

PARENT PREPARATION

By Mary Paul

One might ask the question as to why adoptive parents need preparation when biological parents very often have absolutely no clue or training to raise children. However there are specific issues that need to be addressed by an adoptive parent with reference to a child relinquished or abandoned.

Parents need to be educated on the impact of institutionalization both in infants and older children. At times it may result in developmental delays with regard to speech and language, emotional and psychological development.

Families need to know about attachment and bonding. The basics of how bonding and attachment occur and how to facilitate bonding. Infants are not immune from having attachment difficulties too. Parents need to address these issues should they occur with their child. Grieving in adopted children impacts attachment.

Issues of abandonment, separation and loss issues for the child as they relate to placement, during initial adjustment and at each stage of the child's development should be dealt with.

Parents need preparation on the various ways children grieve when they are separated from all that is familiar in their life and how they may experience that loss, as well as everyday events perceived as losses during long-term adjustment. Families should be aware that grieving has no time line and may occur at any one or at numerous stages of development.

Adoptive parents need help to assess their personal level of self-esteem and their ability to handle rejection, so that they can handle rejection, if that is an aspect of the child's behavior during the attachment process.

Parents need to know that there are no "perfect" children, just as there are no "perfect" parents. When problems come up that feel overwhelming, adoptive parents need to seek help and be open to changing their own perceptions as they learn and grow with their adopted children.

Parents need to know that they may parent as they were parented. If there is any history of emotional, physical, substance or sexual abuse in the background of the adoptive parents they need to adequately address the issues

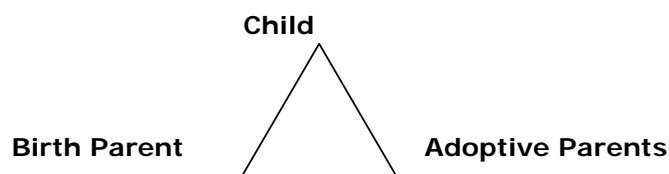
If there is a history of infertility has the family had the opportunity to address this issue? What is their present attitude regarding infertility? Can they separate infertility from adoption?

Adoptive parents need to assess how they cope with crises and handle stress. Adoptive parents need to be counseled about the significance of a will for minor children and appointing guardians for a child.

Parenting is a continued process.

Adoption is not a one-time event, but a life long process. Parents need to have realistic expectations regarding the child's adjustment into the family.

Adoption Triad



Both birth and adoptive parent contributes to who the child is.

- Birth parents – genetic make-up, seeds of talents, possible nurturing of child.
- Adoptive parents – nurture, home, family, may be a new culture, language, opportunities to develop the seeds of talents. .

Temperament:

- Babies are often described as easy or headstrong
- An adoptive child will be just as unique and will come into the family with his/her own unique temperaments.
- As parents one has to learn the child's temperaments and nurture it for positive qualities.

Parents will benefit from knowing and understanding Erickson's model of human development.

We all go through stages.

Infancy, Toddler hood, middle childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood.

At every stage the needs of a child are unique and in their best interests adoptive parents will be one step ahead if they are fore warned.

1. Discuss the importance of giving your child his/her story – prepare your child to answer questions.
2. Discuss between privacy issues in adoption vs. secrecy
3. When a child who is a toddler or older is placed with a family for the purpose of adoption, that child is emotionally going to experience the same developmental pattern in building a relationship with that family.
4. The family emotionally also goes through the same developmental process in building their own relationship with the child.

Infancy 0 – 12 month:

1. Everything is new for the child and for you
2. You have your theories
3. You are now adjusting to reality
4. Start by incorporating the word adoption into your conversation with your child
5. Make a life book

Toddler hood – 18 months to 5 years:

1. Children love to hear their story
2. Your child will use the word adoption and retell their story with joy
3. Your child will not recognize the losses represented in adoption
4. Questions such as 'where did I come from?' ' was I born in.....?' will arise
5. Keep your answers simple and truthful
6. Guard against pseudo maturity

Middle Childhood - 5 to 11 years:

1. Your child is now dealing with adoption outside the family
2. Help determine what they want to share and with whom
3. Assure them that they do not have to discuss this with everyone
4. Distinguish the difference between what is family information and what is information for others.
5. Your child is beginning to understand more about adoption
 - a. Why was I placed for adoption?

- b. What happened to my birth mother and birth father?
- c. Whose fault is it?
- d. Was something wrong with me?
- e. Do my birth parents think about me?
- f. Recognize that the child is beginning to experience some losses
- g. Some space for grieving
 - You are an adult and need to look at your child's needs and not your own need to avoid them
 - Your own losses in adoption may resurface later
 - Make other adoptive families part of your lives
 - Seemingly innocent school assignments may carry emotional weight for an adoptee.

Adolescence – 12 to 17 years:

- A time for all of us to ask questions about self-identity.
- Your child may realize that other people's decision have had a profound impact on his life.
- This impact deals with both the losses in adoption as well as lack of control.
- Provide a safe and open environment to express what he feels without guilt
- Make yourself available for these discussions with your child
- You may or may not have more information to give
- Keep the dialogues open by making affirmation statement
- Do not under estimate any information or items you may have on his life before joining your family
- Be truthful and honest with your child
- Give what information you feel you can,
- Typical teen issues such as questioning your authority

Young Adulthood – 18 to 24 years:

Your child may feel he has the right to information on his birth parents.

They may seek this information without your involvement

As your child seeks a life partner, he/she may fantasize or worry about the possibility of marrying someone who is an unknown blood relation.

In the union territory of Car Nicobar there are no orphans because informal adoption of children has always been an integral part of their lives. However when it is time for them to find partners the adoptive parents give them the information about their biological families .

Andrew Carnegie a young Scotsman grew up to be a leading manufacturer of steel in the U.S. His principle was 'dealing with people is like digging for gold'. You have to move tons of dirt to get even an ounce of gold. What is one looking for? There is something positive in every person. This principle can be applied for adoption. Can the adoptive parent reach the child deep inside?

Bonding and Attachment:

Holly Van Gulden and Lisa Bartels Rabb define a healthy parent child relationship as composed of 3 different packs.

- Trust interaction
 - Positive Interaction
 - Claiming and belonging
- } 3 legged stool

The issue in bonding is TRUST not love

Adoption:

Parents need to understand the losses of all members of the adoption triad. To develop understanding regarding the unique gains which building their families by adoption offer them.

- Losses of birth parent
- Loss of child
- Loss of Adoptive parent

Birth Parent.

- Loss of relationship with child
- Loss of part of self
- Loss of information about the child
- Loss of control in decisions affecting the child after relinquishment

Adoptive parent:

- Loss of control of process
- Loss of early times with their child
- Loss of seeing the child's first smile etc.
- Biological connection to child
- Experiences associated with pregnancy giving birth, nursing a child

Child:

- Birth parents
- Sources of information
- Caregivers
- Familiar food, sleeping arrangements, smells etc.
- Grieving losses

Gains discussion:

Every adoption includes gains.

Birth parents:

- Making an adoption plan for the child
- Possibility of a new relationship for her child
- Hope that her child will be well cared and loved
- Hope that the child will think positively of her.

Adoptive Parents:

- Child to love and cherish
- Opportunity to be a parent
- Fulfillment of a dream
- Building your family

Child:

- Adoptive parents
- New opportunities in life
- Family and relationships
- New environment

Seven Core or fundamental issues related to adoption:

Adoptive parents certainly need to understand the core issues of Loss, rejection, guilt/shame, grief, identity intimacy/relationship and control gain.

Loss:

Without this there would be no adoption. Adoption transposes adopted persons from one location in the human mosaic into a totally new configuration.

The acceptance and resolution of these losses set the tone for the adoption process. The losses need to be identified and accepted.

Rejection:

Young children take responsibility for what happened. Why did she leave me? Fear of repeated rejection can chip away at child's self esteem. There cannot be an acceptance by adoptive parents unless there has been a rejection at first by the birth parents

Guilt and Shame:

Adoptees feel there is something wrong with them. They need to understand that adults are responsible and not them. Unnecessary and misplaced guilt on self whether it is the child or adoptive parents can hamper relationships. The guilt and shame a birth parent goes through needs to be dealt with adequate counselling.

Grief:

Every loss must be grieved. Adopted persons should understand and label the feelings of loss. These feelings include numbness, sadness, anger, depression, emptiness or anxiety.

Adoptive parents help their children best when they allow them to express their grief openly, listen carefully and offer comfort and hope.

Adoptive parents need help as they go through the grief of not having a biological child.

Identity:

Identity is defined both by what one is and by what one is not. Adoptees born in one family lose an identity and then gain one from the adopting family.

Intimacy and Relationship:

The multiple ongoing losses in adoptions coupled with feelings of rejection, shared grief as well as confusion around identity may well affect the development of or quality of inter personal relationships or intimacy for adopted persons.

Adoptive parents find themselves challenged to move past their children's barriers and to create close, secure attachment and relationship with them.

Control Issues:

Adopted persons must come to terms with issues of mastering and control and own the gains they have made through adoption.

Adoptive parents must give children age appropriate choices and responsibilities throughout their development avoiding power struggles and control battles.

Adopted children often need extra attention paid to skill building and problem solving to regain a sense of control in their lives.

The experience of adoption then for adopted persons as well as adoptive parents can be one of loss, rejection, guilt/shame, diminished identity, thwarted intimacy and threats of self-control. The same feelings present in birth parents can be helped with counseling.

With the appropriate and timely preparation of parents interested in adoption of a child, one can aid in the foundation of healthy family life and relationships.

Bibliography- Parents in process- Holt International-USA
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