

Engagement of Parents as Agents of Healing

The Role of Family Involvement

Child mental health policy and practice has increasingly embraced family-driven practice which promotes family involvement in all aspects of planning and service delivery.

Evidence for positive outcomes related to family involvement is mounting in mental health treatment for foster care.

*“Parental support is crucial in creating a conducive healing environment. When parents are engaged in the therapeutic process, children often feel more secure and valued. Studies have shown a direct correlation between parental involvement and positive therapy outcomes.”**

**The Importance of Parent Involvement in Child Therapy, Kids First, Oct 28, 2024*

There has been a shift to understanding the importance of relationships between the child and family, family functioning, and family involvement in healing, especially for long-term mental health goals. Adoption competent mental health services focus on the development of adoptive parenting competencies which are foundational to “parents as agents of healing.” Several elements are critical to engage parents and build their competencies:

1. The assessment must examine parent functioning and relationship/ attachment.
2. Assessment feedback must be provided to the parents - it shapes their understanding of the presenting problems, increases their motivation for/engagement in treatment, increases receptiveness to psychoeducation, re-framing of child behavior in light of greater understanding, and increase in use of more appropriate therapeutic parenting strategies.

You can review all of the adoptive parent competencies on the [National Center Knowledge Hub](#).

The Basics – Make It Clear	Help Designate Who Will Be Involved	Think About the Type of Family Involvement You Want
<p>What are your:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentions • Expectations • Wishes • Opportunities • Challenges 	<p>Foster/Bio Family Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster Child • Parents • Aunts, Uncles • Siblings • Others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact: Direct or indirect with service providers and caseworkers • Communication: Visits, calls • Planning: Amount of input • Team Participation
Help Define A Treatment Plan*		Participate in Creating a Roadmap
<p>Different disorders need different therapeutic approaches and interventions. Goals and objectives should address each child’s specific symptoms and challenges.</p> <p>A personalized treatment plan considers the unique goals, experiences, and circumstances of each child.</p> <p>Mental health treatment plan goals and objectives should provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure • Improved communication • Recognition of accomplishments • Progress tracking • Increased motivation <p>Mental health goals and objectives provide hope. And, HOPE is a crucial part of any mental health journey.</p>		<p>Once you and the team have defined the goals and objectives for WHAT is needed, it’s time to figure out the HOW. Roadmaps always make the journey more manageable!</p> <p>Mental health goals and objectives provide hope. And, HOPE is a crucial part of any mental health journey.</p> <p>The child and family should help define and pursue their mental health treatment plan goals and objectives creating a safe and supportive environment.</p> <p>As you work to build your roadmap take into consideration feelings, self-perceptions, and desires for the mental health and well-being of yourself, your family, and the child in your care.</p>

Using this process helps create a comprehensive, meaningful, personally relevant plan which increases the likelihood of positive outcomes.

* Goal planning in mental health service delivery: A systematic integrative review (NIH); <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9807176/>

The NFPA’s Role – A Collaborative Effort With The National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health

Last year NFPA was selected as one of five partners with the Center for Adoption Support and Education (CASE) to be a partner in the development of the first-ever National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services.

NFPA is grateful to be able to bring foster, adoptive and kinship parent voices to the table in helping bridge child welfare and mental health systems to improve availability and accessibility of adoption competent mental health services for our members and the children in their care.



Treatment Plan Inclusion	Suggested Parent Strategies
<p>A treatment plan may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coping strategies • Mood regulation • Reducing anxiety and stress levels • Enhancing social skills • Improving self-skills habits • Sleeping • Eating • Exercising <p>Mental health goals and objectives provide hope. And, HOPE is a crucial part of any mental health journey.</p>	<p>Identify Parent Competencies That Need to be Developed/Enhanced Identify the skills and capacities needed to meet the child’s needs and incorporate into treatment planning.</p> <p>Provide Unwavering Support Love Them Unconditionally. Convey that your love is constant and unconditional and is not based on achievements or failures.</p> <p>Celebrate Effort Recognize Them. Focus on the journey rather than the destination. Recognize hard work and perseverance.</p> <p>Encourage Exploration Empower Them. Allow them to explore and make choices on their own. Offer them real-world experience in problem-solving, decision-making.</p> <p>Set Achievable Goals Establish Realistic Objectives. Work with them to set benchmarks or milestones and celebrate the small steps achieved.</p> <p>Lead by Example Embody Confidence. Demonstrate self-assurance in navigating your own challenges.</p>
Getting Real	
<p>There will be challenges to serving as an agent of healing – these might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties with transportation, • Scheduling problems for meetings • A lack of follow-through from the case worker or provider agency • Large caseloads and paperwork • Multiple and disconnected service providers • Lack of training on specific strategies for family involvement both for families and providers <p>Finding Solutions Work together with your treatment team, caseworker, provider and family to address any barriers. Make an action plan to resolve</p>	
Additional Resources	
<p>NC for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services - https://bridges4mentalhealth.org</p> <p>NC Knowledge Hub - https://bridges4mentalhealth.org/hub/</p> <p>NFPAti - https://nfpati.org/trauma-healing-courses</p>	