

# Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew



## Study Guide

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"One hundred years from now,  
it will not matter  
what kind of car I drove,  
what kind of house I lived in,  
how much I had in my bank account,  
nor what my clothes looked like.

But the world may be a little better  
because  
I was important  
in the life of a child."

-Anonymous

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# A Letter from the Author

"If only I would have known these things thirty years ago!"

"Where were you when I needed you?"

"I had no idea that my child experienced this at relinquishment!"

"Why weren't we told about the challenges that lay ahead and how to meet them?"

"I have never had a hero before. I think you could be considered that to me. I love your book. I relate with you and if it were not for you, I would be nowhere. You have given me confidence and the proof that I am worth much!"

These are a few of the comments I have heard while speaking about the often-hidden feelings and needs of adopted children, teens, and adults!

Many adoptive parents and mental health and adoption professionals who have read *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Parents Knew* have expressed a desire for a study guide that will help them prepare prospective adoptive parents and new adoptive parents for the challenges of adoptive parenting.

*Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew* brings them a considerable way on their journey toward understanding adopted people. However, there is a need for a study guide that can be used by individuals, parents, counselors, mental health professionals, and support group leaders that facilitates dialogue concerning the twenty things presented in the book.

A biblical dimension has been added to the workbook that is not contained in the book.

The chapters in the study guide are short. Take them at your own pace or divide them in blocks for specific assignments.

May God richly bless you as you gain a new understanding of the adopted child!

Enjoy!

*Sherrie Eldridge*

## Chapter 1



# A Grafted Tree

A grafted tree. Magnificent to behold. One of a kind.

Contrary to nature. Luxurious leaves and intricate roots.

Loaded with horticultural

challenges for gardeners, but ultimately yielding trees with unparalleled beauty.

The dynamics of the grafted tree are applicable not only to gardeners, but to those touched by adoption.

We can learn many lessons about the dynamics of adoption by studying the gardening technique of grafting. Webster's defines *grafting* as "A bud of a plant inserted in a stem of another plant in which it continues to grow."

1. What has to happen to a stem before it can be inserted into the stem or trunk of another tree? What words apply?
  - Chopped off
  - Severed
  - Cut off
  - Separated
  - Removed
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. If this stem could speak, what do you think it would say?
  - "Ouch!"
  - "What are you doing to me?"



“Why are you taking me away from my roots?”

- “Where are you taking me?”
- “Why is this happening?”
- “How am I ever going to heal?”
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Now apply this principle of severing to adoption. What happens to a child before he or she is placed into an adoptive family?

- Loses birth family
- Loses a sense of belonging
- Relinquished (severed)
- Trauma
- Wounded
- Loses sense of self-esteem
- Loses sense of connection to human race
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. If this infant or child could speak, what do you believe he or she would say?

- “Where is my mommy?”
- “I can't hear her voice anymore.”
- “I can't hear the sound of her heartbeat.”
- “Where are you taking me?”
- “I don't know who you are.”
- “I am terrified.”
- “I hurt so bad.”
- “I am so happy.”
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

For a tree grafting to “take,” certain conditions are required. Cambium layers of stock and scion must be joined over as large an area as possible, held together rigidly, and protected from drying out.

For bonding and attachment to occur between adoptive parents and children, certain conditions, actions, and attitudes are required.

5. Specifically, what conditions, actions, and attitudes are required *for the child?*
- I feel safe.
  - You will listen to and meet my needs.
  - You will hold me constantly for the first month of life together.
  - You will speak truth to me about what is happening.
  - You will use adoption language from day one.
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. Specifically, what conditions, actions, and attitudes are required *for the adoptive parents?*
- My prior losses (infertility, stillbirths, and deaths) are already grieved, so I can be emotionally in tune with you.
  - You won't have to live according to my agenda.
  - You do not have to replace a child we lost.
  - I know we're not the parents you expected.
  - You must feel sad. I do too.
  - I love you and will never leave you.
  - I am your mommy/daddy now.
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

When a graft takes, it takes with a vengeance, producing a union at least as strong and often stronger than the rest of the tree.

7. What could happen within the adoptive family if the child successfully attaches to the parents? Be specific.
- The child will come to terms with relinquishment by birth mother.
  - The child will know his or her parents are the number one cheerleaders.
  - Unity in the family.
  - Freedom to talk about anything—a safe environment.
  - Parents won't be threatened when child asks about birth family.
  - Parent and child will be in tune emotionally.
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

When a graft fails, the point of union is weakened. The failure may show up immediately, or it might not be evident for years.

8. How can you tell if attachment is not occurring? What would be some symptoms or signs to look for?

*In an infant?*

- Eating problems
- Arching of back and refusing comfort
- Sleeping problems
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

*In a school-age child?*

- Temper tantrums
- Failing in school
- Antagonistic toward adoptive mother
- Crying when read stories involving abandonment or orphanhood
- Fear of new situations
- Fantasies about birth family; daydreaming a lot
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

*In a teenager?*

- Feeling of chaos inside that he or she can't verbalize ("I don't even know what's wrong.")
- Unhealthy choice of friends
- Rage
- Refusal to make eye contact
- Superficial charm
- Manipulative attitude
- Promiscuity
- Stealing
- Lying
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

In nature, sometimes grafting a third element can solve a problem of incompatibility. By grafting a third element between the stock and scion—one that is compatible to both—you can save a graft that is not initially successful.



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14. What has changed in your perspective on adoption since doing this chapter?

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The Bible says, “After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated live tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree” (Romans 11: 24: NIV).

Listen to the words of God, the adoptive Father—the ultimate adoptive Father! How does he speak about adoption issues to his children?

First, he acknowledges verbally that severance precedes adoption: “...you were cut out...” Notice that he doesn't cover the reality of the severance with a veneer of romanticism. Instead, he calls it like it is.

How refreshing to know that he calls it like it is! He doesn't gloss over the fact that severance precedes grafting or that loss precedes blessing. Instead, he speaks the truth no matter how painful it may be.

If God, the heavenly adoptive Father, displays such truthfulness in dealing with his adopted children, dare adoptive parents do any less for their children today?

"The adopted child.  
Magnificent to behold.  
One of a kind.  
Biological features often  
contrary to yours.  
Intricate roots that need to  
be healed.  
Loaded with behavioral  
challenges for parents,  
but ultimately yielding  
a life of unparalleled beauty."

## Chapter 2



# Entering the Adoptee's World

"A key concept to remember is that your child's perception about adoption began not at birth, not on adoption day, but during the first nine

months of life in the womb of his or her birth mother."

Imagine yourself boarding a jet that will take you on your long-awaited trip to Europe. You are wined and dined all across the Atlantic, and you anticipate the trip being a wonderful adventure. Now picture yourself getting off the plane and looking around at the surroundings. They look foreign to you! The people are speaking another language. The aroma in the airport doesn't resemble McDonald's or Burger King. You go to your hotel and discover that the concierge doesn't speak English, so you try speaking a little louder and doing sign language. After settling in your room, you meander down the street outside looking for an appealing restaurant. When you find one and are given the menu, much to your chagrin, it is all in French with no translation. When the waiter comes, you ask for a translation, but he can't speak English.

1. What do you think would seem "foreign" to you as you enter the European airport (highlight what applies to you)?
  - Smells
  - Sights
  - Sounds
  - People
  - How the people are dressed
  - Surroundings
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

- Noises
- Mother's body
- Heartbeat of mother
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you believe a baby can remember what happened on adoption day? Why or why not?

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4. If you heard the people in your hotel and restaurant speaking only in a language you couldn't understand, how would you feel?

- Weird
- Isolated
- Afraid
- Frustrated
- Helpless
- Angry
- Like a fish out of water
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

All of a sudden, a situation you thought was going to be wonderful has produced feelings of isolation and loneliness. No matter how hard you may try, you are not able to make a "connection" with anyone or anything in this country.

5. How can you gain entrance into the world of the adopted child/adult?

- Avoid the topic of adoption as long as possible.
- Acknowledge the reality of adoption from day one.
- Deny the biological differences between child and family.
- Initiate conversations about the child's pre-adoption perceptions.
- Accentuate the positive; correct uncomfortable emotions about adoption.

- Talk about special challenges adoptive families face and how to meet them successfully.
  - Enforce a “no talk rule” through body language. A quivering lip works wonders.
  - Foster silent shame in the child by refusing to talk about the birth family.
  - Say to the child, “You can tell me anything.”
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. Draw a picture of someone who wasn't informed about adoption trying to gain entrance into the world of an adopted child/adult. Explain it to your group.
7. Draw a picture of someone who is savvy about adoption truths who is entering the world of the adoptee. Explain to your group.



8. Certain words can hurt or heal an adoptee. Trying to think about how your adopted child interprets what you say and learning how to translate what your child is really saying are essential for entrance into his world. The following table provides some examples.

<b>Words That Hurt</b>	<b>How the Adoptee May Translate</b>	<b>What God Says in the Bible</b>	<b>Words That Heal</b>
Given up for adoption.	I was alone. I didn't belong to anybody.	Psalms 27:10 (Amp): "Though my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will receive me."	It must be sad to think about the time when your birth mother said goodbye. But there was Someone else there with you all the time, even though you couldn't see him. It was Jesus. He was with you then and is with you now, and He will never leave you.
This is my adopted daughter.	I am different.	Matthew 3:17: "And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love...'"	This is my daughter.
We couldn't have our "own" kids, so we adopted you.	I'm second choice and second best. If I'm not their own, where do I belong? Am I an alien?	Ezekiel 16: 4-7 "...you became a jewel among jewels."	God formed our family through adoption. You are his jewel and ours.

“Many studies concur that the baby in the womb hears, tastes, feels, and learns, and that what he thus experiences begins to shape his attitudes and expectations of himself. He can sense and react not only to large undifferentiated emotions in the mother like love and hate, but also to shaded emotions such as ambivalence and ambiguity.”

Dr. Thomas Verny  
John Kelly  
*The Secret Life of the*

*Unborn Child*



## Chapter 3

# A Profound Wound

“I suffered a profound loss before I was adopted. You are not responsible.”

The feelings we discussed in the last chapter are similar to those an infant or child feels on adoption day. Imagine yourself as an unborn child, living and thriving in the safe, warm environment of your mommy’s womb for the first nine months of life. Her heartbeat is your source of security. The sound of her voice is comforting. The warmth of her body makes you feel safe. Then you are born, and within hours or days, you are placed into the arms of another woman. You can’t hear the sound of your mommy’s heartbeat. You can’t feel the warmth of her body. Her voice has suddenly been silenced. Where is your mommy?

1. If you were that infant, how would you feel as you were placed into the arms of another woman—when what you needed was to be placed on the tender breast of your mother?
  - Panicked
  - Euphoric
  - Abandoned
  - Peaceful
  - Terrified
  - Rejected
  - Sad
  - Welcome

- Betrayed
  - Traumatized
  - Safe
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. Imagine that you were then taken home by this woman and her husband, and the house was filled with noisy people? Video cameras were rolling. Cameras were flashing, and everyone was saying how beautiful you were. How would you feel?
- Glad to be chosen
  - Terrified
  - Unable to be comforted
  - Strange
  - Comfortable
  - Out of place
  - Like you didn't belong
  - Relaxed
  - Bewildered
  - Like you had lost your best friend in the whole world
  - Sad
  - Different
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. What do you think you would need most in this situation?
- For everyone to say how cute you were
  - To be held by everyone in the family
  - Quiet
  - Food
  - Someone to speak the truth about what you may be feeling
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

Such is the loss that an adopted child feels on adoption day. It can be likened to a toddler having both parents wiped out in an automobile accident, except that there is no acknowledged grief and loss, no funeral, no closure. Just a baby with a broken heart.

4. The baby's emotions are very different from those of the people around him. Fill in the blanks by contrasting what the baby might be feeling to those feelings expressed in his new family:
- He is grieving...others are \_\_\_\_\_.
  - He is wounded...others are \_\_\_\_\_.
  - He needs comfort...others are \_\_\_\_\_.
  - He needs for truth to be spoken about how he feels...others are \_\_\_\_\_.

The word "loss" is like a dirty word to adoptive parents. It wounds them to the core. It makes them feel helpless, and every defense they possess surfaces when the word is mentioned. Highly respected author, adoption professional, and adoptive mother, Jayne Schooler says, "Whenever I mention the word 'loss,' it's like a wall goes up between me and many of my listeners."

Relinquishment is probably one of the happiest days in the lives of adoptive parents. But to the adopted child, it is one of the most painful. Instead of "adoption day," it is "loss day."

5. How would adoptive parents react if they heard that their child had suffered a trauma before they ever held him in their arms?
- Entertain "What if" thoughts: "What if we had developed a closer relationship with the birthmother?" or "What if we'd been in the birthing room at the time of delivery and 'caught' the baby as it was delivered?"
  - Deny that a baby can feel or remember anything
  - Dismiss the idea of loss as absurd
  - Assure themselves that love can surely heal the wound
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is the most important thing adoptive parents can do to provide what this child needs?
- Read every available book on adoptive parenting
  - Meet with other adoptive parents for support
  - Work through their own grief and loss issues (such as infertility, stillbirths, or death of a child) prior to adoption
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

Grief is the *natural* response to loss. It is the heart's way of trying to heal itself. Denying that there has been a loss is like having a pink elephant in the living room. Everybody knows it is there, it's walking around making a mess of things, but nobody talks about it. How much better it would be to acknowledge the truth and set everyone free!

1. What are some ways this grief and loss can be processed?
  - Talk about adoption from day one.
  - Talk openly about the birth and birth family.
  - Pretend it doesn't exist; just put the past behind and start over with a clean slate.
  - Read stories to children with themes of abandonment and adoption.
  - Quiver your lip whenever the child mentions adoption.
  - Enforce an unspoken "no talk" rule through your body language.
  - Tell your child he's okay when he expresses sadness about his birth family.
  - Be religious when child expresses natural, conflicting emotions surrounding adoption: "Just count your blessings!"
  - Make a "grief box."
  
7. What are some of the items that might be in your child's grief box? Draw a sketch of them.

What God says about the brokenhearted in the Bible:

Psalm 34:18 "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."

Psalm 47:3 "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds."

"It is painful to enter your child's suffering. It's so much easier to assume that all is well inside your child, especially if she hasn't manifested any obvious problems. But every adopted child has been wounded, simply because she

## Chapter 4



# The Courageous Runner

“I need to be taught that I have special needs arising from adoption loss, of which I need not be ashamed.”

I will never forget the image of a female runner on the cover of *Time Magazine*. She was muscular and agile-looking, ready to take on any competitor. From the knee down, she wore a stainless steel prosthesis. As I studied the photo, I couldn't help but identify with this courageous girl. It was obvious that she had special needs arising from some physical trauma in her life. I too, have special needs, for I suffered an emotional trauma when I was only ten days old. How I identified with that girl. And I'm not alone—just about every adoptee I have talked to says that he or she has a certain emotional vulnerability. The key is to learn that these vulnerabilities are the result of trauma and that we need not be ashamed of them.

1. Think about the girl on the *Time Magazine* cover. What would have happened to her if she didn't know she had special needs?
  - She would use crutches.
  - She would feel inferior, like damaged goods.
  - She would not reach her full potential in life.
  - Everyday activities would be a strain for her.
  - She wouldn't experience the thrill of overcoming.
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. What role did the elderly gentleman play in this girl's life in this chapter?

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3. Do you know your own adoption-related special needs?

- Are you terrified of rejection?
- Is saying good-bye difficult for you?
- Is entering new situations stressful for you?
- Do you sometimes interpret a closed door to an opportunity as rejection?
- When someone doesn't return your call, do you think there is something wrong with you?
- Are you afraid of being forgotten?
- Are you afraid God will reject you someday in the same way your birth mother did?
- Do you look at life through a lens of rejection?
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Shame is the feeling that something about you is wrong. Not that you have done something wrong, but that you as a person are wrong. Faulty. Defective.

4. How does shame surface in the life of an adoptee?

- Low self-esteem
- Sabotaging his or her own success
- Hanging out with losers
- Acting out
- Believing his life is a mistake
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

The antidote to shame is learning, embracing, and enjoying God's opinion of you. In Ezekiel 16:4-6 (Living Bible), God talked to the orphaned nation of Israel. We can apply this passage to our own adoption experiences. Notice what God says: First he validates the painful abandonment on the day of birth; second, he calls you forth to a personal relationship with him; and finally, he declares you to be a jewel among jewels. I have shared this with many adoptees, and I don't know one whose eyes didn't light up when he heard this precious, life-transforming truth.

If you would like to pursue biblical truths about an adoptee's special needs, the following list can serve as a springboard for study.

### The Special Needs of an Adoptee

*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made! (Psalm 139:14)*

<b>Emotional Need: Reading</b>	<b>Scripture</b>
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I need help in recognizing my adoption loss and grieving it.	Ecclesiastes 1:18
I need to be assured that my birth parent's decision to relinquish doesn't mean I am defective.	Proverbs 34:5
I need to learn how to deal with my fears of rejection—to learn that absence doesn't mean abandonment, nor does a closed door mean that I have done something wrong.	Genesis 50:20
I need permission to express all my adoption feelings and fantasies.	Psalm 62:8

<b>Educational Need: Reading</b>	<b>Scripture</b>
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I need to be taught that adoption is both wonderful and painful, presenting lifelong challenges for everyone involved.	Ezekiel 17:10a Romans 11:24
I need to know my adoption story first, and then my birth story and history.	Isaiah 43:26
I need to be taught healthy ways for getting my needs met.	Philippians 4:12
I need to be prepared for hurtful things others may say about adoption and about me as an adoptee.	John 1:11

<b>Validation Need: Reading</b>	<b>Scripture</b>
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I need validation of my dual heritage (biological and adoptive).	Psalm 139:16b
I need to be assured often that I am worthy and welcome.	Isaiah 43:4 Zephaniah 3:17
I need to be reminded often by my adoptive parents that they delight in my biological differences and appreciate my birth family's unique contribution to our family through me.	Proverbs 23:10

<b>Parental Need: Reading</b>	<b>Scripture</b>
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I need parents who are skillful at meeting their own emotional needs so that I can grow up with healthy role models and be free	
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to focus on my development, rather than taking care of their emotional needs.  
12:15

II Corinthians

I need parents who are willing to put aside preconceived notions about adoption and be educated about the unique challenges adoptive families face.

Proverbs 23:12  
Proverbs 3:12-14  
Proverbs 3:5-6

I need to hear my parents openly express feelings about infertility and adoption loss, which will produce a bond of intimacy between us.

Ecclesiastes 1:18

I need a non-competitive attitude between my adoptive and birth parents. Without this, I will struggle with loyalty issues.

Psalms 127:3

<b>Relationship Need: Reading</b>	<b>Scripture</b>
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I need friendships with other adoptees.

Ecclesiastes 4:12

I need to be taught that there is a time to consider searching for my birth family as well as a time to give up searching.

Ecclesiastes 3:4

I need to be reminded that if I am rejected by my birth family, the rejection is symptomatic of their dysfunction, not mine.

Isaiah 49:15  
John 1:11

<b>Spiritual Need: Reading</b>	<b>Scripture</b>
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I need to be taught that my life narrative began in eternity past—in the very heart of God—that He created me to have a relationship with Him.

Jeremiah 1:5a  
Ephesians 1:11

I need to be taught that any two people can make love, but only God can create a life. He planned my life and He makes no mistakes.

John 1:3

I need to be taught that in this broken, hurting world, God forms families through adoption as well as birth.

Psalms 68:6

I need to be taught God's opinion of me—a jewel among jewels.

Ezekiel 16:4-7 LB

I need to accept the fact that all my adoption questions won't be answered this side of heaven.  
29:29

Deuteronomy

"Never forget how important your role is in cheering your child on in the race of life. You are his prosthesis, his special support. You may be one of few who truly understand his unique weaknesses and strengths. I can just see you in the grandstands shouting 'Keep going! I know you can do it!'"

## Chapter 5



# Understanding Grief

“If I don’t grieve my loss, my ability to receive love from you and others will be hindered.”

1. What are the developmental tasks that Dr. Daniel Stern talks about on page 43?

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2. What happens if each stage is not completed?

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3. Konrad Lorenz says that human and animal grief-like responses are similar. Do you buy this? Why or why not?

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4. Try to compare how the greylag goose’s grief over the loss of its mate might contrast with that of an infant or child who has just been relinquished. You may use the example of Dr. Connie Dawson on pages 44-45 and Marcy Axness on pages 45-46 to make your comparison.

<b>Greylag Goose</b>	<b>Relinquished Infant or Child</b>
<i>Example:</i> Anxiously attempts to find mate.	<i>Example:</i> Cries all the way home from hospital.
Moves about restlessly.	
Flies great distances.	
Goes to where partner might be.	
Gets lost in the process.	

5. What do you believe would happen if the grieving process didn’t occur? Tim Green’s example on page 46 may provide insight.

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6. Define “grief” in your own words.

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7. When should parents help a child grieve the loss of the birth mother?

- Between the ages of five and seven
- Whenever the child brings up the topic of the birth family
- When the child starts distancing himself from the family
- From day one
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. What are the four tasks of grieving (beginning on page 50)?

Task One:

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Task Two:

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Task Three:

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Task Four:

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9. If you are right-handed, use your left hand (or if you are left-handed, use your right) to draw an adoptee who needs to grieve:

10. What cycle needs to take place so that the adoptee will learn to trust (see page 54)?

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11. Name three reasons why adoptees don't grieve.

a. \_\_\_\_\_

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b. \_\_\_\_\_

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c. \_\_\_\_\_

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12. Read the account of Dr. Richard Gilbert on pages 58-59 and record in the space below the words or phrases that speak to you in your situation.

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Isaiah 42:3 says, "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out."

"We must be careful not to sanitize, sentimentalize, or even glamorize the pain of adoption; it really is miserable stuff, and it is intensely personal. The pain of adoption is not something that happens to a person; it is the person. Because the pain is so primal, it is virtually impossible to describe."

James Gritter, M.S.W.  
*The Spirit of Open Adoption*

## Chapter 6



# Watch Out... It's Adoptee Anger!

"My unresolved grief may surface in anger toward you."

I will never forget the day I sat in my counselor's office and she said, "Sherrie, you have a right to be angry!" "Right to be angry?" I muttered. "I thought good Christians weren't supposed to be angry." Somewhere in my religious past, I had missed the words "Be angry, but sin not."

1. Describe a five-year-old adoptee having a temper tantrum. What is he saying? How is he acting? How long does it last? Don't spare any details!

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2. Who is often the adoptee's target for anger?

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3. To whom is the anger really directed? Why (see page 62)?

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I truly believe that the level of the adoptee's anger is indicative of how much he or she misses the birth mother. So, if any birth mothers are reading this, don't be afraid of the anger... It is proof that there is a special place in the adoptee's heart and soul for you.

4. Make an "anger list" from past to present.

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5. What are the messages the adoptee is trying to send through the anger?

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The most important thing adoptive parents or others who love the adoptee can do is to remain the adult and not take the attack personally. Listen! Listen! Listen!

### **Listen to Me!**

Listen to me. I am frightened. I am confused.

Listen to me. Allow me to think through my feelings by expressing them to someone who won't judge me, won't tell me I shouldn't have these feelings, or that I don't mean what I'm saying. Perhaps if you listen to me and I can freely tell you my feelings, they will no longer overwhelm me.

Listen to me...when I can't burden my family with my problems. They, too, are involved, and because we have such strong feelings about each other, we cannot always hear accurately when we talk. I need someone to listen to me without the words being filtered and distorted through their feelings.

Listen to me...when I am lonely. Oh, I know most people think that because I am busy I have a full life. And I am glad I have been successful in avoiding their pity. But sometimes, when nights have been long, I want to cry out for human contact, but there is no one there to listen to me.

Listen to me when I am angry...when I am angry.  
And if I tell you I am angry with God, will you  
reject me?

While you are listening to me, for those moments  
that I am the focus of your attention, you are giving  
me a part of your life. This gift will help validate  
me, help me see myself as a person of worth. It  
could even happen that through this gift of yourself,  
I may be strengthened in my awareness of the  
infinite power of love. And in spite of the  
confusion, anger, fear and loneliness I may be  
experiencing, when I feel love again, I may realize  
that God is touching me.

(Used with permission. Written by  
aStephens Minister at First Presbyterian  
Church, Enid, OK)

"Anger, the other side of  
depression, is always waiting  
to be tapped in the  
adoptee.... There is the  
unexpressed anger that they  
are adopted; anger that they  
are different; anger that they  
are powerless to know their  
origins; anger that they  
cannot express their real  
feelings in a family climate of



## Chapter 7



# Finding the Feelings

“I need your help in grieving my loss. Teach me how to get in touch with my feelings about adoption and then validate them.”

It is absolutely essential that an adoptee grieve the losses of relinquishment. Otherwise, he or she will not be able to give or receive love from anyone.

I am going to share a practical tool in this chapter that you can use for this purpose. It is called a “grief box,” and it can be used with both children and adults to bring about healing from relinquishment. The following is just a springboard to get you going on your own grief box.

## CONSTRUCTING A GRIEF BOX

“Grief is the heart’s way of healing itself.”

“Grief is to the soul as a fever is to the body.”

“I, even I, am he who blots out your transgressions, for my own sake, and remembers your sins no more. Review the past for me, let us argue the matter together....” (Isaiah 43:25-26 NIV)

1. *Make a list of the things that make you sad (your losses).* A child will need an adult to help him make a list.
  - Loss of my birth mother
  - Loss of medical history
  - Loss of family history

- Loss of birth certificate
  - Loss of emotional closeness with my adoptive parents
  - Loss of ability to live in reality instead of fantasy
  - Loss of willingness to be transparent and real
  - Loss of self-esteem
  - Loss of sense of belonging
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
2. *Select a box that you can use to store several items. It might be one of the following:*
- Grandma's old jewelry box
  - A standard brown box
  - A shoe box
3. *Find items that are symbolic of each loss and place them in your box.*
- Jewel...loss of self esteem
  - Band-Aid...loss of medical history
  - Castle...loss of reality and living in adoption fantasy
  - Mask...loss of willingness to be transparent and real
  - Shirt with "Superwoman" embroidered on it...loss of willingness to face the pain of the past
  - Small house...loss of emotional connection with adoptive parents
  - Plastic unborn baby...losses I received as an unborn baby because I was unwanted
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. *Remove the items, one by one, and tell God everything you feel and remember about each loss.*
- I feel angry about....
  - I am terrified of....
  - I was so sad when....
  - I felt hate toward....
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. *Forgive.* Speak the following words, addressing them to each person listed. “ \_\_\_\_\_, I forgive you for \_\_\_\_\_.”
- Others (birth parents, adoptive parents, etc.)
  - God
  - Yourself
6. *Replace the items and thank God (sacrificially) for each loss.* “Thank you, God, for allowing this pain in my life. I know you will enable me to grow closer to you because of it.”
- Thank you for loss of birthmother...it taught me my need for you.
  - Thank you for the loss of emotional closeness with parents...it taught me the need I have for healing.
  - Thank you for the “Superwoman” days...it taught me I don’t have to be perfect because Jesus died for my sins—past, present, and future.
  - Thank you for the mask and the “I have it all together attitude”...it taught me that I can be human and that I am loved, warts and all.
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. *Offer a sacrifice of praise to God; put your box up on a shelf.* “God, I give all of this to you. Do with it whatever you want. Please redeem it for your glory.”
8. *Listen!* II Chronicles 29:27 (KJV) says, “...when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also with trumpets and instruments.” Listen to his words:
- I love you with an everlasting love.
  - You are precious to me.
  - I will never leave you or forsake you.
  - You are my child.
  - You are the apple of my eye.
  - You belong to me.
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

"Adopted children need to be reminded often of their strengths, competence, and intrinsic worth. This enables them to gain some mastery over the deep sense of helplessness that may arise from adoption loss."

## Chapter 7



# Finding the Feelings

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  - Thank you for the mask and the “I have it all together attitude”...it taught me that I can be human and that I am loved, warts and all.
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. *Offer a sacrifice of praise to God; put your box up on a shelf.* “God, I give all of this to you. Do with it whatever you want. Please redeem it for your glory.”
  
8. *Listen!* II Chronicles 29:27 (KJV) says, “...when the burnt offering began, the song of the Lord began also with trumpets and instruments.” Listen to his words:
  - I love you with an everlasting love.
  - You are precious to me.
  - I will never leave you or forsake you.
  - You are my child.
  - You are the apple of my eye.
  - You belong to me.
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

"Adopted children need to be reminded often of their strengths, competence, and intrinsic worth. This enables them to gain some mastery over the deep sense of helplessness that may arise from adoption loss."

## Chapter 8



# Sandcastles of the Heart

“Just because I don’t talk  
about my birth family  
doesn’t mean I don’t think  
about them.”

The framed print above my bedroom table says it all: “My Sandcastle.” It pictures blue skies, a sandy beach, and a four-year-old girl straddling a two-foot-tall sandcastle. Busy at work, she slaps handful upon handful of wet sand upon her creation, oblivious to the seagulls flying overhead or the people walking by.

“I’ve been just like that little girl,” I told myself as I examined the print. “I’ve been building a sandcastle in my heart for years, trying to build a life that would conform to my fantasy of what life should be. Life with my birth family. Life with my perfect family that was out there somewhere.”

My sandcastle grew as the years went by, and I felt very safe living in it.

But then the tide came in, and with each successive wave, my sandcastle washed out to sea. After the last vestige had washed away, I stood empty handed, looking into the face of Reality, and I felt angry!

In the midst of my anger, someone came striding down the sunny beach, with strong legs and sandaled feet. Pointing to the place where my sandcastle stood, he gently said, “Look what is there instead. It is reality. You are going to gain your sense of safety and comfort from another source now—one that is deeper and richer. I (God) want to fill your innermost being with my presence. You don’t need your sandcastle anymore. Look to me. I am all you will ever need.”

1. Do you think adoptees can live in a fantasy world without being aware of it? If so, how?

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2. Make up what you think would be an adoptee fantasy. Don't spare any details!

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3. On page 85, Drs. Brodzinsky and Schechter say, "In our experience, all adoptees engage in a search process. It may not be a literal search, but it is a meaningful search nonetheless. It begins when the child first asks, 'Why did it happen? Who are they? Where are they now?'" Do you agree with the doctors? Why or why not?

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4. There is a very special place reserved deep in the adoptee's heart that no one else can fill. Who do you believe could fill that place?

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5. Without peeking at the book, write your definition of "fantasy."

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6. Why do you think adopted kids fantasize more than non-adopted kids?

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7. Are adoptee fantasies bad? Should parents try to stop them? Should adoptees try to hide them?

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8. Name six ways for recognizing adoptee fantasies:

a. \_\_\_\_\_

b. \_\_\_\_\_

c. \_\_\_\_\_

d. \_\_\_\_\_

e. \_\_\_\_\_

f. \_\_\_\_\_

9. How can adoptive parents gain access into the fantasy worlds of their children?

- Ask probing questions.
- Tell them to quit staring out the window.
- Ask them what's wrong with them.
- Ask them, "If you could ask me anything in the whole world, what would it be?"
- Try to distract them from daydreaming.
- Tell them that it's all just pretend.
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

10. Draw a sandcastle made up of fantasy thoughts an adoptee might have.

Truth be known, Moses, an adoptee who lived in biblical times, probably had adoption fantasies like those of many adoptees today. On the hillsides as a shepherd, he probably dreamed of that perfect family and the nurturing person who would love and care for him unconditionally.

As Moses revealed these deep secrets to God, he discovered a rare bit of wisdom about these fantasies. He discovered that the direction of the fantasy was what mattered. If the object of his fantasy was a person or circumstance from the past, he would be filled with sadness and depression. If the object was someone in his present-day life, he would be disappointed and have unrealistic expectations of them. However, if the object of his adoption fantasy was God himself, he would experience hope and comfort greater than the wounds of the past.

“God can do anything—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams!” (Ephesians 3:20, *The Message*)

"The fantasies are the mother replacement: the comfort zone that the mother did not provide. They serve the function of the surrogate rag doll that experimental monkeys are given after their real mother is taken away."

Betty Jean Lifton  
*Journey of the Adopted  
Self*



## Chapter 9

# You

# Go First!

“I want you to take the initiative to open conversations about my birth family.”

Just as a five-year-old child wants an adult to jump into deep water first and then be there to catch him when he jumps in, so the adopted child wants the parent to open up the topics of relinquishment, adoption, and reunion.

1. Even though adoptees have a deep need to talk about their birth relatives, they are often hesitant to broach the topic. Why do you think this is so?

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2. Read Nancy Verrier’s statement about victimization on page 97. What would some thoughts of victimization sound like? Give specific examples.

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3. What is the difference between feeling victimized and feeling sorry for yourself?

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4. Flesh out specific thoughts that characterize the various components of a victim's mindset (pages 98-99).

*Innocence:*

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*Defenselessness:*

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*Helplessness:*

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5. What is the adoptive parent's greatest fear?

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6. What does the adoptee most need the adoptive parents to do?

- Be a wimp and give in to fear
- Act nervous and self-conscious
- Display conviction that parents have a vital role to play in the life of their child
- Attempt to "out do" the birth parents; use one-up-manship

- Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. What specific ways can parents signal that it is okay for the adoptee to ask whatever he wants to about his birth or birth family?

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8. List at least eight statements that adoptive parents can use to initiate conversation about the birth family with the child.

*Example:* "I wonder where you got that beautiful red hair. Maybe from your birth mom?"

a. \_\_\_\_\_

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b. \_\_\_\_\_

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c. \_\_\_\_\_

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d. \_\_\_\_\_

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e. \_\_\_\_\_

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f. \_\_\_\_\_

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g. \_\_\_\_\_

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h. \_\_\_\_\_

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9. Draw a picture of a tortoise (symbolic of the adoptee). List five things he might say when he is brave enough to stick out his head from his shell and ask a question about adoption.

The tortoise's statements:

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Matthew 18:3 says, "And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me."

**Five Common Attitudes of Adoptive Parents**

1. Insistence: All problems are due to adoption.
2. Assumption: Parents have romanticized views of adoption and expect adoptee to have only positive attitudes about adoption.
3. Acknowledgment: Adoption is seen as *one* of the factors in family problems.
4. Rejection: Parents admit, "Yes, there's a difference, but...." They want to forget it.
5. Denial: Parents have not told children about adoption. There is a big secret in the family.

H. David Kirk  
*Shared Fate*

## Chapter 10



# Sticks and Stones Won't Break My Bones

"I need to know the truth

about my conception, birth, and family history, no matter how painful the details may be."

"Going through home again" means that the adoptee reaches way back into history to find his origins so that he can be a blessing to others and be at peace within himself. I believe this is one of the developmental tasks of every adoptee. When one "goes through home again," he finds both positive and painful aspects of his past. However, the adoptee longs for every part, for it is HIS history!

I will never forget the first conversation I had with my birth mother after having searched for her for seven years. She delivered some shocking news during our telephone conversation: She had been raped. I am glad she felt free to share that information with me because it gave me more love for her and the sacrificial act of love she gave in carrying me for nine months until birth. At first it produced a sense of shame. Whenever others would ask about my adoption story, I always began with the words, "I was conceived in rape." A few years later, I realized I was carrying her shame and pain. Now I simply say, "My mother was raped."

1. Why do you believe adoptees engage in a search for their origins?

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2. Are there some to who don't have any interest? If so, who and why?

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3. Read the words of Drs. Brodzinsky and Schecter on page 111. If adoptees don't all engage in a literal search, what do they do instead?

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4. When the desire to search is subconscious or masked, what are some of the ways adoptees express their unspoken need? Give examples for children and adults.

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5. What happens within the adoptee's psyche when she finds out later in life that negative information about her history has been willfully withheld?

- What she doesn't know will never hurt her.
- She will feel betrayed and unable to trust others in the future.
- She will believe there is something wrong with her—that's why it was kept a secret.
- She will be angry.
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. What do you believe is the appropriate age for parents to disclose negative or painful information?

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7. What clue should parents look for to assure them that the time is right (see the bottom of page 113)?

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8. What developmental task do adoptive parents help their children with by disclosing painful history?
    - They learn to bite the bullet.
    - They learn to separate from their painful past, grieve it, and go on to a bright future.
    - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  9. What is the desired result of this type of conversation?
    - Building your relationship with your child
    - A demonstration of unconditional love when the child feels upset or shameful
    - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  10. How can adoptive parents prepare themselves for such a task?
    - Be at peace with the information before sharing it.
    - Don't assume you know how the child will react.
    - Pray and ask God for wisdom in choosing the right words.
    - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  11. As the conversation progresses, what should the parents do?
    - Read body language.
    - Don't over-react to the child's show of emotion; show empathy.
    - Don't assume that what seems upsetting to you will necessarily be upsetting to the child.
    - Let the child take the lead. Answer questions as they come up.
    - Other \_\_\_\_\_
  12. What are the painful parts of your child's history that need to be told?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  13. Create a mock conversation between you and your child in which you reveal the painful parts of his or her past. Use happy, sad, confused, and angry faces after each statement.

“If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciple. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” (John 8:32 NIV)

“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.”  
(Proverbs 25:11 NIV)

"Is this easy? Of course not, but it is the right thing to do. Hidden information and family secrets always surface at inappropriate times and can cause significant damage to relationships. By you demonstrating respect for your child and his heritage, you reinforce your relationship and model an example of how to react to such information."

Jeanine Jones, M.S.W., CCSW  
*Jewel Among Jewels Adoption  
News*

# Chapter 11



## Am I Bad?

"I am afraid I was 'given away' by my birth mother because I was a bad baby. I need you to help me dump my toxic shame."

Many adoptees live with the silent shame that tells them something is inherently wrong with them. The daughter of a friend of mine was convinced of this. In spite of her mother's reassurance that there was nothing wrong with her and that she was a wonderful child, the daughter continued to carry the shame. When she was a teen, she was diagnosed with scoliosis. This was proof to her that something truly was wrong with her, and that was why her birth mother "gave her away."

Adoptees will cope with this shame in one of two ways: through rebellion or conformity. This is the root problem that needs to be identified and removed.

1. Define "shame" in your own words.

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2. What are some ways that adoptees try to deal with the pain?

- Overachieve
- Display an "I-have-it-all-together" attitude
- Try to please everyone
- Sabotage her nearly successful efforts
- Apologize incessantly
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. What messages lie beneath the coping mechanisms just listed? See pages 118-119.

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4. Have you detected any remnants of shame in your child? If so, what are they? If not, have you been looking for them?

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5. The shame originates with the relinquishment by the birth mother. What is the predominant thought that produces shame?

“My birth  
mother\_\_\_\_\_”

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6. How could you teach your child to recognize and transform shameful thoughts? Fill in the blanks in the following table.

<b>Shameful Thought:</b>	<b>How to Transform It:</b>
"Me bad baby mommy?"	"No, you are a wonderful child."
"Did my tummy mommy love me?"	
"My life is a mistake."	
"I am an illegitimate child."	

7. Write a “welcoming letter” to your child, telling her how happy you are that she is your daughter and what you would have said to her if you were in the birthing room when she was born.

"Not flesh of my flesh  
nor bone of my bone,  
but still miraculously  
my own. Never forget  
for a single minute  
that you didn't grow  
under my heart, but  
in it."

--Fleur Conkling

Hejlinger

8. What are some words you can use to affirm your child's value?

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“I sought the Lord, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears.  
Those who look to him are radiant; their faces are never covered with shame.”  
(Psalm 34:4-5 NIV)

"The best way you as  
an adoptive parent  
can help free your  
child from toxic  
shame is to learn to  
laugh at your own  
foibles and mistakes.  
Because your child  
may believe she is a  
mistake, she needs  
you to model for her  
that being human is  
okay."

## Chapter 12



# Don't Leave Me!

"I am afraid you will  
abandon me."

"Reject my child? That is the last  
thing I would ever do. She is precious to me."

This is how parents react when I tell them that their child is terrified of rejection by them. Did the adoptive parents create this fear? No, it goes back to the initial separation from the birth mother. No matter how loving the plan or whether the adoptive parents were there in the delivery room to hold the baby after birth, the sudden disappearance of the one to which the child was most intimately united for nine months translates as rejection. The result is that the child looks at life through a lens of rejection—including his adoptive parents who adore him.

1. What was the reaction of the adoptive mother to her child's fears on pages 124-125?

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2. Without looking at the book, define fear in your own words, and then tell how it manifests in your child.

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3. What do you think is your child's perception of relinquishment by the birth mother?

- Being left at the side of a road
- A baby in a basket in a field alone
- A birthing room with no one there but the child
- A child looking into a window on a cold winter's night at a happy family, longing to be a part of it
- On the outside looking in
- An infant crying for her mother
- A baby left on the steps of an orphanage, with only a diaper to her name
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. How does the fear of abandonment show up in your child's life? He is afraid to:

- Go to kindergarten
- Be left in the nursery at church
- Stay with a babysitter
- Be away from you at all—even in another room of the house
- Enter college
- Say good-bye
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. What are some practical ways you can convince your child that you will always be there for him?

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6. How are your qualifications as a journey mate for your child? Are you free from a dysfunctional past and the losses of life prior to adoption, such as infertility, stillbirth, and death? If you haven't dealt with your own fears, you won't be able to go to that fearful place of

remembrance with your child; you will run the other way emotionally!  
Assess your readiness in the space provided below.

When you need me  
to make you whole  
to give meaning to your lives  
to heal your pain,  
I feel overwhelmed.  
                    Connie Dawson, Ph.D.,  
L.P.C.

7. How can you empower your child away from fear and into confidence?

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8. Draw a haunted mansion. Write your child's fears on the walls. Then on the lines below describe how you and your child can remove those messages and put positive ones in their places on the lines.



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“I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you.” (John 14:18 NIV)

"Empathy will be your key into your child's fears of abandonment. Don't be afraid to specifically verbalize your thought-provoking questions. It will connect you and your child in a deeper way."

# Chapter 13



## I May Seem Happy, But...

“I may appear more ‘whole’  
than I actually am. I need  
your help to uncover the

parts of myself that I keep hidden so I can integrate all the  
elements of my identity.”

According to psychologists Joseph Luft and Harry Ingram, there are four parts to a person’s identity. Identity is a big deal for the adoptee anyway, because he is trying to make sense of his dual identity—nature and nurture. But studying those four aspects, the psychologists suggest, is a helpful tool for helping *you* to understand your child more effectively.

1. The first part of the adoptee’s identity is “known to self.” This is the part of herself that she is consciously aware of, like the color of her hair, skin, eyes, etc. Name the specific “known to self” items about your child. What would she say she knows about herself?

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2. The second aspect of the adoptee’s personality is “unknown to self.” This is the image that the child, teen, or adult projects to the outside world. He may wear the mask of a strong guy or put on the “I have it all together” attitude, but it is important for you as a parent to know if this strength

comes from health and wholeness within or if it is a cover up for insecurity and fear. How does your child present himself to the outside world?

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3. What is essential in the child's life for his strength on the outside to be paralleled with strength on the inside (see page 134)?

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4. What symptoms would indicate your child is wearing a mask on the outside but feeling insecure on the inside?

- He conforms to whatever group he is in.
- He is an overly compliant child.
- He cries when he hears or sees themes of abandonment and loss.
- He acts one way at home and another way outside the home.
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. The third aspect of personality is "unknown to self." If you've heard the words to a popular song "me and my shadow," you will have some idea of what this category is all about. This can include the subtle messages the adoptee receives while in the womb—messages about her worth especially. If the birth mother chooses to become detached emotionally from the child during pregnancy, or if for some other reason, like alcohol or drug addiction, the mother does not have a welcoming, nurturing attitude toward the child, the child will sense this.

What would you put in this list for your child?

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6. The fourth aspect of the adoptee's identity is "unknown to others." This is the information about herself that she is aware of but may choose not to share with others, such as the painful parts of her adoption or even the fact that she was adopted. This is not a bad thing! In fact, it demonstrates healthy boundaries. What are you aware of that your child keeps from the outside world?

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Psalm 139:13 and 15 say, "For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.... My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body."

"Adopted children do not stay children. They grow up. The issue for the 'big people' in their lives is this: Will we assure that they grow up healthy and whole? Or will we handicap and cripple them with secrets, barriers, possessiveness, and fear? I, for one, see myself in the former role. I'm the chief facilitator, the president of their fan club, and the head cheerleader.

Kathy Giles

# Chapter 14



## I Want to Be Strong

“I need to gain a sense of personal power.”

The story of the mama eagle teaching the eaglet to fly is another wonderful lesson, like grafting, that we can learn from nature. We are going to go through this process together, and your assignment will be to assess where your eaglet is and how you can teach him to fly.

1. Eagles build their nests high in the mountains or trees. They take sticks and thorns to form their nests and then line it with soft things. What are some of the sticks and thorns (hard things in his life) that formed the original nest (womb) the child was born into, and what soft things (nurturing) did the mother line the nest with?

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2. When the eaglets reach a certain stage in development, they begin to complain about the sticks and thorns. What things would your eaglet complain about?

I was given up by my birth mother.

I don't think my birth mother loved me.

If my birth mother loved me, why did she give me away?

Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. At that point, the mama eagle flutters over them, and their attention is drawn away from the painful thorns and sticks as it is drawn to the sound of her wings. A certain language is communicated by the wings that only the eaglets can understand. As the mama eagle spreads her wings abroad (14 feet), they begin to say, “Wow, we didn’t know you were so big! We want to learn to fly like you, mama!” What would be the language you could communicate to your child that would encourage him to look away from the his painful past and toward an exciting future?

Share the birth and adoption stories.

Tell him that he is a gift to you from God.

Show him how confident you can be about the facts of his adoption and his process of becoming whole.

Tell him how the seemingly painful things in life can turn out to be the biggest blessings.

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. How can you encourage your child to get up on your wing?

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5. As you fly with the adoptee on your wing, when is the best time to lurch and let him tumble for a while?

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6. How will you know it is time to swoop down and rescue your desperate eaglet?

When he is overwhelmed.

“Let’s talk more about your birth family later.”

When he is afraid.

“I will walk with you to school the first day.”

When he is angry.

“I would be angry too if I had been through what you have.”

When he is tired.

“Let’s get a good night’s sleep and talk about this some more tomorrow.”

Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. In time, your child will come to terms with his relinquishment and adoption experiences. He will be able to face any storm in life because of the fact that he has weathered this dark storm. He will fly with confidence and courage. Draw a picture of an eagle (as best you can) and write messages coming from his beak that you believe your child will say when he gains a sense of mastery and control.

Deuteronomy 32:11 says, "...like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them on its pinions."

### **Seven Affirmations for the Adopted Child**

1. I will do my best to connect with you.
2. You can count on me.
3. You can push, but I will not let you push me away.
4. I will care for you and myself.
5. We can both tell the truth and be responsible for our behaviors.
6. I support you in learning what you may want to know about your history and heritage.
7. You are lovable just the way you are.

Connie Dawson, Ph.D., L.P.C.  
*Growing Up Again*

## Chapter 15



# I Wanna Be Me!

"Please don't say I look or act just like you. I need you to acknowledge and celebrate our differences."

I absolutely cringe when I hear adoptive parents say, "Oh, she looks just like us. She has blonde hair and blue eyes...she just fits right into the family. No one would ever know she was adopted."

Wrong! She knows she was adopted and is not like you. To make these kinds of comments only fosters denial and puts the adoptee in a more vulnerable place.

I can understand how it happened with my parents back in the '40s, but it is still happening today. I hear it all the time!

1. How do you think the adoptee might interpret the words just stated?
  - It's not okay to be me.
  - You want me to be and look like you.
  - I can't be my own person.
  - There's something wrong with me so they have to cover it up and act like I am just like them because they are okay.
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

"Differences can be either a source of shame or an invitation to learn about the adoptee's tie to her pre-adoption past."



2. Differences are a big deal to the adopted child, whether he is conscious of it or not. What can result if differences are not acknowledged and explained?

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3. Do you believe there are inherent differences between you and your child? If so, what are they? Here's a list to help you get started. Name specific differences after each bulleted point.

Food:

Friends:

Personality:

Leisure activities:

Body build:

Fears:

How he gives and receives love:

Taste in music:

Hair and eye color:

Other:

4. What is the parental task when it comes to differences (see page 149)?

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5. If the differences aren't validated, what subtle message will the child receive (see page 149)?

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6. What is the healthiest way to deal with differences? Give a one word answer.

7. How can adoptive parents learn to celebrate the differences in their children?

Study the child—not in an “I’m-going-to-study-you” kind of attitude, but a “you-are-precious-to-me” kind of attitude.

Have an ethnic dinner.

Talk about the birth family freely.

Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. Read the piece about the braided ribbons on pages 151-152. Draw a three-stranded braid in the space below and integrate the aspects of the nature side of your child and the nurture side.

After you have completed your drawing, purchase three ribbons of the designated colors and do the exercise with your child. Hang the ribbon somewhere significant so that the child will be reminded constantly that he is a unique weave of nature and nurture.

Psalm 139:14 says, “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made....”

"When adoptive parents deny the reality of a difference between a biological child and the adopted child, they think they are assuring the adoptee of their love, but they are, in effect, denying the adoptee's reality."

Betty Jean Lifton

# Chapter 16



## Don't Let Go of Me for Too Long

“Let me be my own person...  
but don't let me cut myself  
off from you.”

All children long to differentiate from their parents, but adopted children find this difficult because of their fear of abandonment. For this reason, it will be a slower process for the adopted child than it is for the biological child. It may seem like a push-pull process to the adoptive parents as the child learns to separate himself but also know that there are open arms waiting to congratulate him.

Again, we come back to the topic of the dual identity. Just think about it. As the adoptee takes one step forward, she becomes more aware of her pre-adoption past. It's a paradox, but it's true.

1. Adoptees who are trying to differentiate from their parents may go about it in awkward ways. Name a few.

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2. Startling, potentially hurtful statements may be hurled at the adoptive parent. “You’re not my *real* parents.” It is important that the parent remain the adult in these situations and respond accordingly.

How would you respond to this statement?

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3. What are some other signs that your child is moving toward autonomy?

Questions about difference in skin color

Statements about what is real (real families, etc.)

Wondering about what birth parents look like

Put-down statements

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. In your own words, what do you believe the adoptee is trying to communicate with the following statements? (No peeking at the book!)

Statement	Adoptee’s Intended Meaning
Families are defined by blood.	
You are just my adoptive mother.	
You are not my real family.	
I wonder what my birth family looks like.	
My real mother would let me do that.	
My birth mommy gave me up because she loved me.	

My other mommy gave me away because I was a bad baby.	
You are sort of my daddy.	
I don't want to tell my adoption story at school this year.	
I'm pregnant.	

5. What is the best reaction a parent can display when the child makes statements such as these?
- Run in the bathroom and sob.
  - Listen calmly and compassionately.
  - Bite your lip and try not to cry.
  - Take it personally.
  - Doubt your qualifications as a parent.
  - Get mad and storm out of the room.
  - Play the martyr.
6. How can you help her to build and strengthen her individuality? Give examples of the following:
- Verbalize what she is probably feeling
  - Offer assurance of your presence and support
  - Tender touch
  - Leave notes for her
  - Learn to let go, let her make mistakes, etc.
  - Appreciate her curiosity
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
7. What is the greatest fear of the parents as separation occurs (see page 158)?

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Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it."

"The greatest gift you can give to your child as she learns to move forward toward autonomy is an attitude of letting go."

## Chapter 17



# Don't Tell Without My Permission

“Please respect my privacy  
regarding my adoption.  
Don't tell other people  
without my consent.”

Why is it that when someone commits a crime the headlines read, “Adopted child of so-and-so commits cold-blooded murder?” The headline certainly wouldn't read, “Biological child of so-and-so commits cold-blooded murder.”

Why is this? Why do society and ignorant friends tend to label the adopted child?

The adopted child, more than anything, wants to feel like one of the kids. Like he fits in. Like he's not weird. Labels like the aforementioned headline single out the adoptee and make it sound like it's bad to be adopted.

1. Your child needs to know that you won't reveal his adoptive status like a banner in a parade. How can the two of you work on an agreement that would foster this?

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2. There is a fine line between celebrating the adoptee's differences and “marking” him as adopted in a way that may cause damage. What kind of damage could occur?

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3. Define “confidentiality.”

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4. Give specific instances of when you can show respect and confidentiality about your child’s adoptive status.

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Matthew 5:37 states, “Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’”

"Confidentiality implies privacy, intimacy, and trust. To say that confidentiality between an adopted child and parent is vitally important is not an exaggeration. Upon this foundation is built trust, honest communication, and freedom to express personal thoughts, feelings and beliefs."



## Chapter 18

# I Feel Crabby



## On My Birthday

“Birthdays may be difficult for me.”

*I have* talked to adoptees who say that birthdays are a happy occasion for them. However, I

have not met one adoptee who, if asked, would not confess that he thinks about his birth mother on his birthday.

Birthdays are a bittersweet time for adoptees. Bitter because they lost the person they were intimately united with for nine months. Instead of calling it “birthday,” perhaps we should call it “loss day.” Some adoptees fake happiness for the sake of their joyous relatives, and some withdraw, not wanting to see or talk to a soul.

1. What would be some clues that your child is experiencing bittersweet thoughts and feelings on his birthday?
  - In the toddler years:
  - In school-age children:
  - In teenagers:
  - In adults:

2. How does it make you feel to know that the adoptee is potentially struggling with mixed emotions?

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3. What should you do when you notice signs that your child is stressed?

- Go on with the party anyway.
- Figure he'll get over it once the guests arrive.
- Ask him prior to planning if he indeed wants to have a party.
- Ask probing questions.
- During the party, take him in the house and chew him out.
- Make fun of his reaction after the kids leave the party.
- Verbally acknowledge that you are aware that adoptees sometimes find birthdays difficult.
- Give the child extra attention—a little TLC goes a long way.
- Beef up bedtime rituals (extra story, back rubs, etc).
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Ecclesiastes 3:4 says, "There is a time to laugh and a time to weep."

"There seems to be an anniversary reaction (also felt by the birth mother), which sends many adoptees into despair around their birthdays.... Is it any wonder they sabotage their parties? Why would they want to celebrate the day they were separated from their birth

## Chapter 19

# I Hate Having to Say,



“I don’t  
know...  
I was  
adopted.”

“Not knowing my full

medical history can be distressing at times.”

With every new physical ailment that comes my way, I wonder if it is tied to my unknown past. Many pieces of vital information are withheld from adoptees—information that those who were not adopted take for granted.

1. There are many times when an adoptee has to say “I don’t know. I was adopted.” List some of those times.

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2. What emotion do you think that statement triggers in the adoptee?

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3. What can adoptive parents do to comfort the child? Or what can adults who were adopted as children do?

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4. What can adoptive parents do to prepare the child?
- Get a full medical history from both sides of the birth family.
  - Tell them “Chin up!”
  - Talk about the reality of the embarrassment many adoptees feel regarding this topic.
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. Write a scenario in which an adoptive parent tells a physician prior to her examination that the child is adopted.

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6. Draw a picture of an adoptee that has to say, “I don’t know. I was adopted.”

Colossians 3:12 says, “...clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”

"When an adoptee is denied medical information, whether from a hospital, county court, or birth relative, he may feel like a naughty child who has just had his hands slapped or like an adult who has no rights whatsoever."

## Chapter 20



# Is It Okay If I Am a Handfull?

am afraid I will be too  
much for you to  
handle.”

As I sat at breakfast chatting  
with an adoptee friend, she

related her most recent visit with her psychiatrist. With sadness she said, “My doctor says that he has done all he can do for me. He is referring me to someone else.”

When she said these words, a tidal wave of fear washed over me. Would my doctor say the same thing? It translated to my friend and I that we were too much to handle and worthy only of rejection.

When I went to my doctor the next time, with a stuttering voice I asked him, “Am I too much to handle?” When he caught on to what I was really saying he said, “Sherrie, I *want* you to be my patient. I am here for you.”

I choked back tears of relief.

1. Read the account of the *Runaway Bunny*. What kind of statements did the bunny issue to the mother bunny?

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2. How did the mother respond?

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3. Adoptees have a tendency to run from the pain of relinquishment. As soon as they get near the pain, they run. They run out of support groups. Out of relationships. Out of commitments. What should adoptees be told when this happens?

“You’re a case!”

“What’s wrong with you?”

From counselor: “I am going to hold your feet to the fire until you feel the emotions.”

That adoptees must revisit the place of pain in order to be whole.

That the natural reaction is to run—they are not weird or alone.

From counselor: “Where did you go?” (This should be said when the client disassociates.)

“I am here for you!”

“Don’t be silly!”

Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. What are adoptees basically afraid of?

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5. Draw a picture of you, the adoptive parents, as the parent bunnies and your child as the baby bunny. Draw things that he has run away from and then ways you have met him and assured him that you are there for him.

# Chapter 21



Don't Give  
Up on Me  
When I Act  
Like a Brat

"When I act out my fears in obnoxious ways, please hang in there with me, and respond wisely."

One adoptive parent I know had a daughter who was acting out in every way possible. When she got to the point of suicide, this mother listened to her fears but then found professional institutional intervention. The mother's words were "I am sending you away for one year to save your life." This is a wise mother!

1. What are some ways that adoptees may act out their fears?

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2. What does the adoptee always need to be reassured of by you?

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3. What trap do adoptive parents sometimes fall into? (See the case of Laura on page 194.) Have you fallen into this trap? How and when?

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4. When do you think professional intervention is necessary?

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5. What is another trap adoptive parents fall into, according to Dr. Foster Cline?

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6. Read the account of Dr. Cline and his clients. List insights and how they might apply to your situation. Be ready to share them with the group. (Listening to other adoptive parents is one of the best forms of support!)

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7. As a parent, what can you do with a child who is acting out?

Be a confident parent.

Be affectionate as a married couple.

Maintain a united front.

Let the adoptee make choices.

Let the adoptee learn from the consequences.

Don't discipline in anger.



Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. Write your own definition of “wise” and apply it to how you have responded to your child in the past and present.

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Proverbs 8:11 states, “...for wisdom is more precious than rubies, and nothing you desire can compare with her.”

"Adopted children need to be given the freedom to express 'obnoxious' feelings.... However, they also need to learn that while unpleasant feelings are permissible, obnoxious behavior is not."

## Chapter 22



# I Will Always Want You to Be My Parents

“Even if I decide to search for my birth family, I will always want you to be my parents.”

I have yet to meet one adoptee who has been reunited with birth parents who doesn't love his or her adoptive parents more than before the search began. Adoptive parents need to know that most adoptees have a fierce loyalty and love for them, but that there is also a place within the adoptee's heart that only the birth parents can fill. The majority of adoptees I talk with say, “I am so glad I was adopted!”

1. How do you feel about the possibility of your child instigating a reunion with birth parents?

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2. Read the description of Marilyn Meberg's reaction on page 200 and see if you can identify. If so, how? If not, why?

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3. What does Kathy Giles say the greatest fear is for adoptive parents when thinking about the prospect of a reunion? What parts of her piece stand out to you?

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4. What sources of support can you obtain when your child is in the search stages?

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5. What is your child's perspective when contemplating reunion?

- I want information.
- I don't want to hurt my adoptive parents.
- This has nothing to do with them. It doesn't negate my love for them.
- I feel torn between two sets of parents.
- I am finally being true to my own process and not living according to someone else's agenda.

Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. What can you do for your child?

- Disclose *all* information.
- Cry a lot.
- Encourage your child to count the cost. He may be rejected. Is he able to withstand such an experience?
- Tell him *you're* the parents and ask why he would want to search.
- Assure him that he will grow, no matter what the outcome.

Other \_\_\_\_\_

7. Draw a picture of both sets of parents and your child.

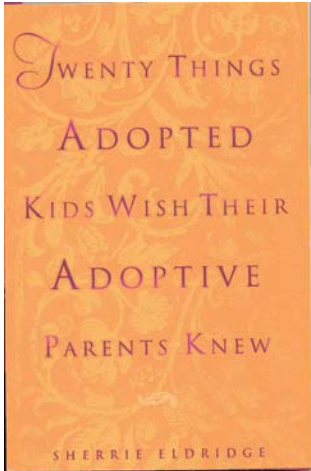
I Corinthians 13:4-7 says, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

"For me, a real mother is one who recognizes and respects the whole identity of her child and does not ask him to deny any part of himself."

Betty Jean Lifton

*Journey of the Adopted*

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**GREGORY C KECK, Ph.D.**, Founder/Director of the Attachment and Bonding Center of Ohio and co-author of *Adopting the Hurt Child*

As a psychiatrist who has worked with dozens of adoptive families, and as an adoptive father myself, I can appreciate the sensitivity, understanding, common sense and helpful suggestions given in this book. Sherrie has thrown the light of appreciation and understanding on the unique issues that often lie buried in the corners of adoptees’ lives.

**FOSTER. W. CLINE, M.D.**, is an internationally acclaimed child and adult psychiatrist, consultant, speaker, and author of *Parenting with Love and Logic*.



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