

Comprehensive Assessment Outline

The goal of a comprehensive assessment is to integrate adoption-related information into a comprehensive developmental (for the child) and family assessment. What will be new is the way in which adoption issues and risk and protective factors affecting adoption adjustment are woven into other assessment questions/ techniques.

I. Prenatal, birth, developmental, medical history

- A.** Known genetic risks including family history of psychiatric illness, substance abuse, and violence
- B.** Prenatal and birth history including risk factors such as malnutrition, inadequate prenatal care, drug/alcohol exposure, premature birth, birth weight, delivery complications, and heightened stress for the mother
- C.** Developmental information: physical & motor, intellectual, language, and psychosocial development; developmental delays
- D.** Serious illnesses, hospitalizations, disabilities, or health issues
- E.** Other risk factors identified

II. Pre-placement and placement experiences

- A.** Reason for entering out-of-home care, age at entry, trauma or loss experience associated with the removal; moves in care including returns home; child's relationships with others in out-of-home care; quality of care in out-of-home placements; how did child experience events?
- B.** Family
 - 1. Primary families that child experienced and noteworthy information about them
 - 2. History of family functioning and challenges present in birth family
 - 3. Siblings and relationship dynamics (birth, foster, adoptive)
 - 4. Norms, values, kinship patterns, communication, and socialization influences in family
 - 5. Nature of relationships with extended family members, including contact with them once removed from birth parents

6. History of contact, if any, between birth/foster and adoptive families; quality of relationships between family members; child's involvement, if any, during contact; child's reaction to contact

C. Attachment history

1. Early nurture and quality of attachments to caregivers
2. Significant attachment figures, including siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles?
3. Primary losses and child's perceptions & reactions; extent that these have been processed with child; who does child need to grieve?
4. Healthy attachments/relationships that need to be supported/maintained
5. Attachment challenges demonstrated in current home

D. Trauma exposure and traumatic stress (neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, exposure to violence, traumatic grief, other)

1. Types of trauma experienced
2. Age(s) of child when each occurred
3. Frequency, duration, and severity
4. What specifically happened? Who, what, where, when (details of traumatic experiences help to identify triggers)
5. Messages child received from others about traumatic events (such as not being believed that child was being victimized, it was child's fault, etc.)
6. Child's perceptions & beliefs related to important events
7. Behavioral reactions and symptoms of trauma (emotional dysregulation, maladaptive beliefs, behavioral problems, unresolved trauma)
8. Triggers - What problematic behaviors or emotional responses appear to be associated with specific times, places, events, people or other stimuli
9. Assess for Developmental Trauma Disorder: 7 domains that may be affected (attachment, biology, affect regulation, dissociation, behavioral control, cognition, and self-concept)

III. Adoption

- A.** Adoptive/guardianship parents' motivation for adopting, coherence of expectations and reality, salient experiences in adoption process (such as failed attempts at adoption, feeling important info. was not disclosed, etc.)
- B.** Parents' experiences of grief and loss (including issues related to infertility), and other adoption issues; adoption communication openness
- C.** Child's attitudes about adoption prior to placement and currently; assessing core issues of adoption

IV. Current functioning and presenting issues

A. Child

1. Developmental issues, including learning challenges
2. Child's psychosocial functioning at home, in school, with peers, in neighborhood, and within their own community
3. High risk behaviors – sexualized behaviors, drug/alcohol use, history of self-injury or harm to others, criminal activity
4. Mental health functioning, including internalizing and externalizing problems, diagnoses, treatment history, medications; assess for various mental health conditions, neuro- psychological issues, sensory integration dysfunction, alcohol related neurodevelopmental disorder
5. Child's fears, concerns, and hopes, view of problems
6. Strengths and positive experiences (for child and for family)
7. Child's primary support system, community resources, extended family
8. What are child's key issues, thoughts, and feelings related to adoption or guardianship? (Assess re: grief and loss, identity issues, attachment problems, depression, search issues, etc.) What does being adopted mean to the child and how does this fit into his/her understanding of self and family? What are the child's salient memories about past families?

9. Nature of ongoing contacts with birth family members and other attachment figures
10. Child's experience with bullying or violence and their capacity/coping skills to mitigate the impact

B. Adoptive or Guardianship Family

1. Configuration of adoptive or guardianship family - parents' significant history; strengths; significant events in family
2. Parents' expectations/views of child and themselves as parents; history of parent-child relationship; their view of presenting problems
3. Assessment of parents' attachment difficulties and attachment to child
4. Assessment of parents' insightfulness, commitment to child, stability of placement, and any safety issues in the family
5. Relationship between birth and adoptive family over time; parents' perceptions and attitudes related to birth parents
6. Family's history of seeking help; reason for seeking help now; goals for treatment
7. Marriage and co-parenting relationship
8. Sibling relationships within family
9. Other identified family problems (maltreatment; lack of needed resources, including respite; mental health/substance abuse problems of parents; other family stressors such as job loss, health problems, etc.)

C. Environmental factors

1. Family's formal and informal support system
2. Relationships with important systems – extended family, school, faith group, service systems, neighborhood, etc.
3. Experiences of people acting out against them

V. Relevant Standardized Measures (a few possible measures are suggested, but many more are relevant)

- A. Child functioning and mental health** (Achenbach System of Empirically Based Assessment, Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales)

- B. Trauma exposure and symptoms** (Traumatic Symptom Checklist for Young Children, UCLA Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Reaction Index)
- C. Parent-child relationship and attachment** (observations of interaction, semi-structured interview protocols, self-report measures from both parent and child perspective, such as Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction subscale of the Parenting Stress Index; Disturbances of Attachment Interview)
- D. Parent functioning** (Parenting Stress Index, Beck Depression Inventory, etc.)