separation, Liz returned to the room. When she heard the door, Sally looked up to Liz, then to the stranger and then back to the toys. Liz walked toward Sally with a smile and said, "Hey Miss." She then moved a chair out of the way so she could sit down closer to Sally. At the same time, Sally got up on her hands and knees, as if she was about to go to Liz, but then she moved back slightly away from Liz, onto her knees, and returned her attention to the toys (the stranger left the room at about this time). Liz asked Sally about what she had been doing while she was out of the room and Sally responded quietly, mentioning the toys. After a few seconds, Sally asked, "Where has Emma gone?" and Liz explained that she had gone out of the room for a few minutes but would be back. Sally and Liz continued to chat about the toys until the knock came to indicate the next separation.

At the second separation Sally asked, "Will you come back in?" Liz replied, "If you stay here for a minute." Sally said, "I want to come out too." Liz responded by telling her that she needed to stay in the room and suggested she try and put the Legos back together. Sally asked, "Will anyone else come in?" Liz told her that Emma would come back in the room in a minute and got up to leave. Sally said, in a louder voice, "Please, I don't want her to come back in." Liz again directed Sally to play with the toys she had brought and reassured her that she wouldn't be long. Once Liz had left the room, Sally called out "Mum!" and after waiting for a response she turned to the toys.

Sally was left alone in the room for three minutes before the stranger re-entered. After the stranger had been in the room for three minutes, Liz returned, smiling. Sally looked up as she entered, but then returned her attention to the toys. Liz said, "Hi there" as she moved toward Sally and sat in front of her. Liz asked Sally about what she had been doing (the stranger left at about this time). Sally did not answer Liz's question but asked "Can we leave?" Liz smiled and nodded, saying, "Soon." Sally asked Liz if she was going to have to go out again. Liz touched Sally on the head and said, "No, I don't have to go out again. You and I will be together. How does that sound?" Again, Sally did not answer Liz's question but returned to the toys. Within a minute, Sally and Liz had started a role-playing game with the toys they had brought.

Three minutes after the stranger had left, the therapist brought some books into the room. Liz tried to interest Sally in the books. Initially Sally was resistant and expressed her desire to continue playing, but Liz was able to engage her by suggesting they read the book to the toys they had brought. Sally was familiar with the book and joined in at times.

After finishing the book, Liz told Sally that it was time to pack up the toys. Sally put her toys into Liz's handbag first and then helped Liz with packing away the other toys. When all the toys were packed up, Liz gave Sally a high five and they left the room together.

2.2.2 | The parent perception assessment: The circle of security interview

In the COSI conducted immediately after the SSP, Liz was asked whether Sally showed her that she needed comfort during either of the reunions. Liz spent some time thinking about the question before replying, "I guess so, she would have liked me to play with her and engage her and give her eye contact." It seemed that Liz was aware that Sally needed comfort at the point of reunion but did not see Sally's focus on the toys as a miscue (hiding her true need for comfort) but as a need to enjoy the toys with her mother. The term "cue" is used in the COS model to refer to ways in which children directly or indirectly communicate their needs to their caregiver, while a "miscue" refers to ways children hide their true needs to maintain connection with their caregiver.

When asked more generally about the experience of the SSP, Liz said that it was less stressful than she thought it would be, though she did feel a bit worried when leaving the room, particularly when Sally was in the room on her own and called out for her. She said that she thought the separations were a bit scary for Sally, but also thought that she "did seem to self-regulate pretty well ... she seemed to get into her own little groove."

Liz later revealed that she struggles with Sally being upset. She went on to say that she finds seeing Sally "not coping" very difficult. She gave an example of taking Sally to gymnastics and finding that there was a new teacher because the regular teacher was away sick. She said that Sally got upset and did not want to join in, and although (with encouragement) she did participate for a few minutes she continued to get upset and wanted to sit with Liz. Liz said she found this "tough" and at the time was thinking about finding a "solution" for Sally. She went on to say that her greatest fear as Sally's parent was Sally "getting upset with any of her anxiety and stuff." Later, Liz disclosed that she herself had suffered from several panic attacks and had "a bit of a mental breakdown" in her twenties.

When Liz was asked if she thought that Sally knew when she (Liz) was upset or distressed, Liz replied that she thought Sally probably did know. She returned to the gymnastics example at this point and said that Sally probably picked up on her own anxiety about there being a new teacher. When asked if Sally ever tries to soothe her, Liz said that when she tells Sally that her "engine" is going fast (a concept that a psychologist has used with Sally to explain feeling dysregulated), Sally will tell Liz to take some deep breaths. Liz said that she felt good that Sally has used some of the "tools in her toolbox to help others self-regulate or self-soothe."

Liz indicated that she had had a good relationship with her parents as a child (and continued to do so). She noted that her parents had followed "the parenting style of the 70s" and went on to say, "we had a lot of rules in our house." She said that she did not want to repeat her parents' "rules and discipline [and] the black and white thinking" in her parenting, but did want to pass on the "loving kindness of family" that she learned from her parents.

2.2.3 | Additional routine measures

The Being a Parent Scale, an adaption of the Parenting Sense of Competence Scale (Gibaud-Wallston & Wandersman, 1978), and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997), a parent-rated measure of child symptoms, were used as routine measures both pre- and postintervention. On initial assessment, Liz scored in the Average range on both the efficacy and satisfaction subscales of the Being a Parent Scale. At this time, Liz rated Sally's total difficulties as being within the borderline range for clinical significance on the SDQ.

At preintervention, the Concerns of Relational Experience (Poulsen & Coyne, 2014) was also used in conjunction with the COSI for the assessment of Liz's *Core Sensitivity*. Core Sensitivities describe the distinct, yet predictable patterns of relating to others the parent holds, their state of mind with regards to relationships. This concept is drawn from the work of Bowlby's *internal working models* of attachment (i.e., representations of self and other based on early experiences with important caregivers; Bowlby, 1969/1982) and Masterson's (Masterson & Klein, 1995) object relations theory and is used to assist the therapist to understand the non-conscious representations that a parent may hold regarding both themselves and their child(ren). There are three Core Sensitivities—Esteem Sensitive, Safety Sensitive, and Separation Sensitive. Esteem Sensitivity refers to a concern that one's flaws will be exposed by a critical other, engendering shame and humiliation. Safety Sensitivity refers to a concern that one will either be intruded on, controlled, and overwhelmed by the subsequent feelings, or that one will not be able to make a meaningful connection and left isolated. This engenders in the person an attempt to make a compromise where relationships with potentially

indifferent others are managed to be “not too close” and “not too far.” Separation Sensitivity refers to a concern that one will be abandoned by an uncaring other, causing feelings of intense helplessness and depression that one will have to manage all by oneself (Poulsen & Coyne, 2017).

2.3 | Resulting case formulation

Based on the SSP, the linchpin struggle in Liz and Sally's relationship was determined to be the bottom of the Circle, based on their difficulty reconnecting, with Sally not directly showing her needs for comfort and organization of feeling, and Liz overly willing to distract Sally from these needs by orienting her attention to play. As noted earlier, the linchpin struggle is the interactional pattern with the greatest impact on the security of the relationship. It is the pattern that, if changed, has the greatest likelihood of significantly increasing the security of that parent and child. Liz demonstrated an ability to be a Secure Base and Safe Haven, referred to as being the Hands on the Circle, by organizing Sally's experience and taking charge when necessary (e.g., book reading and pack up). Liz also demonstrated that she could support Sally's exploration, engaging in Sally's games and at times sitting back to watch over Sally's play. She also provided help (particularly with manipulating the toys) when required.

Sally and Liz seemed to have an organized way of negotiating Sally's bottom of the Circle attachment-related needs—Sally would miscue Liz by engaging with the toys instead of coming directly to Liz for comfort and connection. Liz would follow this miscue by supporting Sally's focus on the toys and the two re-established their connection through play rather than direct intimacy. This avoidant strategy was evident in both reunions during the SSP. The strategy was coherent, predictable, and worked well enough that they could then focus on exploration and remain in relationship with one another. However, this strategy leaves Sally's underlying anxiety and distress about being separate from her mother unrecognized and therefore unregulated. In COS terms, this is a *limited Circle*, in which the relationship is most comfortable for the dyad on the top of the Circle so they work to maintain focus there, at the cost of responding adequately to Bottom half needs.

Based on the COSI, it was hypothesized that Liz was *Esteem Sensitive*. A theme of achievement and competence emerged throughout the interview. Her discomfort with Sally's not being able to cope and her pride at Sally's teaching others about the “tools in her toolbox” were key moments of the interview; however, this theme ran throughout. This hypothesis was further supported when in the first session Liz mentioned to the therapist that she was an “academic” type of person and would appreciate any additional reading materials the therapist could provide, and that she had begun reading the Circle of Security Intervention textbook.

2.3.1 | Treatment plan

As per the COS Intensive Treatment Protocol, five learning goals were developed based on Liz's hypothesized Esteem sensitivity. Liz's sensitivity was important to consider in ensuring that learning goals and new information were presented in a kind way to ensure that a feeling of being criticized was not activated, risking an experience of feeling shamed as a parent. The subsequent dysregulation that this might cause would block the reflective process necessary for successful intervention. These learning goals were used to guide the selection of clips in the intervention:

1. Sally needs me to comfort her and be with her when she is anxious or upset.
2. When Sally needs comfort, there are times when she miscues me by acting like she is interested in activity.
3. When Sally needs comfort, I encourage her exploration. When I respond to her need for comfort, there comes a point where I get stressed and so to manage my Shark Music I distance myself from her by teaching and supporting her focus on toys to engage with me. I try to get her to explore before her cup is filled.
4. I misdirect Sally and encourage exploration when she needs comfort as a way to manage my Shark Music. My Shark Music is about how her intense emotions make me feel stressed and anxious and the only way I know how to calm down is to feel in control so I provide scaffolding to avoid Sally's emotions.

5. When Sally is concerned and needs comfort, I am able to reassure her and provide comfort. This allows Sally to calm down and become interested in exploring and enjoy playing with me. (For example, after reunion 2 in the SSP, Sally asks Liz if she will have to leave again, and Liz is able to provide some reassurance).

2.4 | Course of treatment

The version of the individual protocol used in Liz's treatment is outlined in Table 1.

2.4.1 | First tape review

The first tape review was designed to help Liz see Sally on the Circle and to identify when she was cuing versus miscuing her attachment needs. The first clip in any tape review in the COS protocol is designed to "soften" the parent and activate caregiving instincts. For Liz, the first clip in this first tape review was of the stranger entering the room for the first time, when Sally hid behind her mother. During the first viewing of this clip, Liz identified that Sally was feeling scared and needed comfort. When viewing it in the next session, she reflected that she wished she had put her arms around Sally; she said that she felt Sally needed to be held.

The second clip was designed to show Liz successfully meeting a need on the Circle in the area in which she generally struggles (the bottom). This clip was taken from the second reunion segment of the SSP, when Sally asked Liz if she has to leave again and Liz touched her on the head and said that they will be together from now on. When viewing this the first time, Liz readily identified that Sally was on the bottom of the Circle, and reflected that she did not feel she completely filled Sally's emotional "cup" in this interaction. She also reflected that Sally's body language looked like that of a sad dog in this clip. When watching it for the second time, she said that when she herself is feeling dysregulated she does not like to be touched, but that she now recognized that Sally does appreciate physical touch as a way of calming.

The third clip was selected to show Liz a moment of struggle. This clip was taken from the first reunion, just as Liz walked back into the room. In the first viewing, Liz recognized that Sally is on the bottom of the Circle and looked as though she was going to give her a hug, but stopped herself. Liz identified that Sally was miscuing her by playing. She reiterated these observations in the second viewing.

The final clip of the first review was a celebratory clip, designed to close the review on a positive note. For Liz's review, this clip was taken from the book-reading segment of the SSP. When viewing this clip for the first time, Liz said that she saw Sally moving out of sadness and beginning to feel more comfortable. When viewing it for the second time, Liz said that she thought that Sally may have been cuing for physical comfort by sitting close to her and moving her handbag out of the way.

2.4.2 | Second tape review

The second tape review was designed to help Liz see how her Shark Music (procedural memory) interferes with her ability to meet Sally's needs. The first clip was again selected to "soften" and was taken from the first free play segment of the SSP. In the clip, Sally asks a number of questions about what is happening and going to happen and Liz answers these questions. When watching this clip for the first time, Liz immediately responded by saying, "I'm totally miscuing her and probably should have organized her feelings and comforted her." She reflected that at the time of the filming she had been concerned that providing comfort may have upset Sally, but now realized that comfort was what Sally needed. When viewing the clip in the next session, Liz said that she was hearing Shark Music in the clip and could see herself "dancing" with Sally as they both miscued one another. She said that she felt sad watching the clip, but also hopeful, recognizing how far their relationship had progressed since the filming.

The second clip in this tape review was intended to show Liz a key moment of struggle, a time when it is clear she was hearing Shark Music, which prevented her from meeting her child's need. This clip was selected from the second separation episode, from when Liz hears the cue to leave, through to when Liz has left the room and Sally calls out for her before turning to the toys she had brought from home. Liz immediately recognized that she was hearing Shark Music in this clip and saw that she was pushing Sally to explore, despite her cuing that she was on the bottom of the Circle. She

TABLE 1 Individual protocol

Session number	Key theme	Goals
1	Connection (psychoeducation)	<p>Join with parent and help him or her feel valued and respected</p> <p>Intrigue the parent in the material presented</p> <p>Begin to create the "Holding Environment"</p> <p>Reduce parent's anxiety about watching herself</p> <p>Teach the COS using tapes of other parents interacting with their children</p> <p>Begin to establish behavioral, non-critical language to describe what is seen on the video tapes</p> <p>Help the parent create positive transference to the therapist as strong, kind, and wise</p> <p>Begin to organize the therapeutic goals for the parent</p> <p>The most significant goal of this session is to help the parent want to return to Session Two—All else is secondary.</p>
2	Hidden in plain sight (psychoeducation)	<p>Continue to build the "Holding Environment"</p> <p>Create some feeling of urgency to learn new information for the benefit of the child</p> <p>Begin teaching observation skills</p> <p>Help parent learn how to give behavioral, non-critical feedback regarding the video tapes watched to learn to distinguish between following a child's cues and taking charge (leading)</p> <p>Offer first structured opportunity for parents to "turn themselves in." Turning in refers to parents engaging in a reflective process that considers the role of their states of mind in effecting important relationships.</p> <p>Build positive momentum and expectation for session three.</p>
3	Cue and Miscue (Tape Review 1a)	<p>Help the parent to manage anxiety and feel successful in presenting the tape</p> <p>Establish a norm of being focused on staying relevant to the task of understanding the tape being presented</p> <p>Establish the rhythm of how tape review works.</p> <p>Manage positively any defensive processes</p> <p>The seeds of being vulnerable and not only looking at positive moments but also looking at struggle will be established in these first tape reviews</p>
4	Being with (Tape Review 1b)	As above
5	Procedural memory	<p>Invite the parent into more vulnerability and help with seeing that there is nothing wrong with having areas of struggle.</p> <p>Invite the parent's feedback on the sessions so far. As a therapist, you are interested and concerned about her experience. You can hear what she has to say, even if it is not positive.</p> <p>Ask parents to turn themselves in regarding their Shark Music and make this process seem healthy and normal.</p> <p>Encourage transgenerational explorations of Shark Music. Each of us learns it growing up to help us survive and now the situation is different and we can re-evaluate.</p> <p>Soothe parents' anxiety about learning more about their Shark Music and create a positive expectation for the tapes to come. By risking learning about Shark Music, they will now have more choice and freedom for their child and themselves.</p>
6	Relationship struggle	<p>Consolidate parents' understanding of Shark Music. Highlight that this knowledge gives them power; it provides a choice point (to listen to sharks that no longer exist or meet their child's need despite the discomfort). This understanding allows them to both see this choice point, and make a more informed decision, rather than responding instinctively.</p> <p>Invite the parent to understand the link between Shark Music and Miscues (through limited Circles)</p> <p>Invite the parent into more vulnerability and help with seeing that there is nothing wrong having areas of struggle.</p> <p>Ask parents to turn themselves in regarding their Shark Music and make this process seem healthy and normal.</p>

(Continues)

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Session number	Key theme	Goals
7	Hearing the music (Tape Review 2a)	<p>To continue to enhance parents' feeling of being understood, valued, and supported while reducing their anxiety regarding criticism and humiliation. (supporting of holding environment and therapeutic alliance)</p> <p>To identify and explore the key area of struggle in which parents are promoting insecurity in their relationship with their children by responding to the children's needs in a defensive manner (increasing reflective capacity)</p> <p>To support reflective dialogue regarding how their children protect them from Shark Music by the use of miscues (defenses against internal representation of negative other)</p> <p>To punctuate parents' success in the management of their Shark Music</p> <p>To help the parent maintain a positive representation of herself while she learns about areas with which she struggles</p> <p>Focus upon and support the parent's emotional experience as she views her Shark Music</p> <p>Gently invite the parent into exploring the history of how she may have learned this particular form of Shark Music</p> <p>Respect the parent's defenses to the degree that she does not want to feel or explore her emotional history</p> <p>Look for opportunities to join the parent in her emotional experience and be willing to guide her in new ways of acknowledging and managing the pain she finds there. Do not try to make feelings go away, rather be with her in this newly shared experience, providing acceptance and an interest in understanding</p> <p>Explore, where you can, the parent's internal working models. What are her self-representations and representations of her child as she watches her struggle? If needed, help her explore her representation of the therapist</p> <p>Support the gradual awareness that defenses are protective processes ("Of course this is how you have managed this pain through the years") that at one time helped them survive and that now may be preventing them from learning and finding more a new sense of safe relationship.</p>
8	Seeing the struggle (Tape Review 2b)	As above
9	Integration	<p>To review the material from the previous sessions and consolidate the parent's understanding of key concepts (cue/miscue, Shark Music, rupture and repair)</p> <p>To "stocktake" any shifts in the parent's internal working models, representation of child/relationship etc.</p>
10	Choosing security (Tape Review 3)	<p>For parents to see how they are using what they have learned thus far</p> <p>For parents to see how they are now (or are not) meeting their child's needs-acknowledging the power of Shark Music</p>
11	Celebrating change	<p>To set the parent up for "flying solo"</p> <p>To affirm all that the parent has learned thus far.</p> <p>To acknowledge that there will be difficult times ahead and that even secure relationships will continue to have ruptures and other challenges (with repairs!)</p>
12	Catch-Up/termination	Follow up to assess progress 6–12 weeks postintervention

Note. This protocol was developed alongside the therapy. Further refinement has been ongoing. Further details of the COS Intervention can be found in the Circle of Security Intervention textbook and the Circle of Security Parenting manual (Cooper et al., 2009; Powell et al., 2014).

said that in that moment she had been feeling stressed and anxious about how to leave without Sally becoming very distressed. She also said she now felt sad watching it, particularly seeing that she did not give Sally any physical comfort before leaving. Liz reflected that she was surprised that Sally did not get up and cling to her (as she often did when Liz attempted to leave her at kindergarten). She reiterated this sentiment when viewing the clip in the next session and the therapist invited her to consider that she may have provided just enough scaffolding that Sally was able to "keep

it together.” The therapist also introduced the idea of “Mummy Dust,” that by setting up Sally with a toy (the toys they had brought from home) she had left a small source of connection for Sally. When watching this clip for the second time, Liz reflected that Sally getting upset (particularly becoming fearful and clinging) is what triggers her Shark Music. She said that the combination of not knowing how to soothe Sally, as well as feeling empathetic to her distress, was what made her Shark Music louder.

The third clip was taken from the second reunion and was selected to show Liz that even in moments of struggle there are times when she does meet Sally’s needs. In this clip, as Liz re-enters the room Sally looks up briefly to her mother and then quickly directs her attention back to the toys. Despite this miscue, Liz continues to engage with Sally and ask about what she has been doing. When viewing this clip for the first time, Liz identified that Sally was miscuing and recognized that this was likely because she was not used to getting “that kind of comfort” and knows that it might make Liz uncomfortable to provide physical comfort. When viewing the clip for the second time, Liz commented that she felt like she was just “going through the motions” and was not aware at the time of Sally’s emotional state,

The final clip was again a celebratory clip and was taken from the pack-up segment of the SSP when Liz and Sally play with the toy camera. On the first viewing, Liz said she wondered whether Sally was looking for some more comfort at this time, but also recognized that she looked more relaxed in this clip than in previous clips and may have been moving to the top of the Circle. When viewing it for the second time, Liz said that she felt she would have liked to have given Sally a cuddle in this clip and thought she probably needed her emotional cup filled a bit more before exploring.

2.4.3 | Third tape review

The third tape review clips were selected from a second, modified SSP, filmed several weeks after the second tape review was shown. This modified SSP did not involve a stranger and only included one separation episode. Liz looked more relaxed throughout this second filming and although Sally did not cue her need for comfort in the reunion episode, Liz did not follow her miscue and instead invited her into a cuddle (which Sally accepted) and spoke with her about the separation. The first clip showed a moment of mutual enjoyment (racing toys around the room). This was taken from the free play after the separation episode. Liz recognized though that Sally was cuing her need for enjoyment and she was meeting this need.

The second clip was selected to show an area of ongoing vulnerability in the relationship. This clip came from the separation episode from when Liz heard the cue to leave the room. In this clip, Liz scaffolds her exit, giving Sally a hug and a kiss. Sally walks with Liz to the door, Liz gives her another hug and then directs her back to the toys before leaving. Sally waits a moment before opening the door (as if to check if Liz is just behind the door). When she cannot see anyone, she closes the door and goes to sit with the toys. Liz said that she thought that Sally was on the bottom of the Circle, though was not overly anxious or afraid. She saw that Sally asking to walk her to the door was her cuing for comfort (which Liz provided).

The third clip was selected to show aspects of the relationship which have improved. This clip came from the reunion episode. Sally was playing with toys when Liz re-entered the room and she continued to fiddle with them as Liz walked toward her with open arms. However, as soon as Liz got close enough, Sally dropped the toys and went to Liz. Liz held Sally for several moments and the two talk quietly about the separation before Sally returned her attention to the toys. As Sally moved toward the toys and showed Liz what she had been doing during the separation, Liz kept a hand on Sally’s leg, maintaining an openness to providing further comfort. When watching this clip Liz said she wondered whether she had provided enough comfort to fill Sally’s cup (before she moved to the toys), but recognized that she had maintained her availability to Sally and had not been “put off” by her miscue.

The final “celebratory” clip was taken from the book-reading segment when Sally climbed into her mother’s lap for the story. Liz said that she noticed Sally came straight into her lap (without asking) and she said she thought that this was due to them both working on having a more comfortable physical relationship.

2.5 | Outcome and prognosis

The second filming, of the modified strange situation, indicated that Liz and Sally's relationship was moving toward security, although it was not formally coded. In the final few sessions, Liz mentioned that Sally's kindergarten teachers had mentioned that they thought Sally was "blossoming" and that she herself thought Sally was able to come to both herself and Robert for comfort more often. At the end of therapy Liz's scores on the Being a Parent Scale had risen from within the Average range, to within the Above Average range (for both the efficacy and satisfaction subscales). Sally's total difficulties score on the SDQ (as reported by Liz) had reduced from being within the borderline clinical range to being within the normal range.

In the termination or "catch-up" session (conducted approximately 3 months after the "final" session), Liz said that Sally had "taken to school like a duck to water" and was "thriving." She also commented that she felt more confident providing Sally with comfort and noticed that Sally was cuing her more frequently and miscuing her less frequently (for comfort).

3 | CLINICAL PRACTICES AND SUMMARY

This case study demonstrates how the COS Intervention, applied in an individual context for a mother whose daughter was experiencing separation anxiety, can result in increased security in parent-child relationships. The individual protocol presented here represents a hybridization of two forms of the approach to provide a robust delivery of the intervention in a new modality. This innovation preserves central treatment components like individualized treatment planning from detailed attachment-based assessment, alongside reflectively oriented treatment tasks such as tape review, while integrating pre-prepared video footage into the psychoeducational components to offset the absence of group modeling and feedback.

In the discussed case, the process of engaging reflectively with the struggles in her relationships with her daughter, while experiencing the empathic support of the therapist to contain her own Shark Music, allowed Liz to develop the capacity to respond more sensitively to her child's needs. In the case of this dyad, this was accomplished through Liz's increased capacity to respond and meet Sally's needs on the bottom of the Circle, particularly in moments of connection around difficult feelings for Sally.

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