

Talk About Adoption:

Effective Communication and
Use of Language in the Clinical Setting

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The Facts

- ▶ A Low Estimate is that 52% of Americans are touched by adoption within their family and/ or circle of close friends. (New York Times)
- ▶ This percentage does not take into account those families created by donor and alternative reproductive technologies, kinship, guardianship, remarriage, and foster care– all forms of what we call “emotional adoption.”



The Facts

Who's Adopted?

- ▶ About 1.5 million children under age 18
- ▶ Approximately 7 million Americans of all ages
- ▶ Approximately 38% of children in Residential Treatment

Who Else is Connected to Adoption?

- ▶ About 14 million birth parents
- ▶ Around 14 million adoptive parents
- ▶ Then consider their siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and friends!
- ▶ In addition to all of the families by fostering, kinship, and guardianship.

- ▶ Adopting is the taking on and extending or making of family by admitting others to the clan and claiming them as relative, as in marriage
- ▶ It is a lifelong process and it affects the generations before and after in many direct and indirect ways for both birth and adoptive families
- ▶ Adoption is complex; it is never simple.



Questions to Consider

- ▶ Why is it important to talk to adults and children about adoption?
- ▶ When is it useful to talk to adults and children about adoption?
- ▶ How do you appropriately talk to adults and children about adoption?

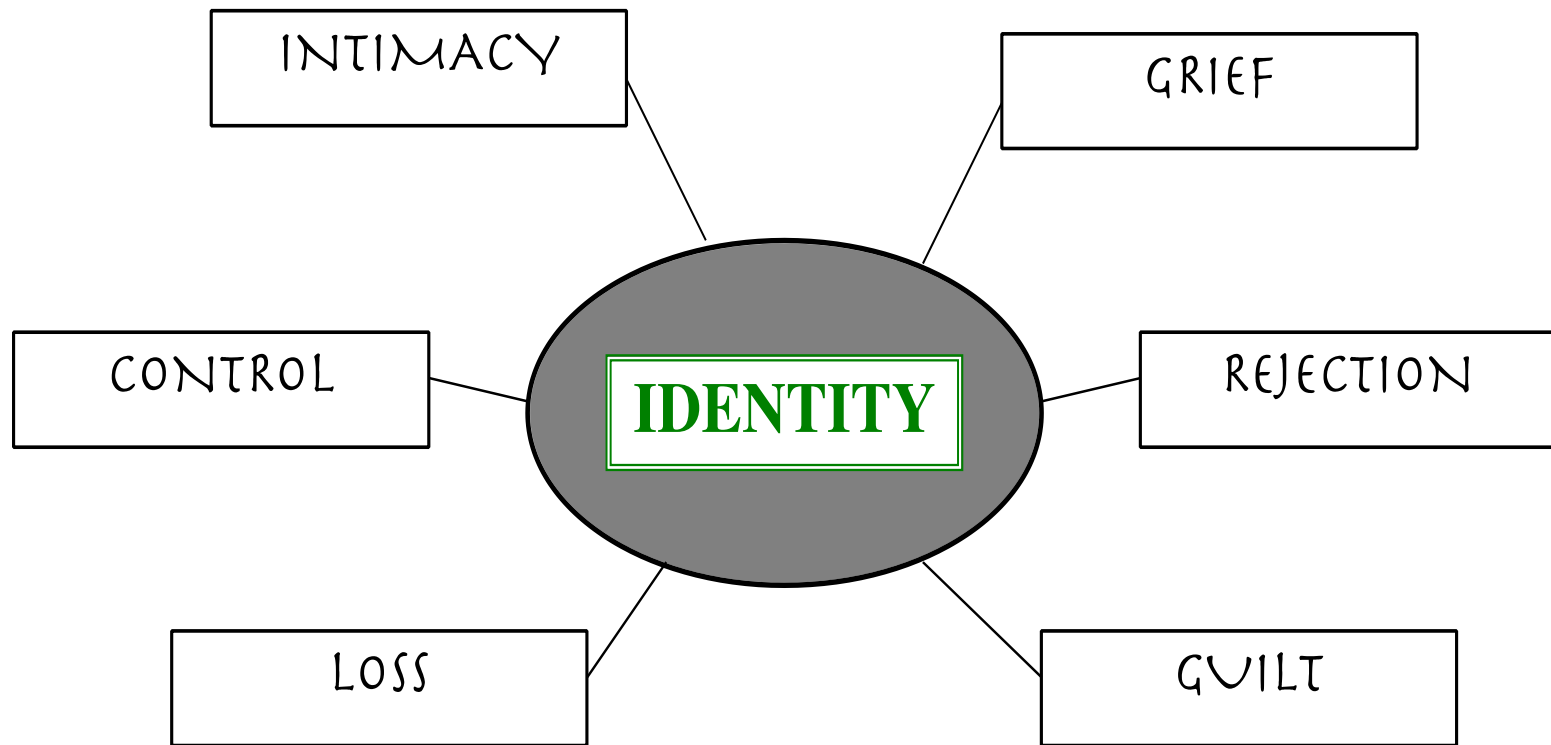


Why its it Important to Talk About Adoption?

- ▶ To help children make sense of their story
- ▶ To help parents make sense of their child's behavior
- ▶ To validate a child's experience as being normal
- ▶ To promote joining and reduce a child's feelings of divided loyalty



The 7 Core Issues of Adoption



Kaplan and Silverstein, 1995

Talking to Children About Adoption.

When you talk:

- ▶ Start talking when the child is young
- ▶ Continue to talk about adoption throughout a child's development; show a willingness to talk
- ▶ Talk in an atmosphere of openness and trust

What you say:

- ▶ Be developmentally appropriate
- ▶ Do not talk too much
- ▶ Do not force talk about adoption
- ▶ Be mindful of yourself and your role in conversation



Talking to Children About Adoption.

Guidelines:

- ▶ Create a safe space (in groups, with individuals)
- ▶ Find ways to facilitate discussions (with individuals)
- ▶ Vary techniques/ activities to spark conversations (with groups)

What do we mean by complex blended families

- ▶ Root Families are families where the mother and father who gave birth to the child are also parenting the child together
- ▶ Complex families are every other type of family structure
- ▶ Complex blended families are a blending of many families by adoption, fostering, kinship care, remarriage, or alternative reproductive technologies



Find ways to facilitate discussion: Use of Expressive Therapies

Role Play/Theatre

Art



Writing



Music

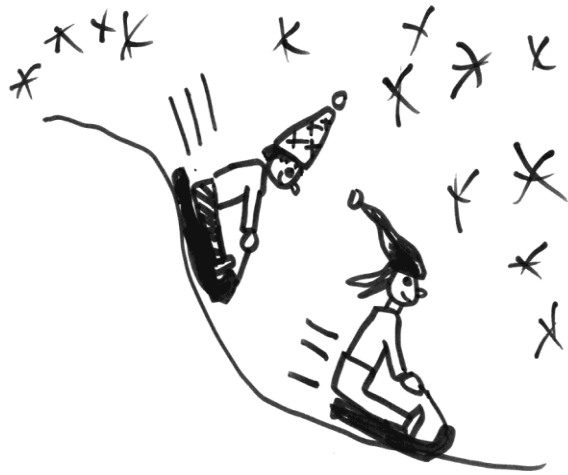
Play



The Professional

A Help or A Hindrance...

Family Crisis = Change



Strength-Based



Why a Systems Perspective in Adoption and After Adoption



“Evaluation” Often Preferred Over “Treatment”



Are Professionals Trained Enough to Work With This Population?



Skill Set Needed to Treat The Family of Adoption



- Adoption + Child Development
- Trauma
- Diversity
- Family Systems

Master Therapists in Adoption and Post Adoption



A Strength-Based Non-Pathological Model



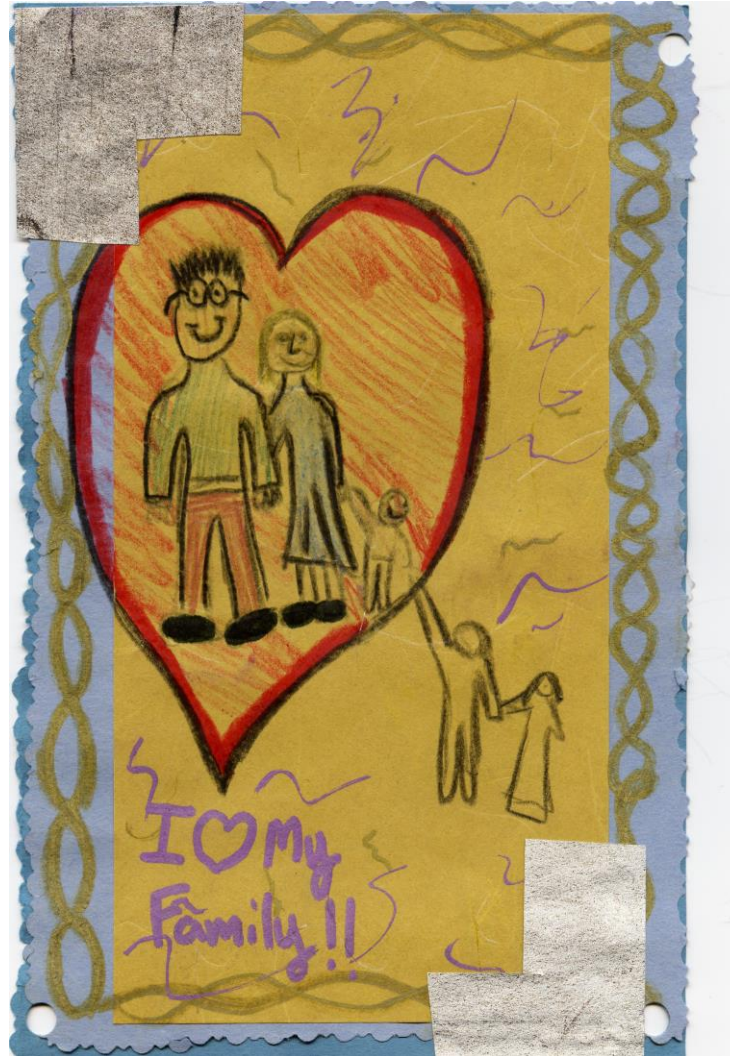
Inter-Generational Model



The Normative Crises in the Development of the Adoptive Family



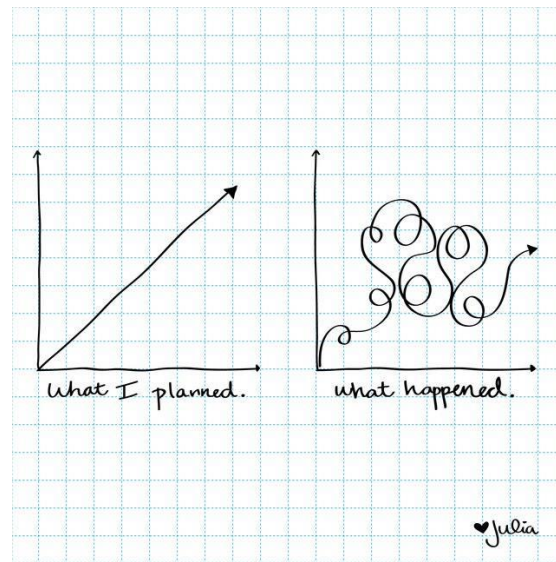
Trauma Competent



Pavao's Brief-Long-Term (BLT) Therapy



Fifty-Thousand Mile Checkups



Family Orchard Model



“Boarding School” Model



“Talkabouts”



Clinical Mediation Model



Clinical Visitation Model



Consultation Model



Groups Model



This Model Includes:

- Educational Resources
- Crisis Intervention
- Advocacy
- Supervision and Professional Self-Assessment
- Information and Referrals
- Ongoing Support and Consultation or Therapy to Complex Blended Families
- Consultation to the Professionals who Serve Them



Clinical Treatment

Individual Therapy: For children and adults

Family Therapy: For children and their caregivers
(family systems approach)



Couples Therapy: For birthparents, adoptive parents, couples, and adult adopted people around issues of infertility, decisions to parents, parenting styles, intimacy, and identity



Part One: Contact Information

Let's check the spelling of your first and last name?

Your email address (most important)

Your address?

Telephone?

Another number (cell/work/fax) to reach you at? Is it okay to leave a message at this number or send information to that address?

Have you received services from _____ or from other adoptive informed professionals before?

If YES: When and with whom?

If NO: How did you hear about us? (Very important for referral information)



Part Two: Information

Let's start with you. What is your birth date and age? Are there other adults living with you? What are their names and ages?

Are there any children in your home? Let's start with the eldest... name, age, birth date. Is s/he your child through birth or by adoption or a stepchild?

If by ADOPTION: Was the adoption international or domestic? Which country? What agency?

History/Circumstances: Can you tell me anything about the birth family?

Has there been any contact between your family and (child's) birth family (open or semi open adoption)?

What is the race/ethnicity/religion of the birth family and your family?

When was your child adopted/place in foster care? (Age)

When did your child come into your home? Where was your child before s/he came into your home? How long was s/he there? (Gather ALL placements and length of stays.)

Do you know the reason why s/he had to leave that home/hospital/orphanage/etc?

If children in the home: Are you parenting alone or with a partner?

If parenting with a partner: What is his/her name, age, date of birth? Year you were married/How long have you been in this relationship?

Are there any previous marriages or children for either of you?

Part Three: Family History

Race/Ethnicity/Religion? Do you have any siblings? Are they siblings through birth or adoption? Where are they living now?

Your parents names and ages. Any other marriages or children? Any history of adoption in your family?

If anyone is deceased: When did s/he die? How did s/he die?

Adopted Person

Do you have any information about birth mother or birth father? Has there been a reunion? Siblings through birth? Starting with the eldest: names & ages. Race/Ethnicity/Religion?

Birth Parent

Who is in your family? Parents names & ages? Siblings? Starting with the eldest: names & ages.

Race/Ethnicity/Religion?

Did you live at home or elsewhere during your pregnancy?

When did you place your child?

Is it an open or closed adoption? Are you in reunion?

Are you calling for yourself/related to surrendering a child/placing a child for adoption?

Part Four: Presenting Problem/Services Offered

Now, tell me a bit about what is going on for you now?

What prompted your call? (Ask questions relevant to story being told.)

Any history of mental health issues?

Any history of medical problems?

Any history of drug/alcohol addictions?

Any history of physical or sexual abuse?

Collaterals: Are there other health care professionals involved?

Names, Titles/Roles, Agency, Phone, Email Contact Information.

What are you thinking about in terms of services?

Consultation: Used when there is a specific question that you are hoping for guidance/advice/suggestions/brainstorming/education/etc.

Individual therapy, family therapy, couples therapy, groups

(If client is unsure, suggest beginning with a consult to help them decide.)

Coaching...personal, parenting, or professional

Next Steps

- ▶ Genogram developed
- ▶ Family seen



“ I could finally talk with other parents who had very similar challenges”

–Edward, uncle and parent of a 9–year–old



“I think art therapy is a great place for adopted kids. It tells kids that being adopted isn't so lonely.”

–Susan, age 10



If you would like more information about services offered at PACT, please don't hesitate to contact us...



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