

COMING TO TERMS WITH THE REALITY OF YOUR CHILD'S ADOPTION

After many long years of wondering about your adopted child, you have now made contact with the adoptive family. Like some other birth parents, you have found that your child has not had the life you always hoped for.

Perhaps your child spent some time in foster care or experienced childhood abuse or neglect, when you believed he/she would be adopted by "perfect" parents. Perhaps your child grew up in a family with values so different from yours, you feel uncomfortable with him/her. Or perhaps your child suffered an illness or disability when you had imagined he/she would be perfectly healthy. Or worst of all, perhaps your child died before you were able to meet, and you sometimes wonder if he/she would still be alive today if you had not made the decision to place your child for adoption.

At the time of the adoption you may have been told many things about the type of family who would adopt your child. While your own circumstances may have been responsible for your decision to place your child for adoption, no doubt some of the things you were told about adoption also influenced you. Most birth parents place their children for adoption because they believe adoptive parents can offer the child more than they can at that time.

Most birth parents were distressed by the decision to adopt and would have preferred to keep the child. Unfortunately, in the past there were few social or economic supports for single parents and if you lacked family support, or were fearful of telling your family about the child you probably felt you had no choice other than adoption.

Placing your child for adoption under those circumstances meant that you probably had strong feelings about the adoption, and a need to believe that the child would have a "wonderful" life. While you may have worried about your child's wellbeing over the years, you probably consoled yourself with the thought that he or she was adopted by people who had wished to be parents for a long time, and who welcomed your child into their family. You may have reassured yourself that the process of choosing adoptive parents was "foolproof", and that they would understand your predicament and explain it to your child. You may have promised yourself that one day you would be able to see your child again, and he/she would also be looking forward to that day.

Since finding out that your child's adoption was not what you expected, you may have experienced many strong feelings. Perhaps some of these feelings are left over from the past. You may have found that you relived all the hurt and guilt from the time of your pregnancy and the adoption. You may feel that you were lied to or misled by people who encouraged you to consider adoption. If you now feel that you could have provided your child with a better life than he/she had with the adoptive family, you might feel guilty that you chose to consent to the adoption and angry that other people encouraged you to.

As you come to terms with the reality of your child's adoption, you will grieve for the loss of the "perfect adoption" you always imagined your child would have. You will also grieve for the loss of the "fantasy" child, who was raised by the perfect adoptive parents. The reality is that your child will be very different to this. It will take time to accept this person, who is a stranger to you, just as you are to your child.

If your child is no longer alive, you will grieve both for the loss of your "fantasy" child, and the loss of the real person you will never be able to meet. Unfortunately some people may tell you not to grieve for a person you never met, but of course they are wrong. Your loss is truly a double one, and you will experience all the hurt, anger and pain that parents feel upon losing a child. Hopefully the adoptive parents will be able to share some information about your child's life and personality. Of course their pain is great too, and adoptive parents in this circumstance, and those whose children suffer a serious disability, sometimes feel anxious that the birth parents will blame them. You may wish to reassure your child's adoptive parents of your feelings in this regard, and acknowledge their pain at the loss of their son or daughter.

The opportunity to hear other people's experiences, to discuss things individually with a counsellor or in a group with other people who share a common interest can be very helpful and supportive. These are all services that PARC offers and we would welcome a call from you.

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