

# A D O P T I O N C O M P E T E N C Y C U R R I C U L U M

## Trainer's Guide



**NATIONAL CHILD WELFARE  
RESOURCE CENTER**

*for Adoption*

*-A Service of the Children's Bureau-*

16250 Northland Drive, Suite 120  
Southfield, MI 48075  
*at Spaulding for Children*



## *Dedicated to Drenda S. Lakin*

*The Adoption Competency Curriculum is dedicated to the memory of Drenda S. Lakin, former Director of the National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption. A staunch advocate for children and youth, Drenda spent over 30 years advocating for the adoption of waiting children with special needs. As Director of the National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption, she oversaw the work of the Center's original Special Needs Adoption Curriculum, from which this Curriculum is based. Though she is truly missed, Drenda's legacy lives on through the lives she has touched both personally and professionally as a collaborator, motivator, and mentor.*

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## Who We Are and Why We Developed this Curriculum

The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption (NCWRCA), formerly known as the National Resource Center for Special Needs Adoption, is a service of the Children's Bureau. National Resource Centers (NRCs) are funded by the Children's Bureau, within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Each NRC provides on-site training and technical assistance to States, Tribes, and public child welfare agencies in the preparation and implementation of the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) process.

The NCWRCA has been located at Spaulding for Children in Michigan since 1985. Since 1985, it has trained more than 75,000 professionals and parents in best practices in adoption and post adoption services. The NCWRCA continuously develops and disseminates new training curricula, publications, and training DVD's to improve adoption methods and practices. The *Adoption Competency Curriculum* updates the popular *Special Needs Adoption Curriculum* developed in 1990. It includes the latest research on adoption practice. It is designed to be a comprehensive curriculum that speaks to all the issues in the adoption of children/youth from the child welfare system. It is appropriate for training practitioners new to adoption as well as those who have experience in this area. It acknowledges that most adoption practitioners have had years of child welfare experience in protective services or foster care prior to transitioning to adoption. Thus, they come to adoption practice well versed in the strengths and challenges of children who experience the child welfare system.

Spaulding for Children was founded in 1968. Its founders had a dream that all children are adoptable, without regard to their age, race, or disability. Acting upon that dream, Spaulding has become internationally acclaimed for its pioneering work in the field of special needs adoption. Since its inception, Spaulding has provided adoption and related services to hundreds of children and their families. The Agency has also provided training and consultation to professionals in England, Scotland, South Africa, United States and Canada.

Spaulding's mission is: In collaboration with families, communities, and local, state, and national organizations, Spaulding will assure that all children grow up in permanent families and have the help they need to be successful in life.

This Curriculum's richness is attributable to a close working relationship between the NCWRCA, the foster care and adoption staff, and the children/youth and families served by Spaulding.



## Philosophy Underlying the Curriculum

The *Adoption Competency Curriculum* (ACC) is based on the belief that children/youth in the child welfare system whose parental rights have been terminated are entitled to a permanent family. For the majority of these children/youth, that permanent family is created through legal adoption. Given their past experiences of abuse and/or neglect and being a child/youth in the child welfare system, these children/youth have developed systems of coping that might be similar to other children/youth. Many need additional understanding and support to successfully adapt to being a child/youth in a family. This Curriculum focuses on some of the common issues and challenges that occur when the child/youth is transitioned from foster care to adoption. It emphasizes the roles of the adults—child welfare practitioners, foster parents, relatives, adoptive parents—in accepting the child/youth unconditionally, understanding the impact of the child welfare system on the child/youth, and supporting his/her transition to adoption.

## Central Concepts in the Curriculum

ACC is designed as a comprehensive curriculum for training child welfare practitioners in public and private agencies who provide adoption services for children/youth who have been abused or neglected. ACC provides opportunities for participants to:

- Assess their own knowledge, strengths and resources.
- Apply knowledge to real case scenarios.
- Determine their need for further information and provides guidance on where to obtain that information through a comprehensive bibliography.

The participant exercises are designed to be relevant and applicable to practitioners new to child welfare adoption practice as well as those who have been in the field for many years.

ACC recognizes that adults learn differently and provides information in a number of different ways to help trainees integrate the information they are learning. This Curriculum also integrates the knowledge and experiences of the participants and encourages them to share that knowledge and those experiences with others during the course of the training.

Cultural competence is a central concept in ACC. By this, we mean recognizing and celebrating diversity, treating others with respect, and working to understand differences rather than to make judgments about them.

ACC also is based on a series of competencies, or skills, that participants will develop over the course of the training. Curriculum competencies are listed in each module.



## A Note about the Curriculum Development Team . . .

The *Adoption Competency Curriculum* (ACC) is designed to be a comprehensive curriculum for training child welfare practitioners in public and private agencies who provide adoption services for children/youth who have been abused and/or neglected. It has been structured so that it is relevant for the beginning and experienced practitioner. It is designed to provide opportunity to apply concepts using the practitioners' own agencies' policies and procedures. It addresses the major aspects of adoption services with children/youth in the child welfare system. It highlights the challenges and provides opportunities to develop solutions.

The Curriculum Development Team researched each issue to ensure that the latest knowledge and promising practices were included in the Curriculum, developed content materials, provided constructive criticism on content, formatted outlines for the modules, identified reference materials and articles, developed the pre-tests/post tests, and served as field test trainers and observers.

Members of the Curriculum Development Team included:

- **Natalie Lyons**, MSW, Vice President and Center Director, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption
- **Ernestine Moore**, MSW, JD, Adoption Competency Curriculum Development Director
- **Sandra Burgess**, Burgess Editorial Services
- **Dana Cadman**, Burgess Editorial Services
- **Angela G. Cause**, MSW, Adoption Manager, Arizona Department of Economic Security
- **Marcia Cipriani**, BA, and **Brad Graham**, Media Magic Productions
- **Sharen E. Ford**, PhD, Manager Permanency Unit, Colorado Department of Human Services
- **Melissa Granger**, MSW, Project Specialist, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption
- **Sharonlyn Harrison**, PhD, Public Research and Evaluation Services
- **Janice King**, MSW, Research Analyst, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption
- **Suzanne Harvey Kapica**, MSW, Consultant, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption
- **Drenda Lakin**, MSW, ACSW, Retired Vice President, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption. Ms. Lakin died in September 2006, but her commitment to adoption lives on in this Curriculum.
- **Sheila Malone**, Retired Adoption Program Specialist, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption
- **Lorraine Mayes**, Trainer/Consultant, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption
- **Barbara Mucha**, Administrative Assistant, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption
- **Bonnie Sumblor**, Contractual, Videographer/Editor
- **Pamela Walker**, Trainer/Consultant
- **Letitia Wright**, BS, RSW, IPP Case Manager, Spaulding for Children

The primary tasks of the Curriculum Development Team were to research and to synthesize subject matter; to organize the content into a clear, instructionally sound document that includes educational DVD's and to present the material in clear, concise language.



The Trainer’s Guide and Participant’s Handouts reflect the work products of the Curriculum Development Team supported by the Curriculum Development Director Ernestine Moore, layout by Barbara Mucha, and editing by Sandra Burgess and Dana Cadman of the Burgess Editorial Services.

The Curriculum was pilot tested at the Kansas Department of Social and Rehabilitation Services, Kansas City, Kansas; the Michigan Federation for Children and Families, Lansing, Michigan; and the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Austin, Texas.

Special thanks go to the following individuals who participated in the pilot tests. Their role was to offer constructive criticism to improve the content and structure of the Curriculum prior to submission to the Children’s Bureau for federal review. All of these persons, in their various roles, were critical to the development of this Curriculum, and we thank them:

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- **Pamela Freburg**, Lutheran Adoption Service
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- **Sharon Knight**, Adoption Program Manager, District of Columbia Child and Family Services Agency
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- **O. Jane Morgan**, Director, Capacity Building Division, ACF/ACYF/Children's Bureau
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- **Ada White**, Director of Adoption Services, Child Welfare League of America
- **Kathryn Woolsey**, MSW, Intern, Wayne State University



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- **Yolanda Brown-McCutchen**, Business Office
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- **Sharen Killen**, Child & Family Services
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- **Lorraine Mayes**, Trainer/Consultant, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption
- **Barbara Mucha**, Administrative Assistant, National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption
- **Letitia Wright**, BS, RSW, IPP Case Manager, Spaulding for Children

Besides those previously named, we owe deep gratitude to the adult adoptees, youth, birth parents, adoptive parents, and direct practice staff who participated in videos and shared personal and professional insights. As a result, this curriculum is a relevant, empowering, practice-based model for beginning and experienced practitioners in the child welfare adoption field.

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- **Virginia Sturgeon**, BSW, MSW
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## Special Features of the Adoption Competency Curriculum

ACC includes written and DVD materials that are easily used by the trainers and training participants. Icons and print variations are used in the Trainer's Guide to denote training exercises and DVD segments. Traditionally, the NCWRCA has distributed curricula in hard copies—The Trainer's Guide and the Participant's Handouts. In the Trainer's Guide, the trainer's preparation pages are printed on blue paper; materials used in training are printed on white paper, and materials referenced but not trained are printed on pink paper. Participant handouts also are assembled in a separate Participant's Handouts, which participants may use readily throughout the training and refer to afterwards. This distribution to the States will be electronic. The electronic copy provides a cost-effective way for the Curriculum to be distributed to all States and, given the significant amount of state-specific material included in the Curriculum, for the States to efficiently incorporate and update these state-specific components. We encourage the States to use the color coded system when the Trainer's Guide is printed. For cost-effectiveness, the Participant's Handouts can be printed and distributed without binding.

Consistent with the nature of adult learning patterns, ACC uses DVD segments to highlight, model and reinforce training concepts. Dramatic case scenarios and documentary DVD facilitate interactive and experiential activities during each module.

ACC also provides participants with opportunities for self-reflection and open discussion of issues in child welfare adoptions.

In the Bloom's Taxonomy, this Curriculum broadly provides knowledge, opportunity to comprehend, opportunity to apply and opportunity for analysis. It also provides limited synthesis and evaluation opportunities.

## Components of the ACC Curriculum

The Trainer's Guide is designed to provide a comprehensive outline of the issues of child welfare adoption. The Curriculum is divided into seven modules designed to be trained alone or trained in any combination to meet the administrative needs of the organization and the participants. Each module has four sections: trainer's preparation instructions, training materials, including Participant's Handouts, and a reference section.

1. The *trainer's preparation section*, copied in blue, includes:

- **This section provides directions on unique features of the specific module.** Many segments of the modules require gathering current policies, procedures, case recording formats, statistics, and the like for the training location. This should be done at least six weeks before the training.

The Curriculum is designed to be relevant for both beginning child welfare practitioners and experienced child welfare practitioners. Trainers should review the backgrounds, experiences, current job functions of all registrants for a specific training and identify the hot issues/concerns in the State so that they can tailor the presentation of the content and activities to the registrants.



- **Required Materials/Equipment and Room Setup** lists the items specifically needed for training this module.
2. The **training materials section** includes the actual training content with instructions on what to do and say. The material is quite thorough. The *trainer should not read* the material during the training. Rather, the detail is provided so that the trainer will be best prepared to cover the content. It is suggested that the trainer, as part of his/her preparation, write bulleted notes for the content in the margins to keep him/her on track and ensure that the material is covered without reading.

Within the Trainer’s Guide, each type of activity and instruction is designated by a labeled icon. They are as follows:



### **Directions to Trainer**

Directions tells the trainer what needs to be done during a particular segment. It is up to individual trainers to decide how to accomplish these tasks during their preparation for training. Sometimes, this icon does not appear but a check mark “✓” is at the beginning of a sentence which is a direction for the trainer.



### **Trainer’s Points to Participants**

This section is content for mini-lectures. The factual information to be shared with participants is contained here. It is thoroughly written so that the trainer is prepared to discuss relevant points. The points should not be read.



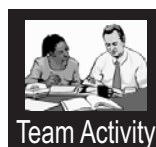
### **State-specific Information**

This section includes state-specific policies and procedures. It is designed to ensure that the participants receive training that is consistent with the policies and procedures that impact their daily practice.



### **Large Group Discussion**

This section offers proven triggers for stimulating exchanges in the large group setting. It includes suggestions for managing the large group discussion to keep it lively, informative and on track.



### **Team Activity**

Team activities provide the opportunity for open discussion of attitudes, feelings and reactions to information presented throughout the training. They also provide a forum for participants to get to know one another and to develop a supportive network.



### **Individual Activity**

Individual activities emphasize self-assessment and personal discovery. The Trainer's Guide provides clear instructions, hints and rationales to help make these activities meaningful and productive.



### **Participant's Handouts**

The Participant's Handouts icon identifies materials that the participants will use during the training as well as materials that are not trained but that participants are to use for reference.



### **DVD Description**

The Trainer's Guide provides a brief synopsis of each DVD, followed by the key points to be covered in the Team Activities and Large Group Discussions following the DVD. All curriculum DVD's are included in the front of the Trainer's Guide.



### **Transition**

Transitions help the trainer more easily move the participants from one discussion or activity to another.

## **3. Participant's Handout Materials**

Participant's Handout materials are reproduced in the Trainer's Guide immediately follow the trainer's reference to them, always beginning on a new page. A white space might appear before these materials. Some of the TG's Participant's Handouts have answers or prompts. Those given to the participants do not.

Each participant should be given Participant's Handouts copied from the CD named Participant's Handouts included in the Trainer's Guide. The handouts include State or agency specific policies, procedures, and data that the trainer should obtain and insert at the designated page for that content.

## **4. Reference**

These materials are used by the trainer for additional resource information. They are printed on pink paper.



## Assumptions about the Training Process

ACC advances the concept of empowerment and applies it to providing services to children/youth. This perspective requires that the training process be based on the principles of empowerment.

Also inherent in the Curriculum design are the assumptions that the ACC:

- Builds on the integrity and experience of the participants.
- Encourages active participation, integration and investment by the participants.
- Educates participants by engaging them in learning activities that help them to gain knowledge and build skills through an accumulation of experiences.
- Recognizes and addresses the realities and constraints of the systems charged with providing adoption services for children/youth in the child welfare system.
- Serves as an impetus for further learning, not as the completion of the learning process.
- Uses upon the principles of the adult learning model espoused in Bloom's Taxonomy: knowledge → competence → application → analysis → synthesis → evaluation.

## Recommendations for Use of the Adoption Competency Curriculum

The *Adoption Competency Curriculum* has been designed so that it can be trained in any modular sequence that is, each module stands alone and can be trained as a complete module or in segments with proper preparation. This format provides participants or agencies the option to select the content that is most important to them and deliver the training in time periods that meet their organizational needs. The total Curriculum is designed to be trained in sixty-six contact hours. The actual training time can be lengthened or shortened based on participants' needs.

The modules and the designed number of hours are:

- Federal Laws and Policies Impacting Adoption Placement – 8 hours
- Multiethnic Placement Act/Interethnic Adoption Provisions – 8 hours
- Child and Youth Assessment and Preparation – 16 hours
- Family Assessment and Preparation – 12 hours
- Decision Making and Placement Selection in Adoption – 4 hours
- Title IV-E Adoption Assistance – 8 hours
- Post Adoption Services – 7 hours
- Compassion Fatigue: Secondary Traumatic Stress Disorder, Burnout, Vicarious Trauma – 3 hours



## **Who Should Serve as Trainers for ACC**

This Curriculum is designed to be trained by public or private agency training staff or child welfare managers, supervisors or experienced caseworkers. Ideally, trainers will be from the geographic areas of the participants. Experiences and insights validate the content of the training. Further, children, youth, birth parents, relatives, foster parents, and adoptive parents might be included as trainers/consultants for specific segments.

The NCWRCA will provide technical assistance to trainers designated by the States to ensure that each is prepared to train this Curriculum.

## **How Should ACC be Presented**

The Curriculum has been designed to provide a range of information delivered in a lecture format/group discussion format as well as options for the activities or team exercises. The “Trainer’s Points,” “Large Group Discussion,” and “Individuals and Team Activities” should be based on the participants’ needs. Knowing where your participants are coming from and their prior knowledge helps considerably in modifying the Curriculum content and time allotted to complete a specific component. The Trainer’s Guide is a “Guide,” not an absolute.

## **Who Can Benefit from the Curriculum**

The ACC is designed to educate child welfare practitioners in public and private agencies who provide adoption services for children/youth in the public child welfare system. Materials are written in clear, straightforward language. The language of other professions is used where necessary to provide the participants with the ability to communicate effectively with those professionals. All such language was defined, to the extent possible, in commonly used language.

