Adoption Competent Therapy and Trauma-Informed Care

Adoption Competent Mental Health · https://bridges4mentalhealth.org/hub/adoption-competence/adoption-competent-therapy-and-trauma-informed-care/

Adoption competent approaches by their very nature address and target the combined critical issues of attachment and trauma to a child’s development and functioning as they are inextricably intertwined. Adoption competent therapists are trauma-informed and most qualified to help children and families who have experienced child welfare. Systems that employ and train adoption competent clinicians provide treatments that are responsive to the complex and developmental traumas that children being adopted from foster care have experienced.

National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services

Building Bridges to Improve Mental Health

ADOPTION COMPETENT THERAPY AND TRAUMA-INFORMED CARE

Adoption competency is not a single practice or protocol but a comprehensive set of knowledge, values, and skills competencies. Adoption competency encompasses a range of core tenets that are rooted in the belief that healing occurs best in the context of family and that parents are considered primary agents for change and growth.



This distinguishment is paramount given the interpersonal nature of the primal, profound, and lifelong losses that adopted children experience in being separated from their birth/first families. The experience of being adopted and transplanted into a new environment can impact the child's ability to attach to their new caregivers/adoptive parents, peers, and later, intimate relations. When separations and/or subsequent experiences are experienced as traumatic, a child's development in any/all domains and functioning will be further impacted. Assessment and intervention of these nuances are a unique hallmark of adoption competent care. Adoption competent approaches by their very nature address and target the combined critical issues of attachment and trauma to a child's development and functioning as they are inextricably intertwined.

Adoption competent professionals understand the breadth and depth of losses, the complexity of identity formation, and the implications of trauma to a developing brain and body. As such, they place less emphasis on assigning diagnostic labels and greater emphasis on making sense of the child's past, emphasizing safe and positive experiences in the present, and maintaining or creating connections for the future. They recognize challenging behaviors are manifestations of an array of biological and experiential risk factors and that these often pre-date adoptive placement, ever heightening a strengths-based, supportive approach with adoptive parents and kinship caregivers. The understanding that children have survived adverse experiences and have developed defensive behaviors triggered by their brains and manifested through their actions is a critical cornerstone of both adoption competent practice and trauma informed care.

Trauma-informed care (TIC) is a framework that acknowledges and responds to the widespread impact of trauma on all individuals involved with a program, organization, or system. TIC works to understand potential pathways to recovery and seeks to actively resist re-traumatization through the integration of knowledge about the trauma into policies, procedures, and practices (SAMHSA, 2014). Complimenting an adoption competent framework, TIC is an all-encompassing approach that involves supporting the child and the adults who care for them, such as parents, siblings, other family members, and teachers.

Trauma Informed Care