

Adoption and Grief

Adoption and Grief...do they really go together? The answer is a resounding yes! Many of us on our pathway to adoption have come through the heart-wrenching grief of infertility. However you came to adoption, all of our children have joined our family because of the loss of their biological family. How do these losses continue to impact our children and us, their parents?

Grief is a common theme through all of life. The Bible tells us "...there is a time to live and a time to die." The true question is how we balance grief and joy, living and dying, on the same pendulum at the same time, as is often the case with adoption.

Our great joy at receiving our child is in fact the birthparents' greatest loss and may mean our child's loss of their culture, traditions, friends, and biological relatives as well.

Regardless of the age of the child you adopt all children go through some common stages of loss. Older children usually need to go through these stages, but hopefully will accomplish these at an abbreviated pace.

The typical times of loss seem to be:

Placement Yes, even babies recognize new faces, languages, etc.

2-to-4-years As you begin to share their adoption story, talk about birth parents

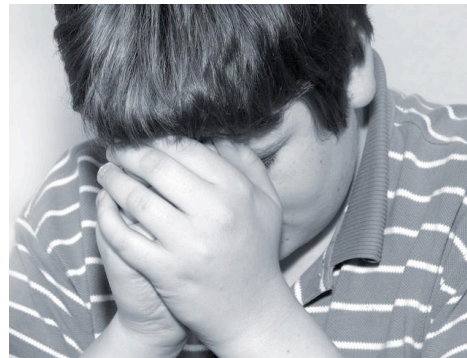
6-to-8-years As their mind grasps/ conceptualizes adoption and having a birth family

Middle school Desiring not to be different from peers, including how their family was formed

High school identity crisis

Other major life events such as graduation from high school, college, marriage and birth of the first child. Again, all joyous occasions that can also trigger more loss and longing.

As parents, we can help guide our children through this journey of grief, but only if we have dealt with our



own grief issues. We all, at some point in our lives, face the loss of someone dear to us through death, illness or divorce. We can even experience grief when dealing with intense disappointment.

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, in her research on death and dying, identified five stages of grief that people

experience following a serious loss.

1. Denial and isolation – shock, denial that the loss has occurred, social withdrawal.

2. Anger – anger at the person who died, the world, oneself or at God.

3. Bargaining – often with God. "If I do this, can the pain go away?"

4. Depression – numbness, sadness and continued anger to some extent.

5. Acceptance – when the anger, sadness and mourning lessen in intensity, the person accepts the reality of the loss.

As we model understanding and dealing with our own grief, we can teach our children that indeed joy and sorrow can live together as old friends. Remember to keep the door open for honest communication. Our children probably won't volunteer to share these losses with us...so we have to be the ones to bring up adoption issues. I have found that Mother's Day, Father's Day, birthdays and other holidays are good times to have adoption/birthparent discussions. We can share the burden of grief with our children and raise them to be emotionally whole and healthy.

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