



School-Based Mental Health Professionals Training

Adapted from National Adoption Competency
Mental Health Training Initiative

Better Outcomes for Children & Youth!

NTI School-based Mental Health Professionals Training provides the foundational knowledge, values and skills school counselors, social workers, psychologists, and school-based therapists need to effectively support the mental health and well-being of children experiencing foster care, adoption, kinship care and/or significant separation and loss of birth family, community, and culture.

Adapted from the nationally recognized National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training developed by C.A.S.E., core competencies include understanding and addressing the complex and often nuanced mental health needs of children who have experienced significant losses and/or trauma. This includes understanding the impact of loss and grief and early adverse experiences on well-being, development, attachment and identity. Also discussed are the implications of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression especially for children in transracial and transcultural families. It includes foundational information, best practices, and therapeutic strategies to support children of all ages in the school setting, including strategies to assist educators and other educational staff to effectively support children with challenging behaviors.

Module 01: A Case for Adoption Competency

Module 1 provides an overview of the training and makes the case for the need for adoption competency - that is, a foundational understanding of the needs and challenges of children,

youth, and families experiencing foster care, adoption or guardianship or other significant separations from and loss of family, community, and culture. 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; 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: The Language of Adoption

Lesson 3: Guiding Principles That Support Effective Mental Health Practice

Lesson 4: Achieving and Maintaining Permanence Is Key to Well-Being 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

- Acquire appropriate expectations for this course based on an accurate understanding of the focus, nature, and main goals of the training.
- Identify core knowledge, values, and skills that characterize an adoption competent mental health professional.
- Recognize the importance of using positive adoption language.
- Identify and integrate into your practice the guiding principles that inform adoption competent clinical interventions to address the unique mental health needs of children, youth, and their families.
- Understand the negative impact of impermanence on mental health and adjustment in adoptive and guardianship families.
- Identify the salient clinical issues associated with the various adoption and guardianship options.

Module 02: Understanding and Addressing the Complex Mental Health Needs of Children & Youth 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 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; and how to collaborate effectively with child welfare and other professionals to support appropriate treatment and intervention.

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

Lesson 2: Understanding the Impact of Early Childhood Experiences on Mental Health

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

Lesson 4: Issues in Diagnosis and Treatment of Adopted Children’s Mental Health Needs

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

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

- Understand how early life experiences and risk and protective factors impact a child's or youth's mental health and well-being.
- Recognize the importance of knowing children's unique and complete story and the negative impacts of missing or misinformation and secrets.
- Help children and youth construct a coherent life narrative that makes sense of their experiences and supports a positive identity.
- Conduct assessment through an adoption and guardianship lens.
- Identify and describe the core mental health issues that are addressed in adoption competent clinical interventions with children, youth, and their adoptive and guardianship families.
- Recognize limitations of current diagnostic assessment and medication practices commonly used with children and youth with foster and/or institutional care experiences.
- Understand the treatment implications regarding Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder for this population.
- 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 – Attachment, Child Development, and Mental Health

Module 3 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 how attachment challenges manifest in the classroom, including strategies for supporting felt safety and security in the school setting.

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

Lesson 2: The Implications of Attachment Challenges in Treatment

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

- Comprehend attachment and recognize its critical importance for children's development.
- Synthesize an understanding of attachment patterns and challenges in your work with families and the importance of appropriate diagnosis of attachment disorders.
- Assess the impact of early insecure attachment on brain structure and social, emotional, verbal, and cognitive development.
- Integrate common treatment goals for reparative work with children, youth, and families.

Module 04 – The Impact of Loss and Grief Experiences on Children's & Youth's Mental Health

Module 4 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, children's developmental understanding of loss; and how loss and grief manifests developmentally, behaviorally, and emotionally. We will review therapeutic strategies and tools for helping children grieve and heal; 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 Loss and Unresolved Grief on Emotional Adjustment and Mental Health

Lesson 2: Understanding Loss and Grief Issues in Adoption in the Context of Developmental Stages, Emotional Adjustments, and Mental Health of Children & Youth.

Lesson 3: Understanding and Supporting the Stages of Grief in Adoption and Helping Youth Manage Their Losses.

Lesson 4: Impact of Abandonment and Rejection on Children’s Mental Health

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

- To identify and describe principles and key features of grief models and the mental health impacts and behaviors associated with ambiguous loss and unresolved grief
- Describe the child’s developmental understanding of loss in adoption.
- Describe the stages of grief for a child and common behaviors associated with those losses.
- Integrate two loss and grief models that support grief work in your clinical practice.
- Identify the impact of abandonment and rejection on mental health, how it presents clinically, how to support children through separation, and implications for therapeutic intervention, and

Module 05 – Trauma and the Impact of Adverse Experiences on Brain Development and Mental Health

Module 5 focuses on the impact of trauma, including trauma from separation, and its impact on brain development, behavior, and mental health of children experiencing adoption or guardianship, as well as the implications for therapeutic work. Lessons focus on tools to assess trauma history and its impact on functioning; the importance of shifting thinking from “what’s wrong with you” to “what happened to you;” how to manage trauma triggers and learn strategies to provide a healing environment in the school setting, including establishing felt safety, building coping and regulatory skills, and supporting readiness for children to process emotions related to traumatic experiences; and address secondary trauma for parents and professionals.

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: Models for Addressing Complex Trauma

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

- Identify and describe types of trauma and implications for therapeutic intervention with each
- Describe the impact of trauma and early and ongoing adverse experiences on brain development, behavior, and identity formation
- Identify relevant diagnoses associated with trauma and the diagnostic limitations
- Describe adoption competent practices and tools to assess trauma history and its impact on functioning.
- 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

- Synthesize therapeutic strategies and interventions in your work that help youth integrate their life story, establish safety and readiness to process emotions, provide structure and experiences that nurture and heal, and support the development of coping and self-regulation.

Module 06 – Understanding the Impact of Race, Ethnicity, Culture, Class, and Diversity on Children and Families

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; providing therapeutic strategies to initiate important conversations and reviewing strategies for addressing microaggressions, bullying, and discrimination.

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

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

Lesson 3: Talking About Race and Racial Identity

Lesson 4: The Mental Health Professional’s Role in Working with Youth with Diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression

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

- Identify differences among race, ethnicity, culture, class, and children’s and youth’s awareness of these at different developmental stages.
- Understand the process of racial identity development throughout the lifespan.
- Demonstrate awareness of your own biases and commitment to culturally sensitive clinical practices and to preserve and honor children’s and youth’s culture, race, and ethnicity.
- Increase your understanding of the complexities of adoption and guardianship in diverse families
- Transform your practice to meet the unique challenges of adoption and guardianship families.
- Describe adoption competent practices to assess racial cultural identity in children and youth.
- Integrate into your practice therapeutic strategies to initiate conversations with children about race, ethnicity, and culture and to support the integration of identities.
- Identify and describe therapeutic strategies to initiate conversations with students about sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE) and to support the integration of identities.
- Identify and describe considerations related to supporting students living with parents or caregivers 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 for 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.

Lesson 1: Overview: Identity Matters

Lesson 2: Identity Formation During the Adolescent Years

Lesson 3: Supporting Positive Identity Formation

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

- Identify and describe how our identity is shaped, and the impact of adoption on identity formation.
- Understand adolescence as the pivotal time for clarifying identity.
- Integrate identity work in your clinical practice with adoptive youth and families.
- Recognize adolescence as a pivotal time in identity formation and understand the importance of helping the youth integrate their story.
- 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.
- Identify and integrate practices to assist youth in exploring dimensions of their identity and integrating their life story.
- Synthesize strategies to help youth integrate their life story and manage difficult or intrusive questions or comments about their adoption story.

MODULE 8: Adoption and the Life -Long Journey: Providing Ongoing Supports for Youth

Module 8 looks at adoption as a life-long process including the factors that support or threaten children's and the family's ongoing safety, permanency, and well-being. Lessons will focus on supporting children and youth in the school setting to develop self-regulation and coping skills, including promoting attunement and felt safety with children; understanding and reframing behaviors; developing realistic expectations; and providing a balance of nurture and structure. Lessons also explore the unique needs of relative caregivers, and the continuum of post-adoption/guardianship services that help to prevent disruption or dissolution, as well as the need to collaborate across multiple systems to support child and family well-being.

Lesson 1: Teaching Self-Regulation Skills

Lesson 2: Unique Assessment Issues when Working with Relative Caregivers

Lesson 3: Supporting Stability and Wellness Long-term

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

- Learn strategies that support the development of the youth's capacity for self-regulation and healthy coping
- Describe the therapeutic strategies to develop realistic expectations and reframe discipline as teaching.

- Integrate approaches that support secure attachment, promote felt safety, provide a health balance of nurture and structure to support the development of self-regulation and coping skills in youth.
- Recognize and synthesize into your work issues in assessment unique to relative care providers across diverse populations and cultures.
- Recognize adoption as a life-long process, with ongoing elevated mental health needs often years after placement.
- Identify and describe the continuum of post-adoption mental health needs and the services that help to promote stability.
- Assess the need to collaborate and advocate with multiple systems to support family stability and child well-being.