

PARENTING ADOPTED TEENS INTO THEIR ADULT YEARS



Dee A. Paddock, MA, MTS
deepaddock@mac.com
www.familieswithadifference.org

Adoption Issues for Adolescents

- * Control and autonomy - fears of rejection and abandonment.
- * Coping with adoption grief and loss issues.
- * Integrating adoption into a stable and secure identity -- feelings of not belonging.
- * Heightened interest in their past and their birth family -- exploring feelings about the search process.
- * Swinging between merging (dependency) and individuating (independence) from family.

Adoption Issues for Adoptive Parents of Adolescents

- * Negotiating issues of control and autonomy with adopted teen.
- * Helping adopted teens cope with ongoing adoption-related loss.
- * Fostering positive view of the adopted teen's birth family.
- * Supporting the adopted teen's search interest and plans.
- * Helping the adopted teen develop realistic expectations regarding searching.
- * Maintaining open communication about adoption. *(David Brodzinsky, et al.)*

- * Adopted teens may not be ready or able to leave home at the same time or in the same way as their non-adopted peers.
- * Adopted teens may struggle with fantasies about birth family and high degrees of ambivalence about their current family relationships.
- * Adoptive parents may struggle to gain realistic expectations of themselves in parenting an adopted teen and realistic expectations of their teen in terms of attachment and family loyalty.

Identity Issues

- * Identity development can be difficult for adopted teens, especially in closed adoption, because they have two sets of parents. Adopted teenagers must define their values, beliefs, gender identification, career choices and expectations of themselves as adults without any genetic markers or models.
- * Teens who have been adopted transracially or transnationally often feel more alienated from their families than they did when they were younger children.
- * Adopted teens and young adults may have particular concerns about sexuality and parenthood. Some adopted teens view sex as a symbolic means of undoing the adoption.

Control and Autonomy

- * Tension between parents who don't want to give up control and the teenager who wants independence is the hallmark of adolescence. This tension may be especially intense for adopted teens who feel that someone else has always made decisions for them: the birth family decided to place them for adoption and the adoptive parent(s) decided whether to accept them.
- * Parents who recognize that their teens have two sets of parents and don't feel threatened by that fact are more likely to establish a more positive environment for their teens and young adults that will make them more comfortable to express their feelings.

Grief and Los Issues

- * As adopted teens mature, they think more about how their lives would have been different, both positively and negatively, if they had not been adopted or if they had been adopted by another family.
- * Some teens may feel more angry at their adoptive parents than they have ever felt before. They may be critical of how their parents helped them adjust to their adoptive status. They may withdraw into themselves or feel they need to stray far from home to find their true identity.

How to Ease the Transition

- * **Clarify values:** Whose values will set the pace for the transition from adolescence into young adulthood? What if your values clash? Can you convey your continuing love and commitment to your child even if she chooses a path other than the one you had hoped for?
- * **Be a role model:** Show how adult family members still care for one another, communicate and remain involved in each other's lives and that physical separation does not mean relational or emotional separation.
- * **Keep a room open:** If at all possible, keep their room open as a place to stay when they come home to visit. This concrete reminder that they still have a place in your home and thus, in your life and in your family, can be crucial at this time. *(from article by Sue Badeau)*
