

MODULE XII: POST ADOPTION ISSUES FOR FAMILIES

Note Taking Guide

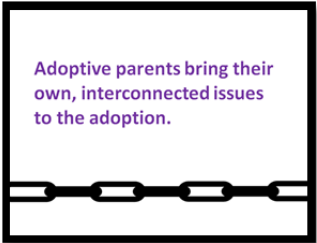
At the end of this session, you will be able to:

- Identify long-term issues impacting parents who adopt children from foster care
- Identify reasons why children need to understand their histories
- Explain different types of post adoption support for adoptive families

Adoption Dynamics Impacting Families

Adoption issues for parents include:

- Loss of the dream child
- Unmet expectations
- Infertility
- Feelings of failure and guilt
- Lack of entitlement
- Fear /threat from birth parents
- Isolation
- Control
- Overprotectiveness
- Sibling Issues

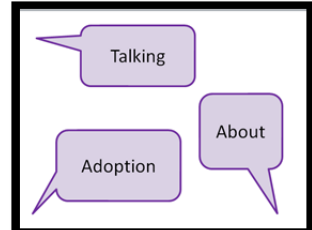


Adoptive parents bring their own, interconnected issues to the adoption.

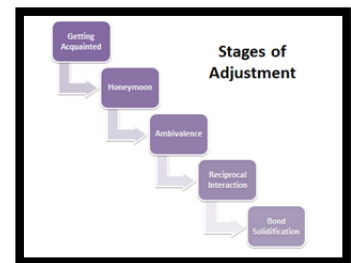
Talking About Adoption

Adoption should be an open and comfortable topic from the time the child enters the home. All known information should be shared with a child before the child begins adolescence. When talking about adoption, parents should:

- Initiate the conversation
- Use proper terminology
- Repeat the information
- Avoid judgement



Stages of Adjustment for New Adoptive Families



Post Adoption Services

Services should include:

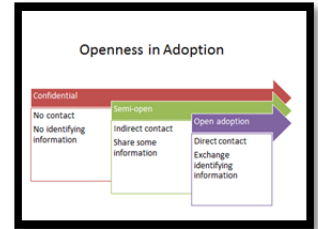
- Education and training
- Family associations
- Support groups
- Crisis intervention
- Networking/mentoring
- Family Therapy
- Respite care
- Additional Information
- Adoption Subsidies



Openness in Adoption

Advantages of openness:

- Access to information
- Familiarity and normalcy
- Connection and belonging
- Additional support
- Greater understanding of child’s history



List three ways you will use the information from this training.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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Survival Skills for Adoptive Parents

Acknowledge the child's grief and let the child understand your losses.

Network with other adoptive families to avoid isolation.

Don't over-react to problems.

Don't under-react to problems.

Talk openly about adoption in the family.

Encourage the child to have positive feelings about her birth family.

Get as much information as possible about the birth family and the child's history.

Always be honest in sharing information about the birth parent and the birth history.

Be alert for signs of distress when losses or transitions occur.

Splitting is best dealt with by establishing good communication and trust.

Avoid control battles.

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Adoption Terminology

Certain adoption-related terminology evokes negative feelings and should be avoided. Below are suggested alternatives that communicate the same information in more positive ways.

POSITIVE	NEGATIVE
Birthparent (father, mother) Biological (parent, child, ancestry)	Real parent Natural parent
Adopted person Adoptee Adult Adoptee	Adopted child when speaking of an adult
Adoption Triad Adoption Triangle Adoption plan was made for... The baby joined the family The older child moved in with his family An adoption was arranged for... He was placed	Adopted out Put up for adoption Given away Given up
Birthchild	Their own child Their real children
To opt for, to take on, to choose, to continue parenting	Keeping
Born outside of marriage Born to a single person (Divorced, Single, Never married, Unwed mother)	Illegitimate child Bastard Unwanted child
Termination of parental rights Unable to continue parenting Court termination	Gave up for adoption
Made an adoption plan Legally released Voluntary release	Gave away
My child	Adopted (when it is used constantly, it can become a label)
The waiting child Child with special needs Child available for adoption	Hard to place child
Search Reunion Making contact	Finding one's real family Locating one's parents

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“The Truth and Nothing but the Truth”

by Jayne Schooler, 1996

Sharing with Children about Their Unpleasant Past: The Adoptive Parents’ Challenging Task

“If we aren’t straight with our children about their past, they will pick up on it and fantasize something that may be much worse.” Carol Williams, University of North Carolina

Why is it difficult to do?

Sharing with a child about an unpleasant past is difficult for both workers and parents. The details seem far too painful. Yet, according to Claudia Jewitt, the missing pieces are often those pieces that make sense to the child and fill in the blanks.

“The information is a relief for these children,” Jewitt says “because it takes the responsibility for what happened off the child. They need to know that they weren’t placed for adoption because of something they did.”ⁱ

Knowing that it is the right thing to do, and knowing just how to do it are two different things. Just how does a worker or parent carry out this an unpleasant task?

Sharing about Abandonment

Adults abandon children when life circumstances become overwhelming. One thing a parent can point out, according to Jewitt is to ask the child, “Have you ever had a real hard thing to do? Did you get frustrated? What did you want to do? ‘Leave it’ is generally the answer. The child perhaps can related to the emotion of frustration.

Points parents and workers can make:

- People abandoned children out of fear, confusion and frustration
- Children are hard to care for and some people can not handle the responsibility
- A child’s behavior is not the cause of an abandonment
- Adoptive parents will not abandon the child in tough times

Sharing about Physical Abuse

A child is not slapped, screamed at, or hit because he is a bad child. He is treated that way because the adults in his life are out of control.

In helping a child to understand parental angry, Jewitt suggests to ask the child, “When you are angry, do you feel like hitting someone?” This question will help a child understand in a small way why people hit when they are angry, even though they know it is wrong.

Points parents and workers can make:

- When children are hit, the adult is out of control.
- Parents, often frustrated by life circumstances take their anger out on their children, even when they know it is wrong.
- It is possible that their parents experienced the same trauma of abuse growing up and it is the only way they know to handle their anger.

- It is not the child's fault for what the parent does.

Sharing about Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is a type of abuse that children do feel partially responsible. Perhaps the abuser indicted this to the child. An abuser perhaps told the child he wanted to be close to him in a special way, yet he knew it was wrong. The child often suffers with fear by keeping the secret and guilt after releasing the truth. Both those emotions must be recognized by parents and workers and addressed.

Points parents and workers can make:

- Sexual abuse is never the fault of the child
- The abuser touched you in ways that were not right and he/she is totally responsible for their actions.
- The child was completely right in disclosing the abuse, even if the remaining parent expressed anger or unbelief.
- The child may have feelings of anger and confusion that he/she should feel safe to express.

Sharing about Substance Abuse

Children who were placed for adoption may have vivid or vague memories of what life was like living with someone who abuses alcohol or drugs. Children need to have the opportunity to talk about their memories of not having food to eat, not having clean clothes to wear or a clean bed to sleep in. Children need to share their fears of the chronically absent, abusive or "spaced-out" parent.

Points parents and workers can make:

- You did not cause your parent's drinking or drug problem

- Your parent acted like they did toward you because he/she was taking drugs or drinking too much.
- They did not have control over their problem and you needed to be in a safe and secure place to finish growing up.

Sharing about Mental Illness

Claudia Jewitt says that "children who are placed for adoption because of a parent's mental illness can be helped to remember or understand behavior that used not consistent with appropriate parenting. Perhaps the child remembers the parent being depressed...or observed rapid mood changes making it hard to know what to do.

Jewitt encourages adoptive parents or workers to help the child make the connection with their life experiences. "They may have been afraid of something that other people told them not to be afraid, or they may have had difficulty knowing if they were dreaming or awake."ⁱⁱ

Points parents and workers can make:

- Your parent was very upset in his feelings and that kept him/her very confused. They couldn't make good decisions on how to take care of you.
- It was important that you could finish growing up in a safe home.
- Your parent had this problem before you were born.
- You didn't cause your parent's condition.

Sharing about Lawbreaking

Occasionally, children enter into the system, and eventually into foster care and adoption because their parent is incarcerated. Although this knowledge casts a shadow over the child's

perception of his parent, it is important he knows the truth.

Children need to understand that sometimes parents make bad decisions that have long term consequences. When their parent choose to break the law (and name the offense age appropriately), he/she will suffer long term consequences.

Points parents and workers can make:

- Your parent chose to break the law because he/she thought it would help him/her solve her problems. It did not.
- Your parent's decision resulted in their being sent to jail for a long time.
- Because they will be in jail for a long time, the court decided that it would be too long a time for you to be without a family.

Whatever the situation regarding a child's history, the truth is paramount. One adult adoptee, in learning of the criminal past of her parents said. "It is not a pretty truth, but at least it is the truth. Now I can go on with my life without the make-believe."

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Adoption Subsidy Options

An adoption subsidy is financial assistance that enables families to adopt children who have special needs. A child qualifies as having special needs if he meets one of the following criteria:

- Older;
- One of a sibling group;
- Has medical or developmental disabilities, or emotional problems;
- Has an emotional dependence on foster parents and therefore should not be moved;
- Has factors in the medical history or genetic background that place the child at risk of developing a disorder or condition later in life *or*
- Is a member of a minority ethnic or racial group.

There are three types of subsidies. They may be used separately or together, depending on the circumstances.

1) *Maintenance Subsidies*

These subsidies are used for food, clothing, shelter, school supplies, and personal incidentals. The child may also receive a Medicaid card. The **Federal** Maintenance Subsidy, Title IV-E is available for children whose parents met ADC (TANF) or SSI requirements. There are no income eligibility requirements for adoptive parents applying for Title IV-E subsidies. The **State** Adoption Maintenance Subsidy is available for children who are not eligible for Title IV-E. There are income restrictions for adoptive parents applying for a State Maintenance Subsidy.

2) *Special Services*

The Post Adoption Special Services Subsidy (PASSS) Program is available for a child's special needs not covered by insurance or other subsidies. PASSS is especially helpful for children whose special needs may not have been identified at the time of the adoption. PASSS is a unique subsidy designed to assist Ohio families after the finalization of their adoption. Adoptive families must apply for, and be determined eligible for PASSS. The subsidy is available to adoptive families, with the exception of step-parent adoptions, regardless of the type of adoption (international, attorney, public or private agency). The child does not have to meet either the federal or state definition of special needs. The program is implemented on a State Fiscal Year (July 1st and ends June 30th).

3) *Nonrecurring Costs*

This is a federal adoption subsidy which provides up to \$1,000 per child for adoption-related expenses, such as legal fees, medical exams, transportation costs, etc.

Note: Adoption Subsidy criteria can change. Please check with your agency for the most current information.