

Mental Health Professionals and Adoption Competence

Strengthening clinical practice, improving outcomes, and supporting lifelong healing.



As a mental health professional, you are often working with children and families who present with complex histories shaped by trauma, loss, and disrupted relationships. At the same time, you may be navigating high caseloads, productivity standards, limited time, and systems that do not always support the level of care these families need. Many children and families impacted by child welfare do not fully benefit from traditional mental health approaches because their experiences require more specialized, relational, and developmentally informed care.

The challenges reflect gaps in how services are designed and delivered.

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 who navigate 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 Professionals

Adoption competent care strengthens your clinical practice by helping you more effectively assess, engage, and treat children and families impacted by child welfare.

It provides the tools to:

- **Understand how early separation, loss, grief, and identity challenges** impact behavior and relationships
- **Tailor clinical practices** to reflect the real-life experiences of youth and families impacted by the child welfare system
- **Strengthen therapeutic alliances** with children, caregivers, and cross-system professionals
- **Provide family-centered, trauma-informed care** rather than focusing solely on individual symptoms
- **Integrate relational and developmental context** into assessment and treatment planning

As a result, you can:

- **Improve clinical outcomes** for children and families with complex needs
- **Increase engagement and strengthen therapeutic relationships**
- **Reduce ineffective treatment approaches** and improve care alignment
- **Deliver more responsive, individualized care**
- **Build confidence** in your clinical decision-making and approach

Adoption competence helps you move beyond symptom-focused treatment to provide care that supports long-term healing, stability, and connection.

How the National Center Supports Mental Health Professionals

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

- **Practical, skill-based training** grounded in real-world practice
- **Access to workforce and development training** such as [National Training Initiative \(NTI\) learning communities](#), [Training for Adoption Competency \(TAC\)](#), and ongoing [professional development](#)
- **Tools** to integrate adoption competence into your everyday practice
- **Support** for delivering effective, family-focused care to children and families

Adoption competence is not an add-on. It is a **necessary clinical skill set for effective practice**. The National Center recognizes the realities of clinical workloads and system constraints. Adoption competence helps mental health professionals improve clinical practice, deliver more effective care, and increase their confidence and skills in working with families impacted by child welfare.



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 Providing Care in Complex Situations. You Do Not Have to Do It Alone.