



## FAST FACTS: Grief & Loss in Adoption

Emotions of grief and loss are a natural, emotional process often connected to the adoption process. Adoption grief and loss does not lessen the love that is shared and experienced by an adoptive family. Who often grieves in adoption?

- The adopted child. Example: Why am I not with my birth family? This can be especially complex for youth adopted from foster care who have an attachment to their birth parents.
- The child's birth parents. Example: Did I make the right decision?
- Birth parents whose child was adopted from foster care. Example: How can they take our children? We tried hard; we did the best we could.
- Adoptive parents. Example: The loss associated with infertility-leading to adoption

Grief and loss in adoption is disenfranchised and complex grief, meaning that it is often not validated or recognized. Grief and loss often exist in emotional stages that are fluid, meaning that there is not a clear, organized progress to experiencing the stages.

Emotional stages of grief and loss can include shock and denial, anger, despair, mourning, guilt, and acceptance. Not all stages need to be experienced. Grief and loss are individualized.

For the adopted child, the emotions of grief and loss often co-exist with realizations and questions about being adopted. There are so many areas where 'Why?' is the question for adopted/fostered youth.

### Considerations for adoptive parents:

- Remember that youth take their lead from their parents in how to respond to, and initiate conversations on tough issues.
- As much as possible, pre-plan how you will respond to your child's questions about being adopted and their associated grief and loss emotions.
- Make certain that you understand your own emotions of grief and loss so that they do not negatively impact your response to your child's emotions of grief and loss.
- Understand that the emotions of grief and loss will change as a child develops psychologically.
- Help children name their emotions and help them normalize emotions of grief and loss. Grief and loss often may be expressed as anger and rage. Children need help to get beyond their fear of their emotions to be able to face the deep grief over what has been lost in their life.

- Identify triggers that activate grief and loss with the adopted child so that you can be proactive and supportive when these emotions are activated. Don't ask the child why they did something. Rather ask, "What's happening with you? What is going on inside?" Fear is intimately connected with grief and loss and can be the driving force in many behaviors.
- If emotions of grief and loss progress to the point where they are interfering with a child's physical and emotional health, seek professional help. When selecting a mental health therapist, make certain the therapist understands and is experienced in serving adoptive youth and families. The MN ADOPT HELP team can assist families in finding adoption and trauma competent therapists. <https://www.mnadopt.org/help-prog/>
- Identify supports, such as support groups for adoptive parents and youth. Being with people with a shared experience can be incredibly helpful and supportive. The North American Council on Adoptable Children – NACAC – has a wide variety of support groups, online and in person, in their **Adoptive Foster Kinship Connections** program, [connections@nacac.org](mailto:connections@nacac.org).

## Resources:

- How Infants Grieve, A Guide for New Adoptive Parents, Kathleen Kelly Halvorson, March 6, 2018, Gladney Center for Adoption, Adoption.com
- Making the Transition from Infertility to Adoption, Joni Mantell, March 27, 2015, Family Building Options, Infertility, Pre-Adopt, IAC Counseling Center
- How the Grieving Process Applies to Adoption, my perspective on what the adoptees grieving process looks like, Tom Andrida, September 28, 2015, Adoption.com
- Seven Core Issues in Adoption & Permanency: <https://www.nacac.org/resource/seven-core-issues-in-adoption-and-permanency/>
- Ambiguous Loss Haunts Foster & Adopted Children: <https://www.nacac.org/resource/ambiguous-loss-foster-and-adopted-children/>

## Information presented by:



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To learn more about Foster Adopt Minnesota and our efforts to ensure each child will have a permanent family, call 612-861-7115 or visit [www.fosteradoptmn.org](http://www.fosteradoptmn.org).