



Search & Reunion

Module 7 examines identity formation and connection with birth family.



WHERE DID I COME FROM?

Virtually all adopted youth engage in a search process at some point in their lives, whether it means active outreach or playing it out in their heads – meaningful in either event.

Whether the youth finds a healthy, welcoming birth family or birth family that is dysfunctional and rejecting, it is important for parents and guardians to be supportive and available to process whatever the outcome.

Help parents understand the importance of reminding youth that they do not have to follow in the footsteps of their birth parents if they find they are unhealthy, or on a negative path.



Child Welfare Professionals can help youth and their parents think through potential challenges. Ask them to consider the following questions as they approach search and a potential reunion:

- What are your hopes, expectations? What if your birth mother or birth father doesn't meet those expectations?
- What if he or she wants more of a relationship than you are willing to have? What if he or she wants less?
- What supports do you have as you navigate this journey? Who can you lean on?
- What is your self-care plan if things don't go well?



FANTASIES, EXPECTATIONS AND REALITY

Search and reunion is like tossing a pebble into a pond – there is a ripple effect that extends beyond the person searching and the one found. Adoptive parents, siblings, the spouse and children of the birth mother or father, grandparents and other extended family members may all have feelings about an adoption reunion. It can become confusing and at times overwhelming.

The case study of Janna in Module 7 Lesson 5 illustrates the complex and fluctuating feelings an adopted person often has as she goes through life. Relationships under the best of circumstances can be difficult to navigate. Feelings of loss, grief, abandonment and divided loyalties make relationships in reunion all the more challenging.

Understandably, search and reunion can feel like an emotional rollercoaster. As a child welfare professional, you can help to normalize the queasiness and unease of this ride.



PRACTICE YOUR ROLE!



Think about a youth who is intent on search and reunion. What might you say to explore the interest, goals and expectations of the youth. What is her fantasy? What kind of relationship does she hope to have? How might she feel if she finds unexpected information about her race, background, parents' history? What suggestions might you offer to help her manage her expectations and feelings? You can also role play this with a coworker or supervisor.

NTI Training Improved Competence

"(NTI) gave me tools to discuss the birth family and how to allow them in the children's lives even after permanency is achieved."

-NTI user

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