



The Good Grief of Adoption

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Learning Objectives

- Define grief and various models of grieving.
- Define disenfranchised grief and loss.
- Define ambiguous loss and its role in adoption.
- What do children look like when experiencing grief?
- Factors that influence children's reaction to loss.
- How can I help my child?
- Therapeutic interventions for children and teens.



Defining Grief

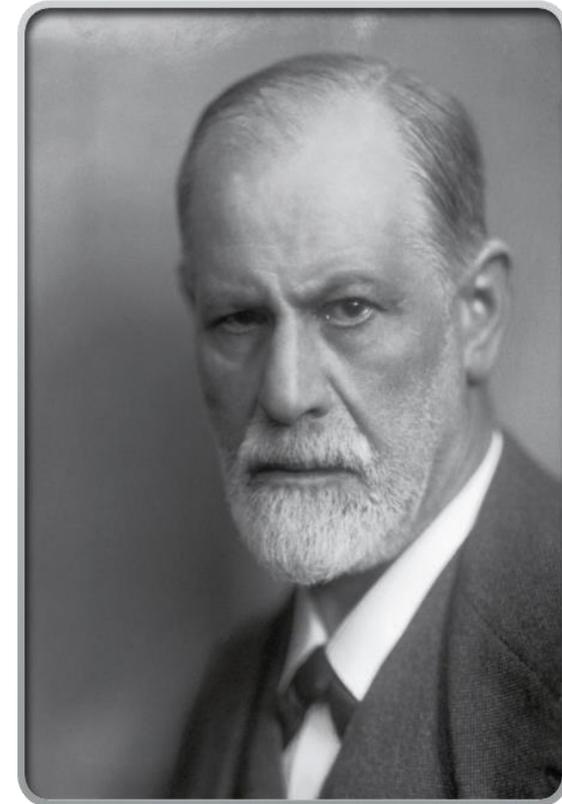


- Grief can be defined as “the response to the loss in all of its totality – including its physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral and spiritual manifestations – and as a natural and normal reaction to loss,” (Hall, 2011).
- Grief is the price we pay for love, and a natural consequence of forming emotional bonds to people, projects and possessions.

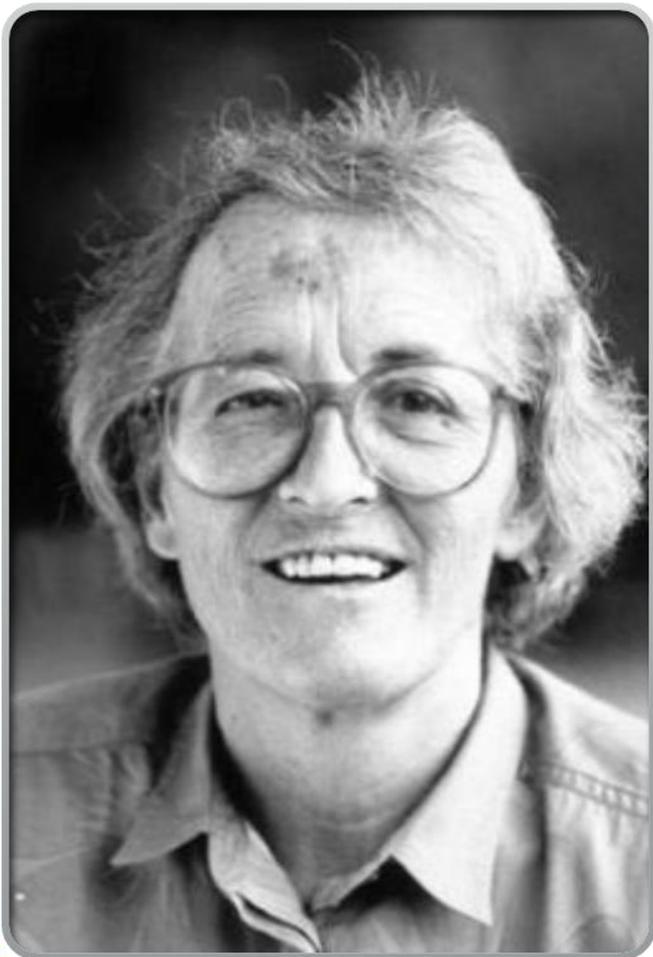


Models of Grief- Freud

- Sigmund Freud was the first to discuss grief (1917).
- “Grief Work” required the following:
 - Freeing the individual of their bond to the loved one.
 - Readjusting to life without the loved one.
 - Building new relationships.
- Freud believed you had to completely separate yourself from the loved one, and acknowledge and express painful emotions (guilt and anger).
- Freud believed that if this did not occur it would increase the risk of both physical and mental illness.
- Research does not support this model.



Models of Grief- Kubler-Ross

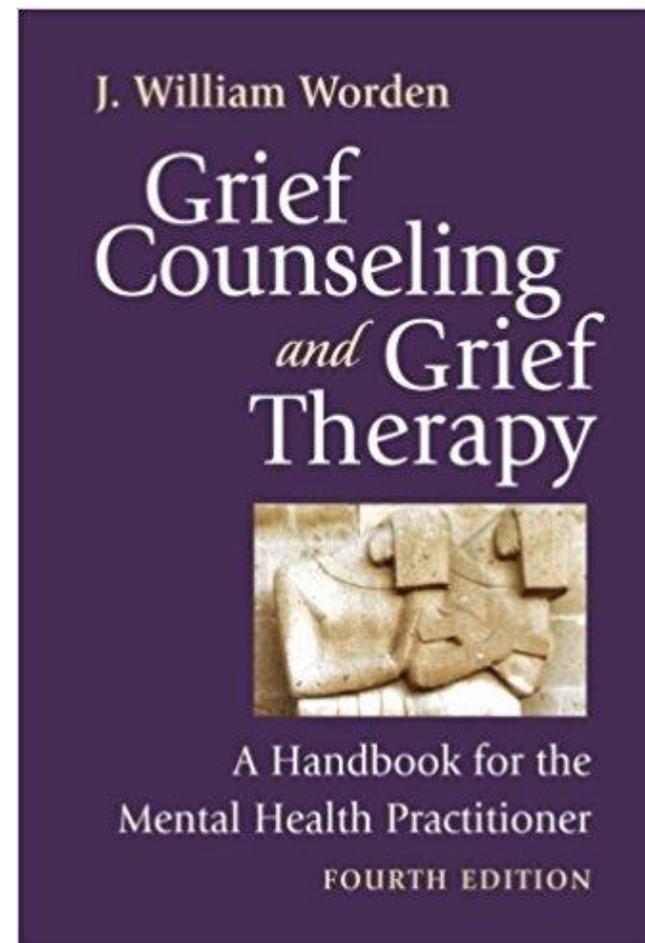


- Elizabeth Kubler-Ross and The Five Stages of Grief.
- Very well known following her publication of *On Death and Dying*.
 - 1. Shock and Denial
 - 2. Anger, Resentment and Guilt
 - 3. Bargaining
 - 4. Depression
 - 5. Acceptance
- While both famous and concise, no research evidence to support that grief looks like this.



Models of Grief- Worden

- Worden's Task-Based Model (2008).
 - Task 1. Accept the reality of the loss.
 - Task 2. Process the pain associated with grief.
 - Task 3. Adjust to a world without the loved one.
 - Internally
 - Externally
 - Spiritually
 - Task 4. Find an enduring connection with the loved one in the midst of embarking on a new life.





Disenfranchised Grief

Grief that people experience when they have a loss that isn't or can't be openly acknowledged, publicly mourned, or socially supported.



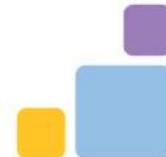
Move
out of
the way
we
have
papers
to sign
It's
Adoption
Day!

Disenfranchised Grief



Disenfranchised Grief

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYfAcHGkRLs>
- Gregory Manning, PsyD., Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption.



Loss



- The process of losing something or someone.



Experiential Exercise

- You are MOVING and won't be returning. The truck is on its way. You have less than TEN MINUTES to pack 10 SINGULAR ITEMS.
- Develop a list of what you MUST take with you- things, people, etc. that you cannot live without.



Moving Day



- The moving company calls and can't send a truck, so they are sending an SUV. You must **REDUCE** those items from 10 TO 5.
- Cross items off your list.



Moving Day

- The vehicle pulls up in front of your house. It is **NOT** an SUV. Reduce your items to 2.
- Edit your list.



Ambiguous Loss

The grief or distress associated with a loss in which there is a confusion or uncertainty about that person or relationship.



Type 1:

When the person is **PHYSICALLY** present but **PSYCHOLOGICALLY** unavailable.

E.g., Chemical dependency.

Type 2:

When the person is **PHYSICALLY** absent but **PSYCHOLOGICALLY** present.

E.g., Incarceration, military, foster care, etc.



What Loss Can Look Like:

Ambiguous Loss

- Difficulty with transitions.
- Changes in sleep/nightmares.
- Trouble making decisions
- Can't move on through typical disappointments.
- Learned helplessness/hopelessness.
- Depressive feelings.
- Anxiety
- Feelings of guilt.

PTSD

- Difficulty with transitions.
- Changes in sleep/nightmares.
- Trouble making decisions, learning new things, concentrating.
- Acting out parts of their trauma in play.
- Changes in feelings:
 - Depression, anxiety, intense anger outbursts, irritability, guilt, detached from others.
 - Trouble feeling happy.
- Reckless, self-destructive behavior.



Ambiguous Loss in Adopted Children

- Research reflects that ambiguous loss often peaks for adopted children during adolescence, because identity development is one of the primary developmental tasks as a teen.
- Adopted individuals who were able to discuss difficult feelings about the uncertainty and lack of information about birth family with their adoptive family showed fewer symptoms of ambiguous loss than those from adoptive families where they couldn't talk about it.





Ambiguous Loss in Adopted Children

- We know it's harder to resolve grief when:
 - We don't know if a loss is temporary or permanent.
 - Uncertainty about a loss prevents a child's ability to recognize roles and relationships in their adoptive family.
 - There is no clear, symbolic ritual surrounding the loss.
 - The lost relationship is not socially recognized or is hidden from others.
 - The circumstances that led to the loss are perceived negatively by others.





Factors Affecting Children's Reactions to Loss

- The temperament/personality of the child.
- The attachment to birth parent.
- Age and developmental stage.
 - Low ability to cope
 - Comprehension
 - Difficulty dealing with stress
 - Cognitive distortion of placement experience



Children's Reactions to Loss

- Past experiences with separation
 - Number of moves can decrease the reaction to separation → Numbness
 - Increased moves can decrease the ability to form close attachments
 - Lack the ability to form intimate relationships
 - Develops fear of abandonment and self-doubt



Children's Reactions to Loss

- How the child sees loss
 - Lack of control over situation
 - People outside the family have more power than parents
 - Someone gave me away (i.e., I didn't measure up, I wasn't good enough to keep, etc.)
 - I was taken away
 - I caused the separation
 - Adults are not trustworthy



Factors that Influence Children's Reactions to Loss

- The way the loss occurs AND how it is communicated to the child.
- How successful we are in validating the child's grief:
 - Permit and invite children to express their feelings.
 - Share similar experiences of other children.
 - Accept the child's continuum of feelings.
- Keep the child as informed as developmentally possible as to why the separation occurred and what is happening now.
- The availability of support.
- Child's willingness to accept support.



What Can I Do?



- Give your child permission to grieve their birth family without guilt.
- Help your child identify what has been lost.
 - Birth parents
 - Siblings
 - Extended family
 - Pets
 - People who look like me
 - My name
 - Country
 - Culture
 - Language
 - My favorite toy
 - My blue sweater



What Can I Do?



- Name the feeling of ambiguous loss and acknowledge how difficult it is to live with it.
- Redefine what it means to be a family → try to be comfortable with the ambiguous boundaries.
- Help the child maintain their sense of identity by turning the “Family Tree” into a “Family Orchard.”
- Acknowledge that certain events trigger feelings of loss:
 - Holidays
 - Birthdays
 - Anniversaries
- Develop new family rituals.
- Provide them simple, truthful, age-appropriate information.
- Let them ask questions.
- Going-on does not mean forgetting or not loving the people of our past.



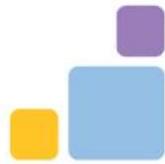
Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.)

<http://adoptionsupport.org/member-types/adoption-competent-professionals/?states=va>

And if your child
struggles,
DO NOT GIVE UP.
Just call your friendly,
neighborhood,
adoption-competent
therapist.

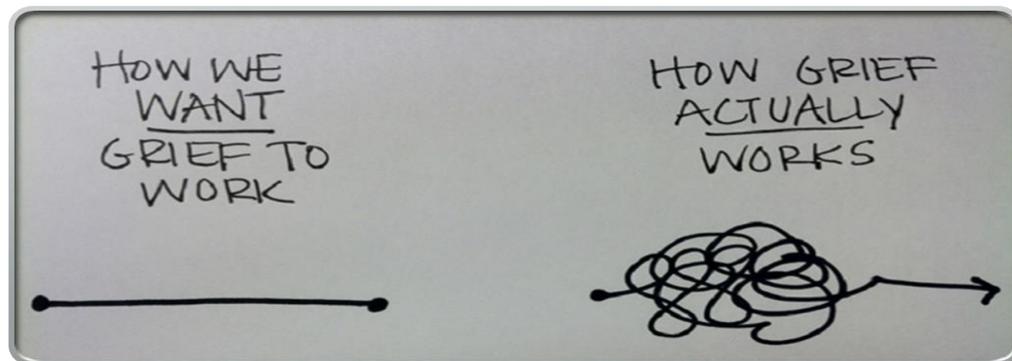


Good Grief!



Keep in Mind...

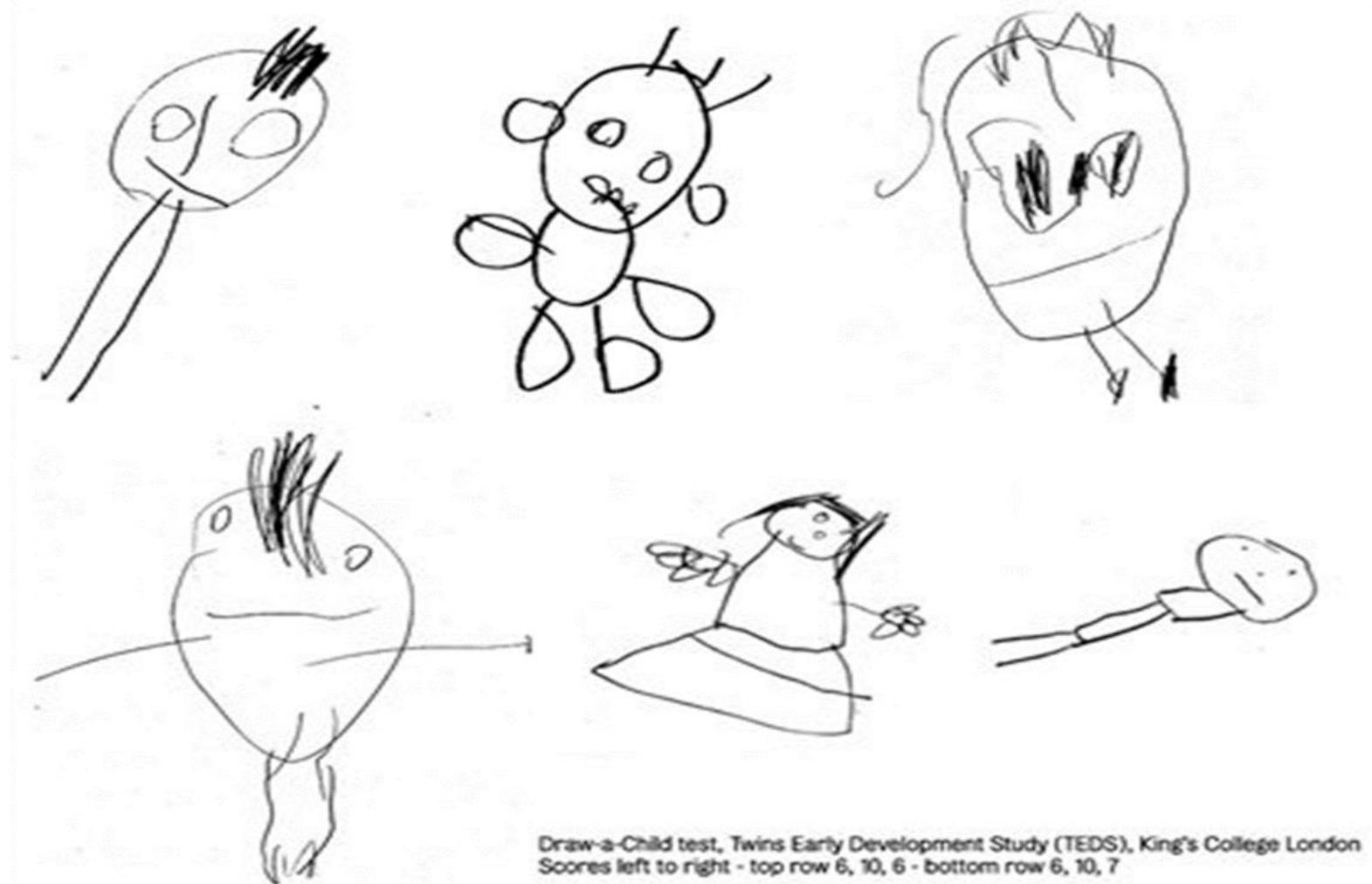
- Treatment looks different depending upon the following:
 - The developmental stage of the child
 - Cognitive ability of the child
 - Child's unique personality
 - The type of therapist selected
 - Sometimes things get worse before they get better





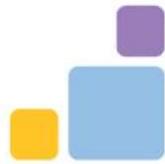
Draw a Family







Show Me Your Family





Show Me Your Family



Remember...

- We cannot rush the grieving process.
- Children grieve in waves.
- Children need to re-grieve as they grow and develop.
- Their grief is often described as Sad, Mad, and Bad.

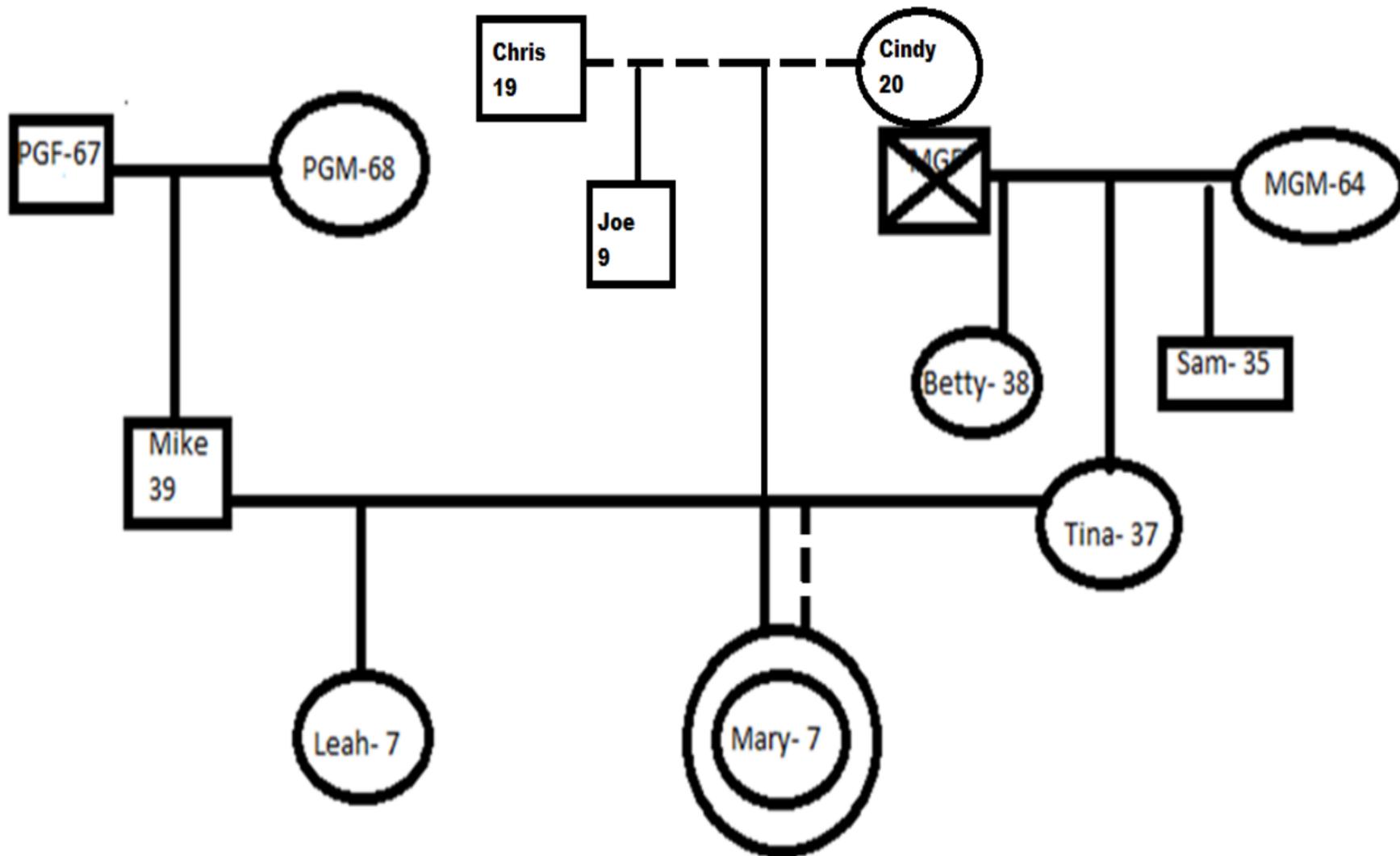


Commemoration



Genogram

Links the child's birth family to the adopted family in a visual way



Life Book



Life Books

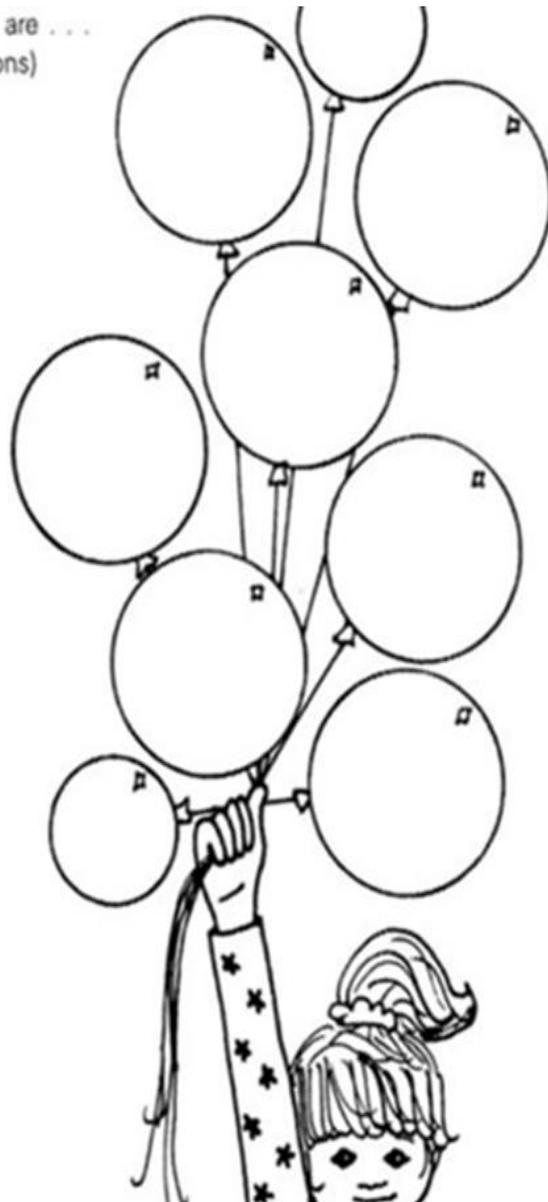


- Original and Post-Adoption Names
- Date of birth
- Copy of Original Birth Certificate and a copy of the Post-Adoption Birth Certificate.
- Family Constellation (or Orchard)
- Names and addresses of Birth Family
- Memories of Significant Moments
- Pictures, Pictures, Pictures!
- Major Childhood Milestones:
 - First Words
 - First Haircut
 - First Tooth
 - Crawling
 - Walking
 - Favorite Toy
 - First Pet
 - First Friend



Words that best describe me are
(write the words in the balloons)

- Friendly
- Silly
- Generous
- Out-going
- Athletic
- Musical
- Dependable
- Talkative
- Shy
- Sweet
- Nervous
- Excitable
- Inventive
- Loud
- Honest
- Quiet
- Funny
- Nice
- Creative
- Artistic
- Hyper
- Leader
- Aggressive
- Charming
- Good Student



Sample Life Book Page



don't you draw a picture of her.

If you don't like to draw, maybe you could cut out a picture from a magazine.

Sample Life Book Page



Sample Life Book Page

Instructions for filling out the "Where Have You Stayed?" Pages:



1. Ask your social worker to print out a computer copy of your placements. *This will help a lot!*
2. Below are possible answers just to give you some ideas.
3. If you have had lots and lots of moves then create a second notebook/lifebook—just for placements.

SAMPLE PAGE

I stayed with the Harper family (foster family).

I moved in on May 1, 2000 and stayed for about 6 months.



What I remember most about this place:

The great food.

How crazy the foster father was.

How much fun I had with Sam, my foster brother.

How much I wanted to leave.

Getting hit.

Getting lots of new clothes.

My friends at school.

The boy/girl friend I met when I lived there.

On a scale of 1 - 10 Rate this placement by marking the line.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

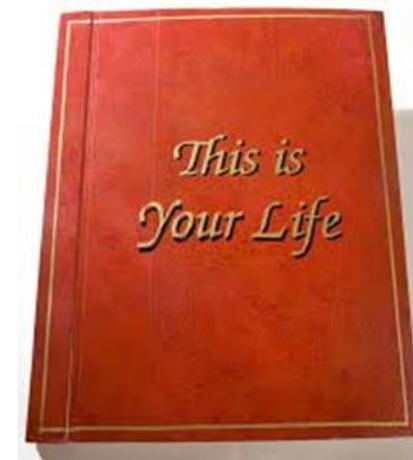
Hated it

It was OK

Loved it

Cultural Life Book

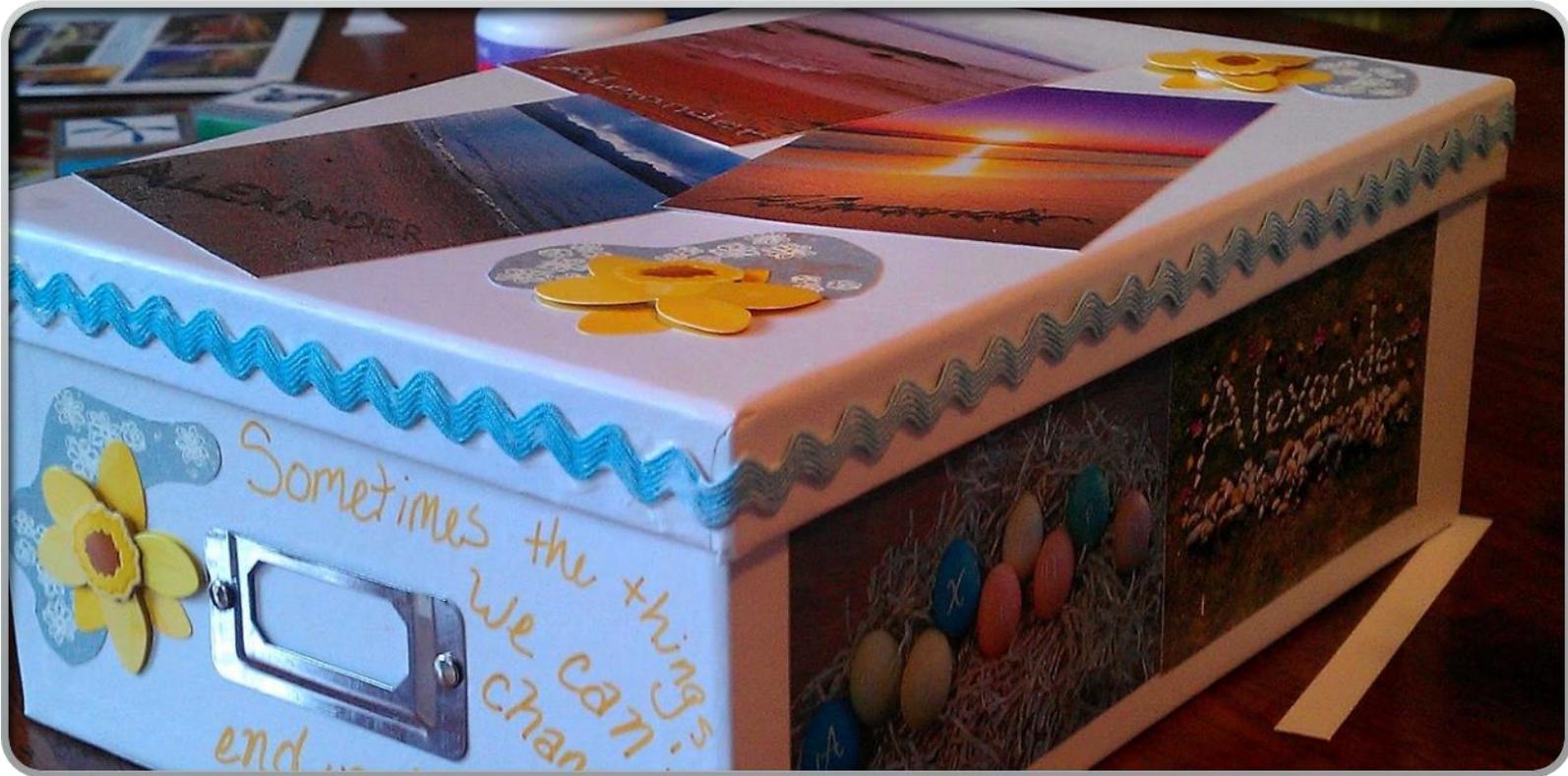
- Focus on culture and location.
 - Include pictures of the orphanage
 - Recipes for local cuisine
 - Pictures of the area where the child lived
 - Folktales
- Look for local opportunities for your child to learn about their cultural origins
 - Cooking classes
 - Styles of dress
 - Religious communities



Other Life Book Examples

- http://ifapa.org/pdf_docs/LifebookPagesAll.pdf
- <http://emkpress.com/pdffiles/lifebook.pdf>
- http://www.adoptionlifebooks.com/?for_when_1%27m_famous.htm

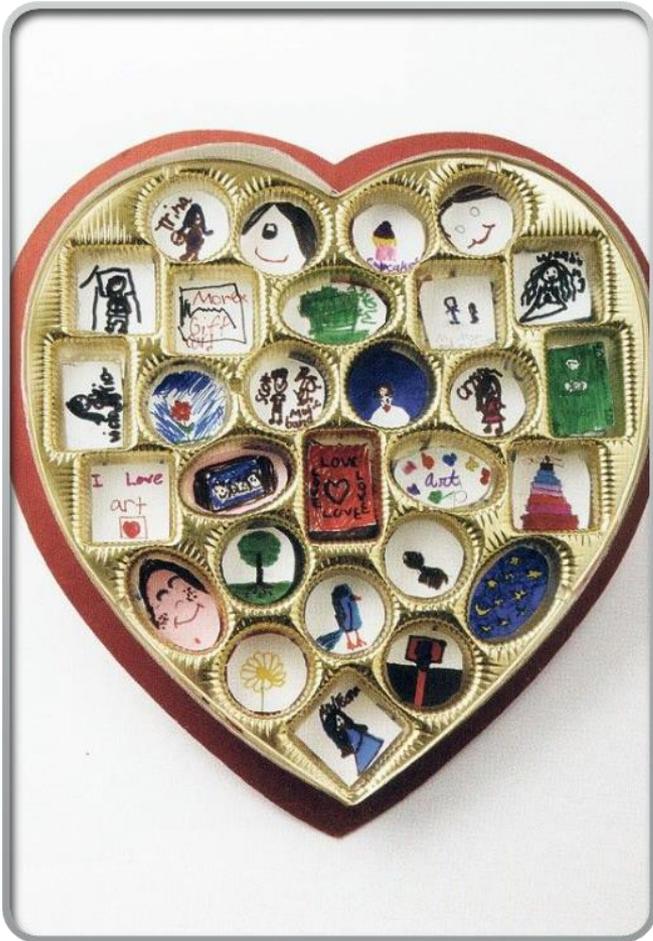




Loss Box



Loss Box



- Children will decorate the box on the outside.
- Fill the interior with items that represent their loss.
 - Drawings
 - Photos
 - Collage
 - Clay Work

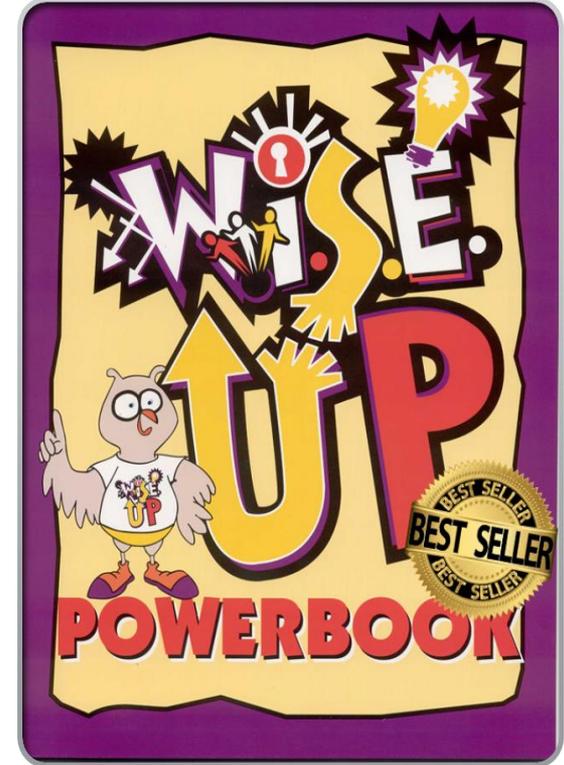


Sample Items from a Loss Box



Answers before there are Questions

- W.I.S.E. Up!
 - Who is your real mother?
 - How come she didn't keep you?
 - Don't you want to find your real mother?
 - I hear you were left at an orphanage-
 - What's wrong with you?
 - Is your mother a prostitute?
 - Do you have a dad?
 - Where is you dad?
 - How come he didn't marry your mother?
 - I heard that all kids in foster care were abused. What happened to you?
 - How will you know what you look like when you grow up?
 - How can she be your mother when her skin isn't dark like yours?
 - How much did your parents pay for you?
 - Is your real mother a drug addict?



Arm your child with Answers

- W. • Walk away or ignore what is said/heard.
- I. • It's private and I don't have to answer.
- S. • Share something about my adoption story.
- E. • Educate others about adoption in general.

Did you know that nearly ALL kids who were adopted by their families get asked about adoption?



W.I.S.E. Up!

<http://adoptionsupport.org/store/>

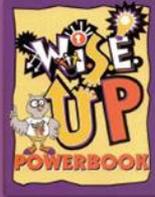


You have the power to answer any questions about adoption!

W = Walk Away
I = It's Private
S = Share Something
E = Educate Others

W.I.S.E. UPSM
the World
about Adoption!

Learn W.I.S.E. UPSM
with the Powerbook.



 The Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.)

Additional copies of this poster may be ordered by visiting www.adoptionsupport.org. C.A.S.E. is the sole owner of the W.I.S.E. UPSM program and Powerbook, which may not be used for training or replication without permission.





Taking your Teen to Therapy

- Be aware that the therapist cannot share every detail with you.
- If the teen believes that the therapist is a spy for the parent, they won't talk and nothing will be accomplished.
- Boundaries of confidentiality are usually set the first session.



Teens in Grief

Give permission for teens to grieve losses.

Validate the teen's sense of confusion as he/she moves to consolidate a sense of self.

Educate the teen about developmental issues in adoption

Teens often do well in groups.

Groups allow for growth and emotional healing.

Opportunities to identify with other teens and normalize experiences (e.g., I am not alone!).

Group helps release stigma and shame.

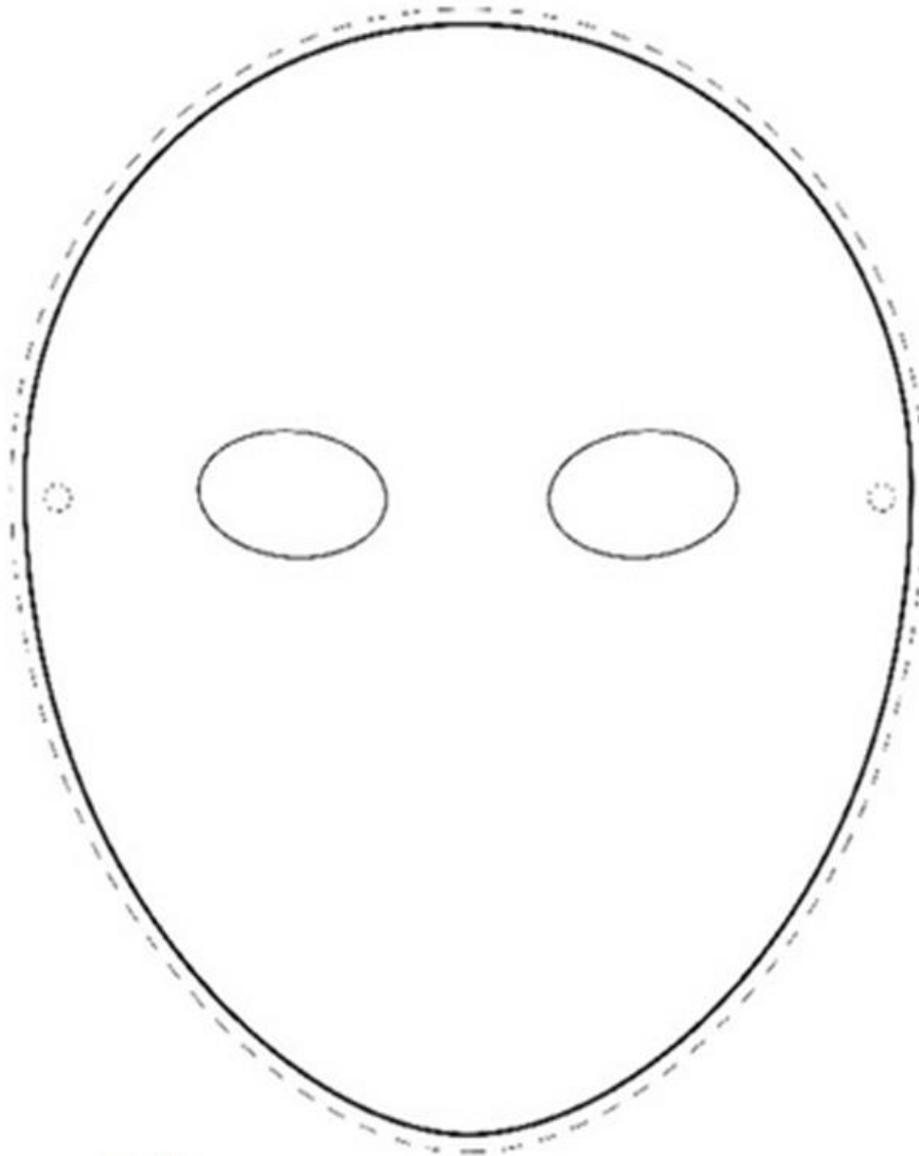


Interventions with Teens

Dear

Write a Letter





Masks



Masks

Outside



Inside



In Conclusion...

- We Know:
- Unresolved separations will interfere with the formation of new relationships.
- New attachments are not supposed to replace the old ones.
- If we give children a chance to process their past losses it makes it easier for them to move forward.
- Children fear re-occurrence of pain of losses and will avoid intimacy.
- Adults who can show support of a child's emotions as the child copes with grief support the development of new attachments.
- Adoptive parents must accept that loyalty issues will exist but that children can love more than one set of parents.



Questions?

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