

Resources for Adopted Individuals

Adoption is a life-changing event for all involved, from the birth parents who make the brave decision to give their child up, to the adoptive parents who make an equally brave decision to welcome that child as their own. Yet one group which may go overlooked is that of the adopted children themselves. There are a number of issues that can arise for these individuals.

If the child was adopted at a very young age, they may not even know they were adopted until adolescence, or even later. A possible conflict in identity may result, as these children have spent so much time in an identity which they may perceive to no longer be valid. Children who were adopted late enough in life to be cognizant of the process can have their own issues, as well, perhaps wondering why their original parents didn't keep them, or having trouble accepting their adoptive parents as legitimate. Children adopted by parents of an ethnic, racial, or cultural group other than their own often face a unique conflict as they try to reconcile the two identities internally.

It has been shown that adult former adoptees suffer from a number of problems, including struggles with identity, low self-esteem, and feelings of abandonment. These underlying troubles may lead to further struggles like alcohol abuse, marital difficulties and depression. Many adult adoptees will also seek out information about their own genetic histories, spending years trying to find siblings, parents or any other biological relatives. The upshot of these issues is that they are nothing new. They are so frequently encountered that they are known about and there exist mechanisms to help these individuals cope.

One option is to find a support group. The mere act of connecting with a group of people who have had similar life experiences and dealt with similar issues can be beneficial in itself. The cliché is that misery loves company, and in this case it's true. Seeing that others are going through some of the same things is reassuring. Support groups provide a forum in which former adoptees can discuss their experiences and confess their troubles. National support groups such as ALMA and the American Adoption Congress are good resources for adult adoptees.

Individual counseling is another option. Some counselors and therapists specialize in adult adoptees. Some of these professionals are adult adoptees themselves. The therapeutic intervention can treat a number of aspects of the adult adoptee experience. Therapy can help the individual in their interpersonal relationships, help them heal from lingering feelings of abandonment, and even assist in the search for birth parents (which can be a cathartic solution in itself). This kind of counseling can be costly, but some counselors offer group

sessions, which may combine some of the advantages of support groups and individual counseling.

For the adopted individual, adoption is a lifelong experience. It does not end when the adoption is finalized, nor at the onset of adulthood. It is something that adoptees carry around throughout their lives, and as such it must be addressed and coped with. Fortunately, there are resources for these individuals. For those struggling with issues like those described above, a good starting point is www.adopting.org, a website with resources geared to all people touched by adoption, including adult adoptees.