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# Child Welfare Training on Parents with Disabilities: Patterns Across the United States

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# Background

- There are 4.1 million parents with disabilities in the U.S. (NCD, 2012). These parents regularly face discrimination:
  - Disproportionately higher removal rights
  - Discriminatory treatment in custody cases
  - Higher rates of termination of parental rights.



# Background



- A study by the NCD (2012) highlighted the inadequacies in the child welfare system when it comes to supporting parents with disabilities.
  - Results of this study highlight the importance of training for child welfare professionals to address these gaps.

# Current Study

- The present study sought to understand patterns in child welfare training on work with parents with disabilities across the United States.
- Guiding questions:
  - Who are states training about disabilities?
  - How much training on work with parents with disabilities are child welfare professionals receiving?
  - What content is covered in these trainings?



# Methods



- Contacted directors/assistant directors of the child welfare training system for all 50 states and the District of Columbia.
- 43 directors agreed to be interviewed.
- Interviews were transcribed, and transcriptions were coded in order to identify themes across states.

# Methods

- Coding Process:
  - Quantifiable questions were analyzed quantitatively, and frequencies were reported.
    - Multiple layers of coding were sometimes employed.
  - Interviews were then coded holistically.
    - 55 key words/phrases were collapsed into 24 meaning units, with some meaning units containing smaller sub-units.





# Methods

- Coding Process:
  - Identified meaning units and sub-units were used as a guide for potential themes for individual questions.
    - An iterative process was employed.
  - To code individual questions, all responses to each question were read.
    - Significant key words/phrases were noted.
    - These key words were tracked, and frequencies were reported.



# What type of training system exists in each state?

	Frequency	Percent
State-Operated	18	41.86
State-University Partnership	17	39.53
Both/Mixture	7	16.28
In Flux	1	2.33
Total	43	100



# Do states train frontline child welfare workers, supervisors, or both??

	Frequency	Percent
Primarily Frontline Workers	1	2.33
Primarily Supervisors	0	0
Both	42	97.67
Total	43	100

# How much training do states require for frontline child welfare professionals?

	Frequency	Percent
0 to 50 Hours	2	4.65
51 to 100 Hours	4	9.30
101 to 150 Hours	9	20.93
151 to 200 Hours	7	16.28
201 to 250 Hours	5	11.63
251 to 300 Hours	5	11.63
301 to 350 Hours	2	4.65
351 to 400 Hours	1	2.33
401 to 450 Hours	0	0
451 or more Hours	2	4.65
Unclear Response	4	9.30
Could Not Give an Answer	1	2.33
Wide Range: 180 to 240 Hours	1	2.33
Total	43	100

How much training do frontline child welfare professionals receive on work with parents with disabilities?

# How much training do frontline child welfare professionals receive on work with parents with disabilities?

	Frequency	Percent
1 or More Full Days	3	6.98
In Context of Other Trainings	21	48.84
1 to 4 Hours	5	11.63
Limited	3	6.98
None	9	20.93
Could Not Provide Answer	2	4.65
Total	43	100

# Additional Questions about Required Frontline Worker Training on Work with Parents with Disabilities



- What is the length of this training?
- Who provides this training?
- What content is covered in this required training?

# Required Training for Frontline Child Welfare Professionals: Overall Themes

- Lack of training/topic not addressed (35%)
- Services, supports, treatment, and/or interventions (35%)
- Mental health/illness (33%)
- Unwillingness or inability to answer questions/expressed uncertainty (30%)
- Safety (assessment and evaluation and/or general safety concerns) (26%)
- Engagement (23%)
- IDD addressed (23%)
- No specific training (21%)
- Planning (21%)



# Required Training for Frontline Child Welfare Professionals: Lack of Training/Topic Not Addressed (35%)

“Gosh, you pose such a good question. We talk about mental health, and we talk about accessing services, but we don’t go very in-depth about parents with disabilities.”

“We talk about challenges and issues, but [I] can’t say we spend any significant time highlighting that particular population.”



# Required Training for Frontline Child Welfare Professionals: Services, Supports, Treatment, and/or Interventions (35%)

“[Content includes] being able to see some of the mental health issues parents may deal with and being able to get them referrals for services . . .”

“We do have some discussion on parents who might need mental health treatment or substance abuse [treatment] . . . They have to get what they need to parent their children effectively.”

“There’s only the one that is very much specifically disability-oriented, and that’s the 2-hour [training] . . . [It includes] getting them familiar with services available in [state] and how to go through application processes . . .”

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# Required Training for Frontline Child Welfare Professionals: Mental Health/Illness (33%)

“Most of our work with disabilities is dealing with parents with possible mental illness type disabilities.”

“We talk about the challenges that parents [with mental health concerns] face. We talk about stigma [and] we talk about how to engage parents with mental health challenges . . .”

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# Required Training for Frontline Child Welfare Professionals: Unwillingness or Inability to Answer Questions/Expressed Uncertainty (30%)

“I couldn’t answer that, honestly. I can’t give you a specific percentage. It is addressed, but I could not even begin to give you a percentage.”

“I don’t have the content—I supervise trainers but don’t train this.”

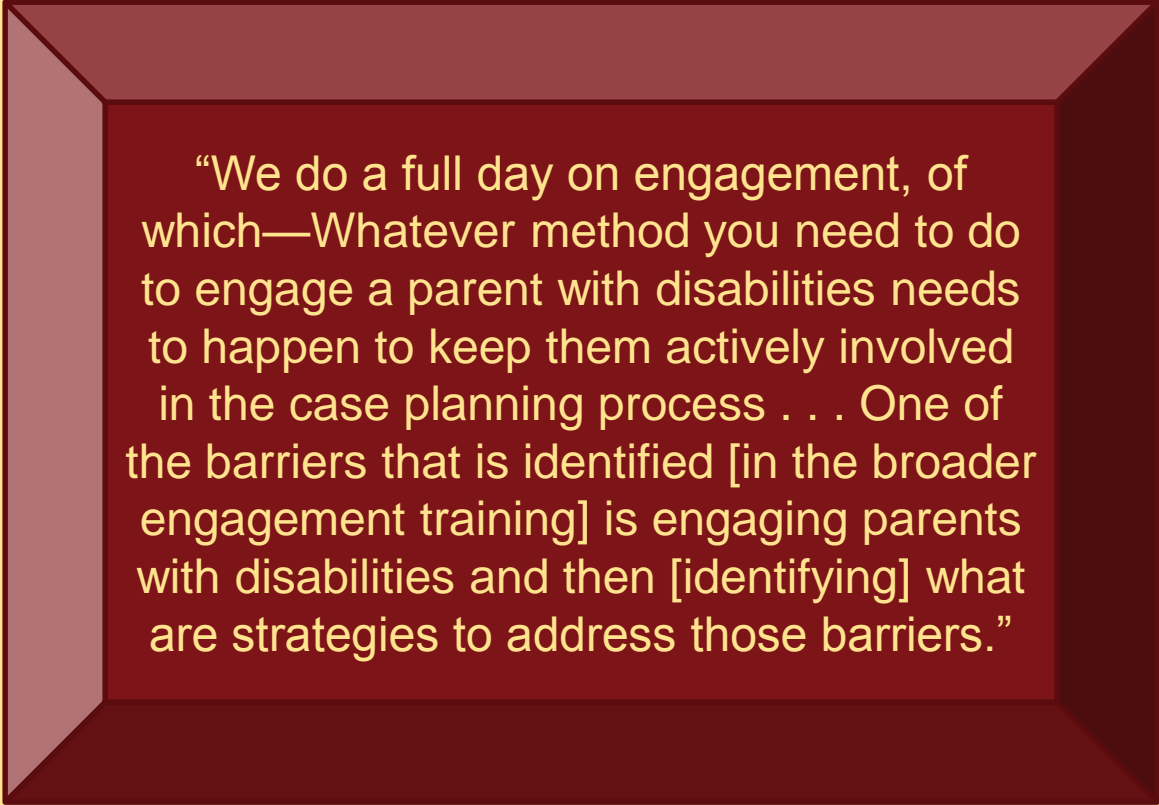
# Required Training for Frontline Child Welfare Professionals: Safety – Assessment & Evaluation and/or General Safety Concerns (26%)

“[This topic is] addressed in safety training . . . [We] look at parent functioning but not specifically what that means for parents with disabilities.”

“[We cover] some content [on work with parents with disabilities] in family-based safety services content.”

“If there’s a mental illness that impacts safety, treatment is needed as part of a safety plan.”

# Required Training for Frontline Child Welfare Professionals: Engagement (23%)



“We do a full day on engagement, of which—Whatever method you need to do to engage a parent with disabilities needs to happen to keep them actively involved in the case planning process . . . One of the barriers that is identified [in the broader engagement training] is engaging parents with disabilities and then [identifying] what are strategies to address those barriers.”

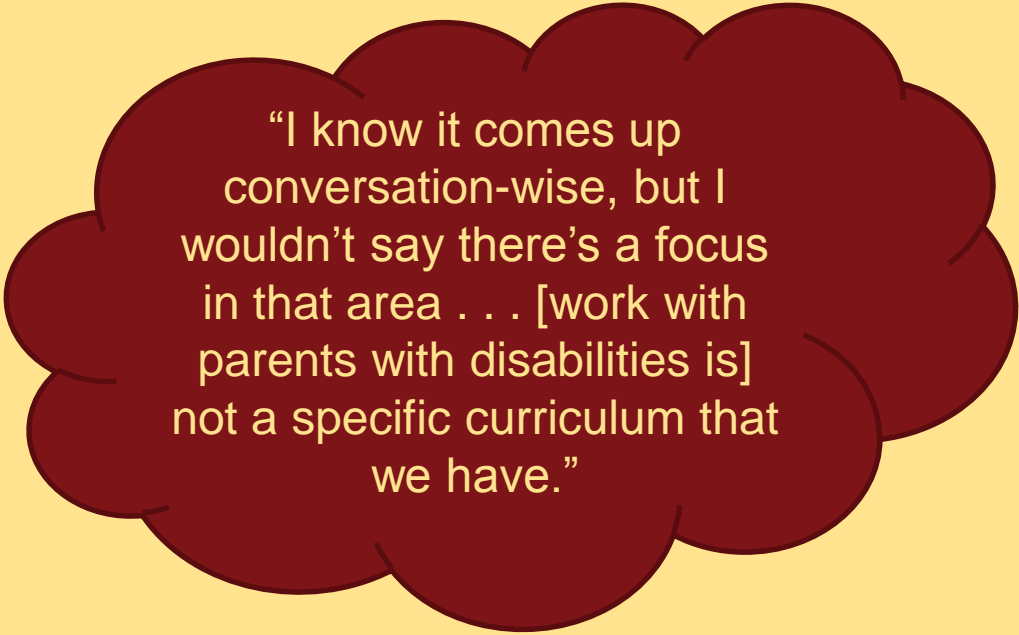
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# Required Training for Frontline Child Welfare Professionals: Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities Addressed (23%)

“In our developmental disabilities training . . . we talk about how [workers] have to work with youth in care and their parents and caregivers with disabilities. We talk about background on developmental disabilities, rights and responsibilities of persons with developmental disabilities, and then we share resources. We go over some myths . . . [and] we talk about what are some types of disabilities . . .”

“There’s a scenario with a parent with a developmental delay, and it’s all around working with that family with that type of issue or concern.”

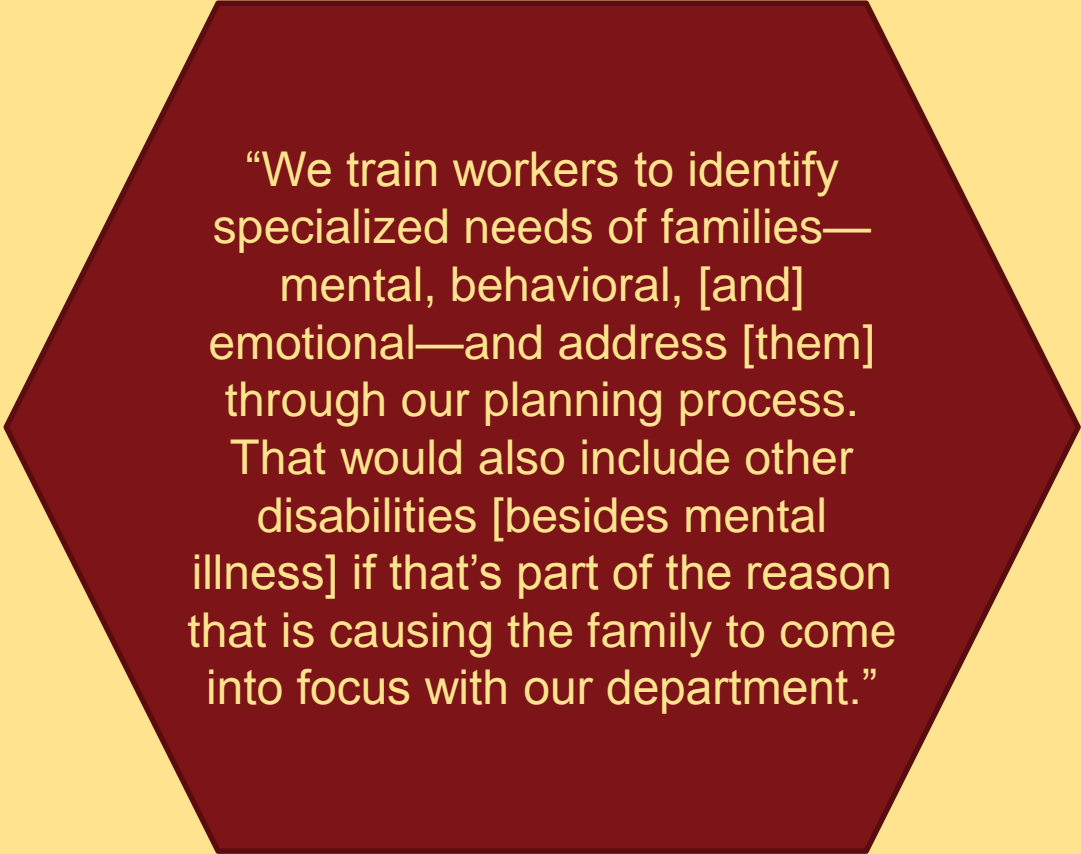
# Required Training for Frontline Child Welfare Professionals: No Specific Training (21%)



“I know it comes up conversation-wise, but I wouldn’t say there’s a focus in that area . . . [work with parents with disabilities is] not a specific curriculum that we have.”



# Required Training for Frontline Child Welfare Professionals: Planning (21%)



“We train workers to identify specialized needs of families—mental, behavioral, [and] emotional—and address [them] through our planning process. That would also include other disabilities [besides mental illness] if that’s part of the reason that is causing the family to come into focus with our department.”

# How much training do states require for child welfare supervisors?

	Frequency	Percent
None	7	16.28
2 Days	1	2.33
4 Days	1	2.33
5 Days	4	9.30
7 Days	2	4.65
8 Days	6	13.95
9 Days	4	9.30
10 Days	2	4.65
12 Days	4	9.30
15 Days	2	4.65
16 Days	1	2.33
18 Days	1	2.33
19 Days	1	2.33
25 Days	1	2.33
Could Not Give an Answer	4	9.30
Unclear Response	2	4.65
Total	43	100

How much training are child welfare supervisors required to complete on supervising work with parents with disabilities?

How much training are child welfare supervisors required to complete on supervising work with parents with disabilities?

	Frequency	Percent
Full Day	1	2.33
In Context of Other Trainings	7	16.28
1 Hour	1	2.33
None	17	39.53
Not Applicable	8	18.60
Could Not Provide Answer	9	20.93
Total	43	100

# Additional Questions about Required Supervisor Training on Work with Parents with Disabilities



- What is the length of this training?
- Who provides this training?
- What content is covered in this required training?

# Required Training for Child Welfare Supervisors: Overall Themes

- Lack of training/topic not addressed (47%)
- Unwillingness or inability to answer questions/expressed uncertainty (33%)
- Not applicable—no required supervisor curriculum (19%)
- No specific training (16%)
- Engagement (14%)
- Services, supports, treatment, and/or interventions (9%)



# Required Training for Child Welfare Supervisors: Lack of Training/Not Addressed (47%)

“I’m really embarrassed to say this, but it’s not in there. You really are bringing up something we need to pay attention to.”

“Our supervisor academy is more focused on how to provide supervision . . . So it doesn’t get as much in details of working with specific families because supervisors have to go through [new worker training] ”



# Required Training for Child Welfare Supervisors: Unwillingness or Inability to Answer Questions/Expressed Uncertainty (33%)

“I could not give you any of those kinds of percentages.”

“I don’t know. I don’t think so, but I don’t know for sure.”

# Required Training for Child Welfare Supervisors: Not Applicable—No Required Supervisor Curriculum (19%)

“We don’t have a set number of required hours other than the 20 annual hours. They pick what area to do trainings in.”

“They don’t have any other than they have to have the training that’s required for frontline workers, but there’s no requirement past that. We do provide training for supervisors, but it’s not required.”

# Required Training for Child Welfare Supervisors: No Specific Training (16%)

“I don't there's any specific content, honestly.”

“At this point, that is not something we have as a specific topic, but this conversation is raising [this topic] as something we need to look at and explore.”

“There's not a specific area in the curriculum that addresses [supervising work with parents with disabilities], but that's not to say it doesn't come up.”

# Required Training for Child Welfare Supervisors: Engagement (14%)

“The approach is that there are general tenets about engaging families in child welfare regardless of who the family is . . .”

“I know we have a lot on engagement skills . . .”

“A lot of the supervisor training is generally around supervising in general . . . And our practice model, which is really generic and around engaging families regardless of the presence of disabilities.”

# Required Training for Child Welfare Supervisors: Services, Supports, Treatment, and/or Interventions (9%)

“We do not have specific disabilities; we have information . . . That says how we refer to other agencies who . . . Work with parents with hearing impairment or visual impairment, but we don’t have specific trainings related to those.”

“. . . We move into a broader focus of just working with individuals with disabilities and how we interact with them, and then understanding eligibility characteristics and what would qualify someone for [government disability] services.”

# Do state training systems provide elective trainings for child welfare professionals on work with parents with disabilities?

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Yes, multiple</b>	10	23.26
<b>Yes, one</b>	6	13.95
<b>Somewhat</b>	3	6.98
<b>No</b>	20	46.51
<b>Could Not Provide Answer</b>	4	9.30
<b>Total</b>	43	100

# What is the length of elective trainings on work with parents with disabilities?

	Frequency	Percent
1 or More Full Days	6	13.95
Half Day to Full Day for Each Training	1	2.33
.5 to 3 Hours	4	9.30
In Context of Other Trainings	2	4.65
None	20	46.51
Could Not Provide Answer	8	18.60
Varies Widely Depending on Training (.5 Hour to 2.5 Days)	2	4.65
Total	43	100



# Elective Training: Topics Covered by States Who Provide Training on Work with Parents with Disabilities

- Services, supports, treatment, and/or interventions (16%)
- Unwillingness or inability to answer questions (16%)
- Mental health/illness (14%)

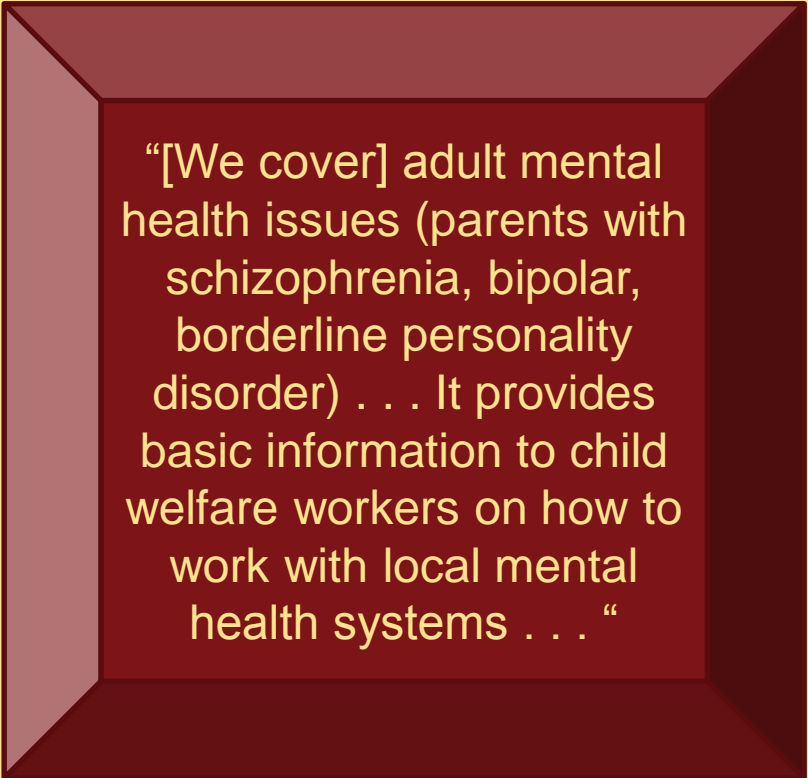


# Elective Training: Services, Supports, Treatment, and/or Interventions (16%)

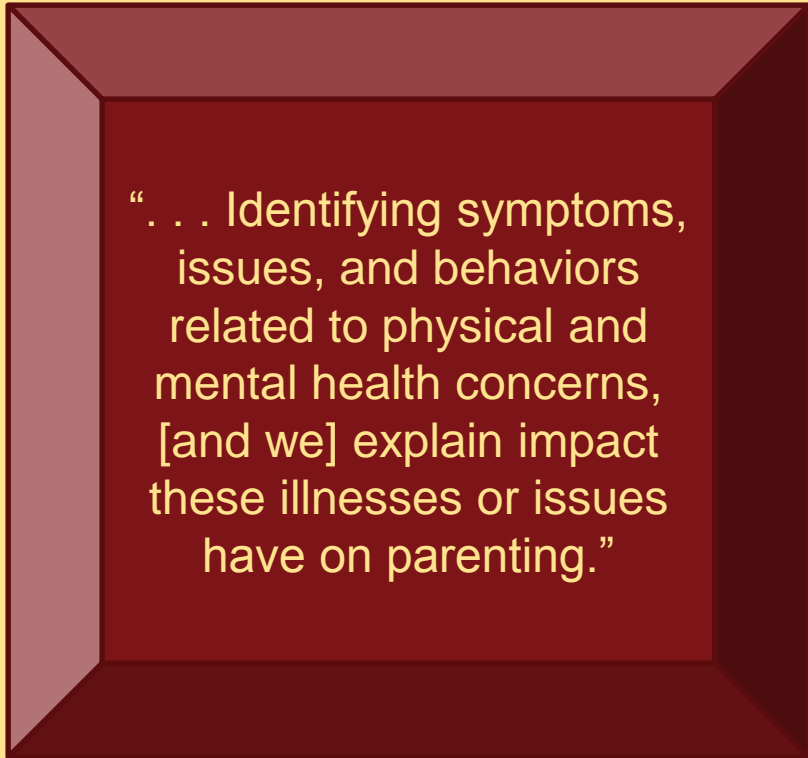
“[Our curriculum includes information on] ethical engagement and services for children and families with hearing loss and/or vision loss . . .”

It is focused on underlying reasons why our families come under the supervision of the department. With family members dealing with abuse or neglect, and [if] we determine that a component of it could be caused by maybe a disability, then we would assess that need and provide services to remedy the abuse and neglect.”

# Elective Training: Mental Health/Illness (14%)



“[We cover] adult mental health issues (parents with schizophrenia, bipolar, borderline personality disorder) . . . It provides basic information to child welfare workers on how to work with local mental health systems . . . “



“. . . Identifying symptoms, issues, and behaviors related to physical and mental health concerns, [and we] explain impact these illnesses or issues have on parenting.”

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# What gaps in training on parents with disabilities do training supervisors perceive?

- Limited resources (including fiscal, human capital, concise resources, overwhelmed workforce, in rural areas, time, and/or in general; 37%)
- Lack of training/topic not addressed (33%)
- Need for awareness/familiarity (16%)
- Barriers (the breadth of different types of disabilities, federal guideline constraints, scope of child welfare, and/or understanding barriers parents face; 16%).
- How to connect to, provide, and/or coordinate services, supports, treatment, and interventions (16%)
- Bias, discrimination, and stigma (9%)
- Communication and interviewing (9%)



# Perceived Gaps in Training: Limited Resources (37%)

“It’s not so much a training need, but we need more resources and services we can provide to that population.”

“I think it’s challenging, when you get into more specialized areas, having enough people in your agency trained in the right things because there are so many specializations you can have in child welfare. It’s hard to have someone trained in every area to an expert degree.”

# Perceived Gaps in Training: Limited Resources (37%)

“I would think probably the time to put in, in regards to that foundational piece. Not that it’s not important, but just trying to get everything that needs to go in—that’s why it’s so briefly touched.”

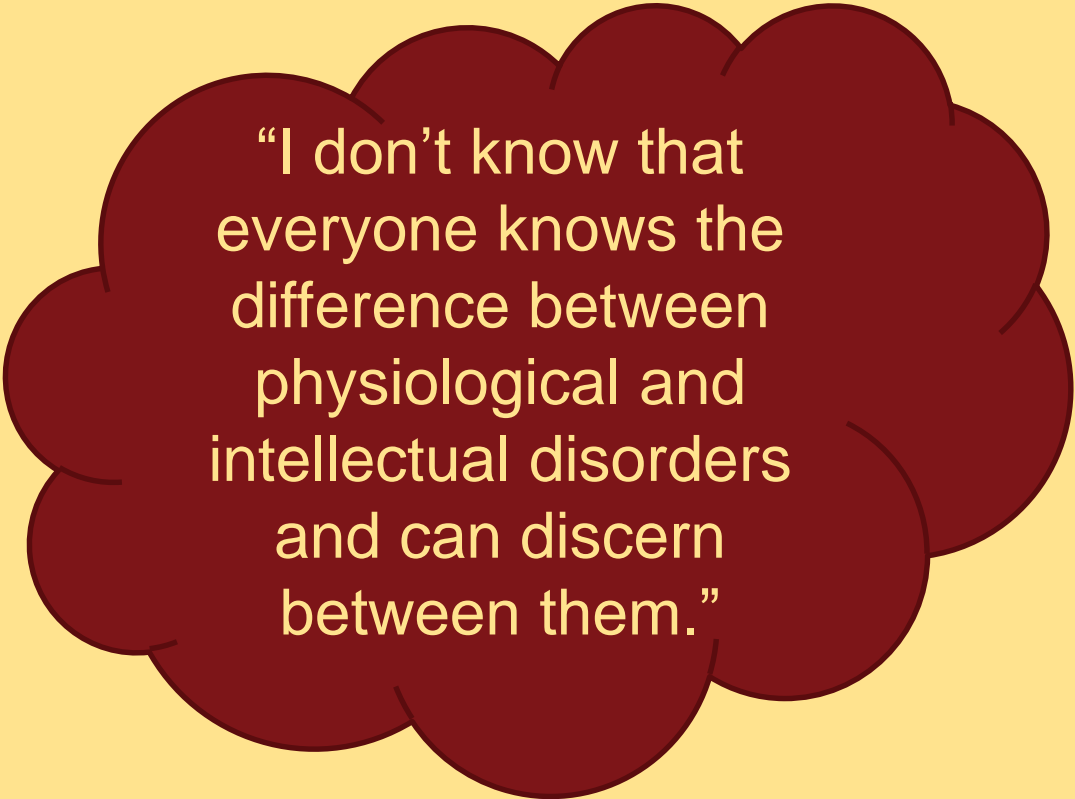
“ . . . We lack services in rural parts of our state, so services we do have are not the most appropriate for families with disabilities.”

# Perceived Gaps in Training: Lack of Training/Not Addressed (33%)

“Because there’s a lack of general training on it, it often goes unaddressed in case planning and work. So there are some big sweeping gaps . . . We have a long way to go in terms of making sure all workers have an understanding of how to approach and work with parents with disabilities.”

“I don’t think it’s even on the radar, quite frankly.”

# Perceived Gaps in Training: Need for Awareness/Familiarity (16%)



“I don’t know that everyone knows the difference between physiological and intellectual disorders and can discern between them.”



# Perceived Gaps in Training: Barriers (16%)

“We would need specific training on specific disabilities . . . And that would be really diverse training because there are so many different types of disabilities. So I wouldn’t know where to start developing something like that.”

“I think there are so many issues that are pressing for children in child welfare—that may be one of the gaps, to broaden the scope a bit.”

# Perceived Gaps in Training: Barriers (16%)

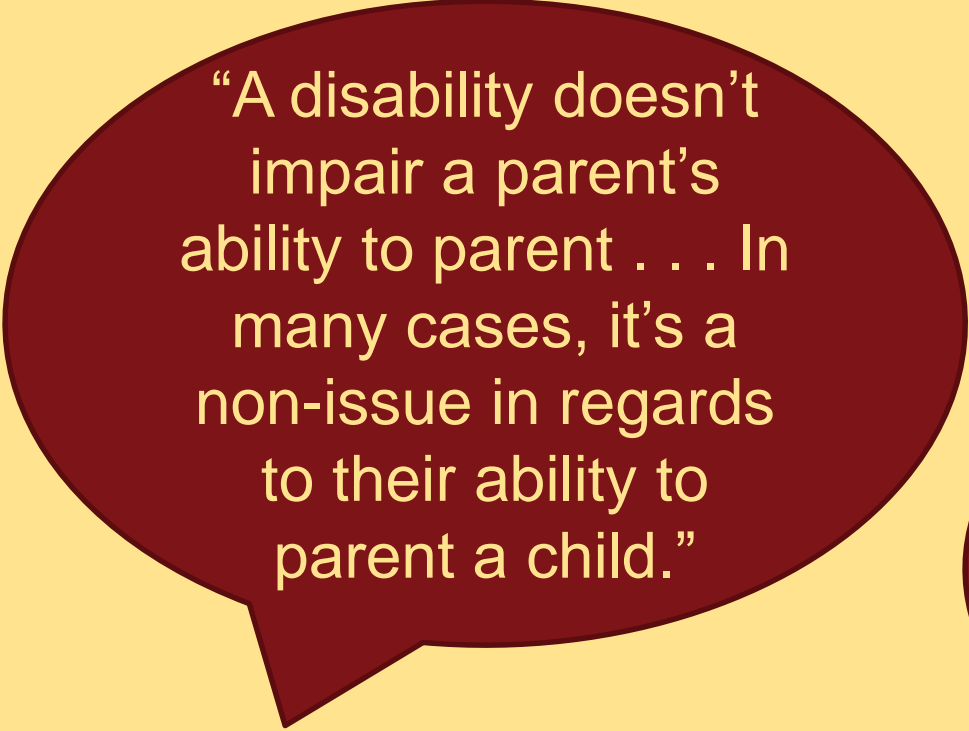
“I think just because the field as a whole is such a big undertaking and such a huge variety of topics you can come across and influence in every single one is difficult . . . I think it’s hard to be an expert in any one given thing when it’s such a wide population you’re trying to serve with the child welfare system.”

” . . . And then I also think the nature of federal guidelines and time frames when working with parents and children with disabilities don’t always align with what parents need to make substantial change.”


# Perceived Gaps in Training: How to Connect to, Provide, and/or Coordinate Services, Supports, Treatment, and Interventions (16%)

“When the parent has a clearly documented disability, what I hear from folks is that it’s really easy to work with that, and there are services. When I hear a lot of counties struggling is when they believe the parent has a disability that is not diagnosed and then figuring out what’s going on with that parent and getting services.”

# Perceived Gaps in Training: Bias, Discrimination, and Stigma (9%)



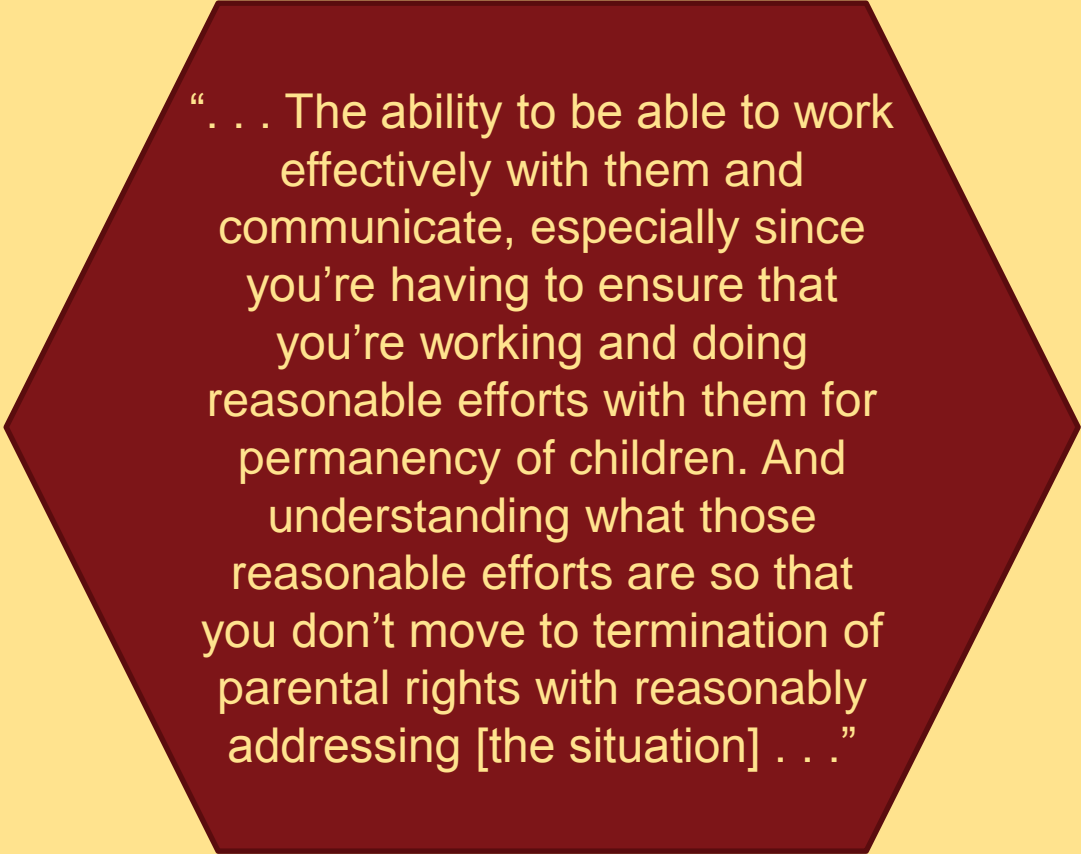
“A disability doesn’t impair a parent’s ability to parent . . . In many cases, it’s a non-issue in regards to their ability to parent a child.”



“I think the gap is bringing in our own biases and sometimes being culturally aware.”

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# Perceived Gaps in Training: Communication and Interviewing (9%)



“ . . . The ability to be able to work effectively with them and communicate, especially since you’re having to ensure that you’re working and doing reasonable efforts with them for permanency of children. And understanding what those reasonable efforts are so that you don’t move to termination of parental rights with reasonably addressing [the situation] . . . ”

Are training directors familiar with the  
2015 joint memo regarding practice  
with parents with disabilities?

# Are training directors familiar with the 2015 joint memo regarding practice with parents with disabilities?

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	14	32.56
May Recall	4	9.30
No, But I Believe Someone in My Agency May Be	8	18.60
No	17	39.53
Total	43	100

# How do states utilize the contents of the 2015 joint memo?

- Not applicable (unfamiliar with memo; 58%)
- Of the 18 states who indicated some level of familiarity:
  - Assess for needs (22%; 9% of total sample)
  - Avoid discrimination (22%; 9% of total sample)
  - Not utilizing contents of the memo (22%; 9% of total sample)





# How States Utilize the Contents of the 2015 Joint Memo: Assess for Needs (22%; 9% of Total Sample)

“With it being a part of the training policy, . . . [it helps with] ensuring . . . that we are assessing needs and ensuring that parents with disabilities receive the services they need to care for their children.”

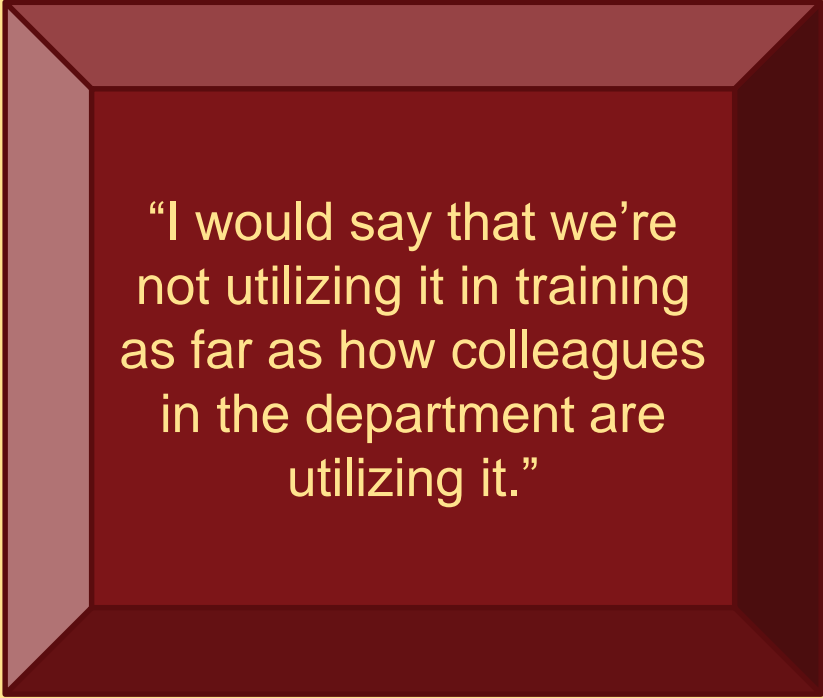
“. . . What we do is like, for our exams and stuff, we have to ask that question, ‘Does anybody under any circumstance have any sort of disability?’ And if they do, we have to make those accommodations for them.”

# How States Utilize the Contents of the 2015 Joint Memo: Avoid Discrimination (22%; 9% of Total Sample)


“We do some training to make sure staff aren’t discriminating. [We] make sure case plans are written in a way families can understand.”

“We want to make sure children are safe to reunify and make sure they don’t linger in our care because [a] parent has disabilities or [because of a] lack of services.”

# How States Utilize the Contents of the 2015 Joint Memo: Not Utilizing (22%; 9% of Total Sample)



“I would say that we’re  
not utilizing it in training  
as far as how colleagues  
in the department are  
utilizing it.”



“We haven’t utilized the  
contents of that memo.”

# Conclusions and Recommendations

- Specific, targeted child welfare training on work with parents with disabilities is lacking across the U.S.
- State training directors often identified a lack of training (n = 25, 58%), expressed uncertainty and/or an unwillingness or inability to answer (n = 19, 44%), and indicated there is no specific training on this topic (n = 17, 40%).



# Conclusions and Recommendations

- The most commonly identified training topics include
  - Service provision (n = 18, 42%)
  - Engagement (n = 18, 42%)
  - Mental health/illness (n = 16, 37%)
  - Safety (n = 12, 28%)
  - Intellectual and developmental disabilities (n = 12, 28%)
- More training on work with parents with disabilities is needed.
  - We recommend these additional trainings utilize a strengths-based approach and target professionals at multiple levels.



# References

National Council on Disability. (2012). *Rocking the cradle: Ensuring the rights of parents with disabilities and their children*. Retrieved from [https://ncd.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/NCD\\_Parenting\\_508\\_0.pdf](https://ncd.gov/sites/default/files/Documents/NCD_Parenting_508_0.pdf)