Adoption: Developmental Ages and Stages

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The Cradle
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What is ADOPTION?
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- the act or process of adopting a child
- the act or process of beginning to use something new or different
- the act or process of giving official acceptance or approval to something
What is missing?

LOSS
What’s in your wallet?
Grieving a Loss
• Identify the gains and losses experienced by members of the adoption circle
• Understand the factors that affect the experience of loss.
• Recognize the signs of grief in adopted children at different developmental stages
• Identify situations that may trigger grief responses
• Develop strategies for helping children grieve their losses
Gains and Losses

Gains
• Love home
• Prepared family
• Secure environment
• Sense of belonging
• Permanence
• Opportunity to share love

Losses
• Biological connection
• Choice
• Control
• Ability to get questions answered
• Social status
• Relationship with birth family
• Familiar people and places
Gains and Losses

Who am I?

I miss my mom.

I wonder where my brothers and sisters are.

Will I ever meet my birth parents?

Why didn’t she keep me?
Loss and the Adoptee
Loss and the Adoptee

- Loss is not permanent
- Realized after-the-fact
- Socially unrecognized
Loss and the Adoptee
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ages and Stages</th>
<th>Infants &amp; Toddlers (0-2)</th>
<th>Preschoolers (3-5)</th>
<th>School Age (6-12)</th>
<th>Teens (13-18)</th>
<th>Adults (19+)</th>
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<td>Cannot understand</td>
<td>Literal &amp; self-</td>
<td>Understand adoption</td>
<td>Questions about identity</td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
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<td>gains &amp; losses</td>
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<td>Like but don't</td>
<td>Feelings of</td>
<td>Self-assertion</td>
<td>Anger</td>
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Infants and Toddlers (0-2)

- Characteristics
  - Lack abstract thinking
  - Grieve loss of birth parent(s)/caregivers
Infants and Toddlers (0-2)

• Behaviors
  – Changes in eating and sleeping
  – Lethargy
  – Crying
  – Separation anxiety
  – Developmental regression
Infants and Toddlers (0-2)

• Strategies
  – Use patience, understanding and closeness
  – Have comfort foods
  – Provide consistent schedules and routines
  – Keep major changes to a minimum
Preschoolers (3-5)

- Characteristics
  - Literal and self-absorbed
  - Like but don't understand adoption story
  - Sensitive to differences
Preschoolers (3-5)

• Behaviors
  – Searching or pining
  – Excessive clinging
  – Separation anxiety
  – TANTRUMS
Preschoolers (3-5)

• Strategies
  – Tell the adoption story
  – Reaffirm closeness
  – Model ways to express feelings
School Age (6-12)

- Characteristics
  - Understanding adoption gains and losses
  - Feelings of divided loyalties
  - Curiosity about birth parents
  - Ambivalence about adoption
School Age (6-12)

- Behaviors
  - Daydreaming
  - Withdrawal
  - Obsessive questioning
  - Anger
  - Compulsive activities
School Age (6-12)

• Strategies
  – Encourage children to talk
  – Offer support and feedback
Lifebooks

Adoption Day
May 15, 2006

On May 15th we met you for the very first time! You were so scared and timid. The Director let us meet one of your nannies and mommy got to feed you lunch before you took us on a "tour" of your classroom.
Adolescents (13-18)

• Characteristics
  – Questions about identity
  – Self-assertion
  – Feelings of loss or abandonment
Adolescents (13-18)

- Behaviors
  - Rebellious or provocative behavior
  - Sullenness or depression
  - Sexual promiscuity
Adolescents (13-18)

• Strategies
  – Encourage self-expression
  – Keep channels of communication open
  – Listen non-judgmentally
Adults (19+)

- Characteristics
  - Curiosity
  - Anger
  - Resentment
  - Guilt
  - Fear
  - Grief
Adults (19+)

• Behaviors
  – Difficulty maintaining relationships
  – Difficulty with intimacy
  – Difficulty maintaining jobs
  – Postpartum depression
  – Continued struggle with identity
Adults (19+)

- Strategies
  - Be supportive
  - Share any information
Resources

• Adoption Support and Preservation (ASAP Services)
  – Statewide, state-funded, home-based services available to all adopted children (and subsidized guardianship). Parents can request services.

• The Theraplay Institute
  – Trainings for parents and professionals; Database of attachment-based therapists throughout the state.
Resources

• **A Home Within**
  – Free therapy for all current and former foster youth. Available only in Chicago and North Shore area. Parents, caseworkers, GALs can request services.
  – [www.ahomewithin.org](http://www.ahomewithin.org)

• **Adoption Learning Partners (ALP)**
  – Online learning program on a variety of adoption-related topics. Some programs are free or are very reasonably priced. Would apply to non-adopted individuals as well.

• **The Cradle-Center for Lifelong Adoption Support**
  – Fee-for-service therapy for adopted children and families
  – Offices in Evanston and Oak Park
Conclusion

“Though your child has experienced a tremendous loss, it is important to remember that, while we may have our unique needs and challenges, adoptees are not broken and should be loved, cared for, and treated as whole beings.”

—Christina Romo