

# Continuum of Development of Adopted Children

## 0-3 YEARS

Adopted child does not realize difference between themselves and non-adopted children

### Strategies for parents

Collect as much concrete information as possible (goodbye letters from birthparents and pictures are helpful)

Develop "Life Book" for children, including these concrete bits of information.

Begin talking comfortably and positively with your infant, family, and friends about adoption.

## 3-7 YEARS

Child asks a lot of questions. Loves to hear their adoption story. Can repeat it verbatim but has little understanding of concepts.

### Strategies for parents

Encourage questions and answer honestly. Difficult issues may be omitted (but never changed) until child is older.

Tell Adoption Story as a favorite bedtime story.

Use and add this to their Life Book.

Reassure child that they will not lose adoptive family.

## 8-12 YEARS

Child understands concept of adoption. Begins grieving process. May stop asking questions as part of denial. Realizes that they had to lose something to be adopted.

### Strategies for parents

Don't force child to discuss issues but let them know you are open and comfortable when they are ready.

Let child know it is understood that they can love both sets of parents and that they do not have to choose.

Ask if child has questions or feelings they would like to discuss.

Let child know you are not threatened or angry about questions regarding birth family and/or past history.

## 12-16 YEARS

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.

### Strategies for parents

Allow child to exercise control whenever possible. Provide opportunities for decision-making.

Child has a right to their birth information. Help child access and accept information.

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 present consequences for broken rules. Allow child to experience natural consequences of behavior.

Continue to let child know that you love him/her no matter what.

## 16-19 YEARS

Young adult may be depressed and over-react to losses. May be anxious about growing up and leaving home.

### Strategies for parents

Let child know they may remain at home after graduation if they choose.

Be alert for sadness when relationships with peers fall or during anniversary reactions such as birthdays or Mother's Day.

Continue to keep adoption topic open with the home.

Provide supportive opportunities for independence and freedom.