Literature Review

Intercountry Adoption and Private Domestic Adoption

National Training & Development Curriculum for Foster and Adoptive Parents

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North American Council on Adoptable Children

National Council for Adoption

National Training and
Development Curriculum
FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS

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Introduction

The Administration on Children, Youth & Families, Children's Bureau funded the development of a national training initiative to prepare foster and adoptive parents to effectively parent children exposed to trauma and to provide these families with ongoing skill development needed to understand and promote healthy child development. At the end of the grant period, states, counties, tribes, territories, and private agencies will have access to a free, comprehensive curriculum that has been thoroughly evaluated, which can be used to prepare, train, and develop foster and adoptive parents. The National Training and Development Curriculum for Foster/Adoptive Parents (NTDC) will be designed for families who are fostering and/or adopting children through the public child welfare system as well as those adopting through an intercountry or private domestic process.

The NTDC curriculum will be comprised of three components:

- **Self-assessment**
- **Classroom-based training**
- **Right-time training**

The curriculum will be piloted and rigorously evaluated in six to eight sites (state, county, territory, or tribe) that will be selected based on a non-biased, multi-step process. It is anticipated that the final curriculum will be disseminated across the United States in 2022.

To inform the development of this national training initiative, a needs assessment was conducted. The needs assessment included interviews with stakeholders, systematic literature reviews, information gathered from interviews with professionals in the field and a survey of states. The systematic review of the literature represents one component of the needs assessment. There were three literature reviews conducted for the needs assessment including a literature review specific to relative and non-relative foster/adoptive parents, a literature review specific to Native American foster/adoptive parents and a literature review specific to families who adopt via the intercountry or private domestic process.

This literature review was conducted to help identify characteristics parents who adopt via the intercountry or private domestic process need to embody in order to be successful as well as suggested training themes for these parents. The broad systematic review searched for and retrieved published studies, including peer reviewed journal articles, government reports, and other sources identified in the gray literature, dated between 1970 and 2016, through web-based searches on Google Scholar, Google, JSTOR, SpringerLink, MEDLINE, ERIC, and Social Work Abstracts. Some of the key terms for the web-based searches included: intercountry adoption, international adoption, adoptive parent curriculum/training, pre-service training for adoptive parents, traits of successful international adoptive parents, success factors in

adoption, attachment informed adoptive parenting, and cultural competency when fostering a child from a different race/ethnicity/culture. Following a comprehensive search, 317 documents were located. After excluding 178 documents due to duplication and a lack of relevance, 139 documents were selected for in-depth review. After more intense examination against the inclusion/exclusion criteria (i.e. articles included in the lit review must have been written in English and the inter-country adoptive families discussed must have been U.S. Citizens and residing in the United States), 63 documents were excluded leaving a final sample of 74 studies for review. A review of these final 74 documents resulted in the identification of 10 specific characteristics and 9 training recommendations that parents who want to adopt privately, either domestically or intercountry, need to have exposure to best prepare them for their caretaking roles.

National Training and Development Curriculum
FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS

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What are Training Recommendations?

- Training recommendations describe meaningful sets of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that are important to the role of an adoptive parent within each topical/thematic area.

- Each training recommendation has a specific result or output.

What are Characteristics?

- Characteristics – qualities or personal attributes that are critical to successful adoptive parenting. These traits would be difficult to teach and tend to be inherent or achieved through life experience.

Examples:

- Has a sense of humor

- Exhibits optimism

- Flexible

- Caring

Training Recommendations for Parents who Adopt Children via the Intercountry or Private Domestic Process

Developing healthy attachment bonds (n=36)	Adoptive parents are consistent, empathetic, sensitive, and emotionally available to their child. Adoptive parents do not take their child's behaviors personally and work to become child-centered through the creation of rituals and routines. For a secure attachment to form, a sensitive and responsive caregiver must be available on a consistent basis. Lack of consistency in behavior or emotional responses by the parents can foster an insecure attachment between parent(s) and child.

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Ability to maintain attentiveness to the parent/child relationship (n=31)	Adoptive parents do not hold back and wait for the relationship to develop; they are proactive in fostering healthy dynamics and try to anticipate and interrupt negative behavior patterns. They utilize positive reinforcement to help in building intimacy and trust between them and the child.

Barth, R. P., Crea, T. M., John, K., Thoburn, J., & Quinton, D. (2005). Beyond attachment theory and therapy: Towards sensitive and evidence-based interventions with foster and adoptive families in distress. *Child & Family Social Work*, *10*(4), 257-268.
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Advocate for the medical and or educational needs of the child (n=24)	Adoptive parents recognize the varied medical and educational needs of the child and actively advocate for the appropriate and necessary services to help ensure a more secure and successful placement outcome.

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Providing culturally competent care (n=23)	Adoptive parents do not assume their own childhood experiences are the same as their child's and they take time to consciously examine their own beliefs about the child's race and culture. Adoptive parents are aware how race and culture can influence their relationship with their child and how they interact (i.e. celebration of different holidays, choices of foods eaten in the home, and the level of exposure the child has to other cultural traditions associated with their racial/ethnic identity). Aware of the roles race, ethnicity, and culture play in the life of the child. Respect for the child's race, background, and culture of birth.

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Understanding the developmental stages (n=21)	Adoptive parents have a working knowledge of the developmental stages that all children go through and are sensitive to the fact that there are additional factors that must be accounted for that can affect child development of adopted children. Some of these factors include experiences associated with separation, abandonment, grief, loss, building trust, expressing anger, and identity development. Understand that these may affect developmental stages of growth and will differ significantly from one child to the next.

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Understanding the potential for traumatic cultural effects on adopted children (n=18)	Adoptive parents realize that transracial adoption exposes the child in public (i.e., lack of physical similarity between them and the rest of the family) and assess how they will handle this attention. Understanding that the more a child knows about adoption at an early age, the better equipped they are to handle the issues that arise. Adoptive parents are able to assess how racism and cultural prejudices might affect their child

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Teaching child about their cultural heritage and cultural socialization (n=18)	Adoptive parents have knowledge of the history of the culture from which their child originated and engages their child in learning about his or her culture of birth. They are proactive in working to develop relationships with other persons in the community who come from racial and cultural backgrounds similar to that of their child. Adoptive parents are aware of the child's needs to develop pride in their racial identities as well as coping skills to deal with racism.

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Understand how to help the child process grief and loss (n=5)	Recognize that very young children may not fully understand concepts like adoption or loss, but that does not mean they cannot feel grief. Can help the child cope by expressing empathy, reassuring the child, and taking proactive efforts, including seeking out supports outside the family unit, to assist the child in processing grief and loss.

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Characteristics of Successful Parents who Adopt Children via the Intercountry or Private Domestic Process

Emotionally supportive/nurturing (n=42)	Work to create an emotionally supportive environment that gives their child a safe space to verbalize and process emotions, including the positive ones. Able to provide child a supportive space to share and act as a calming guide to listen and empathize. Listening more than you speak and empowering the child to find solutions for his/her own problems/challenges.

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Readiness for parenting/ motivated to adopt (n=38)	The prospective adoptive parent has done research to learn about the adoptive process before they begin; they have collectively decided that adoption would be in the best interest for their family unit. The parents believe they are emotionally mature, can make a long-term commitment, and can offer stability in various aspects of life for the child (physical, mental, emotional, financial, and educational).

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Stability and patience (n=33)	Strive to maintain a degree of predictability and consistency in a child's physical and social environment. Adoptive parents see their role as helping the child achieve success in small, incremental steps, beginning with measurable, daily tasks. They do not dwell on past mistakes or worry about the future to pressure themselves or their child. They teach the child the importance of celebrating small successes.

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Understands the importance of maintaining support systems (n=31)	Adoptive parents see the family as a system working together in the best interest of everyone. They view the child's total environment as a working system that has great influence on the child. Adoptive parents work with schools, the neighborhood, friends, and community supports to strengthen the child's adjustment to their new life. Adoptive parents also lean on these relationships for their own self-care.

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Optimistic (n=25)	Have the ability to adjust their expectations and see the best in difficult situations. They understand that mistakes will happen; they forgive themselves and their child when mistakes happen and are able to make adjustments and allowances around rules, expectations, and decision-making to maximize positive outcomes. They have realistic and flexible expectations of themselves and their child and acknowledge and appreciate small steps towards goal achievement.

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Acceptance of the unknown (n=14)	Adoptive parents are welcoming of new challenges and new relationships. They understands that there are no guarantees about the future of this action but are still motivated to move forward. They do not view challenges as insurmountable and are able to adjust, accommodate, and accept changes. They are willing to make changes in their own expectations and can be flexible as needed.

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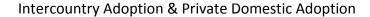
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Financial stability **(n=11)**	Adoptive parents who are working and maintaining stable employment. They are able to take on the financial responsibilities of caring for an adopted child without the need for outside monetary resources.

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Healthy family and marriage functioning (n=8)	Successful family structures (which can include single parents, married parents, same sex couples, and/or other cohabitating partners) engage in regular and frequent communication, practice emotional regulation, have family cohesion, take time for leisure activities, and demonstrate collective resilience when faced with adversity.

Belanger, K., Copeland, S., & Cheung, M. (2008). The role of faith in adoption: Achieving positive adoption outcomes for African American children. *Child Welfare, 87*(2), 99.
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Have a sense of humor (n=3)	Adoptive parents have the ability to laugh at themselves and not take everything seriously. Adoptive parents are able to use humor to manage stress that can result from adoptive parenting. Humor can be used to vent feelings and deescalate tense situations.

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Faith/religion (n=3)	Faith/having a sense of spirituality creates an outlet to remain connected to supportive family, friends, and religious organizations within the community. Having faith/sense of spirituality is associated with having an increased ability to create and sustain hope, as well as with having a more positive view for the future.
Belanger, K., Copeland, S., & Cheung, M. (2008). The role of faith in adoption: Achieving positive adoption outcomes for African American children. *Child Welfare, 87*(2), 99.	
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