

# **ADOPTCARE NETWORK TRAINING**

**FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS**



The  
Adoption  
Exchange

Connecting Children and  
Families Since 1983

Training presented by The Adoption Exchange

# Trainer Information

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# AdoptCare Competencies

1. Values and Assumptions
2. Characteristics of Child's History & Effective Adoptive Parenting
3. Child Development and Adoption
4. Emotional Conflicts for the Adopted Child
5. Psycho-Social Issues, Diagnoses, and Treatment of the Adopted Child
6. Strategies to Address Challenges in the Adoptive Family
7. Post Placement Support and Services

*Video:* ReMoved



<http://vimeo.com/heschle/removed>



## Competency #1: Values and Assumptions

### Objectives:

- Personal assumptions about adoption
- Values & assumptions used in this training



*We bring our own personal beliefs/values about adoption or how adoptive parents “should” parent into our work with them. We must be careful not to let our values interfere with helping the family.*

*Handouts #1-3*

## Competency #2: Characteristics of Child's History & Effective Adoptive Parenting

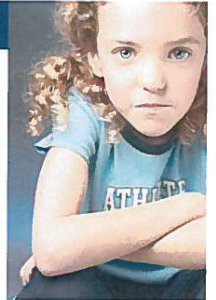
### Objectives:

- To understand our societal view of families
- To describe issues that cause children to come into care
- To understand how society's views of families and child welfare values of reasonable efforts, family preservation, safety and permanence are reflected in adoption
- To understand how racial and cultural characteristics impact family dynamics and service provision
- To identify individual characteristics that contribute to successful special needs adoptions
- To identify dynamics that contribute to effective parenting

*Handout #4*

## Reasons Children Come Into Foster Care

- Neglect – physical, educational
- Abuse – physical, sexual, emotional
- Abandonment
- Substance Abuse (often the source of A&N)
- Physical or mental illness – of child or parent
- Death of a parent
- Poverty



*These issues continue to have an impact on a child (and his new family) during foster care and when the child is adopted.*

## Who are the Children in Care?

- All ages

Extra risk factor:

- Special Needs:

Age (over 6)

Sibling Group

Psychological Problems

Medical Problems

- Minority heritage due to overrepresentation in the system

*Many minority children are adopted transracially or transculturally, which creates unique challenges*



## Who are their Parents?

People with issues of:

- Substance abuse
- Psychological problems
- Victimization
- Criminal history
- Domestic Violence
- Generational family dysfunction

Extra risk factor: poverty, minority status



*A child's perception of his foster or adoptive family reflects his reaction to his previous experiences*

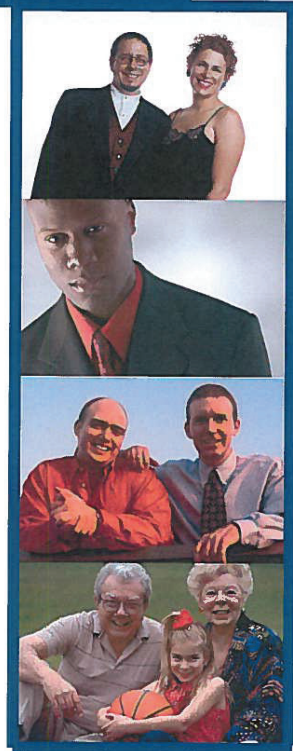


## Adoptive Families Are:

- Two parent families
- Single parent families
- Gay & Lesbian families
- Kinship families

*Each kind of family has its own particular additional issues, but all are considered safe families for children.*

*This does not mean they will not have problems or that they understood the problems they would have.*





# Dichotomy Between Adoptive Family and Adopted Child



**WORLDS  
APART**



## **Adoptive family is assessed for:**

- Functional family life
- Stability
- Positive parenting style

## **Adopted child has probably experienced:**

- Trauma
- Chaotic environment
- Instability
- Grief and loss

# Characteristics of Effective Adoptive Parenting

- Predictors in special needs placements
- Child's characteristics match parents' tolerance

*The professional's job is to support the parents to become increasingly able to meet the needs of the child.*



*Handout #5*

## Competency #3: Child Development and Adoption

### Objectives:

- To explain that adoption is a lifelong process
- To identify the task or each developmental stage of life, as well as additional adoption-related tasks of each developmental stage
- To identify the impacts of abuse and neglect on a child's development

*Old issues are triggered at each developmental stage. Parents often believe their work with the child has not been successful and feel hopeless.*

*Handouts #6-7*

## Impact of Abuse and Neglect on a Child's Development

- Child may have missed key developmental tasks and have cognitive, emotional, social delays
- Strategies and habits learned by children to survive in a chaotic home environment are maladaptive in other settings
- Three out of four school-aged children who have been in foster care have been sexually abused

*Ongoing effects from abuse/neglect and drug exposure require special kinds of parenting and continuing, long term parental patience.*

## Competency #4: Emotional Conflicts & the Adopted Child

### Objectives:

- To identify the seven core issues in adoption
- To identify the impacts of loss and multiple placements
- To apply these concepts and strategies to minimize the impacts of abuse, neglect, and multiple moves to case histories of Colorado children



## 7 Core Issues in Adoption

1. Loss
2. Rejection
3. Guilt/Shame
4. Grief
5. Identity
6. Control
7. Intimacy



*Handout #8*

## Factors Influencing a Child's Reaction to Separation and Loss

- Age and stage of development
- Level of attachment to caregivers
- Child's bond with birth parents and siblings
- Child's perception of the reason for separation
- How well child is prepared for the move
- Will there be post-separation contacts with important persons

*Multiple placements traumatize children*

*Handouts #9-10*

## The Effects of Trauma on the Child and Adoptive Family

- Negative vs. positive working model
- Child becomes caught in a negative neurophysiological feedback loop = dysregulation
- Survival behaviors – based on fear
- Reenactment of history in new setting
- Creates barriers to attachment formation
- Makes parents look “Crazy” to professionals
- May result in sabotage of placement

*Handout #11*

## Competency #5: Psychosocial Issues, Diagnoses, & Treatment

### Objectives:

- To understand the importance of attachment and the definition of attachment disorder
- To begin to understand the effects of trauma on the developing brain
- To recognize psycho-social disorders that often affect adopted children including Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Depression, Dysthymia, and Bi-Polar Illness
- To review assessment and treatment guidelines for children in adoptive families *Handouts #12-13*

## Common Diagnoses of Adopted Children

- Attachment Issues/Disorder
- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- Affective Disorders

*Handout #14*



## Common Diagnoses of Adopted Children

- PTSD
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders
- Drug Effects



*Adopted children are **3-6 times** more likely to have mental health issues than the general population. Accurate diagnoses are essential because successful treatment of adoption issues may depend on prior treatment for these issues*

## Assessment Areas for Adoptive Families

- Current parental stress level
- The parents' motivation for adoption; differences between parents
- Parental expectations
- Parental history
- Transition to adoptive parenthood
- Attitudes about, and experiences with birth parents
- Adoption revelation and the child's curiosity about his or her origins *Handout #15*
- The family's social support for adoption

## Assessment Areas for Adopted Children

- Child's early history - what is trauma history
- Child's current functioning and symptoms
- Previous testing, diagnosis, treatment
- History of multiple caretakers
- Child's working model/reenactment/survival behaviors
- Knowledge and feelings about adoption and self
- Knowledge, attitudes, and feelings about the birth family
- Family communication about adoption
- Feedback from others about adoption

*Adding questions about adoption to intake and ongoing assessments can inform your interventions*

# Treatment Guidelines

- Adoptive parents **must** be included in therapeutic interventions
- Safety and security are of paramount importance to successful grief and attachment work
- Adoptive parents' feelings and experience must be validated
- Avoid seeing imported pathology as a manifestation of adoptive family dysfunction. Eliminate blaming for adoptive family issues.



- Avoid therapist changes; be flexible in number and length of sessions

## Treatment Guidelines

- Focus on behavioral issues that might result in disruption
- Help parents understand the effects of trauma on behavior
- Help child and family become secure in relationship so survival behaviors diminish
- Address faulty working models
- Help adoptive parents modify their expectations
- Talk about the child's past and about adoption issues, even if the child or family doesn't

## Competency #6: Strategies to Address Challenges in the Adoptive Family

### Objectives:

- To identify tools to help children and families overcome fears and aid with good communication practices
- To explain the stages of the adoption process and the roles of some key players
- To appreciate three aspects of parenting and how these can be relayed to children who are being / have been adopted
- To recognize when challenges may arise during and after the adoption process
- To learn and define eight issues that outline the differences of adoptive families and that commonly give rise to unique challenges
- To knowledgeably address the issues challenging adoptive families
- To identify general approaches that address the needs and challenges of adoptive families

*Handout #16*



## Intervention Strategies

- Address grief and loss for parents and child
- Foster realistic expectations given the child's history—help parents prioritize
- Help entire family “de-personalize behavior” through understanding effects of trauma
- Understand, teach and predict when typical challenges are likely to occur--anticipate and prevent
- Promote new attachments for children

*Handouts #17-20*

## Intervention Strategies

- Help parents gain skills to break ineffective parenting habits & learn effective ones
- Help parents access specialized therapies – medication, offender treatment, sex abuse treatment
- Teach survival skills for adoptive parents
- Provide support groups; strengthen support systems
- Do damage control

*Remember – The parents will be responsible for most of the child's healing. They must be taught to work with the child at home in an effective way.*

# 3 Aspects of Parenting

## *A birth parent provides:*

The gift of life  
The color of your eyes  
Your height potential  
Your physical appearance  
Intellectual potential  
Temperament  
Talents

## **The Birth Parent**

## **The Court**

### *A legal parent provides:*

Financial responsibility  
Safety & protection  
Major decisions  
Consent for surgery  
Legal responsibility  
for your actions

## **The Legal Parent**

## *A parenting parent provides:*

Love  
Instruction on family living,  
values & religion  
Discipline  
Care for your hurts, worries &  
illnesses  
Help & encouragement  
Life skills

## **The Parenting Parent**

The process of legal adoption combines the aspects of legal and parenting parents into the role of **parents**.

### **Explain these three different aspects of parenting to the child.**

*You may want to explain to the child that, The parents who come to know you—all of your unique needs and wants—become your legal and parenting parents through the process of legal adoption through the court. After adoption, you no longer need the court or a caseworker to make decisions for you. Your birth parents will always be important to you for giving you life and for many other reasons. However, you can choose whom you want to bring into your heart as “family.” These are special relationships and bonds that are built through commitment, giving, sharing and over time.*

Vera Falberg, A Child's Journey Through Placement, Perspectives Press, 1991. Used with permission.

*Handout #21*

## 8 Areas of Difference and Challenge Within Adoptive Families

- **Mastery or Control** – Adoption is controlled by others, contrary to most people's desire to maintain control over their own lives
- **Family integration** – When a new member enters a family, there is a shift in the family system and a new balance is sought
- **Unmatched expectations** – Unmatched expectations must be addressed and clarified. "Grieving the gap"
- **Separation, loss, and grief** – Loss and grief issues can become barriers to forming new relationships

*Handout #24*

## 8 Areas of Difference and Challenge in Adoptive Families

- **Entitlement** – Adoptive families may not feel entitled to parent the child, and the child often doesn't feel entitled to be a member of the family
- **Claiming** – The process of claiming leads to adoptive family members full acceptance of one another. This is complicated by older children's memories of past families
- **Bonding and Attachment** – Love doesn't happen overnight, although that is a common expectation
- **Identity formation** – These issues become paramount for adoptees during adolescence



## Common Adoption Issue Triggers

- Moves or Other Transitions
- Birthdays
- Holidays, especially Thanksgiving/Christmas
- Mother's Day
- Death/Illness
- Loss of a Pet
- Adoptive Parents Leaving Town
- Anniversary dates



*Handouts #22-23*



## Specific Treatment Tools

- Child's "Lifebook"
- Pictorial time times -- "Where I have Lived" "Eco Map"
- Techniques that objectify feelings-- Feeling charts or continuums, journal writing, letters, stories
- Family stories and family rituals—build shared memories. Include claiming rituals
- Specialized parenting techniques
- Reframes for difficult issues: "Love does not grow overnight"
- Empower family through information/skills
- Break through the "secrecy of adoption"
- Debunk the myth of the "perfect family"

# The Purpose of Interventions



- Encouragement of attachment
- Validation of the child's right to have and understand his/her own history and feelings, as well as providing a safe place to express those feelings.
- Validation of the parent's feelings, teaching of concepts, skills, more realistic expectations, and effective ways to work with the child in the home.
- A gradual move to greater family stability and health.

*Handout #25*

*Connect families to community resources*

## Competency #7: Post-Adoption Services

### Objectives:

- To identify the steps of adoption and how post-placement services are conceptualized



## Post-placement Treatment and Support

- Adoption support should not end with finalization
- School Issues are a major area of needed support
- Utilizing a team approach to family support
- The role of parent support groups
- Respite Care – planned and crisis

*Other parents who have been through difficult times with adopted children can provide a wealth of information and hope for parents in crisis.*

## Parting Words for Adoption Professionals

- Adoption is a lifelong process, as well as a single event
- Most adopted children have greater needs than children who are raised in their birth families
- Love does not fix everything
- Placement is only one point in a child's growth toward becoming an adult
- Adoption is a journey of joy and sorrow, challenge and triumph

# Thank You

- Questions, comments or suggestions?
- Please complete the training evaluation forms. Your feedback is important to us.

The Adoption Exchange

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