The NTI Mental Health training provides the foundational knowledge, values and skills needed to enhance adoption competency. It is specifically designed for mental health professionals providing or interested in providing therapeutic or clinical services to children, youth and families experiencing adoption or guardianship, this training opens critical points of understanding for guiding healthy outcomes.

Core Competencies Overview

The competencies covered in this training include understanding and addressing the complex and often nuanced mental health needs of children experiencing adoption and guardianship, with a focus on the impact of grief and loss, trauma, attachment, identity challenges, and the impact of race, ethnicity, culture, class and diversity on adoption and guardianship especially for transracial and transcultural families.

In addition to sharing clinical best practices in assessment and treatment and therapeutic parenting strategies, NTI provides an overview of evidence-based and evidence-informed treatment models that have been shown to be effective in helping children and youth heal from trauma and strengthen attachments. In addition to the 10 module/25-hour training, three 90-minute live coaching/consultation sessions will be provided to a select number of participants during the training to support the use of strategies learned in clinical practice.

Module 1 – Case for Adoption Competency

Module 1 provides an overview of the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training for Mental Health Professionals and makes the case for the need for adoption competency in working with children, youth and families experiencing adoption or guardianship.

Lessons in this module orient participants to the training; highlight the guiding principles that provide the foundation for work with children and families from an adoption or guardianship lens; provide context for the changes in adoption and guardianship practice today; emphasize the urgent need for permanency for children; and, introduce salient clinical issues for children and youth and their families experiencing adoption or guardianship from foster care, private infant adoption or inter-country adoption.
Module 2 – Mental Health Needs of Children Moving Towards or Having Achieved Permanence through Adoption or Guardianship

Module 2 provides context for the complex mental health needs of children experiencing adoption or guardianship and the importance of helping children/youth understand their life stories.

Lessons focus on the new frameworks for assessment and limitations of current diagnostic and medication practices commonly used with children with foster and/or institutional care experiences; skills and techniques for helping children/youth make sense of their adoption/guardianship stories; challenges related to developmental stages of the adoptive family life cycle; goals for therapeutic work and strategies for engaging families; and, how to collaborate effectively with child welfare and other professionals to support appropriate treatment planning and intervention.

Module 3 – The Impact of Loss and Grief Experience on Children’s Mental Health

Module 3 focuses on the central role of loss and grief in foster care, adoption or guardianship and how ambiguous and unresolved loss, abandonment, rejection, and disenfranchised grief impact the mental health of children.

Lessons will emphasize the different kinds of loss and grief, and children’s developmental understanding of loss; focus on how losses and grief manifest developmentally, behaviorally and emotionally and therapeutic strategies and tools for helping children grieve and heal; provide strategies and evidence-informed therapies to help professionals and parents support grieving children; identify special issues in relative caregiving, and highlight the importance of and provide strategies to support openness and maintaining of family, community and cultural connections to mitigate losses.

Module 4 – Trauma and the Impact of Adverse Experiences on Brain Development and Mental Health

Module 4 focuses on the impact of trauma, including trauma from separation, on brain development, behavior and mental health of children experiencing adoption or guardianship as well as the implications for therapeutic interventions.

Lessons focus on diagnostic limitations and tools to assess trauma history and its impact on functioning; the importance of helping parents shift thinking from “what’s wrong with you” to “what happened to you” and strategies to support parents providing the healing environment and manage trauma triggers for their child; strategies and evidence-based/evidence-informed interventions to establish felt safety, build coping and regulatory skills, and readiness for children to process emotions related to traumatic experiences; and the impact of and strategies to address secondary trauma for parents and professionals. Several evidence-based interventions are shared, including Trauma-focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Child Parent...
Psychotherapy, Trust-based Relational Intervention, Attachment, Regulation, and Competency, and Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing.

**Module 5 – Enhancing Attachment and Bonding in Adoption and Guardianship**

Module 5 focuses on understanding the impact of early insecure attachment, poor nurture, separation and abrupt moves on attachment and supporting the process of rebuilding or strengthening attachments.

Lessons focus on understanding the continuum of attachment styles and challenges and the importance of accurate diagnosis of attachment disorders; provide tools for assessing attachment in children and parents and common goals for reparative work in your clinical practice; behaviors associated with child and parent attachment styles and implications for clinical intervention; therapeutic tasks for children and parents to promote attachment and bonding and employ therapeutic parenting strategies that enhance children’s safety and attachment; evidence-based/evidence-informed attachment-based therapies to address attachment challenges and create a healing environment that facilitates attachment. Additional models discussed include Attachment and Biobehavioral Catch-Up, Circle of Security, Collaborative Problem-Solving, Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy, Parent Child Interaction Therapy, Theraplay, and Video-based Intervention to Promote Positive Parenting and Sensitive Discipline.

**Module 6 – How Race, Ethnicity, Culture, Class and Diversity Impact the Adoption and Guardianship Experience and Mental Health Needs of Children**

In Module 6, participants will learn how race, ethnicity, culture, class and diversity impact a child’s experience of adoption or guardianship, especially in transracial and transcultural families. Lessons focus on understanding challenges in various types of diverse families, including single parent, relative caregiver, transracial/transcultural families, children with special needs, and children or parents with diverse sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

Lessons also focus on being aware of one’s own biases and commitment to preserve children’s culture, race, ethnic identity and sexual orientation/gender identity(expression); strategies to support healthy racial identity development and racial socialization; strategies to assess parental capacity to parent children of diverse cultures or gender identities; therapeutic strategies for helping parents to initiate conversations about race/ethnicity/culture in transracial and transcultural placements and about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression to support the integration of identities; and strategies for addressing microaggressions, bullying and discrimination.
Module 7 - Identity Formation in Adoption and Guardianship

Module 7 focuses on the nature of identity formation in the context of adoption and guardianship and the impact of missing information, inaccurate information and lack of integration of one’s adoption story in identity formation.

Lessons focus on understanding identity formation, barriers to positive identity and the importance of helping youth explore dimensions of their identity and integrate their story for identity development; strategies to address the “Six Stuck Spots” in identity formation and the role of openness in positive identity formation; strategies for helping children and youth do the work of understanding who they are, where they came from, and where they are going; strategies for working with parents to integrate the history of birth family and influences of significant others in the lives of their children; and the role of search and reunion in identity formation and strategies to help parents understand the importance of their support in the search and reunion process.

Module 8 – Assessment and Treatment Planning with Children and Families Experiencing Adoption or Guardianship

Module 8 will integrate and apply the information learned from previous modules to the assessment and treatment planning process, with focus on the overlay of adoption and guardianship-related issues and questions that should be incorporated to assure that clinical work is provided with an “adoption lens.”

Lessons will also focus on how to formulate treatment plans that support more secure attachment, resolution of grief, and promotion of self-regulation and positive identity formation; and the integral role of parents in therapeutic work. There is also an opportunity for clinicians to consider their own strengths around adoption competent clinical practice.

Module 9 – Using Therapeutic Parenting Strategies to Address Children’s Challenging Behaviors

Module 9 focuses on the nature of challenges and concerning behaviors commonly seen in adoptive and guardianship families and the therapeutic parenting strategies that professionals can teach and support parents to use.

Lessons focus on supporting parents to promote attunement and felt safety with children, understand and reframe behaviors, develop realistic expectations, provide a balance of nurture and structure, teach self-regulation and coping skills, and manage particularly challenging behaviors.
Module 10 – Family Stability Post-Permanency

Module 10 looks at adoption as a life-long process and the factors that shape adoption or guardianship adjustment and either support or threaten children’s and the family’s ongoing safety, permanency and well-being.

Lessons will explore the needs of children and families after adoption or guardianship and the continuum of post-adoption/guardianship services that help to sustain them; strategies for the clinician to support youth and families to address mental health needs, support individuation through adolescence, support openness, and prepare for common mental health challenges; and key aspects of post-placement services to stabilize at-risk placements to prevent adoption disruption or dissolution.

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