



Permanency &  
Adoption  
Competency  
Training



In partnership with Kinship Center, a member of Seneca Family of Agencies, and with funding provided by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services and from the Zukerman Family Foundation, the Adoption Council of Ontario is proud to present:

# Pathways to Permanence 2: Parenting Children Who Have Experienced Trauma and Loss<sup>©</sup>

An 8 session (24-hour) Curriculum designed for Adoptive, Kinship and Customary Care families who are parenting children who have experienced trauma and loss.

- This parent and caregiver curriculum is informed by and incorporates key concepts from Seneca/Kinship Center's ACT: An Adoption and Permanency Curriculum for Child Welfare and Mental Health Professionals. The goal is to provide compatible information to both professionals and parents to enable them to work together in improving permanency outcomes for children. The Adoption Council of Ontario has purchased the exclusive Ontario licenses to both the Pathways 2 curriculum and the ACT curriculum.
- The Pathways to Permanence 2 curriculum is available in locations across Ontario. For more information please contact [PACT@adoptontario.ca](mailto:PACT@adoptontario.ca).

Upon completion of this training participants will:

- Develop an understanding of diverse family constellations; understand that loss, grief and separation are core issues in adoption and permanency for the child, permanent family and birth family
- Appreciate and respect the child's genetic history
- Appreciate the power of sibling relationships
- Be able to consider the unique cultural and multi-cultural issues that affect the child's and family's identity formation and future experiences
- Understand developmental stages and the unique ways that children move through these stages
- Understand the impact of loss and trauma on a child's development
- Develop skills to support developmental re-parenting
- Understand how healthy attachment develops & the impact of early trauma on attachment relationships
- Understand the factors affecting early brain development
- Develop skills to support attachment-based parenting
- Appreciate the importance of children knowing all parts of their story
- Develop skills to support therapeutic parenting
- Be able to assess personal strengths and areas for growth

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# Overview of the Curriculum

- Session 1: Parenting Children with Extra Needs
- Session 2: Lifelong Issues in Permanence
- Session 3: Childhood Development
- Session 4: Creating Positive Attachments, Part 1
- Session 5: Creating Positive Attachments, Part 2
- Session 6: Parenting the Child of Abuse and Neglect
- Session 7: Parenting the Child with Drug and Alcohol Exposure
- Session 8: Building a Community-based Family Support Program



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## Session 1: Parenting Children With Extra Needs

This session begins the adoption and permanence knowledge and skill building content, focusing on the impact of societal views on the adoption/permanency experience for children and families. The similarities and differences of parenting through adoption/permanence versus non-adoption/permanence are explored, as well as a child's understanding of adoption/permanence. Openness in adoption is discussed, particularly as it relates to children knowing their story. The extra challenges involved in becoming an adoptive/permanent family are explored with an emphasis on identifying strengths in families that can prepare them for the journey ahead.

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## Session 2: Lifelong Issues in Permanence

Session 2 continues the adoption/permanence knowledge and skill building through an exploration of kinship connections for both children and parents/caregivers. *The Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanence* is introduced, and provides a theoretical framework for the class series. The core issues of Loss, Rejection, Shame & Guilt, Grief, Identity, Intimacy and Mastery are discussed as they relate to all members of the adoption/permanence constellation. Recognizing the core issues is an intervention that can assist constellation members and professionals to better understand each other and the adoption/permanence experience.

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## Session 3: Childhood Development

This session presents the stages of child development, as a foundation for understanding what happens when a child's development is impacted by trauma and loss. Emphasis is given to how children may become "stuck" at an earlier stage of development, based on traumatic life events, and the importance of parents/caregivers parenting to the stage of development rather than chronological age of the child. The difference between a traditional parenting approach and a developmental re-parenting approach is introduced, with focus given to why traditional parenting methods are often ineffective with children who have experienced trauma and loss. Techniques for identifying and meeting the needs underlying children's negative behaviors are explored.

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## Session 4: Creating Positive Attachments, Part 1

Session 4 introduces the theory of attachment, another foundational concept for this class series. The important role of attachment in the formation of healthy relationships is discussed, and the critical role of the Arousal-Relaxation Cycle in the attachment relationship between child and caregiver. A healthy cycle, in which the child's needs are consistently met, is described, as well as what happens to children when attachment is impaired by trauma and/or multiple changes in caregivers. The two tasks of the parent/caregiver are defined, which are decreasing distress and increasing pleasure for children. Emphasis is placed on the importance of doing this over and over again as part of the attachment building process, with techniques provided for parents/caregivers to use in assisting their children in forming healthier connections.

## 5

### **Session 5: Creating Positive Attachments, Part 2**

This session introduces the science of attachment, and how attachment impacts a child's developing brain. The neurological benefits of a secure attachment pattern for infants/children is discussed, including the negative impact of chronic neglect/abuse on a child's regulatory system and attachment pattern. Participants will also learn how their own early life experiences have a lasting impact on their relationships, with emphasis given to the importance of parents being able to regulate themselves before responding to their children's behaviors. The impact of a parent/caregiver's attachment style on the child's resulting attachment style is explored, including the importance of parents/caregivers being attuned to their children's needs in order for a more secure attachment to develop. Attachment-building behaviors that parents/caregivers can do every day with their children are presented.

## 6

### **Session 6: Parenting the Child of Abuse and Neglect**

Session 6 gives an overview of abuse, neglect and trauma to provide a context for better understanding children's histories, behaviors and needs. The therapeutic parenting skills of reflective listening and talking to children about their difficult histories are explored, with examples provided of what children understand about their story at different developmental stages, as well as language to use when sharing particularly sensitive information with children. The lingering feelings that children continue to experience as a result of neglect/abuse, even when they are currently in a safe home environment, is discussed, with further opportunity provided to apply the concepts of developmental re-parenting, attachment-based parenting and therapeutic parenting to children's challenging behaviors.

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### **Session 7: Parenting the Child with Drug & Alcohol Exposure**

This session begins with an overview of the high incidence of parental drug and alcohol use in child abuse and neglect cases, including children who are exposed in utero to drugs/alcohol. The impact of prenatal exposure on an unborn child's central nervous system and brain development is presented, with interventions for care of prenatally exposed infants. The long term impact of in utero exposure is explored, and the concept of sensory processing is introduced to help participants better understand some behaviors of older children who have been prenatally exposed. The importance of using developmental re-parenting, attachment-based parenting and therapeutic parenting techniques with children who have been prenatally exposed is reinforced, with additional guidelines for helping children who were prenatally exposed.

## 8

### **Session 8: Building a Community-based Family Support Program**

The objective of Session 8 is to provide Pathways to Permanence 2 participants with the tools that they need to begin to build an ongoing parent support network in their community. The participants will be guided and supported by their Pathways trainer and the ACO's PACT Parent Leader, an experienced adoptive parent who has built a thriving parent support group and youth network in her community. Information and contact information about existing supports and networks in their communities will be provided to participants. The leaders will work with the participants to develop a plan so that the knowledge and the relationships built during the Pathways to Permanence 2 training can continue to grow, and a bridge to an ongoing family support program is created.

## Core Beliefs of this Curriculum

- Permanency in a family is at the center of the core beliefs
- Every child deserves a family
- Children must have permanency to achieve their full potential
- Children and adolescents need families for a lifetime, not just for childhood
- Healthy, functional families can provide a stabilizing and healing environment for previously traumatized and abused children
- Keeping children's previous, positive connections facilitates and deepens the attachment to the new caregivers
- Adoption, foster care and relative caregiving involve complex issues requiring specialized training for the caregivers
- Children and their families must receive interventions that are culturally competent and built on strength-based, family-systems models

## Rationale for the Curriculum

In developing the Pathways to Permanence 2: Parenting Children Who Have Experienced Trauma and Loss curriculum, Kinship Center addressed an unfilled need by creating a clinically informed competency building training for parents and caregivers of children that have been traumatized by early abuse and broken attachments in their lives. Traditionally, issues arising in children, and through them the families that care for them, have not been addressed or treated adequately by the social work community at large. Once the legal aspects of the child's care had been addressed, the family was often left on its own, without the community or other resources needed to help heal the child in their midst. This stress can negatively impact marriages and other children in the family.

The purpose of these classes is to provide a foundation based on both science and experience for parents to better understand and help the children in their care, while guiding them to a functional and healthy adult life. It is the intent of the Pathways to Permanence 2 curriculum to assist parents and caregivers to recognize, identify, and address the core issues with new tools given to them during the series. The parents become empowered and have more empathy as their skills increase. By using the information from this curriculum, families can be stabilized and children helped to heal from trauma.

A guiding theme in this curriculum is the belief that parents and caregivers need to develop a greater understanding of themselves in order to better parent their children, a point that becomes particularly critical when parenting children with traumatic histories. This was already a strong theme in the curriculum before its most recent revision, and it became even more clear during the field testing of the revised curriculum that this series is as much about the parents as it is about the children. This theme is woven throughout the curriculum, with each theoretical framework or concept that is introduced.

