

5 Ways to Help Your Child Process Adoption Loss

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Susan Kuligowski | November 30, 2017

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While there is much focus on what is gained through adoption, adoptive families should also be cognizant of what has been lost. Whether or not a child is adopted at birth or as a teen; as a ward of the state or an orphan; domestically or internationally; or having come from a safe home vs. an abusive environment, it is natural and understandable for an adopted child to be experience confusion, grief, and uncertainty to some degree at some point during his life – or in some cases throughout his life.

Here are some ways that you can help your child process adoption loss.

Education

Educate yourself to better understand what adoption loss means to an adopted child and how this may impact your forever family. Your child's grief is not a reflection of your parenting, but his reality as an adopted child. You need to be accepting of this loss as you would any loss your child may experience during his lifetime. By understanding where this loss comes

from, what it may look like in your child depending on age and maturity, and how you can best support him through his grief, you will be able to help her to better understand his feelings and help him to find healthy ways to deal with these feelings at different stages of his life. Educating yourself may also prepare you for your own feelings toward your child's birth family and how this reality applies to the dynamic of your forever family

Acknowledge Feelings

Allow your child to share her feelings with no expectations or judgement. While you hope she'll find comfort in her adopted family – and she most likely wants that, too – that doesn't change the fact like anyone else who has experienced loss, she needs to feel in control of her own feelings and to be allowed to process these feelings. As an adopted parent, sometimes we need to take a deep breath and remember that we've taken on a great responsibility in adopting a child. In other words, be open and honest and allow her to do the same. Never embellish your child's adoption story – rather, if you don't have the answer, tell her so. And while you need to use your judgement based on age and maturity so far as some of the more critical and sometimes unpleasant details, it's always best to tell the truth at an age-appropriate level. We must acknowledge an adopted child and embrace her past just as much as we want to focus on her future. Encourage her to ask questions and talk about adoption when the opportunity arises. Don't push her to discuss something she isn't ready for, but certainly be ready for when that moment comes.

Seek Support

Adoption support groups are a great opportunity for your child and your family to share thoughts and feelings common in the adoption community and in a safe setting with others who get it. While family and friends are obvious go-tos, they may not necessarily understand what your child and/or your family is experiencing on an intimate level. Through the support of other adoptive families, you may find play groups, camps, educational programs, and other resources that match your child's and/or your family's needs. In addition, there are many books and movies that touch on various adoption themes. These can be a great gateway to lead into conversations with your adopted child and let him know he is not alone in these thoughts.

Work it Out

Sometimes an activity may help to soothe a child experiencing loss. If she's not up for deep conversation, encourage her to express herself through the written word, art, or music. Consider working together to create a life book or scrapbook of your child's adoption story – a great way to bond with your child while allowing her to work through her loss in a creative way. Not into the arts? Sports is another great bonding exercise – time spent together where the focus can be spent working toward a healthy result both emotionally and physically. Take a run or a walk, play ball, go for a swim.

Counseling

If your child is having a difficult time opening up to you, it's never a bad thing to consider counseling should he exhibit dangerous or unhealthy behavior. Keep in contact with his teachers and coaches for any noticeable changes in behavior. Sometimes talking to a professional who is removed from the situation allows for another level of trust necessary to share thoughts or feelings he may not yet know how to express or may feel uncomfortable expressing at home.

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