



Support. Education. Local Events.
for Adoptive Families



The seven core issues of adoption *continued*

Exploring intimacy and identity

Our 2023 newsletters are featuring the seven core issues of adoption: grief, loss, rejection, intimacy, identity, control, and shame. These were first identified in the 1980s by adoption educators Deborah Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan Roszia. They emphasized that adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents commonly experience these issues at various times throughout their lives.

Intimacy

Intimacy, as it relates to the core issues, refers to emotional closeness in a relationship. Vulnerability and trust are essential to forming new relationships, whether romantic partners or friendships.

- For some **adoptees**, especially those experiencing issues with control, shame or rejection, and letting others get close, can provoke anxiety. If identity is a challenge, being genuine may also be difficult. Adoptive parents commonly express concerns about their child not having a “best friend” in whom they can confide. Discomfort with intimacy can lead to a pattern of unhealthy or unstable romantic relationships.
- **Birth parents** may find intimacy challenging if they relate it to grief and loss. They may struggle with trust in future romantic relationships if a previous partner was unsupportive, during or after the pregnancy. A birth parent experiencing shame may hold back,

fearing others will judge that part of their story. This can lead to unintentionally superficial relationships, weakening the quality and longevity of the connection.

- **Adoptive parents** may also struggle with intimacy. During the adoption process, one parent often takes the lead. If a hesitant spouse feels unable to genuinely express cautions or doubt, the dissonance can negatively impact the relationship, and they may project their resentment onto the child.

Sharing your experiences with others on a similar journey can help lower defenses. Journaling, devotionals, self-help books, or talking with a therapist may also help.

Identity

Identity formation is a natural, developmental process everyone experiences; but the process can be more complex for those touched by adoption.

A birth parent who relinquished her only child may wonder if “mother” is part of her identity. A newly adoptive parent may not feel like “Mom” or “Dad” yet, especially in their first year of parenting. Both adoptive parents and birth parents may find themselves comparing their role as a parent to friends and family who are raising biological children, or they may struggle with navigating openness in their relationship with each other.

Adoptees might feel a sense of being different or not

“If fear is the great enemy of intimacy, love is its true friend.”

— Henri Nouwen

The seven core issues of adoption continued

belonging. They may find themselves thinking more about their birth family and adoption story. They may ask questions, request information from their file, or explore the search process.

- **Acknowledge that this is common.** Questions and feelings alone are not necessarily cause for concern and occur throughout the post-adoption lifespan.
- **Encourage open communication.** Sometimes it is easier to talk with those who have similar experiences, so support groups—in-person or online—can be helpful. Clarifying facts and background history can be especially beneficial for adoptees.
- **Find the balance in accepting all parts of identity.** All-or-nothing thinking, labels defined by society and culture, and generally trying to fit into someone else's definition may create more stress or negatively impact self-esteem or coping strategies.

You can find many resources online that go deeper into the seven core issues of adoption, including this article from Child Welfare Information Gateway:
https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/factsheets_families_adoptionimpact.pdf



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Check out postadoptionrc.org for past editions of our newsletter, events, helpful articles, and more information about us and services we offer.

All three Post-Adoption Resource Centers have many family fun events planned, as well as support groups and trainings. Please check your Post Adoption Resource Center region's Facebook page or website, watch for monthly calendars, or give us a call to find out what is available near you.

REGION 2

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REGION 3

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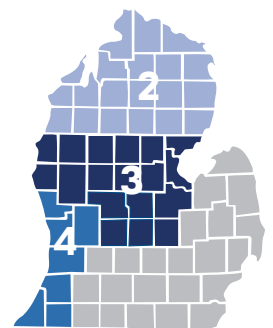
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postadoptionrc.org

Other suggested websites: adoptivefamilies.com adoptioninstitute.org