

Higher Education Students and Adoption Competence

**Building the skills, confidence, and knowledge
to support children and families.**



As a higher education student, you are preparing to enter the workforce where you will support children, youth, and families with complex and often unmet needs. Many children and families impacted by child welfare experience trauma, loss, and disrupted relationships, but the systems and services designed to support them are not always responsive to those realities.

As you prepare for your future career, you may not always receive training that fully prepares you to navigate these complexities in real-world practice.

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 Higher Education Students

Adoption competence is a foundational skill that strengthens your preparation for real-world practice and helps you enter the workforce with greater confidence and readiness. It provides the tools to:

- **Build foundational skills** for working with children and families impacted by child welfare
- Understand how **trauma, attachment, loss, and identity intersect** across systems
- Prepare for **real-world practice** with complex family dynamics
- **Strengthen** your ability to collaborate across mental health, education, and child welfare systems
- Develop a **deeper understanding** of the populations you will serve

As a result, you can:

- Enter the workforce **better prepared** to support children and families with complex needs
- **Build confidence** in your professional skills and decision-making
- Provide more **responsive, informed, and effective** care
- Contribute to **stronger, more coordinated** systems of care
- Be part of a workforce that **improves outcomes** in safety, permanency, and well-being

Students represent a critical opportunity to create long-term systems change. Adoption competence helps ensure that, as you enter the workforce, you are prepared to meet the realities of practice, not just the theory.

How the National Center Supports Child Welfare Professionals

The National Center offers practical, real-world support to help you build the skills and knowledge needed for your future career. Through this partnership, you will gain:

- Access to foundational knowledge and tools that prepare you for professional practice
- Access to workforce and development training such as [National Training Initiative \(NTI\) learning communities](#), [Training for Adoption Competency \(TAC\)](#), and ongoing [professional development](#)
- Exposure to real-world practices that reflect the experiences of children and families impacted by child welfare
- Support for developing skills in **cross-system collaboration**

Adoption competence is not an add-on. It is a critical foundation for effective, responsive professional practice. Adoption competent training prepares students to serve with skill, humility, and impact. By partnering with the National Center, students enter the workforce better prepared, more confident, and more responsive to the needs of children and families.



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

You're Preparing to Enter a Complex Industry. You Don't Have to Do It Alone