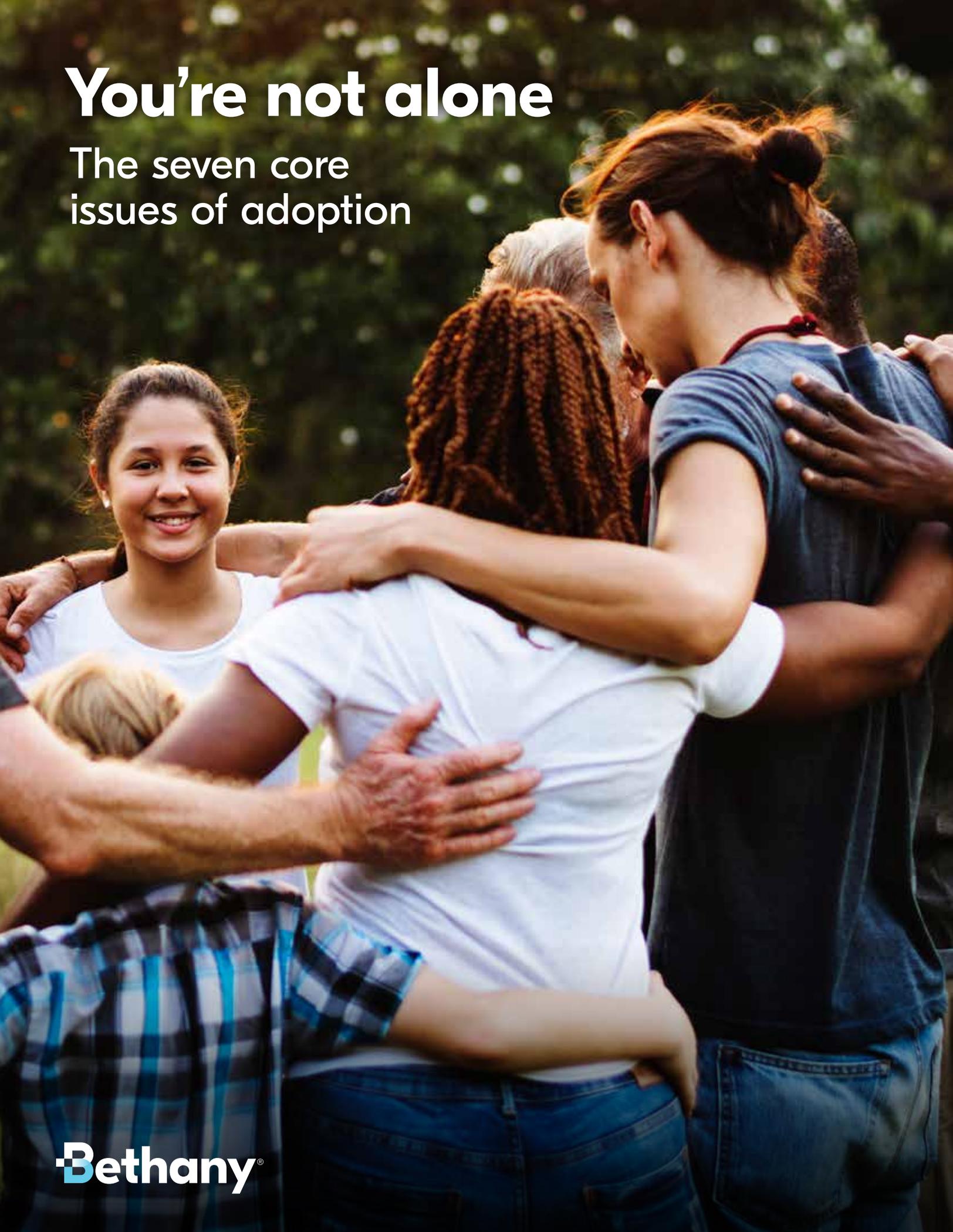


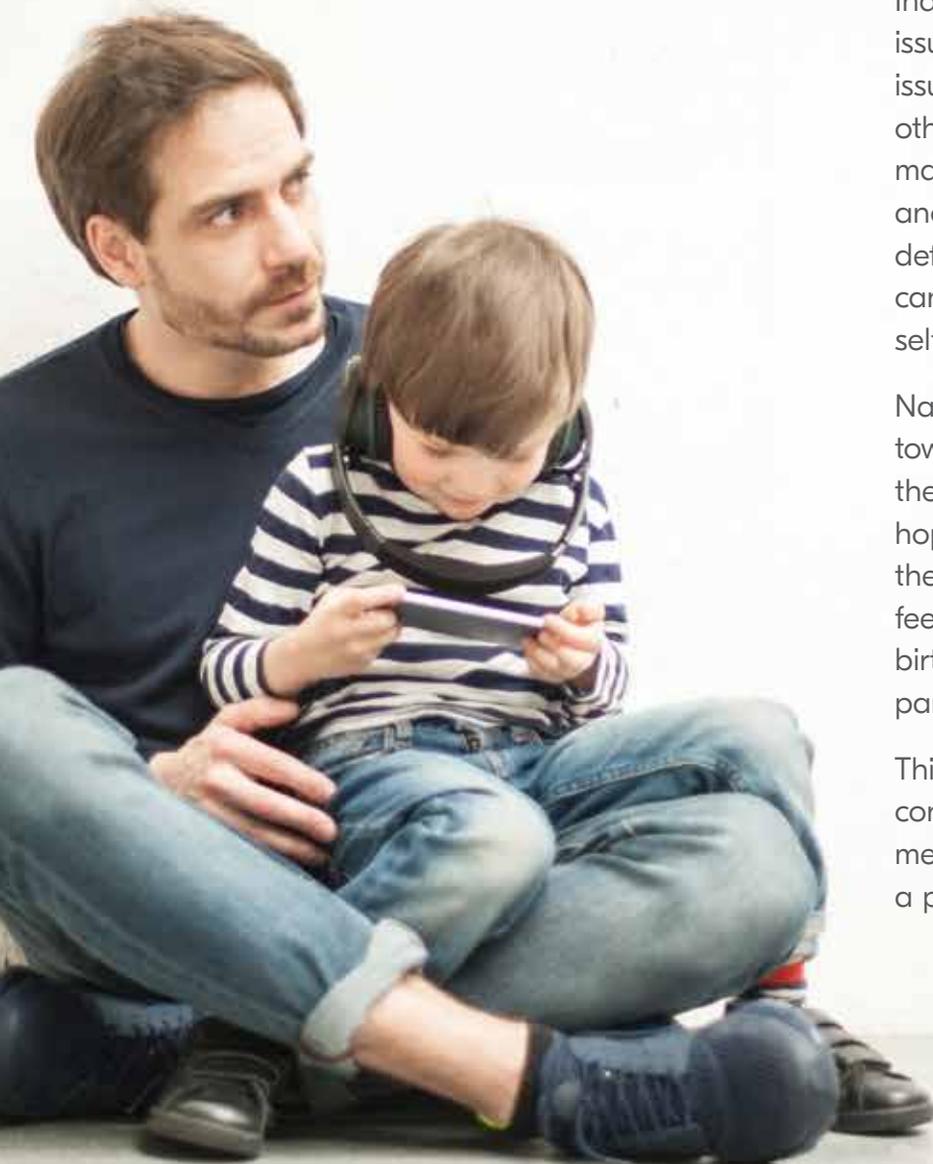
You're not alone

The seven core
issues of adoption



You're not alone on your adoption journey

Seven core issues of adoption impact birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents alike and shape how they process their adoption experience.



More than 30 years ago, adoption educators Deborah Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan Roszia published a groundbreaking article identifying seven “core issues” of adoption:

grief, loss, rejection, control, identity, intimacy, and shame

Silverstein and Kaplan Roszia used the term “core” because they apply to each member of the adoption triad (or “constellation,” to use their term), and they observed that members can encounter and revisit these issues throughout their lives.

Individuals may experience the core issues individually or together. One issue may emerge to the forefront as others recede, or movement in one area may spur corresponding movement in another. While the core issues don't define a person's experience, they can shape a person's perception of self, relationships, and the world.

Naming the core issues was a first step toward normalizing and destigmatizing them. Silverstein and Kaplan Roszia hoped that those who experience these adoption-related issues would feel less isolated, knowing that most birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents experience them too.

This e-book provides an overview of each core issue and how they might apply to members of the triad. We've also included a page of resources to learn more.



GRIEF

**Grief is not a disorder,
disease, or sign of weakness**





Grief

Author Earl Grollman wrote, “Grief is not a disorder, disease, or sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical, and spiritual necessity—the price you pay for love. The only cure for grief is to grieve.”

All members of the post-adoption community experience grief, varying in intensity and timing, throughout their lifespan. But as Silverstein and Kaplan Roszia observed, “The losses in adoption are difficult to mourn in a society where adoption is seen as a problem-solving event.” After all, a birth mother chooses life for her child, a child gets a family, and a family gets a child. However, these gains do not erase grief for what was lost.

An adoptee’s grief over the loss of birth family or unknown history is not a rejection of the adoptive family.

It’s natural for a birth parent to grieve, even if making an adoption plan was their decision.

An adoptive parent’s grief for unmet parenting expectations is not a lesser form of love for the child.

We can embrace those who are grieving and understand that loss is an innate aspect of adoption. If you’re unsure how someone in the triad is grieving, simply let that person know you’re thinking of them and available to listen. Your gesture opens the door for conversation, but don’t take it personally if the person chooses not to share deeply personal information or emotions with you.



LOSS

While we readily understand concrete loss, ambiguous loss is harder to grasp





Loss

While we readily understand concrete loss, such as the death of a loved one or the separation of a child from birth family or birth culture, ambiguous loss is harder to grasp. This form of loss can include loss of relationships, unmet expectations, and unfulfilled dreams.

Someone grieving ambiguous loss may display behaviors or emotions they can't explain. And without words to name what they are missing, they may not recognize their overall experience as grief. Lack of closure and understanding can lead to unhealthy coping skills, but a person can still process ambiguous loss with acknowledgment and support.

When possible, maintain relationships between birth families and adopted children. Open adoption is designed to alleviate the pain of loss for everyone in the relationship. When contact with birth parents is not possible, look for other connections to maintain.

Adoptive parents and children can stay connected with extended biological family, friends also adopted from the same orphanage, or previous caretakers or foster parents who were important.

Those who have an intimate understanding of similar loss can validate your experience in a deeper way. Support groups exist for this very reason and are a helpful resource.



REJECTION

Rejection can become a lens through which individuals filter thoughts and feelings





Rejection

For adoptees, feelings of rejection may initially relate to questions around why they weren't raised by birth family. In adolescence, rejection may surface if an adoptee struggles to fit in with peers. For adoptive families, parents may experience rejection by others who see their family or adopted child as second-best. For birth parents, rejection may represent how they feel society views them or their child.

Rejection can become a lens through which individuals filter thoughts and feelings:

A school-aged peer asks an adoptee, "Why did your mother give you up?" The child may hear, "*Why did your mother refuse to raise you?*"

A friend says to a birth parent, "I don't think I could choose adoption for my child." The birth parent may hear, "*You rejected the child you created, so I reject you.*"

A relative says to an adoptive mother, "Is it a good idea to keep a relationship with his birth mother?" The adoptive mother may hear, "*Won't your child reject you as his mother with his birth mother in the picture?*"

When we care for someone who is hurting, it can feel uncomfortable to sit with their pain. Our instinct may be to "fix the problem" or change the topic, but these approaches are usually ineffective. Offering empathy can go a long way to helping the person feel better. You might say, "I'm here for you if you'd like to tell me more about it."



INTIMACY

Intimacy refers to emotional closeness





Intimacy

Intimacy, as it relates to the core issues, refers to emotional closeness in a relationship. Vulnerability and trust are essential to forming new relationships, whether romantic partners or friendships.

For some adoptees—especially those experiencing issues with control, shame, or rejection—letting others get close can provoke anxiety. If identity is a challenge, being genuine may also be difficult.

Adoptive parents commonly express concerns about their child not having a “best friend” in whom they can confide. An adoptee’s discomfort with intimacy can lead to a pattern of unhealthy or unstable romantic relationships.

Birth parents may find intimacy challenging if they relate it to grief and loss. They may struggle with trust in future romantic relationships if a previous partner was unsupportive, during or after the pregnancy. A birth parent experiencing shame may hold back, fearing others will judge that part of their story. This can lead to unintentionally superficial relationships, weakening the quality and longevity of the connection.

Adoptive parents may also struggle with intimacy. During the adoption process, one parent often takes the lead. If a hesitant spouse feels unable to genuinely express cautions or doubt, the dissonance can negatively impact the relationship, and they may project their resentment onto the child.

Sharing your experiences with others on a similar journey can help lower defenses. Journaling, devotionals, self-help books, or talking with an adoption-competent therapist may also help.



IDENTITY

**Identity formation is a natural,
developmental process**





Identity

Identity formation is a natural, developmental process everyone experiences; but the process can be more complex for those who have experienced adoption.

A birth parent may wonder if “mother” is part of her identity. A newly adoptive parent may not feel like “Mom” or “Dad” yet, especially in their first year of parenting. Both adoptive parents and birth parents may find themselves comparing their role as a parent to friends and family who are raising biological children. If either feels unsure about their identity in an open adoption, they may struggle to navigate their relationship with each other.

Adoptees might feel a sense of being different or not belonging. They may find themselves thinking more about birth family and their adoption story. They may ask questions, request information from their file, or explore the search process.

Acknowledge that this is common. Questions and feelings alone are not necessarily cause for concern and occur throughout the post-adoption lifespan.

Encourage open communication. Sometimes it’s easier to talk with those who have similar experiences, so support groups—in-person or online—can be helpful. Clarifying facts and background history can be especially beneficial for adoptees.

Find the balance in accepting all parts of identity. All-or-nothing thinking, labels defined by society and culture, and generally trying to fit into someone else’s definition may create more stress or negatively impact self-esteem or coping strategies.



CONTROL

Feeling in control provides
a sense of safety





Control

Feeling in control provides a sense of safety, security, and mastery over one's life. But adoption, for everyone, is marked by loss of control.

Adoptees do not choose to lose their birth families or, in many cases, do not participate in the adoption plan. Some older children may choose whether they want to be adopted, but the circumstances leading to that option were out of their control.

Birth parents may feel like adoption is their only choice following an unintended pregnancy, or it may be court mandated after a child is placed in foster care. They lose control over how their child is raised.

Adoptive parents often face long timeframes, unexpected challenges, and delays while waiting for a referral, placement, or finalization. They also navigate unknowns about a child's history, including incomplete information about a child's emotional, developmental, or physical needs.

Adults and children commonly try to regain a sense of control by controlling other areas of their lives. The following can reduce the power of "control issues" in one's life:

- Identify what pushes your buttons and in what situations you find yourself trying to exert control.
- Explore opportunities for choices you can control, and keep a flexible agenda.
- Nurture a talent or determination to do what makes you or your child feel productive and proud. Feeling successful in one area can ease the urgency to feel in control of everything.

A woman with dark hair in a bun, wearing a white knit sweater, sits on a light-colored sofa. She is looking upwards and to the left with a thoughtful expression, her hand resting against her face. Another person's hand is visible on her shoulder from the left. The background is a bright, out-of-focus window with sheer curtains. The entire image has a light blue tint.

SHAME

Believing we are flawed and
therefore unworthy of love





Shame

Brené Brown, a well-known vulnerability researcher, defines shame as “the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore unworthy of love and belonging. Something we’ve experienced, done, or failed to do makes us unworthy of connection.”

Shame is the least discussed of the core issues. But when we avoid exploring this feeling, especially among those in the adoption triad, we only give shame more power.

Adoptees may experience shame, believing something inherently wrong with them made them unworthy of being raised by their birth family.

Birth parents may experience shame over their unintended pregnancy or for feeling they could not meet their child’s needs.

Adoptive parents may experience shame about infertility, or they may fear they are not worthy to parent a child they did not biologically create.

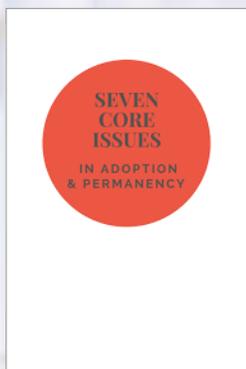
Sharing our feelings of shame with others requires vulnerability. And vulnerability—met with judgment, misunderstanding, or ridicule—further fuels shame.

Yet shame cannot be resolved without courageous vulnerability, met with empathy and connection. Connection can be terrifying for some in the adoption network because it can trigger fear of abandonment, grief, and loss.

This is why adoption professionals so often encourage support groups. If there is one place where shame is familiar, welcome, and has room to heal, it’s with others with similar experiences who can genuinely show empathy and be vulnerable with you.

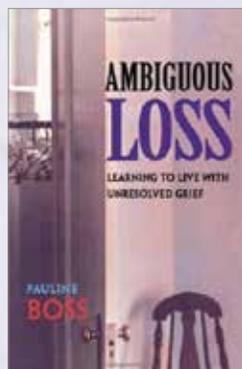
Learn more about the core issues of adoption

[BOOKS]



Seven Core Issues of Adoption and Permanency

by Sharon Kaplan Roszia



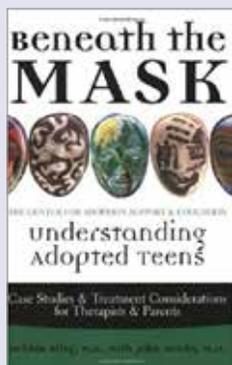
Ambiguous Loss: Living with Unresolved Grief

by Pauline Boss



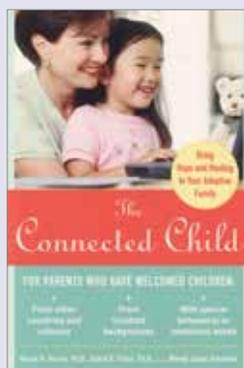
Before You Were Mine: Discovering Your Adopted Child's Lifestory

by Susan TeBos and Carissa Woodwyk



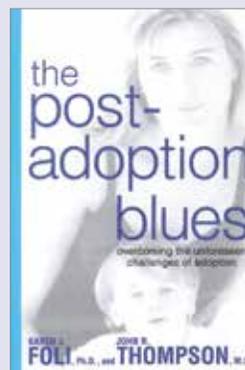
Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens

by Debbie Riley and John Meeks



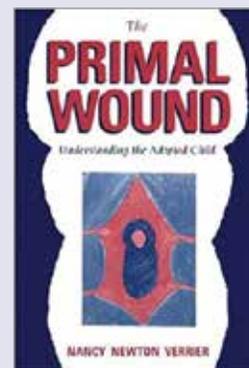
The Connected Child: Bring Hope and Healing to your Adoptive Family

by Karyn Purvis and David Cross



The Post-Adoption Blues

by Dr. Karen Foli and Dr. John Thompson



The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child

by Nancy Newton Verrier

[ORGANIZATIONS WITH ANNUAL CONFERENCES]

American Adoption Congress
www.AmericanAdoptionCongress.org

Christian Alliance for Orphans
www.cafo.org

Empowered to Connect
www.EmpoweredToConnect.org

Korean American Adoptee
Adoptive Family Network
www.kaanet.org

North American Council
on Adoptable Children
www.nacac.org

[PODCAST]

Creating a Family
www.BlogTalkRadio.com/CreatingAFamily

Search: "When Parents Struggle to Attach to their Adopted Child"

[WEBSITES]

www.AdopteeReading.com

www.Adoption.com –
search "core issues of adoption"

www.AdoptionSupport.org –
"education and resources" tab

www.ChildWelfare.gov/Topics/Adoption –
scroll to the link "for adopted people"

www.CreatingAFamily.com

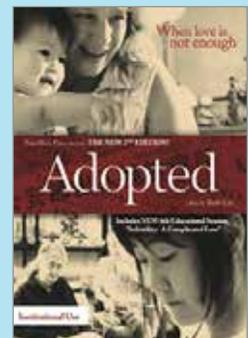
[WEBINARS]

[www.vimeo.com/OnDemand/
CoreIssuesOfAdoption](http://www.vimeo.com/OnDemand/CoreIssuesOfAdoption)



[FILM]

Adopted
www.AdoptedTheMovie.com



Closure
www.ClosureDocumentary.com

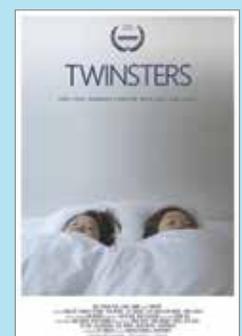


Somewhere Between
www.SomewhereBetweenMovie.com



The Dark Matter of Love
www.TheDarkMatterOfLove.com

Twinsters
www.TwinstersMovie.com





Need additional support?

POST-ADOPTION CONTACT CENTER

Any birth family members, adopted adults, and adoptive family members throughout the United States can contact us. You do not have to be a current or former Bethany client.

Schedule a free introductory, virtual meeting or phone call to discuss questions or concerns. From there, we can assess types of services and resources that may be beneficial to you or your family.

[Bethany.org/PACC](https://www.bethany.org/PACC)
BCSPostAdopt@bethany.org
(866) 309-7328

Concerns we address

Grief and loss

Openness in adoption

Trust and attachment

Identity and life stages of adoption

Family dynamics and adoption adjustment

Trauma, abuse, and neglect

Challenging behavior

Planning for birth family search

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Post-Placement Services Consultant

Angela is passionate about assisting all who are connected to adoption and empowering them with the knowledge and tools to navigate the unique aspects of life after adoption.

As a licensed, adoption-competent clinician, she has completed Rutgers University's Adoption Certificate program and has been trained in many research-based therapeutic modalities and interventions. These include training on assessing adult attachment, Texas Christian University Institute of Child Development's Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI®) with Dr. Karyn Purvis and Dr. David Cross, and Bethany's ADOPTS counseling model.

