

Pre-Training Handout

Skill Set and Competencies

Skill Set: Basic understanding of emotional reactions to adoption commonly experienced by adoptive parents.

- Familiar with emotional conflicts adoptive parents may have after the adoption. Aware of how these issues might impact the long-term adjustment of the family.
- Knows the importance of talking with adopted children about their birth families in a way that they can easily understand. Knows why it is important not to talk in a negative way about the birth family.
- Knows why it is important to talk to other people about the adopted child's situation in a way that respects the child's dignity and privacy.
- Knows why it is important to get support and education after adoption.
- Aware of resources and supports for adoptive parents after adoption finalization.

ADOPTION TERMINOLOGY

**Adapted from the work of the Parenthesis Post Adoption Program,
Columbus, Ohio, 1986**

Certain adoption-related terminology evokes negative feelings and should be avoided. Below are suggested alternatives that communicate the same information in more positive ways.

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Birthparent (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	Adopted out Put up for adoption Given away Given up
Birthchild	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 for adoption
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	Finding one's real family Locating one's parents

- 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 used in your own family? What does Grandma say? Peers? Outsiders?
- Help to educate yourself and others to routinely use positive and constructive language

Survival Skills for Adoptive Parents:

- ◆ Acknowledge the child's grief and let the child understand your losses.
- ◆ Network with other adoptive families to avoid isolation.
- ◆ Don't over-react to problems. Not all problematic behaviors or feelings are related to adoption; many are developmental or are related to circumstances in the child's environment. Talk with other parents and/or knowledgeable professionals to determine whether problems are really related to adoption, or are a normal part of growing up.
- ◆ Don't under-react to problems. Get post adoption services early, if needed. Adoptive families often need post adoption support at key times in the life of their child. Families should be aware of available services prior to onset of crisis.
- ◆ Talk openly about adoption in the family. It is often necessary to *initiate* conversation, as children can be fearful of hurting the adoptive parent's feelings.
- ◆ Encourage the child to have positive feelings about his/her birth family. To enjoy positive self esteem, s/he must feel good about his/her "roots". Remember that parents are allowed to love more than one child. Children should be allowed to love more than one parent. Don't force your child to choose between you and the birth parent.
- ◆ Get as much information as possible about the birth family and the child's history. Remember that the "trail" gets cold quickly; get as much information as possible at the time of placement. You can return to the agency at any point in the future to clarify information or to obtain additional information.
- ◆ Always be honest in sharing information about the birth parent and the birth history. If the information is very difficult, some facts may be deferred while the child is very young. Facts should *never* be changed. As a rule of thumb, children should have complete information by the time they enter adolescence
- ◆ Be alert for signs of distress when losses or transitions occur. Remember to be sensitive to "anniversary reactions" and increased emotional stress around birthdays, holidays, and Mother's Day. Be sure to discuss feelings and fears openly.
- ◆ Allow the adoptive father to become the primary parent during adolescence. Much of the child's grief, anger regarding abandonment, and divided loyalties are directed toward the birth mother. This anger is often transferred to the adoptive mother. The mother/ teen

Survival Skills for Adoptive Parents (cont)

relationship can become very strained. The adoptive father should handle limit-setting whenever possible.

- ◆ Avoid control battles. You may need to lose a few battles in order to win the war. Parents can successfully work on only one or two behaviors at a time. Prioritize your battles, and be prepared to let a lot of other less important issues slide for the time being.

The TRUTH

“The Truth and Nothing but the Truth”
by Jayne Schooler, 1996



Sharing with Children about Their Unpleasant Past: The Adoptive Parents' Challenging Task

“If we aren't straight with our children about their past, they will pick up on it and fantasize something that may be much worse.” Carol Williams, University of North Carolina

Why is it difficult to do?

Sharing with a child about an unpleasant past is difficult for both workers and parents. The details seem far too painful. Yet, according to Claudia Jewitt, the missing pieces are often those pieces that make sense to the child and fill in the blanks.

“The information is a relief for these children,” Jewitt says “because it takes the responsibility for what happened off the child. They need to know that they weren't placed for adoption because of something they did.”¹

Knowing that it is the right thing to do, and knowing just how to do it are two different things. Just how does a worker or parent carry out this an unpleasant task?

Sharing about Abandonment

Adults abandon children when life circumstances become overwhelming. One thing a parent can point out, according to Jewitt is to ask the child, “Have you ever had a real hard thing to do? Did you get

frustrated? What did you want to do? ‘Leave it’ is generally the answer. The child perhaps can related to the emotion of frustration.

Points parents and workers can make:

- People abandoned children out of fear, confusion and frustration
- Children are hard to care for and some people can not handle the responsibility
- A child's behavior is not the cause of an abandonment
- Adoptive parents will not abandon the child in tough times

Sharing about Physical Abuse

A child is not slapped, screamed at, or hit because he is a bad child. He is treated that way because the adults in his life are out of control.

In helping a child to understand parental angry, Jewitt suggests to ask the child, “When you are angry, do you feel like hitting someone?” This question will help a child understand in a small way why people hit when they are angry, even though they know it is wrong.

Points parents and workers can make:

- When children are hit, the adult is out of control.
- Parents, often frustrated by life circumstances take their anger out on their children, even when they know it is wrong.
- It is possible that their parents experienced the same trauma of abuse growing up and it is the only way they know to handle their anger.
- It is not the child's fault for what the parent does.

Sharing about Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is a type of abuse that children do feel partially responsible. Perhaps the abuser indicted this to the child. An abuser perhaps told the child he wanted to be close to him in a special way, yet he knew it was wrong. The child often suffers with fear by keeping the secret and guilt after releasing the truth. Both those emotions must be recognized by parents and workers and addressed.

Points parents and workers can make:

- Sexual abuse is never the fault of the child
- The abuser touched you in ways that were not right and he/she is totally responsible for their actions.
- The child was completely right in disclosing the abuse, even if the remaining parent expressed anger or disbelief.
- The child may have feelings of anger and confusion that he/she should feel safe to express.

Sharing about Substance Abuse

Children who were placed for adoption may have vivid or vague memories of what life was like living with someone who abuses alcohol or drugs. Children need to have the opportunity to talk about their memories of not having food to eat, not having clean clothes to wear or a clean bed to sleep in. Children need to share their fears of the chronically absent, abusive or "spaced-out" parent.

Points parents and workers can make:

- You did not cause your parent's drinking or drug problem
- Your parent acted like they did toward you because he/she was taking drugs or drinking too much.
- They did not have control over their problem and you needed to be in a safe and secure place to finish growing up.

Sharing about Mental Illness

Claudia Jewitt says that "children who are placed for adoption because of a parent's mental illness can be helped to remember or understand behavior that used not consistent with appropriate parenting. Perhaps the child remembers the parent being depressed...or observed rapid mood changes making it hard to know what to do.

Jewitt encourages adoptive parents or workers to help the child make the connection with their life experiences. " They may have been afraid of something that other people told them not to be afraid, or they may have had difficulty knowing if they were dreaming or awake."ⁱⁱ

Points parents and workers can make:

- Your parent was very upset in his feelings and that kept him/her very confused. They couldn't make good decisions on how to take care of you.
- It was important that you could finish growing up in a safe home.
- Your parent had this problem before you were born.
- You didn't cause your parent's condition.

Sharing about Lawbreaking

Occasionally, children enter into the system, and eventually into foster care and adoption because their parent is incarcerated. Although this knowledge casts a shadow over the child's perception of his parent, it is important he knows the truth.

Children need to understand that sometimes make bad decisions that have long term consequences.

When their parent choose to break the law (and name the offense age appropriately), he/she will suffer long term consequences.

Points parents and workers can make:

- Your parent choose to break the law because he/she thought it would help him/her solve her problems. It did not.
- Your parent's decision resulted in their being sent to jail for a long time.
- Because they will be in jail for a long time, the court decided that it would be too long a time for you to be without a family.

Whatever the situation regarding a child's history, the truth is paramount. One adult adoptee, in learning of the criminal past of her parents said. "It is not a pretty truth, but at least it is the truth. Now I can go on with my life without the make-believe."

Handout # 4



Subsidy Options

An adoption subsidy is financial assistance that enables families to adopt children who have special needs. A child qualifies as having special needs if s/he:

- ❖ Is older;
- ❖ Is one of a sibling group;
- ❖ Has medical or developmental disabilities, or emotional problems;
- ❖ Has an emotional dependence on foster parents and therefore should not be moved;
- ❖ Has factors in the medical history or genetic background that place the child at risk of developing a disorder or condition later in life *or*
- ❖ Is a member of a minority ethnic or racial group.

There are three types of subsidies. They may be used separately or together, depending on the circumstances.

1. *Maintenance Subsidies*

These subsidies are used for food, clothing, shelter, school supplies, and personal incidentals. The child may also receive a Medicaid card.

The **Federal** Maintenance Subsidy, Title IV-E is available for children whose parents met ADC (TANF) or SSI requirements. There are no income eligibility requirements for adoptive parents applying for Title IV-E subsidies.

The **State** Adoption Maintenance Subsidy is available for children who are not eligible for Title IV-E. There are income restrictions for adoptive parents applying for a State Maintenance Subsidy.

2. *Special Services*

The Post Adoption Special Services Subsidy (PASSS) Program is available for a child's special needs not covered by insurance or other subsidies. PASSS is especially helpful for children whose special needs may not have been identified at the time of the adoption.

PASSS is a unique subsidy designed to assist Ohio families after the finalization of their adoption. Adoptive families must apply for, and be determined eligible for PASSS. The subsidy is available to adoptive families, with the exception of step-parent adoptions, regardless of the type of adoption (international, attorney, public or private agency). The child does not have to meet either the federal or state definition of special needs.

The program is implemented on a State Fiscal Year (July 1st and ends June 30th).

3. *Nonrecurring Costs*

This is a federal adoption subsidy which provides up to \$2,000 per child for adoption-related expenses, such as legal fees, medical exams, transportation costs, etc.

List of Suggested Reading Materials

Books for Parents or Professionals

List of Suggested Reading Materials

Books for Parents or Professionals

Adopted Like Me. 2005. Michael Watson. Gallery of Diamonds Publishing. A beautifully written story of an adoptee's search for his birth family and an integrated identity.

Adopting the Hurt Child: Hope for Families With Special Needs Kids. 1995. Gregory Keck and Regina Kupecky. Pinon Press. Excellent resource for parents who have adopted traumatized children.

Adopting and Advocating for the Special Needs Child. 1997. L. Anne Babb and Rita Laws. Westport: Bergin and Garvey. A guide for adoptive parents of children with special needs.

After Adoption: The Needs of Adopted Youth. 2003. Jeanne A. Howard and Susan L. Smith. Child Welfare League Press. Overview of research into the needs and adjustment of children adopted from the foster care system.

Being Adopted, The Lifelong Search for Self. 1993. Brodzinsky, Schechter, & Henig. 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 birth family.

Beyond Consequences, Logic, and Control: A Love-Based Approach to Helping Children with Severe Behaviors. 2008. Heather Forbes and Bryan Post. Beyond Consequences Institute. A book about providing emotional safety for traumatized children.

The Black Parenting Book. 1999. Ann C. Beal, M.D., M.P.H.; Linda Villarosa,; and Allison Abner. A book that presents information on raising Black children with a healthy racial identities.

Brothers and Sisters in Adoption: Helping Children Navigate Relationships when New Kids Join the Family. In press: 2009. Arleta James. Perspectives Press.

Children's Adjustment to Adoption: Developmental and Clinical Issues. 1998. Anne B. Brodzinky, Daniel W. Smith, David M. Brodzinsky. Sage Publications. An excellent professional summary of pertinent adoption issues.

Child with Special Needs: Encouraging Intellectual and Emotional Growth. 1998. Stanley Greenspan and Serena Wieder. Addison Wesley. A book about promoting and enhancing development.

A Child's Journey Through Placement. 1992. Vera Fahlberg, M.D. An invaluable guide for professionals placing children or treating children who have experienced separations.

Connecting with Kids Through Stories. 2005. Denise Lacer, Todd Nichols, and Joanne May. Jessica Kingsley. A guide to parents or therapists who want to help children understand adoption through storytelling.

Creating Capacity for Attachment. 2005. Arthur Becker-Weidman, Deborah Shell. Wood and Barnes Publishing. A book to help clinicians assess and treat children with attachment issues.

Clinician's Guide to PTSD: A Cognitive Behavioral Approach. 2006. Guildford Press. Guide for improving therapist's competence in using CBT.

Facilitating Developmental Attachment. 2000. Daniel A. Hughes. Jason Aronson/Inghram Book Co. Provides the foundations of emotional relationships and ways to enhance those relationships.

Fostering Changes: Myth, Meaning and Magic Bullets in Attachment Theory. 2006. Richard Delaney. Wood and Barnes Publishing Co. Good techniques to help older children in foster care.

Growing Up Again, Parenting Ourselves, Parenting Our Children. 1998. Jean Illsley Clarke and Connie Dawson. Hazeldon Book/Harper Collins. Helps parents who did not have a good start themselves.

Healing Trauma: Attachment, Mind, Body, and Brain. 2003. Marion F. Solomon and Daniel Siegel. W. W. Norton and Co. Research and theory on attachment and trauma.

Helping Adolescents with ADHD & Learning Disabilities: Ready-to-Use Tips, Techniques, and Checklists for School Success. 2001. Judith Greenbaum and Geraldine Marke. Jossey-Bass. Helpful for parents in dealing with school issues.

Inside Transracial Adoption. 2000. Gail Steinberg and Beth Hall. Perspectives Press. Practical advice for parents who have adopted transracially or transculturally.

Nurturing Adoptions. 2007. Deborah D Gray. Perspectives Press. Outstanding, hopeful information for both parents and professionals.

Parenting Children Affected by Fetal Alcohol Syndrome—A Guide for Daily Living. 1998. Ministry for Children and Families, British Columbia. May download from

snap@snap.bc.ca. Practical guide with approaches for parenting children who are affected by prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol.

Parenting from the Inside Out. 2003. Daniel Siegel and Mary Hartzell. Penguin/Putnam. Explores family relationships through the lens of brain-based, attachment-focused work.

Parenting the Hurt Child: Helping Adoptive Families Heal and Grow. 2002. Gregory Keck and Regina Kupecky. Pinon Press. Specific ideas for parents who have adopted traumatized children.

Risk and Promise: A Handbook for Parents Adopting a Child from Overseas. 2006. Ira Chasnoff, Linda Schwartz, Cheryl Patt, and Gwendolyn Neuberger. National Training Institute. A thorough description of issues for parents adopting internationally.

Skills Training for Children with Behavioral Problems—Revised Edition. 2006. Michael Bloomquist. Guilford Press. A guide for parents and professionals who need practical suggestions for reducing anger and anxiety.

Supporting Brothers and Sisters: Creating a Family by Birth, Foster Care and Adoption. 2006. Arleta James. AJ Productions. A curriculum with tips for helping siblings in a foster or adoptive home. An accompanying DVD is provided.

Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child: Making Sense of the Past. 2000. Betsy Keefer and Jayne Schooler. Bergin & Garvey. A book to help parents and professionals talk to children in a developmentally appropriate way about adoption.

Toddler Adoption: The Weaver's Craft. 1997. Mary Hopkins-Best. Perspectives Press. A guide to attachment and learning issues for parents who adopt children between the ages of one and four.

Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew. 1999. Sherrie Eldridge. Dell Publishing. A book written by an adult adopted person who provides insights into the feelings and concerns of adopted children.

What Every Adoptive Parent Needs to Know. 2008. Kate Cremer-Vogel and Dan and Cassie Richards. Mountain Ridge Publishing. Offers insights into understanding adoption dynamics.

The Whole Life Adoption Book. 2008. Jayne Schooler and Thomas Atwood. Navpress. Realistic advice for building a healthy adoptive family.

Wounded Children, Healing Homes. 2009. Jayne Schooler, Betsy Keefer Smalley, Tim Callahan. NavPress. A book about the impact of parenting traumatized children on foster and adoptive families.

Books for Children or Young Adults

The Adopted One. 1979. Sara Bonnet Stein. 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.

All About Adoption. 2004. Marc Nemiroff and Jane Annunziata. Magination Press. A children's book for ages 6-11 with good information about children's feelings, adoptive families, and birth parents.

A Place in My Heart. 2004. Mary Grossnickle, Illustrated by Alison Relyea. Speaking of Adoption. A beautiful crafted, insightful story for preschool or early school age children about a chipmunk adopted by a family of squirrels and his feelings about his birth family.

Being Adopted. 1984. Maxine Rosenberg and George Ancona. Harper Collins. Helpful for children, ages 5-10, when they first have questions about adoption. Three children relate their adoption stories.

The Best Single Mom in the World: How I Was Adopted. 2001. Mary Zisk. Albert Whitman and Co. A good book for children adopted by a single parent.

Borya and the Burps. An Eastern European Adoption Story. 2005. Joan McNamara. Perspective Press. A book that is fun to read and helpful for young children in understanding their adoption history.

Filling In the Blanks: A Guided Look at Growing Up Adopted. 1988. Susan Gabel. Perspectives Press. A book for pre-teens and early teens working on identity formation.

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

I Wish for You a Beautiful Life: Letters from the Korean Birth Mothers of Ae Ran Won to Their Children. 1999. Edited by Sara Dorow. Yeong and Yeong Book Co. Letters collected from mothers in a home for unwed mothers in Seoul, Korea.

Is That Your Sister? A True Story of Adoption. 1992. Catherine and Sherry Bunin. Our Child Press. Six-year-old tells what is like to be adopted in a multiracial family. For children ages 4-8.

The Mulberry Bird. 1996. Anne Braff Brodzinsky. Perspectives Press. A book for elementary school-age children.

Sam's Sister. 2004. Juliet Bond and Dawn Majewski. Perspectives Press. A read-aloud book for children who have birth siblings living in another family.

Teenagers Talk About Adoption. 1989. Crook, Marion. Seven Hills Books. 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.

Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born. 1996. Jamie Lee Curtis. Harper Collins. Helps children understand the excitement of adoptive parents awaiting a child.

Tell Me a Real Adoption Story. Betty Lifton and Claire Nivola. 1993. Alfred Knopf Publishing Co. A book for children ages 6-12 regarding identity formation.

Twenty Life Transforming Choices Adoptees Need to Make. 2003. Sherrie Eldridge. Pinon Press. Book for older teens and young adults. Reads like a novel while addressing adoption issues.

We See the Moon. 2003. Carrie A. Kitze. EMK Press. A book for young school-age children adopted from China.

When You Were Born in China. 1997. Sara Dorow. Yeong and Yeong. A book to help children adopted from China understand their histories in a realistic way.

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

You Be Me, I'll Be You. 1990. Pili Mandlebaum. Kane/Miller Book Publishing. A bi-cultural child decides she dislikes her brown skin. Her father devises a creative alternative.

Zachary's New Home. 2001. Geraldine Bloomquist and Paul Bloomquist. Magination Press. A book to help children learn to trust after abuse.

Multicultural Resources for Parents and Children

40 Ways to Raise a Nonracist Child. Mathias & French, A frank and important guide for black and white parents who want to teach their children to shun prejudice, narrow-mindedness, and hatred.

The Black Parenting Book. 1999. Beal, Ann C., M.D., M.P.H.; Villarosa, Linda; and Abner, Allison. A book that presents information on raising Black children with a healthy racial identities.

Multicultural Teaching. Teidt & Teidt, Extensive book lists.

Peoples of the World. Trundle, Roma. Usborne Publishing. 32 pages of color illustrations and information about many cultures (ages 6-12).

Raising Black Children, Comer and Puissant,

Raising the Rainbow Generation. Hopson & Hopson,

We Don't Look Like Our Mom and Dad. Sobol, Harriet. Story about two Korean boys.
(ages 3-10)

Workbooks and Activity Books

Hands Around the World, Susan Milord, Williamson Publishing, Charlotte, Vt. Plants, stories, crafts, cooking, songs and dances to build cultural awareness.

The Kids Multicultural Art Book. by Alexandra Terrain. Williamson Publishing, Charlotte, VT. Roots, rhythms, and traditions found in art in a hands-on experience (ages 3-9)

International Children, by Karen Sevaly, Teacher's Friend Pub., Riverside, Ca. Customs, costumes, and flags of 22 nations.

Small World Celebrations, by Jean Warren & Elizabeth McKinnon, Warren Publishing, Everett, Wa. Art, games, songs and snacks to introduce children to holidays and festivals around the world.

ⁱⁱ Quoted from *The Adopted Child*, June, 1985. 2 Ibid.

ⁱⁱ *ibid*