

Mental Health Leadership and Adoption Competence

**Strengthening systems, improving outcomes,
and advancing high-quality care.**



As a leader in mental health, you are responsible for ensuring your system can meet the needs of children, youth, and families with increasingly complex presentations. Many of the children served across behavioral health systems have experienced trauma, loss, and disrupted relationships, often as part of involvement with child welfare. At the same time, systems face workforce shortages, service gaps, and increasing demand for high-quality, trauma-informed care. Despite these challenges, leaders are expected to improve outcomes, increase access, and ensure effective use of resources. These challenges are not a reflection of leadership. 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 Mental Health Leadership

Adoption competent care is a system-level strategy that strengthens how mental health systems respond to children and families with complex needs while improving efficiency, outcomes, and workforce capacity.

It provides the tools to:

- **Align clinical practice** with the needs of children impacted by trauma, loss, and permanency experiences
- **Strengthen workforce** capacity through targeted training, supervision, and shared frameworks
- **Reduce service mismatches** and ineffective treatment cycles
- Create a **common language** across behavioral health, child welfare, and other systems
- **Integrate adoption competence** into existing structures without duplicating investments

As a result, you can:

- **Improve clinical outcomes** for high-acuity populations
- **Increase system efficiency** and reduce unnecessary service utilization
- **Strengthen coordination** across public and private agencies
- **Enhance workforce** confidence, retention, and effectiveness
- **Build more sustainable, responsive systems of care**

Adoption competence is not just a specialty. It is a strategic approach to system improvement that helps mental health systems better serve children and families while maximizing existing resources.

How the National Center Supports Mental Health Leadership

The National Center partners with mental health leaders to strengthen systems, align practice, and improve outcomes. Through this partnership, you gain:

- **Strategic guidance** for incorporating adoption competence into policies, supervision, and workforce development
- **Implementation support** that aligns training, referral processes, practice change, and system priorities
- Access to **workforce and development training** such as [National Training Initiative \(NTI\) learning communities](#), [Training for Adoption Competency \(TAC\)](#), and ongoing [professional development](#)
- **National expertise** grounded in real-world behavioral health and child welfare systems.

The National Center assists leaders in maximizing current investments while enhancing system responsiveness to children and families with complex histories.

With the help of the National Center, leaders can support better outcomes, increase efficiency, and foster long-term sustainability.



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 are Leading Systems Under Pressure. You Do Not Have to Do It Alone.