# Adoption Competence for Tribal Leaders

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# **Tribal Leadership** and Adoption Competence

## What is Adoption Competency?

Simply put, being adoption/permanency competent means a professional and/or child-serving system has the knowledge and skills to provide services that are responsive to the unique needs of children and families who experience the child welfare system. Permanency means more than placement. It means helping children and families build secure attachments, maintain healthy connections, and navigate challenges over time with understanding and compassion. Permanency thrives when systems and professionals work together to strengthen families through every stage.

Experiencing separation and loss and navigating a permanency journey impacts every part of a child's identity. The core issues (including loss, grief, rejection, guilt, shame, and identity) can surface at different stages of life for children and their families.

Permanency-competent professionals are trained to understand children's behaviors in the context of their relationships and experiences within the child welfare system. In their practice, these professionals respond empathetically to the underlying needs of children and families through family-centered, trauma-informed care. By building core competencies, practitioners can guide families toward understanding, resilience, and connection.

## Why Adoption/ Permanency Competency Matters for Native Children and Families

Adoption /Permanency competence respects sovereignty, acknowledges historical trauma, and supports community-led practices. It aligns with Tribal values and is culturally responsive.

Adoption/Permanency competence supports Tribal communities by:

**Integrating cultural identity, family connections, and community strengths into care**

**Respecting Tribal authority in defining healing and permanency**

**Supporting children and families without imposing non-Tribal frameworks**



For Native children and families, healing must be defined and guided by Tribal values, cultural practices, and community priorities. Adoption competence empowers child welfare and mental health professionals working with Tribal Nations to facilitate healing and permanency through a culturally centered lens. The National Center recognizes that termination of parental rights and formal adoption is not often the preferred permanency option for children served by tribal child welfare systems. Instead, guardianship or customary adoption, often with relatives, is more frequently the choice to achieve permanency for children who are unable to return to their parents. Adoption competency applies across the child welfare continuum and supports kinship placements.

Tribal Leadership