

SEVEN CORE ISSUES IN ADOPTION

	Adoptee	Birth Parent	Adoptive Parent
LOSS	Fear ultimate abandonment: loss biological, genetic, cultural history. Issues on holding on and letting go.	Ruminate about lost child. Initial loss merges with other life events; leads to social isolation; changes in body and self image; relationship losses	Infertility equated with loss of self and immortality. Issues of entitlement lead to fear of loss of child and overprotection.
REJECTION	Personalize placement for adoption as rejection; issues of self esteem can only be "chosen" if first rejected. Anticipate rejection; misperceive	Reject selves as irresponsible, unworthy because permit adoption; turn these feelings against self as deserving rejection; come to expect and cause rejection	Ostracized because of procreation difficulties; may scapegoat partner, expect rejection; may expel adoptee to avoid anticipate rejection.
GUILT/SHAME	Deserving misfortune; shame of being different; may take defensive stance/anger.	Party to guilty secret; shame/guilt for placing child; judged by others; double bind; not OK to keep child and not OK to place	Shame if infertility; may believe childlessness is curse or punishment; religious crisis.
GRIEF	Grief may be overlooked in childhood. Blocked by adult, leading to depression/acting out, may grieve lack of "fit" in adoptive family	Grief acceptable only short period but may be delayed 10-15 years, lack rituals for mourning; sense of shame blocks grief work	Must grieve loss of "fantasy" child; unresolved grief may block attachment to adoptee; may experience adoptee's grief as rejection.
IDENTITY	Deficits in information may impede integration of identity; may see search for identity in early pregnancies; extreme behaviors in order to create sense of belonging.	Child as part of identity goes on without knowledge; diminished sense of self and self worth; may interfere with future parental desires.	Experience diminished sense of self; are and are not parents (Kirk's role handicap").
LOYALTY Sub-issue	Difficulty or confusion in developing close relationships out of concern of rejecting other significant people from the past.	Remains childless as act of loyalty to the child. Refrain from search due to loyalty to child.	Need for approval and validation out of concern from perceived loss of the child to other parent figure.
INTIMACY	Fear getting close and risk reenacting earlier losses; concerns over incest; bonding issues may lower capacity for intimacy.	Difficulty resolving issues with other birth parent may interfere with future relationship; intimacy may equate with loss*	Unresolved grief over losses may lead to intimacy/marital problems; may avoid closeness with adoptees to avoid loss.
CONTROL	Adoption alters life course; not party to initial decisions; haphazard nature of adoption removes cause and effect continuum.	Relinquishment seen as out of control disjunctive event; interrupts drive for self actualization	Adoption experiences lead to "learned helplessness"; sense mastery linked to procreation; lack generativity.

*based on Silverstein and Kaplan 1986 with additions by Abigail Lovett