

The National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative
Mental Health Professional Learning Objectives

MHP Module 1. A Case for Adoption Competency

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. (L1)
- 1.2. Identify and describe the guiding principles that inform adoption competent clinical interventions to address the unique mental health needs of children and their adoptive and guardianship families. (L2)
- 1.3. Describe the elevated risk for an array of mental health disorders of adoptive children and the rationale for adoption competent mental health services. (L5)
- 1.4. Identify core knowledge, values, and skills that characterize an adoption competent mental health professional. (L1)
- 1.5. Identify common myths about adoption and describe the accurate information associated with each myth. (L4)
- 1.6. Describe the clinical issues associated with adoption and distinctions between each of the current adoption and guardianship options. (L5)
- 1.7. Describe the negative impact of impermanence on children’s mental health and adjustment in adoptive and guardianship families. (L3)
- 1.8. Describe the pathways to adoption and guardianship and how practice has changed over time. (L4)

MHP Module 2. Mental Health Needs of Children Experiencing Adoption or Guardianship

Upon completion of Module 2, the trainee will

- 2.1. Identify and describe the core mental health issues that are addressed in adoption competent clinical interventions with children and their adoptive and guardianship families.
- 2.2. Recognize limitations of current diagnostic assessment and medication practices commonly used with children with foster and/or institutional care experiences prior to adoption.
- 2.3. Recognize the importance of knowing children’s unique and complete story and the negative impacts of missing or misinformation and secrets.
- 2.4. Describe the features of a framework for comprehensive clinical assessment through the lens of adoption and guardianship.
- 2.5. Identify and describe the developmental stages of family formation and points at which a therapist might intervene with a child/youth and his/her family.
- 2.6. Identify and describe specific therapeutic tools and how they can be used to help children know more about their stories, work through their past experiences, and achieve greater readiness to form healthy relationships.

- 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 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.

MHP Module 3. Impact of Loss and Grief Experiences on Children’s Mental Health

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 Identify the impact of abandonment and rejection on mental health, how it presents clinically, and implications for therapeutic intervention.
- 3.3 Describe adoption competent practices to clinically assess children, distinguishing manifestations of unresolved grief from pathology.
- 3.4 Recognize the therapeutic importance of grief and loss work and the value of openness and maintaining past connections in ameliorating loss and grief.
- 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 in work with parents to develop awareness of their own losses, understand behaviors within the context of history of loss and grief, and employ family rituals and culturally sensitive experiences that help children put voice to their loss and to heal.
- 3.7 Collaborate/advocate with other professionals involved with the child/family to reduce/avoid subsequent loss experiences.

MHP Module 4. Trauma and Impact of Adverse Experiences on Mental Health

Upon completion of Module 6, 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 the features of neurodevelopmental disorders associated with prenatal alcohol exposure (ND-PAE).
- 4.4 Subscribe to the belief that children can be resilient and reparative work can be done when parents learn and employ parenting strategies to promote healing.

- 4.5 Describe adoption competent clinical assessment practices to assess trauma history and its impact on functioning and to formulate treatment plans that employ effective and developmentally appropriate therapeutic interventions.
- 4.6 Identify and describe therapeutic interventions with children that establish feelings of safety and readiness to process emotions related to traumatic experiences and build coping and regulatory skills.
- 4.7 Identify and describe therapeutic strategies that assist parents to understand behaviors within the context of trauma history and establish appropriate behavioral expectations.
- 4.8 Identify and describe therapeutic strategies that assist parents to provide structure and routines, experiences that nurture and heal, and support the development of coping and self-regulation skills by their child.

MHP Module 5. Attachment and Bonding in Adoption and Guardianship

Upon completion of Module 4, the trainee will

- 5.1 Recognize the critical importance of attachment and the impacts of early insecure attachment on brain structure and social, emotional, verbal, and cognitive development.
- 5.2 Identify and describe limitations of current mental health practices and features of the new developmental trauma diagnosis.
- 5.3 Describe the process of early attachment formation, behaviors associated with attachment styles, and implications for clinical intervention.
- 5.4 Subscribe to the belief that secure attachments can be built/re-built.
- 5.5 Describe adoption competent clinical practices to assess attachment history and formulate appropriate treatment plans employing primary therapeutic models for attachment work.
- 5.6 Identify primary treatment goals and therapeutic tasks for children and for parents to promote attachment and bonding.
- 5.7 Identify clinical practices associated with attachment that are unhelpful/potentially harmful.
- 5.8 Identify and describe strategies and therapeutic tools for helping families understand and honor their children's previous attachments and unique story.
- 5.9 Identify and describe 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.

MHP Module 6. Understanding the Impact of Race, Ethnicity, Culture, Class, and Diversity on Children and Families: Implications for Mental Health Practice

Upon completion of Module 3, the trainee will

- 6.1 Identify differences among race, ethnicity, culture, class, and disabilities, children's awareness of race at different developmental stages, and understand the process of racial identity development throughout childhood and adulthood.

- 6.2 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.
- 6.3 Identify and describe the main challenges of transracial/transcultural adoption and guardianship and implications for mental health.
- 6.4 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.
- 6.5 Identify and describe therapeutic strategies for assisting parents to initiate conversations with their children about race, ethnicity, culture, and/or sexual orientation and gender identity and to support the integration of identities.
- 6.6 Identify and describe strategies that educate parents about the challenges and drawbacks of being “color-blind” and to help families promote their child’s racial/cultural identity and recognize and address racism and discrimination.

MHP Module 7. Identity Formation in Adoption and Guardianship

Upon completion of Module 7, the trainee will

- 7.1 Describe the impact of adoption and guardianship on identity formation and implications for mental health.
- 7.2 Recognize adoption as a lifelong process rather than an event, the importance and ongoing impact of a child’s birth family, and importance of positive cultural identity.
- 7.3 Recognize adolescence as a pivotal time in identity formation and understand the importance of helping the youth integrate his story.
- 7.4 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.
- 7.5 Describe the clinical implications of current search and reunion practices.
- 7.6 Identify and describe adoption competent clinical practices for assessing the status of identity formation and assisting children to explore dimensions of their identity, learn and manage difficult or missing information, manage feelings that arise from divided loyalties, integrate histories of their birth and adoptive/guardianship families.
- 7.7 Identify and describe adoption competent practice 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

MHP Module 8. Assessment and Treatment Planning with Children and Families Experiencing Adoption or Guardianship

Upon completion of Module 8, the trainee will

- 8.1 Identify the limitations of current diagnoses, overuse of psychotropic medications, and potential for misdiagnoses that can lead to ineffective treatment.
- 8.2 Identify adoption competent clinical assessment protocols and tools and describe their appropriate use to conduct a comprehensive specialized assessment that reveals the unique stories of children and families.
- 8.3 Formulate treatment plans that support secure attachments, processing and resolution of grief and loss, strengthening coping and self-regulation skills, and continued positive identity formation within a healing family environment.
- 8.4 Recognize the family (rather than the child) as the core client and demonstrate a commitment to family systems work.
- 8.5 Employ an ecological orientation and strengths based approaches that fully engage parents and build their understanding and capacity for therapeutic parenting.

MHP Module 9. Using Therapeutic Parenting Strategies to Address Children’s Challenging Behaviors

Upon completion of Module 9, the trainee will

- 9.1 Identify and describe the nature of concerning behaviors commonly experienced in adoptive/guardianship families.
- 9.2 Believe in safety as a priority and parents as resources and primary agents of healing and safety.
- 9.3 Describe adoption competent clinical practices to assess behaviors within the context of their life experiences and their potential as survival behaviors and to formulate treatment plans that employ effective and developmentally appropriate therapeutic interventions.
- 9.4 Identify and describe therapeutic strategies that assist parents to understand and reframe behaviors within the context of the child’s life experience, establish appropriate age- or stage-appropriate behavioral expectations, and to build a parental support network.
- 9.5 Describe specific models of therapeutic parenting and their appropriate use with families experiencing a range of challenging behaviors.
- 9.6 Identify and describe specific therapeutic strategies with parents to assist them to develop attunement, provide structure and routines, identify and manage triggers that cause dysregulation, employ praise and reinforcement, avoid power struggles, allow natural consequences to occur, and support the development of their child’s capacity for coping and self-regulation.

MHP Module 10. Family Stability Post-Permanency

Upon completion of Module 10, the trainee will

- 10.1. Recognize adoption as a life-long process, not an event, ongoing elevated mental health needs often years after placement, and help-seeking by adoptive/guardian families as a strength rather than sign of failure.
- 10.2. Demonstrate an awareness of the limitations of common mental health practices with children/youth with complex needs and the negative experiences often reported by adoptive parents seeking mental health services.
- 10.3. Conduct comprehensive clinical assessments employing adoption competent protocols and tools that reveal the unique stories of children and families and inform treatment plans that support long-term family stability and wellness.
- 10.4. Identify and describe predictable stages of identity and family formation and related clinical issues.
- 10.5. Identify and describe degrees of openness and the importance of openness in ongoing adjustment and identity formation.
- 10.6. Provide appropriate clinical support for parents to apply their understanding of their child and therapeutic parenting strategies to support individuation through adolescence and young adulthood, promote positive identity formation through young adulthood, and support search and reunion if pursued by their child.
- 10.7. Identify and describe the continuum of post-adoption support and preservation services that families may access.