

A Competency Model for Foster and Adoptive Parents

by Freda D. Bemotavicz

Edmund S. Muskie Institute of Public Affairs
University of Southern Maine
96 Falmouth Street - P. O. Box 9300
Portland, Maine 04103-9300

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Institute Staff

Freda Bernotavicz	Project Director
Sabra Burdick	DHSTI Director
Sue Ebersten	Manager, Finance and Administration
Jim Floyd	Manager, CWTI
Margaret Morrison	Manager, Adoptive/Foster Parent Training
Dolores Bartley	Trainer
Franklin Brooks	Trainer
Tricia Mosher	Trainer
Larry Ullian	Training Specialist
Ellen Fowler	Training Specialist
Wendy Bessey	Research Assistant
Carol Sue Hayden	Research Assistant
Gloria Banach	Adoptive/Foster Parent Trainer
Victoria Beetel	Adoptive/Foster Parent Trainer
Marie Laverriere-Boucher	Adoptive/Foster Parent Trainer
Ruth Landeen	Adoptive/Foster Parent Trainer
Bonnie Lovett	Adoptive/Foster Parent Trainer
Karen Neff	Adoptive/Foster Parent Trainer
Susan Phillips	Adoptive/Foster Parent Trainer
Susan Probert	Adoptive/Foster Parent Trainer
Debora Berry	Manager, Funded Accounts
Linda Boucher	Administrative Assistant II
Suzanne Humphries	Administrative Assistant I
Patricia Morton	Administrative Assistant I
Barbara Bolduc	Secretary
Phyllis Goulet	Secretary

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Overview

A. Maine Child Welfare Training Institute (MCWTI)

Formally launched in 1991, MCWTI is a cooperative project between the Bureau of Child and Family Services of the Department of Human Services and the Muskie Institute of Public Affairs of the University of Southern Maine. The goal of the Institute is to enhance the professional development and organizational effectiveness of child welfare providers in order to improve the quality of services delivered to the children and families of Maine. While several states have implemented similar child welfare training programs in recent years, the Maine Institute has several unique features that influence its activities: collaboration, comprehensiveness, unifying themes, and a holistic approach to competencies.

1. Collaboration

Agency personnel and Institute staff work as a team to design and deliver training consistent with agency priorities and reflective of the state of the art in adult learning. To ensure that training is incorporated as an essential element of the organization, all activities are designed and developed in a collaborative approach. The end-users of all training components provide information on their needs; the university provides technical assistance and guidance. With top-level administrative support and oversight, standing committees guide all activities related to developing and delivering training programs. (For adoptive and foster parent training, the committee also includes a representative from the Maine Foster Parent Association as well as Foster and Adoptive parents who join agency personnel and Institute staff in monthly meetings to plan and review the training program.)

2. Comprehensiveness

Training is viewed as an ongoing process of professional development that includes monitoring and reinforcing classroom learning and relating this to behavior on the job. Institute activities range from preservice training, job shadowing, in-service workshops, and management training, to informal learning or participation in academic courses. The institute also addresses issues of selection, retention, and performance appraisal. At the end of preservice training, for example, prospective adoptive and foster parents meet with an assigned caseworker to review outcomes of the training and to agree on a personalized learning plan.

3. Unifying Themes

Six themes provide a unifying vision for the Institute, a way of communicating across Institute activities, creating a sense of commonality through shared values and a sense of direction through articulating a set of principles to guide action. The themes are Self-responsibility, Expectations of Excellence, Mental Models, Systems Thinking, Team Learning and Parallel Process (see Appendix A).

4. Competency-Based

Training is based on a holistic view of the competencies needed for effective performance. Like many competency-based programs, we use task analysis to identify the functional skills, knowledge and abilities (often called the KSA'S) needed to carry out job requirements. But such skills, knowledge and abilities reflect only the readily observable competencies needed to perform the specific tasks; they do not capture the full range of competencies needed for effective job performance. A systems view of job performance

suggests a continual, dynamic interaction among three major components: *the individual* performing the job, the *tasks* or job duties, and the organizational setting *or context*. To identify the competencies needed, the analysis needs to go beyond just the tasks.

A holistic view of competencies includes the underlying personal characteristics that distinguish effective performers (the attitudes, values, traits and motives which drive people to action). In addition, specific organizational settings - such as a large public bureaucracy or a small private agency—require different context skills and knowledge. Finally, linking all these skills (as a meta-competency), the Maine competency model emphasizes self-awareness and reflective practice as the basis for self-directed, ongoing learning to bridge the gap from the classroom to job performance in the real world of work.

B. Components of a Holistic Competency Model

Developing a holistic model requires combining several different approaches to the analysis of job performance and to the collection of data. The functional or task-related knowledge and skills are developed through task analysis using both on-site observation and expert opinion. The characteristics of outstanding performers are generated through a different technique known as the Behavioral Event Interview. Using a structured approach, trained interviewers probe beneath the surface to articulate the underlying characteristics of individuals who have been identified as being outstanding at their particular job. The identification of the context knowledge and skills requires yet a different approach. Here the unit of analysis moves from the specific job tasks to the organizational setting. Some of this information is drawn from organizational data in policy and procedures manuals. Surveys provide more in-depth information on the organizational culture and climate.

This holistic approach to competency identification results in a competency model which has five categories:

Work Management Skills: Performing effectively in the work context.

Conceptual Skills: Using information effectively.

Interpersonal Skills: Relating to others effectively.

Self-Management Skills: Effective use of self in the job.

Technical Knowledge: Information necessary to perform the job tasks.

Each category contains a list of competencies with specific indicators that demonstrate performance.

Data from each of the different approaches are combined and redundancies eliminated. The resulting model is then reviewed and validated by focus groups familiar with the job in question. Such reviews ensure that both concepts and language accurately reflect the experience of those most knowledgeable about effective performance. Furthermore, the reviews reflect the institute's commitment to shared ownership.

In this holistic approach, effectiveness on the job is viewed as a process, a constant spiral of learning, growth and renewal which stems from the individual's inner core of competencies, her or his attitudes, values and motives. Because training can address this inner core only to a limited extent, the responsibility for the on-going process of effectiveness must rest with each individual. Thus, the first five days of Maine's twenty-day mandatory preservice training for child welfare caseworkers is devoted to an exploration of self: the ways in which individuals see the world, how they process information and relate to others, how they deal with conflict, and how their personal experience and history impact on their values and behavior.

A holistic approach also recognizes that effective functioning in the real world of work involves the capacity to learn from experience and to manage change. The truly competent professional is engaged in an ongoing process of self-assessment and reflective practice, competencies that are emphasized throughout the curriculum as well as modeled by the trainers. In this constant spiral of learning and growth, of reflecting upon and learning from experience, the individual is engaged in a continual process of becoming competent at being competent.

C. Development of the Adoptive and Foster Parent Competency Model

This holistic approach was used to develop a competency model for the joint training of both adoptive and foster parents.

1. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities Needed to Perform the Job Tasks

The training model focuses first on the specific tasks or duties that make up a job or role. After identifying five basic functions for adoptive and foster parents (Appendix B), a listing of related knowledge, skills, and abilities was developed through a literature search. Two key sources of data were (a) Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, Alternative Care Sub-committee, and (b) Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, Comprehensive Competency-Based Training Steering Committee. The list of knowledge requirements then became a component of the competency model, reflecting primarily the technical knowledge, the conceptual and the interpersonal skills.

2. Characteristics of Outstanding Performers

This component of the training model attempts to get below the surface of observable behavior to identify the personal characteristics (e.g.: values, motives, traits) that distinguish people who are outstanding in the particular role. Typically in Institute training programs, this component is developed by Delphi Consultants, private consultants who are trained and certified by McBer and Company of Boston in the Behavioral Event Interview. After interviewing outstanding Performers, consultants analyze the data to identify an array of competencies that distinguish excellent performance.

To identify the interview sample for this training program, all licensed and approved adoptive and foster parents (approximately 2000), as well as all DHS adoption and licensing staff, were contacted by i-nail and asked to nominate outstanding adoptive or foster parents. A group of seventeen interviewees were selected to represent different regions of the state as well as different categories of parents (foster, adoptive, or both). Consultants conducted two-hour, tape-recorded interviews with individuals or couples who described key events in their experience as adoptive or foster parents. Detailed analysis of the transcripts produced eighteen competencies or personal characteristics that distinguished effective adoptive or foster parents. Interview data provided specific indicators for each competency and were grouped in the four categories of Work Management Skills, Conceptual Skills, interpersonal Skills, and Self-Management Skills.

3. Context Skills

Context skills identify the competencies required to function effectively in a specific organizational setting. While adoptive and foster parents are not agency personnel, their role involves a close working relationship with the public agency. For this model, staff collected data through telephone interviews with a representative sample of experienced adoptive and foster parents who volunteered to provide information on their experience of working with the agency. Participants responded to a structured questionnaire that addressed issues related to mission, policy and procedures, professional standards, external environment,

and culture/climate. Analysis of their responses produced a list of context skills that was reviewed by the training committee and incorporated into the competency model—primarily in the category of Work-Management Skills.

4. Self Assessment and Reflective Practice

The competency listing was reviewed to ensure adequate representation of these skills, especially in the category of Self-Management Skills.

5. Review and Verification

Throughout the process of developing the competency model, members of the Adoptive and Foster Parent Training Committee reviewed and revised individual components, such as the Characteristics of Effective Performers and the Context Skills. These reviews resulted in changing the language to make it more reflective of the target audience, and in building familiarity and ownership of the competencies. The final competency model, therefore, belongs to those most directly involved in providing services to adoptive or foster children.

D. Applications

Initially, the competency model was used as the basis for designing the curriculum for the introductory Training. This is a twenty-hour program which is divided into eight sessions which is offered in the evenings and weekends to individuals and couples who are contemplating becoming foster and adoptive parents. In addition to featuring specific content (such as issues of grief and loss or the impact of abuse), each session provides training activities designed to make participants aware of the competencies and provides opportunities for their development.

The competencies are also used as a framework for evaluation of the training. Participants complete a competency checklist to conduct a pre- and post- self-assessment which provides feedback to themselves and to the trainers. In addition, individual session evaluations highlight the competencies covered in the session and ask participants to write about those which they found most useful. The training team (composed of two experienced Foster and/or Adoptive parents), uses this information along with their observation of participants to develop a written competency-based assessment on each participant at the end of the training program. This feedback is provided to the Licensing worker or Adoption worker.

Other ways of using the competencies are currently being explored. These include conducting a needs assessment for in-service training and using the competencies to communicate expectations of learning outcomes to contracted trainers.

Competency Model for Adoptive and Foster Parents

Outline

- A.** Family Management
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 - 2.00 Family-Oriented Priorities
 - 3.00 Household Organization
 - 4.00 Transition Management
 - 5.00 Setting Standards
 - 6.00 Behavior Management
 - 7.00 Managing Severe Behavioral Problems

- B.** Conceptual Knowledge/Skills
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- C.** Interpersonal Knowledge/Skills
 - 10.00 Interpersonal Sensitivity
 - 11.00 Communication Skills
 - 12.00 Coaching Skills
 - 13.00 Counseling Skills

- D.** Self-Management
 - 14.00 Commitment to Children
 - 15.00 Perspective
 - 16.00 Equilibrium
 - 17.00 Flexibility
 - 18.00 Self-Development

- E.** Technical Knowledge
 - 19.00 State Law/Agency Policy
 - 20.00 Family Systems
 - 21.00 Human Development
 - 22.00 Physical/Sexual Abuse
 - 23.00 Substance Abuse
 - 24.00 Separation and Loss
 - 25.00 Foster/Adoptive Care System
 - 26.00 Working with Adolescents
 - 27.00 Health issues
 - 28.00 Community Issues
 - 29.00 Psychological Issues
 - 30.00 Cultural Sensitivity

Adoptive and Foster Parent Competency Model Comprehensive Listing

A. FAMILY MANAGEMENT

1.00 Collaboration

Makes appropriate information available to other family members, caregivers and caseworkers; works as an effective team member; enlists assistance of service providers as needed to meet child's needs; understands roles and responsibilities of people in the child welfare system and the ground rules for interactions; offers information and support to other adoptive/foster parents; assists in preparation of testimony when needed and testifies in court hearings.

- 01.01 Makes sure other family members, caseworkers and other caregivers have all the available information needed to manage situations and make sound decisions.
- 01.02 Serves as a collaborative team member to caseworkers, counselors, medical professionals, teachers, guardians ad litem etc., in developing and implementing plans for children's care.
- 01.03 Appreciates what caseworkers, counselors, other caregivers, guardians ad litem and service providers can contribute to understanding and solving problems; does not hesitate to enlist their assistance.
- 01.04 Understands and applies knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of people in the child welfare system and the ground rules for adoption foster care and, including confidentiality, liability, reasonable efforts, reunification, and statutory and regulatory requirements.
- 01.05 Advocates for the child in order to obtain needed services.
- 01.06 Reaches out to other adoptive and foster parents to and provide mutual support, parenting skills and systems information.
- 01.07 Assists in preparation of testimony, and when necessary- testifies in court hearings.

2.00 Family-Oriented Priorities

Holds strong convictions about importance of family bonds; uses family routines and rituals to create continuity and stability; enjoys spending time as a family; shows warmth and affection in order to encourage a sense of security for children; gives priority to meeting family's needs when deciding about transitioning a child into and out of the household; assures that all family members are treated with respect; treats all fairly; provides individual attention to each child.

- 02.01 Has strong convictions about the importance of family bonds and mutual support for the well-being of children and adults.
- 02.02 Has family routines and rituals to provide a sense of continuity and stability.
- 02.03 Enjoys time spent with children and doing things as a family; finds creative ways to arrange regular family outings.
- 02.04 Is comfortable in showing warmth and affection to children.
- 02.05 Gives priority to meeting the family's needs and preserving its life style when deciding about transitioning a child into and out of the household.
- 02.06 Encourage members of the household to value one another as persons and treat each other with respect.
- 02.07 Takes care to treat every child in the home equitably and fairly.
- 02.08 Makes time for one-on-one attention to each child in the household.

3.00 Household Organization

Involves children in planning and decision-making; makes decisions jointly with other adults; plans and organizes household activities; involves children in developmentally appropriate household chores and activities; arranges the family living environment to promote safety; prepares family members to meet emergency situations, health and safety needs; keeps careful records.

- 03.01 Involves children in the family in planning and decision-making, as appropriate, and especially decisions regarding transitioning a child into and out of the household; values their ideas and respects their feelings.
- 03.02 Makes key decisions regarding the children jointly with other caregivers in the household.
- 03.03 Coordinates schedules and household activities to be certain nothing important is overlooked.
- 03.04 Involves children in developmentally appropriate household chores and activities.
- 03.05 Thinks through problems that could occur and arranges the family living environment to promote safety (e.g., sleeping and seating arrangements- security and safety precautions).
- 03.06 Records important information about the child in a secure place (e.g., legal documents; pictures; medical records).
- 03.07 Makes sure that each family member is aware of and knows how to respond to emergencies, in ways appropriate to his/her abilities.

4.00 Transition Management

Prepares all family members for the arrival/departure of a child in household; helps arrivals feel welcome; stays positive during setbacks in adjusting; helps child maintain continuity with past; manages own feelings about arrivals; helps facilitate transition of children.

- 04.01 Prepares children and others in the home for new arrivals and departures; explains any special needs, how they can help, etc.
- 04.02 Is sensitive to the needs of new arrivals in the household. Helps them feel welcome and comfortable in their new surroundings, while recognizing potentially increased needs of other household members.
- 04.03 Accepts that adapting to a new home takes time and usually involves setbacks; stays positive and optimistic.
- 04.04 Helps children maintain continuity with their past through use of life books and appropriate visits with their birth family, former foster families and playmates. In addition preserves their cultural heritage.
- 04.05 Manages their own feelings and helps others in the home to manage their feelings about people coming in and out of their home.
- 04.06 Recognizes the impact of an unplanned move on the child. Other household members; discusses and plans for transition with the caseworker, child and other household members.
- 04.07 Helps facilitate the best possible transition for children leaving the home and the parents who are receiving the child. Labor with careworkers to develop appropriate plan to future contact.
- 04.08 Helps present the child's new living arrangement in a positive and caring manner.

5.00 Setting Standards

Has realistic yet challenging expectations for family members; adjusts expectations and standards to age and abilities of children; clearly explains house rules and expects them to be followed by everyone; is clear about roles and responsibilities of all members of the household.

- 05.01 Sets and models high standards of personal conduct and expects others to do likewise.
- 05.02 Sets standards and developmental expectations that are appropriate for the age and capabilities of each child.

- 05.03 Clearly explains to children what is expected of them and the consequences if they fail to meet expectations.
- 05.04 Establishes house rules and expects them to be followed by everyone in the family.
- 05.05 Is clear about roles and responsibilities of all members and the household and communicates those diverse roles to all household members.

6.00 Behavior Management

Helps children set limits on their behavior; follows through on discipline; forges agreements with other adult household members so that rules are applied consistently; disciplines fairly and appropriately; encourages and reinforces positive behavior; uses appropriate techniques to extinguish negative behavior.

- 06.01 Understands why physical discipline is detrimental to children.
- 06.02 Understands the importance of setting limits for children; follows through on discipline that is consistent with limits set even though it may feel uncomfortable.
- 06.03 Forges agreements and presents a united front by coordinating with other adult members of the household so that rules are applied consistently and opportunities for manipulation are minimized.
- 06.04 Is consistent about what is and is not acceptable behavior.
- 06.05 Disciplines fairly and appropriately in proportion to the offense developmental stages in accordance with DHS policies licensing rules and regulations.
- 06.06 Does not give in to manipulative behavior; holds his/her ground with the child.
- 06.07 Encourages positive behaviors by child's options and allowing developmentally appropriate in decision-making.
- 06.08 Encourages learning and positive behavior by conveying healthy expectations and showing appreciation for progress.
- 06.09 Provides incentives for good behavior and extra effort.
- 06.10 Uses appropriate techniques to extinguish negative behavior (e.g., ignoring temper tantrums).
- 06.11 Is open to seeking help in choosing and applying discipline strategies.

7.00 Managing Severe Behavioral Problems

With the caseworker, therapist and others establishes a plan for each child to handle severe behavioral problems; protects people and pets when a child is behaving destructively; projects calm when a child is out of control; uses appropriate techniques to calm children who are exhibiting out of control behavior; understands that severe behavioral problems are not quickly overcome.

- 07.01 With the caseworker, therapist and others develops a strategy for intervening should a child exhibit out of control behavior. Has a plan tailored to each child's needs as to how the parents and other household members will handle severe behavioral problems; values the plan as a means to stay grounded in emergencies.
- 07.02 Protects people and pets in the household when a child is behaving destructively; acts quickly to get everyone out of harm's way.
- 07.03 Projects calm and control when a child is out of control.
- 07.04 Uses appropriate techniques to calm children who are exhibiting out of control behavior, self-destructive, or destructive to people, pets, and property. Works closely with children to help them learn how to bring themselves under control.
- 07.05 Understands and accepts the fact that severe behavioral problems are not easily or quickly resolved.

B. CONCEPTUAL KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS

8.00 Critical Thinking

Identifies patterns in behavior; identifies and makes sense of behavior; searches for underlying reasons for behavior; verifies facts surrounding conflicting stories; forms independent judgments based on careful observations.

- 08.01 Identifies trends or patterns in behavior over time.
- 08.02 Identifies behavior that is, out of character or atypical (e.g., signs/symptoms of developmental disabilities, sexual behavior problems, substance abuse and its effects).
- 08.03 Seeks to understand the underlying reasons for or causes of behavior.
- 08.04 Recognizes the impact of individuals prior experience and background to make sense of his/her behavior.
- 08.05 Recognizes that you may hear conflicting or hard-to-believe stories from the child.
- 08.06 Forms independent judgments based on careful observations; does not have blind faith in the opinions of experts; recognizes the need to discuss differing opinions with team members.

9.00 Psychological Understanding

Recognizes critical importance of children feeling secure, being able to trust adults, having self-esteem; respects child's emotional bonds with birth parents; respects child's right to privacy; is sensitive to child's moods; is sensitive to child's readiness for new experiences; involves child in establishing appropriate disciplinary action.

- 09.01 Recognizes the importance of children feeling secure; builds children's confidence in the family's ability to protect them from harm.
- 09.02 Recognizes the critical importance of children trusting adults and demonstrate him/herself worthy of that trust.
- 09.03 Recognizes the critical importance of self-esteem and works diligently to help children feel good about themselves.
- 09.04 Understands and respects children's emotional bonds to birth parents.
- 09.05 Respects children's right to some privacy and expects the child to reciprocate in kind.
- 09.06 Is sensitive to children's moods.
- 09.07 Is careful not to overwhelm children, approaches learning and unfamiliar experiences and in accordance with each child's readiness.
- 09.08 Recognizes the importance of involving the child in establishing appropriate disciplinary action.

C. INTERPERSONAL KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS

10.00 Interpersonal Sensitivity

Is sensitive to non-verbal cues, hidden meaning or intent in communication; listens for what is going on beneath the surface in group settings; respects preferences and uniqueness of each child; listens for things going wrong with child; remembers what it was like to be a child; is able to view situations from others' perspectives,

- 10.01 Is sensitive to and takes steps to interpret non-verbal cues as to what people, particularly children, are thinking and feeling.
- 10.02 Is sensitive to hidden meaning or underlying intent of what people are asking or saying.

- 10.03 Is sensitive to what is going on beneath the surface in group settings (e.g., interpersonal conflicts, family tensions, manipulations, etc.).
- 10.04 Discovers and respects the preferences and unique aspects of children's personalities.
- 10.05 Has antennae up all the time to know what children are doing- has a "sixth sense" for when things are going wrong.
- 10.06 Can remember what it was like to be a child; can empathize with children's thoughts and feelings.
- 10.07 Can view situations from other (adults') perspectives and empathize with their feelings.

11.00 Communication Skills

Maintains high level of communication in household; pays attention when children speak; considers child's level of understanding in communication; respects requirements of confidentiality; considers how something may be interpreted when communicating; is assertive when communicating with professionals; communicates key information about child's progress to appropriate team members; communicates with open, non-judgmental attitude.

- 11.01 Maintains a high level of communication in the household; encourages everyone to share responsibility for keeping one another informed.
- 11.02 Pays attention when children speak; let them know they have been heard and their feelings considered.
- 11.03 Tailors communications to the child's level of understanding.
- 11.04 Respects requirements of confidentiality and exercises discretion when sharing information.
- 11.05 Stops to think about how what is said and how it may be interpreted by others and adjusts communications accordingly.
- 11.06 Uses assertive communication skills in work with agency staff and other professionals, including follow up on those communications.
- 11.07 Makes sure that key information about the child's progress at home or with service providers is communicated to appropriate team members, orally and/or in writing.
- 11.08 Maintains a non-judgmental open attitude when communicating with children, parents, other team members.

12.00 Coaching Skills

Assists children to develop social skills, to build friendships; helps children succeed through instruction, praising, using experiences as objective lessons. Helps children think through implications of actions; assists children to value differences; encourages children to take risks; serves as role model for healthy family life.

- 12.01 Assists children to develop and improve their social skills.
- 12.02 Give children opportunities for success; provides instructions, demonstrations, etc., on how to do the things they are expected to do (e.g., make their beds, clean their rooms, take care of personal hygiene).
- 12.03 Helps children explore their interests and develop their own special talents.
- 12.04 Helps children think through the implications and consequences of their actions.
- 12.05 Uses experience from everyday life as object lessons to teach children.
- 12.06 Assists children and to value differences and understand the special needs of others.
- 12.07 Encourages children build friendships and to explore the world beyond the immediate family.
- 12.08 Compliments and praises children to reinforce learning and enhance their self-esteem.
- 12.09 Encourages children to take risks to learn new skills or try new things.
- 12.10 Serves as a role model for healthy family life and appropriate parenting skills.

13.00 Counseling Skills

Creates a safe emotional climate for children and family members to express and discuss feelings; facilitates discussion and problem solving; answers children's questions honestly; encourages children to face up to problems; responds swiftly to children's emotional distress; attempts to help children believe that traumatic events in their lives are not their fault; helps children find appropriate ways to channel strong feelings; attempts to help children see value in the counseling process; collaborates with therapists.

- 13.01 Creates a safe emotional climate for children and others to discuss their feelings.
- 13.02 Encourages people to bring things that are hard to talk about into the open where they can be addressed; and facilitates discussion and problem solving.
- 13.03 Answers children's questions honestly and helps them put life experiences into perspective.
- 13.04 Gives children time, space, and support to work through their problems.
- 13.05 Works with children to help them name, verbalize, and appropriately express their feelings.
- 13.06 Encourages children to face up to their problems and to deal with them in a constructive way.
- 13.07 Responds swiftly when children are emotionally distressed- makes certain they receive appropriate care and attention.
- 13.08 Attempts to help children understand and believe that bad and sad things that have happened to them are not their fault (e.g., being removed from their parents' care, being abused).
- 13.09 Finds appropriate ways to express and channel children's strong positive and negative feelings (e.g., play, art, music, games).
- 13.10 Attempts to help children understand the benefits of working through the counseling process, including relationship building, assessment, diagnosis and treatment- collaborates with therapists.

D. SELF-MANAGEMENT

14.00 Commitment to Children

Puts child's long term interests before self interest; cares about welfare of children; has faith that child can be helped; gives extra attention to help children; feels proud when children achieve small steps forward; advocates strongly on issues important to child's well being; makes commitment to children.

- 14.01 Puts the best long-term interests of the child before own self-interest.
- 14.02 Cares deeply about the welfare of children; stands by them even when it requires sacrifice.
- 14.03 Has faith that every child can be helped; provides the best care possible for each child.
- 14.05 Gives extra attention to help children; is patient and does not give up easily.
- 14.06 Feels proud when children put forth extra effort and achieve even small steps forward.
- 14.07 Advocates strongly on issues that are important to the child's well-being.
- 14.08 Makes a commitment to children; continues to show support for and care about the children after placement terminates, as appropriate.

15-00 Perspective

Is able to step back from situations and keep own emotions in check; can determine what is urgent and what is not; can place current situation in context of child's history and future, seeks appropriate support if allegations of abuse and neglect occur.

- 15.01 Knows when to take time out, to step back from a situation, to calm down and think things through.

- 15.02 Is able to work through strong feelings that may get in the way of effectiveness.
- 15.03 Maintains perspective on what is urgent and what can wait, what is important and what is not.
- 15.04 Places what is happening today in the context of the child's history.
- 15.05 Seeks appropriate support if allegations of abuse and neglect occurs; deals with the social and emotional trauma inherent in such an investigation.

16.00 **Equilibrium**

Maintains a positive outlook in the face of life's ups and downs; believes that care and consistency may lead to healthy lives; stays in touch with own feelings; recognizes own limitations; sets aside quiet time for self and adult relationships.

- 16.01 Has inner strength and a strong, positive outlook on life.
- 16.02 Is resilient and philosophical about life's ups and downs; bounces back from disappointments and avoids cynicism.
- 16.03 Believes that care and consistency may help children lead healthy, productive lives.
- 16.04 Stays in touch with own intuitions and feelings.
- 16.05 Recognizes own limitations; knows when to ask for help in dealing with difficult problems or circumstances.
- 16.06 Accepts and/or sets quiet time aside for personal regeneration.
- 16.07 Sets time aside to nurture the adult relationships in his/her life.

17.00 **Flexibility**

Can cope with uncertainty of child's length of stay in home; can trade off high standards of housekeeping to attend to more pressing matters; can change or revise plans quickly, is able to juggle attention between people and tasks effectively; appreciates assistance even when tasks are not done perfectly; adjusts to changes in child welfare system.

- 17.01 Is able to cope with the uncertainty of a child's tenure in the home.
- 17.02 Is not resentful about having to trade off high standards of housekeeping in order to attend to more pressing matters.
- 17.03 Is not thrown off balance by a need to change plans at the last minute.
- 17.04 Is able to juggle attention to people and tasks effectively.
- 17.05 Appreciates assistance in getting things done even though it is not done perfectly or the way he/she would have gone about it.
- 17.06 Revises plans and approaches when they are not working.
- 17.07 Adjusts to changes in child welfare system.
- 17.08 Adjusts to working with a variety of professionals.

18.00 **Self-Development**

Improves parenting skills through training, learning resources; stays open to new information; uses experience as a basis for developing parenting skills.

- 18.01 Educates self about how to effectively address children's problems.
- 18.02 Takes advantage of training and other learning resources to improve parenting skills and techniques.
- 18.03 Stays open to new information and to new ways of doing things.
- 18.04 Uses what can be learned from experience to develop techniques and guidelines for parenting and handling of family problems.

E. TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE

19.00 State Law/Agency Policy

State statutes; legal/judicial process; child welfare agency policies/regulations; documentation; collaboration with the agency.

- 19.01 **State Statutes:** Laws that define abuse/neglect; adjudicated youth issues of legal liability, confidentiality, adoption.
- 19.02 **Legal/Judicial Process:** Legal processes related to child placement and family reunification; role, rights, responsibilities of adoptive foster parent and birth parents in both child welfare system and legal system; when/how to seek legal guidance; state legal processes regarding child welfare, including roles and responsibilities of judicial/legal personnel, role of guardian ad litem, interveners, judicial review.
- 19.03 **Child Welfare Agency, Policies/Regulations:** Mandate, structure, and regulations of child welfare agency; policies regarding reunification, discipline, investigation of abuse, confidentiality, investigation of licensing violations.
- 19.04 **Documentation:** Value of maintaining records regarding child's history, including the use of life books; agency's policies regarding reporting—adjustment of foster family and child in care, emergencies, vacation planning, respite care, record keeping, training, grievance procedures, agreement from, confidentiality form, health records.
- 19.05 **Collaboration with Agency:** How family case plan guides child/youth care activities, foster family activities, provision of services to meet child/youth's needs, administrative case review.

20.00 Family Systems

Family relationships; family sensitivity; impact on family system.

- 20.01 **Family Relationships:** Ways of respecting and maintaining a child's ties to primary and previous adoptive/foster relationships; ways to use regular visits to support a child's ties to primary/birth family; ways to manage the impact of visits upon the feelings, behavior of children; ways to work with and help primary/birth families.
- 20.02 **Family Sensitivity.** Understanding of family systems theory, especially as it relates to own family; types of children/youth that own family can most effectively adopt/foster, types of children who should not be placed with own family; awareness of behaviors/problems that are most likely to be disruptive to family relationships; awareness of amount of stress family can handle.
- 20.03 **Impact on Family System:** Understanding the impact of a new child on a family system; how properly matching children/youth to the adoptive/foster family, as well as defining, clarifying family roles and rules can help own family adjust to adoptive/foster caregiving; ways to assess own strengths/needs in providing care for children; ways to manage impact of placement disruption on all members of adoptive/foster family; strategies to prevent placement disruption.

21.00 Human Development

Developmental process; sexual development; developmental disabilities,

- 21.01 **Developmental Process:** Stages, processes and milestones of normal physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development from birth through adolescence; age-appropriate and realistic expectations for children/youth with developmental problems; ways to assist primary families in understanding their child's developmental problems/needs.
- 21.02 **Sexual Development:** Process of human sexual development and behavior; facts/issues related to birth control, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, abortion, multiple

sexual partners, and sexual identity; developmental issues related to sexual identity and homosexuality.

- 21.03 **Developmental Disabilities:** Nature, causes, symptoms, and treatment of mental retardation, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, spina bifida, Down Syndrome, attention deficit disorder, fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effects, other conditions that delay or impair child's development.

22.0 Physical/Sexual Abuse

Family dynamics; effects of abuse; special behavioral problems.

- 22.01 **Family Dynamics:** Types of family situations that can contribute to physical/ sexual abuse and neglect of children/youth by their families; ways that adoptive/foster caregiving can help children/youth and their families overcome the problems contributing to, resulting from abuse and neglect.
- 22.02 **Effects of Abuse:** Signs, symptoms, and effects of physical/sexual abuse, neglect and emotional maltreatment on child's growth and development; effects of prenatal conditions and birth trauma on child's growth and development; procedures for communicating suspicions of sexual abuse to foster care caseworker; procedures for cooperating in the investigation/court processes involved in sexual abuse cases.
- 22.03 **Special Behavioral Problems:** indicators of emotional disturbance, mental health problems/behavioral disorders; how to protect other family members and those in immediate environment from sexual abuse by child/youth; signs/ symptoms of depression/suicide in children/youth; ways to obtain emergency mental health services.

23.00 Substance Abuse

Signs of abuse; effects of abuse; substance exposed infants.

- 23.01 **Signs of Abuse:** Possible causes, signs, and symptoms of alcohol and other drug use.
- 23.02 **Effects of Abuse:** Signs and symptoms of drug or alcohol exposed children, youth; techniques for stimulating development and dealing with accompanying physical, social, cognitive, emotional problems; medical risks associated with substance abuse, stages of recovery, effects of recovery process on family system.
- 23.03 **Substance Exposed Infants:** Special needs of substance exposed infants, indicators of fetal alcohol syndrome and fetal alcohol effects in infants, treatment approaches that can be useful in parenting these infants.

24.00 Separation and Loss

Feelings/behaviors, traumatic events.

- 24.01 **Feelings/Behaviors:** Effect of separation and loss on children's feelings and behaviors as they move through the foster care system.
- 24.02 **Traumatic Events:** Infertility, miscarriage, sudden infant death syndrome, sudden death of family member.

25.01 Adoptive/Foster Care System

Realities of adoptive/foster parenting; agency adoption/foster care system.

- 25.02 **Realities of Adoptive/Foster Parenting:** Potential stresses in parenting someone else's child/youth with a disability; how to seek support, education, financial subsidy, and respite services for adoptive/foster family members.
- 25.03 **Agency Adoption/Foster Care System:** Reasons for placement of children/ youth, for maintaining a policy of permanency planning, for promoting a team approach to family reunification. Understanding of the process of adoption/ foster care.

26.00 Working with Adolescents

Adolescent development; behavioral problems in adolescents; independent living.

- 26.01 **Adolescent Development:** Physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development of the adolescent youth; sexual identity and homosexuality.
- 26.02 **Behavioral Problems in Adolescents:** Behavioral indicators of adolescent depression, suicide, other emotional disturbances; how to make appropriate referrals for treatment services.
- 26.03 **Independent Living.** Skills needed by adolescents to live independently; variety of techniques, including teaching, modeling, coaching, and positively reinforcing, which help youths prepare for independent living; how to help youth connect their past and present life experiences with appropriate goals for the future.

27.00 Health Issues

Medical issues; AIDS.

- 27.01 **Medical Issues:** Health, hygiene, and nutrition practices that prevent or reduce the likelihood of illness in children/youth; basic first aid and CPR techniques, conditions which require emergency treatment; health/medical conditions that can result from abuse/neglect; how to consult and work with health care professionals.
- 27.02 **AIDS:** Signs, symptoms of AIDS, psychological and social aspects of the disease, ways to sensitively help a child/youth talk about feelings and concerns in a manner appropriate to the child's culture and developmental level; current medical, legal, policy information about HIV infection and AIDS.

28.00 Community Issues

Larger community; resources.

- 28.01 **Larger Community.** The hazards in the community which place children at risk and how to minimize children's exposure to such risks.
- 28.02 **Accessing Resources:** How/when to request family planning services; specialized education, developmental and recreational services in the community for children/youth with developmental disabilities; how to obtain needed services and work with service providers to meet child's special needs; value of affiliating with other adoptive/foster parents and adoptive house parent support groups; procedures to enroll children in school, to collaborate with school personnel.

29.00 Psychological Issues

Psychological understanding; placement process; parenting skills.

- 29.01 **Psychological Understanding:** Understanding of possible reasons for problem behaviors, such as lying, stealing, violence, fire setting, other destructive behavior; dynamics and motivation of child adolescent sexual offenders.
- 29.02 **Placement Process:** Predictable stages of grief and loss; rationale for placement of siblings together or separately; stages of adjustment to placement in foster care- impact of multiple placements on child's development; negative effects on children of changing and inconsistent living arrangements; effect of placement on individuals and families.
- 29.03 **Parenting Skills:** Ways to observe behavior and recognize patterns of delay or disability, dynamics of abuse and neglect; how to effectively manage stress; understanding of the causes and manifestations of pathological behavior; how to seek assistance in dealing with emotionally damaged children.

30.00 Cultural Sensitivity

Response to diversity; ethnic groups.

- 30.01 **Response to Diversity:** Importance of recognizing the cultural, social, and economic similarities and differences between a child's primary/birth family and adoptive/foster family; recognition of own cultural/ethnic and religious barriers or biases.
- 30.02 **Ethnic Groups:** Minority groups predominant in Maine.

APPENDIX A UNIFYING THEMES OF THE INSTITUTE

1) Self-Responsibility

Slogans: "Take ownership." "Be proactive."

Being responsible for self means being knowledgeable enough about ourselves, our perspectives, our behaviors, and our values that we can discern our effect on others. It also means owning our actions and words. Self-responsibility is a quest for continual learning achieved through an on-going process of reflection-discovering the gap between what we say and what we do. Self-responsibility means taking a proactive stance within the organization, figuring out what needs to be done, helping to create and shape the work environment.

2) Striving for Excellence

Slogans: "Provide quality." "Can do!"

We have a responsibility to identify and build on our own strengths as well as those of our colleagues. Although we work in a world where the demands made on us are often unrealistic, we must resist the temptation to use organizational realities as an excuse for failing to provide quality services. We must approach challenges creatively, identifying and removing barriers to quality services, rather than accepting problems and frustration as the norm. With clients as well as with colleagues, it is essential to have the expectation that, through collaborative efforts, situations can be managed and problems can be solved.

3) Valuing Diverse Perspectives

Slogan: "Recognize mental models—your own and others'.

We all carry around internal pictures of how the world works; these mental models influence what we do because they influence what we see. Recognizing the characteristics of different personal styles and different learning styles helps us to see more sharply the strengths and limits of our own mental models. When we affirm the reality of multiple mental models we open the way to draw on the resources of this variety to engage in productive advocacy and inquiry.

4) Systems Thinking

Slogans: "Look at the big picture." "Tension is natural."

We work in a world of tension, in which we are constantly faced by multiple demands from different interest groups both within our organization and within the larger community. Dealing with these multiple demands calls for systems thinking: looking at the "big picture" rather than at separate events or individuals, and taking a long view which includes the future as well as the immediate present. This focus on interactions and on dynamics creates a climate for action that emphasizes causes rather than symptoms. When we take a systems view and when we recognize that tension is a catalyst for positive change, we can lay the groundwork for high quality problem solving.

5) Team Learning

Slogans: "Communicate." "No blaming!"

Teamwork means aligning ourselves with others who have different responsibilities and, perhaps, different priorities. Dialogue and discussion are tools to help us value these differences; effective teamwork is based on open, clear communication. When we collaborate we consolidate the energies of

individuals who, in diverse ways, share and work towards the same goals. In working together, we need to extend compassion to ourselves, colleagues, supervisors and administrators as well as to clients. We need to work to solve problems without placing blame on people. It is essential to assume that we all are working toward the same goals; we all want good things for people.

6) Parallel Process

Slogans: "Model positive behavior." "Stop the negative process."

Both positive and negative attitudes, values, ways of interacting with and treating one another at one organizational level tend to be repeated at other levels. Organizational culture, climate and structure have a powerful effect on our behavior. In addition, much of what we learn comes through the modeling of behaviors, although frequently this takes place at an unconscious level. Wherever we are in the organization, we should take responsibility to model positive behaviors and stop negative parallel processes. Continued efforts to practice the unifying themes will promote more conscious and more positive modeling of behavior.

APPENDIX B
FIVE TASKS OF ADOPTIVE AND FOSTER PARENTS

1. PROTECTING AND NURTURING:

provides a safe, healthy environment for children with unconditional positive support.

2. PROMOTING PERMANENCY OUTCOMES:

promotes permanency planning leading first to family reunification or to other safe and nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime.

3. SUPPORTING PRIMARY RELATIONSHIPS:

supports relationships between children and youth and their primary/birth families.

4. MEETING DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS:

meets the developmental needs of the child by building self-esteem, supporting cultural identity, providing positive guidance, using appropriate discipline, supporting intellectual/educational growth, and encouraging positive social relationships.

5. WORKING AS A PROFESSIONAL TEAM MEMBER:

participates as essential and effective member of a professional team.

APPENDIX C
GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE CURRICULUM

- 1. Parents, like teachers, have a responsibility to create an environment for learning and growth.**
In such an environment children (or training participants) can draw on inner resources to meet challenges and develop the knowledge and skills they need to enrich their lives. The Adoptive and Foster Family Preservice Curriculum, as well as the training process, is designed to mirror this conviction.
- 2. We live in a world (family, community, society) that is a dynamic web of interrelationships.**
This world shapes both our experiences and our responses to those experiences. Each person develops strategies (some helpful, some less helpful) for handling these interrelationships. The Adoptive and Foster Family Preservice Curriculum and the training process are designed to clarify these interrelationships and to build on the knowledge and abilities developed through prior experience.
- 3. We all continue to grow in our understanding of and ability to live in this dynamic web of interrelationships.**
This on-going learning can be sustained by critical reflection on experience that includes:
Shared Vision: making continued efforts to affirm a common sense of purpose or mission;
Systems Thinking: paying attention to different patterns within the whole; recognizing the interplay of various patterns of relationships within a context;
Mental Models: acknowledging that we all perceive and interpret experience in different ways; appreciating that these differences enrich and expand our mutual learning;
Self-mastery: understanding and developing personal strengths; understanding and improving areas of weakness;
Team Learning: cooperating with others for mutual growth in developing knowledge and skill; working jointly with others toward building on the lessons of experience to achieve a common purpose.
- 4. Each of us learns in complex and unique ways that involve physical, emotional, and intellectual activity.**
Some learn best by doing, some by feeling, some by observing, and some by analyzing. The Adoptive and Foster Family Preservice Curriculum and the training process are designed to provide a range of different types of experiences that accommodate different styles of learning.
- 5. Paolo Freire, a noted educator, once observed, "In a true learning situation, no one can tell who is teaching and who is learning."**
In our complex world we are all continually learning, often from one another. The Adoptive and Foster Family Preservice Curriculum and the training process are designed not to present final and complete answers about the role of adoptive and foster parents, but to engage trainers and participants in a living experience of team learning that lays the groundwork for on-going learning and growth.

THEMES OF THE CURRICULUM

The goal of this Preservice Training is to provide adoptive or foster parents with the foundational skills necessary to prepare them to understand and cope with the experience of receiving an adoptive or foster

child into their home. Hopefully this curriculum will be the beginning of continued ongoing learning and personal enrichment.

There are three themes which guided the development of this curriculum and are interwoven throughout.

1. Parent as Professional

This curriculum emphasizes the role of the parent as a member of a professional team who works in partnership with DHS and other service providers. Parenting skills are identified and practiced; prior experiences, knowledge, and skills are used as a basis for building strength to meet the new challenge of parenting a child with special needs.

2. Understanding the Child

This curriculum asks the participant to understand the child and his/her development from the child's point of view. It does not prescribe an ideology of a set of rules and it does not look at the child as a clinical social problem. Rather, the emotional experience of the child who has been abused, neglected, or severed from his/her family is emphasized; the participant is encouraged to take a humanistic yet realistic look at the child as a human being.

3. Lifelong Learning

By focusing on the process of identifying patterns and understanding the roots of behavior, this Pre-Service training asks adoptive and foster parents to assess and plan their own learning, to think of themselves as learners engaged in the task of developing their own knowledge and skills as parents. Reflective Practice as a means of understanding and building on their own experiences for future learning is woven throughout the curriculum.

APPENDIX D BACKGROUND READINGS

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