

# Life Cycle Adoption Issues At-A-Glance

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Life Stage	Child adopted at infancy to toddler age	Adoptive Parent	Birth Parent
<b>Prior to Adoption</b>		<p>Complex Losses and other emotions</p> <p>Anxiety about adoption process</p>	<p>Untimely Pregnancy</p> <p>Difficult Choices</p> <p>Complex Emotions</p>
<b>Initial Adjustment</b>	<p>Developing trust and security</p> <p>For <b>toddlers</b> being adopted - the experiences of loss, disorientation, adaptation and adjustment.</p>	<p>Provide love and security to baby.</p> <p><b>Parents of toddlers</b> try to understand their child's needs and to help them to adjust</p> <p>Happy to be parents</p> <p>Reality of becoming parents</p> <p><b>Emotional Challenges:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Release of complex emotions related to their family building experiences</li> <li>- Claiming and feeling entitled to parent their child.</li> </ul>	<p>Complex loss and other emotions</p> <p>Grief Process</p> <p>Multiple Losses which may also include loss of attention from adoptive parents</p> <p>Dual task of needing to understand the importance of the adoptive parents claiming their child; while experiencing their own needs and feelings of loss.</p> <p>Role and/or goal confusion</p>

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<b>Infancy to 2</b>	Feeling trust, security and usually happiness	Parenting joys and realities  <b>Emotional Challenges:</b> -Dual task of claiming their child and incorporating that their child has another set of parents. - Becoming comfortable talking about adoption with family, friends and to some degree strangers	Working through stages of grief.  Making peace with their decision.  Coming to terms with their role definition in relation to their child and sometimes to the adoptive parents as well.  Incorporating the role of birth parent into their sense of identity.  Developing other aspects of their lives.

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<b>Ages 2 - 4</b>	<p>Relatively happy time - the usual developmental issues for those adopted as newborns.</p> <p>May have separation, sleep or transition issues particularly if adopted as a toddler.</p> <p>Can grasp emotional message that adoption story is special and that he/she is loved.</p> <p>Parrot the adoption story but too young to grasp what adoption really means.</p> <p>*Question "did I grow in your tummy" often occurs at around age 4. Almost all children ask this question no matter how they entered their family.</p>	<p>May begin to think about how they will tell their child about adoption and how they will feel about doing this.</p> <p>Feelings about open adoption may shift as child develops and concerns for their child develop.</p> <p>Thinking about a second child and/or socializing with parents who are having second children can raise family building issues for adoptive parents.</p> <p>*Mother's first chance to answer a question related to adoption and to learn something about how she really feels about talking to her child about this.</p>	<p>Level of contact with adoptive family may shift.</p> <p>Not uncommon for some birthmothers to pull back from contact at this stage.</p> <p>Less frequently (particularly with adoptive families who have been educated about open adoption) some adoptive families pull back at this stage. This is extremely painful to birth mothers who placed their trust in these families.</p> <p>Anniversary Reactions and Memories</p> <p>Developing coping skills to live with loss.</p> <p>Developing other aspects of their lives.</p>

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<b>Ages 4 - 6</b>	<p>Likes adoption story and may parrot the story and usually accepts that this is happy "because my parents said so."</p> <p>Some children will grasp they have birth parents at this stage.</p> <p>Essentially still defines family by who lives in the home.</p> <p>Child begins to ask many questions about babies and birth; and begins to grasp that families are formed in different ways.</p> <p>Notices and has some feelings about differences, especially if in multicultural family.</p>	<p>Some parents may feel some uncertainty or insecurity talking to child about adoption and particularly talking about birth parents.</p> <p>Feelings and questions about being public about the way their family was built may occur.</p> <p>Who to tell? What to do about telling school?</p>	<p>Level of contact with adoptive family may shift.</p> <p>Anniversary Reactions and Memories</p> <p>Developing other aspects of their lives.</p>

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<b>Ages 7 to 12</b>	<p>Child understands basic concepts of adoption: that they have birth and adoptive parents; and that an adoption plan was made.</p> <p>With this increased awareness, may feel sadness about not knowing their birth parents and even have an adaptive grieving process.</p> <p>May wonder "Why didn't they keep me?" and/or feel an increasing interest in birth parents.</p> <p>Realizes "not everyone is adopted like me," and does not like being different.</p> <p>With the awareness that an adoption plan had been made, may feel some insecurity and wonder what makes love permanent. May test parents' attachment to them especially if feelings not validated.</p>	<p>As child's awareness increases, there is a normal phase of sadness and ambivalence about adoption. This can be painful for parents to experience.</p> <p>Compassion for their child's wishes to know more about birth family; and concerns about being compared to birth parents and the life that could have been.</p> <p>Parents need to learn to acknowledge the feelings that their child has are normal feelings for an adopted child.</p> <p>Concerns about how their child will understand the more difficult aspects of their stories.</p> <p>Concerns about their child's self esteem.</p> <p>Need to stay centered when their child tests the bounds of their relationship and family rules.</p>	<p>For the first time the child may express genuine interest in learning more about or seeing birth parents.</p> <p>Adoptive families may want to increase openness in adoption.</p> <p>May have increased opportunity for communication with child and adoptive parents.</p> <p>Impact of nurture on child can be disconcerting to birthparents.</p> <p>Child may or may not want to relate to them after meeting them once or twice and this may stir up additional feelings of loss and some disappointment.</p> <p>Anniversary Reactions and Memories</p> <p>Developing other aspects of their lives.</p>

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<p><b>Adolescence</b></p>	<p>Need to separate, become more independent and to define their identity.</p> <p>Adopted teens face dual task and complexity of identifying and psychologically separating from 2 sets of parents. This occurs even if the teen does not know much about the birth parents.</p> <p>Due to history of adoption, some fear loss of family (adoptive and birth parents) more intensely than other teens and this contributes to their anxiety and acting out.</p> <p>Issue of being <b>different</b> takes on a heightened meaning for adopted teens as they sort out nature vs. nurture vs. what is unique about them.</p> <p><b>Sexuality</b> brings with it more awareness about both birth parents and associations to their birth and losses. May wonder about birth father for the first time.</p>	<p>Feelings of loss, concerns about separation.</p> <p>Anxiety about unknowns related to child's genetic history. EG. Acting-out teens may be difficult to distinguish from mood disorders.</p> <p>Due to adoptive parents own history of losses, teens normal need to separate may feel harder in an adoptive family than in a biological family. Parents may need support during this time.</p> <p>Teen expression of being <b>different</b> can feel more rejecting to adoptive parents because these parents' contribution was nurture and not nature. When parents' values are rejected, they may take it more personally.</p> <p><b>Sexuality</b> and typical adolescent concerns plus any issues related to child's history.</p>	<p>Child may have genuine interest in learning more about or seeing birth parents</p> <p>Could provide a fuller story and a more specific explanation of the reasons for placement; and the medical and social history.</p> <p>Need to understand their wishes and capacity for relationship with child/teen. May need counseling at this time.</p> <p>Teen's <b>difference</b> from them based on the nurture they received may be experienced in many different ways by birth parents.</p> <hr style="border-top: 1px dashed #92d050;"/> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Infertility and Adoption Counseling Center</b></p> <p>Located in Pennington, Red Bank &amp; Summit New Jersey; and NYC  Phone: 609-737-8750  Email: <a href="mailto:JMantellMSW@aol.com">JMantellMSW@aol.com</a>  Website: <a href="http://iaccenter.com">http://iaccenter.com</a></p> </div>

