The Seven Wonders of Adoption - By Betsy Keefer-Smalley

Adopted children, as well as foster children separated long-term from their birth families, may experience feelings and reactions commonly called “adoption issues.” Let’s face it, we all have issues related to our experiences and histories. That doesn’t mean we have mental health problems, but it does mean we view the world through a lens impacted by our past experiences.

There are seven identified issues related to long-term separation from birth family. Some issues will be more significant than others depending on the child’s developmental level or current situation. For example, identity will be a more prominent issue for children who are in early adolescence (when identity formation is an important developmental task) or for those children who are in communities that differ dramatically from their own racial or cultural identities. The importance of adoption issues varies with each child depending on a variety of factors, including the child’s resilience, temperament, history of trauma, his understanding of the reasons leading to his separation from his family, and his developmental level.

The following outline provides a list of seven commonly identified adoption issues, reframed from the child’s point of view as “wonders.” Also included are some possible behaviors displayed by a child experiencing feelings associated with each of the issues.

Wonder # 1: Loss and Grief
“I wonder why I lose everyone and everything that is important to me. What is the matter with me?”

Behaviors associated with this issue:
- overreactions to real or perceived losses (death of a pet or grandparent, a friend moving away, school transitions, etc.)
- difficulty with separations from foster or adoptive parents (school or day care, camp, sleep overs, parents’ getaway or business trips, hospitalizations)
- difficulty emancipating from the foster/adoptive home; attempts to delay emancipation through self-induced failure.

Wonder # 2: Rejection/Abandonment
“I wonder if these people are really going to keep me.”

Behaviors associated with this issue:
- approach/avoidance conflicts in relationships, especially with parents, but occurring also in relationships with peers
- rejecting others before they can be rejected (“I will ‘quit’ before I get fired”)
- negative behavior to speed anticipated rejection and test commitment of others
- attempts to be “perfect” to avoid rejection.

Wonder # 3: Guilt and Shame
“I wonder what I did to make my own parents throw me away.”

Behaviors associated with this issue:
- magical thinking; belief he caused the separation from the birth family
- low self-esteem
- expectation of failure and future rejections.
Wonder # 4: Trust

“I wonder if I can believe what these people are telling me.”

Behaviors associated with this issue:
- refusal to attach
- either clinging, inappropriately dependent behavior or early, inappropriate self-care and distancing from nurturing caregivers
- stealing
- caring for own needs and desires because child has not learned that others will meet his needs
- lack of interest in pleasing others.

Wonder # 5: Identity

“I wonder who my people are and if I will be like them.”

Behaviors associated with this issue:
- looking and behaving in ways that are very different from the foster/adoptive family
- changing identities frequently in a search for one that is like the birth family

Wonder # 6: Control

“I wonder why everyone else makes decisions about my family, how much information I get, how old I have to be to meet my siblings or birth parents. When do I get to make important decisions about my life?”

Behaviors associated with this issue:
- constant control battles with authority figures
- lying, even when the lie does not seem to benefit the child
- stealing
- obsessive compulsive behavior (list-making, unusual orderliness)
- lack of flexibility.

Wonder # 7: Divided Loyalties

“I wonder if I should remain loyal to my birth mother or if I should allow myself to love and be loved by my foster/adoptive mother.”

Behaviors associated with this issue:
- recurring episodes of running away from the foster/adoptive home.
- acting out during the holidays or near Mother’s Day
- refusal to attach to the foster/adoptive parents
- modeling after birth parent or fantasy of birth parent.

To cope with self-destructive or challenging behaviors, foster parents must first understand the feelings and perceptions that lead to the child’s reactions. Remember the “lens” of adoption issues as you help your foster child with feelings about being separated from the birth family.

Betsy Keefer Smalley is a member of the FPC Faculty and is the Director of Foster Care and Adoption Training at the Institute for Human Services (IHS) in Columbus, Ohio. She is lead author of the IHS Pre-service Training for Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Caregivers, which is being adapted for FPC. The first three classes, “Child Abuse and Neglect,” “The Child Welfare Team,” and “Parent-Child Attachment” are now available on www.FosterParentCollege.com. Watch for the next two pre-service classes this spring.

Opportunities


Submit your nominations for Champions for Children. This regular column spotlights foster parents, advocates, social workers, foster care alumni, etc. Please email a sentence or two about your nominees, along with their contact information, to Lisa at press@northwestmedia.com. Thank you.

Indiana parents, please check with your regional training director before you enroll in classes.

Yes, you CAN reprint articles from this newsletter. Please notify us of your plans, and on the article state the story is “Reprinted with permission from FosterParentCollege.com® Connections.” Email Lisa at press@northwestmedia.com.

Find additional resources for foster care and adoption at www.FosterParentCollege.com
Internships for College Students Who Spent Time in Foster Care

The Foster Youth Internship Program of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) seeks applicants for its 2011 program. CCAI is for young adults who spent at least 24 consecutive months in foster care at any point in their life and who have completed at least 4 semesters of higher education by May 29, 2012. CCAI places these interns in Congressional offices in Washington, DC for a 9-week internship program. Housing, travel, and a weekly stipend are provided by CCAI. Applications are accepted through January 6. The program will run May 29-July 29, 2012.

The goal of the program is to educate policymakers about the experiences of foster youth in an effort to inspire legislative improvements for foster care. Interns participating in this program benefit both personally and professionally, gaining experience and skills that will bolster their careers for years to come. For more information and to apply, visit www.ccainstitute.org/fyiapply or contact Emily Collins at emily@ccainstitute.org or 202-544-8500.

Carefree Cooking – Lisa’s Spinach Tortellini Soup

This soup is a breeze to make on weeknights and is popular served at winter get-togethers. We never bother with smaller batches because it’s so good the next day for lunch.

**Ingredients:**
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 4 cloves garlic, chopped
- 2 quarts vegetable or chicken broth
- 2 14-ounce cans diced or chopped tomatoes
- 1 ½ pounds fresh spinach
- 1 pound mushrooms
- 2 15-ounce cans white beans or black-eyed peas, drained and rinsed
- 1 19-ounce package frozen cheese tortellini
- 4 teaspoons dried basil, or to taste
- 2 teaspoons dried oregano, or to taste
- Grated Parmesan cheese
- Salt and pepper

**Directions:**
1. Simmer chopped onions in olive oil over medium heat until translucent, about 5 minutes. Stir often.
2. Stir in the chopped garlic and stir another minute.
3. Pour in broth, increase heat to medium-high and bring to a boil. Lower heat to medium-low and simmer 5 minutes.
4. Add canned tomatoes. Simmer 5 minutes.
5. Meanwhile, chop spinach and slice mushrooms.
6. Stir in spinach, mushrooms, beans and tortellini. Simmer 10 minutes. Add a little water if the soup gets too thick as the tortellini absorbs the stock. This is meant as a very thick soup or stew, so go easy.
7. Add basil, oregano, salt and pepper to taste. Turn off heat and let soup stand 5 minutes.
8. Serve topped with grated Parmesan cheese.
9. Optional: In a 10-inch frying pan, cook 1 pound of bulk Italian sausage. Drain off fat and stir into soup just before serving.

January Word Find Fun – Hang this page on your fridge for your children's enjoyment.

There are lots of special dates in January, namely the birthdays of A.A. Milne, Martin Luther King Jr., Paul Revere, Betsy Ross, J.R.R. Tolkien, Louis Braille, Isaac Newton, Benjamin Franklin, Lewis Carroll, Jackie Robinson and Franklin D. Roosevelt.

This word find celebrates another very important January date in the USA, National Dress Up Your Pet Day, January 14. In this puzzle you'll be searching for types of pets and the clothes they might wear.

| S | P | Q | V | J | L | K | Y | R | K | V | D | T | C | Z | H | Q | G | F |
| S | F | A | S | E | B | A | C | K | T | N | N | D | P | F | M | E | H | I |
| T | O | S | J | T | L | I | O | V | F | T | S | N | P | F | T | S | G |
| V | A | H | N | A | H | G | K | D | C | L | A | F | M | L | L | T | K | U |
| G | V | G | Z | S | M | G | A | I | B | K | C | E | G | I | W | O | I | A |
| S | N | Q | O | D | R | A | E | N | I | M | T | K | B | I | R | J | N |
| V | E | W | Q | T | G | I | S | T | B | I | O | Q | B | R | I | R | T | A |
| Z | C | O | B | H | E | W | H | N | E | Y | T | U | K | E | E | A | X | T |
| C | B | G | K | V | G | I | R | D | L | E | E | Y | E | G | F | P | V | J |
| L | C | G | E | V | P | G | G | V | H | B | U | Q | P | F | H | O | Y | S |

Word Key:
- Beagle
- Bikini
- Iguana
- Iguana
- Toga
- Koi
- Kilt
- Parrot
- Pajamas
- Gerbil
- Girdle
- Tomcat
- Tights

Kids Krafts – Fabric Necklace

Who knew an old pair of pants could turn into such a cute necklace or headband? Simply cut, add beads, tie it together, and voila--an instant accessory. This idea can be adapted for any holiday, using special colors or festive fabrics.

What You Will Need:
- An old piece of stretchy clothing (like stretch pants) that can be cut into a strip approximately 24" by 2"
- Large beads with holes wide enough for fabric to fit through
- Scissors
- Needle nose pliers

How you make them:
1. Cut fabric into a strip approximately 24" by 2".
2. Lay out beads in an appealing pattern. String beads onto fabric, using needle nose pliers to pull, if necessary.
3. Space beads according to your taste. Tie ends together.
4. Tips: The more stretchy the fabric, the better for pulling the necklace over your head. This piece may also be used as a headband.

From Mia Cronan, Kaboose.com.