

The pain of an adoptive mother and father

My husband's and my experience of being adoptive parents has been traumatic. We adopted our son and daughter when they were only a few weeks old, five years apart and different birth parents. My son spent his first few weeks in the hospital nursery, not ill, but just waiting for new parents. I believe he suffered from having no one to bond with at that crucial early time. My daughter was being cared for by a foster mother for a few weeks until she came to us. The Department advised us to tell our children of their adoption at a very early age, so we did – when they were learning about where babies come from.

My son, from the time he could crawl, had behavioural problems and they became worse as he grew. There was no medical reason, and we were told he was on the borderline of being “hyperactive”. Well, it certainly felt that we had a hyperactive child (ADHD etc was not known about in the late 1960s and early 1970s). In hindsight, I am aware he did not bond with us, his adoptive parents, and as he grew older, we could not reason with him regarding hurting people's feelings. He didn't bond with his adoptive sister and was not a “big brother” to her. My husband and I found we were on a “merry-go-round” of visiting counsellors, child psychologists, and psychiatrists. We also went to a parenting course. We even had one of the professionals come to our home but we were told our son “sabotaged” the tests she was doing. One group of professionals videoed our family behaviour, to see how we all interacted. They were stymied, they could not see any problem with our parenting, eventually they showed the film to a professor and he agreed with them and sent a message to us “to keep on rearing our children the way we were”. We were told that our son had misdirected anger and was punishing me, his adoptive mother, for something – at that time he was only about 5 or 6 years old.

Eventually we stopped the searching for answers of how we could handle our son - he was angry with us for taking him to so many professionals and still is angry about that. He cannot see that we were doing what parents do – finding help when your child needs help.

Our son is now in his 30s and eight years ago he cut all ties with us; there was no huge argument, just a cold closing the door on us. It happened when he found his birth mother without talking to anyone about it, nor being prepared for the huge upheaval to everyone. A couple of years before, we gave him the only information we had, her name and suburb, and we had told him we did not mind him searching, but please tell us beforehand.

Well, he didn't, and as I said, he did not think of any consequences. He did not tell us he found her for about 9 months. By then he had a bond with her and called her "Mum". We invited his birth mother to our home so we could meet, and I had a series of photos made up of him over the years to give to her. I hugged her, gave her the photos and thanked her for what was a beautiful gift – our son. She threw the photos back at me and ran out of the house. She could not handle meeting us. She blamed her parents for giving her son up for adoption, they may have advised her, but ultimately it was her decision to sign the papers and she still cannot accept the responsibility of her own actions.

Our son is married with three children, we saw one grandson a couple of times but not the other two grandchildren. My husband and I have lost our son, daughter-in-law and three grandchildren. Our daughter has lost her brother, and my daughter's son has lost his cousins. And yes, a counsellor advised me again in the past few years, it appears to be our son's misdirected anger towards us. That now he has found his birth mother, he cannot risk losing her again, by showing anger toward her.

We tried many times to heal the rift, but our son will not make contact, he just wants to forget his past history and will not talk about it with anyone. I will not give up on my grandchildren, they are the innocent little people in this story, so I send presents to them by post, but never receive a thank-you or acknowledgement.

Someone asked me once, is it worth adopting children. At that time, I could not answer. Now I feel yes, it is worth it, to give a child something that their circumstances took away, to give them a chance to have a wonderful life..... but be aware, that as adoptive parents we take the chance of being hurt (as natural parents do too!).

We have been hugely traumatised and it is harder than losing someone to death, we still love our son and only this year we have found some comfort - our daughter had her first baby and lives with us. She has given us the gift of sharing her son with us, and it has helped a little. Our new grandson has shown me I can still open my heart to a child not born to me, I thought I had lost that ability. But... I still cry and still cannot understand how someone can treat us so badly, after all, we opened our hearts and home to our very special children.

Anon.