



CELIA CENTER
Adoption | Foster Care | Support





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7 Common themes in Adoption:

Loss

Rejection

Shame and Guilt

Grief

Identity

Intimacy

Mastery and Control



SEVEN CORE ISSUES IN ADOPTION

ADOPTEE	BIRTH PARENT	ADOPTIVE PARENT
<u>LOSS</u>		
Fear ultimate abandonment; loss 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 & immortality. Issues of entitlement lead to fear of loss of child and overprotection.
<u>REJECTION</u>		
Personalize placement for adoption as rejection; issues of self-esteem; can only be chosen if first rejected. Anticipate rejection; mis-perceive situations.	Reject selves as irresponsible, unworthy because permit adoption; turn these feelings against self as deserving rejection; come to expect and causes rejection.	Ostracized because of procreation difficulties; may scapegoat partner; expect rejection; may expel adoptee to avoid anticipated rejection.
<u>GUILT/SHAME</u>		
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 OK to keep child and not OK to place.	Shame of infertility; may believe childlessness is curse or punishment; religious crisis.
<u>GRIEF</u>		
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 work.	Must grieve loss of “fantasy” child; unresolved grief may block attachment to adoptee; may experience adoptee’s grief as rejection.
<u>IDENTITY</u>		
Deficits in information may impede integration of identity; may see search for identity in early pregnancies, extreme behaviors in order to create sense of belonging.	Child is part of identity goes on without knowledge; diminished sense of self & self-worth; may interfere with future parental desires.	Experience diminished sense of continuity of self; are not parents
<u>INTIMACY</u>		
Fear getting close and risk reenacting earlier losses; Concerns over possible incest: bonding 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/marital problems; may avoid closeness with adoptee to avoid loss.
<u>CONTROL</u>		
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, interrupts drive for self-actualization.	Adoption experiences lead to “learned helplessness” sense mastery linked to procreation lack generativity.

1986 Silverstein & Kaplan



Emotional Coping Skills

B = Breathe & make a choice of the following:

W = Walk Away

I = Use an “I Message”

- Say “**I FEEL ...**” **basic feelings...**
- SAD, MAD, SCARED, or GLAD *then...*
- Say “**I NEED ...**” ...the 5 **A**’s **basic needs**
- **ALONE TIME**, **AFFECTION**- smile, hug, high-five, **ATTENTION** - listening from someone
APPRECIATION- what am I doing well at?
OR **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT** – does someone get me, see me, hear me?

S = Share with someone what happened i.e. friend, listening partner, therapist.

E = Express yourself: write your story, write a letter to one of the 7 core themes, externalize thoughts and feelings into poetry, art, journaling, dance, or music.