

WEBINAR:

# Improving Permanence Through Advancing Adoption Competency

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Dawn Wilson, Director, C.A.S.E. Training Institute

November 18, 2025



National Center for  
Adoption Competent  
Mental Health Services

Building Bridges to Improve Mental Health

# Housekeeping



- This webinar will be recorded and emailed to all registrants
- Place any questions in the Q&A box
- We will have dedicated time for Q&A at the end and any unanswered questions will be answered and shared in the follow-up email
- All attendees are muted—please raise hand to be unmuted
- Use the chat to engage with each other and presenters.

**We want to hear from you!**

# Today's Agenda



**1:00-1:05pm:** Welcome and review of objectives

**1:05-1:25pm:** Overview of the National Center

**1:25-1:45pm:** Breakouts to learn more about NTI

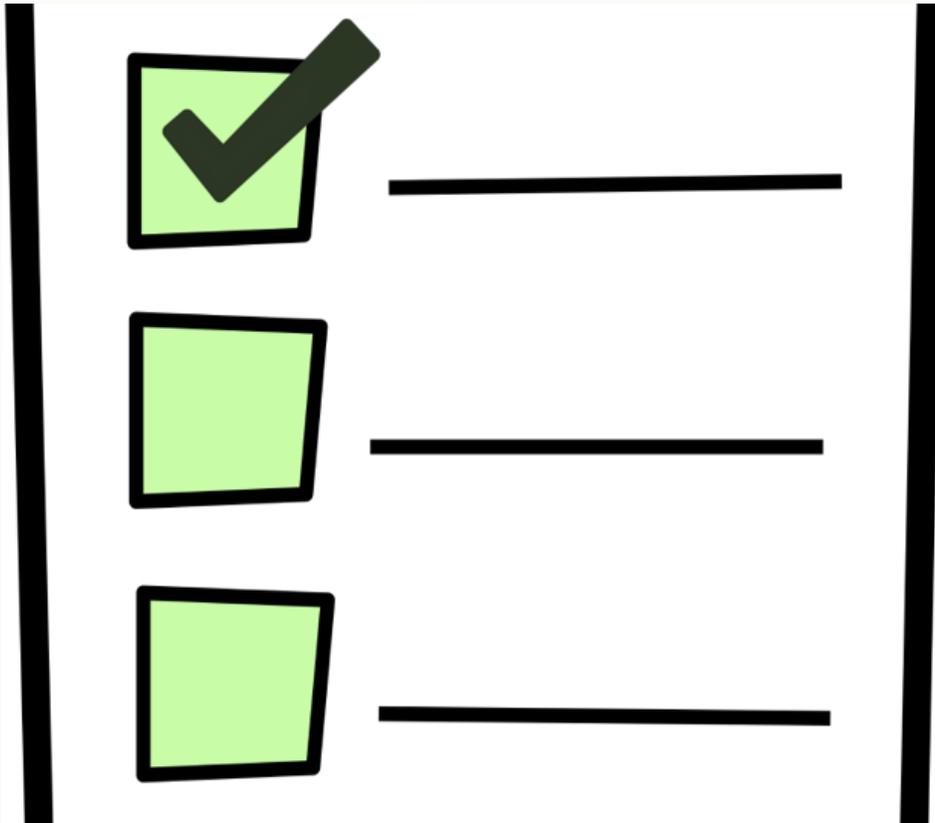
- *Child welfare*
- *Mental health*

**1:45-1:50pm:** Q&A

**1:50-1:55pm:** Action steps and resources

**1:55-2:00pm:** Survey

# Objectives



## Participants will:

- Learn about how the National Center is advancing this work within States, Tribes, and territories through cross-system Steering Teams
- Understand adoption competency and its application to the permanency workforce
- Identify their role in increasing access to adoption competent mental health services
- Learn about the NTI curriculum and how it applies to their role
- Enroll in NTI

# What We Do

C.A.S.E. and the National Center



Established in 1998, the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) is a national leader focused on the mental health of adoptive, foster, and kinship families. We support this community with a staff of more than 70 dedicated professionals nationwide and a committed Board who guides our strategic direction.



Compassion

Integrity

Excellence

Innovation

## The C.A.S.E. Vision

A world where every child and family connected to adoption, foster, and kinship care thrives.

## The Mission of C.A.S.E.

To improve the well-being and permanence of children and their families by providing adoption competent mental health services, advancing learning to build a responsive national network of professionals, and **transforming policy and practice through research and advocacy.**

# What Do We Mean by "Adoption Competence"?



**All children, youth and families who have experienced disruption in a primary caregiving relationship will benefit from Adoption Competent Mental Health Services.**

- Not a single practice but a comprehensive set of knowledge, values, and skills competencies
- Attachment-focused
- Trauma-informed
- Healing occurs best in the context of family
- Addresses core issues such as loss, rejection, guilt, grief
- Therapeutic parenting: reframe behaviors based on a deep understanding of the child's experiences





01

The **National Center** will work collaboratively with States, Tribes, and territories to support and build their capacity in enhancing the adoption competence of mental health practitioners and to improve accessibility of mental health services that are responsive to the needs of all children, youth, and families who have experienced child welfare.

ADOPTION COMPETENCY

The **National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI)** is designed to build the capacity of child welfare and mental health professionals in all states, tribes, and territories to effectively support children, youth, and their foster, adoptive, and guardianship families.

02



03

**Training for Adoption Competency (TAC)** is the nation's premiere assessment-based certificate program for training mental health practitioners and developing adoption competency skills.

There is no single path to achieving adoption competence, no single degree that will ensure it, and no single graduate or post-graduate training program that can be expected to fulfill this goal by itself, especially given that knowledge in this area is constantly evolving. Developing and sustaining adoption competence is an ongoing, multipath process.

The **C.A.S.E. Academy** is for mental health professionals of all levels to grow and deepen in adoption, foster, kinship specialty practice across the country.

04



ADOPTION COMPETENCY >>>

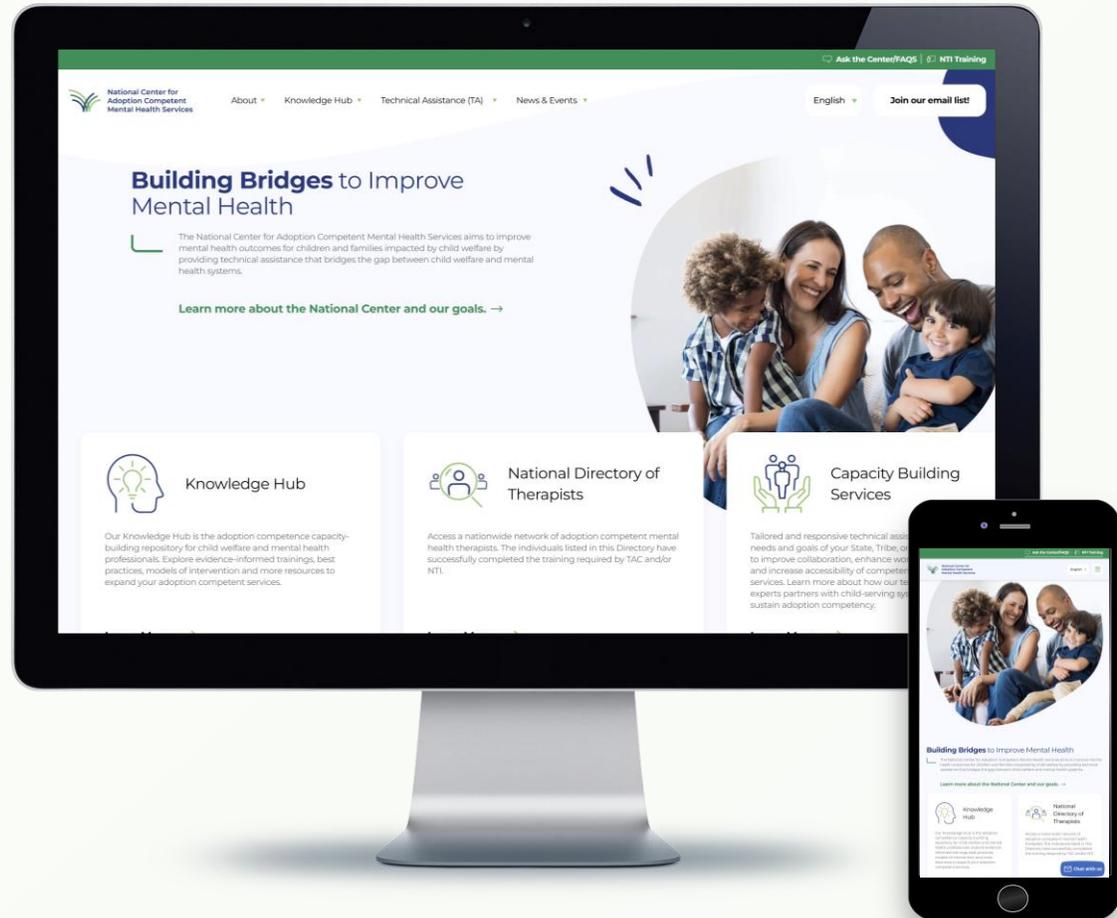


## Our North Star

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**We envision a world where any youth who has experienced the child welfare system reaches their full potential. To meet this goal, we strengthen the capacity of STTs to become systems that are preventative and truly healing. Through effective collaboration across child serving systems, STTs meet family needs. Adoption competency is an integrated and sustained framework which fuels systems to deliver the highest-quality accessible services and supports. Professionals within child welfare, mental health and other key systems are trained and supported to deliver adoption competent services that meet the unique needs of this population.**

# Transforming Policy & Practice



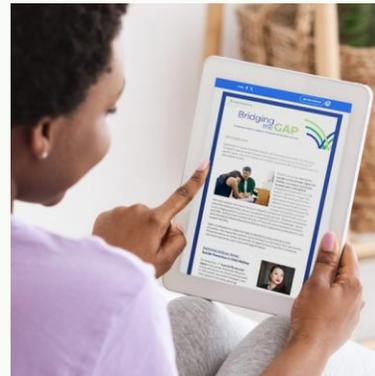
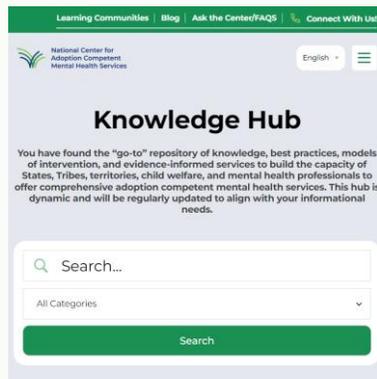
Launched in 2024, the **National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services** supports states, tribes, and territories to build bridges between child welfare and mental health systems. We provide technical assistance and evidence-informed training to strengthen coordination and collaboration to drive systemic change that will improve children’s mental health outcomes.

# Building Bridges to Improve Mental Health

National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services



The **National Center** supports States, Tribes, and territories (STTs) as they build their capacity to improve mental health outcomes for youth and families who have experienced the child welfare systems. Universal Services offered:



**A vibrant online Knowledge Hub**

**Monthly webinars focusing on key issues and the latest thought leadership**

**Monthly newsletters with high utility resources**

**Peer learning opportunities that bring professionals across the nation together**

You can expect from your engagement with the National Center a team of dedicated subject matter experts who work alongside you to realize three primary goals:

- 1. Improved cross-system collaboration**
- 2. Better equipped workforce to meet the unique and often complex needs of this population**
- 3. Enhanced accessibility to mental health services for ALL families.**

# Cross-System Collaborations





# Child Welfare

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## Breakout





MENU TRANSCRIPT

- 1. Introduction
  - 1.1 Introduction
  - 1.2 Section 1: Lesson 3 Objectives
- 2. The Story
  - 2.1 The Story
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  - 2.3 The Importance of the Story
  - 2.4 Video: Adopted Children Pt 1
  - 2.5 What is Important?
- 3. Preparing For Dialogue
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Web-based training addressing the mental health needs and challenges of children and youth experiencing foster care, kinship care, guardianship, and adoption

- Tools and resources to support clinical and casework practice
- Assessment and therapeutic strategies to address behavioral challenges
- A shared language to foster collaboration between child welfare, mental health, and education professionals

NTI is...

- Web-Based
- Interactive
- Self-Paced
- **FREE**



**nti** National Adoption Competency  
Mental Health **Training Initiative**™

[adoptionssupport.org/nti/access](https://adoptionssupport.org/nti/access)





SCAN



**National Adoption Competency  
Mental Health Training Initiative**

TM

Free NASW & NBCC approved CE Credits provided for all trainings via CASE Institute LMS

### Child Welfare Training

- 17.5 hours
- 7 modules
- Casework focused
- CW Professionals and paraprofessionals across the continuum in public & private settings.

### Child Welfare Supervisor Training

- 21.5 hours for supervisors
- 7 modules
- Supervision for casework

### Mental Health Training

- 27 hours
- 9 modules
- Clinically focused on assessment & treatment
- MH Professionals in public or private settings providing clinical services to children, youth and families experiencing foster care, adoption or guardianship.



### School-Based Mental Health Training



- 17.5 hours
- 8 modules
- Focused on more deeply understanding underlying causes of students' behavior
- School-based MH Professionals who want to more deeply understand and address the MH needs of students experiencing adoption, foster care, kinship or guardianship situations.
- In addition, it is relevant for students experiencing other types of trauma such as refugee, immigrant, and homeless situations and/or divorced families.



nurture.  
inspire.  
empower.

# NTI Competencies



- Making a Case for Adoption Competency & Need for Permanency
- Understanding Children's Mental Health Challenges
- Healing from Loss and Grief
- Impact of Trauma on Brain Development
- Re-building and Strengthening Attachment
- Supporting Positive Identity Formation
- Providing Post-Adoption Supports

**Unique Benefits  
Built into NTI:**

1



**Promotes Systems Change:**

NTI provides aligned content for CW and MH professionals; NTI is applicable across the CW continuum.

4



**Provides Post-training Supports**

NTI offers transfer of learning tools to keep competencies "alive."

2



**Includes a Robust Toolbox:**

NTI Tools include trauma-informed, therapeutic strategies and resources to address behavioral challenges with children, youth, and families.

3



**Tested & Data Informed:**

NTI is proven to build the capacity of the national workforce. In pilot testing, significant gaps in knowledge were filled and practice significantly improved.



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## Support provided by NTI Implementation Specialists:

- ✓ Plans for implementation
  - How to integrate NTI?
  - Who will access the training and when?
  - How will training be messaged?
  - Will training be mandated?
- ✓ Provides communications tools, encouragement, and support
- ✓ Troubleshoots integration challenges
- ✓ Provides transfer of learning and coaching support for staff and supervisors



# How is NTI Being Integrated?

**Using NTI as an Onboarding Tool**

**Requiring Mental Health Professionals to Complete**

**Providing Protected Time for Completion**

**Engaging Supervisors in Coaching Sessions**

**Implementing New Policy to Require NTI**

**Providing Private / Contracted Providers Access via LMS**

**Incentivizing Completion**

**Using Learning Journals in Supervision**

**Including NTI in Provider Contracts**

**Including Managed Care**

**Partnering with State Licensing Boards to Provide CEUs**

**Providing Hybrid Learning Opportunities**

## Children's Reactions to Loss: Common Behavior Patterns of the Grieving Process

### Shock/Denial

#### General Description of Stage:

- The person appears compliant and disconnected from the event, as if the loss was of little significance. The person may be stunned, robot-like or "shell shocked".
- The person may deny the event and/or the feelings accompanying the event. There is little emotional expression.

#### Behavioral Expressions in Separated Children:

- The child often seems indifferent in affect and behavior.
- The child may not show an emotional reaction to the move.
- The child may appear to make a good adjustment for a period of time, often referred to as the "honeymoon period".
- The child may go through the motions of normal activity, but shows little commitment or conviction.
- The child may be unusually quiet, compliant and eager to please. In retrospect, the child's behavior may appear passive and emotionally-detached or numbed.
- The child may deny the loss and may make statements, such as: "I'm not staying here. Mommy will get me soon".

#### Diagnostic Implications:

- Caseworkers, foster parents and parents may misinterpret the child's compliant and unemotional behavior, believing the child "did fine... it was an easy move." When a child is thought to have handled a move without distress,

Rycus, J.S., Hughes, R.C. (1998) *Field Guide to Child Welfare*, Child Welfare League of America, pp 45-51  
Reprinted with permission from the author(s).  
Handout provided by the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative.

## Talking with Children about Aspects of their Past

1. **Create an environment of communicative openness:** give the child permission to find answers and acknowledge the difference of adoption or guardianship.
2. **Start talking about adoption early and initiate ongoing opportunities:** just because a child is not talking about adoption does not mean she is not thinking about it. For example, an adoptive father asked his 9-year old son if he ever thought about adoption, and the boy answered "not really". He then asked if he ever thought about his birth mother, and the boy replied, "All the time!" Parents should not wait for a child to bring it up but should initiate discussions about these issues and take advantage of opportunities that present themselves. They should also use positive adoption language.

3. **Be honest in a developmentally appropriate way** (never lie and share all by age 12): A great resource for parents to learn how to talk with children about complicated issues such as maltreatment and parental mental illness is *Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child*, by Betsy Keeler and Jayne Schooler. They advocate that children should be told everything that is known about their history, and that this should be shared incrementally and in a manner that they can understand. They believe that even the most negative aspects of their history should be shared with them by age 12, so that they have a chance to integrate and come to terms with this information prior to the tumultuous time of adolescence.

4. **Empathize with feelings without being judgmental or always trying to fix it:** Parents should first empathize with painful feelings that their children express or facilitate the expression of these feelings, without trying to sugar coat or negate these feelings.

5. **Help your child "grow" her adoption story and control telling it outside the family:** Children's questions about adoption will increase in complexity as they grow up, and it is important for the preschool adoption story to grow with the child. Parents also need to prepare the child for the kinds of comments or difficult confrontations they may run into outside the family. The Center for Adoption Support and Education's WISE-UP curriculum for children is a resource for parents in addressing these issues.

## "WHOSE JOB WAS IT?"

This assessment tool is used with older children and youth to assess who was available to meet specific needs in their lives. There is a column for each change in family, and you could add other areas of interest. You would ask the child to choose from the following persons: Mom? Dad? Both? Relative? Brother? Sister? Neighbor or other relative? Staff person? Yourself? Nobody?

Need	Family of Origin	Placement 1	Placement 2
Food	_____	_____	_____
Clothing	_____	_____	_____
Shelter	_____	_____	_____
Protect from harm	_____	_____	_____
24-hour supervision	_____	_____	_____
Teach right from wrong	_____	_____	_____
Teach problem solving	_____	_____	_____
Provide discipline	_____	_____	_____
Help with school work	_____	_____	_____
Take you to doctor	_____	_____	_____
How to get along/others	_____	_____	_____
Encourage honesty	_____	_____	_____
Role models	_____	_____	_____
Affection (hugs, etc.)	_____	_____	_____

Fahlberg, V. (1991). *A Child's Journey through Placement*. Indianapolis, IN: Perspectives Press.  
Cruger, M.J. (1985, 1993). *Rational Point of View*, Birmingham, MI.

# How Can You Use NTI Resources in Your Work?

## Children's Reactions to Loss:

### Common Behavior Patterns of the Grieving Process

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- Handout can be used by you to support children and youth who are grieving or shared with parents/caregivers to help them understand reactions through the various stages of grief
- Provides examples of how children may behave
- Provides implications for this behavior – for example – just because children aren't talking about something doesn't mean they're not thinking about it. Adults need to initiate conversation

## Talking with Children about Aspects of their Past

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- Handout can be used by you to open conversation with children and youth or shared with parents/caregivers to help them talk to children and teens about their life story
- Emphasizes that it is everyone’s job to engage children in learning about and understanding their life story – not just therapists
- Provides practical tips and prompts for having honest conversations

# NTI is not just a training...



# it's **practice-changing!**

- ✓ Focuses on the impact of loss, trauma, and broken attachments on well-being
- ✓ Provides more effective assessment and treatment strategies
- ✓ Uses a family systems perspective
- ✓ Models how to have difficult conversations
- ✓ Promotes understanding of the need underlying behavior
- ✓ Plus much more!



# Mental Health

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## Breakout





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NTI Tools include trauma-informed, therapeutic strategies and resources to address behavioral challenges with children, youth, and families.



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Mental Health professionals  
have a **critical role** in helping...

Children  
tell/understand  
their stories



Parents understand  
the impact of grief,  
loss, trauma



Parents reframe  
their children's  
needs



Parents honor and  
maintain  
connections

# An Adoption-Competent therapist must be:



- Knowledgeable about the **psychological impact** of adoption on children and families
- Knowledgeable about the **impact of trauma** on the brain and behavior
- **Experienced** working with adopted youth/families
- Knowledgeable about **resources available** for foster and adoptive families
- **Trained** to meet the unique and specific needs of this large population

# NTI Competencies



- Making a Case for Adoption Competency & Need for Permanency
- Understanding Children's Mental Health Challenges
- Healing from Loss and Grief
- Impact of Trauma on Brain Development
- Re-building and Strengthening Attachment
- Supporting Positive Identity Formation
- Providing Post-Adoption Supports
- **Assessment and Treatment Planning through an Adoption Lens**
- **Therapeutic Parenting Strategies to Address Challenging Behaviors**

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- ✓ **Plus much more!**



# How do I become an adoption competent provider?

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**Enrollment in NTI Training**



# Enrollment in NTI Training



**Sign Up**

To use the key ILLINOISQWP, please sign up for a new account or login to an existing one.

First Name *Required*

Middle Name

Last Name *Required*

Email *Required*  
wilson@adoptionssupport.org

Password *Required*  
\*\*\*\*\*

Re-enter Password *Required*

**Center for Adoption Support and Education**

3919 National Drive, Suite 200, Burtonville, MD 20866

301-476-8125 | [caseweb@adoptionssupport.org](mailto:caseweb@adoptionssupport.org)

Need LMS Technical Support? Go to: [Tickets](#)

1. [Sign up to be enrolled](#)

# Enrollment in NTI Training



## 3. Log-in to account using the username and password

The screenshot displays the C.A.S.E. website interface. At the top left is the C.A.S.E. logo with the tagline "nurture. inspire. empower." At the top right, there is a search icon, a "Login" button, and a menu icon. The main content area is split into two panels. The left panel, titled "Sign Up", contains a message: "To use the key ILLINOISCWP, please sign up for a new account or login to an existing one." Below this is a dark grey button with the text "Username already exists". The form fields include: "First Name" (Required) with "Dawn", "Middle Name" with "W", "Last Name" (Required) with "Wilson", "Email" (Required) with "wilson@adoptionsupport.org", "Password" (Required) with ".....", and "Re-enter Password" (Required). The right panel, titled "Login below to see all your courses.", contains a "Username" (Required) field with "wilson@adoptionsupport.org", a "Password" (Required) field with ".....", a green "Login" button, a "Keep me logged in" checkbox, and a "Forgot Password?" link. The footer contains "Additional Resources" with a link to the "C.A.S.E. website", the "Center for Adoption Support and Education" address "3919 National Drive, Suite 200, Burtonsville, MD 20866", and "Need LMS Technical Support?" with a link to "Open a Ticket".

# Enrollment in NTI Training



## 4. On your dashboard – click on the NTI tile in “My Courses”



# How Can Families Access AC Providers?

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# National Directory



Ask the Center/FAQs | NTI Training

National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services

About | Knowledge Hub | Technical Assistance (TA) | News & Events

English | Join our email list

## National Directory of Adoption Competent Professionals

We are pleased to share the Adoption Competence National Directory, which offers access to hundreds of mental health therapists nationwide with formal training in adoption competence. The therapists listed in this Directory have completed training in either or both of the C.A.S.E. training programs described below. Explore our national database to find therapists in your area trained in adoption competence. \*

*\*The individuals listed in this Directory have successfully completed the training required by TAC and/or NTI. TAC indicates individuals who have successfully completed the 72-hour instructor-led Training for Adoption Competency (TAC™), which is the only accredited, evidence-based, assessment-based adoption competency training in the country. NTI indicates individuals who have completed the 30-hour web-based National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI™). The completion of this training reflects their commitment to learning and growth within the specialization of adoption competence. However, their inclusion in this Directory is not intended to be and does not serve as an endorsement or certification of their clinical skills or proficiency in practice. C.A.S.E. does not warrant the expertise or capabilities of any individual therapists.*

To use the category sorting below, choose a category selection, and the directory listings will sort automatically based on your different selections. You can also download your results to an Excel CSV using the "Download" button.

Sort by State: All States

Sort by Country: All Countries

Sort by Training: All Trainings

Licensed Clinician: All Licenses

Payment Options: All Payment Options



**The most positive experience I had with a mental health professional was defined by deep empathy, adoption-informed knowledge, intergenerational insight, and empowerment. They met me where I was, embraced the complexity of my story, and helped me pass on a more honest, emotionally intelligent legacy to the next generation...these qualities are not just helpful; they are essential.”**

**- Adoptive Parent**

# Finding the Right Mental Health Therapist



**National Center for Adoption Competency Mental Health Services** Building Bridges to Improve Mental Health

## Finding the Right **Mental Health Therapist**

*Parents and caregivers who have experienced child welfare services or adoption are often looking to find appropriate mental health services – this may include licensed counselors, clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists, or psychologists.*

Finding a mental health therapist who has expertise and specialized training to understand your family's needs is critical. There are many ways to support finding the best therapist for your family. Parents/caregivers can call prospective therapists or schedule an initial interview to find out more about the therapist's area of specialization and approach to treatment. Some therapists offer an initial consultation that is free of charge to ensure the right fit for you and your family. Parents should start by giving the therapist a brief description of the concern or problem for which they need help and then delve deeper using the questions below. It may also be advisable for the therapist to meet the youth and family to ensure a connection can be made.

**To find therapists that have additional trainings in adoption competency, parents can also consult the searchable **Adoption Competency National Directory** available via the **C.A.S.E.** website: [adoption.support.org/national-directory/](http://adoption.support.org/national-directory/)**

### Questions to Ask Prospective Therapists

- How long have you been in practice and what degrees, licenses or certifications do you hold?
- What age youth do you specialize in serving? Birth to 17? Teenage age adolescents?
- What is your experience in providing services to youth and their adoptive, kinship and/or foster families?
- How do you support the child's sense of loss?
- What experience do you have working with and supporting connections with both family members (including siblings)?
- What unique issues do you see teens and their foster, kinship and kinship families experiencing?
- What continuing clinical training have you had on adoption-related issues?
- What training have you had in trauma-based care?
- How do you include parents and other family members in the therapeutic process?
- Do you prefer to work with the entire family or only with children?
- Do you offer parent support groups and/or teen groups?
- Do you provide anticipatory guidance and psychoeducation for parent/caregivers?
- Do you give parents regular reports on a child's progress?
- What approach to therapy or clinical models do you use?
- Can you estimate the initial timeframe for the course of therapy?
- What changes in the daily life of the child and family might we expect to see because of the treatment?
- How do you work with other adults in the child's life (including teachers/behavior providers, school counselors, pediatricians, psychiatrists)?

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**C.A.S.E.**  
National Center for Adoption Competency

**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES**  
Administration for Children and Families  
Child Welfare Services Unit • 4752-01-02

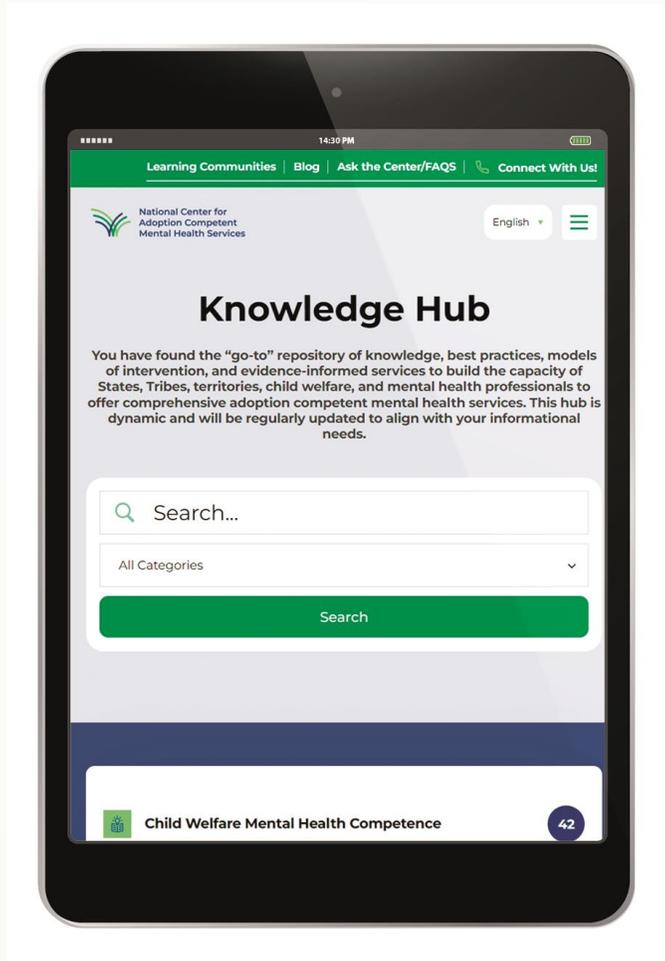
- Ask about their specialization and treatment approach.
  - Provide a brief overview of concerns and ask specific questions to determine the therapist's suitability.
  - Take advantage of a free consultation (if offered) to assess compatibility
- <https://bridges4mentalhealth.org/docs/finding-the-right-mental-health-therapist/>

# What You Can Do to Support the Work



- **Build your systems capacity to sustain the development of an adoption competent workforce**
- **Collaborate to create a smooth referral process for families**
- **Refer families to adoption competent providers**
- **Take the NTI training**
- **Review and share the Knowledge Hub resources**
- **Connect with the National Center for ongoing knowledge development**

# National Center Knowledge Hub Resources



- [Adoption Competency: A Brief Introduction](#)
- [Adoption Competent Mental Health Professionals: An Overview](#)
- [Adoption Competent Therapy and Trauma-Informed Care](#)
- [Effects of TAC on Treatment Quality and Effectiveness: A Brief Summary](#)
- [Helping Mental Health Providers Achieve the Outcomes That Matter Most](#)

# Action Steps



1

Complete a brief survey evaluating this webinar

<https://go.unl.edu/ncwebinar>



2

Visit The National Center website for more information

[bridges4mentalhealth.org](https://bridges4mentalhealth.org)



3

Email your questions to:

**Mary Wichansky,**  
National Center Director  
[wichansky@adoptionsupport.org](mailto:wichansky@adoptionsupport.org)



4

Sign up for our emails

[Connect With Us](#)



# How did we do?



The **National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services** was funded in Oct. 2023 by the United States Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Children's Bureau. The National Center will provide targeted technical assistance and evidence-informed training to strengthen coordination and capacity among child welfare and mental health systems to improve the quality of mental health services provided to children, young adults, and their families while in care and in adoptive and guardianship homes.

The **Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.)** is the lead organization for the National Center. C.A.S.E. is nationally recognized for its pioneering work in adoption-competent mental health services and fostering the development of a highly skilled adoption-competent workforce through its National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI), also funded by ACF.

The **Children's Bureau** seeks to improve the safety, permanency and well-being of children through leadership, support for necessary services, and productive partnerships with states, tribes, and communities. It has the primary responsibility for administering federal programs that support state child welfare services. Additionally, it provides matching federal funds to states, tribes, and communities to help them operate every aspect of their child welfare systems, including the prevention of child abuse and neglect, the support of permanent placements through adoption and subsidized guardianship, and the information systems necessary to support these programs.

## Stay Connected

Become part of our community and follow the National Center on our social networks as we help impact systems change.



[bridges4mentalhealth.org](https://bridges4mentalhealth.org)



*The National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services was supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of financial assistance totaling \$4 million dollars with 100 percent funded by ACF/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACF/HHS, or the United States government.*

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