



# Assessor Training

Post-Training  
Skill-Building  
Assignments

## For Supervisors

### FROM THE FIELD

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*"The Adoption Assessor training series is a good overall program. However, new assessors will need help applying what they learn in training – particularly when they finish the program. As supervisors, we either need to help them ourselves or have experienced mentors or assessors in place to work with new assessors while they do some of these things for the first time."*

From the OCWTP  
Adoption Assessor  
Feedback Study

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### INTRODUCTION

When your assessor completes one of the 10 required modules for the Adoption Assessor series, he or she will receive a post-training, skill-building assignment. The assignments are designed to not only help staff apply what they learn in training when they return to work, but to provide you – the supervisor – with easy-to-use tools for coaching some of the essential skills adoption assessors need to use.

Each assignment reinforces a priority skill introduced in training and instructs staff to complete a worksheet that directs them to practice applying the skill with either families from their own caseload or from real case examples from the field.

### OVERVIEW

There are 10 assignments - one for each module:

|               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Module One:   | Family and Child Assessment                            |
| Module Two:   | Birth Parent Services                                  |
| Module Three: | Post Finalization Adoption Services                    |
| Module Four:  | Adoption Assistance                                    |
| Module Five:  | Placement Strategies                                   |
| Module Six:   | Pre-Finalization Adoption Services                     |
| Module Seven: | Openness in Adoption                                   |
| Module Eight: | Cultural Issues in Adoption                            |
| Module Nine:  | Gathering & Documenting Background Information         |
| Module Ten:   | Achieving Permanency through Interagency Collaboration |

Several of the assignments include additional resources needed for the assignment (e.g., prepared case studies; interviews with birth parents) and each assignment instructs learner to review his or her work with the supervisor. The assignment should not take your assessor any longer than 60 minutes to complete and it should not take you or the experienced assessor you delegate to help coach your new assessor, any longer than 15-30 minutes to review the assignment with the assessor.

Each assignment includes:

**LEARNING OBJECTIVES** stating what the learner will gain from completing each assignment

**INSTRUCTIONS** listing the steps a learner will take to complete the assignment

**WORKSHEET** providing a format to record the learner's work

## Supervisor' Role as Coach

Effective child welfare practice requires intensive training, supervised practice, feedback, and experience. Because of the complex skills required for this work, skill mastery cannot be accomplished in a classroom alone. Staff need on-the-job support, mentoring, and coaching. Unfortunately, these tasks often fall to supervisors already overwhelmed by numerous responsibilities. In order to insure best practice, supervisors need to either provide the coaching themselves or identify experienced assessors to help coach new skills.

### SEVEN STEPS TO GOOD COACHING

Coaching is a basic supervisory function that most of you do without thinking about it or without calling it coaching. In essence, you are usually just doing your job, making sure assessors know what to do and know how to do it, and then making sure they are doing it right. When those tasks are examined, they basically break down to seven steps:

#### 1. ESTABLISH THE FOUNDATION FOR COACHING

The essence of coaching centers on you – the supervisor – building interactions that are safe and that enable your assessors to share their ideas, information, thoughts, and feelings. Establishing this foundation has to happen early to ensure that assessors are willing to accept input, suggestions, and direction. This type of learning environment will make it easy to incorporate these assignments with the educational supervision you provide on a daily basis.

#### 2. CO-CREATE THE COACHING RELATIONSHIP

Just like casework practice, your ability to engage assessors helps set the tone for future work. Supervisors as coaches build the necessary trust for a working relationship with their assessors by demonstrating competence, keeping agreements, spending the necessary time to help assessors learn new skills, and making sure expectations are clear. You also facilitate engagement by treating your assessors as individuals; and by respecting diversity issues, such as culture, learning, and communication styles.

#### 3. OBSERVE AND ANALYZE

These two skills are used throughout the coaching process and involve gathering information about performance and performance gaps. Initially, observing and analyzing help establish the need for coaching and help with the next step - developing a coaching plan. The 10 assignments introduced here, were identified by observing new adoption assessors as they completed Adoption Assessor training and reflect the skills most noted as needing extra practice by assessors new to this field of practice. However, as you help your assessor apply new skills, your ability to observe their work and analyze potential problems will be key to being a successful coach.

#### 4. CREATE A COACHING PLAN

These 10 post-training assignments already establish the coaching plan for 10 specific skills. But, for a quick review, developing a plan for coaching involves the following:

- √ Establish the standard      The best-practice standards for the skills being practiced in these post-training assignments are clearly outlined during the training modules. If your assessors are unclear, refer them to handouts and resources distributed during training.
- √ Describe the outcome      Outcomes need to be clear for everyone. The easiest way to ensure this is to use the S.M.A.R.T. standard for writing outcomes; Specific, Measurable, Achievable; Realistic, and Timely. If your assessor needs additional practice with a skill, you will need to be clear about the outcome.
- √ Brainstorm solutions      There are many models for brainstorming solutions. It does not matter what model you use - what matters is that you do it! Each assignment provides ideas for additional practice. These suggestions can be added to any ideas brainstormed by you and your assessor.
- √ Determine who/what/when      Coaching plans should clearly outline who is involved, what will be done, and when tasks should be completed. The 10 assignments in this document establish the who and the what. All you need to do is set a date and time to discuss the assignment with your assessor.
- √ Check for understanding      This is often overlooked. For these assignments, you will need to clearly establish the expectation that your assessor will complete the worksheets, clarify the assignment if needed, and check with the assessor when they return from a training module to make sure they understand your expectation.

#### 5. FACILITATE THE LEARNING

This is the active part of coaching where specific coaching strategies are selected and the coaching plan is put into action. Although the assignments establish what needs to be done, you will probably still need to do the basic coaching strategy - explain it, model it, watch it, give feedback, and do it again if necessary. Additional coaching strategies are provided for each assignment in case your assessor needs additional learning experiences.

#### 6. MONITOR AND FOLLOW-UP

There are many ways to monitor and follow-up with how an assessor is progressing with their post-training assignment. For example, it may be as simple as sticking your head in your assessor's office or sending an e-mail asking how things are going. You could also agree ahead of time for your worker to come to you for a status report.

## 7. DOCUMENT AND REWARD

Documentation is as important when coaching as it is when working with a family. It helps provide a written trail of steps taken and progress made and can be valuable when determining future developmental plans with your assessors. Each assignment includes a worksheet that will make it easy for your documentation and will not require you to complete another form. However, if an additional intervention is needed, don't forget to document it.

Rewarding progress will help keep your staff motivated, stress the importance of practicing skills, and help to reinforce that coaching and being coached are important functions in your unit. It will also help ensure that children and families receive the best available services.

## Coaching the Post-Training Assignments

Attached are separate supervisory coaching sheets for each assignment. Each sheet includes:

**WHAT YOUR ASSESSOR LEARNED** This section provides an overview of the content your assessor learned in the module.

**WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT** This section discusses how this content relates to the work your assessor does with children and families.

**KEY COACHING POINTS** This section clearly outlines the key points you want to make when reviewing the assignment worksheet with your assessor.

**CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS** This section briefly discusses any cultural considerations you need to be aware of when reviewing the assignment.

**THINGS TO WATCH FOR** This section provides you with clues that your assessor may need additional coaching in this area.

**SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES** This section lists several additional coaching activities you could do with your assessor if he or she needs additional practice.

**RESOURCES** This section links you to resources and handouts that will help refresh your knowledge of content needed to complete the assignment.

## How to Begin

1. Inform your new assessor about the post-training assignment he or she will receive at the end of the training module and set a date for the two of you to meet and review the worksheet.

Note: Remember, you may decide to delegate these coaching tasks to an experienced assessor on your unit.

2. Monitor your new assessor's progress on the assignment by periodically checking with him or her and asking how things are going.
3. Review the *For Supervisors* section for the assignment that corresponds to the module your assessor is attending. Remember, this section provides you with an overview of the assignment and outlines main points to discuss when you meet with the assessor. If you need a refresher on any content, refer to the list of resources that will link you to pertinent handouts and resources used in the module.
4. Meet with your assessor to review the assignment worksheet. If he or she need additional practice, brainstorm activities or select one from those suggested in the *For Supervisors* section.
5. Repeat the process, starting with the next Adoption Assessor module in the series.



## Supervisory Coaching Tool Assignment #1 Family and Child Assessment

### WHAT YOUR ASSESSOR LEARNED

- Strategies to mutually assess families as potential adoptive resources for children
- Information to assist in the identification of families who have a high probability of long-term success in parenting adopted children
- Strategies to assess the social and emotional functioning of children, their developmental needs, and readiness for adoptive placement
- Information regarding selection and match in adoption, including clarification of the requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act, as amended

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

- Mis-assessment is the greatest mistake assessors could make; applicants could be wrongly denied or inappropriately approved.
- This module helps new assessors be aware of their own values and cultural context when assessing families. Without this awareness, new assessors may look for families they would have wanted to have as their own parents, instead of families for waiting children.

### KEY COACHING POINTS

- Family assessment is done *with* the family, not *to* the family!
- Family assessment should be strength-based.
- Assessment only rules families out as adoptive or foster applicants about 5% of the time.

### CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- What may be a strength in one culture could be an indicator of dysfunction in another.
- Cultural competence is necessary to adequately engage applicants in the assessment process and will greatly enhance the quality of the mutual assessment that needs to occur.
- Cultural issues heavily impact motivation to adopt or foster.

## THINGS TO WATCH FOR

- Assessor missing indicators that family may be inaccurately identifying their strengths and weaknesses
- Assessor missing indicators of families who appear to not be fully disclosing
- Assessor minimizing inappropriate motivation (i.e., one partner not motivated but going along with the decision to adopt or foster)
- Assessor missing indicators that the family does not understand adoption is a lifelong process
- Assessor overlooks important assessment information; is not culturally competent; mis-assesses the family’s strengths; or denies weaknesses which could lead to an adoption disruption or dissolution.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- The supervisor or an experienced assessor conducts an interview with an applicant family, while the new assessor observes the “modeling.” The supervisor or experienced assessor debriefs with the new assessor.
- The supervisor edits a written assessment completed by the new assessor, providing a rationale for each change or suggestion.
- The new assessor reads several “model” homestudies to learn what a well-written homestudy looks like and is asked to meet with the supervisor or experienced assessor to review what he or she learned.
- The supervisor reviews the *Family Interview Guide* (see resources listed below) with the new assessor to assure he or she grasps the basics of assessment interviews.
- The assessor determines what cultural groups are prevalent in their community and receives additional training on the norms of these groups.

## RESOURCES

If you need a refresher on content for this module, please refer to the resources below:

- Form JFS 01673 (<http://www.odjfs.state.oh.us/forms/file.asp?id=43560>)
- For the following handouts, go to resources in the *For Trainees* section at: [www.ocwtp.com](http://www.ocwtp.com)

Blank Prediction Path

ICWA

Ohio’s ICWA Guidelines

Ohio Policy Statement - ICWA

Sample Prediction Path

Summary of MEPA

A Guide to MEPA

Recruitment & Retention of Resource Families

Assessment Categories

- Family Interview Guide ( go to resources in the *For Trainees* section at: [www.ocwtp.com](http://www.ocwtp.com) )



## Supervisory Coaching Tool Assignment #2 Birthparent Services

### WHAT YOUR ASSESSOR LEARNED

This one-day module includes information regarding adoption planning with birth parents and their families. Assessors learned:

- How to foster responsible parenting decisions on the part of the birth parent, both in terms of keeping the child safe and healthy while in his or her care, and in terms of making responsible placement decisions
- Phases of the grieving process and how to best support birthparents and their families as they cope with their losses
- Suggestions for helping birth parents experiencing termination of parental rights gain a sense of closure
- Methods assessors can use to gather and record social and medical histories of birth families

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

Birth parents who have had an opportunity to explore alternatives and begin grieving will:

- Make more informed decisions for their child
- Give the child permission, when appropriate, to be part of another family
- Maintain a level of openness that is helpful to the child's adjustment
- Be less adversarial in considering adoption as an alternative

### KEY COACHING POINTS

- It is important to ensure that birthparents understand that adoption is a lifelong experience.
- Birth parents are empowered when they understand that responsible parenting includes making a permanency plan for their child. They can determine what should be in their child's permanency plan, such as the level of openness with the child and family, how to pass on birth family information to the child and family, and how to symbolically give permission for the child to be parented by someone else.
- Assessors need to be aware of adoption-related issues and how these issues might be expressed behaviorally. These issues include loss, guilt, shame, control, identity, rejection, trust.
- Assessors should involve birthfathers in responsible birth parenting by empowering them in decision-making.
- Birthparents may feel too overwhelmed to ask questions. Therefore, assessors need to give clear explanations, outline all options, and continue to review steps and options.

## CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Grief is expressed differently in different cultures. Assessors should not assume someone isn't grieving because they aren't grieving the way they would.
- Assessors should be aware that in some cultures, birthparents will be encouraged to pretend the child never existed.

## THINGS TO WATCH FOR

- Assessors who miss signs that the birthparents have depersonalized the child. (For example, the birthparent doesn't name the child, or refers to the child as "it" instead of "he" or "she")
- Assessors who misinterpret the birthparents' disinterest or uncooperative nature, not recognizing that the birthparents may be displaying depression or anger as an expression of their grief
- Assessors who allow the birthmother to keep the birthfather and his family from participating in planning for the child by refusing to name a father
- Assessors who attempt to impose their planning on the birthparent and do not respect client self-determination

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- The supervisor "models" support by having the assessor observe the supervisor conduct a meeting with a birthparent and then debrief with the assessor afterwards.
- The supervisor schedules a meeting with the assessor to review birthparents' rights and to answer any questions.
- The supervisor reviews paperwork and timelines with the assessor.
- The supervisor has the assessor watch the video *Losing Isaiah* and schedules a time to discuss the assessor's reactions to the video.
- The supervisor arranges for the assessor to speak with a birthfather about his experience with the child welfare system.

## RESOURCES

- For the following handouts, go to resources in the *For Trainees* section at: [www.ocwtp.com](http://www.ocwtp.com)
  - Ohio Laws - Open Records
  - Rights of Birth Parents
  - Supporting Birth Parents
- Child Welfare Gateway: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/birth/workingwith/index.cfm>





## Supervisory Coaching Tool Post-Finalization Adoption Services Assignment #3

### WHAT YOUR ASSESSOR LEARNED

- An overview of the need for post-adoption services
- Lifelong adoption issues that can the adopted person and the adoptive family
- Components of post adoption services and strategies for implementation of such services
- Issues of search and reunion in the post-finalization phase of adoption

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

- Dr. Denise Goodman found in her 1993 doctoral study of adoptive families (*Here Today, Gone Tomorrow: An Investigation of the Factors that Impact Disruption*) that the greatest predictor of the ability of the adoptive family to withstand crisis and preserve the adoption was the provision of post-adoption services.

### KEY COACHING POINTS

- Adoptive families face challenges that are not present in families created by birth.
- The need for post-adoption services is a normal part of adoptive family development and is not necessarily related to pathology within the adoptive family.
- Risk factors in post-adoptive families can include the psychological presence of the birth parent; adoptive parents' unrealistic expectations; unresolved grief of the adoptive parents (related to infertility); events or dates that trigger feelings related to the adoption; as well adoption-related issues such as feeling unconnected.
- Support groups, crisis intervention, training, search and reunion support, mentoring, family therapy, respite care, and day treatment are all components of post adoption services.

### CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Transcultural adoption (adoption of a child raised with a different lifestyle and value system) may place additional stress on an adoptive family.
- Some families may not want to maintain ties with the placing agency and may refuse services.
- Some families may not feel comfortable accepting help outside of the family.
- Families may prefer to access providers within their own cultural context (e.g., providers from the family's community, ethnicity, or others whom the family values as a "helper, whether a mental health clinician, clerical person, or a mentor foster/adoptive parent).

## THINGS TO WATCH FOR

- Assessors who allow families to deny their need for services
- Assessors who don't educate families who are adopting an infant that they still need services
- Assessors who cannot help families find the balance between ignoring the differences in parenting a biological child and parenting an adopted child, and over-emphasizing the differences
- Assessors who fail to recognize families who do not acknowledge the significance of the birth family or are threatened by the birth family's psychological presence
- Assessors who do not understand the importance of providing children with their birth families' social and cultural histories and, therefore, fail to collect the information or do not educate adoptive families who are refusing to share the information
- Assessors who ascribe "blame" to the adoptive parents when the family requires post-adoption services to address adjustment difficulties

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- The supervisor has the assessor attend a support group or association for post-adoptive families.
- The supervisor has the assessor interview a family with an adopted teenager to determine what the critical points have been for their child and family and to determine what services would have been helpful in supporting this family at those critical points.

## RESOURCES

- For the following handouts, go to resources in the *For Trainees* section at: [www.ocwtp.com](http://www.ocwtp.com)
  - Disruption Steps
  - Information on Disruption
  - Intergenerational Issues in Adoption
- Child Welfare Information Gateway: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/search/>
- North American Council for Adoptable Children: <http://www.nacac.org/postadoption/services.html>



## Supervisory Coaching Tool Placement Strategies Assignment #4

### WHAT YOUR ASSESSOR LEARNED

- Placement strategies to maximize success and minimize trauma to the child, foster family, and adoptive family
- Pre-placement visitation rationale and methodology as well as information that should be shared with families making an adoptive commitment to a child

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

- Placement almost universally creates crisis for children. The degree of trauma experienced by a child is largely dependent on the worker's skill in structuring the placement.

### KEY COACHING POINTS

- Crisis theory informs us that when an event occurs that a person perceives as a stressor, there is an upset in the person's emotional state, and that person will engage in coping behaviors to try and restore emotional equilibrium. Coping behaviors are often misinterpreted. Crisis may result when normal coping activities are not adequate to resolve the stress, and equilibrium cannot be restored.
- Young children tend to express their reaction to stress physically, older children express their reaction physically and emotionally.
- Children experiencing placement will begin a grief process with predictable stages.
- Crisis can have both short and long-term effects on children.
- The unknown is threatening. Carefully planned pre-placement visits reduce the stress related to "unknowns" for the child.

### CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Grief may look different based on a number of factors, including the child's cultural background and age.
- To minimize stress and change for children, assessors should work to reduce changes, as much as possible, through maintaining cultural continuity (e.g., foods, language, expressions of affection, parenting styles, etc.)

## THINGS TO WATCH FOR

- Assessors who fail to recognize families who do not see the child as a separate person with separate needs (e.g., families who insist on changing the first name of the child.)
- Assessor who do not assist families in developing empathy for the child, the birth family, and other attachment figures concerned about the child's transition.
- Assessors who lack sensitivity and empathy for the feelings of the child, the sending family, and the receiving family in a placement triad

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- The supervisor has the assessor interview a family in the post-placement phase to ask about their placement experience. What was helpful? What would have been helpful? What was problematic?
- The supervisors has the assessor shadow an experienced worker who is conducting pre-placement visits for a child who is transitioning to a new placement.

## RESOURCES

- Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children: <http://icpc.aphsa.org/>
- Child Welfare Information Gateway: <http://www.childwelfare.gov/outofhome/placement/strategies.cfm>
- For the following handouts, go to resources in the *For Trainees* section at: [www.ocwtp.com](http://www.ocwtp.com)
  - Guide to Child's Lifebook
  - Minimize Crisis for Adoptive Families
  - Minimize Crisis for Child
  - Minimize Crisis for Foster Families



## Supervisory Coaching Tool Adoption Assistance Assignment #5

### WHAT YOUR ASSESSOR LEARNED

- The value of subsidies to families, children, and the child welfare system
- Information regarding rules and procedures for accessing adoption subsidies as well as strategies to maximize resources for adoptive families

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

- To assure permanence, assessors must ensure that each child has access to services and supports needed throughout childhood and into adulthood.
- Children who appear to have no special needs currently may develop a need for services in the future.

### KEY COACHING POINTS

- It is important to accurately document the financial situation of the birth family.
- Adoption subsidies were created to assure that no child be denied an adoptive family due to a lack of financial resources.

### CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Some families may be reluctant to accept subsidy as they see it as a government handout or as charity.
- Some families may be reluctant to share financial information.
- Some families may be reluctant to maintain ongoing contact with the public child welfare agency.

### THINGS TO WATCH FOR

- An assessors own biases regarding subsidy (e.g., feelings that the family is being paid to raise the child, or that adoptive families should be responsible for meeting the needs of the child)
- Assessors who fail to help families acknowledge the special needs of their child
- Assessors who do not inform prospective adoptive families about subsidy resources which might be available to support permanency for children

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- The supervisor can suggest the assessor attend additional training on adoption assistance.
- The supervisor and assessor together complete a family’s subsidy application packet.
- To explore how subsidies support permanence for children, the supervisor has the assessor visit an adoptive family whose subsidy is scheduled for an annual review.

## RESOURCES

- For the following handouts, go to resources in the *For Trainees* section at: [www.ocwtp.com](http://www.ocwtp.com)
  - Post-Final Adoption Bibliography
  - Post Adoption Services
  - International Adoption Assistance
  - Non-Recurring Adoption Expenses
  - Ohio Special Needs Definition - Assistance
  - Overview of Subsidy Programs - Assistance
  - Post Adoption Special Services Subsidy
  - State Adoption Maintenance Subsidy
  - State Special Services Subsidy - Assistance
  - Subsidies Checklist - Assistance
  - Title IV-E Adoption Assistance
  - Title IV-E Special Needs Definition
- Child Welfare Information Gateway:  
<http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/postadoption/assistance/index.cfm>
- North American Council for Adoptable Children: <http://www.nacac.org/adoptionsubsidy.html>



## Supervisory Coaching Tool Pre-Finalization Adoption Services Assignment #6

### WHAT YOUR ASSESSOR LEARNED

- Strategies for assessing the adjustment and attachment of the child and family prior to finalization.
- Stages of adoption disruption and strategies to avoid disruption.
- Strategies and techniques to strengthen and stabilize the adoptive placement.

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

- A study on adoption disruption done by the University of Southern Maine identified lack of supportive services as one of the major causes of disruption.
- In practice, assessors providing post-placement services often do not recognize the necessity of intensive post-placement interventions, and they often do not see themselves responsible for initiating such services. When family problems escalate and crisis occurs, these assessors feel helpless and unable to stop the impending disruption. This is unfortunate, since early intervention can often prevent crisis.

### KEY COACHING POINTS

- Assessors cannot place children and assume adoption "work" has been completed. It is, in fact, only beginning.
- The goal of pre-finalization adoption services is to strengthen, stabilize, and maintain the adoptive placement.
- Three methods of fostering attachment are: arousal relaxation cycle, positive interaction cycle, claiming behaviors. Resource or link to handout? ( See *Helping Parents Encourage Attachment* handout in resources listed below.)
- Family adjustment after adoptive placement generally occurs in a predictable sequence of five phases. These have been called *Getting Acquainted, Honeymoon, Ambivalence, Reciprocal Interaction, and Bond Solidification*. ( See *Disruption Steps* handout in resources listed below.)

### CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Claiming behaviors ( such as taking a family picture with the new child or sending an announcement of their newest family member) or meeting the child's needs (through arousal/relaxation cycle or positive interactions) can vary from one culture to another.
- The child and adoptive family may struggle to adapt to one another due to cultural differences.
- Supportive services for the adoptive family should be provided within the family's cultural context.

## THINGS TO WATCH FOR

- Assessors who cannot re-direct parents who think the child should take the first step in forming an attachment
- Assessors who do not know strategies to minimize “splitting,” (Splitting occurs when the child idealizes the birthparent, usually the birthmother, and rejects the adoptive or foster parent, usually the mother.)
- Assessors who fail to recognize that the child or the adoptive parent is showing signs of unresolved grief related to prior separations and losses
- Assessors who do not provide pre-placement preparation to the child or the adoptive parent
- Assessors who ignore a child’s stressed or insecure attachment patterns
- Assessors who fail to address the adoptive parent’s unrealistic expectations for the child and for the adoption experience
- Assessors who do not share critical information with the adoptive family about the birth family history, the child’s placement history, or special needs
- Assessors who do not perceive safety concerns when a child in an adoptive placement is at risk.

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- The supervisor has the assessor accompany a mentor worker on a post-placement visit to an adoptive family. The worker debriefs with the mentor following the visit about observations, concerns, and possible interventions.

## RESOURCES

- North American Council for Adoptable Children:  
<http://www.nacac.org/postadoptionarticles/disruptionsupport.html>
- For the following handouts, go to resources in the *For Trainees* section at: [www.ocwtp.com](http://www.ocwtp.com)
  - Helping Parents Encourage Attachment
  - The Losses of Childhood
  - Strategies to Help Grieving Children
  - Most Common Reasons for Adoption Disruption
  - Services to Families in Post Placement
  - Using Community Resources
  - When a Family Is in Crisis
  - Disruption Steps
- Disruption Prevention Link: <http://www.nacac.org/postadoptionarticles/planpreparesupport.html>
- Resource Family Retention: An Overview  
<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcp/downloads/retention-overview.pdf>





## Supervisory Coaching Tool Openness in Adoption Assignment #7

### WHAT YOUR ASSESSOR LEARNED

- The continuum of openness and the various styles of adoption occurring along that continuum
- The historical perspective of openness, as well as reasons supporting openness within current adoption practice
- The advantages and liabilities of openness
- Strategies to maximize the advantages while minimizing the liabilities of openness
- Techniques to open adoptions that finalized as closed adoptions
- Techniques to manage conflict within open adoption relationships

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

- Secrecy in families can lead to distrust, a distorted reality for both parents and child, and an unhealthy preoccupation with fantasies.
- There are benefits in openness for all members of an adoptive family. These benefits are tempered by the fact that challenges also exist within open relationships. Assessors must be skilled in helping families determine the appropriate level of openness to meet the needs of the child.

### KEY COACHING POINTS

- The central focus of successful adoption relationships is always to meet the needs of the child.
- Birth and adoptive families should be empowered to determine the parameters of the open relationship.
- Having the support and encouragement of the birth family can greatly enhance the child's acquisition of a positive identity.
- Within limits, assessors must preserve the right of the parent to make whatever choices they can for the future of their children, even if they are unable to be the parenting figure in the future of the child.
- While an open adoption is not legally enforceable, the success of the adoption will depend on the integrity the participants bring to their commitments.
- Openness in adoption exists along a continuum between totally open and totally closed. Most adoptions exist somewhere between these two extremes.
- Each open adoption relationship is as unique as the individuals within that relationship.

- There should be flexibility within open adoption relationships to accommodate change as all persons within the relationship, including the child, grow and mature. The relationship must also be flexible enough to accommodate conflict, a component of all human relationships. A pre-existing avenue for managing conflict will greatly enhance the open adoption experience.

## CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Some cultural groups may have more tolerance and comfort with open family systems than others.
- There may be significant cultural differences between the birth family and the adoptive family. Birth family members may have a different religion, different language, educational level, socio-economic level, even different attitudes about time and keeping commitments for contacts. These cultural differences can lead to stress within the relationship.

## THINGS TO WATCH FOR

- Assessors who attempt to control and direct the level of openness for families
- Assessors who make promises to birth or adoptive parents about the ongoing nature of the openness relationship

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- The supervisor has the assessor interview a family engaged in an open relationship with a birth family member to ask how that foster or adoptive family preserves comfortable boundaries, respects and learns more about the culture of the birth family, resolves conflict with the birth family, and how they determine the child's need for either more or less contact.

## RESOURCES

- Child Welfare Information Gateway: [http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_openadoptbulletin.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_openadoptbulletin.cfm) (for workers)
- Child Welfare Information Gateway: [http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_openadopt.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_openadopt.cfm) (for families)
- For the following handouts, go to resources in the *For Trainees* section at: [www.ocwtp.com](http://www.ocwtp.com)

Child's Perspective

Hospital Dos and Don'ts

Openness Toolbox

Parent's Perspective



## Supervisory Coaching Tool Cultural Issues in Adoption Assignment #8

### WHAT YOUR ASSESSOR LEARNED

- The role culture can play in permanency planning
- The tenets of both the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Multiethnic Placement Act, assuring workers can make placement decisions that meet the needs of children while complying with federal law and state administrative rules.

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

- A culturally competent assessors is more likely to support positive agency policies regarding foster and adoptive parent recruitment and retention, disproportionality among children entering and leaving the child welfare system, and culturally appropriate support services to resource families.
- A culturally competent assessor is more likely to make accurate assessments of resource families and children, and successful matches of children and families.
- Assessors must be aware of the requirements of the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Multiethnic Placement Act, as amended. Assessors must also know the processes associated with appropriate implementation of these laws in Ohio.
- Assessors must be able to support families as they absorb children with differing lifestyles, codes of conduct, and values into their systems. Cultural differences between parents and children can impede healthy attachment.

### KEY COACHING POINTS

- Culture is a system of values, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, and standards of behavior that govern the organization of people into social groups and regulate both individual and group behavior.
- Culture is learned and is constantly evolving to meet the needs of the group. Race, gender, and ethnicity are not learned.
- Most foster and adoptive placements, regardless of the race or ethnicities of the families and children involved, are transcultural in nature; that is, the child and the caregiving family may have different lifestyles, traditions, and values.
- Children develop a racial/ethnic identity as they mature. The stages of this identity formation vary between members of the majority culture and members of a minority culture.
- The Indian tribe has jurisdiction over children eligible for membership in that tribe. Each tribe defines criteria for membership.
- In most cases, race, color, or national origin (RCNO) cannot be considered in making foster or adoptive placement decisions. Ohio, however, has a process for considering RCNO when a child displays a need to have one or more of these issues considered as one factor in placement decision-making.

## CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Assessors should be aware of their own cultural milieu and be able to respect and appreciate the cultures of others.
- Assessors should be aware of the impact of culture on child development and can apply this understanding to the assessment of children’s needs and strengths.
- Assessors must be aware of the impact of culture on each of the assessment categories used to guide families in determining their readiness for adoption or foster care.
- Effective assessors are aware of cultural differences in communication styles and can flex their own style appropriately to communicate clearly and accurately with resource families and with children.

## THINGS TO WATCH FOR

- Assessors who make comments verbally or in written assessments that reflect stereotypic thinking
- Assessors who fail to ask about each child’s Indian heritage to assure agency compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act
- Assessors who do not understand or appropriately apply MEPA, as amended

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- The supervisor has the assessor interview a family with a transcultural placement to ask what the challenges and rewards have been for all family members.
- The supervisor has the assessor research the agency’s statistics to determine the populations of children who are disproportionately represented in the agency’s caseloads. The assessor determines whether families being recruited as resource families are reflective of the children being served by the agency. If not, the supervisor and assessor may discuss recruitment and retention practices that might be improved.
- The supervisor has the assessor determine what cultural groups are prevalent in the community and receive additional training on the norms of these groups.

## RESOURCES

- For the following handouts, go to resources in the *For Trainees* section at: [www.ocwtp.com](http://www.ocwtp.com)
  - Cultural Implications of Assessment Categories
  - Cultural Issues in Development
  - Cultural Resources Guide
  - ICWA
  - MEPA Can and Cannot (Permissible and Non-Permissible Activities)
  - A Guide to MEPA
  - MEPA Standards
  - Additional MEPA Resources & Links
  - NACAC Pubs on Transracial Adoptive Parenting
  - Process to Consider RCNO Flowchart
- [www.casey.org](http://www.casey.org) On the left, click on “Tools and Resources”; scroll down to “Knowing Who You Are” and click; next, click on “Watch Video.” See handout on next page for more detailed instructions on accessing the video via the website.
- North American Council for Adoptable Children: <http://www.nacac.org/transracial.html>
- Child Welfare Information Gateway: [http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_trans.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_trans.cfm)
- A Guide to MEPA (US Dept. of Health and Human Services): <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/mepa94/mepachp2.htm>
- North American Council for Adoptable Children--articles: [http://www.nacac.org/trans\\_articles.html](http://www.nacac.org/trans_articles.html)



## Supervisory Coaching Tool

### Gathering & Documenting Background Information

#### Assignment #9

#### WHAT YOUR ASSESSOR LEARNED

- The importance of honesty in disclosure of information to foster and adoptive families, as well as the ethical and legal consequences of wrongful adoption (misrepresentation, intentional concealment, or negligent disclosure)
- Information resource families need and creative ways to access that information
- How and when to share information effectively with resource parents
- Techniques to help foster and adoptive parents communicate information in a helpful way to their children

#### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

- Agencies and workers who do not share information with resource families can be sued for wrongful adoption.
- Background information is needed by children to reduce identity confusion, reduce unhealthy preoccupation with fantasies, and foster a positive self-image. Children who understand why they were separated from their birth families will be less likely to fear abandonment by the resource family.
- Background information is needed by families accepting children so they can make informed choices about children who come to their families, thereby reducing the likelihood of placement disruption. Appropriate placements significantly enhance foster parent retention.

#### KEY COACHING POINTS

- Adopted children should be provided with complete and accurate information about their past in a developmentally appropriate manner. Adopted children need complete and accurate information to address issues of guilt, fantasies, divided loyalties, identity, genetics, medical history, and self-esteem.
- Adoptive parents need complete and accurate information to answer a child's questions truthfully, to understand the impact of a child's trauma, and to fill in the child's memory gaps.
- Gathering and documenting complete background information is a comprehensive task involving all agency staff, past or present, who have had contact with the child, birth family, or other significant persons in the child's life.
- Early disclosure of information to the child promotes a healthy parent/child relationship, creates awareness of adoption within the context of love and commitment, avoids having to "undo" incorrect information, and removes the fear of accidental revelation.

## CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Children need to know their racial and ethnic histories, to the extent possible, in order to develop a positive identity and self-image and to feel some connection with their heritage.
- Foster and adoptive families should be coached to understand the importance of honoring a child's cultural heritage as part of helping him understand and accept his birth history.

## THINGS TO WATCH FOR

- Assessors who make little effort to collect information about the child's birth family, including the birth father and his relatives
- Assessors who poorly prepare the child's lifebook

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- Assessor may read *Lost and Found* by Betty Jean Lifton regarding the adopted person's anger resulting from "genealogical bewilderment."
- Assessor may read *Wrongful Adoption* by Madelyn Freundlich regarding the liability of failure to disclose information to adoptive parents.

## RESOURCES

- For the following handouts, go to resources in the *For Trainees* section at: [www.ocwtp.com](http://www.ocwtp.com)
  - Hostile Birth Parents
  - Positive Adoption Language
  - Sources of Gathering & Documenting Info
  - Train the Team Handout
  - What Info Is Needed?
  - Wrongful Adoption



## Supervisory Coaching Tool

### Achieving Permanency Through Interagency Collaboration

#### Assignment #10

#### WHAT YOUR ASSESSOR LEARNED

- How to facilitate permanent placement of children through collaborative efforts
- Information about system transformation and about the stages of collaboration with other workers and agencies
- Strategies to enhance their skills in navigating these stages to ensure permanence for children

#### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

- Collaboration is necessary in order to meet the needs of children awaiting permanency
- Collaboration helps assessors comply with the requirements of federal legislation (e.g., the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 makes it illegal to deny or delay adoptive placements due to geographic location of either the child or the adoptive family)
- Collaboration makes it possible to be responsive to agencies and families using new technology in finding placements for children
- Collaboration assists state governments with budgetary constraints by moving children out of the foster care system

#### KEY COACHING POINTS

- Collaboration is more than just a good relationship and more than just “being polite.”
- A shared vision and complimentary missions demand that collaborating partners overcome disagreements and work together professionally to help children find appropriate permanent homes.
- When adoption agencies are insensitive or judgmental about the cultures that have developed in other organizations, barriers to communication and collaboration can severely hamper the ability of individuals within those agencies to work together effectively.

#### CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Different agencies will have different styles of communication, beliefs, and codes of conduct.
- Stereotypes of agencies (e.g., private agencies have unlimited resources and only take the easy cases) can impede collaboration.
- Individual assessors may have different work styles and may need to “style-flex.”

## THINGS TO WATCH FOR

- Assessors with poor communication skills
- Assessors who do not clearly understand their role in the collaboration process
- Assessors who do not question stereotypes about other agencies
- Assessors who are rigid and cannot flex their work styles for successful interagency or intra-agency collaboration

## SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

- The supervisor encourages the assessor to take a “field trip” to visit a collaborating agency and learn about the services provided by that agency.
- The supervisor has the assessor audit a meeting or staffing regarding an interagency collaboration.
- The supervisor has the assessor attend a regional adoption resource exchange meeting.

## RESOURCES

- For the following handouts, go to resources in the *For Trainees* section at: [www.ocwtp.com](http://www.ocwtp.com)  
Work Styles Profile