

Practice Change Behaviors for Mental Health Professionals

The following are specific practice behaviors that the NTI Training encourages mental health professionals to use in their work.

1. Use adoption sensitive language
2. Conduct comprehensive assessments with children and youth that includes collecting information about their birth and developmental history using multiple informants including the child, caseworkers, adoptive parents, case file, etc.
3. Develop an understanding of child and youth attachment history by collecting information about experiences with their birth family and other placements (foster families, group homes, orphanages, etc.)
4. Assess for trauma and grief before making other mental health diagnoses.
5. Conduct a comprehensive assessment with parents that includes asking about their experiences of trauma, loss, and grief.
6. Consider your client's community of origin when making diagnoses and treatment plans.
7. Use approaches that consider the impact trauma has on brain development to address developmental trauma.
8. Incorporate creative and expressive approaches into your work (Lifebooks, digital stories, memory boxes, etc.)
9. Use a family system approach
10. Provide parents with psychoeducation on trauma and help them understand the survival function of their child's behaviors.
11. Recommend and facilitate open and honest communication between child/youth and parents regarding their adoption story.
12. Support children and youth in maintaining connection with birth family members and/or previous foster family members when appropriate.
13. Teach parents therapeutic parenting skills that will promote security and attachment.
14. Provide psychoeducation to help parents develop realistic expectations for parenting a child who has experienced significant loss and trauma.
15. When working with families with transracial adoptions/foster care placements support the child in exploring their identity and provide parents with strategies to understand and support their child's identities.
16. Work with children and youth to process and validate their experiences of loss.
17. Identify and collaborate with other important systems in the family's life (i.e. child welfare case workers, school, etc.).
18. When working with kin adoptions/placements, work with parents to process and address the unique challenges associated with kinship (boundaries, conflicted loyalties, etc.).
19. When working with families with transracial adoptions/foster care placements, collect information about the parent's capacity to parent a child from a different community of origin.

National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI)

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