

4 Losses Your Child Experiences after Adoption

Adoption is joy and loss all tangled up together, always.

Shannon Hicks *September 08, 2018*



You may have heard folks in adoption circles say that adoption is rooted in loss. I prefer to say that adoption is joy and loss all tangled up together, always. Every adoption story is different, but each child who has been adopted has experienced losses and will continue to process those losses as they reach different developmental stages. Even in cases where a child was adopted as an infant and did not experience abuse or neglect, her feelings of loss are valid and need to be heard by the adults who she trusts. Here are four losses your child experiences after adoption:

Loss of primary attachment figure

Babies in utero already know their birth mom's voice. They have spent nine months literally attached to her, and when they are born, they instinctively turn toward the voice they learned while inside her body. A child's birth mom is his first attachment figure. Even for children whose parents witness their birth and bring them home from the hospital, this first attachment is broken.

Loss of traditional family narrative

As much as we try to teach kids that there are many ways to form a family, the prevailing societal narrative of family is still that of a mother and father and their biological children. As much as we love our kids and give them every reassurance that our family is "real," this is a very real loss too.

Loss of easily accessed information

In a closed adoption, **adoptees** may find themselves with very little (or no) information about their biological family history, their birth, and the first months or years of their lives. In **open adoptions**, information about birth family physical and mental health history may be edited or omitted for a variety of reasons. In virtually all adoptions, answers to an adoptee's questions about their birth family or their own early experiences are more complicated to access than it would be for biological children.

Loss of privacy

There are typically many adults involved in the process of facilitating an adoption. Social workers, lawyers, judges, and other **adoption agency** representatives have access to information about a child's birth family and birth story. While this cannot necessarily be avoided, adoptive parents should be aware of this loss and should be cautious about sharing details of their child's story more widely than necessary.

It's true that adoption involves loss. Adoptive parents need to be prepared to walk beside their children as they experience these losses and provide support and additional resources as needed. It's also true that adoption does not need to be defined only by loss. There are great joys, great moments of celebration, and great relationships to be gained. As adoptive parents, part of our job is to make sure our children know that both their feelings of joy and their feelings of loss are normal, valid, and okay to express.

