

ADOPTION CORE ISSUES

	ADOPTEE	BIRTHPARENT	ADOPTIVE PARENT
LOSS/ SEPARATION	Loss of biological, genetic, & cultural ties. Separations are felt as losses; divorce, death, illness, parental absence, emancipation.	Loss of ability to control one's body & fate. Hyper-fertility. Loss of progeny, separation from loved one; loss of equity & adoptive parent support.	Loss of ability to bear biological child; infertility. Loss of idealized family, "dream child".
REJECTION	View placement for adoption as rejection. Low self-esteem. "2 nd class, 2 nd choice". Anticipates repeated rejection. Adoption as a byproduct of a "real" family.	Potential rejection by family, peers, & adoptee for placing; feel different, inadequate. Fear rejection by adoptive parents and partner.	Potential relative rejection of adoption/family. May experience child's rejection more acutely. Fear caseworker rejection.
GUILT & SHAME	Deserving of maltreatment; Shame of being different. Sense of responsibility for being a burden on birth-parents, not living up to adoptive parent's needs. Ashamed of history.	Anticipates public scorn and feels guilty for "giving up". Shamed by own insufficiency of parenting readiness. Sexual shame; guilt over pleasure and personal goals.	Shame of infertility; may view it as punishment. Guilt for imperfection, especially in parenting (shame at sick or excessive action of kids & own angry responses or resentment of child's needs).
INTIMACY	Intimacy may risk loss. Lack of early bonding/attachment impairs capacity. May seek intimacy to excess or actively avoid it. Sex-abuse victims coming to adoption may confuse sexuality & intimacy.	Intimacy may risk guilt/shame. Level of stress in loss may lead to relational dysfunction due to decreased self-esteem. Less intimacy with birth-siblings in order to be "fair" to "lost" child.	Intimacy with child may risk rejection. Stress level in adoption may lead to marital dysfunction due to decreased intimacy. Less intimacy with other/birth children to be "fair".
POWER/ CONTROL/ MASTERY	Adoptee had no control over own adoption decision. Events prior to adoptions (foster care, abuse) confirmed lack of control. Conduct ranges from helpless re-victimization, to power struggles, to victimizing others.	Birth-parents had no control over child or adoptive parents after adoption. Circumstances prior to relinquishment confirmed lack of personal control. Compulsion to replace loss may cause recurrent and self-imposed losses.	Parents do not control process of adding family member; at the agency's "mercy". Power struggles with child leave parents feeling helpless, inadequate. May over-protect or over-control child. Helplessness at lack of services.
GREIF	Grieve loss, often many losses in older adoptee. Expression of grief often blocked by well-intentioned adults. Grieve over adopted differences, loss of birth-family connection. "I'm not what either family wants me to be and I can't be what they want".	Grieve loss of child & adoptive parents. Compounded grief. Blocked by abstract nature of open adoption loses. Grieve over contrast in birth-sibling lifestyles.	Grief over unmet expectations, fantasized child/family life. View adoptee's grief as rejection impairing attachment process. Grief at prior abuse of older adoptees and their child's many losses.
IDENTITY	Deficits in information impedes integration of identity. Search for identity in acting-out behaviors, or excessive accommodation. Identity may relate to "bad seed" or early antisocial models.	Sense of being a birth-parent as scarlet letter; cognitive dissonance in claiming or denying relinquished child. Identity impacted by quality of open adoption relationships.	Sense of being an adoptive parent is unlike biological parents; perceived requirement is perfection. If in crisis, often feel unlike self, feelings of rage and frustration. Hate title of "rescuers". Identity threatened by child's failings.

Adapted from Deborah Silverstein & Sharon Kaplan, c1986.