

## CURRICULUM BELIEFS AND BIASES

Regarding our use of the word “adoption” throughout this training, we believe that guardianship and other forms of permanence can hold as much emotional worth to a child as the legal process of adoption. *It is the value behind the relationships in one’s permanent family that leads to a critical sense of belonging.* The goal is to be connected to this family for life, regardless of the legal terminology in each specific case.

- **Adoption is a life long process which brings both grief and joy.**  
Adoption is a lifelong process that is not completed when the adoption is finalized. There can be feelings of great joy as well as great loss throughout the adoption relationship.
- **Families are the healing mechanism of the child.**  
It is the parent’s task to heal a child. A therapist can help, but it is not the therapist’s job to heal the child. Parents need to learn as much as possible about the therapeutic process. Parents should not be sitting in the waiting room while a therapist takes their child into an office for an hour. Families must *always* be included in the process. Healing takes place 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, not one hour a week in the therapist’s office.
- **Birth families count.**  
It is important to talk about birth families with children, helping them make appropriate connections between themselves and their birth families. Appropriate information needs to be available for children to develop a sense of who they are and who they will become.
- **Men count.**  
Often, men are not part of the adoption process. The adoption process has too often ignored men, or downplayed the role of men, both as birth fathers and adoptive fathers. Historically, the focus has been on birth mothers and adoptive mothers. Our goal is to pull men into the adoptive process whenever possible.
- **Children’s losses must be reduced whenever possible.**  
Adoption is created through loss. Without loss, adoption would not occur. All those involved in the process experience some sort of loss and grief. The way those losses are resolved will impact children throughout their lives. Our goal is to insure that the greater burden of loss is borne by the adults rather than by the children. .
- **Adults should always carry more emotional responsibility.**  
The adoption process can be arduous and emotionally difficult for everyone involved. Historically, when a child was in foster care awaiting adoption, and the adoption plan did not work out, the child was left with feelings of rejection. Concurrent planning—a plan to simultaneously seek reunification and adoptive resources—allows for children to be placed in the home of those who may be a permanent placement *if* reunification does not occur. Either way, if the child is returned home, or adopted by foster parents, the child wins. The adults carry more of the emotional responsibility.
- **Professionals need special knowledge.**  
It is not enough to be a trained therapist or social worker when working in adoption or permanency. Specialized training in the unique dynamics of adoption and permanency



Pathways to  
Permanence 2

Parenting  
Children  
Who Have  
Experienced  
Trauma  
AND LOSS

Session 1

Parenting  
Children  
with  
Extra Needs

Parent’s  
Toolbox



placements is vital. Once families are created through adoption or permanency planning, they may need specialized information and training for future issues. We should not assume that just any therapist will possess the expertise of working with adoptive and permanency formed families.

- **Planning ahead for the child is key to success.**  
Planning ahead for all transitions in adoption is vital to a family's success. This also relates to minimizing the emotional consequences for children in all areas. Imagine losing the person who has been central to your world. How would you regain the ability to trust? We need to work diligently to avoid disruptions whenever possible in foster, relative caregiver, and adoptive placements.
- **Permanency is our goal: a child must have a family for a lifetime.**  
We seek permanency for children. If reunification is not possible, our goal is adoption or another permanent placement. Long term foster care is not a permanent plan. It is important for children to get the message of permanency. The message to the child is: "We are here for you forever. We'll be here when you are 10 years old or 40 years old. We will be here when times are good or when they are tough. We are not going anywhere. You are ours forever."
- **Adults need to make changes too.**  
Children should not be expected to make all the changes. Grown-ups must make changes too. When adjustments need to be made to accommodate adoptive transitions in a family, it is important that children see adults trying to change when necessary.
- **Grief must be acknowledged and dealt with.**  
Sometimes families are built by adoption because of issues of infertility, which may include significant grief. This grief must be acknowledged and dealt with so it does not become an obstacle to relationships. Once children join a family, grief over such things as missed opportunities to share in the child's early life can surface. These, too, must be acknowledged, shared and put into proper perspective. How a parent confronts and deals with such grief and loss will impact the parent's ability to help a child confront his or her distress, loss, and grief.
- **Success means the child has a family.**  
Success is defined as a child gaining a permanent family. It is not defined as a perfect child within a perfect family. It is not defined as a child achieving success to make his or her parents proud. Expectations need to be flexible in the definition of "success." Our goal is always to maximize the child's potential, within the reality of the child's abilities. Having a supportive family who stands by the child is the measure of success. A family that nurtures strengths, while working on areas that need improvement, can improve the child's chances for success.
- **Children Grow Best in Families.**  
Our strongest bias is that children grow best in families. This belief stems from extensive work with children, as well as the current research on successful adoptive families. It is well established that children in residential treatment who may be severely disturbed

and behaviorally unable to live in families, often do much better when they are able to transition into families. Deep, meaningful and emotional connection to a family, whether biological or not, appears to spark improvement for children in all areas.



Pathways to  
Permanence 2

Parenting  
Children  
WHO HAVE  
Experienced  
Trauma  
AND LOSS

*Session 1*

Parenting  
Children  
with  
Extra Needs

Parent's  
Toolbox