



RI Department of Children, Youth & Families Provides New Training to Address Mental Health Needs of Foster Children

RI DCYF partners with National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services to improve child and family well-being.

PROVIDENCE, RI (April 1, 2026) — The [Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families](#) (DCYF) is partnering with the nonprofit [National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services](#) to enhance mental health services for children who have experienced traditional and kinship foster care, guardianship and adoption.

Rhode Island joins Oklahoma, Illinois, South Dakota and Michigan, plus the Navajo Nation, in receiving the National Center's free training and technical assistance. The National Center's support is aimed at strengthening collaboration between DCYF, community partners and mental health systems, as well as building a workforce that supports healing, stability and lasting change.

"Through this partnership, our staff will continue to grow their skills to best support children who have experienced grief, loss of trust and questions around identity," said **DCYF Director Ashley Deckert MSW MA**. "This intentional training is another step in strengthening our ability to foster permanency and enhance the well-being of children and families across Rhode Island."

As part of this initiative, DCYF and the [Parent Support Network of Rhode Island](#) are engaging families with lived experience to provide their perspectives on navigating mental health systems when those systems are not "adoption-competent," or trained in addressing separation, trauma and other challenges the children and families have faced, Deckert noted. "When mental health providers understand the full context of a child's experience, children feel seen, rather than labeled, and parents feel supported, rather than blamed or dismissed," she said.

The Department is offering the web-based training to more than 65 supervisors in the Division of Family Services, Division of Youth Development and Foster Care Licensing before providing the training to more than 200 social caseworkers. The training also is available to children's behavioral health providers and other Rhode Island child and family well-being professionals.

"Together, with our state partners, we are laying the foundation to offer more coordinated, specialized services that meet children and families where they are," said **Darlene Allen, CEO and executive director of Adoption Rhode Island**. "Our partnership with the National Center gives us a roadmap for building that capacity statewide. This work will support better outcomes and stronger family bonds."

"The National Center is excited to continue our partnership with DCYF to advance adoption competence," said **Mary Wichansky, director of the National Center for Adoption Competent Mental Health Services**. "By building cross-system partnerships, Rhode

Island is taking a proactive, family-centered approach to care to improve stability and long-term outcomes for children, youth and families."

The partnership is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children & Families (Children's Bureau), at no cost to participating states.

About Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families

At Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families, our mission is to build a system of care where every child grows up in a safe and loving family environment that supports the development of strong, resilient families throughout the state. To fulfill our mission, we believe that family, community and government share responsibility for the safety, protection and well-being of children, emphasizing prevention over intervention through an integrated continuum of care that reflects a partnership between all parties and is culturally relevant. Learn more at dcyf.ri.gov and read our [2025-2030 strategic plan](#).

Contact

Barbara Francella
Public information Officer
Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families
barbara.francella@dcyf.ri.gov