Module #8: Adoptive and Birth Families
Student Packet
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Overview of Module

In this Module, students will identify different types of adoptive families and the clinical issues that different types of adoptive families may experience. Students will be provided with opportunities to explore their own views and beliefs about different types of adoptive families and how they may impact their clinical work with those families. Students will practice the use of clinical skills in working effectively with different types of adoptive families. This Module also will focus on the needs of birth family members. Students will identify the clinical issues that birth family members – birth mothers and birth fathers and extended birth family members -- may present and identify and use clinical skills to address these issues.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:
1. Describe two types of adoptive families and give at least three examples of each.
2. Identify three biases and beliefs about different types of adoptive families that clinicians may have and describe how those biases/beliefs may affect their clinical practice with these families.
3. Identify two clinical issues that each of the different types of adoptive family may experience.
4. Demonstrate one or more clinical skills in working with gay and lesbian adoptive families.
5. Identify three biases and beliefs about birth family members that clinicians may have that may affect their clinical practice with these families.
6. Identify two strategies that clinicians can use to ensure that biases and beliefs do not negatively impact clinical practice
7. Identify three clinical issues that may impact birth parents.
8. Demonstrate one or more clinical skills in working with birth parents on the impact of adoption on them.
Module #8: Adoptive and Birth Families
Pre-Module Assignments

A Checklist of Homework Assignments

✓ Read five short articles about adoptive and birth families:
  • *Who Adopts? Characteristics of Women and Men Who Have Adopted Children*
  • *Understanding and Supporting the Unique Needs in Kinship Adoption*
  • *Foster Parents Considering Adoption*
  • *Does Adoption Make Infertility all Better?* After reading the story, develop a list of 4 or 5 “take aways” from this article that you believe will be relevant to your clinical practice. Bring these “take aways” to class with you.
  • *The Impact of Adoption on Birth Parents*

Students’ Pre-Module Assignments:

1. **Pre-Module Assignment #8.1:** Read *Who Adopts? Characteristics of Women and Men Who Have Adopted Children* at: [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db12.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/databriefs/db12.htm) We will discuss these issues in class.

2. **Pre-Module Assignment #8.2:** Read *Understanding and Supporting the Unique Needs in Kinship Adoption* by Ellen Singer, LCSW-C at: [http://www.adoptionissues.org/kinship_adoption.html](http://www.adoptionissues.org/kinship_adoption.html). We will discuss this article in class.

3. **Pre-Module Assignment #8.3:** Read *Foster Parents Considering Adoption* at the Child Welfare Information Gateway at: [http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_fospar.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_fospar.cfm)

4. **Pre-Module Assignment #8.4:** Read *Handout #7.4: Does Adoption Make Infertility all Better?* This article provides a wonderful conversation among three women: Glenna has been married for five-and-a-half years and experienced infertility for five of those years. Kait has been married three years and, though she did not go through a specific time period of trying to conceive, she was told early on before marriage that conceiving would more than likely be impossible for her. Stacey has been married six years and has been trying to conceive for three years. Each woman’s story is different and unique, yet all three also carry some similarities. After reading the story, develop a list of 4 or 5 “take aways” from this article that you believe will be relevant to your clinical practice. Bring these “take aways” to class with you.

5. **Pre-Module Assignment #8.5:** Read *The Impact of Adoption on Birth Parents* [http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_impact/f_impact.pdf](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_impact/f_impact.pdf)
Module #8: Adoptive and Birth Families

Agenda

9:00AM – 9:25AM   Welcome and Introduction

9:25AM – 10:15AM  Different Types of Adoptive Families

10:15AM – 10:30AM Break

10:30AM – 12:30AM Clinical Issues for Different Types of Adoptive Families

12:30AM – 1:30PM  Lunch

1:30PM – 2:30PM   Clinical Issues for Different Types of Adoptive Families (Continued)

2:30PM – 4:00PM   Birth Parents and Extended Family Members – Part 1

4:00PM – 4:25PM   Birth Parents and Extended Family Members – Part 2

4:25PM – 4:30PM   Summary and Closing

A break will be called during this segment
Web-Based Resources

The Adoption History Project. *Birth Parents.* Available at: http://darkwing.uoregon.edu/~adoption/topics/birthparents.htm


Singer, E. *Understanding and Supporting the Unique Needs in Kinship Adoption.* Center for Adoption Support and Education. Available at: http://www.adoptionissues.org/kinship_adoption.html

Other Resources


Module #8: Adoptive and Birth Families

Handouts
Handout #8.1  An Adoptive Family for Eve

Eve, a 3 year old, currently lives in an orphanage in Moldovia. Assume that Moldovia does not have restrictions on international adoption based on marital status or age. What are your thoughts about the following prospective adoptive parents for her?

(1) Hank, a 40 year old single male. Hank has been a scout leader and is very involved in his church. He has never been married and he wants to be a parent.

(2) Bob and Ethel, a married couple of strong religious background. Bob is 62 and Ethel is 49. They considered themselves God-fearing people who are called to help helpless children.

(3) Linda, a single 32 year old accountant, has never been married. She is very close to her nieces and nephews. She believes that it is unlikely that she will marry and she wants to be a mother.

(4) Tom and Sandy, in their late 20s, have just completed a third round of unsuccessful infertility treatment. They have decided that adoption is the next step. Tom does not want to adopt a boy. They believe that a 3 year old would not be too old for them.

(5) Derek and Sam, ages 38 and 36 respectively, have been in a committed relationship for five years. They live in a state that does not permit same sex marriage. They are ready to adopt and decide that Derek will adopt as a single person. Later, Sam will complete a second parent adoption.
Handout #8.2 Joan, Morris and Jerry

Joan and Morris come to you for help in dealing with their family’s struggles with Jerry, Joan’s birth son and Morris’ adopted son. Jerry was five years old when Joan and Jerry’s father, Jim, divorced. Jim left town to “start over” and has made no more than three or four telephone calls to Jerry over the past 5 years. Joan met Morris when Jerry was 6 years old and they married a year later. Initially, Jerry seemed very happy that Morris was in their lives. The two got along very well. Morris easily found ways to connect with Jerry. Morris adopted Jerry when he was age 9.

Since the adoption, Jerry has become very angry with Morris -- but only when they are alone together. He tends to be very cooperative with Morris when his mother is around. When she is not present, however, Jerry ignores Morris or mutters negative things about Morris in a way that Morris can hear what he is saying. He then denies that he said what he said. He has destroyed some of Morris’ car magazines and then denied ever seeing them. Morris has shared these incidents with Joan but she finds it hard to believe that Jerry would do these things. Joan wants to believe Morris but she also wants to believe in her son.

Questions for Discussion:

1. What might be happening with Jerry?
2. How might you help Joan and Morris understand what is happening?
Handout #8.3. Case Examples: Relative Adoptions

Case Example #1:
Laura and her husband Dan were unable to conceive after 4 years of trying. They then learned that Dan’s sister, Taren, was pregnant for the second time. Taren was no longer involved with her first son’s father and she was unsure who had fathered her second child. Taren decided to make an adoption plan for the baby. Laura and Dan told her if she was interested, they would love to adopt the baby. Taren agreed. She lived with Laura and Dan throughout the pregnancy. In March of that year, she gave birth to a son. Laura and Dan adopted the baby and named him Richard. A few months later, Taren married a man who is not Richard’s birth father. She recently had another child. Lauren and Dan tell you, their therapist, that Taren does not see Richard often which is by her choice. Richard is now 19 months old and does not really know her. When Taren does visit, she scoops him up and holds him despite his protests. He cries when she holds him and calls for Laura (“Mommy!”) Taren laughs it off and tells him “no, stay with me -- your mama has you all the time.” Laura is not sure how to respond. She feels that Taren is not willing to let her be Richard’s mother on the few occasions that she visits. Dan says that they should “just ride with it.”

Case Example #2:
Mira’s thirty-something sister, Samantha, has battled a heroin and cocaine addiction for many years and recently had to return to rehab. Samantha has a one year old son, Ethan, who is being raised by her and Mira’s mother, Gretchen. Samantha is 6 months pregnant and, unfortunately, she has been using for much of this pregnancy. Neither Mira nor Gretchen know whether Samantha was using drugs during her pregnancy with Ethan, but he is doing well, achieving developmental milestones. Gretchen loves Ethan dearly, but does not feel that she can raise him. She asked Mira and her husband, Jacob, to consider adopting him. The child protective services agency is aware of Samantha’s situation and is helping Gretchen with some of the cost of raising Ethan. Mira and Jacob come to you to discuss what adopting Ethan might mean. They worry that they could adopt him only to have Mira knock on their door 10 years down the road and take him away. They need help in thinking through this decision.

Case Example #3:
Beth, age 62, was first a licensed foster parent for her 10 month old grandson, Daniel. Daniel entered foster care after Beth’s daughter, Sara, was diagnosed with a bipolar disorder, had difficulty keeping job, and was not able to provide stable home for Daniel. Daniel’s dad has not been in touch with Sara or Daniel since Daniel was born. Beth decided to adopt Daniel to, as she puts it, “get the Department of Child and Family Services out of our lives”. Beth adopted Daniel with Sara’s consent. He is now 4 years old. Beth has not been very clear with Daniel about who Sara is in their lives and now Daniel is asking questions. Sara visits every month or so and while sweet to Daniel, has little to do with him. She continues to battle her bipolar disorder, irregularly taking her medication. Beth asks you, her therapist, how she should handle the situation with Daniel.
Handout #8.4 Howard and Alice

Howard and Alice have been fostering for three years. They have fostered four children, all of whom have returned to their parents except for three year old Hailey who has been with them now for 18 months. Hailey’s mother, Grace, has serious substance abuse issues and has not regularly visited with Hailey. On the most recent visit, Grace seemed “high” to them and they told the social worker that they would not let the visit proceed at the agency office. The child welfare agency has now changed Hailey’s permanency goal to adoption and her social worker has asked Howard and Alice if they would consider adopting Hailey. They are thinking this through and have come to you as their therapist to talk about it. They tell you that they love Hailey and would like to adopt her but they have a few “rules” that everyone would need to understand. Mainly, there is no way that Grace can be in their lives. They think that she is dangerous and can only harm Hailey. They do not think that Hailey wants to have anything to do with her and they would make sure that she doesn’t. How would you help Howard and Alice think through these issues?
Characteristics Identified as Common in Foster Parents who Do Not Adopt Successfully

- Unresolved losses in the past and present, resulting in a need to revisit past relationships and an inability to meet the child's needs
- Possessiveness of the child and an unwillingness to acknowledge and work with important people from the child's past
- Rigidity in the family system
- Desperation for a child, resulting in unrealistic expectations of foster care and adoption
- High stress and anxiety levels
- Aggressiveness
- Power and control issues

How would work with:

1. A foster parent who wants to adopt a 10-year old who has been in her care for more than 4 years and wants to protect the child from any further contact with members of her birth family whom the child welfare agency consider safe and important to the child?

2. A foster parent who decided to foster because she knew that fostering was the quickest way to being able to adopt. A 3-year-old was placed with her after he was physically abused. She says that she knew she wanted to adopt him the first time she saw him. The parents’ rights were quickly terminated and the foster parent is pushing the public child welfare agency to move forward with the adoption as soon as possible.

3. Foster parents who only recently began fostering and are now feeling overwhelmed by being foster parents. An 8-year old in their care is being freed for adoption. They say that he wants them to adopt him. They want to adopt him but are not sure if they are ready this soon. They feel that they cannot let the child down.
Handout #8.6 Javina and Brian

Eight-year-old Brian entered foster care at age 5 after experiencing a very chaotic home environment with his mother and father and extended family members who frequently moved in and out of the house. Brian came into care when police arrived at the home and discovered the meth lab in the basement. Brian had visible marks on his legs and back as a result of physical abuse by his mother. At age 7, Brian’s parents’ rights were terminated and he was shortly after adopted by a single woman, Javina. Javina, a warm and caring individual, gave Brian consistent attention and encouragement. Brian at time seemed open to her caring but at other times, he seemed fearful and confused. Whenever Brian became upset, he would hang his head and become mute and then would later get in trouble with aggressive behavior toward peers at school.

How would you work with Javina and Brian?
A Glimpse Inside Adoption: Not All Good, Not All Bad - Part One of Two

Single parent with three adopted children

Kathy Reiter, in Fletcher, North Carolina, is a mom to three kids who were adopted. One was adopted as a newborn, one as a three-year-old, and one as an 11-year-old. The oldest had been in 14 foster care placements before finding his forever family. And one of the girls was from a disrupted adoption. All three children have various emotional, behavioral, developmental, and mental health issues including bipolar, autism, learning disabilities, depression, PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder), RAD (reactive attachment disorder), and ADHD. All are living at home. One is in a public school, another in a private all girls' school, and the oldest is in a specially-arranged, non-graded school, with only one or two other students. Kathy says, "I'm lucky. Almost every one of my friends with challenging kids now has them in out-of-home placements. Mine are home."

What's been the hardest part of adopting?

I guess the lack of resources that address mental health and attachment issues, are some of the biggest difficulties. Another one is getting a diagnosis. Well, what I really mean is a correct diagnosis. One of my three wasn't diagnosed with RAD until he was 13. He's made amazing progress once we started specialized therapy for that, but I wonder how much further along he'd be if we'd started earlier . . . ? Oh, and another thing that's been hard . . . It's grieving the loss of what you thought the relationship would be AND celebrating who they are. I've got a doctorate; I just assumed my children would go to college, too. But for the oldest, he'll never do that. I'd also like to add some thoughts about residential treatment. For one of my kids, an out of home placement was needed, but I resisted. I resisted for a long time. It was a very, very hard decision for me to make. In the end, the six months he spent in residential treatment made the difference between him being able to live at home, and needing to live permanently out of the home.

What's been the best part of adopting?

This may not be what most people say, but for me a big part of it has been the sense of accomplishment I've gotten for doing something that most people can't do. I know I'm making a difference . . . a contribution to society . . . and that feels good. And, who knows, maybe I'll get extra heaven-points for this! Also, it's been fun! That might sound somewhat odd coming from a single mom of three very challenging kids, but is has been. The things I've learned . . . the people I've met . . . it makes life more interesting when you're parenting challenging, adopted
kids. Let me also add that I’ve enjoyed seeing the different interests and personalities of my three. They’re all so different. Just watching that develop has been fun.

**What advice do you have for prospective adoptive parents?**

First off, know yourself. Know what you think you can handle. No one can fully prepare you for the challenges, but you have to be strong enough to face the challenges that will come along. We just have to hope that each match is a good fit. Parents should also know about is parent blame. As a parent, when you have challenging children, not necessarily adopted kids, you get a lot of blame. Teachers, neighbors, and professionals are very quick to assume that your child’s misbehaviors are due to bad parenting. Sure, we can all improve our parenting, and even change it totally to meet the needs of our kids, but the trauma that most of these kids have faced . . . We’re the good guys! We’re the ones taking our kids to therapy and searching for answers. It’s the birth parents and/or sad life circumstances that have made our kids the way they are. And you can’t forget about commitment. Parents have to be willing to make a commitment to their child, no matter what. You can’t know ahead of time how it’s going to turn out, but you have to make that commitment on the front end.

**Would you describe your adoption as a success?**

Yes. It's been both the bane and the blessing of my last 13 years . . . the hardest times in my life, but the best. I did have to redefine what success is to me. If someone had asked me before I adopted, what a successful adoption was, I would have answered very differently. But now, even though it's been very different from what I originally expected, I can definitely say that my adoptions have been a success.
Handout #8.8: Does Adoption Make Infertility all Better?

"What brings me my greatest joy is the result of another woman's most profound loss. It was paramount for me to understand this truth."

Sometimes people hear of a couple that has experienced infertility and then gone on to adopt, and automatically think that the pain of infertility is magically gone now that there is a baby in the couple’s arms. While couples who have adopted have come to a peace and acceptance regarding their infertility, there is still a sense of loss. It’s a dichotomy of sorts: a total ecstasy and joy that their arms are full, and yet a grief that they never experienced the awe and joy of pregnancy and birth.

Three amazing women that I have the privilege to know were willing to share their thoughts and experiences regarding this particular aspect of coming into parenthood. Meet Kait, Glenna, and Stacey.

Glenna has been married for five-and-a-half years and experienced infertility for five of those years. Kait has been married three years and, though she did not go through a specific time period of trying to conceive, she was told early on before marriage that conceiving would more than likely be impossible for her. Stacey has been married six years and has been trying to conceive for three years.

Each woman’s story is different and unique, yet all three also carry some similarities. Some readers may relate to Kait but not Glenna, some to Glenna but not to Stacey. I’ll let them tell their stories themselves...

What led you to adoption?

**Glenna:** Infertility was a big factor in our decision to adopt, although we did talk about adopting before we even knew about our infertility. My father was adopted as an infant, so adoption has always been close to my heart.

**Kait:** This specific adoption was brought on by a family emergency but we always knew adoption would be the main way we created our family. It had been hinted at earlier in my life that I would have trouble conceiving, but it wasn’t until last year that we received an official diagnosis. However, even before we knew “officially” what was wrong, we knew adopting would have to be our “plan A” and were both fairly settled in that course of action.

**Stacey:** Since I was young, I’ve always had a desire to adopt. My husband’s mother was actually a foster child herself, so the desire to help other children was there for him as well.

We debated about whether to private adopt or foster-to-adopt, and in the end there really wasn’t much debate. For us, we really wanted to help children who were already in such need of help and put our money and heart toward that.
We had been trying to conceive for about 3 years when we first looked into fostering. Although it was well past the 1 year mark to begin thinking something was “wrong” we weren’t yet panicking or thinking that a pregnancy might not be in the cards for us.

**If infertility led to adoption, did you have to work through that before you adopted?**

**Glenna:** Definitely. We pulled out adoption paperwork numerous times throughout our nearly 4 years (at the time) of infertility only to place them back in a drawer because I wasn’t ready to stop looking at our infertility treatment options.

Once we received a diagnosis that left only one medical option, which we weren’t willing to pursue, we knew it was time to switch gears.

I had written a lot throughout our years of infertility, working through my emotions. That was very important for me because it helped me work through it and grieve the loss of my dream of conceiving and bearing children naturally. I think grieving is a necessary part of “working through infertility” before adoption.

**Kait:** We did. My husband really wanted our first child to be biological and then adopt the rest of our children. I just wanted kids and wanted him to be happy. We had to reconcile both of our dreams for our family and agree that however God brought about the creation of our family was what we would be okay with. When we were diagnosed, I grieved more for those dreams we had created than anything else.

I did also grieve for all those little flutterings of hope I had felt when my period had been late previously. I grieved for what seemed to be unconscious desires to have a pregnancy and the fact that I would probably never have those positive lines show up on a pregnancy test. Everything happened for us in a such a weird way, but I do wish we had more time to come to terms with our infertility.

**Stacey:** Truthfully the two never went hand in hand for me. I had always wanted to adopt so it wasn’t a last resort for me, it was a choice. I have had to work through my infertility and still do work on dealing with it sometimes.

**What would you tell other couples that have to work through infertility before pursuing adoption?**

**Glenna:** Talk to others who’ve been there. Write, pray, grieve. Adopting doesn’t mean you are “giving up” on your dream of conceiving, but so often people look at adoption as a “plan B” — the thing they pursue when trying to get pregnant doesn’t pan out. What adoption should be thought of is “plan A”, just perhaps not in the chronology one expected. Adoption certainly isn’t second best or a runner-up to conceiving. It is an entirely different miracle of its own.
Kait: Be patient with yourself. Everyone who knows about your infertility will either tell you that God has a bigger plan or that there is always adoption as a fallback plan or basically something about how your infertility is a blessing in disguise. The truth is, no one can understand exactly how infertility is impacting your life because everyone has different feelings about their infertility. Some women feel broken or like less of a woman. I personally never felt that, but I did grieve those moments we wouldn’t have, like the ultrasound or announcing to my husband that we were having a baby.

It’s okay to be devastated by infertility and it’s equally okay to have minor pings of grief, but really, just be glad you don’t have to wonder anymore when your period is late.

Mainly, I think it’s important to recognize that adoption is not a miracle cure for the feelings that come along with infertility. Having a child can help you heal emotionally from the infertility but it’s not like suddenly you have this kid and everything is perfect. Adoption, like infertility, comes with its own unique set of challenges, feelings, new situations, and complications. Don’t expect it to be a stand-in for birthing a biological child.

Stacey: Always make sure you and your husband are on the same page as far as adopting. It’s a very emotional journey; let it bring you together and not tear you apart. Make sure that you want that particular child and not just a replacement for a biological child.

Tell us about your blessing!

Glenna: We have a beautiful 8-month-old son! He is an incredible blessing to us! It surprises me daily how much I love this child; I didn’t know love like this was possible!

We were chosen by his birth mother about a month before he was born. We were graciously invited to be in the delivery room when he was born — what an amazing miracle to witness!

Kait: Our oldest is two-and-and-a-half. She is bright and funny, knows exactly what to do to make people laugh at her, but shy when someone new comes around. It amazes me that even though the girls are only 17 months apart, M is the best big sister imaginable.

Despite not having had a reliable, safe father figure in her life before, she is incredibly attached to her daddy [her adopted daddy, Kait’s husband] and asks frequently throughout the day if Daddy will be home soon. Her favorite things to do are puzzles, reading books, and coloring. Anything that involves small details (like coloring — she likes staying in the lines) or steady concentration. She is a perfectionist and I know no matter what could have happened in her life, she would have the determination to make it into something beautiful.
Our baby just turned one, and oh my stars, is this kid a spitfire! She is busy and silly and curious about everything. It’s unnerving how much she can concentrate on one thing until she gets it figured out. She will study people and the things they are doing so she can replicate the action. She loves music and will dance around the house, especially with her Daddy. She is demanding and opinionated, affectionate and friendly, and into absolutely everything.

I think she did get a lot less baby time attention than her sister did. M is very dependent on us to affirm what she’s doing or be with her all the time. N doesn’t really care. She is incredibly independent and stubborn. In a lot of her behavior, she reminds me of myself, so it’s been a humbling experience to parent her. N did take a lot longer to attach to us, which was a unique challenge in itself, but once she did open up to us, it was so worth it.

**Stacey:** We initially, because of our classes with Child Protective Services to adopt, felt that we couldn’t take the heartbreak of fostering. Of course, during those classes God opened our hearts and made us realize that we could foster — that risking our hearts was worth it.

When we got a call for our first placement for two children, we knew two separate couples who had already said “no” to this placement, and based on the information we too planned on saying “no”.

However, once the call came and she started telling me about the children I just couldn’t bring myself to say no. I told her I would talk to my hubby and call her tomorrow to let her know for sure. Before we hung up she said “I don’t usually tell names because people get hung up on names, but for some reason she felt compelled to tell me. She said their names are S* and J*.” I went speechless. I called the hubby barely able to breathe. I told him about the kids and that I hadn’t been able to say no, but had told the lady that we would call tomorrow about our answer (I still hadn’t told him the names). He, too, couldn’t say no and we decided to take the babies (13 months and 2 years at the time) into our home.

After we made our final decision, I told him the names (I, too, didn’t want to sway his decision based on the names). Their names were the very first names that we had picked out for our biological children. They were supposed to be foster only (short term at that), but they fit from the first second they entered our home, and although through the course of their fostering there were some sleepless nights over whether they would stay or go, something always told us they were here to stay.

After 16 months of fostering and praying, we finalized the adoption of our son and daughter on November 12 of 2008, which will now be known as “Forever Family Day” to all of us.

**What was the hardest thing about adopting and/or fostering?**

**Glenna:** I think that realizing that our son came from another person was a hard truth to accept. When you adopt, babies don’t just come from a baby store or from some generic person out there. Adoption is a choice a woman makes when she comes to the realization that she can’t (for whatever reason) parent
her child. It is a painful, painful decision — one that will affect this woman (and the child’s birth father) for the rest of their lives. Her pregnancy was a crisis, a thing she had to deal with. Choosing to place your child with someone else to raise, well, I cannot imagine making that decision.

What brings me my greatest joy is the result of another woman’s most profound loss. It was paramount for me to understand this truth. It has helped me immensely in our relationship with our son and with his birth mother.

I cannot and will not pretend that his life began with us, even though we were in the delivery room when he was born and took him home from the hospital. His life began 9 months prior, and I have utmost respect for the amazing woman who chose life for him and placed him in a family who would raise him and give him things she couldn’t necessarily give. Any couple who wants to adopt needs to grapple with this realization.

A book that opened my eyes to this was Because I Loved You: A Birthmother’s View of Open Adoption by Patricia Dischler. I highly recommend this book to any couple considering adoption.

Kait: Knowing that someone else got those special moments from early in my child’s life. Yes, we have the rest of their lives for more special moments, but I do mourn the ones we missed.

I also did not expect to miss our former life so much now that we have kids. I wouldn’t trade it for the world, but I will admit I miss going out to dinner with my husband and not having to question whether the place is kid friendly. I miss going to the movies without having to arrange childcare. It’s silly little things like that, but those are the things that changed the most once we added kids to our life.

Also, I really hate how people will stare (our kids are biracial) or how they assume the girls are mine from a previous relationship and my husband was just such a nice man to take all three of us. I’d rather have people ask questions instead of making ignorant assumptions.

Stacey: The hardest thing is putting yourself out there — making your heart more vulnerable than it’s ever been and knowing that in the end of it all, there’s a very likely chance that it’s going to be broken again and again. I still wouldn’t trade it, though. The children in foster care have cried enough to last a lifetime and here we are adults with love and a support system. It’s okay if our hearts our broken and we cry; I would rather it be us than them.

What was the greatest thing about adopting?

Glenna: I am a mom! The Lord gave me the greatest gift of becoming a mother, even though I am barren. I have the privilege of raising my son in the fear and admonition of the Lord, of doing all the
things a mother gets to do, of fulfilling the call of motherhood that I have longed for for so long. I am blessed!

**Kait:** Literally waking up one day and having a family. Seeing these two little girls who have never had a real father figure before, just fall all over themselves with joy when their daddy gets home from work. Hearing the girls call for me and knowing that the “MOOOOOOOM!” they want is me.

**Stacey:** Without a doubt, seeing a baby or child transform from this unsure/scared child and leave our home a happy, smiling child. While it hurts for them to leave, there is this tremendous joy that comes from helping a child and watching them smile and know that you helped put that smile there.

**Did fostering/adopting make infertility all better? Did people expect that it should have? What do you wish people could know concerning that?**

**Glenna:** Of course not. It doesn’t make your infertility go away. I am still barren. In April, we will hit our 5-year mark of trying to conceive. That’s a hard pill to swallow, still — the sight of a pregnant woman, her belly swollen with blessing, is still a painful reminder of my barrenness, of the pregnancy and childbirth I may never experience.

However, I will say that adoption has definitely lessened the blow, so to speak. Though I have never conceived or given birth or breastfed, I am still a mother. I was up all night with feedings, I have changed hundreds of diapers, I have dealt with tummy aches, impromptu baths after diaper explosions, copious amounts of spit-up, laughter, smiles, walks in the stroller, trying to get an 8-month-old out the door while carrying purse, diaper bag, coat, keys, and cup of coffee all at once. Though I didn’t become a mother in the way I expected, I am still a mother.

The question I had to ask myself at the beginning of our adoption process was this: “Do you want to get pregnant or do you want to be a mother?” I wanted to be a mother, hands down!

I had to question my motives here. Was my dream only to get pregnant and experience all the woes and joys of pregnancy and birth? If that was my only goal, then motherhood was not my end game. As it turned out, motherhood was my goal, and the Lord graciously led me that end.

**Kait:** It didn’t make infertility all better. I think some people did expect that our hurt feelings over their insensitivity towards us with regard to our infertility would miraculously disappear.

I wish people knew that as much as I love my children, I do still mourn a little for the pregnancies that never made it into births. My heart aches when friends complain about their pregnancies. Pregnancy, infertility, and the miscarriages we had will always be a sore spot in my heart. Adopting doesn’t change that.
**Stacey:** It doesn’t make it all better. They’re so separate. Adopted children aren’t replacements. They’re a separate, amazing blessing, one that I wouldn’t trade for the world. You’re still going to have to mourn the loss of your fertility and still feel the sadness. Allow yourself to feel those things. It’s not fair for an adopted child to be a “replacement” for a biological child. They need to know you wanted them and love them for the blessing that they are. It’s very important for the adopted child to never have to feel as though they second best.

**Do you feel you have experienced something positive because you have fostered/adopted that those who have biological children may have missed out on?**

**Glenna:** I definitely feel that way, but some of that feeling is probably rooted in knowing I have missed out on the pregnancy/birth aspect. I did get to witness my son’s birth, so I have been with him since he drew a breath. I understand the analogy of spiritual adoption better than many of those who practice the Christian faith, although my son will have a much better grasp on that than even I do.

Since our adoption is transracial, I have learned a lot about what family can really mean and look like. Physical similarities aren’t as important to me as the things we pass down through our heritage and our faith.

One thing that I feel others miss out on is that my husband and I feel that God called us to step out and do something different, to look differently than other families, to be intentional about how our family looks and functions. Once we considered adoption, we felt that we were called to adopt children who needed to be placed, not necessarily children that looked just like us. Transracial adoption has been one of the greatest aspects of our adoption blessing.

I have also watched God provide for every single dollar of the financial aspect of our adoption (it’s very expensive!), and that has been a huge blessing to watch unfold.

**Kait:** I think we got to experience the miraculous change in our children and in ourselves when we finally came together and all realized that we were family, this was permanent, and no one was going anywhere.

I also think because it didn’t come as easy to us as some couples, because we had to struggle and hope and pray that someday we could have a family, we did get to witness more of the miracle of being faithful and of God’s provision.

But the coolest thing we got to experience was watching each other become parents in a hands-on way. We didn’t have this whole experience of months to come to terms with the idea of parenthood, then a newborn, then an infant, then a toddler, etc. We suddenly, unexpectedly, went from zero to two kids.
ages two and under. It was a huge adjustment, but we got to see each other at our best and our worst and ultimately came to depend on each other more and put more value in our relationship.

**Stacey:** Just as there are things I have missed out on by not giving birth, I do feel that there are things that are missed out on when couples don’t get involved in fostering/adopting. While there is heartbreak that you’re able to avoid by not fostering, the joy of helping and loving a child in need is so rewarding. It has brought my husband and I closer than I can communicate adequately enough, as well as brought us closer to God.

As the interview wrapped up, Glenna and Kait had some last additional thoughts:

**Kait:** I just want people to know that we had the option of taking meds and probably would have had a good chance of ending up pregnant and probably even having a baby out of that pregnancy. That being said, I do not for one moment regret turning down the option of fertility meds.

We have the most amazing kids in the world (I know everyone says that) and I can’t imagine loving them more. I think too many women are too hard on themselves after being diagnosed with infertility. The most important thing to me was being a mom, not being pregnant, and I got that without having to take the roller coaster of meds and doctors and tests.

**Glenna:** I really want to encourage couples who can have children naturally to please consider adoption. There is a need for families to take hard-to-place children, not necessarily healthy, white infants who are quickly and easily placed with families.

There are multitudes of children who are waiting on loving families. That is the point of adoption — not to make infertility all better, but to place a child with a family he or she needs. Adoption is an incredible blessing, whether you pursue foreign or domestic adoption. Even if you can have children biologically, at least consider adopting or support someone who is adopting.
Handout #8.9 Adoption and Foster Care by Lesbian and Gay Parents in the United States

- More than one in three lesbians have given birth and one in six gay men have fathered or adopted a child.
- More than half of gay men and 41 percent of lesbians want to have a child.
- An estimated two million gay and lesbian people are interested in adopting.
- An estimated 65,500 adopted children are living with a lesbian or gay parent.
- More than 16,000 adopted children are living with lesbian and gay parents in California, the highest number among the states.
- Gay and lesbian parents are raising four percent of all adopted children in the United States.
- Same-sex couples raising adopted children are older, more educated, and have more economic resources than other adoptive parents.
- Adopted children with same-sex parents are younger and more likely to be foreign born.
- An estimated 14,100 foster children are living with lesbian or gay parents.
- Gay and lesbian parents are raising three percent of foster children in the United States.

For full report, go to: http://www.urban.org/UploadedPDF/411437_Adoption_Foster_Care.pdf
Handout #8.10 Zoltan and Mark

Part 1.

Zoltan: I was fostered myself and wanted to give something back, as it were, and Mark has a really magical quality with children. Kids just feel really comfortable with him. At first we wanted to foster. Initially, we met with a lot of resistance to being approved as foster parents. We pushed hard and finally were approved. Our very first placement was two little girls, half-sisters Natalie and Lucia. After a while it became clear that they were never going to go back to their mother and so, two and a half years after she was placed with us, Lucia is now our daughter. The initial plan was for them to be adopted together, by us. But in the end Natalie's birth father wanted her (he's not Lucia's father).

Question #1: What issues should the family anticipate based on what you have learned so far?

Part 2.

Zoltan: Lucia is in a great school and there are other children with same-sex parents too. Kids will come up to us and say: "So you're Lucia's daddy?" Yes. "And she's got two daddies?" Yes. Now both Lucia and her friends at school are beginning to ask about Lucia’s mother. How should we deal with those questions?

Question #2: How can you help Zoltan and Mark with these concerns?

Part 3.

Mark: Sometimes the stress and pressure during the adoption process became immense – we both stormed out at times. But Zoltan’s my whole life and we’re as solid as a rock. We’d been together nine years when we started this. In Lucia’s eyes we’re Daddy Markie and Daddy Zoltie. She’s very assertive – if I’m helping at her school I’ll be surrounded by kids and she’ll come pushing through them, saying: "That's my daddy." Lucia’s been with us throughout this process, remember, and she’s been overwhelmed by it, I think. She's had a lot of uncertainty, and you forget how much they pick up.

Question #3: How can you help Zoltan and Mark help Lucia with the uncertainty she is feeling?

Mark: We just hope that Lucia will always know that we love her and will be happy that she has two daddies. We do wonder if there will be a time when she might want to be with her mother again.
Question #4: How can you help Mark and Zoltan with these concerns?
Handout #8.11 A Letter from Lindsay

Dear Readers,

I met with a birth mom yesterday. I believe her story is the perfect example of the strength and courage it takes to be a birth mom! This woman we’ll call her “J” recently made an adoption plan for her infant son. Prior to making this adoption plan, she escaped from a war torn country in the middle of the night leaving behind the love of her life as well as all her family and precious belongings. When she got to this country, she found out she was pregnant and had her son a few months after arriving in the U.S. After giving birth, she found out her son had chromosome 8 deletion syndrome which is basically medical jargon for a disease that creates many medical complications and birth defects. After finding this out, she reluctantly placed her baby for adoption in the hopes that there would be a loving family out there that could provide for the many medical needs her son will likely face. After meeting with this woman, I learned that she had graduated from college and spoke 5 languages fluently. I also witnessed her strong sense of perseverance and eternally optimistic attitude. It got me to thinking how negatively birth moms are often portrayed in our society.

Until next time,

Lindsey
**Handout #8.12  Reflections While I Wait**

This is an overview of some of the thoughts that crowd my mind while I wait for our daughter to turn 18 and hopefully seek us out.

When I learned of your existence, I was so many miles away  
An unfamiliar ocean held and captured my tears  
The light that is your spirit held and captured my own  
and over my heart it held sway  
The tears were of confusion, joy and fears  
Yet destiny's course had been plotted and my only thoughts were of you  
Your mother and I conferred and we easily concluded  
That you were our life now, and it was your life we entered into  
We were so young, forgive us for being deluded  
We were so very, very young and the web of innocence still cocooned us  
The realities of this world can be harsh,  
the choices we make sometimes are not our own  
We learned that the world turns a blind eye to injustice  
and, yes, it soon does  
I had made a commitment and I felt it my charge to protect you,  
you who was the seed that we had sown  
We were beguiled by the coercion of man's indifference  
We were so wholly unprepared  
To wrap you in a worthy existence  
We need you to know that we were so very scared  
You are in our hearts and thoughts daily, and this love is very real  
We need you to know that our hearts are with you  
and that we wanted you for our own  
Yet circumstances and our own youthful naiveté' stamped this seal  
On our hearts, this loss we share  
from not shaping our own world for this seed that we had sown  
We need you to believe that this travesty is not your fault  
We hold and cherish each and every moment  
that you were in our embrace  
In the most beautiful and sacred vault  
It is all held for you, waiting,  
the love that we hold for you in this inviolable place  
We wait so longingly for the day that we can be reunited to be as one  
We remember and we love and we wait  
For three to accept and enfold under God's purest day in the sun  

Written for Jasmine as I wait-J.T. Niswonger-August 26th, 1998  
Source: [http://library.adoption.com/articles/i-reflect-as-i-wait-2.html](http://library.adoption.com/articles/i-reflect-as-i-wait-2.html)
"A Birthmother puts the needs of her child above the wants of her heart"
Skye Hardwick
founder of "Life Mothers"

“I knew I loved my daughter from the first moment I found out she was growing inside me. Although I knew I was to naive, young and poor to raise her myself there was never a question she would be brought into this world.I loved her father even though we would never see each other again, therefore, the only sensible choice was open adoption. I loved my child to much to hand her over to people that I had never met. My feeling was and always will be that if I was to scared to look these people in the face, to know and love and bond with them, then how in the world could I in good conscious hand my baby over to them never to see her again? I know without a second of guilt or remorse that I made the right choice in open adoption. How can there be a negative side? Now my child not only has one set of family members who love her, but 2,3,4... How can it be bad to have more people love you rather than less? Now, when each of us wakes up each day to face a new part of our lives, there are no haunting, unanswered questions to get in the way of our feeling secure in who we are so that we may face the rest of our challenges with that knowledge on our side. Now, I feel like I have a second family too, not just my daughter.”

Jennifer Bouchard Doane,
Birthmother and Lifemother.

“My baby was my gift to the world to show everyone strength in innocence and purity, and one day I pray my baby will come home to me to tell me of his journey that I can take with him.”

By: Sarah Sowell
Gave birth to her son April 21st 2004
Open Adoption

“It was so important to me, my selection of the family that I had chosen for my baby, that if for any reason they would not have been able to adopt her, I would have kept her. The couple I chose was the perfect fit, anyone else would have been second choice, and I wanted more for my daughter than second best”

Birthmother who placed through Open Adoption

"I wouldn't give a puppy to someone I didn't know. I had to give my baby to people I had never met."
Anonymous
Handout #8.14  A Birth Mother’s Case: Involuntary Termination of Parental Rights

Miranda was twenty-five years old and had a history of running away during her youth. She had two children who were constantly in and out of foster care as a result of her incarceration and parole violations. She was first jailed for forgery, and while in prison, she gave birth to her first child, Jennie. Miranda was paroled to a halfway house but she escaped. She was later apprehended, imprisoned, and gave birth to Tony in prison. During her second round of parole, Miranda was convicted of theft, burglary, and assault. Back in prison again, Miranda took college courses and received counseling. She became a “model prisoner” according to prison officials. The court, however, found that these changes as too little, too late. The court emphasized the devastating effects the mother’s actions had on her children. The court ignored her attempts to change and judged her solely from her past, and for the court, unforgivable conduct. The court said that Miranda “failed to provide” for her children since they both lived in foster care, and the state provided a long list of factors that showed detriment to the children: repeated incarceration which removed the mother as a resource to the children; disruption of Jennie’s life by transfers of custody; the children’s immediate need for a stable parental figure; the alleged lack of effort on the mother’s part to adjust her conduct to circumstances during parole or permit her to take custody of her children; and the threat of future disruptions when the mother is released again. The court disregarded Miranda’s attempts at rehabilitation and ignored the words of prison officials who described the mother as a “model prisoner” who made efforts to obtain an education and the guidance of counseling. Instead of positively expressing hope that Miranda could change and be motivated to care for her family, the court described her release as a “threat.” Her parental rights were terminated.

For the next 10 minutes become Miranda and write a letter to Jennie and Tony saying good bye to them.
Response #1: I will tell you first hand. It’s a great loss. This child is also part of you and now you don’t know where the child is and if the child is ok. My son’s little boy was put up for adoption by an ungrateful woman that had nothing better in life than to mess up every one else’s over a little of child support and to make her new boy friend’s family love her. (that’s who she gave the baby to) Not only did she devastate my son but his sisters, the sister of his son, my husband and I, the great grandparents, etc. When we all got to see my grandson, he was almost 18 months. Why so long because the adoption agency, the social worker for the adoption agency, the mother and the couple who has my grandson hid him until they had to step in court to prevent the adoption agency giving the child back to my son. We all look forward in seeing my grandson. We try to go once a month. I usually go with my son because these worthless people who has him try to come up with so many lies, Like saying my son has abused my grandson (get real). Christmas this year was hard because they wouldn't even let my son have his son until the 23th of December. But my son went and got him and brought him home for Christmas anyway so brother and sister could be together. YES YES YES adoptions hurt the grandparents more than you would ever know.

Response #2:

It hurts them. The relinquishment of my son for adoption hurt them deeply even though at the time they felt it was the only responsible thing to do. In fact, they cling to those feelings so much, that they still defend themselves even though the loss of their grandchild profound. They never expected the loss to be so much, and they especially never expected that the relationships that they held with me would be so remarkably changed for the worse. I'm not going to play a whose pain is worse game though. But I don't deny how much the relinquishment of their grandson and my son has affected them as much as me.