

## **Competencies**

- 201-07-001 Knows the predictable phases and tasks to be resolved by children and their adoptive families during their adjustment to adoption
- 201-07-002 Knows the events, circumstances, and types of activities that can trigger emotional distress or crisis for adopted children and their families
- 201-07-003 Knows the laws, regulations, and ethics regarding confidentiality in disclosing information among birth parents, adoptive parents, and minor and adult adoptees
- 201-07-008 Understands how adoption may affect adopted children and their families throughout their lives and the life stages and events when adoption issues are most likely to resurface
- 201-07-009 Understands the reasons adopted children and their birth families may search for each other and the potential psychological conflicts that may occur
- 201-07-016 Can prepare adoptive families to share information about the child's birth family and placement circumstances in greater depth and detail as the child grows

## **ADOPTION: FACTS OR FANTASY**

**Please discuss and answer these questions.**

### **T r u e, F a l s e, o r J u s t n o t s u r e**

- \_\_\_\_\_ The issues of parenting a child by birth are just like parenting a child by adoption.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adoptive parents who are experiencing trouble with the adoptive child are often afraid to ask anyone for help.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adopted children are glad that they are adopted.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Dealing with the issues of adoption is a process usually completed by young adulthood.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Middle childhood years are important years for understanding adoption.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Children adopted as infants do not experience challenges with divided loyalties, trust, or grief.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Only a small percentage of adoptees consider searching for their birth parents.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Adoptive parents might intellectually support the search, but emotionally dread it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Birth parents "forget" about their children in a few years.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Many adoptees feel rejected by their birth families.

**FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH ADOPTION DISRUPTION AND DISSOLUTION**

*Post Permanency Services, M. Freundlich and L. Wright, Casey Family Programs*

<b>Child Factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age at time of placement.</li> <li>• History of severe abuse/neglect.</li> <li>• Multiple losses of caregivers</li> <li>• Early trauma.</li> <li>• Multiple placements.</li> <li>• Severe behavior problems.</li> <li>• Severe or extensive health problems, mental health or developmental problems.</li> <li>• Attachment problems.</li> <li>• Rejection of adoptive family or desire to return to birth family.</li> <li>• Continuing relationships with birth family that pose barriers to adoption.</li> </ul>
<b>Parent Factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inadequate understanding of realities associated with parenting a child with special needs.</li> <li>• Unrealistic expectations.</li> <li>• Acceptance of a child into family when family does not have capacity to meet child's needs.</li> <li>• Conscious or unconscious deception in the assessment process.</li> <li>• Unresolved infertility issues.</li> <li>• Parental loss (e.g. death of a child prior to adoption).</li> <li>• Lack of awareness of or disregard for importance of race/culture in adoption.</li> <li>• Inexperience as parents.</li> <li>• Divorce.</li> <li>• Death of adoptive parent.</li> </ul>
<b>Service/Program Factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor preparation of child for adoption.</li> <li>• Inadequate preparation of prospective adoptive parents.</li> <li>• Inadequate agency support provided to the family pre-and post-placement and post-adoption.</li> <li>• Prohibitively expensive services.</li> <li>• Failure to provide information on services and how to obtain them.</li> </ul>

<b>Systems Factors</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of available, accessible services across all systems.</li><li>• Lack of adoption expertise among mental health and education professionals.</li><li>• Lack of commitment and resources to address general poverty, family support, and family preservation services (to reduce the need for adoption).</li><li>• Lack of emphasis on and commitment of resources to develop professionals' assessment, case management, and intervention skills.</li><li>• Lack of resources to develop effective service delivery systems.</li><li>• Policies that emphasize the numbers of and timelines for adoptions at the expense of quality services.</li></ul>
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**Continuum of Development of Adopted Children**  
Adapted from a handout developed by Parenthesis Family Advocates, Columbus, Ohio

<b>0-3 Years</b>	<b>3-7 Years</b>	<b>8-12 Years</b>	<b>12-16 Years</b>	<b>16-19 Years</b>
Adopted child does not realize difference between themselves and non-adopted children	Child asks a lot of questions. Loves to hear his/her adoption story. Can repeat it verbatim but has little understanding of the concepts.	Child understands concept of adoption. Begins grieving process. May stop asking questions as part of denial. Realizes that he/she had to lose something to be adopted.	Child enters anger stage of grieving. May resist authority and try on new identities. May be angry over loss of control in his/her life.	Young adult may be depressed and over-react to losses. May be anxious about growing up and leaving home.
<b>Strategies for Parents</b>	<b>Strategies for Parents</b>	<b>Strategies for Parents</b>	<b>Strategies for Parents</b>	<b>Strategies for Parents</b>
<p>Collect as much concrete information as possible (goodbye letters from birthparents and pictures are helpful).</p> <p>Develop "LifeBook" for child, including these concrete bits of information.</p> <p>Begin talking comfortably and positively with your infant, family, and friends about adoption.</p>	<p>Encourage questions and answer honestly. Difficult issues may be omitted (but never changed) until child is older.</p> <p>Tell Adoption Story as a favorite bedtime story.</p> <p>Use and add to Life Book.</p> <p>Reassure child that he/she will not lose adoptive family.</p>	<p>Don't force child to discuss issues but let him/her know you are open and comfortable when he/she is ready.</p> <p>Let child know it is understood that he/she can love both sets of parents. He/she does not have to choose.</p> <p>Ask if child has questions or feelings he/ she would like to discuss.</p> <p>Let child know you are not threatened or angry about questions regarding birth family and/or past history.</p>	<p>Allow child to exercise control whenever possible. Provide opportunities for decision-making.</p> <p>Child has a right to his/her birth information. Help child access and accept information.</p> <p>Try to keep from responding to child's anger with more anger. Understand that much of his anger is directed at the birthparent.</p> <p>Be firm in limit-setting. Establish preset consequences for broken rules. Allow child to experience natural consequences of behavior.</p> <p>Continue to let child know that you love him/her no matter what.</p>	<p>Let child know he/she may remain at home after graduation if he/she chooses.</p> <p>Be alert for sadness when relationships with peers fail or during anniversary reactions such as birthdays or Mother's Day.</p> <p>Continue to keep adoption topic open within the home.</p> <p>Provide supportive opportunities for independence and freedom.</p>

*Adapted from NACAC "Adoptalk Newsletter" Fall 1991*

### **The Biological Clock: Key Times in an Adopted Person's Life**

by Carol L. Demuth, CSW-ACP

The non-adopted person is surrounded by genetic heritage and has easy access to family history. In families formed biologically answers abound and are absorbed before the need for a question arises. Feelings of belonging and relatedness are taken for granted as they develop gradually and become a part of the person's identity.

Shared ancestry, family resemblances and in some cases cultural heritage are denied the adopted person, who grows up separated from blood relations. As the adopted person matures, the need for information about his birth family grows. Both external life events and internal processes may trigger the desire for additional knowledge or bring to the surface the need to know one's roots.

The following outline will give both the professional working with the adopted person and the adopting parents an idea of the key times at which an adopted person may need more information or may have increased wonderings about his birth heritage. The list is not exhaustive, nor is it meant to imply that every adopted person will have the same need for information at each of these times. An increased awareness of these times, however, will aid those who interact with adopted persons in being more emotionally available and in being better able to meet the adopted person's needs.

Preschool years (2-5), when the child becomes aware of a pregnant woman in his environment

- This causes him to approach his parents with questions about his own birth, which he initially will probably connect with his adoptive parents.

Entrance into school

- The child must deal with adoption outside of the family for the first time, often the first time he has done so on his own.
- He may feel different from his peers.
- He may be faced with questions for which he has been ill prepared.

- He begins to become aware of society's views about adoption, which may differ from those held by his parents.
- Realization of "how babies are made."
- The child realizes there are two people who are not his adoptive parents that made him, but chose not to keep him.
- He may wish he had been born to his adoptive parents.

#### Birthdays

- This becomes a natural day to "connect" with the birthmother psychologically. As the adopted person reflects on his own birth, he will wonder if his birthmother is thinking of him too.
- Although primarily thoughts will concern the birthmother, there may also be thoughts about the birthfather.

#### Times of loss (death, divorce, a move, rejection by a friend, etc.)

- Any loss has the potential of triggering the original loss of the birthparents, once the child is aware of their existence.
- Also, TV programs, movies or books about loss may have the same effect.

#### Medical appointments, illness or medical crises.

- Because the adopted person does not live within his biological family, he rarely has as much medical history as a non-adopted person.
- The adopted person's access to updated medical information is rarely equal to that of a non-adopted person.
- An adopted person may feel disconnected, experience heightened anxiety and possibly anger at the lack of medical history.

#### Adolescence.

- The presence of abstract thinking allows for a more thorough and complex processing of the "whys" of the adoption.
- The adopted adolescent may wonder about what "might have been", and entertain fantasies, both positive and negative, about birthparents.
- The absence of biological role models may lead to feelings of disconnectedness and heightened anxiety about bodily changes.
- Entrance into male/ female relationships and the accompanying feelings of sexual attraction may cause speculation about the relationship between birthparents.

- The adopted adolescent may try to use his adoptive status as a tool for manipulation with his parents, if he senses they are unsure of their role, or threatened by birthparents.

#### Attainment of adult status (18-21).

- An adopted person may feel this is the first time he has a “right” to information on his birth family. Also, he may feel more comfortable seeking information directly, rather than going through his adoptive parents.

#### Engagement or marriage.

- The adopted person may have fantasies of marrying someone to who he is related if birth family is totally unknown.
- Contemplation of having children may be fraught with fear and anxiety if medical history is unknown.

#### Pregnancy/ birth of a child.

- Will often cause the adopted person to reflect on his own birth and his position in the chain of life.
- The adopted person may experience anger and/or feelings of loss and depression as he reflects on not being kept by birthparents.
- Often has increased expectations of feelings towards the baby born to him, as the child frequently is the first person he knows to whom he is related.
- A female adoptee may be particularly reflective during pregnancy, labor and delivery.

#### Mid-life crisis.

- Sometimes this is the turning point to seek information if it has been thought about, but postponed before.
- An adopted person becomes aware of birthparents' increasing age, and possibility of their impending death.

#### Death of adoptive parents.

- May trigger original loss of birthparents.
- An adopted person may feel freed for the first time to pursue information on himself, without fear of hurting the adoptive parents.
- He may unconsciously be seeking to replace lost family.

#### Questions from children.

- Even when adopted person has not sought information, his children may raise questions or need information that will cause an adoptee to pursue more information or possibly search for birth relatives.

#### Old age.

- An adopted person may realize this is his last chance to seek information before his own death. Often, he realizes his birthparents are deceased, but he may want information, or contact with siblings.
- Often the adopted person wants to leave information to his own children.

## Themes in Adoption Parenthesis Post Adoption Program

Children who have suffered a loss through death, divorce, foster care, adoption, or other separations seem to share several common issues. However, each child will react or respond to the loss dependent upon:

1. the significance of the loss
2. whether the loss is temporary or permanent
3. inherent coping abilities of the child
4. availability of supports
5. age and cognitive abilities of the child
  - a) at the time of the loss
  - b) at the present time

Consequently, while some children may react in very extreme ways, others may respond mildly or not at all. In addition, while one child may be affected in the area of loyalty, for example, another may be preoccupied with identity issues. What follows is a discussion of these common themes with particular attention to their appearance in adoption.

### **GRIEF**

When children have been separated from significant figures, their emotional response is one of grief and mourning. For the infant adoptee, the loss is of the fantasy or dream parent they have never met and of "what might have been." For the older adoptee, it most likely is a real loss of biological family or foster family. Grief is a process. There are five identifiable stages. However, not every individual will experience each stage or experience them in the order presented:

Shock/Denial: The child is emotionally numb and cannot accept the loss. The child may deny his own past or ethnicity. The child denies that s/he is adopted or may refuse to talk about being adopted. This stage is the mind's attempt to prevent the individual from feeling the pain of loss.

Anger/Rage: Now the numbness has worn off. Unfortunately, for the adoptee, this stage frequently coincides with adolescence, creating great chaos and confusion. The teen may be angry at himself for causing the separation, thus feeling guilty, and many punish himself via self-defeating behavior. The youth may be angry with the adoptive parents, perceiving the adoption as a kidnapping and may be verbally abusive, defiant, physically aggressive, truant, irritable, or oppositional. And the teen may be angry at the birth family for abandoning him.

Bargaining: In this stage, the youth attempts to regain the “Lost” figure through manipulation. The sophistication of the bargaining behaviors is dependent upon the child's cognitive and developmental level. Younger children may be “as good as gold” thinking that they’ll be rewarded for their behavior. Older children may attempt to disrupt the placement via acting out behavior. Adolescents may run away, make allegations of abuse, or try to “negotiate” the return of the lost figure. Children in this stage of grief also spend a great deal of time fantasizing about the birth family, often looking for them in favorite teachers, movies stars, or even in crowds.

Depression: Once the youth recognizes that the attachment figure is not returning, s/he will enter into depression, a state of mourning and sadness. Here, the youth withdraws from normal activities; eating and sleeping patterns change. S/he is moody and cries easily. Suicidal ideations and gestures as well as substance abuse may also appear as problems for some youth.

Resolution/ Understanding: Under normal circumstances, one cannot tolerate lengthy periods of psychic pain or depression. Consequently, the youth will begin to move towards resolution, slowly at first. It should be noted though, that grief is never fully resolved. Given time and support, it does become manageable. Occasions will arise such as holidays, anniversaries, or other significant events during which the youth may “re-grieve” their loss. When a child enters resolution, there is a return to age-appropriate activities and developmental tasks. Life is fun again. School performance and appearance improve. The child re-engages in the family.

## **CONTROL**

For children who have experienced a loss, many feel that they have had no control or decision-making power over their own lives. The adoptee did not choose to lose his/her birth family, etc. This generated a feeling of frustration and helplessness for many children. Consequently, they may try to regain control of their lives by being orderly, compulsive, neat--needing routine or planning ahead. Other youth may demonstrate their need for control via constant power struggles with authority figures, truancy, defiance, substance abuse, or tantrums. The bright, sophisticated child may hide things, hoard food, develop eating disorders, or utilize more creative means to control family life. In fact, some adoptees create chaos in the family as a means of controlling other family members.

## **LOYALTY**

Having at least two sets of parents creates quite a conflict for the child (whether the parents are real or fantasy). This is also frequently the case for children of divorce. The child may feel that closeness and love for one set of parents may be an act of disloyalty towards the other set of

parents,

thus hurting them. The child finds himself/herself in a dilemma and may be overrun by feelings of guilt. Behaviors frequently seen are: distancing from family members, fantasizing about birth family, confusion/conflict regarding search, guilt over being happy in the adoptive family, denial of having questions or curiosity regarding their adoption. The issue of divided loyalty frequently crops up around the time of the child's birthday or around Mother's Day.

### **REJECTION/ FEAR OF ABANDONMENT**

Regardless of the actual circumstances surrounding the child's adoption, the child's perception is frequently one that s/he was rejected and subsequently abandoned by the birth family. Consequently, some adoptees may feel hurt or angry toward their birth parents. Some adoptees feel that they are unlovable and "unkeepable," and they may act out to test the commitment of the adoptive family. To avoid rejection, some adoptees may not allow themselves to get close to others, or they will reject others before they can be rejected. Some adoptees react by continually seeking acceptance and approval from those around them, being almost too good. It is not surprising that developing and maintaining relationships is a difficult task for some.

### **SELF-ESTEEM**

The perception of being rejected is a direct blow to the adoptee's self-esteem. As one adoptee said, "How can someone who never knew me give me away?" Some adoptees believe that something is wrong with them. They may feel unwanted. Some adopted individuals assume the worst about their birth families and believe that their genetic make-up is far from ideal. School performance and self-confidence are frequently affected. Because they believe themselves to be less, they may settle for less than ideal friends or act out their self-image. They may engage in self-endangering behaviors. Some adopted youth seem to fear success, which would challenge their self-concept.

### **TRUST**

This is a particularly crucial issue for children who have had multiple moves during their young lives. Separations at an early age may threaten the establishment of a basic trust and attachment, which is so necessary for healthy growth and development. Many older adoptees come from a history of abuse and neglect and homes where broken promises are the norm. These children may avoid closeness or require longer times to "warm up". They may have difficulty with intimacy or become involved in clinging, dependent relationships. Stealing, lying, and delayed conscience development may occur in some cases.

## IDENTITY

The lack of information and secrecy that frequently surrounds the child's history and birth family make it difficult for the adoptee to establish his/her identity, a major task of adolescent development. The teen may find this issue confusing, frustrating, and scary. They may have no known history or connection to formulate a base for the "self". "Who am I?" is no longer a rhetorical question. For the child adopted at an older age, the information may be negative (mental illness, substance abuse, abuse/neglect) or chaotic.

Adolescents who are experiencing extreme difficulty may resort to running away, trying on multiple (and usually bizarre) identities, hanging out with "low life" peers, promiscuity, pregnancy, depression, or anger. Some adoptees state that they have always felt different and have never fit in with their peers as being adopted prevented them from "being like everyone else". Consequently, they may initiate a search to satisfy this need, or they may create a blood tie through a pregnancy.



Not all adoptees experience problems with these issues. Some may experience minor difficulties at different developmental stages. The adoptive family, sometimes with the help of a knowledgeable professional, may handle these minor difficulties successfully. A small percentage of adoptees find these issues overwhelming and require more intensive services. It is recommended that adoptive families experiencing extreme distress find post adoptive services that can provide support and assistance that is specific to the adoption related issues of the child.

Developed by:  
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# The Seven Wonders of Adoption

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## Wonder # 1: Loss and Grief

*"I wonder why I lose everyone and everything that is important to me. What is the matter with me?"*

## Wonder # 2: Rejection/ Abandonment

*"I wonder if these people are really going to keep me."*

## Wonder # 3: Guilt and Shame

*"I wonder what I did to make my own parents throw me away."*

## Wonder # 4: Trust

*"I wonder if I can believe what these people are telling me."*

## Wonder # 5: Identity

*"I wonder who my people are and if I will be like them."*

## Wonder # 6: Control

*"I wonder why everyone else makes decisions about my family, my name, how much information I get, how old I have to be to meet my siblings or birth parents... When do I get to make important decisions about my life?"*

## Wonder # 7: Divided Loyalties

*"I wonder if I should remain loyal to my birth mother or if I should allow myself to love and be loved by my adoptive mother."*

## ADOPTION TERMINOLOGY

### Parenthesis Post Adoption Program

Words and phrases to watch for positive and negative connotations.

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Birth parent (father, mother) Biological (parent, child, ancestry) Woman (lady) who gave birth	Real parent Natural parent
Adopted person Adoptee Adult Adoptee	Adopted child (when speaking of an adult)
Adoption Triad Adoption Triangle  Adoption plan was made for... The baby joined the family The older child moved in with his/her family An adoption was arranged for... He/she was placed	Adoption Triad (when it applies to the negative connotation associated with triangulation) Adopted out Put up for adoption given away given up
Birth child	Their own child Their real children
To opt for, to take on, to choose, to continue) Parenting	Keeping

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Born outside of marriage Born to a single person (Divorced Single , Never married, Unwed mother)	Illegitimate child Bastard Unwanted child
Termination of parental rights; unable to continue parenting (older child) Court termination	Gave up
Made an adoption plan Legally released Voluntary release	Gave away
My child	Adopted (when it is used constantly, it can become a label)
The waiting child Child with special needs Child available for adoption	Hard to place child
Search Reunion Making contact	

- Language is important in describing adoption.
- Adoptees are sensitive to feeling different
- We want to try to avoid negative terms and use less judgmental language.
- How is language manifested in your own family? What does Grandma say? Peers? Outsiders?

## GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSING ADOPTION WITH CHILDREN

Adapted from *Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child: Making Sense of the Past* (Keefer, Schooler, 2000) and *Children's Understanding of Adoption: Developmental and Clinical Implications* (Brodzinsky, 2011)

- **Adoption communication is a process, not an event.**

This is an ongoing process that occurs over time as the child develops more understanding and maturity.

- **Adoption communication is a dialogue, not a lecture.**

Parents should determine the child's level of understanding through a give-and-take discussion. Adoption communication should be a two-way street.

- **Be emotionally available and listen.**

Parents should be prepared to listen actively and be attuned to what their child is thinking and feeling.

- **Be aware of the child's developmental level and ability to understand adoption information.**

Parents should use age-appropriate language and be aware of the child's ability to understand abstract concepts related to adoption and relationships.

- **Validate and normalize the child's curiosity, questions, and feelings about adoption, birth families, and heritage.**

It may be necessary for adoptive parents to initiate communication about adoption and birth families. Children may not understand feelings or questions about adoption or the birth family are expected and normal. This curiosity does not reflect a lack of loyalty to the adoptive family.

- **Avoid negative judgments about the birth family or the child's heritage.**

To develop positive self-esteem, children need to have positive feelings about their birth origins, including their cultural or racial group and their families.

- **Some information may be deferred, but never changed. Do not lie.**

To develop trust, children should feel comfortable that information they receive is accurate. If a child is too young to understand complete information, details can wait for the child to mature. Children can be helped to differentiate between intent and action; that is, birth parents may have wanted to provide care for the child but may have been unable to do so due to substance abuse, mental health issues, situations which could not be overcome, etc.

- **Be prepared to help children cope with adoption-related grief.**

Parents and mental health providers may not recognize sadness, confusion, anxiety, and anger as reactions to loss. Parents should be prepared to anticipate feelings and reactions associated with adoption losses.

## Life Cycle Tasks of Adoptive Parents and Adopted Children<sup>1</sup>

Age/Period	Adoptive Parents	Adopted Children
Pre-adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coping with infertility</li> <li>• Making an adoption decision</li> <li>• Coping with the uncertainty/anxiety related to placement</li> <li>• Coping with social stigma re: adoption</li> <li>• Developing family and social support for adoption decision</li> </ul>	
Infancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking on identity as adoptive parents</li> <li>• Finding appropriate role models and developing realistic expectations re: adoption</li> <li>• Integrating child into family/fostering secure attachments</li> <li>• Exploring thoughts/feelings re: child's birth family</li> </ul>	

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Brodzinsky, David; Smith, Daniel; and Brodzinsky, Anne. 1998. *Children's Adjustment to Adoption: Developmental and Clinical Issues*. Sage Publications. London.

Toddlerhood and Preschool Years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beginning the telling process</li> <li>• Creating a family atmosphere conducive to open communication re: adoption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning one's adoption story</li> <li>• Questioning parents about adoption</li> </ul>
Middle Childhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping child master the meaning of adoption</li> <li>• Helping child cope with adoption loss</li> <li>• Validating child's connection to both adoptive and birth families</li> <li>• Fostering a positive view of the birth family</li> <li>• Maintaining open communication re: adoption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mastering the meaning of adoption</li> <li>• Coping with adoption loss</li> <li>• Exploring thoughts and feelings re: birth parents and relinquishment</li> <li>• Coping with stigma re: Being adopted</li> <li>• Maintaining open communication with adoptive parents re: adoption</li> <li>• Validating one's dual connection to two families</li> </ul>
Adolescence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helping teen cope with ongoing adoption-related loss</li> <li>• Fostering positive view of birth family</li> <li>• Supporting the teen's search interests/plans</li> <li>• Supporting teen's positive self-image and information re: cultural heritage</li> <li>• Helping teen develop realistic expectations re: search</li> <li>• Maintaining open communication re: adoption</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrating adoption into stable, secure identity</li> <li>• Coping with adoption loss</li> <li>• Exploring thoughts/feelings re: birth family and birth heritage</li> <li>• Exploring feelings re: search process</li> <li>• Maintaining open communication with adoptive parents re: adoption</li> </ul>

## Intergenerational Issues in Adoption

(Core Issues of Adoption and Intergenerational Issues in Adoption developed by Sharon Kaplan Roszia and Deborah Silverstein.)

	Adoptee	Adoptee as Parent	Birth Parents	Birth Parents as Parents	Adoptive Parents	Adoptive Parent as Grandparent	Birth Grandparent	Siblings
Loss								
Rejection								
Guilt and shame								
Grief								
Identity								
Intimacy								
Control and Mastery								

## Intergenerational Issues in Adoption

(Seven Core Issues of Adoption and Intergenerational Issues in Adoption developed by Sharon Kaplan Roszia and Deborah Silverstein.)

	<b>ADOPTEE</b>	<b>ADOPTEE AS PARENT</b>	<b>BIRTH PARENTS</b>	<b>BIRTH PARENTS AS PARENTS</b>
<b>Loss</b>	I lost both parents, extended family, cultural and genealogical heritage, sense of connectedness, sense of self, social status	I lost the ability to pass on history of extended family, cultural heritage, medical history, loss of extended biological relationships (cousins, aunt, uncles)	I lost of social status, loss of acceptance, loss of lifelong relationship with child, loss of relationship with child's father/mother, loss of genealogical connectedness	I lost the raising biological children together, loss of trust from other birth children- "am I secure here?"
<b>Rejection</b>	I feel rejection by birth family, "like I was gotten rid of," or "thrown-away,"	I feel vulnerability in marital relationship and with in-laws, I fear rejection by child so I become overprotective	I fear rejection peers and parents, rejection by the other birth parent after adoption plan, and I feel self-hatred (rejection of self)	I fear rejected by other child when learn of relinquishment,
<b>Guilt and Shame</b>	If I had been different, would they have kept me? <b>Guilt</b> What was so wrong about me as a person they dumped me? <b>Shame</b>	If something was wrong with me to be given away, will I feel the same about my child? Am I making the same mistakes my birth parents did?	No good person would place a child for adoption - <b>Guilt</b> I am truly a worthless person for doing this - <b>Shame</b>	Why couldn't I have cared for this child - <b>Guilt</b> What good parent would allow for a family to be separated by adoption -- <b>Shame</b>
<b>Grief</b>	I may never know birth family roots or background, may never know bio siblings, may never feel truly connected	I will never have a genealogical connection to the past, or I will never look into the eyes of my birth parent or siblings	I will never know (in closed adoption) how child is doing, never see first day of school, first date, graduation, etc.	I will never be able to share the joys of raising children together

	<b>ADOPTIVE PARENTS</b>	<b>ADOPTIVE PARENTS AS GRANDPARENTS</b>	<b>BIRTH GRANDPARENTS</b>	<b>SIBLINGS</b>
<b>Identity</b>	Who am I? Who do I look like? Who do I act like?	What identity do I pass on to my children? Who are they in light of my adoption?	I may never have another child and never have the identity of being a mother or father.	Can I truly feel good about my identity as a parent since I allowed for this adoption plan?
<b>Intimacy</b>	How close can I become? Will I be rejected in this relationship, too?	I fear intimate relationships - what will I pass on genetically to my offspring?	I fear intimacy because other close relationships have lead to significant losses.	Can I really be close to these children because of my past?
<b>Control</b>	I never had any say about being placed for adoption (especially issue for child adopted as older). No one ever asked me how I felt.	I have no control over my child knowing any genetic past or medical history or having a sense of connectedness.	My parents made this decision for me. I fear powerless, like a victim.	I cannot control how my other children will feel about the issue of adoption in this family.
<b>Guilt and Shame</b>	If I were a better person would I conceive? <b>Guilt</b> What is so bad about me that I cannot become a biological parent? <b>Shame</b>	I don't want my child to search in case I will be replaced and I feel badly about that - <b>Guilt</b> When they said they wanted to search, I was again reminded of my inadequacies as a person	Why couldn't I have cared for this child - <b>Guilt</b> What good grandparent would allow for a family to be separated by adoption - <b>Shame</b>	I can't believe my mother would give a child away - <b>Guilt</b> ...If she is like that, may I am, too - <b>Shame</b>
MASTERY AND GROWTH COMES AS A RESULT OF WORKING THROUGH THESE ISSUES - RECOGNIZING A PERSON HAS A RIGHT TO BE HAPPY AND LOSSES CAN LEAD TO GROWTH AND DEPTH. (Sharon Kaplan Roszia)				

## MARCUS: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Marcus is a 14-year-old boy who was placed with his adoptive family at 12 months of age following one foster placement. His adoptive family includes an older adopted sister, now age 17 (not biologically related to Marcus and also placed at age one year). The sister became pregnant when she was a high school junior. She delivered a baby on the preceding Christmas Day. She decided to raise the baby with help and support from the adoptive parents. Both the sister and her baby are now living in the adoptive home.

Marcus began struggling with school work when he entered middle school. His grades became even worse, often to the point of failing, when he entered high school the preceding fall. He is often verbally abusive and he is particularly angry at his sister for becoming pregnant. He is embarrassed that his first year in high school is spent as the brother of the only pregnant girl in his small school.

Marcus searched for and found his birth mother. He made contact with her before even telling the adoptive parents about the search. The adoptive parents first became aware of the search when the birth mother called them to talk about her recent conversation with Marcus. The adoptive parents are horrified and are still reeling from the pregnancy of the older child. The parents feel as though their efforts in raising these two children have been an abject failure. The entire family immediately has gone into crisis.

- What are the adoption issues that you perceive for Marcus? For the adoptive parents?
- What are the triggers you notice in the family's recent predicaments?
- Where is Marcus developmentally in considering his adoption issues?
- How would you intervene? What services would be useful for this family?

## Discussion Questions: Thoughts, Reactions, Insights

1. What adoption issues did you notice Deann experienced?
2. What adoption issues did you observe in the adoptive parents?
3. What appeared to be the adoptive parents' primary motivations in adopting? Mother? Father?
4. What were some of the possible expectations of the adoptive parents?
5. In what ways did they fail (unintentionally and uninformed) to meet Deann's cultural needs?
6. What unspoken messages might have Deann received from her perceptions of her parents' expectations for her? (Her father said at her first night in the home – "She cried, mother talked with her and after that everything was perfect.")
7. What did you sense were some of the feelings of the adoptive siblings?
8. What feelings and issues did you sense from the birthmother? How did she attempt to rectify those at this point in her life?
9. What feelings and issues did you sense from the birth siblings, especially the brother?
10. What did Deann's entrance into the adoptive family and re-entrance into the birth family potentially represent to all her siblings?
12. What did people in Deann's life fail (unintentionally and uninformed) to do for her?
13. Where were missed opportunities in Deann's life to validate her needs and issues?

## SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS FOR AN ADOPTEE TO CONSIDER WHEN CONTEMPLATING A SEARCH

- How do I define “adoption reunion” and what do I hope to achieve by having one?
- Am I seeking a family in reunion?
- Am I seeking just information (medical, social, cultural, etc.)?
- What do I see as my responsibilities for opening a door into the lives of other people?
- Am I prepared to meet a birth family who wants a relationship? Am I emotionally prepared if they are disinterested in me?
- What am I doing to educate my spouse/partner and children about adoption issues?
- How do I envision the role of the birth family in my life? As family? Extend family? Friends?
- What obligations do I foresee once I open the door of reunion: am I open to meeting siblings? Grandparents? Aunts and uncles?
- Do I anticipate the reunion to hold consequences for my adoptive parents and siblings? If so, what possible consequences could there be?
- Am I emotionally prepared with a backup support system in case I find the other person is not interested in meeting me?
- Am I prepared to find that perhaps the person I am seeking is deceased, in prison, or otherwise unreachable in reunion?
- Am I prepared to go on with my life, understanding it is not my fault if I’m rejected? Do I understand it is the circumstances, not me, being rejected?
- Am I prepared to settle for basic answers to questions, but not a relationship?

All these are important issues to filter through one’s present life situation.

## List of Suggested Reading Materials

Arms, Suzanne. *To Love and Let Go*. 1983. Stories of birth parent experiences and feelings about their pregnancy and placement of child.

Askin, J & Oskim, B. *Search: A Handbook for Adoptees and Birth Parents*. 1982. Harper & Row, NY. A guide for use in searching. Includes current state policies and techniques for searching.

Boss, Pauline. 1999. *Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief*. Harvard University Press. Boston, MA.

Bourguignon, Jean Pierre & Watson, K. *After Adoption: A Manual for Professionals Working With Adoptive Families*. An excellent resource regarding attachment disorders and other issues of post-legal adoption services.

Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig. *Being Adopted, The Lifelong Search for Self*. 1993. Doubleday. A book to help adoptive parents and adoptees understand the struggles and stages of developing an identity when an individual experiences separation from his roots.

Cline, Foster. *Parenting With Love and Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility*. 1990. Raising kids who are self-confident and motivated.

Davis, Diane. *Reaching Out to Children with FAS/ FAE*. 1994. Offers support and hope and serves as a comprehensive resource to professionals and families.

Delaney, Richard. 2006. *Fostering Changes: Myth, Meaning and Magic Bullets in Attachment Theory*. Wood 'N' Barnes Publishing. Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. A book with recent research regarding current attachment research, therapies, and diagnoses.

Dorner, Patricia. *Talking to Your Child About Adoption*. 1991. The booklet emphasized that communication about adoption is an ongoing process.

Dorris, Michael. *The Broken Cord*. 1989. Harper Collins. A single adoptive father writes about his experiences in parenting a child with fetal alcohol syndrome.

Dusky, Loraine. *Birthmark*. 1979. M. Evans & Co., NY. Ms Dusky, a birthmother, tells the story of her experiences and adjustment over the years since making an adoption plan for her daughter. (Loraine and her daughter are featured in *How*

*it Feels to be Adopted, After Reunion*).

Eldridge, Sherrie. 1999. *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew*. Dell Publishing. New York, New York. Written by an adult adoptee about the feelings and issues of growing up adopted.

Fahlberg, Vera. *Separation and Attachment, Putting the Pieces Together*. 1984. Michigan Department of Social Services, DDS Publication #429. An excellent workbook and overview of attachment and separation issues.

Freundlich, Madelyn and Wright, Lois. *Post-Permanency Services*. 2003. Casey Family Programs. Washington D.C. Explores post adoption services and supports most responsive to the needs of children and families.

Gray, Deborah. 2007. *Nurturing Adoptions: Creating Resilience after Neglect and Trauma*. Perspectives Press. Indianapolis, Indiana. A summary of the emotional and developmental impacts of early childhood trauma and neglect.

Hall, Beth and Steinberg, Gail. *An Insider's Guide to Transracial Adoption*. 1998. Pact Press. San Francisco, CA. A comprehensive guide for families for adopt transracially.

Homes, A.M. *In a Country of Mothers*. 1993. Alfred A. Knopf. A novel which examines contemporary myths surrounding adoption and motherhood.

James, Arleta. 2009. *Brothers and Sisters in Adoption*. Perspectives Press. A comprehensive book about how adoption impacts the equilibrium of families.

Jarell Bailey, Julie and Giddens, Lynn. 2001. *The Adoption Reunion Survival Guide: Preparing Yourself for the Search, Reunion, and Beyond*. New Harbinger Publications. Oakland, CA.

Jewitt, Claudia, *Adopting the Older Child*. 1978. Harvard Common Press, Harvard, Mass. Dr. Jewitt, an adoptive parent of older children and a psychotherapist, provides various case histories and experiences of families formed by older child adoption as well as information on the decision to adopt and preparation for children and families.

Jewitt, Claudia. *Helping Children Cope with Separation and Loss*. 1982. Harvard Common Press, Harvard, Mass. Very specific guide about helping children cope with separation, loss, and grief. Can be used by professionals and parents.

Keck, Gregory and Kupecky, Regina. *Adopting the Hurt Child: Hope for Families*

*with Special Needs Kids*. 1995. Addresses Attachment Disorder, issues and strategies for healing the hurt child.

Keefer, Betsy and Schooler, Jayne. *Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child: Making Sense of the Past*. 2000. Gives specific techniques for talking with children in a developmentally appropriate way about difficult birth histories.

Komar, Miriam. *Communicating With the Adopted Child*. 1991. Walker, NY. A guide to the how and what of talking about adoptive issues.

Lifton, Betty Jean. *Twice Born: Memoirs of an Adopted Daughter*. 1975. McGraw-Hill Book Co., NY. Adult adoptee autobiography. Explores author's life long process of coping with being adopted, includes search experience.

Lifton, Betty Jean. *Journey of the Adopted Self*. 1994. Provides an insightful, thorough, and compassionate guide to the adoption experience.

Magid, , McKelvey. *High Risk: Children Without a Conscience*. 1989. Bantam Books. A frightening look at the impact of attachment disorder on conscience development.

Mansfield, Lynda and Waldmann, Christopher. *Don't Touch My Heart: Healing the Pain of an Unattached Child*. 1994. Pinon books. A story of holding therapy.

McNamara, Joan. *Adoption and the Sexually Abused Child*. 1990. Addresses needs of the child who has experiences sexual abuse.

Melina, Lois. *Raising Adopted Children*. Harper & Row. This book provides a guide for adoptive parents to assist them with many questions and situations in parenting a child who is adopted. Appropriate for both families who adopted infants and older children.

Melina, Lois. *Making Sense of Adoption*. 1989. Practical help for parents in how to talk to their children about adoption.

Melina, Lois & Roszia, S., *The Open Adoption Experience*. 1993. Harper Collins. Preparation, placement and adjustments through adolescence.

Musser, Sandra Kay. *I Would Have Searched Forever*. 1979. Jan Publications, Division of AIM Inc. Capa Coral, Florida. Sandy explores the struggle for all in the adoption triangle in reconciling with each other, creating comfortable relationships among all in search situations.

Pohl, C. and Harris, K. *Transracial Adoption: Children and Parents Speak*. 1992. Watts, NY. Issues of transracial adoption through words and experiences of families.

Pertman, Adam. 2011. *Adoption Nation*. Harvard Common Press. Boston Massachusetts. A book about the human impact of adoption.

Rosenberg, Elinor. *The Adoption Life Cycle: the Children and Their Families Through the Years*. 1992. Free Press, NY. Looks not only at the issues of adoptees, but also at those of birth parents and adoptive parents.

Schaffer, Judith & Lindstrom, Christina. *How to Raise an Adopted Child*. 1989. Crown Publishers. A comprehensive how-to book anticipating nearly every situation adoptive parents may encounter. Chapters cover specific age groups, from infancy to teen years.

Schooler, Jayne. *The Whole Life Adoption Book*. 2009. NavPress, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Realistic advice for building a healthy adoptive family.

Schooler, Jayne; Norris, Betsie. 2002. *Journeys After Adoption: Understanding Lifelong Issues*. Bergin and Garvey. Westport, Connecticut. A book about the lifelong impact of adoption and information about search and reunion.

Schooler, Jayne; Keefer Smalley, Betsy; Callahan, Tim. *Wounded Children, Healing Homes*. 2009. NavPress. Colorado Springs, Colorado. Discussion of the impact of parenting traumatized children on foster and adoptive families.

Sheehy, Gail. *Spirit of Survival*. 1986. Bantam Books, NY. Gripping story of the journey of Gail's adopted daughter from Cambodian work camps to her adjustment in her adoptive home. Excellent book.

Silber, Kathy & Speedin, Phyllis. *Dear Birthmother*. 1982. Corona Publishing Co., Texas. A creative approach to adoption through letters exchanged by adoptive parents and birth parents.

Smith, Susan and Howard, Jeanne. 2003. *After Adoption: The Needs of Adopted Youth*. CWLA Press.

Watkins, Mary & Fisher, S. *Talking to Young Children About Adoption*. 1993. Yale University Press, New Haven. Accounts with twenty parents of conversations graphically conveying what the process of sharing is like.

## Books for Children and Teens

Brown, Irene Bennett, *Answer Me Answer Me*. Bryn Kenney's search for her parentage begins after the death of her Gram when she is unexpectedly provided with a fortune and a clue to her roots.

Bunin, Catherine and Sherry. *Is That Your Sister? A True Story of Adoption*. 1992. Six year old tells what is like to be adopted in a multiracial family.

Cole, Joanna. *How I Was Adopted*. 1995. A story of what makes people different and what makes them the same.

Crook, Marion. *Teenagers Talk About Adoption*. Based on interviews with more than 40 adopted teens in Canada, this book conveys the feelings they have about their birthparents, being adopted, and the attitudes of others toward adoption.

Fredberg, Judy and Gueiss, Tony. *Susan and Gordon Adopt a Baby*. 1992. Big Bird is curious when a baby is adopted on Sesame Street.

Gabel, Susan. *Filling in the Blanks: A Guided Look at Growing Up Adopted*. 1988. Perspectives Press (ages 10-14). A workbook to help pre-adolescents understand their own histories.

Girard, Linda Walford. *Adoption is for Always*. 1986. Celia feels alone, angry and insecure about being adopted. But with her parents' patience and understanding, she accepts it and makes her adoption day into a special family celebration.

Gordon, Shirley. *The Boy Who Wanted a Family*. 1980. Michael's hopes, fears, and experiences with his new mom are explored during the one year waiting period to finalize his adoption.

Greenberg, Judith E. & Carey, Helen H. *Adopted*. 1989. Sarah and Ryan are adopted. To help Sarah understand, her parents and grandfather explain about adoption and being a family member.

Grossnickle, Mary. *A Place in My Heart*. 2004. Speaking of Adoption. Wonderful story for young children about the adoption of chipmunk by a family of squirrels.

Krementz, Jill. *How it Feels to be Adopted*. 1982. Alfred A. Knopf, NY. Nineteen adopted children ages 8-16, of various races and cultures are interviewed. Each describes feelings and thoughts about adoption.

Livingston, Carole. *Why Am I Adopted?* 1978. Lyle Stuart Inc. Appropriate for early elementary age children.

Mandlebaum, Pili. *You Be Me, I'll Be You.* A bi-cultural child decides she dislikes her brown skin. Her father devises a creative alternative.

Mills, Claudia. *Boardwalk With Hotel.* 1985. Eleven year old Jessica becomes angry about her adoption and starts to feel competitive with and jealous of her siblings who are not adopted.

Mitchell, Christine. *Family Day: Celebrating Ethan's Adoption Anniversary.* 2009. Author House. Bloomington, IN. A book explaining adoption to school-age children.

Nerlove, Evelyn. *Who Is David?* 1985. Child Welfare League of America. An excellent novel about an adolescent adoptee struggling with identity who participates in a support group for adopted adolescents.

Rogers, Fred. *Mr. Rogers--Let's Talk About Adoption.* 1995. confronts questions children have about adoption with sensitivity and insight.

Rosenberg, Maxine. *Being Adopted.* Helpful for children, ages 5-10, when they first have questions about adoption. Three children relate their adoption stories.

Stein, Sara Bonnet. *The Adopted One.* 1979. Walker & Co., NY. Unusually insightful book for pre-school and early elementary age children. Outstanding text is provided for adoptive parents and older children about normal feelings of adoptees.



## Council on Accreditation Standards Post Adoption Services

### PA-AS 11: POST-ADOPTION SERVICES

**PURPOSE:** *Adoption Services establish a permanent family for children and youth awaiting adoption, and increase the well-being and functioning of birth parents, adoptive families, and adopted individuals.*

**Post-adoption services promote child and adult well-being and family functioning and stability.**

#### PA-AS 11.01

**When the need for post-adoption services is identified, the agency and the individual or family jointly develop a plan that specifies steps for obtaining these services.**

*Interpretation: The decision to develop a post-adoption service plan is based on the wishes of the adopted person, adoptive family, or the birth parents unless it is mandated.*

#### PA-AS 11.02

**Children, birth parents, adoptive parents, and adopted persons have access to needed post-adoption services that include, and are not limited to:**

- a. assessments;**
- b. information;**
- c. case management;**
- d. early intervention for children with developmental delays and educational services;**
- e. counseling, mental health treatment, and crisis intervention services;**
- f. family preservation and stabilization services;**
- g. peer support; and**
- h. respite services and out-of-home care.**

*Interpretation: The agency refers families to adoption competent professionals.*

*Research Note: Research studies demonstrate that adoptive families seek a wide array of post-adoption services, and needs may vary depending upon the type of adoption. Research and literature suggest that families often seek services in response to: issues of separation and loss, relationship problems, self-development and identity issues, and emotional and behavioral problems resulting from childhood abuse or neglect. Research has shown that financial support, medical services, and respite care were important to families that adopted children with disabilities.*

#### PA-AS 11.03

**The agency takes the initiative to explore suitable resources and contact service providers when appropriate, and with the permission of the person or family.**