



# National Training and Development Curriculum

FOR FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS



## Right-Time Training Guide for Support Group Leaders

July 2023

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- Center for Adoption Support and Education
- The North American Council on Adoptable Children
- National Council for Adoption
- ChildTrauma Academy
- The University of Washington



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## Overview of the National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC)

Much has been learned in the past decade regarding the effect of maltreatment and the long-term influence of trauma, separation, and loss experienced by children removed from their families. The promise of a successful placement for these children and stability in these homes is strongly dependent on the preparation, education, and development of these foster and adoptive parents. Particularly, the child/youth's post-adoption stability and well-being are directly linked to adoptive parents' capacity to understand and meet the child's needs and provide the appropriate support and intervention.

To better prepare families who wish to foster, provide kinship care for, or adopt children, the Children's Bureau funded the National Training and Development Initiative for Foster/Adoptive Parents, a cooperative agreement to develop a state-of-the-art foster/adoptive parent training and ongoing skills development program to include intensive preparation and development components that reflect the capacities required of successful foster/adoptive parents. The National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) is intended to be a product that could be used by all states, tribes, and territories and applied consistently wherever it is implemented.

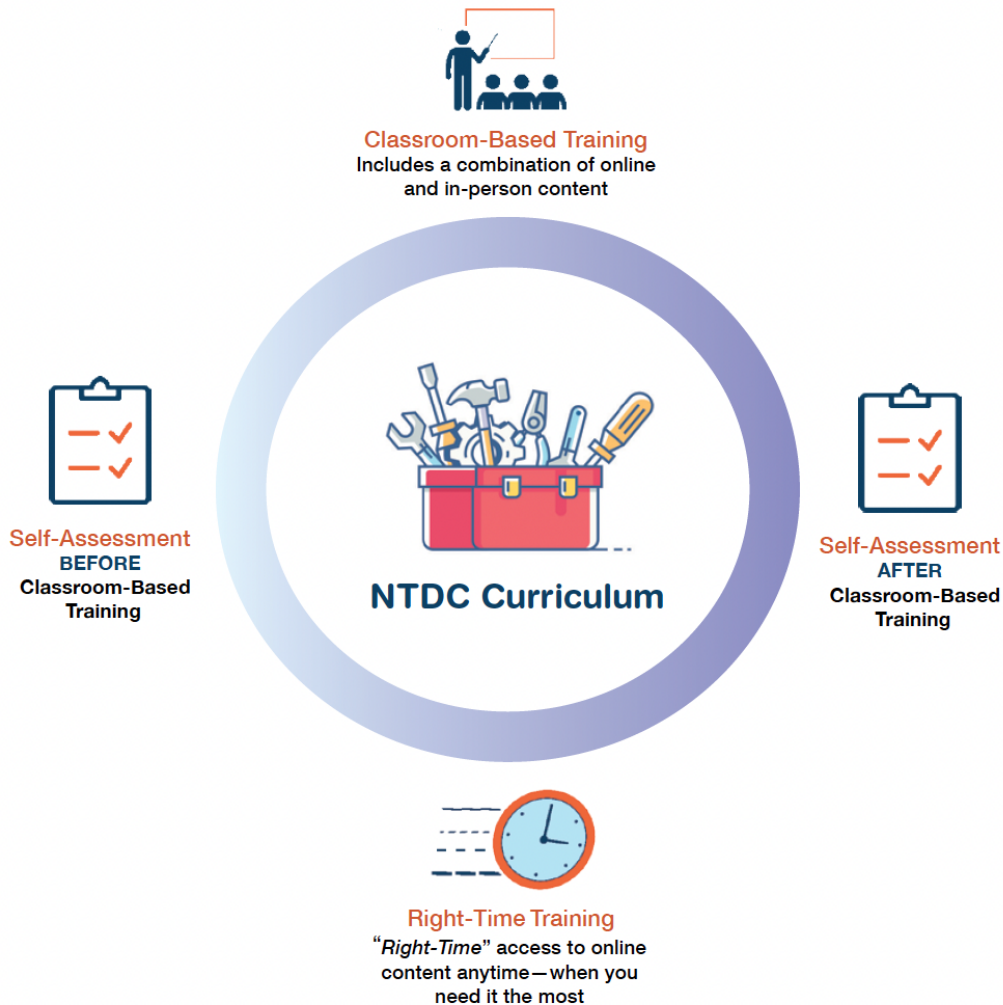
### Target Population

The NTDC was developed using a core set of competencies and characteristics. The curriculum design is intended to support three populations:

- Families who foster, provide kinship care for, and/or adopt children from the child welfare system;
- Families who adopt via the intercountry or private domestic process; and
- American Indian Alaska Native families who foster, provide kinship care for, and/or adopt.

## Overview of NTDC Components

The NTDC curriculum has three components, all of which are equally important in providing families with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need in order to effectively parent children who have experienced trauma, separation, and loss. These components include a Self-Assessment, Classroom-Based Training, and Right-Time Training.



### *Self-Assessment*

The NTDC Self-Assessment tool provides families who are preparing to become foster, kinship, or adoptive parents the opportunity to learn more about themselves as they consider the characteristics and competencies that are important when parenting children who have experienced trauma, separation, and loss. It is designed to be self-administered, allowing participants to

- Recognize their areas of strength,
- Identify areas that would benefit from additional support and information, and
- Discover areas that may cause the greatest challenge when parenting a child or youth.

Through this journey of self-discovery, caregivers can use this information to build on their existing strengths while exploring skills and competencies they see as potential challenges. The Self-Assessment characteristics and competencies are highlighted throughout the NTDC, which supports learning to continue beyond the Self-Assessment completion.

### *Classroom-Based Training*

*Theme* is the term the NTDC uses to describe the individual topical content areas covered in the curriculum. Themes can be compared to modules in a training manual or chapters in a book. Each Classroom-Based Training theme is a mini-training (one to two hours in length) on a specific topic. There are a total of 23 Classroom-Based Training themes. Of these 23:

- Two themes (“Expanding Your Parenting Paradigm” and “Overview of the Child Welfare System”) are designed for online access so that participants can complete them independently or in a classroom setting.
- Two themes were created specifically for kinship families (“Kinship Parenting” and “Building Parental Resilience for Kinship Caregivers”).
- Two themes are specific to the intercountry/private domestic adoptive family population (“Intercountry Adoption Overview” and “Connections with Birth Families After Adoption”).
- Four themes (“Overview of the Child Welfare System,” “Foster Care: A Means to Support Families,” “Reunification: The Primary Permanency Planning Goal,” and “Maintaining Children’s Connections”) are not used with the intercountry and private domestic adoptive family population.

### *Right-Time Training*

Right-Time Training is designed to provide current and prospective foster, kinship, and adoptive caregivers with timely access to a range of training once they have a child in their home. The NTDC Right-Time Trainings are flexible—they can be used by parents on their own, with a worker and the parent together, or in a support group format. Caregivers can pick and choose among the Right-Time Training topics based on what’s happening in their current parenting journey or based on the issues a child or parent is facing. For many foster, kinship, and adoptive families, Right-Time Training offers an excellent, effective, and accessible option for ongoing training requirements within their agencies.

## Purpose of This Guide

The NTDC Right-Time Training Guide for Support Group Leaders offers guidance and suggestions for using Right-Time Training in a support group format. The guide describes how to use the content and the construct to facilitate the sharing of Right-Time Training in a manner that can build skills and capacity in families who foster or adopt.

Parent support group leaders can use Right-Time Training to support families when children move into their homes, as children go through different developmental stages, and as families encounter new challenges. Right-Time Training provides access to vital information and tools.

The trainings can be used in support groups to work through challenges in a group format. In support group settings, Right-Time Training themes can launch and guide group discussions, creating opportunities for caregivers to learn from one another. Discussion questions encourage self-reflection and sharing by group participants. The group can think about an individual member's current challenges or situations and start with the topics that affect most members.

Support leaders can also use Right-Time Training themes with current or prospective parents one-on-one. Right-Time Training content can be used to provide child-specific preparation after a match has been identified. Post-adoption support leaders can also use it to work with parents to address the challenges the family is facing and brainstorm together how to make changes based on what they learned. The additional knowledge and skills will support families parenting through child welfare, intercountry, or private domestic adoption.

Are the Right-Time Training themes effective? Yes! Evaluation results show that participants' satisfaction was high and that they reported improvement across the board following exposure to the Right-Time Training themes. Statistically significant competency changes were observed from pre- to post-test, increasing from 8.3 to 9.0 out of 10, and participants showed statistically significant improvement from pre- to post-test, from 78% to 82% in overall accuracy. The "Sexual Development and Identity" theme showed the greatest improvement.

“

The structure of Right-Time [Training] allows me to easily adapt this to my parent support group. They love it and appreciate learning from each other as they watch, listen, and process information from real experts, youth with lived experience, and other parents who have walked this path of parenting.

—Support Group Leader

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## Accessing Right-Time Training

There are two main ways to access Right-Time Training and the rest of the NTDC curriculum:



- Visit <https://ntdcportal.org>, then choose Curriculum, then Right-Time Training Materials. You'll see a list of all topics.
- Visit <https://learn.childwelfare.gov/> and register to create a CapLEARN account. You can also [click here](#) for a registration guide for professionals that contains step-by-step instructions for accessing NTDC. After you create a CapLEARN account, select "Right-Time Training," choose a topic, and click the "Enroll Me" button.

## Right-Time Training Construct

There are 15 Right-Time Training themes, including one specifically for those who have adopted internationally:

- Accessing Services and Supports
- Building Children's Resilience
- Building Parental Resilience
- Common Feelings Associated with Being Adopted
- Education
- Family Dynamics
- Intercountry Adoptions Medical Considerations (designed for families who adopt via the intercountry process)
- Life Story: Birth Story and Adoption Story
- Managing Placement Transitions
- Preparing for Adulthood
- Preparing for and Managing Visitation
- Responding to Children in Crisis
- Sensory Integration
- Sexual Development and Identity
- Sexual Trauma

In each theme, instructors and participants are directed to consider certain competencies and invited to deepen their understanding of the theme and begin skill-building through a variety of approaches:



**Right-Time Training video:** Each theme begins with a 10- to 25-minute video on the topic that features child welfare, mental health, and other topical experts; experienced caregivers; and children and young adults with lived expertise. These videos are an excellent jumping-off point for support group discussions and can provide insight and guidance to a family struggling with a particular challenge. Each video is introduced with an overview and brief bios of the people interviewed. Among the featured presenters are:

- Dr. Bruce Perry, ChildTrauma Academy
- Kris Faasse, Bethany Christian Services
- Heather Forbes, Beyond Consequences
- Deborah Gray, author of *Promoting Healthy Attachments*
- Dr. Dana Johnson, co-founder, International Adoption Program at the University of Minnesota
- Dr. JaeRan Kim, founder of Harlow's Monkey
- Dr. Sharon McDaniel, founder and CEO of A Second Chance, Inc.
- Debbie Riley, founder and CEO of Center for Adoption Support and Education
- Lori Ross, founder and CEO of FosterAdopt Connect
- Dozens of experts in the fields of foster care, kinship care, and adoption

The Key Points document included in each theme can be used to prepare for what will be covered in the video, prompting families to be aware of crucial learning and serving as a review/reminder after viewing.

“

I thought it was fantastic. I am in the middle of a lot of this with my 9-year-old from China right now. I started crying reading some of the discussion questions. Just when I started feeling the video needed some adult adoptee voices, they appeared. Also, giving parents examples of things to say and do was fantastic.

—NTDC Participant

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**Application/Bringing It Home guides:** Families can use these questions to make the new learning their own and to practice skills and strategies discussed or demonstrated in the videos. Many of the themes have a guiding document that provides families ideas for practicing new skills, engaging in further introspection, and more. For support group leaders, the Bringing It Home guides could easily become the core of an ongoing curriculum, providing a robust approach to learning by doing for their families. For struggling families, leaders can offer a one-on-one, strengths-based, and targeted approach to redirecting problematic parental behaviors and beliefs to ones that better support attachment and healing for children. And for individuals who are motivated to expand and apply what they are learning, these guides are a hands-on approach to lifelong learning and growth. As you use the Application/Bringing It Home guides, remember to refer to the additional resources and the MyStory podcasts—many concepts connect throughout!



**Podcast:** The majority of the Right-Time Training themes include an audio podcast called MyStory, in which a young adult with lived expertise provides insight about how the topic affected them, how caregivers can provide needed support and guidance, and how to avoid some pitfalls and triggers. Several materials listed in the additional resources were written by those with first-person experience.



**Q&A section:** Adults learn in a variety of ways, and individuals have preferences about how and at what rate they learn. To that end, Right-Time Training participants are provided with a Q&A document that poses both frequently asked and more complex questions about the topic, created and answered by content experts. With the Q&A, participants have the opportunity to dive more deeply into specific topics and are encouraged to continue the learning process. Often, the concerns about a particular subject change over time or are not immediately apparent. With these additional answers to important questions, caregivers have a resource they can revisit and reference as needed.



**Resources:** Each theme has additional written resources selected and reviewed by content experts to facilitate additional understanding and address more specific or unique circumstances. Resources from a variety of well-respected and often evidence-based programs and agencies are provided for caregivers as they continue their journey. Within themes, materials are identified that are specific to certain populations, such as American Indian Alaskan Native families, relative caregivers, or international and private domestic adopters.

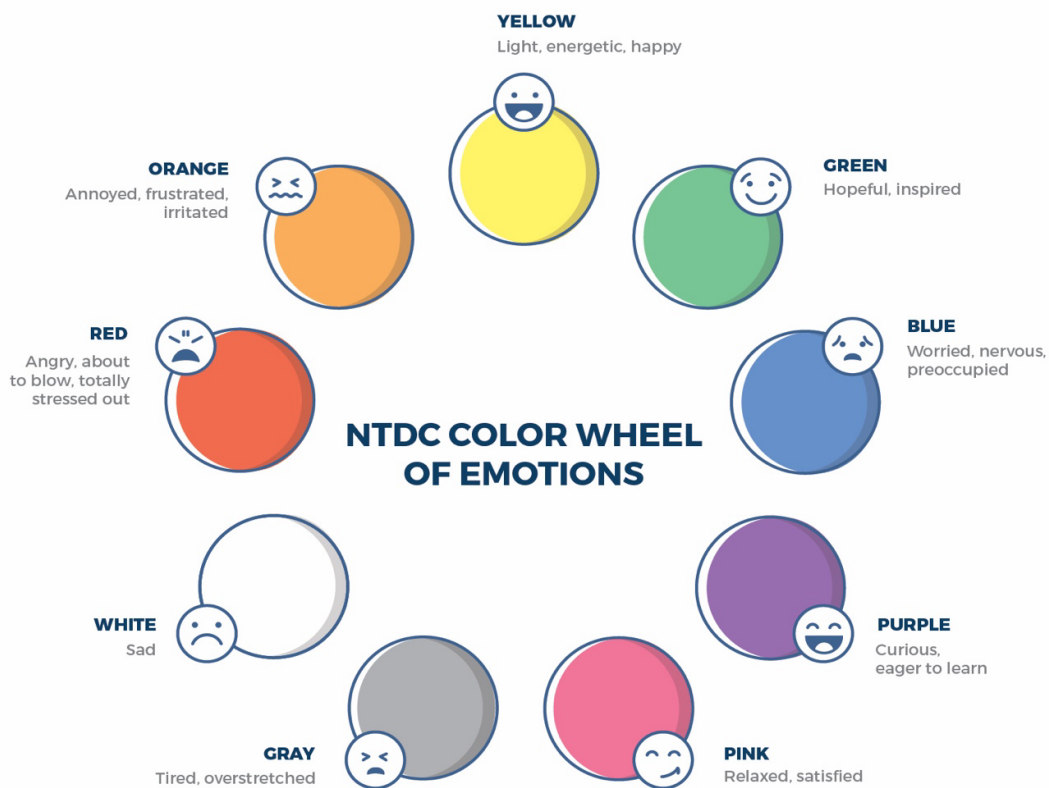
## Using Right-Time Training Themes in Support Groups

### Building an Agenda

Support group leaders can use the components of Right-Time Training themes to structure meetings. Leaders could conduct a 1.5-hour or a 2-hour meeting using the suggestions in Appendix A, which provides an example of how to use a Right-Time Training theme to build a support group meeting agenda. Leaders can facilitate the meeting using the suggestions that work best for their groups' interests and dynamics. Appendix B provides an overview of each Right-Time Training theme and a summary of the competencies and components for each theme.

### Opening Support Group Meetings

The Color Wheel of Emotions is a self-check activity that can work well as a support group opener. This type of regular self-check is important for parents who are adopting or fostering children who may have experienced trauma, separation, and loss because it can help them to become and stay aware of their state of mind. This awareness can strengthen their ability to know when to seek support or when a different balance is needed. Appendix C provides instructions for introducing the Color Wheel of Emotions, and Appendix D is a handout for participants.



## Tracking and Celebrating Growth

Leaders can support their members in tracking their own learning and growth by administering the theme's post-test at the beginning of the support group meeting and again at the end. They can acknowledge the families' growth with shout-outs or prizes, building goodwill.

## Making the Most of the Right-Time Training Experience

Leaders, what are some of the issues you have seen families struggle with frequently? What are the challenges that surprise them later in their parenting journey? As you know, new families can look at fostering or adopting with a bit of a rose-colored-glasses outlook. Look at the Right-Time Training themes as an opportunity to help them think about the future and be prepared.

Encourage your families to take advantage of most or all themes. For example, the “Sexual Trauma” theme is essential for all families because often that history is unknown. The “Preparing for and Managing Visitation” theme combined with the “Managing Placement Transitions” theme help caregivers see the benefits of and strategies for supporting children’s need for continuity and integration of experiences and identity. Caregivers can benefit greatly from using the knowledge and resources gained in the “Preparing for Adulthood” theme to ensure that they’ve done all they can to help their children launch.

Finally, please note that although Right-Time Training themes are a great start, you are not limited to the information and resources featured in them. You are the expert on the families you support and what you can offer them. Make additions to the resources that reflect what is available or expected in your community in order to meet your families’ needs. If you are using the themes to support a family in crisis, be sure that you follow up; don’t assume that a few hours of additional training is going to resolve big issues. More than anything, though, the Right-Time Training themes can assure a family that they are not alone. That validation and feeling of “normalcy” in the face of uncertainty can often be just what a family needs to persevere and believe in themselves.

“

Loved the balance of foster/adoptive parents with professionals and then the nice emotional voices of youth. This video addressed a lot of the issues/myths we try to dispel with caregivers.

I liked how it started and ended with a foster parent’s real journey. Very well done.

—Support Group Leader

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## Appendix A: Example of a Support Group Meeting Agenda

### Right-Time Training Theme: Family Dynamics Sample Annotated Meeting Agenda

This appendix is an example of how to use a Right-Time Training theme to build a support group meeting agenda. Throughout this annotated agenda, you will find alternative suggestions that allow for additional activities and family-centered approaches. You can facilitate the meeting using the suggestions that work best for your groups' interests and dynamics. Listed below are options for a 1.5-hour meeting or a 2-hour meeting.

You could make this a two-part session if there is enough interest or you are aware that the topic is an area in which families could use more time. Introduce the key ideas to participants and assign some activities to work on outside the meeting to revisit the next time. With either option, remember to debrief the next time you meet. If planning to track growth, remember to add time for both a pre- and post-test.

Topic	1.5-hour meeting	2-hour meeting
<b>Opening</b>	10 minutes: Your group has decided this is a training meeting only; welcome and settle in.	30 minutes: Your group has decided to keep their networking time at the beginning of the meeting.
<b>Video</b>	20 minutes: Just a few observations after the video and before the application.	30 minutes: Allow time for more discussion in reaction to the video. Potential prompting questions: <i>What new ideas did you take away from the video?</i> <i>Did anyone have an "a-ha" moment?</i> <i>Did you see your family in the video?</i>
<b>Application/Bringing It Home</b>	20 minutes: Facilitate a discussion about questions 1–3 from the Bringing It Home guide, paying attention to areas where group members are experiencing challenges or asking for more support. Discuss ways that the group as a whole or individually can help meet some of those needs. Suggest that group members consider question 4 as a family exercise. For groups that are into activities and/or crafting, consider scheduling a future meeting for members to create the question 5 photo albums together.	
<b>Podcasts</b>	30 minutes: Listen to the MyStory and Elizabeth Richmond podcasts together, asking members to take note of any advice that resonates with them on sticky notes. Allow five minutes at the end of the podcasts for members to place their sticky notes on a flip chart and take a photo so that you can revisit them at a later meeting.	

<b>Q&amp;A</b>	10 minutes: Ask participants to scan the questions and spend some time on them at home. Alternatively, create a “homework” exercise, assigning members the task of spending time with the Q&A responses and come to a follow-up meeting with additional questions or challenges raised by the suggested answers to work through together as a support network. Be sure to highlight the additional resources.
<b>Resources</b>	Make sure everyone has received a copy of the resources or a link to them for ongoing learning.

### **Right-Time Theme: Family Dynamics Application/Bringing It Home Questions**

1. List some of the primary ways you think your family dynamics might change when a child moves into your home. If you are already fostering/adopting, list the ways that your family dynamics have changed.
2. Based on the information you listed above, what are three changes that you feel most capable of handling in your family? What are three changes for which you might need additional support, information, or resources to handle?
3. List any challenges you have faced or anticipate facing with extended family members and friends being accepting and welcoming of the children you foster/adopt. Share and discuss the list with your partner, a family member, or a friend who is assisting you with this journey.
4. Establish a new tradition that includes everyone in the family. Building shared memories, rituals, routines, and traditions together creates strong relationships. For example, begin a tradition of sharing “roses and thorns” at the dinner table: Each person in turn shares a “rose” (positive experience) and a “thorn” (negative experience). Facilitate the conversation in a way that ensures that everyone is heard.
5. Create a photo album of the people that a child entering your home through foster care or adoption will be most likely to interact with on a regular basis. For each photo, include the person’s name, their relationship to the family, and a brief description of them. Examples of people to include in the photo album include the parents who will be fostering or adopting, children already in the home, grandparents, close family friends, and even pets. This photo album can then be shared with children prior to moving into your home or shortly after they arrive.



**As participants identify challenges, consider additional themes or share resources that can help!**

## Right-Time Theme: Family Dynamics Q&A

### **Question 1: When thinking about fostering or adopting a child, what family issues should parents consider?**

Families who are thinking about fostering or adopting need to be able to handle not only their existing challenges but also the responsibility and challenges of another child. It can be challenging for those who are already parenting children to find the time and energy to give a new child the amount of care and attention he or she will need.

When building new relationships, it is helpful to start from a position of strength. What are your strengths and challenges in parenting children of certain ages? Are you most comfortable and successful with toddlers or with teens? Think about the types of challenges you would be able to handle. Also, think of what types of challenges might be too much for you to handle well. Many foster and adoptive parents originally felt that they could not handle certain situations, but then they discovered they were more capable than they had thought. What special skills do you have? Some families do well with multiple children who have similar needs (such as children who are medically fragile or on the autism spectrum) because these families have gained the skills and knowledge to successfully meet these special needs.

It is important to honestly evaluate how much time, energy, and resources you will have to meet everyone's needs while still making sure to take care of your own needs. Understand that fostering or adopting a child whose history is similar to yours may trigger your own experiences of trauma or loss. Make an honest evaluation of what challenges or situations you can and cannot handle. Also, understand that you will continue to grow during the journey of fostering or adopting a child.

It is crucial that parents who are fostering and adopting understand that they will have to make many adjustments to meet the needs of a child placed in their home. Understanding that the whole household will need to make adjustments is important because many parents expect the opposite: Children placed in your home should not be expected to fall in line with the standards or patterns of your family life. It can be very helpful to talk with parents who have experience with fostering or adopting to learn what to expect and to get their advice on strategies to best support all the children in the family as adjustments are being made. Families should look at their current routines and schedules and make sure they are truly willing to make changes and adjust their lives in order to welcome a child into their family. Parents should also think about the makeup of their family, including the ages of children in the home and how fostering or adopting a child will affect each family member and the family as a whole.

## Question 2: What are some of the ways a family's dynamic or ways of functioning might change with the addition of a new child?

The term **family dynamics** refers to the patterns and ways in which family members interact and function as a family. Adding children to your home will affect several areas of your family's dynamics. All families are made up of several sets of relationships, sometimes called **sub-systems**. For example, parents are a sub-system within the family system. Children in the family are another sub-system, and each parent-child relationship is another sub-system. If there are two parents in the family and no children, a child joining the family results in three new sub-systems: (1) Parent 1 and the child, (2) Parent 2 and the child, and (3) both parents and the child. However, adding a child to a family of three results in an additional eight sub-systems! This means there are many different relationships within the family that need to be developed and nurtured. When new members are added to a family, the previous relationships change. Parents who might have always agreed on things before can begin to be at odds about how to handle new challenges. Children already in the home might show behavior changes such as having tantrums; acting out; or going back to behaviors they had as a younger child (called **regressing**), like sucking their thumb. These behavior changes might happen either because the children feel they are not getting the amount of attention they were used to or because they are confused and/or anxious about the changes taking place in the family.

Fostering or adopting can also change relationships with extended family members such as aunts, uncles, or grandparents. Some extended family members might be very supportive of the decision to foster or adopt. Other family members might not understand or support that decision. Family gatherings can become more difficult and may have to be adapted for the child who has moved into your home. Talk with your extended family before fostering or adopting a child. Let them know that you want them to be a part of your growing family and that you expect all family members to welcome the child. Be sure to share training videos and articles with them and invite them to other opportunities like as panel presentations where they can learn about fostering and adopting.

For kinship caregivers, the changes in roles and relationships can be challenging and confusing for everyone involved. Grandparents may become parents; parents, uncles, and aunts may become siblings; cousins may become siblings or nieces and nephews. Each of these relationships has its own unique dynamic. While people are learning to make adjustments, it is important to make sure the family remains whole and connected. You can do this by keeping the lines of communication open, preparing for changes and challenges, and having patience while people are learning to make changes.

Your **social network** (i.e., your network of friends, family, coworkers, etc.) and community connections are additional sets of dynamics that will change when you foster or adopt. Family and friends will have differing opinions on fostering or adopting. Some

might be very supportive, while others will find it too difficult or uncomfortable to deal with the behaviors of a child who has experienced trauma, separation, and loss. It is common for a foster or adoptive parent to make changes in their social network. For example, visiting a friend or family member's home might become more challenging. Visitors coming to your home might disrupt schedules that are necessary for the child to remain regulated.



*Ecomap: Identifying Your Community of Support* from the “Building Parental Resilience” theme is a great way to better understand where your energy is spent or renewed, as well as where you can look for support.

Sometimes the activities that the family did prior to fostering or adopting might not work as well once a child has moved into the home. You must be willing to make some changes to your routines and activities to include the child who has moved into your home. But it is also important to balance these changes so that the routines and activities for children already in the home can stay in place as much as possible. At first, you will probably find that it is harder to spend time outside your home. Be prepared for this and have some alternate plans in place to help ease tension or anxiety. While everyone is adjusting to a new normal, don't try to do too much. Limit your work and personal commitments as much as possible. During this time, you will need to focus most of your attention on your family.

### **Question 3: What can parents who are fostering or adopting do to ease the emotional stress that they or others in their home might experience?**

One of the best ways to ease emotional stress is to look for support from other parents who have fostered or adopted a child. These parents can help you learn what to expect and give practical advice on how to deal with the stress you might experience. Joining a support group or being around families who are going through similar situations can be a great way to deal with emotional stress. It's easier to handle parenting challenges when we have positive relationships with family, friends, and neighbors. Having a network of caring people in our lives helps us feel secure, confident, supported, and empowered—which helps us all become better parents. Your social network is an important source of support, especially while you adjust to caring for the new child. You can build a strong social network by focusing on relationships where you feel respected and appreciated. You will want to build a strong circle of people whom you can turn to in different situations.

Foster and adoptive parents must practice good self-care. Good self-care makes it possible for you to be hopeful and to prepare for the future. When you make plans for managing challenging situations, you are less likely to feel overwhelmed when those



situations come up. Part of self-care is preparing yourself for challenges. You can prepare yourself for challenges in fostering or adopting a child by taking advantage of training and other opportunities to learn new skills. Self-care also means asking for help when you need it. Accepting help is important and might be something you need to practice. Don't be afraid to let your case manager know when you need help or additional support.

Nonstop parenting can be stressful. You need to make sure that you and others in the family take time to do things that you enjoy. It is important to find at least a few minutes for yourself every day. Some small ways of finding stress relief might include taking a relaxing bath, reading a book, sitting on the porch, listening to music, or having a cup of herbal tea. For many people, keeping a journal can be an important tool for helping them express their emotions and vent their frustrations. Make laughter a part of your household: Laugh at the silly things and celebrate the small victories.

Don't expect that things will be perfect all the time. Children might do well for years but then hit bumps in the road that cause stress in the household. Families might also experience difficult events that affect their ability to manage stress. Even when things are running smoothly, it is important to keep up supportive relationships and practice good self-care.



Don't forget to check out the “Building Parental Resilience” theme as a group! *Self-Care: Barriers and Basics for Foster/Adoptive Parents* is a wonderful resource about tending to your own self-care.

#### **Question 4: What steps can parents who are fostering take to prevent or respond to allegations of child abuse made against them?**

Being falsely accused of child abuse is very stressful. You can prevent the likelihood of a false allegation by doing several things:

- Keep communication open between your family and the child's case manager and team.
- Keep a daily log where you record notes on the child's progress and any concerns you have. This log can serve as a document of your consistent care and attention. It can also help to have these records when you are having conversations with the case manager.
- Keep communication open with the child.
- Let the child know that you plan to keep everyone in the family safe.
- Set up clear rules to protect the privacy and personal space of everyone in the family.

- Do not use any form of physical punishment with the child you are fostering. Physical discipline is not allowed, and physical discipline does not work with children who have experienced trauma.
- Record in your log any accidents or injuries that the child experiences, and report injuries to the case manager right away.
- Limit situations where one person is alone with the child, especially at the beginning of the placement.

Many children in foster care who have experienced trauma have a high risk of exhibiting sexualized behaviors. Children who are **sexually reactive** respond in sexual ways to things that happen. Children who are sexually reactive might act out sexually or act in ways that are meant to provoke or excite others. Make sure a sexually reactive child is never left alone with any adult who could be seen as a threat or a target. For example, a child who has a history of being sexually abused by a male caregiver should not be left alone with a man in the house.

It is the child welfare agency's job to investigate all allegations of abuse. If a child you are fostering accuses you of abuse, cooperate with the investigation and provide information that might be helpful, such as your daily logs and notes from meetings with the child's team.

If a child accuses someone else in the household of abuse, make sure that person and the child are not alone again until the investigation is finished. It is important that foster parents be aware of their state's laws on child abuse and procedures that must be followed if there is an allegation of abuse. This preparation will help you know what to expect if you or someone in the household is accused of abuse. Rely on your support networks during the investigation. Support groups for foster parents are great places to find support and ease stress during an investigation. After the investigation is complete, make sure to follow all agency recommendations.



If any participants are parenting children with a known or suspected history of sexual abuse, the “Sexual Trauma” theme is a must. In the resources section for this theme, you’ll find *House Rules for Sexual Safety* and *Parenting a Child or Youth Who Has Been Sexually Abused: A Guide for Foster and Adoptive Parents* as well as links to additional resources.

### **Question 5: What can children who have been in foster care teach parents who are fostering or adopting about how to make the family a welcoming and safe place for everyone?**

Most children who have entered foster care do not want to be there. They might believe that what happened to break up their family was their fault. The child welfare system often makes life-changing decisions without consulting the child, which takes away the

child's sense of control. Many adults who are fostering or adopting a child try to make the child feel happy, even when the child's life has been turned upside-down. Some children might put on a happy face to please the adult. But, asking a child to be or act in a way that is different than what he or she is really feeling will break down or lose the child's trust.

From a practical point, little things can make a big difference for children in foster care. For example, making sure you have the child's favorite food on hand can go a long way toward making the child feel welcomed. Find out what soap, shampoo, and toothpaste the child likes. Allow the child to have their private space and let the child make their own choices in picking things for their room. Let the child know it's OK if they want to put up family photos and display special mementos.

Some children in foster care have said they need a balanced approach from their foster parents. They want **emotional space**, which can be described as feeling free to be themselves without having to meet others' expectations. But at the same time, they want to build relationships with their foster families and caregivers. Keep in mind that this can be a delicate dance. Make sure that you keep an open, welcoming attitude with the child. Be available for the child to come to you on their own terms. Create opportunities to talk, but do not force conversation if the child is not ready. When the child is ready, provide a welcoming, nonjudgmental place where the child can feel safe to express fears, grief, and feelings about their birth family. Use a gentle voice to reassure the child, allowing the child to let tears flow, let anger out, or both. Understand that even if the child shows anger toward you, that anger is not about *you*. That anger is about what the child has experienced and is still carrying.



You'll find many great tips and resources for supporting your families in the "Managing Placement Transitions" theme. *Tips from Preteens and Teens* has advice from the experts!

### **Question 6: What concrete things can parents who are fostering or adopting do to prepare children already in the home?**

Depending on the children's age, include them in conversations about your plans to foster or adopt. Though children should not have veto power, they will be far more accepting of the changes that come with bringing a child into your home if they know what is happening and feel part of the process. Never give a child already in the home the message that they can ask for another child to leave. Talk with each child about their thoughts and concerns about fostering or adopting a child and then work with each child to address those concerns.

Just like adults, children can get training and information about what it means to foster or adopt. Use words and examples that your children can understand to share the reasons why some children leave their families and come into foster care. Explain that sometimes these experiences can shape how children in foster care behave or act around others. For example, the child who moves into your home might do or say things that don't always make sense, or he or she might say or do things that they don't really mean. Talk to your children about how your expectations for their behavior and discipline might be different from your expectations for the behavior and discipline of the new child who moves into your home (based on each child's needs).

Explain that the new child might need more attention from you as they adjust to their new home. Reassure your children that this does not mean that you care less about their needs. Make sure that you find ways to give each child individual attention. Always give your children opportunities to express their opinions, raise their concerns, and ask questions.

Take practical steps to make the transition smoother for children already in your home:

- Set up clear boundaries for privacy and personal space.
- Make sure that the children in the home can continue their regular routines and activities after the new child moves in.
- Don't expect children already in the home to be caretakers for the new child, even if the child you are fostering or adopting is younger.
- Find ways for children in the family to develop relationships with one another.

### **Question 7: Why is birth order important, and how can changes to the birth order cause challenges in the home?**

**Birth order** refers to the order in which children were born into a family, such as first born, second born, and so forth. Birth order is important because it has a lot to do with the jobs and roles a child takes in a family. For example, a first-born child might take on the role of helper by helping parents care for younger brothers or sisters. But birth order can be disrupted when the child who moves into the home is older than the children already in your home. Some people believe that it is best not to disrupt birth order or add a child to the family who is the same age as another child in the family. But children's personalities vary as well as the way they react to changes in birth order. Thinking carefully about your children's personalities and roles in the family can help you decide if you can expect challenges with a change in the birth order. Fostering or adopting a child who is out of the existing birth order can be successful with extra preparation, commitment, support, and flexibility.

Many things should be taken into account when thinking about the age of a child who might fit best within your home. First, think about the needs, interests, and compatibility

of the children in the family and the children whom you are thinking of fostering or adopting. Be clear about your ability to meet the needs of *all* the children you will be parenting. Remember that children in foster care sometimes miss important developmental steps, which can mean that a child might act younger than their biological age. These differences could mean that two children of the same age in your home might not be at the same developmental stage. Do not compare children to one another. Always “parent to the stage, not the age. Expectations should be based on each child’s abilities and maturity level.

Second, consider the identity each child has within the family. A child who has been happy to be the “baby of the family” might be very unsettled, resentful, or even combative if a younger child is brought into the family. Knowing how each child sees their place in the family will help you to be better prepared to support each child through the adjustment.

Last, carefully think about why you want to foster or adopt a child of a certain age. Looking for a playmate of the same age for a child already in your home is not a good idea. Likewise, it is not a good idea to look for an older child who can act as a role model or babysitter for younger children. These reasons tend to backfire because they set up certain expectations, and when expectations are not met, it causes stress and disappointment. It is not appropriate to expect a child coming into your home to meet your needs or fill certain roles.

Allow enough time for everyone to adjust to their new roles and find their place in the family. During this adjustment period, you may find that you or your children are more irritable than normal. Be realistic about the time that it takes for new relationships to develop. Understand that there may be periods when family members do not get along very well. Do not insist that the children in your family “act like brothers and sisters” if they are not ready to do this. Instead, use these opportunities to show the children you are parenting how to use communication and other skills to build good relationships.

## Appendix B: Individual Themes and Competencies

### Accessing Services and Supports

#### Brief Overview

Normalize the need to ask for services and the importance of being a lifelong learner, recognize the need to become an advocate for children to ensure they get the services they need; recognize the importance of developing a support network (school, community supports, friends, medical), understand the types of services available, including counseling for trauma, separation, and loss; understand the importance of medical/developmental screening and counseling; understand the value of support groups and peer-to-peer programs.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The importance of and strategies for becoming an effective advocate.</li><li>▪ What a therapeutic network is, why families may need one, and how to build it.</li><li>▪ Various types of support and services families should be aware of and how to access them.</li></ul>	14 minutes
<b>Application/ Bringing It Home</b>	No application section in this theme.	
<b>Podcast</b>	Kim Stevens, adoptive mother, speaks to the importance of being an advocate for your foster or adopted child, discusses formal and informal supports, and confirms that seeking out help is a strength.	16 minutes
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	9 questions	
<b>Resources</b>	5 handouts	

## Building Children’s Resilience

### Brief Overview

Resilience can be defined as “the ability to achieve positive outcomes—mentally, emotionally, socially, spiritually—despite adversity” (Kain & Terrell, 2018). The purpose of this module is to help foster and adoptive parents understand concepts and definitions related to enhancing resiliency in children who have experienced trauma, separation, or loss; understand the protective factors and how to build on them; and become aware of strategies that support children and develop their identity, self-esteem, and skills toward self-advocacy.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Definition of resilience and a dismantling of the “Resilience Myth.”</li><li>▪ Factors that support resilience.</li><li>▪ Risk factors.</li><li>▪ Building blocks of resilience.</li><li>▪ Sense of belonging and connection.</li><li>▪ Self-efficacy.</li><li>▪ Sense of identity.</li></ul>	16 minutes
<b>Application/ Bringing It Home</b>	8 questions	
<b>Podcast</b>	Kelscey Martin, 23, discusses the important role her grandmother and other women played in supporting her and offers building blocks for resilience.	5 minutes
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	12 questions	
<b>Resources</b>	14 handouts	

## Building Parental Resilience

### Brief Overview

Understand what parental resilience is and the importance of resilience for parents who are fostering or adopting; recognize the kinds of parenting challenges that are likely to occur when fostering or adopting children who have experienced trauma, separation, and loss; understand the four building blocks of parental resiliency; recognize that friends and family may not understand the complexity of the children's needs or the need to provide support to the family; understand the importance of self-care and the steps necessary to build and maintain self-care.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The importance of and steps to building your resilience when you are parenting children with histories of trauma, separation, and loss.</li><li>▪ Self-awareness and an ability to assess your own resilience.</li><li>▪ Planning for maintaining physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.</li><li>▪ Putting plans into action.</li><li>▪ The importance of self-care.</li></ul>	14 minutes
<b>Application/ Bringing It Home</b>	7 questions; 2 links to recommended reading	
<b>Podcast</b>	No podcast in this theme.	
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	6 questions	
<b>Resources</b>	2 handouts	



# Common Feelings Associated with Being Adopted

## Brief Overview

Understanding of common feelings that children can have that are associated with being adopted, such as believing that they were responsible for removal from their birth family, internalizing the message that they should be grateful or that they should feel lucky to have been adopted, feeling guilty regarding mixed loyalty issues, experiencing a sense of loss or being different, and so on. Strategies for parents to provide support for children to help them address and make sense of these emotions.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Being different from their family, friends, and community.</li><li>▪ Impact of being in a family of a different race or culture.</li><li>▪ Impact of the expectations of others that the child should be grateful.</li><li>▪ Negative, inward-directed feelings of guilt, self-blame, and worthlessness.</li><li>▪ Memories, curiosity, and questions about birth parents.</li><li>▪ Loyalty issues.</li><li>▪ Loss.</li></ul>	17 minutes
<b>Application/ Bringing It Home</b>	8 questions	
<b>Podcast</b>	No podcast in this theme.	
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	6 questions	
<b>Resources</b>	1 handout	

# Education

## Brief Overview

Understand education considerations that may need to be put in place for children who have experienced trauma, separation, and loss; know how to advocate for children in the school settings; be aware of challenges children may encounter in school; understand IEP and 504 plans; be aware of strategies for partnering with teachers and schools for academic success; know how to plan for higher education and/or vocations.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	<p>Highlights of the video include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unique challenges in school settings in terms of academics, behavior, and social-emotional development.</li> <li>▪ How caregivers can provide support through partnering with the school, being an effective advocate, and understanding and leveraging education laws.</li> <li>▪ The importance of having reasonable and flexible expectations.</li> </ul>	15 minutes
<b>Application/ Bringing It Home</b>	7 questions	
<b>Podcast</b>	<p>Ashley Ash discusses the effect of multiple moves on a child’s educational progress and social adjustments, her experience of school as a safe haven and place to excel, and the importance of parents as advocates for their children in school.</p> <p>Oscar, foster care alum, discusses his experience and the effect of constant transitions.</p>	<p>Ashley: 5 minutes</p> <p>Oscar: 8 minutes</p>
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	30 questions	
<b>Resources</b>	4 handouts	

## Family Dynamics

### Brief Overview

This theme is best for those who are in the process of becoming a foster or adoptive parent or families who have just recently started this journey. The theme will provide crucial information a family must consider regarding how bringing children into their home through foster care or adoption will affect their marriage, children already in the home, relations with extended family and friends, and overall schedule. This theme also provides information on what families should consider when determining how and when to bring new children into their home, including making informed decisions regarding the age of children and types of behaviors that the family could effectively handle.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Roles and relationships between and among parenting partners, children already in the home, biological siblings, extended family, friends, and community.</li><li>▪ Managing challenges, adapting expectations, preparation, and self-care.</li><li>▪ Unique aspects of family dynamics in kinship care.</li></ul>	17 minutes
<b>Application/ Bringing It Home</b>	5 questions	
<b>Podcast</b>	There are two podcasts. The first features Jessica De Larwelle, who entered foster care as a teen. She shares some of the challenges she had in entering new families and how her foster families were able to support her transitions and adjustment.  The second features Elizabeth Richmond, foster and adoptive mother.	Jessica: 4 minutes  Elizabeth: 19.5 minutes
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	9 questions	
<b>Resources</b>	2 handouts	

# Intercountry Adoptions Medical Considerations

## Brief Overview

Understand the purpose of pre-placement medical review consultations, including the required U.S. visa medical clinic assessment, and the importance of early and regular pediatric appointments with an adoption-competent medical professional.

Understand common medical conditions affecting children who have experienced institutionalization, including malnutrition, exposure to environmental toxins, and exposure to maternal substance usage.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The importance of consulting with medical specialists.</li> <li>▪ Understanding how the referral process works and what to ask for.</li> <li>▪ The effect of institutionalization on children.</li> <li>▪ Addressing potential malnutrition prior to adoption.</li> <li>▪ Exposure to substances prior to birth.</li> <li>▪ The effects of environmental toxins.</li> <li>▪ Potential and common special needs of children.</li> <li>▪ Travel considerations, including a visa medical exam.</li> </ul>	17 minutes
<b>Application/ Bringing It Home</b>	4 questions	
<b>Podcast</b>	No podcast in this theme.	
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	No Q&A section in this theme.	
<b>Resources</b>	1 handout	

## Life Story: Birth Story and Adoption Story

### Brief Overview

Understand when and how to tell children their adoption/birth story based on age and developmental level; recognize the importance of making this an ongoing conversation with children in an inclusive, open fashion; be willing to honor strengths while also acknowledging challenges.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The importance of and steps to building your resilience when you are parenting children with histories of trauma, separation, and loss.</li><li>▪ Self-awareness and an ability to assess your own resilience.</li><li>▪ Planning for maintaining physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being.</li><li>▪ Putting plans into action.</li><li>▪ The importance of self-care.</li></ul>	22 minutes
<b>Application/Bringing It Home</b>	7 questions	
<b>Podcast</b>	Mercedes Zahler, a transracial infant adoptee raised by a white family in a very rural Midwest community, speaks to the importance of adoptive parents supporting birth family connections to help adopted children know who they are, where they come from, why they look the way they do—in short, developing an integrated sense of self and identity.	4.5 minutes
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	8 questions	
<b>Resources</b>	4 handouts	

# Managing Placement Transitions

## Brief Overview

Effectively supporting children in both planned and unplanned placement transitions both into and out of the foster or adoptive home; helping children feel welcome; staying connected.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The differing roles and responsibilities for caregivers, depending on the type of transition the child has experienced.</li><li>▪ Preparing children for moves.</li><li>▪ Creating a welcoming environment.</li><li>▪ Setting up for success.</li><li>▪ Preparing children to leave your home.</li></ul>	14 minutes
<b>Application/Bringing It Home</b>	7 questions	
<b>Podcast</b>	Christina Guillotte shares how difficult it can be to transition to new homes with new traditions and expectations. She offers advice to caregivers about how they can support children in being accepted for who they are.	5 minutes
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	9 questions	
<b>Resources</b>	3 handouts	

# Preparing for Adulthood

## Brief Overview

Learn a strength-based approach to preparing teenagers for successful transition to adulthood; understand how developmental age affects this process; recognize that preparing for adulthood does not end at 18 and that teenagers require support well after this age; know how to provide teenagers with skills that set them up for success as young adults.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Essential life skills.</li><li>▪ Unique challenges, including relationship-building, social and emotional development, and decision-making.</li><li>▪ The importance of continued connections.</li><li>▪ Connecting to benefits and services.</li></ul>	15 minutes
<b>Application/Bringing It Home</b>	7 questions	
<b>Podcast</b>	Kwam Green addresses the challenges former foster youth face when transitioning to adulthood, as well as some of the benefits and supports that can ease these challenges.	6 minutes
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	8 questions	
<b>Resources</b>	7 handouts	

## Preparing for and Managing Visitation

### Brief Overview

Understand how to check in and address children’s concerns, questions, and emotions before and after visits with their families; be able to name and validate the range of feelings associated with visits between children and their parents; understand how to prepare the children for visits; recognize the importance of visits, even if children exhibit concerning behaviors before or after the visits; understand the foster or adoptive parent’s role in the visit and the need to keep the children free to enjoy the visits; be aware of language to use with children when visits are missed or canceled.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Practical overall tips for caregivers in preparing for visits.</li><li>▪ Preparing and supporting the child.</li><li>▪ Working with the child’s parents.</li><li>▪ Providing support after the visit.</li><li>▪ Handling missed visits.</li></ul>	14 minutes
<b>Application/Bringing It Home</b>	7 questions	
<b>Podcast</b>	Ashlei Steinbruegge shares her experience with visitation while in foster care, focusing on the impact of missing her mother and being separated from her siblings. She explains how hard goodbyes are, especially for younger children who don’t understand.	6 minutes
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	11 questions	
<b>Resources</b>	1 handout	



## Responding to Children in Crisis

### Brief Overview

Be aware of strategies to help children become regulated while de-escalating crises; be aware of strategies to help children return to a calm state and keep children who are dysregulated safe while also keeping family members safe; be aware of strategies to help children and families feel physically and psychologically safe; understand the importance of partnering with other professionals and entities in a crisis.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The science of a crisis.</li><li>▪ Four phases of a crisis.</li><li>▪ How to manage an acute crisis.</li><li>▪ Strategies to prevent a crisis from escalating.</li><li>▪ The importance of self-care.</li></ul>	16 minutes
<b>Application/Bringing It Home</b>	8 questions	
<b>Podcast</b>	There are 3 podcasts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Jennifer Rhodes, foster care alum and youth support worker, shares her lived experience.</li><li>▪ Dr. Bruce Perry relates brain function in a child who has experienced trauma and relates this to crisis escalation and de-escalation.</li><li>▪ Diane Lanni explains the role of the caregiver as an emotional container.</li></ul>	Jennifer: 6 minutes Dr. Perry: 20 minutes Diane: 3 minutes
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	10 questions	
<b>Resources</b>	5 handouts	

# Sensory Integration

## Brief Overview

Understand sensory integration, be aware of how to be a “sensory detective” to identify children’s needs; develop strategies to meet children’s sensory integration needs; be aware of techniques to help children with sensory integration needs.

Component	Description	Length
Video	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Defining sensory integration and sensory processing disorder.</li><li>▪ Managing sensory processing challenges.</li><li>▪ Strategies for success.</li></ul>	22 minutes
Application/Bringing It Home	5 questions	
Podcast	No podcast in this theme.	
Q&A Section	10 questions	
Resources	2 handouts	

# Sexual Development and Identity

## Brief Overview

Understand healthy sexual development; be aware of definitions and language (become familiar with the differences between sex and gender, gender expression and gender identity, and sexual orientation and gender); know how to help children and teenagers develop strategies to handle bias and discrimination; be open to nonbinary gender identities; be aware of how to help teenagers understand healthy sexual relationships.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Healthy sexual development milestones.</li><li>▪ Sexual orientation and gender identity.</li><li>▪ Bias and discrimination.</li><li>▪ Risk factors.</li></ul>	17 minutes
<b>Application/Bringing It Home</b>	8 questions	
<b>Podcast</b>	Jarel Melendez shares his experience with understanding and exploring his own sexual identity and offers insights about how mentors can support youth in their journey.	6 minutes
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	11 questions	
<b>Resources</b>	3 handouts	

# Sexual Trauma

## Brief Overview

Be aware of indicators of sexual abuse; recognize the effects of interrupted sexual development; be aware of the unique challenges associated with parenting children who have been sexually abused; recognize the potential risk factors for children who have been sexually abused, including re-victimization, sexual trafficking, and re-enactment behaviors.

Component	Description	Length
<b>Video</b>	Highlights of the video include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Risk factors and indicators of sexual abuse.</li><li>▪ Creating an emotionally safe environment.</li><li>▪ Strategies to keep children safe and prevent further abuse.</li><li>▪ Promoting healthy sexual development.</li><li>▪ The importance of self-care.</li></ul>	18 minutes
<b>Application/Bringing It Home</b>	7 questions	
<b>Podcast</b>	Susan Josephson, adoptive mother and therapist, discusses her work with children who have been sexually abused and offers hopeful advice.	10 minutes
<b>Q&amp;A Section</b>	14 questions	
<b>Resources</b>	4 handouts	

## Appendix C: Instructions for Introducing the Color Wheel of Emotions

Support group leaders can introduce the Color Wheel of Emotions as follows:

### **SAY**

Tuning in to how you're doing on a daily basis may not be something everyone here is used to, but this type of regular self-check is crucial for parents who are adopting or fostering children who may have experienced trauma, separation, and loss, as it will be helpful to become and stay aware of your own state of mind. It may seem like a simple exercise, but be assured that knowing how we're doing on any given day strengthens our ability to know when and how we need to get support and/or need a different balance. Doing this type of self-check will also help us to teach and/or model this skill for children! Please take a moment to look at the color wheel and jot down on paper the color(s) that you are currently feeling.

### **DO**

Distribute the Color Wheel of Emotions handout. Allow some time for participants to complete the exercise.

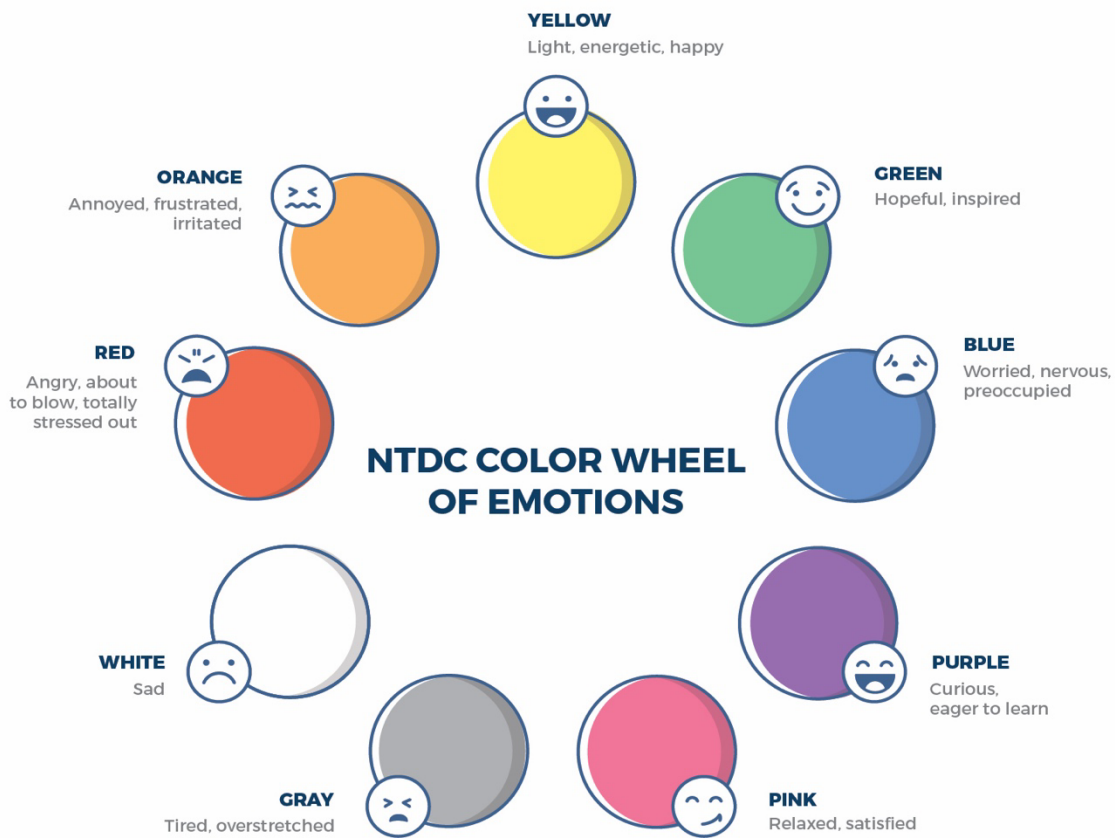
### **SAY**

Now that everybody has had the opportunity to do a quick self-check, would someone like to share what color(s) they landed on today for the Color Wheel?

### **DO**

Call on someone who volunteers to share their color(s). If they share a challenging emotion or feeling, thank the person and acknowledge their courage in sharing, pause for a moment, encourage everyone to take a deep breath, and transition to participation in the meeting.

## Appendix D: The Color Wheel of Emotions Handout for Participants



The Color Wheel of Emotions is a self-check activity that parents are encouraged to do at the start of every session. This type of regular self-check is important for parents who are adopting or fostering children who may have experienced trauma, separation, and loss because it will be helpful to become and stay aware of your own state of mind. It may seem like a simple exercise, but be assured that knowing how you are doing emotionally on any given day strengthens your ability to know when you need to get support or need a different balance.

Doing this type of self-check will also help you teach and/or model this skill for children.

Parents are encouraged to think of the Color Wheel activity as a self-care tool to assess how they are feeling and to focus on emotionally hot areas that may need attention to lessen or resolve. Parents should pay attention to their own emotions so that they can better monitor and regulate themselves—particularly when they are around children who may not be well-regulated. This activity supports parents' awareness of their feelings and offers a way to talk about those feelings with another caring adult. The facilitator will guide you through this activity at every session and introduce the tool as something that you can use with children in your home.



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