



National Adoption Competency
Mental Health **Training Initiative**

Training for Mental Health Professionals

The National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training for Mental Health Professionals provides the foundational knowledge, values and skills needed to enhance adoption competency for mental health professionals providing or interested in providing therapeutic or clinical services to children, youth and families experiencing adoption or guardianship. Core competencies include understanding and addressing the complex and often nuanced mental health needs of children experiencing adoption and guardianship, with a focus on the impact of grief and loss, trauma, attachment, identity challenges, and the impact of race, ethnicity, culture, class, and diversity on adoption and guardianship especially for transracial and transcultural families.

In addition to sharing clinical best practices in assessment and treatment and therapeutic parenting strategies, NTI provides an overview of evidence-based and evidence-informed treatment models that have been shown to be effective in helping children and youth heal from trauma and strengthen attachments. In addition to the 10 module/25-hour training, three 90-minute live coaching/consultation sessions will be provided to a select number of participants during the training to support the use of strategies learned in clinical practice.

Module 01: A Case for Adoption Competency

Module 1 provides an overview of the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training for Mental Health Professionals and makes the case for the need for adoption competency in working with children, youth, and families experiencing adoption or guardianship. Lessons in this module orient participants to the training; highlight the guiding principles that provide the foundation for work with children and families from an adoption or guardianship lens; provide context for the changes in adoption and guardianship practice today; emphasize the urgent need for permanency for children; and introduce salient clinical issues for children and youth and their families experiencing adoption or guardianship from foster care, private infant adoption, or inter-country adoption.

Lesson 1: Course Overview and The Need for Adoption Competency

Lesson 2: Guiding Principles That Support Effective Mental Health Practice with Children and Families

Lesson 3: Achieving and Maintaining Permanence Is Key to Well-Being and Mental Health

Lesson 4: Pathways to Adoption and Guardianship Today- Distinctive Issues that Impact Adjustment and Mental Health

Lesson 5: Core Clinical Issues in Adoption and their Link to Mental Health

Learning Objectives. Upon completion of Module 1, the trainee will

- 1.1 Acquire appropriate expectations for this course based on an accurate understanding of the focus, nature, and main goals of the training.
- 1.2. Identify core knowledge, values, and skills that characterize an adoption competent mental health professional.
- 1.3. Identify and integrate into your practice the guiding principles that inform adoption competent clinical interventions to address the unique mental health needs of children and their adoptive and guardianship families.
- 1.4. Understand the negative impact of impermanence on children’s mental health and adjustment in adoptive and guardianship families and integrate this understanding into the foundation of your practice with children in adoptive and guardianship families.
- 1.5. Describe the pathways to adoption and guardianship and how practice has changed over time.
- 1.6. Identify common myths about adoption and describe the accurate information associated with each myth.
- 1.7. Identify the salient clinical issues associated with the various adoption and guardianship options.
- 1.8. Describe the elevated risk for an array of mental health disorders of adoptive children and the rationale for adoption competent mental health services.

Module 02: Understanding and Addressing the Complex Mental Health Needs of Children in Adoptive and Guardianship Families

Module 2 provides context for the complex mental health needs of children experiencing adoption or guardianship and the importance of helping children/youth understand their life stories. Lessons focus on: new frameworks for assessment; limitations of current diagnostic and medication practices commonly used with children with foster and/or institutional care experiences; skills and techniques for helping children/youth make sense of their adoption/guardianship stories; challenges related to developmental stages of the adoptive family life cycle; goals for therapeutic work and strategies for engaging families; and how to collaborate effectively with child welfare and other professionals to support appropriate treatment planning and intervention.

Lesson 1: The Big Picture: Understanding the Factors that Shape Children’s Adjustment in Adoptive and Guardianship Families

Lesson 2: Understanding Early Childhood Experiences’ Impact on Mental Health

Lesson 3: Tools and Techniques for Helping Children Integrate Their Life Stories

Lesson 4: Family Life is Paramount in Healing: Engaging and Working with Adoption and Guardianship Families

Lesson 5: Issues in Diagnosis and Treatment of Adopted Children’s Mental Health Needs (Parts 1 and 2)

Learning Objectives. Upon completion of Module 2, the trainee will

- 2.1. Identify and describe the risk and protective factors for children and families through the lens of adoption and guardianship.
- 2.2. Integrate the impact of risk and protective factors through the exploration of case examples.

- 2.3. Understand how early life experiences and risk and protective factors impact a child's mental health and well-being and how to conduct assessment through an adoption and guardianship lens
- 2.4. Recognize the importance of knowing children's unique and complete story and the negative impacts of missing or misinformation and secrets.
- 2.5. Help children construct a coherent life narrative that makes sense of their experiences and supports a positive identity.
- 2.6. Identify and describe the developmental stages and challenges of the adopted individual's and adoptive family's life cycle.
- 2.7. Recognize the need for family systems work with parents as potential primary agents of healing and the experts on their child.
- 2.8. Identify and describe goals for family therapeutic work and strategies for engaging families.
- 2.9. Identify and describe the core mental health issues that are addressed in adoption competent clinical interventions with children and their adoptive and guardianship families.
- 2.10. Recognize limitations of current diagnostic assessment and medication practices commonly used with children with foster and/or institutional care experiences prior to adoption.
- 2.11. Identify and describe strategies for effective collaboration with child welfare and other professionals that promotes information sharing, appropriate treatment planning and intervention, and parental involvement in the therapeutic process.

Module 03 – The Impact of Loss and Grief Experiences on Children's Mental Health

Module 3 focuses on the central role of loss and grief in foster care, adoption, or guardianship and how ambiguous and unresolved loss, abandonment, rejection, and disenfranchised grief impact the mental health of children. Lessons will emphasize the different kinds of loss and grief, and children's developmental understanding of loss; focus on how loss and grief manifests developmentally, behaviorally, and emotionally; review therapeutic strategies and tools for helping children grieve and heal; provide strategies and evidence-informed therapies to help professionals and parents support grieving children; identify special issues in relative caregiving; and highlight the importance of, and provide strategies for, supporting openness and maintaining family, community, and cultural connections to mitigate losses.

Lesson 1: The Impact of Ambiguous and Unresolved Loss and Grief on Emotional Adjustments and Mental Health of Children and Families

Lesson 2: Understanding Loss and Grief Issues in the Context of Developmental Stages (Parts 1 and 2)

Lesson 3: Achieving and Maintaining Permanence is Key to Well-being and Mental Health

Lesson 4: Helping or Preparing Parents to Support Their Child's Grief

Lesson 5: Maintaining Connections and Openness

Learning Objectives. Upon completion of Module 3, the trainee will

- 3.1 Identify and describe principles and key features of grief models and the mental health impacts and behaviors associated with ambiguous and unresolved loss.
- 3.2 Describe the child's developmental understanding of loss in adoption.
- 3.3 Describe the stages of grief for a child and common behaviors associated with those losses.
- 3.4 Identify the impact of abandonment and rejection on mental health, how it presents clinically, and implications for therapeutic intervention.

- 3.5 Describe the nature and therapeutic value of life books, loss boxes, journaling, bibliotherapy, and other tools that facilitate reflection about losses and the grieving process, and build readiness for new relationships.
- 3.6 Identify and describe therapeutic strategies that help parents become aware of their own losses.
- 3.7 Understand behaviors within the context of history of loss and grief and employ rituals and experiences that help children put a voice to their loss.
- 3.8 Identify special issues in relative caregiving, adoption, and guardianship.
- 3.9 Recognize the therapeutic value of openness, and describe the importance of past connections in mitigating loss and grief.

Module 04 – Trauma and the Impact of Adverse Experiences on Brain Development and Mental Health

Module 4 focuses on the impact of trauma, including trauma from separation, on brain development, behavior, and mental health of children experiencing adoption or guardianship, as well as the implications for therapeutic interventions. Lessons focus on diagnostic limitations and tools to assess trauma history and its impact on functioning; the importance of helping parents shift thinking from “what’s wrong with you” to “what happened to you,” and strategies to support parents providing the healing environment and managing trauma triggers for their child; strategies and evidence-based/evidence-informed interventions to establish felt safety, build coping and regulatory skills, and readiness for children to process emotions related to traumatic experiences; and the impact of, and strategies to address, secondary trauma for parents and professionals. Several evidence-based interventions are shared, including Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Child Parent Psychotherapy, Trust-based Relational Intervention, Attachment, Regulation, and Competency, and Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing.

Lesson 1: Traumatic Experiences of Children Achieving Permanency through Adoption and Guardianship

Lesson 2: Understanding the Impact of Trauma on Children’s Mental Health

Lesson 3: Assessing Trauma Exposure and Its Impact on Children

Lesson 4: Treatment Goals for Remediating the Consequences of Trauma

Lesson 5: Remediating the Consequences of Trauma: Models for Addressing Complex Trauma

Learning Objectives. Upon completion of Module 4, the trainee will

- 4.1 Identify and describe types of trauma and implications for therapeutic intervention with each
- 4.2 Describe the impact of trauma and early and ongoing adverse experiences on brain development, behavior, and identity formation
- 4.3 Identify relevant diagnoses associated with trauma and the diagnostic limitations
- 4.4 Describe adoption competent clinical assessment practices and tools to assess trauma history and its impact on functioning to assure appropriate diagnosis.
- 4.5 Identify and describe therapeutic strategies and interventions with children that establish feelings of emotional safety, build coping and regulatory skills, and readiness to process emotions related to traumatic experiences, and

- 4.6 Integrate into your clinical practice therapeutic strategies that assist parents to provide the healing environment for their children to begin development of coping and self-regulation strategies
- 4.7 Establish safety and readiness to help children process emotions
- 4.8 Build coping and regulatory skills with children
- 4.9 Assist parents to provide structure and routines, experiences that nurture and heal, and support the development of coping and self-regulation strategies.

Module 05 – Attachment, Child Development, and Mental Health - Promoting Security in Adoptive and Guardianship Families

Module 5 focuses on understanding the impact of early insecure attachment, poor nurture, separation, and abrupt moves on attachment and supporting the process of rebuilding or strengthening attachments. Lessons focus on understanding the continuum of attachment styles and challenges and the importance of accurate diagnosis of attachment disorders; provide tools for assessing attachment in children and parents and common goals for reparative work in your clinical practice; review behaviors associated with child and parent attachment styles and implications for clinical intervention; highlight therapeutic tasks for children and parents to promote attachment and bonding and integrate therapeutic parenting strategies to enhance children’s safety and attachment; and discuss evidence-based/evidence-informed attachment-based therapies to address attachment challenges and create a healing environment that facilitates attachment. Additional models discussed include Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up, Circle of Security, Collaborative Problem-Solving, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, Parent Child Interaction Therapy, Theraplay, and Video-based Intervention to Promote Positive Parenting and Sensitive Discipline.

Lesson 1: Understanding Attachment as the Foundation for Child Development and Mental Health

Lesson 2: The Implications of Attachment and Separation Issues for Treatment

Lesson 3: Assessing and Addressing Attachment Challenges in Children and Parents

Lesson 4: Practice Models for Working with Parents and their Children to Address Children’s Complex Attachment Challenges

Lesson 5: Practice Models for Enhancing Parent-Child Attachment

Learning Objectives. Upon completion of Module 5, the trainee will

- 5.1 Understand attachment and recognize its critical importance for children’s development.
- 5.2 Synthesize an understanding of attachment styles and challenges in your work with families and the importance of appropriate diagnosis of attachment disorders.
- 5.3 Integrate into your clinical practice with families the impact of early insecure attachment on brain structure and social, emotional, verbal, and cognitive development.
- 5.4 Integrate common treatment goals for reparative work in your clinical work with children and families.
- 5.5 Describe the process of early attachment formation, behaviors associated with child and parent attachment styles, and implications for clinical intervention.
- 5.6 Integrate adoption competent clinical practices to assess attachment history and formulate appropriate treatment plans employing primary therapeutic models for attachment work.

- 5.7 Identify primary treatment goals and therapeutic tasks for children and for parents to promote attachment and bonding.
- 5.8 Identify and integrate into clinical practice strategies and therapeutic tools for helping families understand and honor their children’s previous attachments and unique story.
- 5.9 Identify and integrate into clinical practice strategies and therapeutic tools for helping families address attachment challenges, create a healing environment that facilitates attachment, and employ therapeutic parenting strategies that enhance children’s safety and attachment.
- 5.10 Identify clinical practices associated with attachment that are unhelpful/potentially harmful.

Module 06 – Understanding the Impact of Race, Ethnicity, Culture, Class, and Diversity on Children and Families: Implications for Mental Health Practice

In Module 6, participants will learn how race, ethnicity, culture, class, and diversity impact a child’s experience of adoption or guardianship, especially in transracial and transcultural families. Lessons focus on understanding challenges in various types of diverse families, including single parent, relative caregiver, transracial/transcultural families, children with special needs, Native American families, and children or parents with diverse sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. Lessons also focus on being aware of one’s own biases and commitment to preserve children’s culture, race, ethnic identity, and sexual orientation/gender identity/expression (SOGIE); supporting healthy racial identity development and racial socialization; assessing parental capacity to parent children of diverse cultures or gender identities; providing therapeutic strategies to help parents initiate conversations about race/ethnicity/culture and SOGIE in transracial and transcultural placements; and reviewing strategies for addressing microaggressions, bullying, and discrimination.

Lesson 1: The Impact of Race, Ethnicity, Culture, Class and Diversity on the Adoption and Guardianship Experience and Your Practice

Lesson 2: Understanding the Mental Health Needs of Children in Diverse Adoptive and Guardianship Families

Lesson 3: Talking About Race, Racial Identity, and Diversity

Lesson 4: The Mental Health Professional’s Role in Working with Children and Parents to Address Issues around Race, Ethnicity, Culture, Class, and Diversity

Lesson 5: The Mental Health Professional’s Role in Working with Youth with Diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression

Learning Objectives. Upon completion of Module 6 the trainee will

- 6.1 Identify differences among race, ethnicity, culture, class, and, children’s awareness of these at different developmental stages.
- 6.2 Understand the process of racial identity development throughout the lifespan and how to support racial identity development in transracial adoption or guardianship.
- 6.3 Demonstrate awareness of his/her own biases and commitment to culturally sensitive clinical practices and to preserve and honor children’s culture, race, and ethnicity.
- 6.4 Understand the complexities of adoption and guardianship in diverse families
- 6.5 Transform your clinical practice to meet the unique challenges of adoption and guardianship with diverse families.

- 6.6 Describe adoption competent clinical practices to assess racial cultural identity in children/youth and parental capacity to parent children of various cultures or gender identities.
- 6.7 Integrate into your clinical practice therapeutic strategies for assisting parents to initiate conversations with their children about race, ethnicity, and culture, understand the impact on their child's mental health, and to support the integration of identities.
- 6.8 Facilitate parent's understanding of how racial identity, bias, discrimination, and racism in transracial families impacts children's mental health.
- 6.9 Integrate assessment and facilitation skills to enhance parental capacity to parent children in transracial and transcultural placements.
- 6.10 Identify and describe therapeutic strategies for assisting parents to initiate conversations with their children about sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression and to support the integration of identities.
- 6.11 Identify and describe considerations related to supporting children placed in households with parents who have diverse SOGIE.

Module 07 - Identity Formation and the Impact of Adoption and Guardianship

Module 7 focuses on the nature of identity formation in the context of adoption and guardianship and the impact of missing and inaccurate information, and the implications of integration of one's adoption story. Lessons focus on understanding identity formation; barriers to positive identity; strategies to address the "Six Stuck Spots;" and the role of openness in positive identity formation. Also included are strategies for helping children and youth do the work of understanding who they are, where they came from, and where they are going; strategies for working with parents to integrate the history of birth family and influence of significant others in the lives of their children; the role of search and reunion in identity formation; and the importance of parental support in the search and reunion process.

Lesson 1: Overview: Identity Matters

Lesson 2: Identity Formation During the Adolescent Years

Lesson 3: Mental Health Professional's Role in Working with the Child/Youth to Support Positive Identity Formation

Lesson 4: Mental Health Professional's Role in Helping Parents Support Positive Identity Formation

Lesson 5: Mental Health Professional's Role in Supporting Youth Search and Reunion Journey

Learning Objectives. Upon completion of Module 7, the trainee will

- 7.1 Identify and describe how our identity is shaped, and the impact of adoption on identity formation.
- 7.2 Understand adolescence as the pivotal time for clarifying identity.
- 7.3 Integrate identity work in your clinical practice with adoptive youth and families.
- 7.4 Recognize adolescence as a pivotal time in identity formation and understand the importance of helping the youth integrate his story.
- 7.5 Identify and describe the nature of "stuck spots" in identity formation experienced by adopted children and youth, related developmental tasks, and therapeutic interventions recognized as effective.

- 7.6 Identify, and integrate clinical practices to assist youth in exploring dimensions of their identity and integrating their life story
- 7.7 Integrate into your clinical practice strategies to help youth manage difficult or intrusive questions or comments about their adoption story.
- 7.8 Identify and describe therapeutic interventions appropriate to assist parents to understand the identity formation process, support identity exploration, share difficult information and overcome their own fears.
- 7.9 Describe the clinical implications of current search and reunion practices.
- 7.10 Integrate into your clinical practice adoption competent strategies appropriate to assist parents to understand the identity formation process in connection with search and reunion, and the importance of their support during the search/reunion process if it occurs.

Module 08 – Assessment and Treatment Planning with Children and Families Experiencing Adoption or Guardianship

Module 8 will integrate and apply the information learned from previous modules to the assessment and treatment planning process, with focus on the overlay of adoption and guardianship-related issues and questions that should be incorporated to assure that clinical work is provided with an “adoption lens.” Lessons will also focus on how to formulate treatment plans that support more secure attachment, resolution of grief, and promotion of self-regulation; the integral role of parents in therapeutic work; and special assessment issues of relative caregivers.

Lesson 1: Assessment Through the Adoption/Guardianship Lens

Lesson 2: Unique Assessment Issues when Working with Relative Caregivers

Lesson 3: Utilizing the Assessment in Goal Setting and Treatment Planning and Effective Practice Models with Adoptive and Guardianship Families

Learning Objective. Upon completion of Module 8, the trainee will

- 8.1 Understand and integrate an adoption competent assessment protocol into your clinical practice.
- 8.2 Determine applicability of standardized assessment tools in working with adoption and guardianship families.
- 8.3 Recognize issues in assessment unique to relative care providers across diverse populations and cultures.
- 8.4 Synthesize your understanding of these issues into your clinical practice.
- 8.5 Formulate treatment plans that support secure attachments, resolution of grief and loss, self-regulation skills, and continued positive identity formation within a healing family environment.
- 8.6 Recognize the family as the core client and demonstrate a commitment to family systems work.

Module 09 – Using Therapeutic Parenting Strategies to Address Children’s Challenging Behavior

Module 9 focuses on the nature of challenges and concerning behaviors commonly seen in adoptive and guardianship families and the therapeutic parenting strategies that professionals can teach and support parents to use. Lessons focus on supporting parents to promote

attunement and felt safety with children; understand and reframe behaviors; develop realistic expectations; provide a balance of nurture and structure; and teach self-regulation and coping skills. The lesson also addresses challenging behaviors that are often the most problematic for parents and threaten adoption stability.

Lesson 1: Laying the Foundation for Change

Lesson 2: Therapeutic Parenting Strategies for Connecting with Children and Youth Who Push Parents Away

Lesson 3: Teaching Self-Regulation Skills through Therapeutic Parenting

Lesson 4: Addressing Very Challenging Youth and Family Problems

Learning Objectives. Upon completion of Module 9, the trainee will

- 9.1 Describe the therapeutic strategies for helping parents develop realistic expectations and reframe discipline as teaching.
- 9.2 Describe specific models of therapeutic parenting and their appropriate use with families experiencing a range of challenging behaviors.
- 9.3 Help parents promote felt safety for the child and help establish parents as the primary agencies of healing and safety.
- 9.4 Describe specific models of therapeutic parenting and their appropriate use with families experiencing a range of challenging behaviors Identify and describe specific therapeutic strategies to assist parents to develop nurturing, trusting relationships with children who have attachment and behavioral challenges, provide a healthy balance of nurture and structure in parent-child interaction, and support the development of the child's capacity for self-regulation and healthy coping.
- 9.5 Identify and describe specific therapeutic strategies to assist parents to: Develop nurturing, trusting relationships with children who have attachment and behavioral challenges, provide a healthy balance of nurture and structure in the parent-child interaction, and support the development of the child's capacity for self-regulation and healthy coping
- 9.6 Identify and describe very challenging child behaviors and family problems experienced in adoptive and guardianship families.
- 9.7 Describe therapeutic strategies that assist parents to establish developmentally appropriate behavioral expectations.
- 9.8 Integrate into your clinical practice specific therapeutic strategies with parents to address challenging behaviors and avoid power struggles.

Module 10– Family Stability and Wellness Post Permanency

Module 10 looks at adoption as a life-long process including the factors that shape adoption or guardianship adjustment and either support or threaten children's and the family's ongoing safety, permanency, and well-being. Lessons will explore the needs of children and families after adoption or guardianship and the continuum of post-adoption/guardianship services that help to prevent adoption disruption or dissolution. Additionally, this module covers the importance of positive adoption language, as well as provides clinicians with the opportunity to reflect on the impact of this training on their clinical practice.

Lesson 1: Matching Child and Family Needs After Permanency with Effective Services to Maintain Stability

Lesson 2: Post-Adoption Therapeutic Services: Working with Families Across the Life Cycle and Across Systems to Maintain Stability

Lesson 3: The Impact of NTI Training on Your Clinical Practice

Learning Objectives. Upon completion of Module 10, the trainee will

- 10.1. Recognize adoption as a life-long process, with ongoing elevated mental health needs often years after placement.
- 10.2. Identify and describe the continuum of post-adoption mental health needs and the services that help to sustain families and promote stability.
- 10.3. Understand the different types of adoption/guardianship instability and contributing factors present.
- 10.4. Identify key characteristics of post-adoption work across the life cycle
- 10.5. Assess the need to collaborate and advocate with multiple systems to support family stability and child well-being
- 10.6. Engage relevant professionals and systems in addressing child and family needs
- 10.7. Identify your strengths as an adoption competent therapist, and recognize areas in which you can expand your knowledge.
- 10.8. Recognize the importance of the use of positive adoption language.
- 10.9. Identify how this curriculum has impacted your clinical practice.

Funded through the Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau, Grant #90CO1121. The contents of this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the funder, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This information is in the public domain. Readers are encouraged to copy and share it, but please credit the National Adoption Competent Mental Health Training Initiative." Rev. 9.18

