Addressing the Therapeutic Needs of the Adoption Triad

Presented by

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Goals of presentation:

• Increase awareness of adoption friendly terminology;
• Identify members of the adoption triad;
• Develop awareness of issues faced by all members of the adoption triad;
• Learn to assist members of the adoption triad;
• Define closed, semi-open, & open adoption;
• Clarify when open adoption is and is not appropriate;
• Access local resources for birth parents, adoptive parents, & adoptees.
# Positive Adoption Terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Avoid:</th>
<th>Use Instead:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural/real parents</td>
<td>Birth parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knocked up</td>
<td>Pregnant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving your child up/</td>
<td>Making an adoption plan or placing your child for adoption</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving your child away</td>
<td>Adoptive Parents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babysitters/Unnatural parents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your [birth] parents gave you away/up/</td>
<td>Your birth parents loved you so much that they chose parents</td>
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<tr>
<td>didn’t want you.</td>
<td>who could give you what they could not.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegitimate child/bastard child</td>
<td>Birth child/adoptee</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The Miracle of Adoption

- Birth mothers/parents are heroes!
- Adoption plans happen because of a birth mother’s sacrifice.
- Without birth mothers/birth fathers, some of us would not be parents.
The Adoptive Triad

- Birth Parents/extended birth family
- Adoptive Parents/extended adoptive family
- Adoptee

- “Parable of the Braided” by Sherrie Eldridge
- “Legacy of an Adopted Child” author unknown
Therapeutic Issues for Birth Parents

- Loss is at the core of adoption (Paddock, D., untitled article; year published not listed);
- Grieving loss of youth, goals and dreams, youthful body, and social life;
- If the birth parents make an adoption plan, they will need to grieve the loss of their birth child. How and when they do this is individual.
- Decision making:
  - If parenting, accessing resources, budgeting, defining supports (Exactly how will people support me?)
  - If making an adoption plan, what kind of adoption? (private, agency, closed, semi-open, open).
  - Choosing the adoptive parents, “How would it feel to be the answer to someone’s prayer?”
  - Navigating an open relationship with an adoptive couple.
Assisting Birth Parents

• Provide a listening ear:
  * Allow birth parents to tell you what they think & how they feel;
  * Avoid trying to quickly fix the situation for them, e.g., Refrain from telling them to parent their child or to make an adoption plan. This is their decision. It is important that they believe they are making the best decision for their child & themselves.

• Instill hope, helping birth parents know there is hope/life during & after this birth;
Assisting Birth Parents (cont.)

- Encourage birth mothers to be honest about the identity of all possible birth fathers;
- Encourage birth mothers needing emotional support, housing assistance, or help accessing social services to seek the help of local agencies and ministries;
- Attend birth mother support groups with the birth mother if possible;
- Help the birth mother/parents write out a pros and cons list for parenting vs. making an adoption plan;
- Suggest the birth mother/parents seek professional counseling to help with decision-making and grief work.
Assisting Birth Parents (cont’d)

- If you are a prospective adoptive parent, please be honest with the birth parents regarding your intentions for an open adoption relationship. Dishonesty is damaging and potentially devastating for the rest of a birth parent’s life.
Therapeutic Issues for the Extended Birth Family

- Loss of ideal goals for their children;
- Loss of goals and dreams for their grandchildren and for themselves as grandparents;
- Think about exactly how they will support their child/grandchild, e.g., being a grandparents vs. being a childcare provider, changing diapers, financial support, housing, rides;
- If an adoption plan is made, what role will extended birth family play?
Assisting the Extended Birth Family

• Listen with compassion;
• Provide prayer support;
• If requested, attend educational meetings with birth family. This might include hospital meetings, adoption support groups, etc.
• If an adoption plan is made, familiarize yourself with adoption-friendly terminology and adoption-related materials, especially open adoption books on the resource list.
Therapeutic Issues for the Adoptive Couple/Family

- Loss, especially if there is a history of infertility or secondary infertility;
- Issues of inadequacy/insecurity;
- Is adoption the “next best thing” (to having children biologically);
- Can I love/accept an adopted child like I would love a birth child?
- Open adoption—ARE YOU KIDDING?!
Assisting the Adoptive Couple/Family

• Celebrate with them their decision to adopt!
• If they wish to share, listen to them talk about their journey which has lead them to the decision to adopt;
• Pray with/for them about the unknowns and ups and downs of the adoption process;
• Pray with/for them for their birth mother (even if they have not yet been selected), that she is physically safe, staying sober, and getting prenatal care;
• If you hear adoptive couples struggling with feelings of inadequacy or loss, or concern about whether they can love/accept an adopted child, encourage them to seek professional counseling.
Assisting the Adoptive Family (cont’d)

- Begin reading adoption-related books and materials;
- Offer to attend an adoptive families support group with your couple.
Therapeutic Issues for the Adoptee

- Who are my real parents?
- Why did my birth mom give me away?
- Why did she keep my siblings and give me away?
- Why do I have to be adopted?
- Who am I (who do I identify with—birth family/adoptive family)?
- Which heritage do I claim (my birth heritage or my adoptive family’s heritage)?
Assisting the Adoptee

- Help the adoptee learn as much as possible about her birth heritage, history, physical characteristics, strengths, weaknesses.
- When appropriate, help the adoptee search and possibly reconnect with birth mother/father/family.
- Listen to the adoptee talk about losses, wishes, nagging questions.
- Help them grapple with the mystery of faith, where faith plays a part in their lives, their purpose, & future.
Types of Adoptions

• Closed adoption:
  – Formerly the standard in adoption (remains typical for DHS adoptions);
  – The adoptive parents and the birth parents have no contact with each other and share no identifying information. They never meet and know nothing (or very little) about each other.
  – Adoption records are sealed until the child is 18. Depending on the laws of each state, the child may search for his/her birth family and have records unsealed.
Types of Adoptions

- Semi-open Adoptions – Contact between birth parents and adoptive parents prior to the birth may be face-to-face and direct. Once the child is placed with the adoptive family, contact such as letters, pictures, updates, is through a liaison such as an agency, private attorney.

- The child does not meet the birth family but because information about the birth family is retained, it is easier for the child to search for their birth parents later.
Types of Adoptions

- Open Adoption: the direct and ongoing contact and interaction and sharing of identifying information between birth parents, adoptive parents, & adoptees. This can occur before, during, and after the placement of a child.
- Open adoption came about when our culture began to relax about the secrecy of adoption; our culture learning not to shame the birth mother/adoptive; came out of a need shared by many adoptees to search their birth heritage and fill in the blanks of their identity.
- Open adoption came more comes out of the belief that there can't be too many people to love a child and that openness is an ethical obligation to the child.
- The child/children know who their birth parents are and interact with them on a regular basis.
- Open adoption is not recognized as a legal relationship in the state of Oklahoma. Rather it is a shared belief and obligation between the birth parents, adoptive parents, and the child that this type of relationship is best for the child.
Types of Adoptions (cont’d)

- The purpose of open adoption is to give the adoptee the opportunity to know they were loved and valued by the people who gave them life.
- What open adoption is NOT:
  - Co-parenting between adoptive and birth parents;
  - Joint Custody – responsibilities for the child aren’t shared;
  - Baby sitting – the adoptive parents aren’t babysitting until the birth parents “get it together” enough to parent the child.
Types of Adoptions (cont’d)

When is Open Adoption inappropriate:

- Anytime a birth parent’s behavior could endanger a child, undermine the relationship between the adoptive parents and the child, or undermine the parental authority of the adoptive parent.
- When a birth parent’s behavior is illegal or dangerous:
  - Drug/alcohol abuse/dependency
  - Criminal activity
  - History of or current sexual perpetration/violence

Contact with the birth parents may also be suspended if the birth family requests no contact.
Questions commonly asked about open adoption:

- How do you handle meetings with the birth parents?
- Who is your child’s ‘real’ mother/father/parents?
- Do you feel like the child’s ‘real’ parent?
- What does the child call their birth mother/father?
- Do the birth parents stalk you?
- Will the birth parent come back later in the child’s life and try to take the child?
- At what point do you tell your child he/she is adopted?
Resources for Birth Parents

Services/resources for Birth Parents:
- Crisis Pregnancy Outreach – (918) 296-3377
- Birth Mothers Support Group - weekly
- Free legal, medical, & counseling services,
- State aid applications for birth mothers
- Birth mothers/parents choose adoptive family

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Tulsa - (918) 949-4673
- Birth Parent Support Group monthly
- Lifebook (Scrapbooking) class
- Free medical, legal, & counseling services
- State aid applications, translators
- Birth mother/parents choose adoptive family
Resources for Birth Parents (cont’d)

- For birth parents:
  “Letting Go,” DVD accessible through Bethany Christian Services at www.bethany.org

Reading resources:

*Arms Wide Open: An Insight Into Open Adoption*, Jane Waters

*Abigail*, Jane Waters

*Natasha*, Jane Waters

*Children of Open Adoption*, Silber, K. & Dorner, P.
Resources for Adoptive Families (cont’d)

Online Resources for Adoptive Couples/Families
- [www.adoptionlearningpartners.org](http://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org)
- [www.tapestrybooks.com](http://www.tapestrybooks.com) (adoption-related books, materials for all ages)

Crisis Pregnancy Outreach – (918) 296-3377
Adoptive Parent Support Groups - monthly
Adoptive Parent Waiting Families Workshop

Catholic Charities, Diocese of Tulsa – (918) 949-HOPE (4673)
Adoptive Parent Support Group – monthly
“Let’s Adopt” Workshop
Lifebook/Scrapbooking Group

Resources for helpers:
Resources for Adoptive Families (cont’d)

• “Stepping Stones” newsletter, Bethany Christian Services, www.bethany.org
Resources for Adoptees

- www.tapestrybooks.com for reading materials

- Confidential Intermediary Search Program, administered through the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, (405) 521-2475
  Deborah Nomura, LCSW, Search worker, Heritage Family Services Tulsa, OK (918) 491-6767.
References

- Abby’s One True Gift Adoptions – August 2010 Newsletter
“Legacy of an Adopted Child”

Once there were two women who never knew each other;
   One you do not remember, the other you call Mother.
   Two different lives shaped to make you one.
One became your guiding star, the other became your sun.
   The first one gave you life and
   the second taught you to live it.
   The first gave you a need for love,
   the second was there to give it.
   One gave you a nationality,
   the other gave you a name.
   One gave you talent, the other gave you aim.
One gave you emotions, the other calmed your fears.
   One saw your first sweet smile,
   the other dried your tears.
One sought for you a home that she could not provide;
   The other prayed for a child
and her hope was not denied.
And now you ask me through your tears the age-old question unanswered through the years, "Heredity or environment, which are you a product of?"

Neither my darling, neither; just two different kinds of Love.

Author Unknown