

ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL TRAUMA-INFORMED TRAINING STANDARD FOR FOSTER PARENTS THROUGH TITLE IV-E

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The foster care system in the United States serves over 400,000 children annually, many of whom have experienced abuse, neglect, and instability. While increasing the number of foster homes remains a national priority, the quality and consistency of foster parent training are equally critical. Currently, foster parent training requirements vary widely across states, resulting in inconsistent caregiver preparedness and outcomes for children. This report recommends establishing a federal minimum training standard under Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to ensure all foster parents receive comprehensive, trauma-informed training. Standardizing training requirements, expanding access to evidence-based curricula, and strengthening federal oversight would improve placement stability, reduce caregiver burnout, and promote better experiences and long-term outcomes for youth in foster care.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

My three siblings and I lived in over 20 foster homes during our time in care, including two failed adoptive placements. The instability we experienced contributed to anxiety, attachment difficulties, and challenges in achieving permanency. Many of the foster homes we were placed in were not equipped to meet our needs, and in some cases, the environments were harmful. As a sibling group of four, we were often separated, which compounded our collective trauma. Even in placements where we were kept together, caregivers frequently lacked the training and resources necessary to manage our behaviors and support our emotional needs. This often resulted in placement disruptions. Reflecting on these experiences, it is clear that improved foster parent training could have made a significant difference. Caregivers who are equipped with trauma-informed knowledge and skills are better prepared to provide stable, supportive environments that promote healing and long-term well-being.

THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW

In the United States, the foster care system served more than 400,000 children in 2024, many of whom had experienced trauma prior to entering care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for

THE PROBLEM & CURRENT LAW (CONTINUED)

Children and Families, Children’s Bureau, 2025). After placement, children often continue experiencing instability through multiple moves, school disruptions, and sibling separation, contributing to complex emotional and developmental needs.

Foster parents play a key role in addressing these needs, yet training requirements vary significantly across states. Pre-service training ranges from as few as four hours to over 30 hours, depending on jurisdiction (Dorsey et al., 2008), while some states require little or no annual continuing education (Buchanan, 2021). This variation stems from federal policy. Title IV-E provides funding for foster care services but does not set national training standards, leaving states to determine licensing and training requirements. As a result, training quality differs widely across jurisdictions and agencies (Buchanan, 2021).

Even when states adopt evidence-based models, implementation is inconsistent. However, standardized approaches such as the National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC), developed by the Children’s Bureau, incorporate trauma-informed care and lived-experience perspectives (Vanderwill et al., 2023). Other models, including TIPS-MAPP and PRIDE, show improved caregiver preparedness and retention (Redlich Horwitz Foundation & Child Focus, 2017).

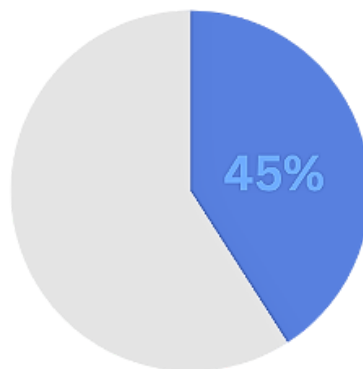
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To establish a national trauma-informed training standard for foster parents through Title IV-E, Congress should take the following actions:

- **Establish a Federal Minimum Training Standard for Foster Parents.** Congress should amend Title IV-E of the Social Security Act to require a national baseline of at least 30 hours of pre-service training for foster parent licensure, including trauma-informed care. While Title IV-E currently allows for federal reimbursement for training costs, it does not require a minimum number of hours. (Social Security Act, Title IV-E, 42 U.S.C. § 670 et seq.). Establishing a baseline requirement would ensure that all foster parents receive adequate preparation before caring for children.
- **Require Trauma-Informed Care Training.** Federal law should mandate that all foster parent training programs include trauma-informed care education aligned with evidence-based guidance from the Administration for Children and Families. Training should focus on understanding the impact of trauma on child and adolescent development and implementing strategies to support emotional regulation and healing.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (CONTINUED)

- Standardize Core Training Competencies Nationwide.** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services should define national competencies, including trauma-informed care, cultural competency, adoption competency, disability awareness, child development, system navigation, and behavioral de-escalation. Cultural competency and disability awareness are especially important in reducing placement disruptions (Buchanan, 2021).
- Expand Federal Funding for Evidence-Based Training Programs.** Title IV-E already allows federal reimbursement for foster parents' training, but access to high-quality evidence-based programs remains uneven. Congress should increase federal funding to support the implementation of evidence-based training models such as the National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC). These programs integrate research-based practices and lived experience, improving their effectiveness (Vanderwill et al., 2023). Congress should also provide targeted grants to states to adopt standardization curricula and maintain existing funding while expanding access and quality.
- Create Ongoing Continuing Education Requirements.** Most states require annual training, but requirements are inconsistent and sometimes minimal. Federal policy should require a minimum of 15 hours of annual continuing education for licensed foster parents as a condition of maintaining licensure. Ongoing training allows caregivers to build skills over time and stay informed on best practices.
- Improve Federal Oversight and Data Collection.** Currently, there is no consistent and meaningful tracking of foster parent training. The Administration for Children and Families should collect and publish national data on foster parent training requirements, completion rates, and outcomes such as placement stability and foster parent retention. Improved data collection would support evidence-based policymaking.



Foster parents who complete 20+ hours of training are 45% more likely to stay in the role long-term