Adoption Competency: A Brief Introduction

Adoption Competent Mental Health · https://bridges4mentalhealth.org/hub/adoption-competence/adoption-competency-a-brief-introduction/

Summary: Adoption competency is not a single practice or protocol but a comprehensive set of knowledge, values, and skills competencies embedded in evidence-informed best professional practices that are more responsive to and effective with adoptive families. Some adoption competent practices are recognized as also appropriate and more responsive to the needs of kinship and foster families.

Application: This resource provides important context to the principles of adoption competence and can be used by both child welfare and mental health professionals to increase their own understanding and to advocate at a systems level.



National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services

Building Bridges to Improve Mental Health

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Adoption competency is not a single practice or protocol but a comprehensive set of knowledge, values, and skills competencies embedded in evidence-informed best professional practices that are more responsive to and effective with adoptive families. Some adoption competent practices are recognized as also appropriate and more responsive to the needs of other types of families formed in ways that differ from birth within a nuclear family (e.g., kinship or foster).

Use of the term "adoption competency" arises from the fact that the body of knowledge established to date has been rooted historically in research and practice with adoptive families. That research and insights from practice over more than two decades have revealed the presence and psychological impacts of "core issues" (i.e., loss and grief, guilt and shame, rejection, identity, intimacy, and mastery/control) and made clear that family formation that differs from formation by birth within a nuclear family brings with it normative challenges that can influence identity, family relationships, and psychological adjustment.

The importance of attachment-focused, trauma-informed approaches became clearer with increasing numbers of children entering adoption with compromised beginnings (e.g., from orphanages in other countries and foster care in the United States). Knowledge from research and practice with adoptive, foster, and kinship families continues to advance and will inevitably produce new insights that will further inform professional practices with families who experience different paths to formation. Within child welfare contexts, the term "child welfare competent" has recently begun to be used to connote the application of adoption competent practices with specific child welfare-involved populations. For example, the term "adoption/guardianship" competent might be used to describe the use of adoption competent practices, as appropriate, with families formed through guardianship.

The comprehensive set of knowledge, values, and skills competencies embedded in evidence-informed best professional practices that constitute adoption competency do not simply develop through experience but require training, strategic supervision, and opportunities for ongoing professional education to remain current as knowledge advances.

Fortunately, the knowledge, values, and skills undergirding adoption competent practice are well defined and have served as the basis for broadly available trainings. This work was first done in 2009 when the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) convened an expert panel involving researchers, advanced practitioners, and those with lived experience who specified more than 200 competencies in 18 domains for licensed mental health clinicians and provided expert advisory guidance in developing Training for Adoption Competency (TAC). TAC is recognized by the California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse as a promising practice with high relevance to child welfare and is the only

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