

Understanding Trauma Through the Lens of an Adoptee

WHAT EDUCATORS NEED TO KNOW

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Numbers of Adoptions in U.S.

- ▶ 2007: 133,737 adoptions
- ▶ 2014: 110,373 adoptions
- ▶ Fewer international and related adoptions
- ▶ Infant adoptions have remained mostly steady
- ▶ Some estimates that 100 million Americans touched by adoption

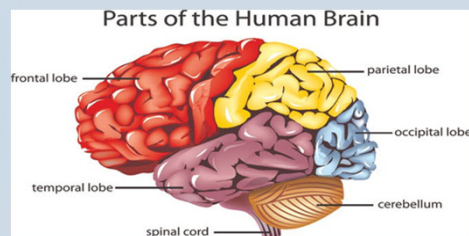
Trauma and Abandonment Issues Related to Adoption

How Does Trauma Affect Children?

- Trauma can affect children's brain, bodies, behavior, and ways of thinking.
- Children who have experienced trauma, especially ongoing trauma - may have developed unhealthy habits and behaviors, including increased aggression and distrusting or disobeying adults.
- "Parenting a child who has experienced trauma may require a shift from seeing a "bad kid" to a "kid who has had bad things happen to them."
- *Child Welfare Information*

Effect of Trauma on Brain Development

- Recent and growing research on how maltreatment affects the brain
- Research is shifting to biological explanations



Adoption adds a level of complexity to the life of an adopted person.

- The loss that results from displacement, even at an early age, hurts children.
- To help your child successfully adjust, helping children to understand and accept these precepts will be beneficial:
 1. Every adopted child was born to a woman, and that woman grieved when the child left her.
 2. Children are not at fault.
 3. Each adopted person had a different genetic and social history (and possibly a different cultural heritage) AND are valued and important

Negative Influences on the Mental Health of Some Adopted Persons

- Lack of attachment to significant people in their lives
- The influence of dysfunctional families
- The effects of poor communication about adoption

Abandonment

- Connections, identity, and family roles
 - Why did my birth parents choose adoption?
 - How do I fit into my adoptive family?
 - What is my role in my family and in society?
- Somatic memories and intimacy
 - Trusting their own “lovability”
 - Fear of being abandoned again
 - Sabotaging relationships
- Telling children about their birth parents
 - Including early chapters of their lives
 - When will I tell my child?
 - Developmental stages to consider

What do adoptees need?

- ▶ Adoption involves loss
- ▶ Separation from a significant person is a crisis for a child
- ▶ Loss is connected to identity
- ▶ Children need safety and permanency

3 tasks for Adoptees

Clarification of Life Events

- What has happened to me?
- What is real? What is factual?
- Long process that is not linear

Integration of All Family Memberships

- Includes both past and present
- Includes:
 - Bio family
 - Foster families
 - Adoptive family
- Loyalty issues and belief that they need to make a choice

Actualization of Belonging in a new family

- Importance of permanency through adoption
- May be difficult for children to visualize or accept

5 Crucial Questions

- ▶ What happened to me?
- ▶ Who am I?
- ▶ Where am I going?
- ▶ How will I get there?
- ▶ When will I know I belong?

What happened to me?

- ▶ Identification of losses
 - ▶ Family
 - ▶ Friends
 - ▶ Pets
 - ▶ Schools
 - ▶ Previous caregivers
 - ▶ Familiar environment
 - ▶ Culture and language
- ▶ Recognizing grief

Who Am I?

- ▶ Identity and sense of self
- ▶ Multiple caregivers
- ▶ Loss of biological parents
- ▶ Clarifying what is factual and what is not factual

Where Am I going?

- ▶ Understanding the past and how it relates to the future
- ▶ Child's ability to attach is connected to their grief work
 - ▶ What is the child's ability to attach?
 - ▶ What attachment difficulties have they had in the past?
 - ▶ Who is relevant and meaningful in their lives?
 - ▶ What traits and qualities are important to them in peers, adults and other individuals?

How will I get there?

- ▶ Safe relationships are important for children to reconcile losses and build new connections

- ▶ Relationships
 - ▶ Stability
 - ▶ Continuity
 - ▶ Mutuality

When will I know I belong?

- ▶ No magic moment for all children
- ▶ Occurs at different rates for children and families
- ▶ Ongoing, lifelong process

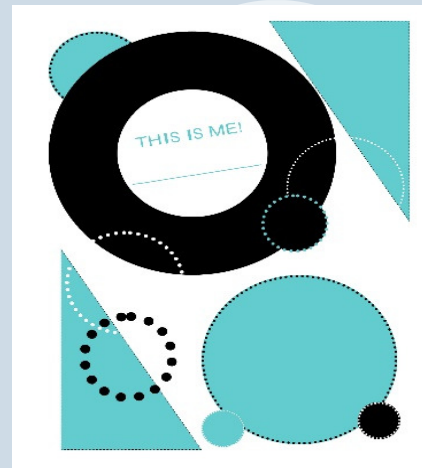
7 Critical Elements for Working with Children

- ▶ Engaging the Child
- ▶ Listening to the Child's words
- ▶ Speaking the truth
- ▶ Validating the child's life story
- ▶ Creating a safe space
- ▶ Going back in time
- ▶ Recognizing pain as part of the process

Techniques

Lifebooks

- ▶ Connects past to present
- ▶ Resolution of grief and losses
- ▶ Identify relationships/validate relationships
- ▶ Encourages self reflection and identity formation
- ▶ Includes all 7 critical elements



Lifebooks



Aids in sense of self by clarifying who the child has lived with

I Grew Up With

Where We Lived

A Special Memory

Includes information on birth families as well as adoptive families and foster families

MY EXTENDED FAMILY MEMBERS

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

How we connected: _____

Celebrating the person in my life.

A time we spent together: _____

Memories: _____

Lifebooks

► Celebrates significant events

The Day You Came To Our Family

The date: _____

Your age: _____

Who brought you: _____

How we felt: _____



My Adoption Day

Photo here

Date: _____

Place: _____

Judge that presided: _____

Importance of people that attended: _____

How I felt: _____



Recognizes relationships

Lifebooks/ Journals

Quiz
Warning: Your Answers Might Surprise You!

Let's see who is in your life! Who are the people you count on? Try this. Answer the following questions as fast as you can. Don't think too hard. Write the first name that pops into your head.

There are no wrong answers!

1. You need to borrow \$50. Who do you call? _____

2. You're going to buy a car. Who would you bring? _____

3. You have a really big secret and need to tell someone? Who? _____

4. Name two people you'd want with you if struck on a desert island. _____

5. You need someone who will tell you the truth about something. Who do you ask? _____

6. You see megabucks and have to share the money with three people. Who? 1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____

7. If you had to get surgery, who would you want to go with you? _____

8. You get in trouble. Who do you call to help? _____

"Why"? Page

I'm a social worker. There are some of the reasons a foster parent might come into care. Some might apply to you as well. It's not easy to think about this stuff, is it? But it's hard NOT to think about it too, huh? Check off the reasons you can relate to!

- My parent(s) had drugs & didn't stop/get treatment
- My parent(s) were abusive
- I don't remember
- My parent(s) left me all alone
- My parent(s) are in jail
- We had no place to live
- My parent(s) left me
- My parent(s) didn't buy food/clothes
- My parent(s) didn't have me safe. My parent(s) were abusive
- My parent(s) were mental ill. They were neglectful
- My parent(s) were unable to care for children
- I don't know the exact reason. I think there might be some
- My social worker/foster parent thinks there are the reason

My thoughts about my family.

Making journal entries helps formulate a sense of identity

Life Maps and Ecosystem Maps

Handout #3.7 EcoMap: Form and Suggestions

ME: My name: _____ I am _____ years old.

Brothers and Sisters

Friends

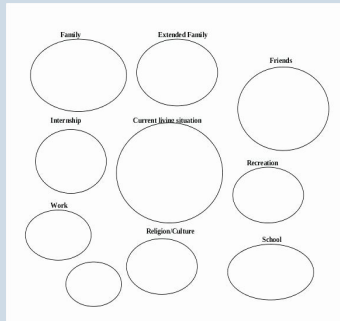
School

My Dreams:

What Bugs Me:

I feel:

20



Child's EcoMap

1. Me: I am _____ years old. Today is: _____
By: _____

2. Why Am I Here?

3. For what reason why?

4. Home

5. Friends and Family

6. School

7. Hobbies and Games

8. I feel:

9. Things that bug me

10. Things I like to do

11. I worry about

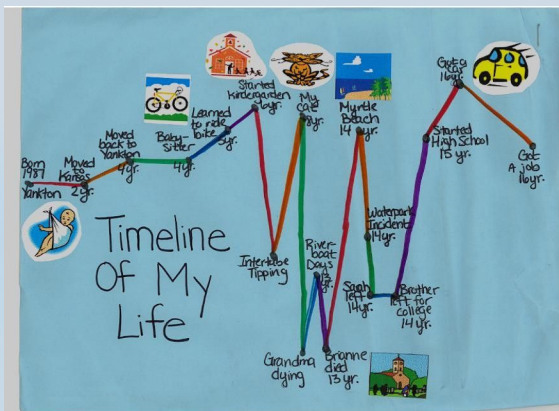
12. My favorite color: _____ Feels Good

13. Dreams

14. Friends

15. Does Not Feel Good

Timelines



Name: _____

Major Events in My Life Time Line

I was born _____

0 | 1 yrs. | 2 yrs. | 3 yrs. | 4 yrs. | 5 yrs. | 6 yrs. | 7 yrs.

Click and drag the box borders to move. Click and drag the arrow to move.

Feeling Charts and Wheels

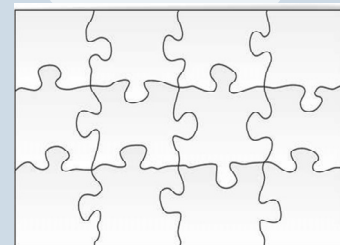


- ▶ Helps children to label their feelings
- ▶ Connect behaviors with feelings and thoughts



Activities for Loss and Questions

- ▶ A loss box
- ▶ Letters to birth parents
- ▶ Puzzle of questions

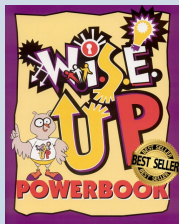


Other tools and techniques:

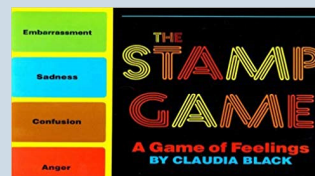
- ▶ Collages
- ▶ Water play
- ▶ Clay
- ▶ Pictures/photos
- ▶ Books related to adoption
- ▶ Movies about adoption/foster care
- ▶ Genograms

- ▶ My Adoption Story: Creative art project for their adoption story

More tools



- ▶ WISE UP! Program
- ▶ 52 Ways to talk about adoption cards
- ▶ Feeling Games:



Helpful Tips for Educators

- ▶ Be mindful of the language you use to describe families.
- ▶ Use inclusive language.
- ▶ Don't assume anything.
- ▶ Listen to families and honor their requests.
- ▶ Know that everyone's adoption story is different.
- ▶ Help children feel accepted and welcome in your classroom and school.
- ▶ Do not avoid the topic of adoption, but be mindful in how you address it.

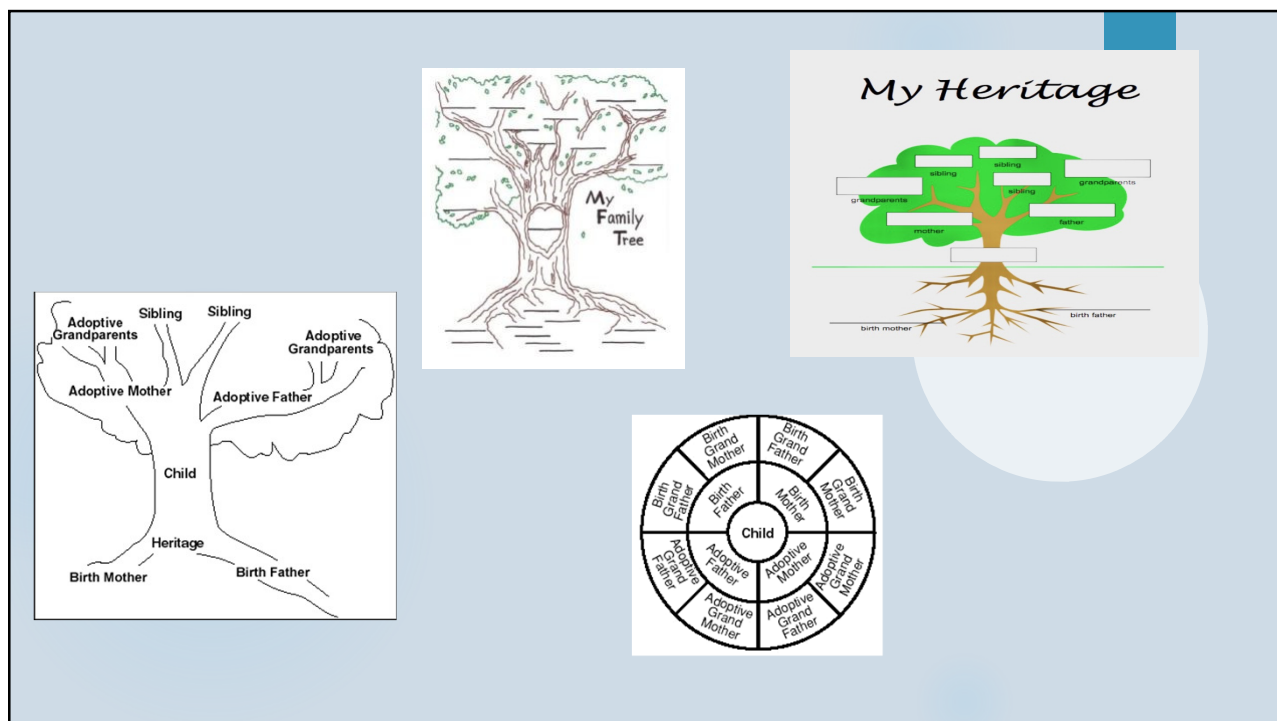
Biased Class Assignments

The Bias

- ▶ *Draw Your Family Tree*
- ▶ *Bring in Your Baby Picture*
- ▶ *Write the Story of Your Life*
- ▶ *Tell the Story of Your Family*
- ▶ *Celebrate your mother or father*
- ▶ *Trace the genetics origins of your eye color*

The Fix

- ▶ *Try a Rooted Tree or Family Forest*
- ▶ *Broaden the Project*
- ▶ *Write about an event in your life*
- ▶ *Diversify how they tell about their families*
- ▶ *Celebrate Caring Day/Family Day*
- ▶ *Teach genetics with less personal examples*



Websites

- ▶ Lifebooks
 - ▶ Adoption Learning Partners
 - ▶ www.adoptionlearningpartners.org
 - ▶ Tapestry Books
 - ▶ www.tapestrybooks.com
 - ▶ A Family For Every Child
 - ▶ www.afamilyforeverychild.org/lifebooks/
 - ▶ Child Welfare Information Gateway
 - ▶ www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-parenting/lifebooks/
 - ▶ Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association
 - ▶ http://www.ifapa.org/publications/ifapa_lifebook_pages.asp

Websites

- ▶ Trauma
 - ▶ Zero to Three
 - ▶ www.zerotothree.org
 - ▶ National Child Traumatic Stress Network
 - ▶ www.NCTSTN.org
 - ▶ Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health
 - ▶ www.alliancesaimh.org
 - ▶ Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health
 - ▶ www.wiaimh.org