

SEVEN CORE ISSUES IN ADOPTION

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ACT

Participant
Resource
Notebook

The Core
Issues

Practice
Tools

	ADOPTED PERSON	BIRTH PARENT	ADOPTIVE PARENT
Loss	Fear, ultimate abandonment; loss of biological, genetic, cultural history; issues of holding on and letting go.	Ruminate about lost child; initial loss merges with other life events; leads to social isolation; changes in body and self image; relationship losses.	Infertility equated with loss of self and immortality; issues of entitlement lead to fear of loss of child / over-protection; loss of impact on child's early years.
Rejection	Personalize placement for adoption as rejection; issues of self-esteem; can only be "chosen" if first rejected; anticipate rejections; misperceive situations.	Reject selves as irresponsible, unworthy because permitted adoption / rights terminated; turn these feelings against self as deserving rejection; come to expect and cause rejection	Ostracized because of procreation difficulties; scapegoat partner; may expel child to avoid anticipated rejection; child's behaviors may cause rejection by others.
Shame/ Guilt	Deserving misfortune; shame of being different; may take defensive stance / anger.	Party to guilty secret; shame / guilt for placing child; judged by others; double-bind: not okay to keep child and not okay to place.	Shame of infertility; view childlessness as curse / punishment; religious crisis; shame about child's behaviors; guilt if they don't like the child.
Grief	Grief may be overlooked in childhood, blocked by adult, leading to depression / acting out; may grieve lack of "fit" in adoptive family.	Grief acceptable only short period but may be delayed 10-15 years; lack rituals for mourning; sense of shame blocks grief.	Must grieve loss of "fantasy" child; unresolved grief may block attachment to child; may experience child's grief as rejection.
Identity	Deficits in information may impede integration of identity; may try on identities of birth family in order to create sense of belonging; may see search for identity in early pregnancies.	Child as part of identity goes on without knowledge; diminished sense of self and self-worth may interfere with future parental desires.	Experience diminished sense of continuity of self; are and are not parents; role confusion about being a foster parent versus an adoptive parent
Intimacy	Fear of getting close and risking reenacting earlier losses; concerns over possible incest; attachment issues may lower capacity for intimacy.	Difficulty resolving issues with other birth parent may interfere with future relationships; intimacy may equate with loss.	Unresolved grief over losses may lead to intimacy problems; child may split the parents; may avoid closeness with child to avoid loss.
Control	Adoption alters life course; not party to initial decisions; haphazard nature of adoption removes cause and effect continuum.	Relinquishment seen as out of control, disjunctive event; lack of control over court process; interrupt drive for self-actualization.	Adoption experiences lead to sense of "learned helplessness;" child welfare system seems to have control; mastery linked to procreation; lack generativity.