

## ADOPTION PLANNING: SPECIFIC ISSUES FOR MARRIED COUPLES AND ADOLESCENTS\*



# ACT

Participant  
Resource  
Notebook

*Family  
Constellation  
Challenges*

Practice  
Tools

### Married Couples

Working with married couples towards adoption planning for a child already born, or to be born within that relationship, calls for delicate and specific exploration of issues that are unique. The following is a suggested list of areas to discover together with your clients.

- How did you come to consider adoption, which of you addressed the idea?
- What was your partner's response, if they know about your adoption consideration?
- Thinking back to the first time adoption came to you as a possible plan, was that in the middle of a crisis? Has that crisis remained, strongly impacting your life? Has that crisis been present many times before? If so, when does it pass, if at all?
- What other options, if any, have you considered at this point?
- Have you shared this thought with others that are family or friends?
- What has been their response, and if one of shock or disapproval, what have you done with that reaction?
- Do you need for this decision need to be supported by family?
- Is there one person who sees your thinking as reasonable, someone that you feel is unconditional in their support?
- In your marital relationship, when hard decisions are made, how do you each handle repercussions from that choice?
- In your relationship, is there a tendency to blame?
- If you were not married to the child's (mother) (father) would you be considering adoption for this child?
- If you have other children, how do you envision talking about adoption for this baby to them? Do you talk of your pregnancy with them? Do they identify with this child as their brother or sister? Do they have a "sibling dream" of their role with this child in your home? If the baby is not coming home to you, can you create a dream for them to have that speaks to their still being a brother or sister but not living together with the new baby?



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- What ways do you think your other children might express their fears about the unknown of adoption for this baby? Do you worry that they will think they are also going to be separated from you?
- Are you making a choice of adoption OR your marriage? Picture choosing adoption to save the marriage, and then divorce comes along at a later time? You will have then lost both the child and the marriage, and cannot go back. Can you predict what that feeling might be like?
- After you have given birth, and you return to your home without your baby, what do you anticipate the reactions of others to be? Can you say out loud some of the things people might bring up? What kind of a plan might you have to help deflect those comments? How much information would you want to share? How do you handle those questions in the presence of your other children? How do you feel your co-workers might react? Do you feel this decision might impact your job?
- Who can you count on to not judge you?
- Where and to whom will you go for support after your child joins an adoptive family?
- Suppose over time you feel you've made a choice at this juncture that no longer seems right. You have come to believe you made a mistake, or your spouse feels so. What do you do then with the irretrievable nature of this choice, one that cannot be undone?

## Adolescents

Working with adolescents towards adoption planning often follows a pattern that is developmentally predictable. There are often intense, draining, vacillating and erratic patterns to the counseling sessions. The work varies depending on whether the client is an early teen or a later age teen.

### *Counseling with teens under 16*

It is likely with a young teen that they have been “brought” to you by another individual. It is likely that they are relying heavily on parents for just about everything. It is important to determine if there is enough support and “room” for them to ask for help from those closest to them.

- How did you get here today? (younger teens will literally report their mode of transportation, more mature will describe who referred them, encouraged them, or insisted on their coming)
- What do you think I can help you with?
- When did you know you were pregnant, and at that point what did you do?
- When and how did you tell your parents, or other adults in your life?
- When you thought about sharing this with your parents, what did you think would happen? What *did* happen? Were you surprised? After you told them, did they back off, or



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did they come up with suggestions of things you should do. Was anyone you told insisting you “give up your baby?”

- Tell me what adoption means...
- Do you know anyone who is adopted?
- What do you think your friends think of adoption?
- Tell me what your favorite day might be right now?
- If you had a baby with you, how would that day be the same or different?
- Are you feeling safe living at home?
- Does your being able to live at home depend on keeping or not keeping your baby?
- If you didn't live at home, is there another place to live that you think is a good idea?
- If you imagine your baby living with other parents, what kind of family would that be? Can you close your eyes and see your baby at his first birthday? Who is he with? What is he doing?
- Can you see yourself when you are 17....22....35? What are you doing, who do you live with?
- Tell me what I would see if you were really angry!
- Tell me what I would see when you are very sad or lonely.
- Who helps you with sad feelings?
- Who do you want to think good things about you? Who is most important?

### *Counseling with teens older than 16*

With older teens 16 and up, the goal might be to determine how that young person deals with decision making, who their support system is and how independent they see themselves. In particular, how well do they think independently, and how much do they need approval.

- How did you get here today? (younger teens will literally report their mode of transportation, more mature will describe who referred them, encouraged them, or insisted on coming)
- What do you think I can help you with?
- When did you know you were pregnant, and at that point what did you do?
- When you found out you were pregnant, what were the first thoughts that came to you? (Some will jump right to parenthood kinds of responses, others will talk only of the “news”)
- Is the baby's father someone who you can count on? Does he know? Tell me about his family.
- When you think about adoption and your child, what do you imagine?
- Have you ever made a really big decision?
- If you have, did you have the right to change your mind later?
- Can you imagine living away from your family? What would that look like?
- What happens when you make decisions your parents don't agree with?
- If your parents have a strong opinion about what you should do right now, how does that opinion feel to you?
- Tell me about the people in your life who will support you no matter what.
- If you imagined your child growing up in another family, would it be a family like yours, or quite different?

- Do you feel most comfortable with situations where you have lots of details, or are you okay with situations where its all new and you don't know what's going to happen.
- You have some dreams for what its going to be like at age 18, can you tell me about them?
- What do you want life to be like when you're 22?
- When you're feeling lonely, what do you do? Who do you go to? Are you okay with being alone?



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\*Adapted by Gayle Ward, M.A. from:  
Silverstein, D.N., & Roszia, S.K. (1994). *Understanding adoption today*. Jacksonville, FL: Daniel Memorial  
Institute.

## YOUR ROLE IN PREGNANCY COUNSELING KNOWING YOUR GOALS...

*Gayle Ward, M.A.*



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Are you in tune with your own view of adoption as a plan for a child? What are your views about a parent who is seeking to relinquish? Do you have an internal agenda with reference to supporting them towards adoption, or talking them out of it?

Knowing your own style with clients, what are the first three things you do to create an atmosphere of acceptance with reference to adoption planning?

What specific words could you use during the first session to give the client room to express fears and doubts about adoption? What words might you use to elicit their anticipated fears?

What would you look for to determine the underlying reason your client came to you for consideration of adoption planning, i.e. are they here to please another; are they aware of their options?

Specifically, what tasks would you frame as immediate, within a few weeks of starting sessions, and what tasks are long term?

How might you introduce adoption as a true option? What words would you use to know what the client's pre-determined stereotyped view of adoption is?

To empower your client, are there books and specific articles you might give them to take home, and other ways you can use to educate them about a choice they may know little about? Are you in touch with other parents who have chosen adoption for their children who might be a resource to you?

What myths about adoption might impact your client? Are you familiar enough with the cultural view of adoption to help them grasp what the difference is between the general public view and reality? How might the media impact your client in reference to adoption?

How might you teach that adoption is a lifelong process, and that the emotions surrounding it evolve and change over time? Has your client ever experienced acute grief? Is there "pre-grieving" going on pre-birth? If not, how do you prepare the parent for the impact of overwhelming feelings when the child is born?

Looking at the time frame from your client's first call to your agency seeking counsel about adoption, to the point at which their child is growing up in an adoptive home, what are the key pieces your client should know? How can you help them anticipate the stages of letting go? Can they anticipate what stumbling blocks might come in two months, six months, two years, ten years?

Can you help predict for your client their expected grief process that will unfold? What will be their coping tools for both anticipated grief, and the reality of separation from their child?



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What hurts and roadblocks might they predict they will face in the hospital during birth? What will their discharge plan be? Who will be with them? Are there concrete plans for the adoptive parents to be with them, separate from them, in the nursery with the baby? How do they picture the hospital experience? Who will care for the child in the hospital? Who will name the baby? Who will choose the child's doctor? Who will walk out the door with the child? Who will leave the hospital first? When might they see each other again? Who will be there at home for that first long day of separation from the child?

What support groups or services are in your community that you can refer your client to for the long term coping process?

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