

Adoption 101

Heartland for Children's
Trauma Informed, Relationship Focused Adoption Training

Class Four



Heartland for Children is a community-based care lead agency
contracted with the Department of Children and Families.

Welcome!

- Any questions regarding material or homework?
- How is everyone feeling about what you learned?
- This class will cover Sexual Safety, Post Adoption services, and adoption benefits.



Let's discuss sexual safety

- Did you know that approximately 84% of our children in care have experienced sexual abuse?
 - What do we mean by Sexual Abuse?
- It is important to be knowledgeable of the normal stages of sexual development and common vs. uncommon sexual behaviors and acts. There is a wide variety of sexualized behaviors that are a normal part of development and childhood.
- Many times it is not the sexual behaviors that are harmful, but the worry and anxiety it causes both parents and children. As parents, we often tend to over-react and over-interpret.
- Sexualized behaviors can sometimes be a symptom of other things going on in the child's life (e.g. excessive emotional stress)

No one is beyond the hope of healing



Parenting the sexually reactive child

- Common reasons why children with developmental trauma are sexually reactive or abusive:
 - Exposure
 - Experiential (impacts beliefs and emotional associations and view of self)
 - Deficits, such as severe neglect (seeking stimulation and self soothing)
- If the child feels shame, they will not feel safe. Respond in a very similar way you would to other challenging behavioral needs. Remain calm and try to remember the why.
- Lets look at some of the stages of sexual development..



Stages of sexual Development

Preschool (0 to 5 years)

Common acts of sexual development

- Sexual language relating to differences in body parts, bathroom talk, pregnancy, and birth.
- Self-fondling at home and in public.
- Showing and looking at private body parts.

Uncommon, "Red Flag" indicators of possible sexual abuse:

- Discussion of sexual acts.
- Sexual contact experiences with other children.
- Masturbation unresponsive to redirection or limits.
- Inserting objects in genital openings.



Stages of sexual development

School Age (6 to 12 years)

Common:

- Questions about menstruation, pregnancy, sexual behavior.
- "Experimenting" with same-age children, including kissing, fondling, exhibitionism, and role-playing.
- Masturbation at home or other private places.

Uncommon:

- Discussion of explicit sexual acts.
- Asking adults or peers to participate in explicit sexual acts.



Stages of sexual development

Adolescence (13 to 16 years)

Common:

- Questions about decision-making, social relationships, and sexual customs.
- Masturbation in private.
- Experimenting between adolescents of the same age, including open-mouth kissing, fondling, and body rubbing.
- Voyeuristic behaviors.
- Sexual intercourse occurs in approximately one-third of this age group.
- Oral sex has been found to occur in 50 percent of teens ages 15 and older.

Uncommon:

- Sexual interest in much younger children
- Aggression in touching others' genitals
- Asking adults to participate in explicit sexual acts



What's next?

- Prepare your family, prepare your home
 - Create a safe environment prior to a child arriving.
 - Once you know the child's history, discuss with your family how you can work together to keep the child safe.
- Welcome the child
 - Family discusses the house rules.
 - Safety Plan Discussion, review of sample contract.
 - Our children come from families with little or no sexual safety rules. Rules need to be made and discussed.
 - Teach differences between surprises, private information, and secrets. Teach what love is and what it isn't.



Safety plan discussion

- Verbally assure the child that (s)he will not be sexually victimized in his/her new home.
- Assure child of your desire to protect him/her.
- Recognize that the child may not be accepting that (s)he is safe in the new home.
- Discuss family touch patterns and what this means.
- Discuss individual's needs for privacy and how the family protects this need.
- Express commitment & acceptance of the child.
- Demonstrate family touch patterns in different areas of the home.
- If there are other children in the home, discuss expected areas of support and tension.
- Clearly state where family members meet their own sexual needs.
- Discuss past sexual abuse of the child.
- Concentrate on feelings & acknowledge that the child might be frightened.



Questions?

- Now let's talk about Post Adoption Services & Supports



Post Adoption Services & Supports

- What is available through Post Adoption Services?
- Early recognition of issues and quick obtaining of support and services is crucial to preventing disruption and dissolution.
- Adoption is a lifelong commitment. Consistency and utilizing these tips are important not only initially, but needs to continue throughout the child's life.
- There are many resources available to families who are struggling before and after the adoption.
- It is important to recognize when help or support is needed so you do not get to the point where you are ready to "give up."

THERE IS NO CRYSTAL BALL! Pay attention to disclosure and remember unconditional commitment!



Support system is vital!

- ALL TOOLS ARE USELESS UNLESS YOU HAVE PROPER SUPPORT!
- Having a strong support system is very important with the adoption process.
- It is important to build a support network of people who will be encouraging and supportive of your adoption and the challenges that come along with it.
- It is good to build a support system of people familiar with adoption and its challenges. These could be people you meet in this class, people you know who have adopted, or people you have met in Adoption Support Groups.
- *Who is in your support system?*



Benefits related to adoption

- Adoption Attorney
- New Name/New Birth Certificate
 - You then must change/update name with Social Security Office
 - If you are allowed to change the Social Security Number, you MUST notify Heartland of the change
- Adoption Subsidy
- Medicaid
- College Tuition Exemption
- Adoption Tax Credit
- Extra Benefits for Teenagers Adopted
- Florida State Worker Benefit
- Florida State Park Pass
- The Adoption Finalization Hearing
- OTHER: Social Security Income, Death Benefits, Agency for Person's with Disabilities
- Case Closed!



HOME STUDY PROCESS

- If you are taking these classes for a specific child in your home the Case Management Organization (Children's Home Society, One Hope United, or Devereux) will be completing your home study.
- You will receive a packet of information to complete. It is imperative you provide all requested documents as quickly as you can.
- Once they have reviewed your packet they will be calling to set up the home study. Please discuss the details of the home study with your assigned adoption specialist. If you do not yet have one, you may contact the adoption supervisor with any questions about the process.
- Questions?



Questions?

- Handouts
- No
- UNMATCHED Families – Class Complete for Today! See you next session!
- MATCHED Families – Stay for further discussion!



HOME STUDY PROCESS

- For UNMATCHED Families:
- Upon completion of your home study binder a Heartland Adoption Specialist will review all documentation. Information like your family profiles, references, backgrounds etc. will all be used to create your home study interview. Every interview is specific to the family.
- The home study is primarily discussion, talking about your childhood, your relationships, career, parenting, health and mental health, etc.



HOME STUDY

CONTINUED

- During COVID-19, the interview portion of the home study will be completed by virtual video. The length of time is different for every family, but is at least a few hours.
- If you are a couple, both applicants must be there.
- While we typically ask that children have other care arrangements, we are experiencing a new normal and it's okay if your children need to be home. Please note that we may discuss some uncomfortable subjects so plans should be made to ensure these can occur out of earshot of your children.



HOME STUDY

CONTINUED

- A physical home visit will be made to your home to complete a walk through and observe the home. We will check in on everyone's health just prior to the visit.
- We ask that all household members wear a mask, if possible. Please make all efforts to maintain a physical distance of 6 feet, especially if you cannot wear a mask.



HOME STUDY CONTINUED

- Your home study will be written up by the adoption specialist and submitted to the Adoption Program Manager for review.
- There are times when additional information or services may be necessary and will be discussed with you.
- You will receive a copy of your home study for review. Let us know if there are any inaccuracies.
- Upon supervisory approval of the home study, we can begin matching!
- We ask that you give us 6 months to match locally before you seek any out of county matches.



What happens next?

- Once your home study is completed and approved by Heartland for Children, you will be provided with a copy for your records.
- You will receive emails from Arline presenting children in our counties looking for a home. If you are interested in learning more, let her know. If you are not interested, please respond that you are not. This helps us know you are getting our emails and engaged in the process.
- *Be Patient!* It is hard, but finding a right adoptive match is better than rushing into a "maybe" match. Remember, Adoption is a permanent commitment and this will affect your family long term – so it is an important decision!



Matching ...

- I will work on recruitment for you..... But remember, *I am looking to match our children with families – not to match our families with children.* I only know about children within our area.
- You can also see available children for adoption in our Circuit via the Adoption Heart Gallery
 - www.heartgalleryofheartland.org
- Other websites are:
 - Adoptflorida.com
 - Links to specific Heart Galleries
 - Adoptuskids.com



Tips!

- Keep in contact often to touch base.
 - Contact with all families should be made at least once per month.
- *Be open.* The more open you are about what child/children you are interested in – the more likely you are going to be matched.
 - Remember the majority of the children that need a forever family are between the ages of 10 and 17 and have moderate or severe needs.
- Do not lose hope or interest just because it is taking a while to be matched. Matching is not an easy thing. Think of how long it takes to find a spouse and the process that occurred to make that happen!
- Make connections with others in this class! They can be a good addition to your support system!



Prepare for success!

- Timing! It has to be the right time, and time that you can dedicate to the process.
 - Adoption is a journey, not an event.
- Continue your education!
- Be ready for change. With adoption comes adaptation!
- Match wisely! There is no knowing how long it will take to be matched. It's okay to say no and it's okay if it takes longer than a year. Don't force it to fit in your timeframe.
- Be your child's advocate!
- Be honest and open! It's okay if you need help and supports.
- Create a strong support system who will understand and support you.
- Be okay with the notion that it will be hard work!



How matching process works....

- There are various ways that a match can occur.....
 - Inquire about a child you see online at the Heart Gallery.
 - Respond to an email from HFC presenting a child.
 - Recommended as a possible match for a child from your Adoption Specialist.
 - Adoption Case Manager reviews your study and thinks you could be a good match for a specific child/children.
- When you inquire, or are recommended, the agency will review your home study determining if you could be a “match” based upon your strengths as a family and the child's strengths and needs.
 - They are given 2 weeks to review studies. Possibly longer if they are considering many families.
 - It is always good to follow up about every two weeks to see if there is any progress.



Matching Process continued...

- There are various meetings during the adoption process. They are all a little different with different names, depending on the agency.
- If you are chosen as a potential match you will be invited to a Match Interview.
 - They want to meet you in person/virtually to discuss the child(ren) and present the child's needs and strengths, evaluate if you can meet needs and support strengths.
 - Typically, they are meeting with a few other families as well.
 - When hearing a child's needs and strengths, be honest about your family's ability to provide for that child/sibling group.
 - Some agencies will send a child study or other information prior to meeting. Come prepared with any questions you may have.



Matching process continued...

- Within 2 weeks, the agency will notify HFC if you have been selected as a match. We will call you either way.
- If you are not selected, please remember it is only about selecting the family who can best meet the needs of the child, it's not a personal decision about your family.
- If you are selected, the disclosure process will begin.
- This is your opportunity to review the child's history, information about why he/she came into care, why rights were terminated, medical history, educational history, therapeutic history, siblings or other connections, special needs, behaviors the child demonstrates, placement history, etc.
- This is the time to ask questions and get to know the child as best you can without meeting. We suggest you talk with people who know the child well – such as the Guardian Ad Litem, Foster Parent, Therapist, Case Manager, etc.
- Disclosure meetings are typically more than one meeting as it is a lot of information to take in.



After Disclosure...

- If after disclosure you are comfortable and confident you can unconditionally commit to caring for the child and any current/possible future needs, visitations will initiate.
- **Never agree to meet the child and begin visits if you are not confident you can provide for the child's current and long-term needs. It is not fair for the child to have a visit with a family who cannot care for them.**
- Visits are typically supervised at first so the child has a familiar person nearby and interactions can be observed.
- Visits progress from supervised to unsupervised day visits, to overnight visits, to weekend visits, progressing until the child, family, and case management organization all agree the child is ready to move in.
 - # of visits until move in varies by case and the child's needs. Discuss the transition plan with the child's team.
 - School must be considered and are typically made during breaks to keep disruption at a minimum.



Getting ready for placement

- What a child brings...
- There will be people visiting your home prior to finalization.
 - Case Managers – at least every 30 days
 - Guardian Ad Litem – typically monthly
 - What happens when they come?
- The child(ren) must live with you **at least** 90 days before the adoption can finalize.
 - Decision to finalize is determined by the family, the child, and case management organization.
 - Rushing to finalize may not be in everyone's best interest. Take time to stabilize your new family with close supports before you finalize the adoption.
 - Once finalized, the case is closed.



Questions?

- THANK YOU ALL SO VERY MUCH!
- Remember: The link to the next class is in the same email you used to join class today!
- The instructor will be different for the next class. If you have any difficulty on the day of class, contact the instructor noted in the email. Their phone number will be listed.