

## Prescribers and Adoption Competence

**Improving clinical decision-making, supporting whole-child care, and strengthening outcomes.**

As a prescriber, you often act as a key decision-maker in diagnosing and treating children and youth with complex behavioral and emotional issues. Many of the children you serve have been impacted by foster care, adoption, or kinship care and may present with symptoms shaped by trauma, loss, disrupted attachments, and identity challenges. Psychotropic medications are commonly prescribed for children and youth who have complex mental health needs. In fact, of the Medicaid or CHIP-enrolled children and youth involved with the child welfare system who had a behavioral health diagnosis, [more than half received psychotropic medication](#), and nearly a third received two or more classes of psychotropic medications during the year.

At the same time, you may be navigating limited clinical history, fragmented systems, time constraints, and pressure to make timely treatment decisions. Traditional diagnostic and treatment approaches do not always fully account for the relational and developmental factors influencing a child's presentation.

These challenges are not a reflection of your clinical expertise. They reflect gaps in how care is 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 the 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 systems ensure these needs are understood, addressed, and integrated into service delivery rather than treated as a secondary concern.

### Why Adoption Competency Matters for Prescribers

Adoption competent care strengthens your ability to make accurate diagnoses and informed treatment decisions by incorporating a child’s full developmental, relational, and trauma history.

It provides the tools to:

- **Differentiate trauma-related** responses from primary psychiatric conditions
- **Integrate developmental history**, attachment patterns, and relational experiences into clinical assessment
- Make **more informed medication** decisions that consider environmental and relational factors
- **Reduce over-reliance on pharmacological interventions** when other supports may be more appropriate
- **Collaborate more effectively** with therapists, caregivers, and child welfare professionals

As a result, you can:

- **Improve diagnostic accuracy** and treatment planning
- **Deliver safer, more appropriate** medication management
- **Reduce polypharmacy** and ineffective treatment approaches
- **Improve engagement** with children and families
- **Support better long-term** behavioral health outcomes

Children impacted by child welfare do not always present in ways that align with traditional diagnostic frameworks. Adoption competence helps ensure that treatment decisions reflect the full context of a child’s experiences.

### How the National Center Supports Prescribers

The National Center provides practical, clinically relevant support to help prescribers strengthen their decision-making and care approaches. Through this partnership, you gain:

- Access to workforce and development training such as [National Training Initiative \(NTI\) learning communities](#), [Training for Adoption Competency \(TAC\)](#), and ongoing [professional development](#)
- Access to hundreds of resources via our [Knowledge Hub](#) that support you in integrating trauma, attachment, and permanency into clinical practice, as well as support more informed assessment and treatment planning
- Strategies to strengthen collaboration across mental health, child welfare, and other systems

Adoption competence strengthens clinical judgment and supports more precise, individualized, and developmentally informed care.



### 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](https://bridges4mentalhealth.org)

***You are Making Critical Clinical Decisions. You Do Not Have to Do It Alone.***