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At The Children's Home

our goal is to invest in the family today to ensure a child's tomorrow. We're an independent non-profit and we have four programs and a pilot program under one roof.





CHILD'S WAY

**ADOPTION &
PERMANENCY SERVICES**



**PEDIATRIC SPECIALTY
HOSPITAL**



PILOT PROGRAM: TEMP

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HEALING WITHIN THE ADOPTION TRIAD: A TRAUMA- INFORMED APPROACH

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Objectives

- 1) Define trauma, and identify similarities and differences between trauma, grief and loss
- 2) Identify elements of trauma in the adoption triad: birthfamily, adoptive family, and adopted children
- 3) Identify treatment techniques for healing in all members of the adoption triad
- 4) Learn statistics on the prevalence of infertility in the population
- 5) Discuss Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) and how it relates to adoption
- 6) Consider the intersection of healing and trauma specific to adoption situations
- 7) Define resiliency and how it relates to adoption
- 8) Become aware of the skills necessary for a practitioner to become adoption competent

What is TRAUMA?

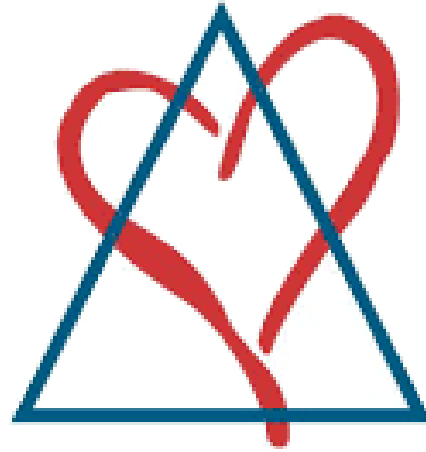
- **Trauma** is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea. (*American Psychological Association*)



Similar Terms:

- Complicated Grief
- Complicated Bereavement
- Traumatic Bereavement
- Traumatic Grief
- Traumatic Loss
- Complex Trauma
- Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder

THE CHILD



**BIRTH
FAMILY**

**ADOPTIVE
FAMILY**

WHAT IS THE ADOPTION TRIAD?

Core Issues In Adoption Triad:

- Abandonment
- Trust
- Loyalty/ confusion
- Identity
- Shame
- Guilt
- Fitting in
- Rejection
- Grief



Birth Family: Rosie's Story

- Background
- Leading up to placement
 - Placement
- After Placement



Birth Family: Trauma before placement

Reasons for voluntary placement/removal

- Mental Health
- Drug and Alcohol
 - Incarceration
 - Homelessness
- Domestic Violence
 - Rape
- Product of “the system”
- Intergenerational Trauma

Birth Family: Adoptive Placement as Trauma

- Examples of the Traumatic Event- placement or removal
- Researches show that after a child is placed for adoption, birthparents often feel numbness, shock and denial
- Feelings of powerlessness
- Losses include genetic continuity, expectations about pregnancy and birth, “feeling normal” and parenting their child
- Lifelong triggers such as walking into the hospital where birthparent gave birth, unexpectedly seeing a photo of the child, child’s birthday, hearing a certain song, major life event, birth of another child
- Physical symptoms, increase or new onset of depression, anxiety or other mental illness, difficulty in relationships



Healing

- Grief Counseling
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Support Groups
- Retreats
- Open Adoption
- Rituals for ambiguous grief
- Art
- Journaling

Adoptive Family: Trauma before placement



Reproductive Trauma: Tonya's Story

12 Months of trying naturally to conceive

Learning every month that pregnancy did not happen

3 Months to be seen by Reproductive Endocrinologist

Infertility testing and diagnosis- unexplained infertility

5 failed IUI procedures

3 failed embryo transfers

Pregnancy obtained- miscarriage at 12 weeks

2 failed embryo transfers

Surrogacy attempt- embryo did not implant in surrogate

Decision to Adopt

Infertility Research

48 million couples and 186 million individuals live with infertility worldwide (WHO)

15% of couples in the United States experience infertility (UCLA Health, 2020)

12.5 % of women in US are using medicalized fertility treatment (CDC)

Among those with infertility, women ages 18-44 are four times as likely to be considering adoption compared to women 18-44 without infertility (CDC National Center for Health Statistics)

Research shows infertility is the primary reason an individual reports wanting to adopt an infant (Van Laningham, Scheuble, & Johnson, 2012)

Many individuals view adoption as their back up plan if infertility treatment fails (Van Laningham, Scheuble, & Johnson, 2012)

The direct impact of infertility on parenting an adopted child

Difficulty bonding with child and feeling entitled to parent child

- Child isn't the child they had imagined
- Family fears losing child and thus struggles to allow self to attach
- Due to infertility, parents lose confidence in their ability and right to be a parent

Parental triggers

- Child looks like birthparent; child has mental health symptoms like birthparent
 - Resent birthparent
- Parent receives a baby shower invitation
- "You aren't my real Mom"

Parent is overbearing and overprotective- fear of losing child

Indirect Impact of Infertility

Marital stress/Divorce

Financial stress

Psychiatric symptoms including
anxiety and depression

- 41 percent of those with infertility report depression (BMC Women's Health, 2004)
- 87 percent of those with infertility report anxiety (BMC Women's Health, 2004)



Healing

- Grief Counseling
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy
- Marriage Counseling
- Support Groups
- Use of reproductive story in healing

Specific tasks for families

- Gain coping skills for triggers
- Add rituals to help with ambiguous loss
- Be realistic
- Shift from pregnancy to parenting; adult centered thinking to child centered
 - “I want to have a baby” vs “I want to grow my family through adoption”

Adoptive Families: Secondary Trauma

Indirect exposure to traumatic material

Stress resulting from helping a person dealing with trauma

Risk factors include high empathy, unresolved grief and loss, and no recovery time

- Recognize symptoms for yourself:
 - Hypervigilance
 - Hopelessness
 - Guilt
 - Avoidance
 - Withdrawal
 - Chronic exhaustion
 - Poor boundaries
 - Sleeplessness
 - Anger

Adoptee: Matt's Story

- Childhood trauma
- Path to adoption
 - Adulthood



Adoptee: Trauma in adoption

- Traditionally referred to as losses
 - Loss of genetic connection
 - Loss of identity without genetic connection
- Loss of feeling emotionally connected to adoptive family; feeling of not fitting in
- Loss of feeling “normal” compared to other kids
 - Loss of medical history
- Loss of knowing and growing up with siblings
 - Loss of culture

ACEs are

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

ACEs lead to:

Early alcohol use

Illegal drug Use

Prescription drug misuse

Alcohol use disorders

Substance use disorders

Suicide attempts

Depression

Risky sexual behavior

Adolescent pregnancy

Lowered IQ

Impaired cognitive function

Diabetes

Heart Attack

Can adoption be both healing and trauma?



Things to consider

- Many adopted individuals view the severance of genetic ties, especially in closed adoption, as being traumatic
- Late Discovery Adoptees (LDA)
- Experts believe that even in infant adoption, child experiences an initial trauma of separation from biological mother



Healing

- Counseling- Trauma Focused CBT; EMDR; DBT
- Post Permanency Counseling
- Networking with others who are adopted
- Open Adoption/Search and Reunion
 - Adoptees have the right to know

EVERY KID

— *is one* —

CARING ADULT
away from being

A SUCCESS STORY.
- Josh Shipp

Healing

- Stability
- Predictability
- Nurturance
- Understanding
- Support

Building Resiliency

“The act of rebounding or springing back or being stretched or pressed, or recovering strength, spirit, and good humor.”

- Demonstrate empathy
- Identify the child’s physical and emotional responses
- Accept them for who they are
- Provide opportunities for them to contribute
- Help them to deal with their mistakes
- Instill optimism



Adoption Triad: Adoption Competent Therapy

“To help all members of the adoption triad, therapists must be able to see the ghosts that accompany them. These ghosts spring from the depths of the unresolved grief, loss, and trauma that everyone has experienced.”

Skills of an Adoption Competent Practitioner

- Allow client to experience loss without minimizing it
- Aware of seven core issue of adoption and how the impact all members of adoption constellation
- Allow client to experience their own resilience and strength, increase self-esteem and plan for the future
- Aware that all members of adoption constellation experience their adoption experience differently
- Aware of the complexity of every member's story and diverse set of circumstances



**Trauma-
Informed
Care**

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