

Continuum of Development of Adopted Children

Adapted from a handout developed by Parenthesis Family Advocates, Columbus, Ohio

0-3 Years	3-7 Years	8-12 Years	12-16 Years	16-19 Years
Adopted child does not realize difference between themselves and non-adopted children	Child asks a lot of questions. Loves to hear his/her adoption story. Can repeat it verbatim but has little understanding of the concepts.	Child understands concept of adoption. Begins grieving process. May stop asking questions as part of denial. Realizes that he/she had to lose something to be adopted.	Child enters anger stage of grieving. May resist authority and try on new identities. May be angry over loss of control in his/her life.	Young adult may be depressed and over-react to losses. May be anxious about growing up and leaving home.
Strategies for Parents	Strategies for Parents	Strategies for Parents	Strategies for Parents	Strategies for Parents
Collect as much concrete information as possible (goodbye letters from birthparents and pictures are helpful).	Encourage questions and answer honestly. Difficult issues may be omitted (but never changed) until child is older.	Don't force child to discuss issues but let him/her know you are open and comfortable when he/she is ready.	Allow child to exercise control whenever possible. Provide opportunities for decision-making.	Let child know he/she may remain at home after graduation if he/she chooses.
Develop "LifeBook" for child, including these concrete bits of information.	Tell Adoption Story as a favorite bedtime story.	Let child know it is understood that he/she can love both sets of parents. He/she does not have to choose.	Child has a right to his/her birth information. Help child access and accept information.	Be alert for sadness when relationships with peers fail or during anniversary reactions such as birthdays or Mother's Day.
Begin talking comfortably and positively with your infant, family, and friends about adoption.	Use and add to Life Book. Reassure child that he/she will not lose adoptive family.	Ask if child has questions or feelings he/she would like to discuss. Let child know you are not threatened or angry about questions regarding birth family and/or past history.	Try to keep from responding to child's anger with more anger. Understand that much of his anger is directed at the birthparent. Be firm in limit-setting. Establish preset consequences for broken rules. Allow child to experience natural consequences of behavior.	Continue to keep adoption topic open within the home. Provide supportive opportunities for independence and freedom.
			Continue to let child know that you love him/her no matter what.	

