

Accredited Certification Program in Adoption Competency for Mental Health Professionals

Module 1: Adoption History, Law, and Process

Learning objectives:

- Describe the early roots of adoption history, including orphan trains, baby farming, placing out, specialized adoption agencies, and matching.
- Describe key milestones in the history of adoption in United States.
- Identify and describe the nine different types of adoption.
- Discuss the laws that govern international adoption.
- Trace the historical path to adoption for four specific groups of children: African Americans, Native Americans, children from other countries, and children from foster care.
- Describe the laws that govern the adoption of children in foster care.
- List and describe the six steps in the adoption process.
- Identify myths that may exist about adoption, adopted children and youth, birth parents, and adoptive families.
- Identify some clinicians' beliefs that may affect their work with adopted persons, adoptive/kinship families, and birth families, including those beliefs that can strengthen the relationships as well as those that may compromise them.
- Describe confidentiality and mandatory child maltreatment reporting requirements when working with adoptive and birth families.

Module 2: Theoretical/Philosophical Framework of Adoption Competent Mental Health Practice

Learning objectives:

- Explain the rationale for TAC and main goals in developing and offering the training.
- Compare the use of mental health services by adopted children and youth with use by non-adopted children and youth.
- Describe key elements of the definition of adoption competent mental health professional.
- Identify unhelpful responses of therapists that many adoptive parents have reported and more helpful alternative responses that better reflect adoption competence.
- Describe and illustrate types of clinical work with birth and adoptive parents and with children/youth at different stages of the adoption process.
- Compare adoption competent clinical practice principles and differentiate them from common perspectives and practices.
- Identify inappropriate adoption language and substitute positive language to correct/improve.
- Describe and illustrate through examples how biases affect clinical practice with adopted persons, adoptive families, and birth families.
- Describe and illustrate through examples the impacts of the adoption process:
 - On adopted individuals
 - On birth parents
 - On adoptive parents process

Module 3: Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Adopted Individuals and Their Families

Learning objectives:

- Identify factors that contribute to elevated risk for mental and behavioral health problems in adopted children and youth.
- Identify the 7 core issues of adoption and explain the pivotal role of loss in the adoption journey.
- Explain the value of understanding the seven core issues of adoption to clinicians and to members of adoption kinship networks.
- Explain and give examples of how each of the core issues may impact each member of the adoption kinship network.
- Identify and describe the five essential domains of adoption competent assessment identified by Murray and Sullivan.
- Distinguish between levels of communicative openness among adoptive families using the “Blind, Balanced, and Blaming” concept.
- Identify and describe the main features of biopsychosocial assessment articulated by Dr. David Brodzinsky.
- Discuss potential benefits and concerns about overmedication of children/youth, particularly in foster care, and implications for therapists' collaboration with prescribing physicians.
- Identify effective therapist approaches to engaging adoptive families including messages communicated to adoptive parents and to adopted children and youth.

Module 4: The Impact of Separation, Loss and Grief: Clinical Strategies for Healing

Learning objectives:

- Explain why loss and grief are key to understanding clinical issues in adoption.
- Identify reasons why the loss and grief reactions of adopted and foster children are often not recognized.
- Define ambiguous loss, distinguish between the two types of ambiguous loss, and describe how ambiguous loss may manifest in those who are affected.
- Give examples of specific losses that children and youth often experience related to adoption.
- Compare the loss experiences of adopted children separated from their birth parents at birth with the experiences of those separated later, after having experience living with the birth family.
- Describe behavioral reactions to ambiguous loss.
- Explain how ambiguous loss may complicate a child's ability to resolve grief and form new relationships.
- Identify factors that influence how a child reacts to grief.
- Identify basic clinical strategies in addressing issues of grief and loss with adult adoptees.
- Describe features of disenfranchised grief defined by Doka and circumstances under which it occurs.
- Explain the nature of disenfranchised grief and its potential impacts on adoptive parents and birth parents.
- Contrast the experience of loss by adoption with the experience of loss by death.
- Identify and describe the four psychological tasks associated with the Good Grief Model.
- Describe goals and strategies that can be used in individual and family therapy to help children grieve their losses and facilitate deeper attachment between child and parent.
- Explain the purpose and appropriate uses of Loss Box and of W.I.S.E. Up! as therapeutic tools.

Module 5: Trauma and Neurobiology

Learning objectives:

- Explain the roles and relationship of genes and experiences in brain development.
- Explain the concept of use-dependent brain development and its clinical implications.
- Define brain plasticity, describe how it varies by region of the brain and developmental stage, and the implications for interventions that build new neural pathways.
- Explain the roles of nurturing and capacity-building in addressing the effects of early adversity.
- Explain how in utero exposure to alcohol may affect brain development, and give examples of interventions to address these impairments.
- Compare moderate/tolerable stress with toxic stress and describe the effects of each.
- Distinguish between behaviors associated with dissociation versus hyperarousal responses.
- Explain how different types of early infant-caregiver relationships impact how children view their worlds and how they form relationships.
- Explain how neglect affects brain development.
- Identify domains of a developmental assessment and the importance of parents' understanding of developmental age in establishing appropriate expectations.
- Identify the most common diagnoses for children/youth with histories of chronic trauma.
- Distinguish between PTSD and Developmental Trauma Disorder citing limitations of PTSD diagnosis for traumatized children.
- Describe key features of Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization, and Neuro-sequential Model of Therapeutics.

Module 6: Enhancing Parent-Child Attachment

Learning objectives:

- Define attachment according to John Bowlby and explain its relationship to an individual's mental health.
- Describe the interactive processes by which internal working models are developed and attachment occurs.
- Compare and contrast the parenting behaviors associated with secure, insecure avoidant, insecure ambivalent, and disorganized attachment styles of attachment.
- Identify and give examples of domains of impairment in children exposed to complex trauma.
- Differentiate attachment disorder from insecure attachment patterns.

- Describe the role of observation in assessing attachment in infants, children, and youth.
- Describe key features of assessment of children with attachment challenges using each of the following methods: Child Attachment Interview (CAI), Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire (AAQ), Bird’s Nest Drawing, Wall around the Heart.
- Describe the key features, primary therapeutic goals, and examples of appropriate uses of Attachment, Regulation, and Competency (ARC).
- Describe the key features, primary therapeutic goals, and an example of appropriate uses of Therapy.
- Describe the key features, primary therapeutic goals, and an example of appropriate uses of Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI).
- Describe the key features, primary therapeutic goals, and an example of appropriate uses of Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy (DDP).
- Explain the beneficial effects of intersubjectivity for child and parent.
- Describe the elements in the PACE “attitude” adopted by therapist and parent in DDP and benefits to child and parent.

Module 7: Supporting Identity Formation for Adolescents and Young Adults

Learning objectives:

- Compare and contrast key cognitive and social-emotional development tasks in early, middle, and late stages of adolescent development.
- Explain the clinical implications of Minority Stress Theory for adopted youth who are sexual minorities.
- Identify parental strategies for reducing health and mental health risks for their LGBTQ youth.
- Explain primary lessons from neuroscience about adolescent brain development and primary implications for clinical practice supporting identity formation.
- Describe the implications of emerging adulthood for clinical work with young adults who are adopted.
- Describe and give examples of the factors influencing the impact of early abuse and neglect on adolescents.
- Describe the impact of sexual abuse on an adolescent’s perception of the world, self-image, behavior toward others, and relationships with others.
- Compare and contrast the effects of trauma occurring in children who are school age and youth during adolescence.
- Describe the factors associated with increased risk for suicide and/or substance abuse in adopted adolescents.
- Identify and describe each of the “six stuck spots” that may affect adopted teens.
- Identify parental strategies for meeting their adolescent’s needs related to identity formation.
- Define and describe features of communicative openness in adoption.
- Describe the four identity statuses identified by Dr. James Marcia and illustrate each with an example of an adopted adolescent’s current life situation.
- Identify issues that may complicate identity formation in adopted teens.
- Explain how the Birth Parent Puzzle Mural and Mask Making activities can be used with clients to facilitate discussions around identity.

Module 8: Supporting Children, Youth and Families as they Prepare for Adoption

Learning objectives:

- Identify and describe the 3 therapeutic tasks in the 3-5-7 Model® used to guide interventions with children, youth, and families in working toward improved well-being and readiness for permanency.
- Identify and describe the 5 conceptual questions in the 3-5-7 Model® that support the 3 therapeutic tasks.
- Identify and describe the 7 interpersonal skill elements of the 3-5-7 Model® for professionals and caregivers to support the work of children, youth, and families.
- Explain the significance of sibling relationships and reactions to adoption without a sibling that may be observed in practice.
- Explain the implications of a child’s parentified role and effective therapeutic practice strategies with children and with adoptive parents.
- Describe differences between being adopted and being raised in one’s family of origin and related issues that arise and may be addressed in therapy.
- Explain the therapeutic merits and uses of lifebooks, ecomaps, genograms, and adoption family trees.
- Describe issues that are important to explore with prospective adoptive parents who have experienced infertility.
- Identify ways that adoptive parenting differs from parenting by birth.

- Identify key parent risk factors associated with adoption instability and areas for assessment and exploration during preparation of prospective adoptive parents.
- List what adoptive parents have identified as most helpful in preparing them for adoption.
- Describe issues for siblings-in-waiting and give examples of how parents and professionals can help them prepare for new siblings.

Module 9: Clinical Issues in Working with Birth and Kinship Families

Learning objectives:

- Describe best practices in pre-adoption counseling with birth parents including issues to explore, red flags, envisioning how adoption might play out, anticipatory grief, considerations around birth and relinquishment, and signing of adoption papers.
- Explain the rationale for and nature of post-relinquishment adoption counseling and longer-term support for birth parents.
- Describe the longer-term clinical issues most frequently observed with birth mothers and clinical tasks to address the issues.
- Identify common societal misconceptions about birth fathers of children who are adopted and implications for appropriate clinical work with them.
- For parents whose rights are involuntarily terminated, describe the impact and behavioral expressions of loss and grief after termination.
- Compare and contrast types of kinship care.
- Explain the benefits of kinship care for children.
- Identify challenges faced by relative caregivers, including those specific to older caregivers.
- Describe risk factors in kinship care related to guilt, loss, and ambivalence, projection and transference, hope/fantasy/denial, and loyalty issues.
- Identify key tasks for the clinician when working with kinship families.

Module 10: Openness in Adoption

Learning objectives:

- Compare and contrast the benefits and challenges of confidential, of semi-open/mediated, and of fully disclosed/open adoption for birth parents, for adoptive parents, and for the adopted person.
- Compare and contrast the clinical issues that may arise in confidential, semi-open/mediated, and fully disclosed/open adoption for birth parents, for adoptive parents, and for adopted children.
- Identify and explain key principles for current practice on openness in adoption.
- Compare openness issues that may arise when foster parents or relatives adopt with issues that may arise for prospective adoptive parents with no previous connection with the child.
- Identify issues for consideration and the clinician role with birth parents and with adoptive parents in initial decision making related to levels of openness.
- Describe issues that may arise for adopted children whose birth siblings live with birth parents.
- Describe appropriate clinical approaches to address fears of birth parents and of adoptive parents related to openness in adoption.
- Identify why birth or adoptive parents may choose to close an open adoption, related clinical issues and goals in work with these parents.
- Give examples of questions and concerns for a clinician to explore with an adopted individual before initiating search and reunion or with adoptive parents initiating search on behalf of the child.
- Explain issues raised by the availability of social media and DNA testing and the role of clinician in helping families navigate search with their teen.
- Identify and describe issues that are particular to international search and reunion.

Module 11: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture in Adoption

Learning objectives:

- Differentiate between race, ethnicity, and culture.
- Describe trends in transracial and transcultural adoption over the past two decades.
- Identify challenges that transracial adoptive families may experience in talking about race in daily life and strategies a clinician can use to start conversations on racial identity.
- Describe how children understand race at different ages and identify questions a clinician may use to assess children's understanding of and experiences with race.
- Define the term "racial identity" and describe the process by which a child develops positive racial identity and give examples of issues that individuals who are transracially/transculturally adopted experience about racial identity.
- List and explain parenting tasks that facilitate positive racial identity.
- Define "racial socialization," its protective features, and three challenges that parents experience in supporting racial socialization of their minority children.
- Identify strategies for parents of children of color to help manage incidents of racism.
- Define microaggression and give examples that may arise in the therapeutic setting.
- Describe methods by which therapists can support transracial adoptive families including prospective adoptive parents and families of adopted children.
- List strategies to increase bi-culturalism in transracial families.
- List tips for teaching tolerance during pre-school years, elementary and preteen years, and teen years.

Module 12: Therapeutic Parenting: Parents as Primary Vehicles for Healing

Learning objectives:

- Explain evidence for the importance of the parent-child relationship and implications for clinical practice.
- Identify the key components of a healing parent-child relationship.
- Identify and describe strategies for promoting secure attachments in newly placed children.
- Describe the roles of psychoeducation and coaching within the context of therapy in supporting the development or strengthening of adoptive parent competencies.
- Describe the knowledge and skills competencies that an adoption competent clinician strives to assist parents in developing.
- Identify and describe strategies and resources parents can use to strengthen coping and self-regulation in their children.
- Identify and describe strategies and resources parents can use to promote healing from trauma.
- Identify and describe strategies and resources parents can use to nurture healthy identity formation.
- Identify and describe strategies and resources parents can use to support attachments to birth families and others in the child's past.
- Identify and describe strategies and resources parents can use to effectively advocate and collaborate with systems that impact their child.
- Identify and describe strategies and resources parents can use to identify their own needs and learn to employ self-care strategies.
- Identify and describe primary content areas for adoptive parent preparation and education.