

Session Information

Wednesday, June 24th, 2026

Beyond Placement: How Connection, Courage, And Clarity Can Redefine Adoption Permanency For Children And Families

Speaker: Adrian McLemore

Adoption is more than a placement; it is a lifelong journey toward belonging. In this session, Adrian McLemore invites adoption professionals to look beyond paperwork and compliance to the heart of what truly creates safety, stability, and permanency for children and families. Adrian uses storytelling, humor, and his lived experience, to explore three essential tools for transformative practice. Participants will leave with practical strategies and a renewed vision to move beyond “placement” and toward lasting connection, cultural humility, and transformative impact in every child and family’s story.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Recall the “bridge, compass, and path” framework for transformative practice, as well as the incorporation of cultural humility into assessment and support processes.
- Identify how connection and secure attachments serve as protective factors and the foundations of stability and belonging.
- Describe how trauma impacts brain development and attachment capacity, including attachment patterns in adulthood.
- Illustrate “problem behaviors” as a child’s communication of unmet, underlying needs.
- Explain the value of kinship and extended networks in long-term stability.

Course Level: Beginning, Intermediate

Practice Considerations in Intercountry Kinship Adoption

Speakers: Lauren Jiang and Stefani Moon

The adoption of relatives and the adoption of a child known, but not related, to the adoptive applicant are increasingly represented in intercountry adoption. Professionals supporting these cases have a responsibility to adapt their practices to best prepare, assess, and support families navigating intercountry kinship adoption. In this session, the speakers will discuss the challenges that arise in kinship cases, the role of cultural humility – recognizing the client’s expertise in their family and their country – and the responsibilities of adoption professionals when working with families, Competent Authorities, and Foreign Supervised Providers in identified-child adoptions.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Integrate the requirements of 22 CFR § 96.35(a) in the context of kinship adoptions, including strategies for safeguarding children’s best interests and reducing risk of exploitation.
- Evaluate PAP preparation and training to ensure it addresses the unique dynamics of kinship adoption, while maintaining compliance with 22 CFR § 96.48.



Session Information

- Consider kinship-specific factors when applying 22 CFR § 96.49 requirements for providing child-specific medical and social information to PAPs.
- Integrate the provisions of 22 CFR § 96.46 in the context of working with Foreign Supervised Providers (FSPs) in kinship adoptions.
- Formulate an intentional approach to international kinship work, prioritizing both cultural humility and regulation compliance.

Course Level: Advanced

From Application to Lifelong Support: Creating Inclusive Adoption Experiences for LGBTQ+ Families

Speaker: Amiee M. Sadler

LGBTQ+ families continue to encounter unique barriers in adoption, from intake paperwork to post-placement support. This session provides advanced strategies for creating inclusive experiences that affirm LGBTQ+ parents while prioritizing children's well-being. Participants will explore policy updates, case studies, and tools to eliminate bias in forms, language, and procedures. Attendees will also examine how to prepare staff, prospective adoptive parents, and birth families for inclusive practices that strengthen relationships with each other. Practical takeaways will empower agencies to make inclusion a standard, not an exception.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Identify systemic and cultural barriers LGBTQ+ adoptive families face.
- Apply inclusive language, forms, and procedures across the adoption process.
- Describe how to prepare staff and birth and adoptive families for inclusive relationships.
- Discover how to foster adoption practices that affirm LGBTQ+ parents and children.
- Create agency-level inclusion checklists and policies.

Course Level: Intermediate, Advanced

Equipping Adoptive Families for Challenging Placements: Practical Tools and Strategies

Speaker: Jackie Smigel

This session empowers adoption professionals to guide families through the critical preparation stage for difficult placements, especially those involving children with trauma histories and sibling groups. Through guided conversations and concrete exercises to use with families, participants will gain practical tools to help families once a specific child (or children) has been identified, but before the placement occurs. Participants will leave with tangible strategies to strengthen family readiness, set realistic expectations, and build a foundation for long-term stability.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...



Session Information

- Identify some of the unique challenges associated with placing children who have complex trauma histories.
- Examine trauma-informed communication and preparation strategies when working with families.
- Plan conversations to help families develop realistic expectations.

Course Level: Intermediate, Advanced

Collaborative and Proactive Solutions: Understanding Challenging Behavior through the Lens of Lagging Skills

Speaker: Dr. Angelica Soto

Traditional behavior management models emphasize rewards, consequences, and adult-imposed discipline. However, for fostered and adopted children—many of whom have experienced trauma, loss, and disrupted attachment—these approaches often escalate conflict rather than promote healing. Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS), developed by Dr. Ross Greene, offers a compassionate, skill-based framework rooted in empathy and collaboration.

Recent empirical studies indicate that CPS produces meaningful behavioral improvements in youth with externalizing challenges. Across multiple studies and settings, CPS is linked with improved communication, collaborative problem solving, and strengthened relationships, consistent with its core premise that “kids do well if they can” rather than simply choosing to misbehave.

This session introduces the CPS philosophy—“Kids do well if they can”—and equips participants to identify lagging skills and unsolved problems. Attendees will learn how to develop responsive strategies that address adopted children’s emotional and developmental needs.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Apply the foundational principles of Collaborative and Proactive Solutions (CPS) to brief case examples involving foster and adopted youth.
- Analyze common behavioral challenges by identifying associated lagging skills.
- Use the Lagging Skills and Unsolved Problems Assessment (LSUPA) to support initial case conceptualization.

Course Level: Intermediate

Grief in Adopted Children: Practical Steps Towards Healing

Speaker: Christy Bonavita

Grief is a major theme woven through the adoption experience. While many models about the stages of grief can help adults understand the complex emotions connected to loss, many caregivers and professionals still wonder how to respond to adopted children in supportive ways. This workshop introduces William Worden’s Four Tasks of Mourning as a practical and



Session Information

compassionate framework for understanding grief in adopted children and youth. Participants will explore how this model provides caregivers and professionals with practical strategies to help children process their grief in healthy ways. Through discussion, reflection, and examples, the presenter will equip adoption professionals with tools to support adopted children and strengthen families so that experiences of loss do not define or control their lives.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Describe ambiguous loss and how adoption-related experiences fit within this framework of loss
- Name three ways that grief manifests in adopted children
- Summarize William Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning and how they relate to adopted children
- List practical strategies that caregivers and professionals can use to support a child through each of the Four Tasks of Mourning

Course Level: Beginning, Intermediate

Advocating for Children's Right to Safe Permanency

Speaker: Tim Keller

Every child deserves a safe and permanent family. Yet delays, system barriers, and fragmented advocacy often leave children lingering in foster care. This session introduces a rights-based approach to permanency that will equip adoption professionals to recognize when legal principles can accelerate safety and stability. Drawing from the Center for the Rights of Abused Children's 2024 Practice Manual, participants will learn how constitutional protections intersect with day-to-day child welfare practice, how to collaborate strategically with attorneys, and how to elevate children's voices in permanency decisions. Through case studies and guided discussion, participants will leave with concrete tools they can use immediately in their professional roles.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Explain how constitutional rights to safety, family integrity, and permanency shape child welfare decision-making.
- Examine legal and procedural barriers that delay or derail permanency outcomes.
- Apply rights-based advocacy strategies to strengthen collaboration with attorneys and court partners.
- Transfer constitutional principles into specific case planning actions that promote timely permanency.

Course Level: Intermediate



Session Information

Oh Great! Another Self-Care Workshop

Speaker: Jennifer L. Surratt, LCSW

What would it feel like to be thrown a Styrofoam cup as a flotation device while drowning? For many adoption professionals, that's what traditional self-care can feel like: insufficient and unsustainable. What if self-care shifted from a "mesponsibility" to a "wesponsibility"? This session will move beyond platitudes and the overemphasis of individual responsibility for coping in high stress, high stakes environments, offering a more grounded, compassionate, and sustainable approach. The presenter will share strategies rooted in self-understanding and connection to help adoption professionals navigate even the hardest days. Attendees will leave with actionable insights to help build resilience not only within themselves, but within their teams and with the families they support.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Explain how the nervous system relies on connection for safety, stability, and overall wellbeing.
- Define moral injury and its impact on adoption professionals.
- Recognize signs of stress, burnout, and secondary trauma that signal a need for additional support.
- Identify strategies for preventing and responding to stress in your daily work.

Course Level: Beginning, Intermediate

Listening with Care: Elevating Transracial Adoptee Voices Through a Trauma-Informed Lens

Speaker: Rachael DuBose

Adoption is a lifelong journey shaped by identity, belonging, and the impacts of early attachment and loss. Transracial adoptees often face unique challenges at the intersection of race, culture, and adoption. This session introduces trauma-informed care as a framework for listening with care and elevating transracial adoptee voices. Participants will gain insight into adoption-related trauma, racial identity development, and family dynamics, and leave with practical, trauma-informed strategies that foster healing, connection, and inclusive environments where transracial adoptees feel their voices are truly heard and valued.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Define the core principles of trauma-informed care and their relevance to identity development for transracial adoptees.
- Examine how racial identity, cultural disconnection, and family dynamics shape the lived experiences of transracial adoptees.
- Recognize barriers that silence adoptee voices and identify strategies to reduce re-traumatization.
- Apply trauma-informed, culturally responsive techniques to elevate adoptee voices within their adoptive families, communities, and professional practice.
- Discover actionable approaches to create safe, inclusive environments that foster healing, resilience, and belonging for transracial adoptees.



Session Information

Course Level: Beginning, Intermediate

Thursday, June 25th, 2026

Building an Adoptive Identity: Navigating the Journey to Self-Discovery

Speakers: Debbie Riley, Tony Parsons, Rachel Cooper Shifaraw, Mikaela Smith, Catey Yost

An adoptee's journey is one of complexity, ambiguity and courage. Adoptees often navigate a unique path of self-discovery, grappling with questions of belonging, heritage, and identity. In this keynote, the speakers will explore the journey of establishing an adoptive identity - a process that weaves the dual realities of birth and adoptive histories. Participants will explore how the typical developmental tasks of adolescence are intensified and complicated by adoption. Through moderated discussion by a panel of inspiring adult adoptees reflecting on their adolescent years, participants will gain an understanding of the factors influencing adoptive identity, including the "six stuck spots," as key areas of vulnerability impacting their identity formation.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Describe the complexities of identity formation in adolescence for adoptees.
- Examine the impact of unresolved loss and grief in adoption on identity development.
- Identify the six most common "stuck spots" for the adopted adolescent.
- Discover strategies that support adoptees' identity and self-worth.

Course Level: Intermediate

Facing the Hard: Navigating Crisis in Adoptive Families

Speaker: Jenn Meyer

Suspensions, elopement, self-harm, psychiatric hospitalizations, risk assessments, complex birth family dynamics, aggression—the challenges adoptive parents may face can seem overwhelming. Parenting an adopted child often means confronting deep-rooted trauma and navigating unpredictable crises. In this session, participants will explore what defines a crisis and how families can prepare for and endure these intense experiences. Attendees will leave with practical insights and supportive strategies to help adoptive families not just survive but grow stronger when crises arise.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Examine the impacts of trauma on adopted children.
- Identify the key characteristics of a crisis within adoptive families.
- Compare effective support strategies for adoptive families before and during a crisis.
- Discover practical approaches to supporting adoptive families in the aftermath of a crisis.



Session Information

- Apply individualized resistance-building strategies tailored to the unique needs of adoptive families.

Course Level: Intermediate

Attorneys and Agencies: Together We Are Stronger

Speaker: Genie Miller Gillespie, Heidi Bruegel Cox, Catelyn Slattery

This interactive session brings adoption attorneys and agency professionals together for a candid discussion on effective collaboration to ensure ethical, transparent, and high-quality adoption services for all parties. The speakers will discuss issues related to ICPC processes and problem-solving; choice-of-law issues and common pitfalls; expectant parent protections and the attorney's role in addressing fraud or misrepresentation; clarity around representation and when additional counsel is needed; appropriate handling of birth parent expenses; assessing and communicating legal risk; and managing expectations around post-adoption contact. Designed as a true dialogue with real-world examples, this session offers practical guidance and honest conversation to strengthen ethical practice, collaboration, and ultimately to improve outcomes in adoption.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Analyze common legal and ethical challenges in adoption cases, including ICPC complications, choice-of-law issues, and situations involving fraud or misrepresentation.
- Apply best-practice strategies for collaboration between attorneys and agencies to clarify representation and manage legal risk.
- Evaluate effective approaches to protecting expectant parents and supporting all members of the adoption triad through transparent communication and ethical decision-making.

Course Level: Intermediate, Advanced

The Complexities of Kinship Adoption

Speaker: Susan K. Taylor

In this session, participants will explore the unique needs of kinship families navigating the adoption process. Kinship adoptive families have much in common with their non-relative counterparts, from legal implications in the early stages to the lifelong impact of adoption on adoptees. The pre-existing connections between birth and kinship adoptive families, however, can compound what is already a complex process and require tailored supports to ensure long-term stability. From life expectancy issues for older grandparents to divided loyalties in sibling adoptions, attendees will hear more about the unique issues, training needs, and support considerations for kin who adopt.



Session Information

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Explain common issues that can arise in kinship adoptions.
- Examine how pre-existing family relationships and divided loyalties impact adoption decision-making, family dynamics, and long-term stability in kinship placements.
- Discover ways to redefine “family” in kinship adoptions to aid children and youth in processing and embracing permanence.
- Differentiate the training and preparation needs of kinship adoptive families, ranging from grandparent to sibling adoptions.
- Apply trauma-informed strategies to create tailored support for kinship families in addressing age-related considerations, ongoing connections, and post-adoption services.

Course Level: Intermediate

Post-Adoption Relationships: Fostering Resilient and Meaningful Lifelong Connections

Speaker: Nina Anderson

This session explores strategies for providing ongoing support and guidance as birth and adoptive families navigate their unique long-term relationships while always centering the child’s best interests. Participants will gain practical insight into communication approaches, including understanding the “rhythm” of post-adoption contact and its impact on each member of the adoption triad. Attendees will leave with practical opportunities to design services and resources that foster resilience, collaboration, and meaningful lifelong connections in post-adoption relationships.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Examine how adoptive and birth parents can create a foundation for meaningful open adoption relationships, including communication, relationship building, and expectation setting that promote the building of meaningful long-term relationships.
- Design models for facilitating collaborative contact that prioritize the child’s best interests.
- Develop supportive services to strengthen post-adoption family systems.

Course Level: Intermediate, Advanced

Real Stories, Real Impact: Lived Experiences in Medically Complex Adoption

Speakers: Jennifer E. Kelly and Robert Lamarche

As medically complex adoptions become increasingly common in the U.S., understanding the real-life experiences of those involved is more important than ever. This session will feature firsthand narratives from birth parents, adoptive parents, adoption professionals, medical professionals, and the children themselves. Attendees will gain insight into the lived experiences of our most vulnerable children and families and learn practical strategies to approach these



Session Information

cases with greater care, thus minimizing harm and maximizing positive outcomes for adopted children and their families.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Identify the unique challenges and complexities involved in medically complex adoptions from the perspectives of children, birth parents, and adoptive families.
- Analyze real-life narratives to understand the emotional, social, and ethical dimensions of these adoptions.
- Apply trauma-informed and family-centered approaches to reduce harm and support positive outcomes in medically complex adoption cases.
- Develop strategies for effective collaboration among adoption professionals, healthcare providers, and families.
- Consider personal biases and assumptions to improve decision-making and advocacy for vulnerable children and families.

Course Level: Intermediate, Advanced

Brain-Based Strategies to Support Behaviorally Complex Adopted Children and Their Families

Speaker: Eileen Devine

Neuroscience research shows how factors such as trauma, prenatal substance exposure, and toxic stress can profoundly shape a developing brain. For many children impacted in these ways, their challenging behaviors are misunderstood as willful and intentional, when in fact they are a common symptom of a brain that works differently. This is why traditional behavior-modification techniques often fall short or fail altogether for adopted children, leaving providers and adoptive families frustrated. This session offers a brain-based alternative: practical, science-informed strategies that equip professionals to better understand and support adoptive families navigating complex needs. Attendees will leave with clear, actionable tools to transform their practices and client outcomes.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Explain how trauma, prenatal substance exposure, and other toxic stressors impact brain development and contribute to challenging behaviors.
- Describe common societal assumptions about brain function and why these assumptions do not hold true for individuals with neurobehavioral conditions.
- Differentiate between interpreting defensive behaviors through a traditional behavioral lens versus a neuroscience-informed, brain-based lens.
- Apply the concept of accommodations as the most effective intervention for supporting adopted children with brain-based differences.
- Develop practical, brain-based strategies to better support the complex needs of adopted children and their families.



Session Information

Course Level: Intermediate, Advanced

Proactive Action: Strategies for Preventive Outreach in Post-Adoption Support

Speakers: Melinda Lis and Michelle Warner

Adoptive families need proactive, responsive post-adoption support. While many may not seek help for years, crises can arise unexpectedly, making clear access to services essential. This session explores how different states are engaging families early and consistently to strengthen long-term stability. Presenters will share key lessons and practical tips rooted in prevention, as well as strategies that agencies can adopt to improve outcomes for families. Participants will also be invited to share innovative outreach efforts from their own agencies and learn from the efforts of others to support adoptive families.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Describe examples of specific preventive outreach strategies to engage families throughout their adoption journey.
- Examine research related to adoption dissolutions and post-adoption support.
- Discover new programs and supports offered by other agencies.
- Demonstrate how proactive and responsive support can ensure adoptive families have timely access to post-adoption support services when they need them the most.

Course Level: Intermediate

Mobility and Military Life: Supporting Adoptive Military Families

Speaker: Dr. Elizabeth Burgin

Military families face challenges throughout the adoption journey; from completing the home study to matching, placement, and finalization, mobility can disrupt processes, require repeated documentation, and complicate communication with agencies and birth families. After placement, military families navigate challenges such as maintaining access to medical and mental health care, fostering secure attachments with a uniformed parent who may spend significant time away, and nurturing open adoption relationships with birth families. This session will equip adoption professionals with insights to effectively support military families at every stage of the adoption process, recognizing their strengths and the complexities of military life.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Describe challenges for effectively managing the adoption home study and match process amid deployment and Permanent Change of Station (PCS) barriers, including navigating inter-state or international moves and maintaining compliance with agency and legal requirements.



Session Information

- Identify best practices for nurturing and sustaining open adoption relationships with birth families despite frequent relocations and military-related separations, focusing on communication and maintaining connection through transitions.
- Explain approaches to supporting attachment and bonding for adoptive children when families face duty-related separations and PCS moves, emphasizing the importance of routines, maintaining parental presence through technology, and fostering family stability.

Course Level: Intermediate

Understanding Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders Through a Trauma Lens

Speaker: Barb Clark

An increasing number of adoptees are impacted by prenatal exposure to alcohol, drugs, and high levels of in-utero stress—all of which can significantly alter brain development. Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD), though more prevalent than autism, are often overlooked, misdiagnosed, or misunderstood. Individuals with FASD live with invisible brain injuries that affect memory, impulse control, emotional regulation, and learning—making traditional behavioral, educational, and therapeutic strategies often ineffective or even harmful.

This session offers a trauma-informed, neurobehavioral approach to understanding FASD. Participants will explore how prenatal exposure impacts the developing brain and how those effects show up in everyday behaviors. Through case examples and practical tools, participants will learn to shift their focus from “won’t” to “can’t,” helping them respond with greater compassion, clarity, and effectiveness. Attendees will leave equipped to better support adopted individuals with FASD and ensure they and their families thrive.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Describe Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) and how prenatal exposure to alcohol impacts brain development.
- Explain how trauma and FASD intersect, contributing to neurobehavioral challenges such as poor impulse control, memory issues, and emotional dysregulation.
- Differentiate between willful behavior and brain-based behavior, shifting from a “won’t” to a “can’t” mindset.
- Identify common misdiagnoses and misunderstandings of individuals with FASD and their impact on treatment and support.
- Apply a trauma-informed, neurobehavioral lens to real-life situations, using practical tools to better support adopted individuals with FASD in home, school, and community settings.

Course Level: Intermediate



Session Information

Unpacking the PACA: Navigating Law, Ethics, and Practice

Speaker: Meshan Lehmann

Post Adoption Contact Agreements (PACAs) promise structure and continuity for families navigating open adoption, but a signed agreement isn't always the guarantee it appears to be. This session takes an honest look at the gap between what PACAs are meant to do and what they actually deliver. Drawing on existing literature, current data from adoption professionals, and a close examination of state statutes, participants will unpack the history and legal framework surrounding PACAs, explore the ethical tensions and power dynamics that shape how these agreements are created and enforced, and examine both the expected and unexpected ways PACAs influence adoption practice. Through case examples, statute analysis, and facilitated discussion, attendees will be invited to reflect critically on what PACAs are designed to accomplish, where they fall short, and what alternative approaches to post-adoption contact might better serve everyone in the triad.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Describe the historical development and legal framework of Post Adoption Contact Agreements (PACAs).
- Analyze the practical implementation of PACAs, including benefits, challenges, and ethical considerations.
- Differentiate how PACAs are interpreted and enforced across states, identifying patterns of bias in statutory language.
- Identify alternative approaches to post-adoption contact and evaluate their potential to better serve all members of the adoption constellation.
- Critically examine the purpose, intended outcomes, and broader impact of PACAs on adoption systems and the families they affect.

Course Level: Intermediate, Advanced

Building Life Skills through Trauma-Informed Community Mentorship

Speaker: Rebecca Britt

This session explores how consistent, trauma-informed mentorship delivered by trained community members can build essential life skills and long-term resilience in adopted children who have experienced developmental trauma. Participants will uncover what most mentorship models miss, and the speaker will offer practical guidance on launching a healing-centered mentorship program for adoptees rooted in connection, emotional awareness, and skill-building. This presentation offers a replicable framework for community-based programs that prioritize relationship over intervention and shows how mentorship can become a powerful tool in ensuring healthy transitions into adulthood.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...



Session Information

- Discover the impact of early developmental trauma on a child's ability to form relationships and build life skills.
- Identify the core components of a healing-centered mentorship model and how it differs from traditional behavioral approaches.
- Examine six targeted life skill categories designed to support children with developmental trauma.
- Determine practical tools for launching and sustaining a trauma-informed mentorship program using trained community members.
- Analyze how to structure mentorship sessions around connection, skill-building, and individualized developmental goals.

Course Level: Intermediate

Friday, June 26th, 2026

Beyond the Decision: Exploring the Lesser-Heard Experiences of Birth Mothers

Speakers: Jennifer Woolley, Mercedes Gruzski, Raisa Niederhelfman, and Jessie Mattos

Join us in a panel discussion elevating the voices and perspectives of birth mothers. Through a facilitated Q&A, panelists will share their lived experiences and highlight aspects of the birth parent journey that are often overlooked. This discussion will explore key ethical considerations for supporting expectant and birth parents and provide attendees with practical insights and tools to offer more compassionate, comprehensive support across the lifespan.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Discover lesser-discussed aspects of the birth parent experience.
- Describe the importance of using birth parent perspectives to inform adoption practice.
- Identify strategies to promote more compassionate and comprehensive support for birth parents across the lifespan.
- Explain important ethical considerations for birth parent services and supports.

Course Level: Intermediate

Building Stronger Families: Lessons from Adoptee Experiences of Disruption and Disconnection

Speaker: Dawn J. Post and Caitlyn Neal

Adoption is intended to create lifelong families, yet some adoptees face experiences of disconnection or disruption that threaten their sense of belonging. This session centers the voices of adoptees who have navigated these challenges, highlighting lessons about resilience, identity, and the importance of enduring connections. Drawing from lived narratives and current research, attendees will explore strategies to strengthen relational permanency, support adoptive and birth family ties, and ensure no adoptee is left without a lasting anchor. Participants will gain practical tools and policy insights to help adoptive families thrive and to affirm that every voice matters.



Session Information

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Identify the factors that contribute to adoption disruption or family disconnection, and their long-term impact on adoptees.
- Examine the importance of relational permanency and why lifelong connections with both adoptive and birth family matter for stability and identity.
- Consider strategies to strengthen bonds and prevent disconnection in adoptive families.
- Demonstrate ways to center adoptee voices in shaping supportive policies and practices.
- Apply practical tools and policy recommendations to create lasting family support systems that affirm every adoptee's belonging.

Course Level: Intermediate, Advanced

Prenatal Stress and Early Instability: Impacts on the Developing Brain

Speaker: Dr. Diana Osipsov

This session explores the neurodevelopmental impact of early adversity from the prenatal period through the first three years of life, using a neuroscience and attachment-informed framework. Participants will examine how in-utero stress and trauma influence fetal brain development, stress regulation systems, and neural pathways associated with emotional regulation, resilience, and relationship-building. Additionally, this session will address the effects of frequent placement changes in children's first three years, including how disrupted attachments impact long-term socio-emotional regulation and brain plasticity, as well as hinders stress response systems. Attendees will leave with a practical understanding of these neurodevelopmental implications and how stable placements and early intervention support secure attachment and resilient development in vulnerable children.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Discover how in-utero stress impacts fetal brain development and neural stress regulation systems.
- Examine the neurobiological markers linked to long-term effects of prenatal stress and trauma.
- Explain how placement instability impacts brain development and attachment formation in early childhood.
- Construct trauma-informed and attachment-based strategies to stabilize placements and support healthy development.

Course Level: Intermediate, Advanced



Session Information

Where Adoption Cases Get Stuck: Immigration Pitfalls and How to Address Them

Speakers: Tiffany E. Markee and Nicole Skellenger

This session will focus on the common issues, challenges, and pitfalls in adoption practice examined through the lens of immigration attorneys' expertise. The speakers will discuss issues related to screening agency-based Hague and non-Hague matters; common adjudication issues; and post-decision management, including responses to RFEs and NOIDS, appeals, motions, and litigation. The session will also address alternatives to agency-based adoptions to support referral options when appropriate. Emphasis will be placed on collaboration between attorneys and agencies to promote clearer, more effective pathways toward case approval and family reunification.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Identify the most common screening issues for families, including a child's eligibility for adoption, adoptive family factors as potential barriers to approval, and timing strategies related to ages of the adoptive parent(s).
- Examine a roadmap of the issues addressed throughout the adoption process, specifically related to the age and identity of the child, sufficiency of the foreign orders, and the child's eligibility as an orphan or Hague adoptee under INA sections 101(b)(1)(F) and (G).
- Evaluate inter- and post-decision submissions, such as RFEs, NOIDS, I-290B motions, and federal litigation.
- Formulate plans for advising families on alternative pathways to permanency, such as immigration via INA section 101(b)(1)(E).

Course Level: Intermediate, Advanced

Beyond the Checklist: Centering Voices and Stories in Adoption Home Studies

Speaker: Dr. Sonya Robinson

Too often, adoption home studies are approached as administrative tasks focused on fulfilling regulatory checklists and procedural requirements. While compliance is important, this perspective can overlook the home study as a human-centered process. In this session, participants will reimagine the home study as more than a formality, viewing it as a critical opportunity to center the lived experiences, voices, and stories of all those involved in an adoption. Attendees will discover best practices in home studies that are inclusive, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive and which affirm diverse family structures. This session will demonstrate how narrative-based approaches empower families, reduce bias, and strengthen adoptions.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Explain how narrative-based approaches to home studies can center the voices of adoptive parents and birth families.



Session Information

- Identify strategies for conducting trauma-informed and culturally responsive home studies that honor diverse family structures.
- Describe the limitations of compliance-driven approaches and methods for integrating family stories into assessments.
- Apply best practices to reduce bias and enhance inclusivity in adoption home study documentation.

Course Level: Intermediate

Examining Trends in Adoption Crisis and Dissolution

Speakers: Heather Sloan and Rebekah Hall

This presentation addresses common trends among adoptive families experiencing crisis or pursuing dissolution of their adoption. These trends indicate characteristics within families that need additional consideration, education, and support. Presenters will discuss how particular family characteristics can add to the family's stress, leading to potential crises. The speakers will address these familial risks and how to mitigate them throughout the adoption process. Attendees will leave with practical considerations to inform their own agency's policies and practices across every stage of the adoption process.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Examine how adoptive family factors influence household stress levels and how these factors might lead to a crisis.
- Identify research trends among families in crisis or who are pursuing an adoption dissolution.
- Consider risk mitigation throughout various stages of the adoption process.
- Evaluate agency policies and practices to better educate and support at-risk families.

Course Level: Intermediate, Advanced

Always a Parent: Supporting Birth Parents Through Ambiguous Loss and Disenfranchised Grief

Speakers: Kelly Tronstad and Justine Johnson

In this session, participants will gain a deeper understanding of ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief among birth parents, as well as the importance of recognizing their experiences holistically. Without this acknowledgement, parents can spiral into further shame and isolation, compounding their grief and resulting in mental health issues, substance use, and/or criminal activity. The speakers will share firsthand accounts of how separation from one's children, coupled with a lack of support, can hinder the grieving process and negatively impact relationships, work, daily functioning, and overall well-being. Attendees will discover how peer support can help mitigate this hidden yet pervasive crisis, and learn how support, compassion,



Session Information

and empathy can enable birth parents to move through their grief and learn to have grace for themselves and others.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Describe ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief and how they negatively impact birth parents.
- Identify how grief and trauma are compounded when not acknowledged and addressed.
- Discover how Adverse Childhood Experiences and intergenerational trauma compound the grief and loss experienced by those with a termination of parental rights and/or transfer of legal custody
- Demonstrate how offering grief support to birth parents suffering from ambiguous loss increases their own resilience and well-being.

Course Level: Beginning, Intermediate

Cultural Humility in Infant Adoption: Considerations for Adoption Professionals

Speakers: Pam Hoehler and Amy Simms

This interactive session invites adoption professionals to explore the principles of cultural humility within the context of domestic infant adoption. The speakers will discuss key considerations related to the home study process, adoptive parent training experiences, waiting pool recruitment and preferences, matching tools, and open adoption. The speakers will highlight the importance of honoring cultural identities within the pre-placement process, recognizing power dynamics, and committing to lifelong learning. Participants will leave with an understanding of cultural humility as an ongoing practice, not a destination, which is essential for ethical, compassionate, and equitable adoption work.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Analyze cultural humility and its significance in the context of infant adoption, emphasizing ongoing self-reflection, learning, and respect for diverse family and community identities.
- Identify strategies to support adoptive parents in creating a culturally affirming environment for their child, including access to meaningful training, resources, and community connections.
- Construct agency policies that promote culturally responsive practices and uphold values of equity, inclusion, and respect for all backgrounds.
- Create reflective practices that examine institutional norms and personal approaches to adoption, with the goal of fostering continuous growth and cultural awareness.

Course Level: Intermediate, Advanced



Session Information

Adoptee Voices: Integrating Strength and Healing in the Adoption Narrative

Speakers: Leah Sutterlin, Trisha Priebe, Chelsea Sobolik, and Jenn Meyer

This panel-style session centers adoptee voices, exploring the varied relationship between lived experience and the current anti-adoption movement. Participants will learn from adoptees who have forged a coherent life story that integrates their adoption journey as a source of strength and hope, without minimizing themes such as loss, grief, and trauma. This session will offer adoption professionals with practical takeaways on how to foster strengths-based language and create environments where adoptees feel supported to express the full, non-linear spectrum of their experience and emotions.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Discover strategies to help adoptees integrate their pre-adoption history and post-adoption life into a story they can embrace and share.
- Recognize ways in which adoptive parents can create a safe space for adoptees to process their emotions and talk about adoption.
- Explain how adoptees can successfully balance complex trauma with positive self-identity.
- Illustrate common societal misconceptions and media portrayals of adoption to reveal the lived reality of the adoptee.

Course Level: Beginning

Lost In the System: Supporting Adopted Children that Struggle to Succeed in School

Speaker: Camillia Whitehead

This session is designed to provide adoption professionals with a comprehensive and practical understanding of the academic and special education challenges faced by adopted children. Participants will examine barriers that adoptive parents face when trying to access needed services as well as legal protections, strategies for support, and the importance of advocacy and collaboration with a child's therapeutic and school supports.

After attending this session, professionals will be able to...

- Describe the connection between trauma and learning.
- Identify the unique academic and special education challenges faced by adopted children.
- Explain the educational rights of children who struggle academically.
- Examine practical strategies to support adoptees' educational needs.

Course Level: Intermediate

