



## **FAST FACTS: Parenting a Child Who is Experiencing Grief & Loss**

It is not possible to talk about adoption without talking about grief and loss. Sometimes, there can be focus on all the perceived gains and “positives” of adoption, such as gaining a wanted child, and the child gaining a loving family. However, the loss of family members, control, belonging, familiar surroundings, connection to heritage, culture, or race are some of many losses experienced in the adoptive process. Healing is possible, and for this, grief and loss needs to be addressed and acknowledged.

### **What is "normal"?**

It is important to know that children display a range of behaviors, and there are no set rules about what constitutes “normal”. When it comes to grief and loss, it would be expected and healthy for a child to

- ask questions about, miss, and feel confused about their birth families. Sometimes it can be confusing for adoptive parents and other family members to understand loyalty towards people the child might not have been close or that may have done hurtful things. It is important to acknowledge that many aspects of a child's identity are tied to birth families, and this type of loyalty is healthy to express.
- become activated over reminders that might not seem obvious to those around them, such as their birthday, a class project, or photos and other reminders of their other family. A child can experience sadness, anger, and hurt, while also feeling loved, celebrated, and well-adjusted in their new family. It is important to understand that grief can have many layers and grief over a lost family does not indicate a lack of love or connection to the new adoptive family.
- experience confusion about their own emotional responses. When caregivers can anticipate grief and loss issues and provide a safe place for a child to process big and confusing feelings, it can support healing and integration. It can be expected that grief and loss get processed over time, but not that there is an official “resolution”.

### **What is "abnormal"?**

While it is to be expected that children experience some mental health or behavioral struggles related to grief and loss, significant impact on a child's ability to function in their family lives, at school, or in the community it may indicate more complicated symptoms and require bigger interventions. Unresolved grief prolongs suffering, interrupts normal activities, or prevents life from being lived to the fullest. If your child is experiencing one or more these or other disruptive or unsafe symptoms, it is recommended to reach out for professional help and support.

Examples of unhealthy behaviors include violence towards self or others, suicidal ideation, extreme interruptions to feeding and sleeping routines, sustained decrease in academic performance, sustained regression of developmental milestones (toilet training, babble talk), prolonged avoidance behaviors, feeling of numbness, spacey or dissociative behaviors, frequent nightmares/night terrors



## Additional information about understanding working through grief:

<https://www.mdedge.com/internalmedicine/article/19087/adolescent-medicine/adopted-children-can-feel-loss>

<https://www.griefrecoverymethod.com/blog/2017/10/grief-adopted-children>

## How to support a grieving child:

Children who are adopted face special challenges and circumstances that should not be ignored. Acknowledging grief and loss is healthy and essential and starts with adoptive families providing a safe space for the child's losses. It is helpful for parents to understand that children should not be forced to forget their pasts. Children need parents who will accept their past, preserve their history, and help them integrate their past into the present. Openness about their birth parents, the circumstances that led to the child's adoption and placement, and the circumstances that led the parents to adopt can help children work through grief and loss more openly. Parents who educate and prepare themselves to support grief and loss issues can aid the adjustment process.

Engage in activities with children that supports healthy processing of grief. Examples of open processing of grief: preparing food from the child's culture, telling stories and keeping memorabilia about the child's past and birth family, setting a place for the child's missing person at the dinner table are all examples of helpful grief practices.

Examples of ways to preserve history and work with loss with children: A child can create a memory box or book to collect memories, photos, and important objects from their past. In turn, a loss box or book can also help a child acknowledge and process their losses and have a place to "put them"

Working with an adoption competent professional and adoption support groups can help children and parents increase coping for grief and loss, and support families in navigating some of the emotional complexities that adoption can bring.

## Sources and Resources on Grief and Loss

<https://adoption.com/5-ways-to-help-your-child-process-adoption-loss>

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-parenting/helping/>

<https://www.pactadopt.org/resources/grief-and-loss-in-adoption.html>

<https://www.nacac.org/?s=grief+and+loss>

<https://www.nacac.org/connect/support-for-minnesota-adoptive-families/>

## Information presented by:



Corinne is a bilingual, Licensed Professional Counselor who believes that fostering the mind-body connection and using integrative models provides the best platform for sustainable healing and change. Corinne holds a Masters in Clinical Psychology and is a registered, trauma informed Yoga teacher with a background in other alternative health and healing modalities. In her clinical practice, Corinne provides individual therapy to adolescents and adults with a specific focus on identity work, body mind integration, and complex trauma. When applicable, Corinne uses evidence based, trauma informed Yoga practices (TCTSY) in sessions as well as EMDR.

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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).