



Family Stability and Wellness Post-Permanency



CONTINUUM OF POST-ADOPTION NEEDS

Module 10, Lesson 1 discusses different levels of need in youth and families after adoption, with close to half of adopted youth requiring mental health services at some point over their development. Risk factors in children, parents and their environment can compound adjustment challenges.

Post-adoption services need to be matched to the level of need of the child and family. For about 20% of families adopting from foster care and some in other types of adoptive families, challenges will be significant and can threaten adoption stability. These families usually require intensive services, crisis intervention, environmental interventions, and possibly residential treatment. **Appropriate treatment can fortify their commitment, improve adjustment and prevent adoption breakdowns.**

Types of Adoption Instability

Adoption instability can occur in different ways, either formally or informally. For a meaningful permanence, youth need enduring connections based on attachment, trust, and acceptance. Some types of instability include:

Disruption: child removed prior to finalization.

Dissolution: adoptive parents' rights are legally dissolved in court.

Discontinuity: child lives away from family either temporarily or permanently.

Unregulated custody transfer/rehoming: custody is transferred without oversight.

Relational impermanence: youth and parents become estranged, end their relationship.



Choose a foster or adoptive family from your practice who experienced a breakdown in their relationship. List all the risk factors in the youth, parents and environment that contributed to instability. What supports might have been useful in repairing those relationships and facilitating healing?

"You're just panicked, and there's just no way out of this. I have no options here. There's no door, there's no window, there's no air to breathe in this situation. You're just stuck, and you know this kid needs help, and nobody will help you. "

"Our whole family had become dysfunctional. Our marriage was coming apart. We did not know how to cope with our daughter. No one had ever told us about what she was going through. We had this fantasy that adoption was the same as forming a family biologically. We were not prepared to help our children, especially our daughter, with the grieving process, the guilt, the anger."



“All Alone” in the Twilight Zone

As shown in the previous green frame, exhaustion, hopelessness and deep despair are common in families who have chronic, severe difficulties where help-seeking has not helped. For parents and children confronting challenges, support groups can be a powerful source of information, education, support and validation.



Review the brief, *Finding and Using Post-Adoption Services*.



Find out what post-adoption services are available in your state and community. This may require phone calls to adoption agencies and child welfare departments to inquire about experts for specialized assessments, support groups, respite programs, camps or mentor programs for adopted youth, etc.



One resource is the **National Foster Care and Adoption Directory Search** at the Child Welfare Information Gateway.

Qualities of Adoption Competent Professional Help

Parents need the long-term support and intervention of an adoption competent mental health professional, who will include them in their child’s treatment, help them to learn how to attend to their child’s specific needs, and give them the tools to create a healing environment.

The challenges of adoptive and guardianship families seeking mental health services are often embedded in a multilayered context. The therapist needs to join with the family to collaborate and advocate with multiple systems.

When families are involved with multiple helping professionals, such as child welfare, crisis-intervention workers, psychiatrists, school social workers or psychologists or specialized assessment resources, communication between them is critical.

Clinicians, if they want to be adoption-competent clinicians, need to have specialized training. There's a body of knowledge that needs to be integrated together for them to be able to approach these families in not only clinically effective ways, but sensitive ways, understanding what these families have gone through, understanding what the children have gone through.

Dr. David Brodzinsky

This course represents a framework that embodies the knowledge, values and skills that are critical in meeting the complex and diverse needs of adoptive and guardianship families.

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It covers a broad array of subjects and practice models. In order to develop further mastery in this special field, a clinician needs to **dig deeper through self-guided study, supervision and consultation.**

Self-Assessment and Future Goals

The last lesson in this curriculum has many self-assessment questions to help you reflect on what you have learned and what new skills you hope to implement in your practice.



Reflecting on Dr. Brodzinsky's statement above and the content of this training, please list the concepts and skills that you intend to integrate in your practice.



Secondly, list those that you intend to investigate further.



Make a plan to integrate the learning of NTI into your day-to-day practice.



Can you identify and enlist the support of someone who can support you in building these specific skills?



Remember you can go back to the curriculum at any time and revisit materials. Do not hesitate to review any of the handouts or supportive materials.

