

Child Welfare Professionals and Adoption Competence

**Strengthening practice, supporting families,
and improving permanency outcomes.**



As a child welfare professional, you are often the first to identify when a child or family needs support. At the same time, you may be navigating high caseloads, limited resources, and challenges connecting families to mental health services that fully meet their needs. Many children and families impacted by child welfare experience trauma, loss, and disrupted relationships, but the services available don't always reflect those realities.

These challenges are not a reflection of your commitment. They reflect system gaps.

The [National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services](#) is a Children's Bureau (CB)-funded organization that is working to improve outcomes for children and families impacted by child welfare. We offer no-cost, [technical assistance](#) and access to practical resources via our [Knowledge Hub](#) to help you address these challenges directly by equipping your workforce and system with the tools needed to achieve excellence in safety, permanency, and well-being. With 25+ years of leadership from the [Center for Adoption Support and Education \(C.A.S.E.\)](#) and implementation of the [National Training Initiative \(NTI\)](#) across multiple states, the National Center is a trusted partner in strengthening child welfare systems.



What is Adoption Competency?

An [adoption competent](#) professional and/or child-serving system has the knowledge and skills to provide services that are responsive to the unique needs of children and families navigating the child welfare system. Adoption (or permanency) competence means your workforce and system are equipped with the knowledge and skills to respond to the unique needs of children and families impacted by foster care, adoption, and kinship care.

Permanency means more than placement. It means helping children and families:

- **Build secure attachments**
- **Maintain meaningful connections**
- **Navigate identity, loss, and transitions over time**

Children who experience separation and loss often carry complex needs related to grief, identity, and relationships. Adoption competent professionals and systems ensure that these needs are understood, addressed, and integrated into service delivery rather than treated as a secondary concern.

Why Adoption Competency Matters for Child Welfare Professionals

Adoption competent care is a practical tool that strengthens your day-to-day work and helps address common challenges in child welfare practice.

It provides the tools to:

- Build cross-system partnerships and improve service coordination
- Identify mental health needs earlier and support timely intervention
- Explain the impact of loss and trauma on behavior and attachment to caregivers, courts, and service providers
- Strengthen communication and advocacy across systems

As a result, you can:

- Support **placement stability** and long-term permanency
- **Reduce disruptions** caused by unmet mental health needs
- **Improve outcomes** for children and families beyond safety to long-term well-being
- **Build confidence** in your practice and support workforce retention



Children and families do not need less support after permanency. They need more targeted, developmentally and relationally informed care. Adoption competence ensures your system can deliver it.

How the National Center Supports Child Welfare Professionals

The National Center offers practical, real-world support to help you strengthen your practice and better serve families. Through this partnership, you gain:

- Access to tools and resources that support **stability, permanency, and family-centered care**
- Training opportunities, including [National Training Initiative \(NTI\) learning communities](#) and [adoption competent workforce development](#)
- Strategies to **strengthen advocacy** for children and families across systems
- Support for coordinated care that **reduces disruptions and improves outcomes**

Adoption competence is not an add-on. It is a **necessary tool** for effective child welfare practice. The lack of adoption competent service providers has made finding proper mental health support especially challenging for families impacted by child welfare, as well as child welfare specialists serving those families. Adoption competent training provides effective strategies for working with children, youth, and parents to address the challenges that often lead to placement changes in foster care and disruption or dissolution in adoption. By partnering with the National Center, child welfare specialists help systems move beyond placement to achieve long-term family stability and success.

Take the Next Step

Ready to strengthen your practice and better support the families you will serve?

- ▶ Enroll in [NTI](#)
- ▶ Contact [Mary Wichansky](#) to implement adoption competence broadly (in your class, cohort, program)
- ▶ Visit our website to learn more about the National Center, training, and resources: bridges4mentalhealth.org

Building Bridges to Improve Mental Health