

Ohio Child Welfare Training Program  
Assessor Training: Tier I

## Post Finalization Adoption Services


## An Adoption Perspective

Peter Kirk, age 12




“The child who is born into his family is like a board that’s nailed down from the start. But the adopted child, him the parents have to nail down, otherwise he is like a loose board in mid-air...”

## What are children bringing to their adoptive homes?

Serious neglect	63%		Experienced 2 factors	61%
Physical abuse	33%		Experienced 3 or more factors	39%
Sexual abuse (placed young; didn't know)	17%			
Prenatal substance exposure	60%			
Multiple moves home	18%			

## Post Adoption Challenges Confronting Families

Smith and Howard, 2003. *After Adoption: The Needs of Adopted Youth.*

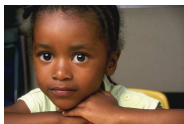


Behavior problems	51%
Learning disabilities	47%
Emotional disturbance	35%
Developmental delays	32%
Chronic medical problems	18%
Mental or physical handicap	15%

Most common unmet need: educational services; tutoring

## Child factors associated with disruption/dissolution...


- Age
- History of severe abuse/neglect
- Multiple losses of caregivers
- Early trauma
- Multiple placements
- Severe behavior, health, mental health, or developmental problems
- Desire to be reunited with birth family
- Continuing relationships w. birth family not supportive of adoption



NACAC, 2010

## Parent factors associated with disruption/dissolution...

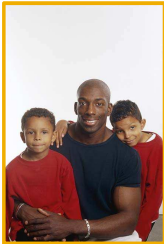
- Inadequate understanding
- Unrealistic expectations
- Inability to meet child's needs
- Conscious or unconscious deception in assessment process
- Unresolved infertility issues
- Parental loss
- Inexperience as parents
- Divorce or death of parents



NACAC, 2010

### Program factors associated with disruption/dissolution...

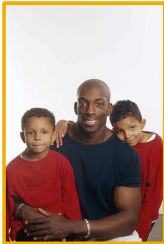
- Poor prep of child
- Poor prep of parents
- Inadequate support for family
- Expensive services
- Lack of information re: services



NACAC, 2010

### System factors associated with disruption/dissolution...

- Lack of available services
- Lack of expertise
- Lack of services to preserve birth family
- Lack of training to develop assessment, case management skills
- Policies that promote quantity over quality




NACAC, 2010

### Yet... 95% of families express satisfaction with adoption. And...

When compared with youth emancipating from foster care, adopted youth are:

- More likely to complete high school or equivalent
- More likely to attend and complete college
- Less likely to be teen parents
- Less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol
- Less likely to have mental health problems
- Less likely to be arrested and incarcerated
- More likely to be employed
- More likely to have adequate incomes



### What are differences between parenting by birth and by adoption?

Positive differences?

Challenging differences?


### Adoptive families do face risks...

What are they??



### Psychological presence

*"The symbolic existence of an individual in the perception of other family members in a way that influences thoughts, emotions, behavior, identity or unity of remaining family members..."*



Dr. Deborah Fravel

### Coping With Adoption Issues

Deny differences

Insist on differences

Acknowledge differences

H. David Kirk,  
*Shared Fate*

### Tasks of Caring for Traumatized Children

Believe and validate experiences

Tolerate child's affect

Manage own emotional responses

Cook, et.al.  
Complex trauma in Children and Adolescents, 2005

### Compassion fatigue

Feeling numb, burned out, and unable to emotionally handle the child's sad history



### Developmental Understanding of Adoption

Age 0-3


- Practice story
- Collect info

➔

Age 3-7

- Concrete thinking
- Parrot story
- Magical thinking

➔



### Developmental Understanding of Adoption

Age 8-11


- Understand story
- Concerned with fairness
- May go "underground"

➔

Age 12-15

- Identity concerns
- Wants control, independence
- Anger, confusion

➔



### Developmental Understanding of Adoption

Age 16-18


- Intimacy issues
- Emancipation concerns
- Considering search

➔

Age 19 +

- Establishing independence
- Ambivalence re: birth family

➔



## Adoption Issues

- Loss/Ambiguous Loss
- Control
- Divided Loyalty
- Abandonment/Fear of Rejection
- Shame/Guilt
- Trust
- Identity




## Ambiguous Loss

a physical loss of someone or something remaining as a psychological presence

“With ambiguous loss, there is no closure; the challenge is to learn how to live with the ambiguity.”

*Ambiguous Loss: Learning to Live with Unresolved Grief, Pauline Boss*



Loss/Grief	Possible Indicators
<p><b>WHY:</b></p> <p>The child has lost:</p> <p>Birth parents, sibs, grandparents, pets, information, history, culture, control</p> <p><b>WHEN:</b></p> <p>Lifelong, especially when triggered by losses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Over-reactions to loss of pets, friends</li> <li>■ Panic if parents become ill or go away on a trip</li> <li>■ Panic with sleepovers, camp</li> <li>■ School phobia</li> <li>■ Difficulty emancipating from home after graduation</li> </ul>


## Events that might trigger issues

- Child's birthday
- Anniversaries of separations
- Mother's Day
- Holidays
- Transitions/Moves/Losses
- Medical crises (parent or child)
- Adolescence
- Graduation
- Engagement/Marriage
- Pregnancy
- Mid-life crisis
- Death of adoptive parents



## Adoption Issues for Parents

- Loss
- Unmet expectations
- Infertility
- Feelings of failure/guilt
- Entitlement
- Fear/threat of birth parent
- Isolation
- Control
- Relationship of birth and adopted siblings



## Post Adoption Services...

- Education/Training
- Associations
- Support groups
- Crisis intervention
- Family networking/mentoring
- Family therapy
- Respite care
- Day treatment
- Kinship placement
- Residential treatment and....




### Handling inquiries from triad members...do not disclose:

- Name: first, last, alias, or maiden
- Social security number
- Address
- Telephone number
- Place of employment
- Statewide MIS number



### First Person Plural



### The Search





Read your role

Begin your search

Get to know one another

### Why do triad members search?

- Need medical information
- Identity—Who am I like?
- Facing a life transition
- Answers....Why?
- Need to connect
- Others?



### Why do triad members decide not to search?

- Lack of interest
- Loyalty to adoptive parents
- Wonder if they have a right
- Fear of rejection
- Others?



### Expectations

ADOPTees	ADOPTIVE PARENTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Emotions/fears</li> <li>■ Fantasies: "perfect family"</li> <li>■ What will be role of birth family in life?</li> <li>■ Do I want answers or relationship?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Reminder of failure/loss</li> <li>■ Inadequacy/rejection</li> <li>■ Fear adoptee may be hurt</li> </ul>



### Phases of Reunion

- May happen in any order
- Some do not experience all phases
- Most logical progression



```
graph TD; A[Search] --> B[Emotional Conflict]; B --> C[Identities Revealed]; C --> D[Initial Contact]; D --> E[Acceptance/ Rejection];
```



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- May happen in any order
- Some do not experience all phases
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```
graph TD; A[First Meeting] --> B[Honeymoon]; B --> C[Post Honeymoon]; C --> D[Resolution]; D --> E[Post Reunion];
```



### Questions??

How will you use this information in your practice?

