Adoption Assessor Refresher Training

Ohio Child Welfare Training Program

In your group:
- Introduce yourself
- Outline your experience in adoption or foster care
- What do you particularly want to review?

Tier I

- Family and Child Assessment
- Birth Parent Services
- Post Finalization Adoption Services
- Adoption Assistance
- Placement Strategies
- Pre-Finalization Adoption Services

Family and Child Assessment

Major Themes
- Mutual process
- Strength-based
- Personal values and cultural incompetence can interfere with accurate assessment
- A joint assessment is preferred
- Goal of matching is to assure a good fit between needs of the child and strengths of the resource family

Family and Child Assessment Review

Assessment Categories
- Assessment Categories
- Assessment Levels
- No-No’s
- In-Depth Assessment
- Prediction Path
- ICWA and MEPA

Assessment Categories
- Motivation/ Expectations of adoption
- Personal and emotional maturity
- Stability and quality of interpersonal relationships
- Resilience, coping skills, and history of stress management
- Openness of family system
Assessment Categories

- Parenting skills and abilities
- Empathy and perspective taking ability
- Entitlement
- Ability for "hands on" parenting
- "Life-long" commitment

Assessment Level Definitions

**Strength - Family is well-prepared and experienced**

**Minimal - Family has a beginning awareness of issues and is motivated to learn more**

**Caution - Family displays some deficit; needs considerable development**

NO -NO'S

- Sexual Conduct Disorders
- Current Drug or Alcohol Abuse
- Severe Mental Illness
- Current Domestic Violence

In-Depth Assessment – A Second Look

Under what conditions might a person who has experienced one of the following issues be a suitable adoptive applicant?

- History of being a perpetrator of physical abuse, sexual abuse or neglect
- History of domestic violence
- Recurrent arrests and convictions
- Unresolved personal issues related to childhood victimization

Child Assessment Information Includes...

- Birth and medical information
- Birth family background and social history
- Placement history
- Developmental and Educational information
- Mental health status

Child's cultural needs

Child's strengths and limitations

Impact of victimization

Support this child may need for a lifetime
Prediction Path

1. Placement trail
2. Strength/Needs Worksheet
3. Prediction Narrative

Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978

- Must be followed when there is custody proceeding of a child of Native American or Alaskan Native descent
- Active efforts must be used to identify and contact child's Indian tribe
- Tribes hold jurisdiction for Native American/Alaskan Native children, not courts or agencies
- Outlines standards for removal, placement and change of placement
- Each tribe determines the child's membership or eligibility for membership
- Ranks placement preferences for Indian children

MEPA, as amended

- Cannot delay or deny a child's placement based on race, color, or national origin;
- Cannot deny a person to foster/adopt based on race, color, national origin;
- Must diligently recruit potential foster/adoptive families that reflect diversity of children.

Behavioral Questions

Focus on actual events in applicant's history

Theoretical:
How do you think you would respond in an emergency or under stress?

Behavioral:
What was the most stressful period in your life? What did you do to resolve the situation, and how did you take care of yourself while you were experiencing this crisis? Who was your primary support at that time?

Updates in Family and Child Assessment

- Behavioral Questions in Interviewing
- Large Family Assessment
- Pre-Adoptive Staffing
- Matching Conferences
- Use of Family Interview Guide

Large Family Assessment

- Used for families with 5 or more children from age 0-18 after the adoption
- Evaluates family's ability to meet the needs of the prospective adoptive child
- Evaluates family's ability to meet ongoing needs of children already in the home
In large family assessments, consider...
- Living space arrangements
- Children currently in home
- Prospective child’s needs
- Parent’s capacities and motivations
- Resources and supports
- Contingency planning
- Family history and experience
- References

Pre-Adoptive Staffing
- To present information about child to assist staff in selecting most appropriate family
- Within 45 days after execution of surrender or permanent custody order by court
- Includes information on special needs; placement history; summary of social, developmental, medical history; lifebook and permanency planning needs; assessment of readiness for adoption
- Documented on JFS 01690

Matching Conference
- Determine the most appropriate resource for the child
- Within 90 days of execution of surrender or permanent court order (if under appeal, within 45 days of resolution of appeal)
- Every 90 days following initial matching conference
- Established protocol conducted in a non-discriminatory manner
- Documented on JFS 01689

Family Interview Guide
- Provides sample questions to guide interviews with prospective adoptive and foster parents
- Offered as suggested guidelines
- Interview questions need to be tailored to families being interviewed
- Follow-up questions will be formulated based on responses from the family members
- A “starting point” as Assessors gather data and guide the family through a process of self-assessment

Birth Parent Services
- Major Themes
- Birth parents, both mother and father, should be empowered to have as much involvement as possible in permanency planning for their children.
- Birth parents should be helped to understand, accept, and manage the pain of an adoption decision, whether that decision is made by the parent or by the court.

Birth Parent Services Review
- Principles of birth parent counseling
- Adoption issues of birth parents
- Rules regarding permanent surrender
- Putative Father Registry
Principles of Birth Parent Counseling

Awareness adoption is a lifelong issue
Family Involvement
Self-determination
Cultural Sensitivity
Enabling

Core Issues of Birth Parents

- Loss
- Guilt
- Shame
- Grief
- Control
- Identity
- Rejection
- Trust

PUTATIVE FATHER REGISTRY

DEVELOPED FOR THREE REASONS:
- To reduce the likelihood of a traumatic separation as a result of improper termination of parental rights
- To require the putative father to take a proactive step in planning for his child’s future
- To protect the father’s rights

1-888-313-3100

Rules Regarding Permanent Surrender

- The assessor must meet with the birth parent at least 72 hours prior to signing the ODJFS form 1666 to discuss:
  - Options available to the birth parents and the child;
  - The surrender will permanently sever parental rights and responsibilities;
  - Open adoption options and procedures;
  - ODJFS 01693: “Statement Concerning Ohio Law and Adoption Materials;
  - Social and medical history (ODJFS form 01616)

Updates in Birth Parent Services

- Engaging the Birth Father
- Research
- Concurrent Case Planning
- Permission messages/ Entrustment Ceremonies

Birth Fathers

What are barriers to working with birth fathers?
People adopted after 1996:
--may have open records when they reach age 21, depending on the wishes of the birthparent. Birthparents will have a continuum of openness from which to choose when signing surrender.

People adopted prior to 1964:
--access to their original birth certificates through a request to Dept. of Health.

People adopted from 1964 to 1996:
--may access original birth certificates in March, 2015; birth parents have option to express wishes, withhold name

Exploring research
- In 61% of cases with a child in kinship care, workers did not attempt to find father
- In 67% of these cases, workers identified problems that affected the father’s ability to care for his child
- 82% of fathers had not contributed to the most recent assessment
- In 84% of cases, workers had no discussion about father with their supervisors

Concurrent Case Planning
- Eliminates delays in seeking permanence
- Requires aggressive search for birth family (including father and father’s family)
- Full disclosure to birth family regarding time limitations of case plan
- Provides a “back-up” plan in case reunification efforts fail

Permission Messages
- Designed to help both birth parent and child understand child will not be parented by the birth parent
- Provides “permission” from birth relatives for child to become part of another family
- Usually face-to-face contacts, but permission may be given in a video, audiotape, or letter

Workers must assess the appropriateness of a transition visit:
- Is it in the child’s best interests to have a transition visit? Will it be psychologically helpful or harmful?
- Who should be there?
- What boundaries need to be set?
- What is the developmental level of the child (would a letter or videotape be more appropriate)?

Post Adoption Services
Major Themes
- Lifelong process
- Many triad members experience adoption issues
- Need for post adoption services should be normalized
Post Adoption Services Review

- Adoption issues
- Expected developmental stages for adopted children and youth
- Components of post adoption services

Adoption Issues

- Loss/Ambiguous Loss
- Control
- Divided Loyalty
- Abandonment/Fear of Rejection
- Shame/Guilt
- Trust
- Identity

Post Adoption Services...

- Education/Training
- Associations
- Support groups
- Crisis intervention
- Family networking/mentoring
- Family therapy
- Respite care
- Day treatment
- Kinship placement
- Residential treatment and...

Handling inquiries from triad members... do not disclose:

- Name: first, last, alias, or maiden
- Social security number
- Address
- Telephone number
- Place of employment
- Statewide MIS number

Updates in Post Adoption Services

- Research
- Psychological Presence

Child factors associated with disruption/dissolution...

- Age
- History of severe abuse/neglect
- Multiple losses of caregivers
- Early trauma
- Multiple placements
- Severe behavior, health, mental health, or developmental problems
- Desire to be reunited with birth family
- Continuing relationships w. birth family not supportive of adoption

NACAC, 2010
Parent factors associated with disruption/dissolution…

- Inadequate understanding
- Unrealistic expectations
- Inability to meet child’s needs
- Conscious or unconscious deception in assessment process
- Unresolved infertility issues
- Parental loss
- Inexperience as parents
- Divorce or death of parents

Program factors associated with disruption/dissolution…

- Poor prep of child
- Poor prep of parents
- Inadequate support for family
- Expensive services
- Lack of information re: services

System factors associated with disruption/dissolution…

- Lack of available services
- Lack of expertise
- Lack of services to preserve birth family
- Lack of training to develop assessment, case management skills
- Policies that promote quantity over quality

Yet… 95% of families express satisfaction with adoption. And…

When compared with youth emancipating from foster care, adopted youth are:

- More likely to complete high school or equivalent
- More likely to attend and complete college
- Less likely to be teen parents
- Less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol
- Less likely to have mental health problems
- Less likely to be arrested and incarcerated
- More likely to be employed
- More likely to have adequate incomes

The Impact of the Psychological Presence

“The symbolic existence of an individual in the perception of other family members in a way that influences thoughts, emotions, behavior, identity or unity of remaining family members...”

Dr. Deborah Fravel

Adoption Assistance

Major Themes

- Adoption assistance has been available since 1980 to assure that money is not a barrier for families wishing to provide permanency to children waiting for adoptive homes.
Adoption Assistance Review

Overview of four subsidy programs available in Ohio

ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

- Title IV-E Adoption Assistance
- Nonrecurring Adoption Expenses
- State Adoption Maintenance Subsidy
- PASSS

TITLE IV-E Adoption Assistance

- Child must be IV-E or SSI eligible
- First maintenance subsidy choice
- No income requirements
- Apply prior to legalization

NONRECURRING ADOPTION EXPENSES

- Covers expenses directly related to adoption--up to $1000 per child
- Child has special needs
- Apply prior to legalization

STATE ADOPTION MAINTENANCE SUBSIDY

- Child is ineligible for IV-E subsidy
- Child has special needs
- Family income and residency requirements
- Apply prior to legalization
- Reviewed annually

POST ADOPTION SPECIAL SERVICES SUBSIDY

- For any adoptive family
- For families that identify needs after adoption legalization
- Families apply to county of their residence
- Provides assistance for broad range of support
- Designed to prevent adoptive placement disruption
Updates in Adoption Assistance

- Changes in rules

Placement Strategies

Major Themes

- Placement almost universally creates crisis for children.
- The younger the child, the more difficult transition is.
- Goals of effective transition planning: minimize stress, maximize child’s ability to cope, and assure child has an accurate perception of the event.
- The degree of trauma experienced by a child is largely dependent on the worker’s skill in structuring the placement.
- The unknown is very threatening. The known is less threatening.
- Permanent traumatic separation greatly increases the child’s sense of loss. Carefully planned transition from temporary to permanent placement limits the child’s perception of loss.
- There is no simplistic “recipe” for placement activities.

Placement Strategies Review

- Crisis Theory

  - Techniques to minimize stress, maximize coping, and assure an accurate perception of the event for the child, the sending family, and the receiving family

Factors Affecting Crisis

- Stressors
- Coping
- Perceptions

Reduce Placement-Induced Crisis:

- Minimize stress
- Increase coping
- Ensure accurate perception of events

Multiple Transitions
Goals of pre-finalization services: strengthen, stabilize, and maintain the adoptive placement. Absence of supportive services before and after adoption finalization—widely identified as a critical factor in the successful continuation of an adoptive placement. Workers must remain actively involved with the adoptive family after placement as an adult educator, a facilitator of resources, and a crisis interventionist. A primary method of ensuring long-term success of an adoptive placement—promote development of attachment between family members and adopted child.

Pre-Finalization Services Review

- Three patterns of developing attachment: Arousal/Relaxation Cycle, Positive Interactions Cycle, and Claiming Behaviors
- Stages of adoptive family adjustment
- Common causes of adoption disruption

Helping to Develop Attachment

- The Arousal - Relaxation Cycle
- Positive Interaction
- Claiming Behaviors

Learning To Be a Family: Phases of Adjustment...

- Getting Acquainted
- Honeymoon
- Ambivalence
- Reciprocal Interaction
- Bond Solidification

Disruptions – WHY?

- Mismatch
- Inadequate preparation
- Lack of pre-finalization services
Disruptions – WHY?
- Lack of family supports and identification of resources
- Unmatched expectations/family strain and overload
- Insurmountable obstacles

EN ROUTE TO AN ADOPTION DISRUPTION...
Honeymoon
Diminishing Pleasures
Adopted Child is Seen as the Problem
Going Public
The Turning Point
The Deadline or Ultimatum
The Final Crisis
The Decision to Disrupt
The Aftermath

Updates in Pre-Finalization Services
- Ambiguous Loss
- Changes in visitation rules
- Assessor activities during visits

Ten Common Parental Expectations
1. Our love will be enough.
2. We (I) will feel love and connection to this child quickly.
3. This child will step into our family system and easily learn how to function within our “rules,” goals, and ambitions.
4. This child’s needs will be just like those of our biological children.
5. Our biological children will embrace this new child as a sibling.
6. Our child will fit well into our extended family and be welcomed by them.
7. My friends and acquaintances will validate my role as parent in our child’s life and support us through the adoption process and beyond.
Ten Common Parental Expectations

8. Our child will see us as his family and forget about his birth family and his past.
9. We/I can do for this child what was not done for me, or I will not do to this child what was done to me.
10. I will never feel any regrets or ambivalence in adopting this child with a traumatic past.

Visitation Rule: 5101:2-48-17

- Face-to-face visit in the home within first seven days of placement
- One face-to-face visit with child and adoptive parent(s) within first 30 days, not including visit within the first seven days
- After the first 30 days, a minimum of one face-to-face visit in the home with the child and family monthly

If there are other household members in the home, the frequency of visits will be:

- One face-to-face visit in the home every 60 days
- At a minimum, two face-to-face visits prior to finalization with any household member whose permanent residence is the adoptive home. No less than 60 days between visits.

Home Visits

At Placement: Placement to 60 days
Early: 60 days to 120 days
Mid: 120 days to before Finalization
At Finalization: Last visit(s) to Closure

What information was a good reminder, validating information already incorporated into your practice?

What information was new to your practice? How will you incorporate that into your practice?