

# Child Welfare Supervisor Curriculum

## Objectives for Application of Learning

~ In-Depth ~

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### About the Child Welfare Supervisor Lessons

The additional 3 hours will help supervisors support their staff to apply learning in their daily casework practice. A downloadable workbook provides supervisors with a variety of activities to choose from to use with their teams or staff individually.

For modules 2-8, the most salient points or takeaways are summarized and guiding principles that provide the foundation for the module are highlighted. Suggestions are provided to help build or strengthen staff skills and to address common challenges supervisors may encounter from staff. The activities are listed by lesson within each module.

### Suggested activities

- **Team discussion or self-assessment about attitudes, biases, concerns** (i.e., conversation prompts to discuss worker biases about placing children with relative caregivers)
- **Review of a case and discussion/processing of learned concepts** (i.e., have workers review an assessment and discuss child's risk and protective factors; what additional information would be helpful to have?)
- **Roleplay of applied skills** (i.e., what conversation starters would workers use with parents to discuss the importance of honoring their child's culture; How could workers better prepare or a child for a move to prevent abrupt separation and re-traumatization?)
- **Shared activities as a team** (i.e., develop a format for Life Books if there is not already one in use; invite a panel to come to team meeting to discuss an issue, share information.)
- **Trial of suggested tools** (i.e., have workers use the ACE survey with prospective parents to assess their trauma history and discuss what they learned; Discuss questions that could be added to your intake/assessment process to better assess a child's trauma history.)

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## MODULE 1

### A Case for Adoption Competency

#### Objectives for application to practice

- Lesson 1** Overview, purpose and need for the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training for Child Welfare Professionals
- Understands the goals and format of NTI training.
  - Defines characteristics of an adoption competent child serving professional.
  - Understands the need for enhanced adoption mental health competency in practice.
- Lesson 2** Guiding Principles that support effective mental health practice with child and families
- Understands how guiding principles impact practice and policy/procedure.
  - Understands the role of parents as partners.
  - Understands the impact of practice on people.
- Lesson 3** Adoption and guardianship options today – how practice has changed
- Understands the evolution of adoption and guardianship practice.
  - Identifies the various permanency options and types of adoption.
- Lesson 4** Children’s urgent need for permanence
- Identifies the developmental needs of all children.
  - Understands the consequences of impermanence for children.

## MODULE 2

### Understanding and Addressing the complex mental health needs of children experiencing adoption or guardianship

#### Objectives for application to practice

- Lesson 1** Overview of mental health needs of children in foster, adoptive and guardianship families
- Understands the complex, underlying causes of children’s behavioral and mental health challenges
  - Develops a comprehensive assessment of children that presents the child’s unique story; their relationships and family history, placement experiences, traumas, losses and significant events.
  - Identifies the risk and protective factors in a child’s life.

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**Lesson 2** Mental health assessment and treatment planning through the lens of adoption and guardianship

- Understands the limitations of current mental health diagnoses in capturing the complexity of adopted or guardianship children's challenges and recognizes that "survival behaviors" helped children cope with previous trauma and loss.
- Describes "Developmental Trauma Disorder" and can explain how it differs from PTSD.
- Knows the primary concerns related to the use of psychotropic medications with children achieving permanency through adoption or guardianship.
- Understands the range of evidence-base applied to specific treatment models.

**MODULE 2**

**Lesson 3** Child welfare professional's role with children: Addressing the complex needs of children in adoptive and guardianship families

- Embraces her/his role as a bridge to identify the child's needs and link to appropriate treatment.
- Uses techniques such as Life Books, ecomaps, and other tools for helping a child talk about past experiences and their thoughts and feelings about them.
- Actively assists children to "put together the pieces" of their story to understand experiences.
- Assists children in identifying and addressing their complicated feelings about adoption or guardianship.
- Responds with empathy to children's expression of feelings.

**Lesson 4** Child welfare professional's role in working with parents to address children's mental health needs

- Engages parents with empathic listening, acceptance, and support.
- Helps parents understand their child in light of the child's history and use reframing.
- Helps parents to understand their own issues related to effectively parent a specific child.
- Interacts with parents to assess and develop their support system.
- Understands the importance of communicative openness and can talk with youth about their questions/concerns as well as support this in their current family.
- Understands the importance of therapeutic parenting.

**Lesson 5** Child welfare professional's role with community mental health providers

- Knows the adoption-competent services and providers that exist in own community for children and families before and after adoption and how to find those in other communities.
- Knows the important questions to explore with providers to determine if the services are a good fit to the child's and family's needs, and can educate families regarding this.

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- Understands mental health assessments and ways in which they can use them in their work.
- Communicates with mental health providers to educate them about the child's unique story, preferably at the point of referral, and checks in with them on the child's progress or other important events

## MODULE 3

### Promoting Secure Attachments – Relationships and Experiences Matter

#### Objectives for application to practice

- Lesson 1** The impact of attachment and separation on the development of children in adoption and guardianship families
- Understands the impact of early attachment experiences on children's: 1) felt safety, 2) brain development, 3) self-regulation capacity, 4) development, 5) sense of self-worth, and 6) willingness to attach to future caregivers.
  - Understands the impact of removal from birth families and ongoing moves in care and is able to support youth through these separations.
  - Can assist children and parents in resolving separations and decreasing internal barriers to future attachments.
  - Appreciates the benefits of ongoing contact with primary attachment figures when this is in the child's best interest.
- Lesson 2** Supporting attachment after children's separation from birth family
- Understands the 4 attachment styles in children and the impact on their behavior and mental health.
  - Understands range of attachment challenges and limitations/implications of Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) diagnosis.
  - Has the ability to recognize attachment challenges in children.
  - Understands the meaning of "claiming" and "entitlement" and can coach parents in strategies for conveying these messages.
- Lesson 3** Child welfare professional's role in working with children to support healthy attachment.
- Can utilize strategies to minimize the trauma of initial removal and later moves in care.
  - Appreciates the value of maintaining healthy connections in the child's life and is able to facilitate this with children and significant others.
  - Can assess the nature of a child's attachment to caregivers.
  - Can help children discuss and better understand their past attachment relationships, including positive and negative aspects, so that they can address attachment challenges, have hope for the future, and embrace a new family.

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#### **Lesson 4**

Child welfare professional's role in working with parents to enhance attachment

- Understands the types of parenting experiences that help a child with attachment challenges to feel safe, accept nurture, develop trust, and learn healthier ways of coping with stress.
- Understands the importance of parents' self-management and self-care in order to manage their emotions during challenging interactions with their child and respond in rational, constructive ways.
- Helps parents create an environment that promotes "felt safety" in children, providing discipline with a balance of nurture and structure to teach children desirable behaviors
- Works with parents to be attuned to their child, engaging the child and building a trusting relationship.
- Helps parents develop the capacity to support children to identify and express feelings.

#### **Lesson 5**

Child welfare professional's role in working with mental health providers to support attachment

- Understands several evidence-based or evidence-informed practice models that seek to enhance attachment in the parent-child relationship.
- Appreciates the necessity of involving parents in treatment in order to create a healing environment that enhances attachment.
- Links children and parents with appropriate attachment-based interventions.
- Supports attachment-related goals in own work with children and families.
- Collaborates effectively with mental health professionals to provide needed information for their assessment, encourage parents to participate in treatment, and obtain clinician input for tracking progress and case planning

### **Module 4**

## **How Race, Ethnicity, Culture, Class, and Diversity Impact the Adoption and Guardianship Experience and Mental Health Needs of Children**

### **Objectives for application to practice:**

#### **Lesson 1**

The impact of diversity on the adoption and guardianship experience

- Is self-aware of own beliefs and attitudes related to diversity and how they may pose barriers in working with children and families.
- Understands the meaning of terms such as race, racial identity and socialization, culture, diversity, implicit bias, and white privilege.
- Understands key differences and needs that are common in diverse types of families and is responsive to issues that are important to address in practice.
- Recognizes and takes steps to ameliorate or mitigate racism in its different forms.

#### **Lesson 2**

Understanding the mental health needs of children in diverse adoptive and guardianship families

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- Understands issues that may pose challenges for diverse types of youth and adoptive or guardianship families and the impact on the child's mental health.
- Is able to engage and work effectively with a diverse range of children and families.

**Lesson 3** Child welfare professional's role with children in talking about race, racial identity and diversity

- Appreciates the importance of honoring the child's race, ethnicity, or culture in a transracial/transcultural adoption, socializing the child to have a positive racial or cultural identity, and the importance of preparing children for experiences of discrimination.
- Is able to have open, accepting conversations with children and parents about issues related to race or culture.
- Understands the nature of historical trauma and how it affects some children in the child welfare system.
- Is able to effectively address with children and parents their concerns related to the child being bullied or the victim of microaggressions.

**Lesson 4** Child welfare professional's role in talking with parents in transracial, transcultural, and other diverse families

- Understands the importance of parents who adopt transracially being aware of the importance of talking openly about race/culture and discrimination and providing the child the opportunity to have friends and role models of their own race.
- Helps children and parents prepare to address unwelcome comments from friends, family members, or acquaintances related to their child or the adoption/guardianship process.

**Lesson 5** Child welfare professional's role in working with LGBTQ families

- Understands the challenges faced by LGBTQ youth in foster care and their experience moving toward adoption or guardianship.
- Is able to support LGBTQ youth and work to minimize the potential for emotional or physical maltreatment they may experience in the child welfare system, whether from foster or adoptive parents, guardians, professionals, or others.
- Is careful to observe confidentiality of youth's sexual identity issues or concerns unless the youth has granted permission to disclose this information.
- Is self-aware of one's own attitudes toward LGBTQ individuals.
- Is comfortable and accepting of LGBTQ foster/adoptive parents or guardians and is able to facilitate discussion of challenges they may face in parenting.

## MODULE 5

### Impact of Loss and Grief Experiences on Children's Mental Health

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## Objectives for application to practice

- Lesson 1** The impact of ambiguous and unresolved loss on emotional adjustment and mental health
- Understands the complexity of factors influencing the loss experiences of youth in foster care, adoption, and guardianship.
  - Understands the nature of ambiguous loss, disenfranchised grief, complicated grief, and childhood traumatic grief.
  - Can address common questions and concerns of youth that pose barriers to resolving losses.
  - Identifies the many different types of loss that youth coming through the child welfare system experience.
  - Appreciates the importance of maintaining connections when in the child's best interest.
- Lesson 2** Understanding loss and grief in the context of developmental stages, emotional adjustment and mental health of children
- Understands differences in how children think about and express grief at different developmental stages, and what behaviors are commonly seen.
  - Understands how children and adults process grief differently and how grief resurfaces for children as they develop.
  - Recognizes expressions of grief in children with whom they work and works to address these with the child, parent, and mental health professional.
  - Understands the 5 stages of grief and recognizes elements of these in youth's responses.
  - Recognizes the additional layers of loss that come with the termination of parental rights.
- Lesson 3** Child welfare professional's role in helping children deal with loss and grief
- Engages children in discussions related to their loss experiences and responds appropriately to address their feelings and thoughts.
  - Understands the key elements of addressing grief with children and youth.
  - Understands the 3-5-7 model and seeks to apply it where applicable in their work with children.
- Lesson 4** Child welfare professional's role with adoptive parents and guardians and facilitating healthy transitions
- Helps parents to understand their role in supporting children who are grieving.

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- Supports birth parents in coping with grief.
- Identifies the elements of a good good-bye and uses practice strategies to support children through difficult transitions.
- Helps adoptive parents and guardians address their own loss and grief issues and establish rituals that facilitate children's integration into their families.
- Understands the unique issues in relative adoptions or guardianships and can address these in practice.

### **Lesson 5**

Maintaining connections and openness and the child welfare professional's role with mental health providers in helping children deal with loss and grief

- Appreciates the value of maintaining meaningful and healthy connections in a child's life.
- Assesses the extent to which openness with significant others is in the child's best interest.
- Works to overcome barriers to openness, when this is beneficial to the child.
- Collaborates with mental health professionals to address children's loss and grief issues – through providing important information at referral, advocating for caregivers to be involved in treatment, talking with providers about openness as needed, and maintaining ongoing communication with the provider to assess progress.

## **MODULE 6**

### **Impact of Early and Ongoing Trauma on Child Development and Mental Health**

#### **Objectives for application to practice:**

### **Lesson 1**

Traumatic experiences of children achieving permanence through adoption and guardianship

- Understands trauma-related terms, such as child traumatic stress, cumulative trauma, complex trauma, triggers, and others.
- Understands the neurochemical impact of trauma and the effects of early trauma on the developing brain.
- Assesses the impact of pre-placement traumatic experiences, initial removal, and placement changes on children.
- Identifies factors that can be enhanced to promote resilience from trauma.

### **Lesson 2**

Understanding the psychological impact of trauma and children's adaptations

- Understands the psychological impact of trauma, from the perspective of traumagenic states, the PTSD diagnosis, and the nature of complex trauma and developmental trauma disorder.
- Recognizes trauma symptoms in children as well as symptoms of sensory processing disorder.
- Understands the link between traumatic experiences and "survival behaviors" – strategies children use to cope with traumatic stress and survive.

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**Lesson 3** Child welfare professional's role in working with children to identify and address the impact of trauma

- Assesses the traumas a child experienced before and after placement and the impact that can be identified on the child's perceptions, behaviors, and mental health symptoms.
- Reduces system-related traumas to children by minimizing moves in care, preparing children for moves or other events, and supporting them through necessary transitions.
- Supports children's healing from traumatic experiences by helping them begin to talk about their experiences, memories, and feelings; by conveying empathy and reality-based information about their situation; and by linking them with appropriate trauma-based mental health services.
- Promotes children's resilience through collaboration with parents, mental health professionals, and other significant adults in the child's life in order to facilitate healing from trauma.

**Lesson 4** Child welfare professional's role in working with parents to understand and address the impact of trauma

- Engages parents to understand and address the child's trauma-related needs and encourages their participation in children's mental health treatment.
- Understands important goals to address with parents to enhance the child's "felt safety."
- Understands the goals and strategies of therapeutic parenting and can identify when these are needed by a specific child.
- Engages children in beginning to process and integrate significant traumas and life experiences and collaborates with parents and mental health professionals in this work.

**Lesson 5** Child welfare professional's role in working with mental health and other professionals to address the impact of trauma; the impact of secondary traumatic stress on child welfare professionals

- Identifies sources of secondary traumatic stress in their own practice and develops strategies to reduce this.
- Helps parents who are struggling with STS to develop strategies for reducing it.
- Links children who have trauma-related mental health needs with mental health professionals who are competent in trauma-focused interventions.
- Collaborates effectively with mental health professionals in order to understand the child's needs and progress

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## MODULE 7

### Positive Identity Formation and the Impact of Adoption and Guardianship

#### Objectives for application to practice

- Lesson 1** Overview: a developmental understanding of identity formation
- Understands the importance of self-identity, how it is formed, and its relationship to mental health.
  - Appreciates how experiences of removal, maltreatment, parents' losing or relinquishing rights to their child, placement moves, and being placed in a new family impacts children's identity and self-esteem.
  - Is able to talk with children and parents to address children's struggles to integrate disparate aspects of their history, answer their questions to the extent possible, and provide positive influences on identity.
  - Can collaborate with mental health professionals in this work.
- Lesson 2** Identity formation during the adolescent years and challenges for youth experiencing adoption and guardianship
- Understands the process of identity formation during adolescence and areas of vulnerability or concerns foster or adopted/guardianship youth face.
  - Understands how the meaning of previous loss and trauma experiences may be viewed differently as a teen.
  - Understands changes that take place during early, middle, and late adolescence.
  - Recognizes the "six stuck spots" for adolescents in relation to adoption and how adoption and guardianship may influence identity formation during the teen years.
  - Appreciates the role of openness in positive identity formation.
- Lesson 3** Child welfare professional's role with children in supporting positive identity formation
- Appreciates the importance of gathering and documenting information essential for the child's identity formation.
  - Obtains information and important items from birth and foster families, which is important for youth in developing an integrated life story and for adoptive parents or guardians in parenting the child.
  - Talks with children about their questions and concerns related to past and current experiences.
  - Prepares adoptive parents or guardians to develop communicative openness in addressing children's questions and concerns about their past, their birth family, adoption or guardianship, and other issues related to their identity.
  - Helps youth develop answers for tough questions or comments they receive from peers or others.
  - Understands how identity can be influenced by adoption or guardianship, as well as the home-finding process.

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#### **Lesson 4**

Child welfare professional's role with parents in helping children and youth with positive identity formation

- Helps parents and guardians understand the importance of telling the truth to the child at the child's developmental level, even when the information is difficult.
- Helps parents and guardians practice the appropriate language to use in telling the whole truth, not the "hole" truth, while preserving the child's positive sense of self.
- Teaches parents and guardians the importance of repeating the information about the child's history at different developmental levels, as understanding of the information changes.
- Helps parents and guardians understand that keeping secrets can be more harmful to the child in the long run, as the child will make up the story if information is missing.
- Recognizes the "Six Stuck Spots" for parents in relation to sharing information with their children and teens.

#### **Lesson 5**

Child welfare professional's role with youth search and reunion journey and collaboration with mental health providers

- Understands the role that Search and Reunion plays in the identity formation of the adolescent, and honors the need for knowledge.
- Recognizes that the adolescent needs to know his complete story as part of his search for an integrated identity during this critical time of development, and as he moves toward adulthood.
- Recognizes the value of the search process and reunion with birth family members when it is possible, if the youth is asking for contact and if it is safe.
- Takes into account the 10 Things about Search and Reunion in evaluating how to help a youth proceed with a search and reunion experience.
- Recognizes that Mental Health Professionals need information about the youth's search and reunion journey and how the youth has reconciled his identity with at least two families – birth and adoptive or guardianship – and maybe more if he has been in several foster homes.

### **MODULE 8**

#### **Promoting Family Stability and Preservation Post Adoption and Guardianship**

##### **Objectives for application to practice**

#### **Lesson 1**

Risk and protective factors impacting child and family adjustment after adoption or guardianship

- Understands the complexity of factors influencing post-adoption or guardianship adjustment and the most important parental qualities for sustaining permanency.
- Educates parents about the normative developmental challenges related to adoption.
- Recognizes and addresses risk factors that challenge adjustment.
- Works to enhance protective factors that support positive adjustment.

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- Understands the difference between legal permanence and relational permanence and factors that need strengthening to establish relational permanence.

## **Lesson 2**

The complex needs of children and families following adoption or guardianship

- Understands the continuum of mental health-related needs in adoptive or guardianship families and plans with permanent parents how to address these needs.
- Refers children and families for early intervention services when indicated.
- Engages adoptive or guardianship families who call for help in an empathic, non-blaming manner.
- Recognizes the qualities in a therapist that indicate adoption-competence and types of unhelpful help.
- Prepares youth and families for the resurfacing of loss and trauma issues and helps them plan for how they can receive help in the future.

## **Lesson 3**

A developmental framework for normative challenges and evolving mental health needs of children and their adoptive and guardianship families

- Identifies needs of children and identifies parents who can best address these needs over time.
- At the time of placement, works with parents to understand the probable adjustment challenges that the child may experience over time.
- Prepares parents to access supports and services after permanency and reframes seeking help as a strength.
- Knows the continuum of formal or informal post-adoption or guardianship services that are available in their service area.

## **Lesson 4**

Matching child and family needs to post-adoption and guardianship services

- Identifies the primary types and causes of instability in adoptive and guardianship families and can recognize these in families with whom they have contact.
- Understands the common dynamics in families that indicate serious risk of instability.
- Recognizes stages of adoption or guardianship breakdown.
- Connects struggling families with appropriate services that fit their needs at the earliest possible point.

## **Lesson 5**

Review of lessons and tools to enhance adoption mental health competence

- Identifies primary tools and strategies that will be used in practice

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