

Five Common Post Adoption Challenges

Adopted persons may deal with a range of issues at different points in their lives. Read the information below from the Child Welfare Information Gateway to gain a better understanding of what those challenges might include.

Loss and Grief

The loss of birth parents as a result of adoption may set the stage for feelings of grief for many adopted persons. The loss experienced by adopted persons may be characterized as ambiguous loss, or the loss of someone who still is (or who may be) alive (Powell & Afifi, 2005). This type of loss also may increase the feelings of uncertainty (e.g., “Do I resemble my biological parents?”) an adopted person feels. Adopted persons who feel secure in their adoption and have open adoptive family communication may be better able to manage their uncertainty and grief (Powell & Afifi). Additionally, adopted persons may have difficulty finding an outlet because their grief may not be recognized by others. Feelings of loss and grief, as well as anger, anxiety, or fear, may especially occur during emotionally charged milestones, such as marriage, the birth of a child, or the death of a parent. Adopted persons may also suffer secondary losses. For instance, along with the loss of their birth mother and birth father, adopted persons may experience the loss of brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins. There also may be a loss of cultural connection or language (in cases of intercountry or transracial adoption). For those who were adopted as older children, there may be a loss of friends, foster families, pets, schools, neighborhoods, and familiar surroundings.

Identity Development

Identity formation begins in childhood and takes on increased importance and prominence during adolescence (Grotevant, 1997). Adoption is a significant aspect of identity for adopted persons, even when they are adults (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2009). The task of identity development may be more difficult for an adopted person because of the additional issues related to adoption, such as why he or she was placed for adoption, what became of the birth parents, does he or she have siblings, and whether he or she resembles the birth parents in looks or in other characteristics. Adoption remains an important aspect of identity throughout adulthood, and one study described the development of adult adoptive identity as having five phases:

- No awareness/denying awareness: The adopted person does not overtly acknowledge adoption issues.
- Emerging awareness: The adopted person views adoption as a positive influence and recognizes some issues, but he or she is not ready to explore these issues.
- Drowning in awareness: The adopted person has feelings of loss, anger, and sadness about the adoption.
- Reemerging from awareness: The adopted person recognizes the issues related to the adoption, but also sees the positive aspects and is working toward acceptance.
- Finding peace: The adopted person has worked through his or her issues with the adoption and is moving toward peace and acceptance (Penny, Borders, & Portnoy, 2007).

Self-Esteem

Often accompanying these issues of identity are issues of self-esteem—that is, how the adopted person feels about him or herself. A number of studies have found that, while adopted persons are similar to nonadopted persons in most ways, they often score lower on measures of self-esteem and self-confidence (Borders, Penny, & Portnoy, 2000; Sharma, McGue, & Benson, 1996). This result may reflect the fact that some adopted persons may view themselves as different, out-of-place, unwelcome, or rejected.

QUOTE OF THE QUARTER

“We look at adoption as a very Sacred exchange. It was not done lightly on either side.”

Jamie Lee Curtis, *Adoptive Mother*



Five Common Post Adoption Challenges Continued

Self-Esteem (continued)

Some of these feelings may result from the initial loss of birth parents and from growing up away from birth parents, siblings, and extended family members. They also may be caused by an ongoing feeling of being different from nonadopted people who know about their genetic background and birth family and who may be more secure about their own identity as a result. Additionally, some adopted persons report that secrecy surrounding their adoption contributes to low self-esteem.

Thinking about the Adoption

The amount and degree of thought an adopted person devotes to his or her adoption may change over time and may vary based on each person's circumstances. For example, the birth of a child to an adopted person, which may be the first experience with a biological family member, may cause the adopted person to revisit earlier issues of identity. The new parent may also be prompted to think about what his or her birth mother experienced in giving birth and what the birth mother and father may have experienced in making the adoption placement decision. Adopted adults who become new parents may be sympathetic to the difficulties of their birth parents, or they may wonder how their birth parents could ever have placed them for adoption. In a study of adopted adolescents' thinking about adoption, 13 percent never thought about adoption, 54 percent thought about their adoption once a month or more, and 27 percent thought about their adoption once a week or more, with males thinking about their adoption more frequently than females (Kohler, Grotevant, & McRoy, 2002). Adolescents in closed adoptions were no more likely to have increased frequency of thought about their adoption than those in open adoptions.

Seeking Genetic Information

Adopted persons often lack birth family genetic and medical history. This information can be vitally important to the diagnosis and treatment of genetically based medical conditions (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, 2010). In addition, being asked to supply medical history information at a doctor's appointment may make adopted persons acutely aware of how they differ from those who were not adopted. Finding out later in life that they were adopted as infants puts adopted persons at risk of misdiagnoses or other medical issues due to their long-held assumption of a family medical history that they later find is incorrect. Additionally, when adopted persons plan to get married or become a parent, they may want to know about genetic characteristics their children may inherit. In many cases, nonidentifying information, such as medical history, may be placed in the adoption file by the birth parents or agency at the time of the adoption. Adopted persons are allowed access to this nonidentifying information, which is usually at least as old as the adopted person. In some States, adopted persons can petition a judge to have their adoption records opened, and some judges will agree to do so in order to provide urgently needed medical information. However, obtaining access to information provided by the birth parents at the time of the adoption may not be sufficient to provide a full medical history. For example, a birth parent, sibling, or grandparent may later develop or be diagnosed with a genetic disease or condition. It is more useful if birth parents regularly update the file that is kept with the adoption agency, attorney or central adoption registry. Additionally, those in open adoptions may be able to get this information directly from their birth parents.

Obtained from the Child Welfare Information Gateway, www.childwelfare.gov.

Child Welfare Information Gateway is a service of the:

Children's Bureau, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb>

Administration for Children and Families, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <https://www.hhs.gov/>

The Post Adoption Resource Center Region 5 Serves Adoptive and Guardian families in the following counties: Barry, Branch, Calhoun, Eaton, Hillsdale, Ingham, Jackson, Kalamazoo, Lenawee, Livingston, Monroe, St. Joseph, and Washtenaw

Holidays Strategies for Adoptive Families

While the upcoming holidays can often be a joyful and exciting time for families, it may be challenging for children who were adopted to transition into feeling like they are a part of the family during such a hectic time of the year. Memories of the holiday season may be painful for your child, and it is important as adoptive parents that you try to understand your child's complex feelings. We have compiled some suggested strategies to help everyone enjoy the holidays.

One way to make your child feel more welcomed during this time of year is to **maintain their traditions**. In Leslie Culpepper's article, "[Holidays with Your Adopted Child](#)," she suggests keeping communication lines open with your child's biological family if it is a functional relationship. A holiday tradition that you could create to help maintain your child's relationship with their biological family might be to start a gift-exchange or an annual holiday brunch. If your child was adopted from another culture, perhaps incorporate traditions from their birth culture so that they know that their culture is important to your family.

Creating new traditions with your child will help strengthen your family bond rather than making them feel like an outsider during this time of year. It is important to incorporate your child into pre-existing traditions that your family may have, but creating new traditions with your child will help them feel like less of an outsider. Suggestions for creating new traditions can be found at <http://www.cozi.com/live-simply/50-holiday-traditions>.

Acknowledging your child's feelings during this time of year is crucial. [The Vaughan Firm's blog](#) suggests asking your child questions, such as "Are you thinking about your birth mom?" It is important to acknowledge that your child may be feeling sad even during the time of year that is supposed to be happy. This helps your child trust you with their thoughts and feelings.

Another way to help your child during this time of year is to **maintain routines**. This helps children feel that

they are in control even during a season that can often be hectic. Consistency is comforting to children.

Lastly, you may need to **prepare your extended family** for the changes that your family is going through. In some situations, it may be best to avoid large family gatherings based on your child's needs. Instead, maybe plan on seeing your family in smaller groups rather than all at once, especially if this is the first time that your child is meeting your family. It is important to help your adopted child to not feel overwhelmed or isolated from the rest of the family.



Summary of Holiday Strategies for Adoptive Families

- Maintain child's traditions
- Create new traditions
- Acknowledge your child's feelings
- Maintain routines
- Prepare your extended family

Credit to www.afamilyforeverychild.org



Extended Families and Adoption

It's supposed to be "warm and fuzzy time," and during the holidays most families anticipate spending time with relatives. Thanksgiving and Christmas get-togethers give us a chance to build connections with people we love who live far away. For the adoptive parent however, these get-togethers can be the source of a lot of holiday anxiety. Adoptive parents want their children to be loved and accepted by their extended families, but many are anxious about how to approach the subject.

Often time's family members need to be educated about adoption. Many may not know positive adoption language, and we worry that someone may say something that hurts our child. We wonder if our relatives will be sensitive to our children's feelings. Other relatives may feel entitled to details about your child's birth family or may not fully understand the need to respect our children's privacy when it comes to their adoption stories. As an adoptive parent, you have learned much in your journey about your child and their needs. Did you know what positive adoption language was or what questions were inappropriate before you started your adoption journey? Fostering relationships between your child and your extended family will take time, but there are ways to get your family up to speed.

- Politely but strongly emphasize that your child's story and the details of it belong solely to your child. They are the only ones who can share that information and will only share as much as they are comfortable sharing.
- Explain how certain aspects of your child's behavior may be influenced by experiences before adoption. For example, if your child has trouble sharing, explain to your family that she is especially protective of her toys because in the foster home she did not have items that belonged only to her. Then explain how you are trying to help her overcome this.



- Having your child meet with your relatives before the holidays can take the pressure off. It's much easier to bond in a low-key situation where expectations are not so high. If this is impossible because your relatives live far away, write them letters and include pictures of your child. Explain your concerns, what positive adoption language is, and why it is important to be respectful of your child's birth family.
- If your relatives are up for reading, suggest articles and books for them to read, or send them to websites like [Creating a Family](#) that have useful resources for anyone who wants to learn more about adoption.
- Observe similarities between your child and your relatives to encourage connections. Maybe your daughter is sassy like Aunt Martha, or maybe your son likes toy cars like Uncle Carl did as a child. Maybe your child likes to tell stories like Grandpa or bake like Grandma.

As your child grows, these people will become a network of support, so it's very critical that your child feels that they accept her as one of their own. These bonds will provide your child with peace of mind that she, her children, and her grandchildren will forever be a part of your family.



Region 5 Meetings and Support Groups

Build connections with and get support from others who truly understand!

In addition to adult meetings, PARC youth groups for older children and childcare for younger ones are available at most meetings. Please RVSP to Rachel_Kornilakis@judsoncenter.org.

Lunch at the PARC now in Ann Arbor and Battle Creek!

Bring a brown bag lunch; PARC will provide drinks.

When: Third Wednesday of each month

Time: 12:00-1:00 p.m.

Location: Judson Center at 3840 Packard Ave, Suite 170, Ann Arbor, MI 48108.

When: First Thursday of each month

Time: 12:00-1:00 p.m.

Location: Family Enrichment Center, on the. Location: 415 28th St S Battle Creek, MI 49015

Fabulous Foster and Adoption Group Ann Arbor

When: First Monday of each month (Except for January where we will meet the second Monday instead due to the holidays.) Time: 6:00-8:00 p.m. Location: Arbor Bridge Church, 2500 S. Main Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48103. Potluck dinner, please bring a dish to pass if you are able. Nominal fee for childcare.

Online Calendar Link: www.parc-judson.org/calendar

Kalamazoo County Support Group

When: Fourth Tuesday of each month

Time: 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Location: St. Ambrose Church, 1628 East G Avenue, Parchment, 49004. This group is offered by the Adoptive Family Support Network. (AFSN contact sgarcia@afsn.org).

Free One Day Conference - "Understanding Complex Kids and Knowing How to Help Them"

When: Saturday, January 21, 2017 Time: 9:00AM-4:00PM

Location: Kalamazoo Regional Educational Service Agency KRESA Service Center 1819 East Milham, Portage, MI 49002.

This conference is for parents and professionals who want to learn more about parenting children who have complex histories, experienced trauma or possible prenatal exposure to drugs and alcohol.

Registration link: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/understanding-kids-with-complex-needs-and-knowing-how-to-help-them-tickets-30040370557>

Adoptive Family Resource Spotlight:

Heather T. Forbes, Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Adoptive Mother

Excerpts from Heather's Best-Seller: Beyond Consequences, Logic and Control Volume 2

"Love-based parenting elevates the importance of the relationship to the highest position. No homework assignment, no chore, and no social etiquette is ever more important than the parent-child relationship. Maintaining connectedness and attunement, thereby sustaining the balance of love of self and love of child, is the primal outcome of every interaction the parent has with the child. When this is achieved, the other less significant items will take care of themselves."

Find more information about Heather Forbes' published works and trainings at:

<http://www.beyondconsequences.com/about-heather>

Contact Us



Please feel welcome to contact the PARC office in your region, visit our website for information, or connect with us via social media!

Region 5 Office
3840 Packard Rd.
Ste. 170
Ann Arbor, MI 48108
734-794-2988

Region 6 Office
2503 S. Linden Rd.
Ste. 130
Flint, MI 48532
810-732-8510

Website: www.parc-judson.org



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