

## Supporting Adoptive and Foster Care Families: Training Emergent Practitioners through a Trauma Sensitive and Culturally Competent Lens

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School psychology training programs must abide by the National Association of School Psychologists' (NASP) standards for credentialing. These core tenets aim to prepare emerging practitioners to work alongside children and families from all types of backgrounds. As family dynamics have changed in our culture school psychology training paradigms must also adapt. There is limited data specific to how trainers prepare practitioners for working with adoptive and foster care families. It is crucial for trainers to have an understanding of the unique needs of adoptive and foster care families so that they can train future professionals in supporting these families through a trauma sensitive and culturally competent lens. This poster discusses current training trends specifically in reference to adoptive and foster care families by including first-hand accounts from adoptive families and children.

### History and Statistics

- The first recorded transracial adoption occurred in 1948 and international adoption became accessible following World War II
- Significant boosts in adoption rates have occurred in response to restrictive international birth policies.
- Special needs adoption emerged in the late 1950's alongside the political shift in special needs advocacy

#### US Adoption Statistics as of 2020:

1 and 34 children today are adopted
Approximately 100,00 children are adopted annually
38% through private domestic adoption
37% through the child welfare system
28% through international adoption

#### Age at the time of adoption:

0-2: 5%
3-4: 9%
5-9: 30%
10-12: 19%
13-14: 14%
15-17: 23%

### Intervention Procedures

- Reframe the understanding behavioral etiology - trauma vs "bad" behavior
- Mind the gap: Development versus Expectation, where does training slide off?
- How do start reconceptualizing behavioral interventions in order to meet individual needs?
  - a. Re-imagine adult interactions:
    - Regulate, Relate, and Reason
  - b. Top-Down Reactions
    - What does the behavior tell us? Are they consistently engaging in survival behavior?
  - c. Polyvagal Theory - Red vs Blue vs Green pathways
    - Where is the child before entering the school doors?
- Reframing the Social Emotional Patchwork
  - a. Re-introduce the value in rapport establishment
  - b. Assess developmental foundation and begin there
  - c. Dusting up outdated intervention techniques

### Assessment Procedures

- Utilize trauma screeners to potentially re-examine parent interview - Developmental questionnaires may be triggering or difficult because of lack of information
- Consider the type and timeline of adoption and its impact on development
  - Private adoption, kinship adoption, international adoption, adoption through the child welfare system (foster care), open vs closed adoptions
- Integrate structured interview and sensory interactions with children in order to better understand current functioning
- Re-imagine the goal of assessment: From diagnosis to Success - 1) Identification, 2) Support, 3.) Intervention
- Examine the overlap between trauma responses and disorder symptomology
  - a. Which came first: the trauma or the eligibility? Current case law is ambiguous and inconsistent regarding special education qualification and trauma  
(Stephen C. v. Bureau of Indiana Education. 2018)
  - b. Understanding "states and traits"
  - c. Training Differential Identification: Trauma and ASD, Trauma and ADHD
    - For example, utilizing tools like the Coventry Grid to differentiate ASD from attachment based trauma impacts in early childhood



Pictured: School psychology graduate student adoptee and her family

### Collaboration with Families

- Grief - the role of birth family communication and the grieving process, research suggests increased communication may minimize feelings of loss.
- Adoptive children are at a greater risk for emotional and behavioral disorders, this data becomes increasingly more pertinent when ACEs are factored into adoption stories
- Indirect correlation between the number of moves and behavioral problems, a possible link to resiliency.

### Trauma-Informed Coursework

Trauma informed coursework should provide students with a comprehensive review of trauma in children related to the impact on internalizing and externalizing behavior and brain development. Emphasis should be on understanding various types of trauma and how it relates to interventions to support children, parents, and teachers across settings. The course should be designed to prepare students to:

- Assess the psychological sequelae of childhood trauma using standardized measures
- Integrate knowledge of brain structures and the neuropsychological effects of traumatic events
- Collaborate with parents and teachers to design behavioral intervention plans supporting children with significant externalizing and internalizing behaviors due to trauma effects.

### NASP Graduate Training Standards

This presentation encourages trainers to conceptualize current assessment and intervention processes differently when working with the unique needs of adoptive and foster care families. This presentation supports the NASP training standards with a focus on the domains of Data Based Decision making (1), Mental and Behavioral Health Services and Interventions (4), Family, School and Community Collaboration (7), Research and Evidenced-based Practice (9), as well as Legal, Ethical and Professional Practice (10).



Pictured: School psychology graduate faculty adoptive mom and her family