



The Adoption Exchange

Welcome

The Adoption Exchange is proud to present:

“Disenfranchised Grief In Adoption”

By: Janet Nordine, MS, LMFT, RPT-S

Please Keep in Mind:

- All lines will be muted during the presentation.
- Please type any questions you have in the chat box and we will go over them at the end.
Contact information: Sburrell@Adoptex.org

Disenfranchised Grief: Adoption – Part I

Janet P. Nordine, MS, LMFT, RPT-S



www.experiencecourage.com

**Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist
Registered Play Therapist Supervisor
NV MFT / CPC Board Approved Supervisor
Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) Practitioner**

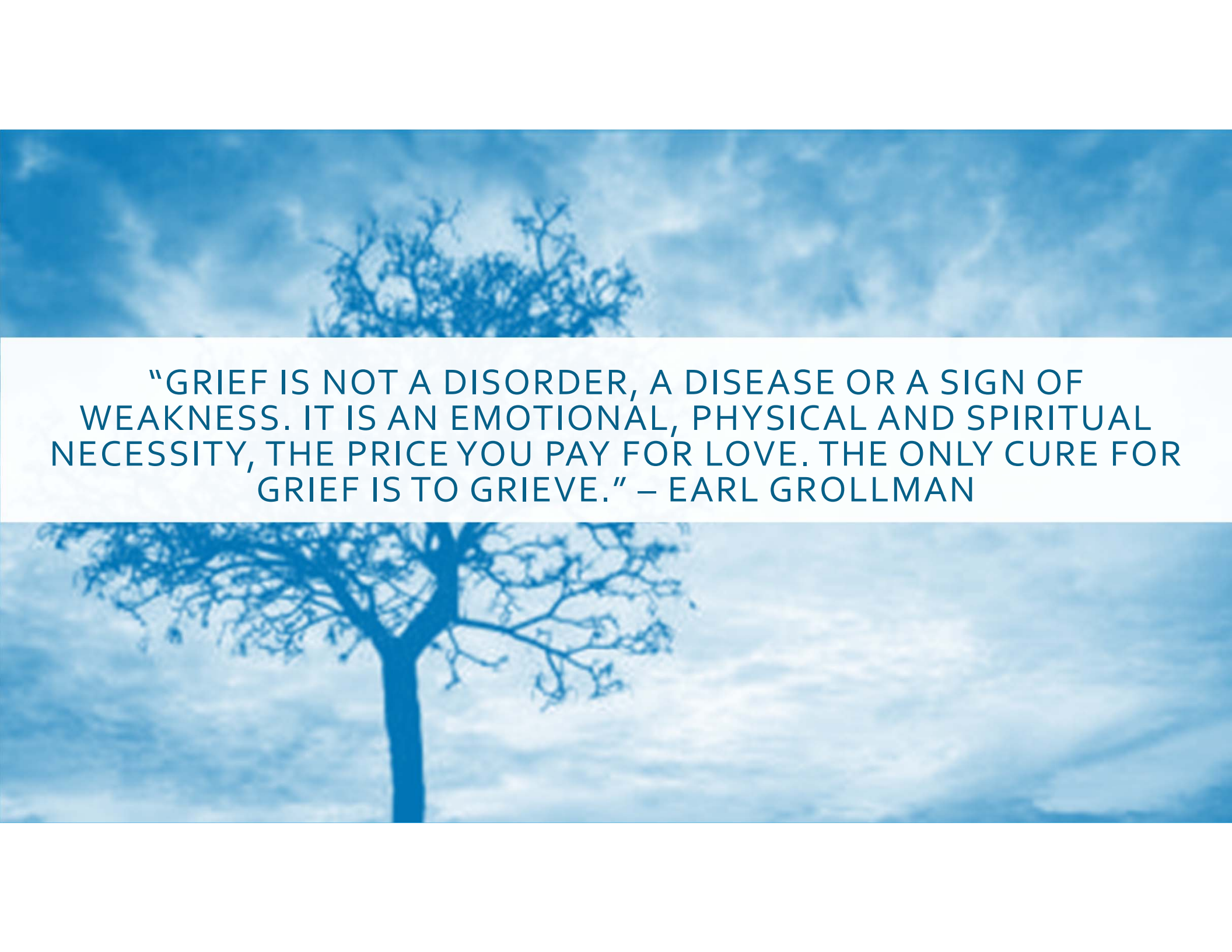
Adopted Person

Affiliations



**NV MFT Board
Approved Supervisor
MFT / CPC**





"GRIEF IS NOT A DISORDER, A DISEASE OR A SIGN OF WEAKNESS. IT IS AN EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL AND SPIRITUAL NECESSITY, THE PRICE YOU PAY FOR LOVE. THE ONLY CURE FOR GRIEF IS TO GRIEVE." – EARL GROLLMAN

Outline for our time together today:

- ❖ Grief described – 5 stages of grief
- ❖ Disenfranchised Grief – Concept Described
- ❖ Presenter's Personal experience with Disenfranchised Grief due to Adoption
- ❖ Disenfranchised Grief in Adoption – Concept Described
- ❖ **Self care – some of this information may be difficult for some to hear. Please take good care during the training.**

Five Stages of Grief

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler

1) Denial - Denial is the first of the five stages of grief. It helps us to survive the loss.

2) Anger - Anger is a necessary stage of the healing process. Be willing to feel your anger, even though it may seem endless. The more you truly feel it, the more it will begin to dissipate and the more you will heal.

3) Bargaining - We will do anything to keep the event from happening. Guilt is often bargaining's companion. The "if onlies" cause us to find fault in ourselves and what we "think" we could have done differently.

4) Depression - Empty feelings present themselves, and grief enters our lives on a deeper level, deeper than we ever imagined. This depressive stage feels as though it will last forever.

5) Acceptance - Acceptance is often confused with the notion of being "all right" or "OK" with what has happened. This is not the case.

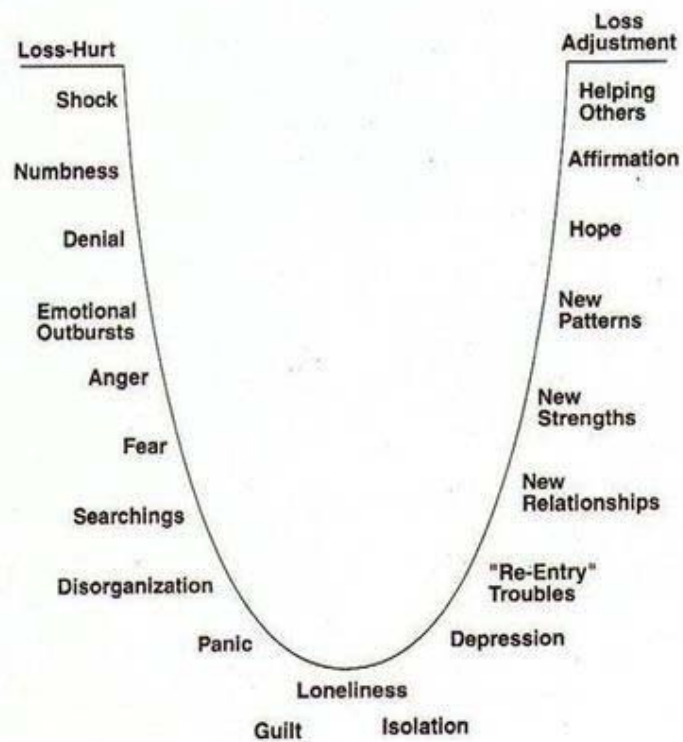
For the Adoption Constellation ~
Grief is **NOT** Linier

Adult Swim – Robot Chicken – “A Sinking Feeling.”

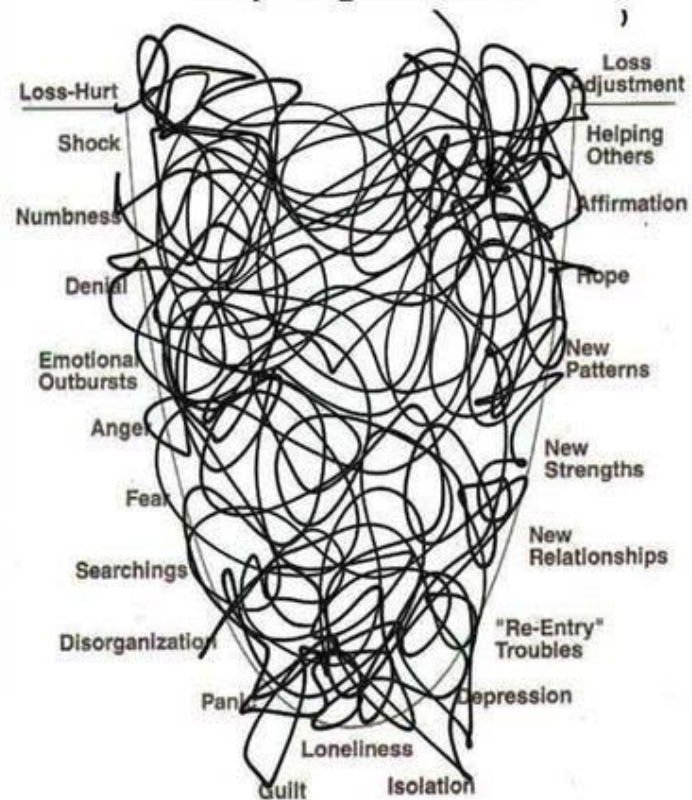


WARNING - This video has a partially beeped out swear – if small ones are in the room

STAGES OF GRIEF



My experience



Disenfranchised Grief

A term describing grief that is not acknowledged by society.

Dr. Kenneth J. Doka

1980's AIDS epidemic

“Sometimes we grieve things other people can not possibly understand” Janet Nordine, MS, LMFT, RPT-S

Disenfranchised...Ambiguous...Grief...Oh My

Ambiguous Grief

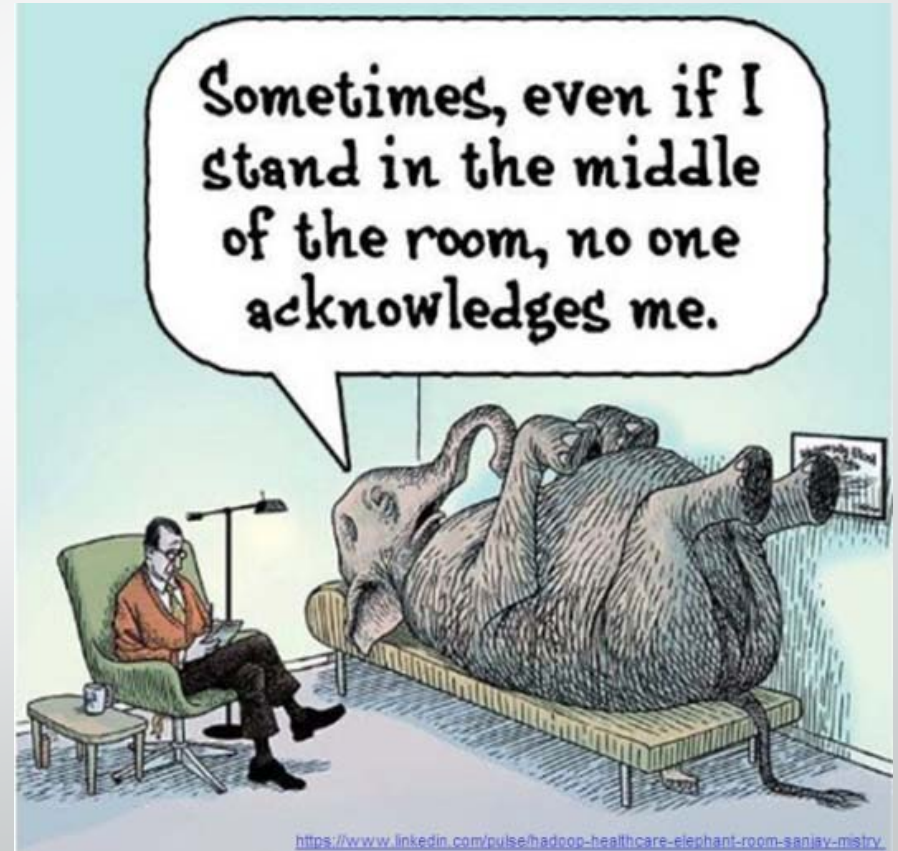
Dr. Pauline Boss

Refers to when a person is physically present but psychologically absent

– OR –

When an individual is psychologically present in the minds of someone but is physically absent.

All too often, Adoption is the Elephant in the Room



Disenfranchised grief occurs in three primary ways

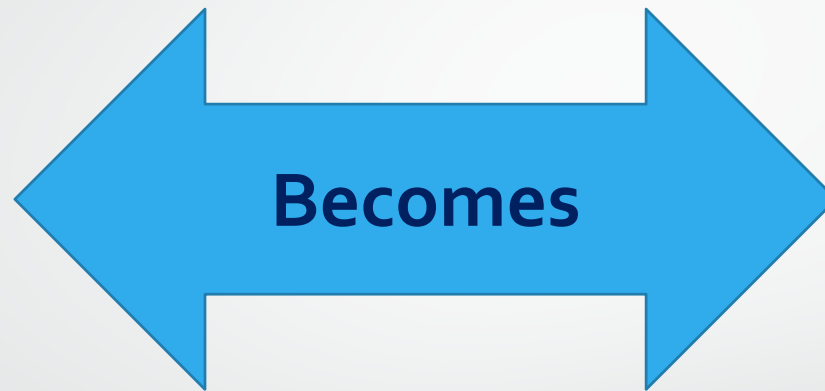
- 1) **The relationship is not socially recognized:** The relationship is not based on recognizable kin ties or denied kin ties
- 2) **The loss is not socially recognized:** losses that result from causes other than death.
- 3) **The griever is not socially recognized:** This may include those who are not socially defined as capable of grief: very old and very young and the mentally disabled.

Each culture provides a range of acceptable behavior after a loss, and any dramatic exceptions to these “grieving rules” will be met with anything ranging from concern or irritation through to censure.

ADOPTION IS A CULTURE!

Over time, if not attended to.....

Ambiguous Greif



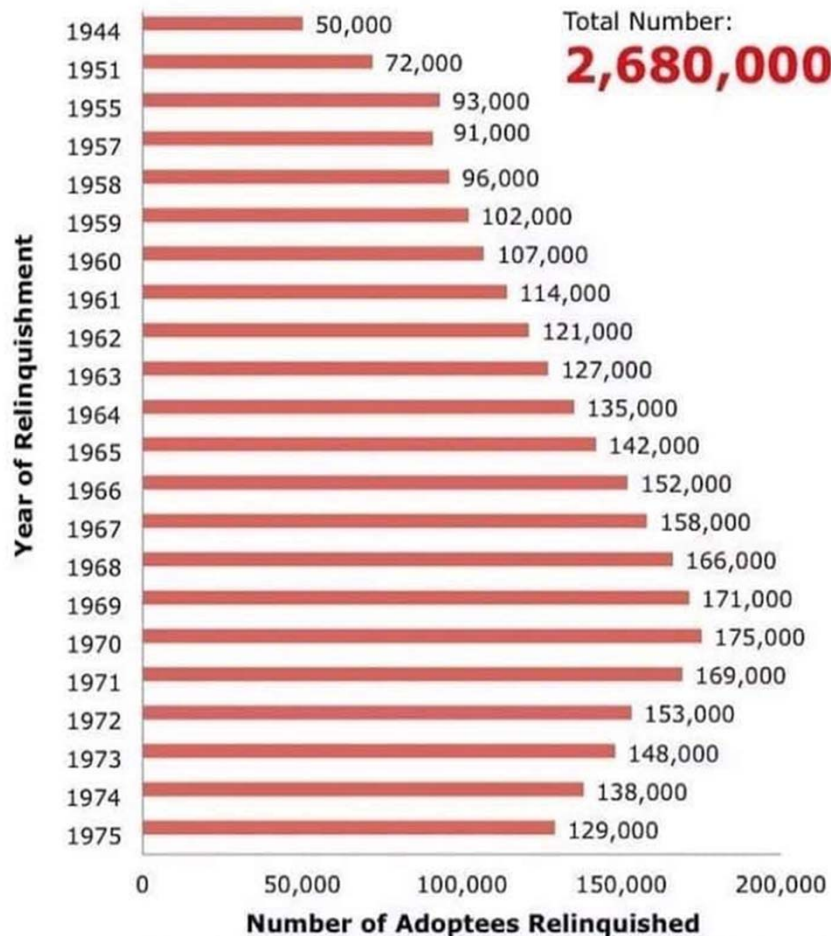
Disenfranchised Grief

**Name the Pain. Acknowledge
the Loss. Just Listen**

November 9, 1965
6:35 am Henderson, Nevada



Estimated Number of Adoptees Relinquished in the United States 1944 through 1975



Source: Penelope L. Maza, "Adoption Trends: 1944-1975," Child Welfare Research Notes #9 (U.S. Children's Bureau, August 1984).

The "Baby Scoop" Era

1940s and 1950s

- Illegitimacy began to be defined in terms of psychological deficits on the part of the mother

1950's – 1970's

- Adoption was presented to the mothers as the only option and little or no effort was made to help the mothers keep and raise the children
- Many girls and women were sent away by their families to "Unwed Mother's Homes" or "Maternity Homes." Many homes participated in Adoption Fraud
 - Adopted babies were used for social experiments

• Notable Dates

- 1960 – birth control pill introduced for married couples
 - 1972 – birth control available for all
 - 1973 – Roe V Wade passes

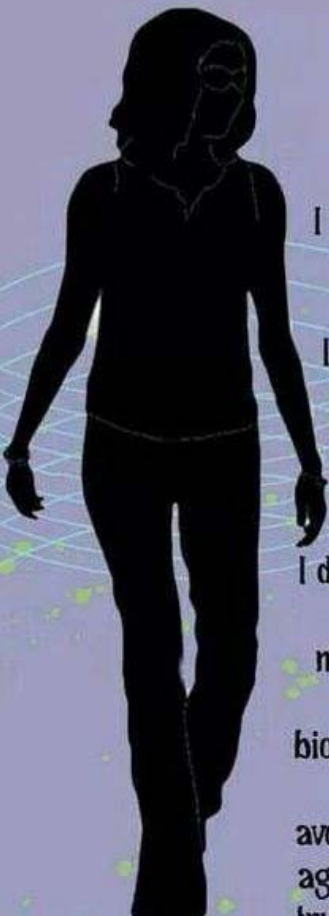
**This does not include the number of infants adopted and raised by relatives



“Grief is any loss we have experienced. And, for those who are adopted, we begin grieving as soon as we are removed from our mother and family”

Janet Nordine, MS, LMFT, RPT-S

- Grief often masquerades as anger. Anger is a secondary emotion. **What is under the anger?**
- Disenfranchised Grief for adoptees – The feelings of loss are misunderstood and often misinterpreted as anger.
- Disenfranchised Grief, if left untreated and unacknowledged, can manifest itself as various mental health diagnoses such as; PTSD, Oppositional Defiance Disorder, Depression, Anxiety, Bi-Polar disorders, and other labels.

A black silhouette of a person walking, facing right, positioned on the left side of the first slide. The background is a light purple with faint, glowing blue and green lines and dots.

I am neither
"pro-adoption" nor
"anti-adoption".

I am all for finding loving homes for
children who truly need them.

I am against unnecessary, unethical,
forced, or illegal "adoptions".

I support children's rights.

I do not support sealed records, altered
birth certificates, child trafficking,
money-for-child exchanges and other
financial incentives, coercion of
biological parents, unenforceable "open"
adoption, advertising of children,
avoidance of fathers rights, unregulated
agencies, and other issues which impact
true child welfare in a negative fashion.

I am adopted.
I wasn't chosen.
I was abandoned.
At times I feel angry.
At times I feel sad.
At times I feel blessed.
At times I feel thankful.
I am adopted.
And it's complicated.

@iamadopted

Disenfranchised Grief in Adoption

Grief that is not Acknowledged or Grief that is Stigmatized by Society

- Death of an ex-spouse
- Death of a Pet
- Death of an Online Friend
- Miscarriage or stillbirth
- Death of a step-child/step-parent
- Death of partner from an affair
- Death of a same-sex partner
- Death by suicide
- Death by accidental drug overdose
- Death of a foster child/foster parent
- Death to HIV/AIDS
- Having an abortion

In the Adoption Community

- Being Adopted / Being an Adoptee
- Parents who experience infertility
- Adoptive parents who struggle with their children
- Birth parents who relinquish their children to be adopted
- Parents who have their parental rights terminated by the court
- Children who remain in Foster Care for years
- Foster parents who hope to adopt, and the child returns home
- Siblings, Grand Parents, Extended family members who lose contact with a child due to an adoption agreement

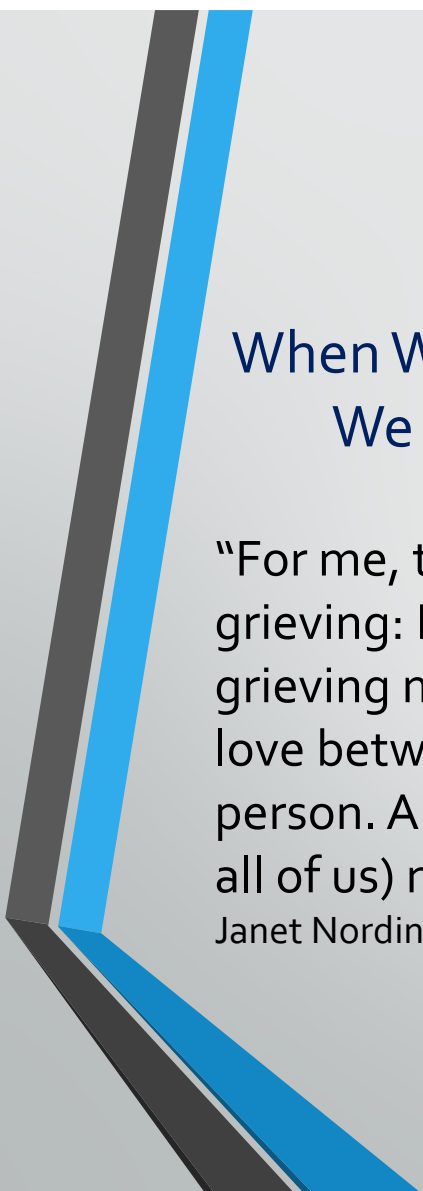
And the list continues.....Types of Disenfranchised Grief In Adoption

- Loss of contact for foster child with biological parent
- Adopted Child missing biological parent
- Adopted adult longing to meet biological family
- Adopted adult who finds, and is rejected by biological family
- Transracial Adoptee missing their culture or mirror of culture
- International Adoptee missing their homeland
- Adopting parent who has experienced infertility
- Adopting parent who does not feel connected to the adopted child
- Birth Mother feeling the loss of the child
- Birth Father feeling the loss of the child
- Longing feelings on Holidays, birthdays, family gatherings
- Adopted Parent who is struggling with adopted child's trauma
- Adopted parent whose family and friends do not understand or accept the child, or the challenges



Disenfranchised Grief in Adoption is **OFTEN** Misunderstood

- "You should be so grateful....."
- "Oh, at least you didn't have to go through labor to get your kids!"
- "You were so loving to give your child a better home"
- "At least you never saw them..."(baby scoop era)
- "All your child needs is a lot of love and they will settle down and behave"
- "Why would you want to find your family? Leave the past in the past"
- "You are such a hero for adopting a child with no home"



When We have known Love,
We will know Grief –

“For me, this is the beauty of grieving: Feeling grief and grieving means there was a great love between me and another person. And, **love** is all I (we, you, all of us) need.”

Janet Nordine, MS, LMFT, RPT-S

things musicals taught me

The price of
love is loss, but
still we pay.
We love
anyway.

thingsmusicaltaughtme.tumblr



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Disenfranchised Grief: Adoption – Part II

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Grief

2/1/17 – Finding my Beginnings Story

- A Story about Sisters and Trees
- <https://experiencecourage.com/2018/03/10/sisters-and-trees/>
- Recognizing my own Disenfranchised Grief and “Coming out of the Fog”
- How knowing my beginning has shaped my life and what I have had to grieve



Your Brain on Grief

Several regions of the brain play a role in emotion

Specifically, the limbic system, amygdala, and pre-frontal cortex

A flood of neurochemicals and hormones dance around in your head and cause difficulty in -----→

GRIEF AND THE BRAIN





Feeling, Dealing And Healing

What can I do to help?



FIND AN ADOPTION OR FOSTER CARE COMPETENT THERAPIST

- Children communicate through play. The Therapist must have training in working with children
 - Not a play therapist if not certified by APT
- The therapist **MUST** understand TRAUMA and have specific training
- The Therapist must understand that foster care is TRAUMA and that Adoption is also TRAUMA
- As a care provider, you should be actively participating in therapy with the child
- Medication is **NOT** the only answer. See a Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist
 - Neuroscience, Mind / Body connection

FIND AN ADOPTION OR FOSTER CARE COMPETENT THERAPIST

Children and Adults who **are** adopted and Children who are, or have been in Foster Care **deserve** to see a therapist who understands the complexities of Adoption

Grow Beyond Words has a list of therapists who are also adopted

<https://www.growbeyondwords.com/adoptee-therapist-directory>

Questions to ask the professional:

Does at least 50% of your caseload include adoptees/adoptive families? (The answer should be **YES**)

How do you help families to build/reinforce attachment through treatment? (The answer should include some of the following: family sessions, play/filial/parent-child interaction therapy, **Theraplay**, **TBRI**, interactive exercises, parent education, Play Therapy by Registered Play Therapist)

How do you distinguish between typical developmental struggles and adoption- or race-related struggles? (The answer should include specific examples of the language or behavior the professional identifies – example: “I wish I had a different family!” vs. “I want to live with my real family!”)

How do you incorporate birth families/culture into treatment? (This may be a difficult one to answer because it is likely to look different for each adoptee, but the professional should not look surprised by the question)

If in an open adoption: Are you willing to include my child’s first family in treatment when appropriate? (The answer should be YES)

How would you respond if my child said ____? (Choose examples of things your child has said about adoption or race that bother you, and decide if you like the professional’s approach, and if they seem calm and confident in their response)

How do you talk about adoption/race with kids? (Make sure the language seems appropriate and very open and honest)

Reference – Dr. Chaitra Wirta-Leiker – Grow Beyond Words Psychological Services, LLC

10 Things Adoptees Want You to Know (and Do)

1. Adoptees want their adoptive parents to prepare emotionally and psychologically before they bring them home to become a family.
2. The adoptee's experience is **REAL**
3. The adoptee needs help to make sense of their "story."
4. Many adoptees struggle with issues of self worth, shame, control and identity.
5. Adoptees are in reunion whether they are formally searching or not.
6. The adoptee's desire to search is not a rejection of the adoptive parents.
7. Adoptees want to belong. They want to connect and feel connected.
8. Adoption is hard.
9. We want adoptive parents to be our advocates.
10. Adoption is a lifelong process.

Lesli Johnson, MFT – Your Mindful Brain – www.yourmindfulbrain.com

01/11/2013 – Huffington Post

JUST LISTEN

Do your own work!

- If you have unresolved wounding, find a therapist to help you work on your own "stuff."
- Parenting groups for traumatized children
- PARTICIPATE in therapy WITH the child in your care.
- **YOU** are their attachment figure. Don't be afraid of getting close and letting them get close.
- Read books about adoption written BY adoptees about adoption
www.adopteereading.com
- Read The Primal Wound by Nancy Verrier

**"YOU CANNOT
LEAD A CHILD
TO A PLACE
OF HEALING
IF YOU DO NOT
KNOW THE WAY
YOURSELF."**

~ DR. KARYN PURVIS

CHAS AND THE CLOUTIER

What Will Help (Disenfranchised) Grief?

Find Your Own Best Way to Healing

- Practice self-care
- Take time away from your daily routine. Take a Mental Health day
- Get support. Find Connection
- Rest, Sleep, Quiet
- Your brain has experienced trauma ~ be kind.
- Challenge negative thought patterns
- Search for the silver lining

Ideas That Can Help When Experiencing Grief

Practice self-care

- Chop veggies/make dinner to music you love
- Curl up with a blanket and Netflix
- Buy yourself a bouquet of flowers
- Do something creative you love
- Cook a new recipe
- Say “no” to something (or someone). Remember: “NO.” It is a complete sentence.
- Follow 5 new inspiring accounts on Instagram
- Repeat a mantra (mine)
- Chew your food slowly and enjoy every single bite

Challenge negative thought patterns

- “Change the voices in your head, make them like you instead.” PINK
- Focus on Progress, Not Perfection.
- Articulate and acknowledging thoughts weighing you down—ones that don't serve any useful purpose beyond keeping you stuck. “I fully accept myself even though...”

Get support. Find Connection

- Find people who understand you and mirror your similar experiences.
- Adoptees
- Adoptive Parents
- Birth Parents
- Foster Parents
- Find a seasoned, adoption competent therapist or on- line adoption competent coach
- Be a friend to them and allow them to be your friend, too.

Disenfranchised Grief Falsehoods

Don't believe everything people say you **SHOULD** do, or feel, or how to act.

"Time Heals All Wounds"

(Adopting Parents)

"They just need love"

"At least....."

(Adoptee Rejection)

"Just forget about them. You are better off without them"

"I understand"

STOP "shoulding" all over yourselves....

(Birth Parents)

"Babies forget"



"I feel one of the biggest factors in grieving as an adoptee is the feelings of loss and rejection are often accompanied by a damaged sense of self. Who are we, really? There is an understandable tendency to think that, "something must be wrong with me for my birth mother to have given me away." – Janet Nordine, MS, LMFT, RPT-S

"Grief Attacks"

When grieving we can be going along and everything seems to be okay. Then out of nowhere grief hits full force. These are not set backs, they are a part of the grieving experience.



Language is Important. Permission is Imperative

- Ask the Child or Adult what words they use
 - “Please tell me about your experience”
- Ask PERMISSION of the child / person to share about them and their experience
 - “I am an adopted person”
- “I have 2 families – my first family and the family I grew up in.” (some have more)



The Need to KNOW

“Where did I come from?”

“Who do I look like?”

“What is my story?”

“Why didn’t she / they keep me?”

**BE HONEST WITH YOUR
KIDS!**

Learning MY Truth vs MY Lifelong Fantasy

- 1) Truth: I heard all kinds of comments as a child that took “unhearing” as an adult (**your child hears it, too**)
- 2) Fantasy - My first mother was NOT Carol Burnett
- 3) Fantasy - No one was ever looking for me
- 3) Truth – She forgot when I was born
- 4) Truth – I have A LOT of siblings
- 5) Truth - My first father
- 6) Fantasy – Adoption reunions are “beautiful”
- 7)

Getting Our Needs Met ~

Even When it Seems No One Understands

As a person who is part of the Adoption Constellation, it seems **no one** can possibly understand the feelings of:

- ❖ Loss
- ❖ Joy
- ❖ Regret
- ❖ Rejection
- ❖ Fear
- ❖ Delight
- ❖ Guilt
- ❖ Shame
- ❖ Happiness



Practice saying what you need....

Just see what comes out!

“I need friends who check on me”

“I need company when I do something really hard.”

“I need people to remember I am hurting”

“I need to celebrate the good stuff”

“I need support”

“I need to just talk and have someone listen, even if they do not fully understand me”

Final Thoughts on Disenfranchised Grief & Grieving



We know that there are times when we will experience heartbreaking sorrow, when we will grieve, and when we may be tested to our limits. However, such difficulties allow us to change for the better, to rebuild our lives in the ways we never could have expected. We will be amazed at what grief teaches us. We can become something different from what we were—better than we were, more understanding than we were, more empathetic than we were, with stronger hearts than we had before.

"The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not 'get over' the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same nor would you want to."

—Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and David Kessler

www.whatsyourgrief.com

To Learn More:

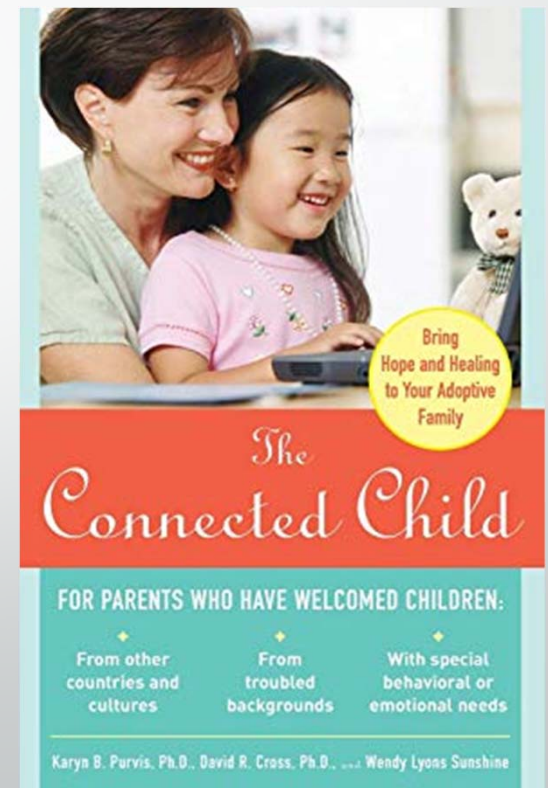
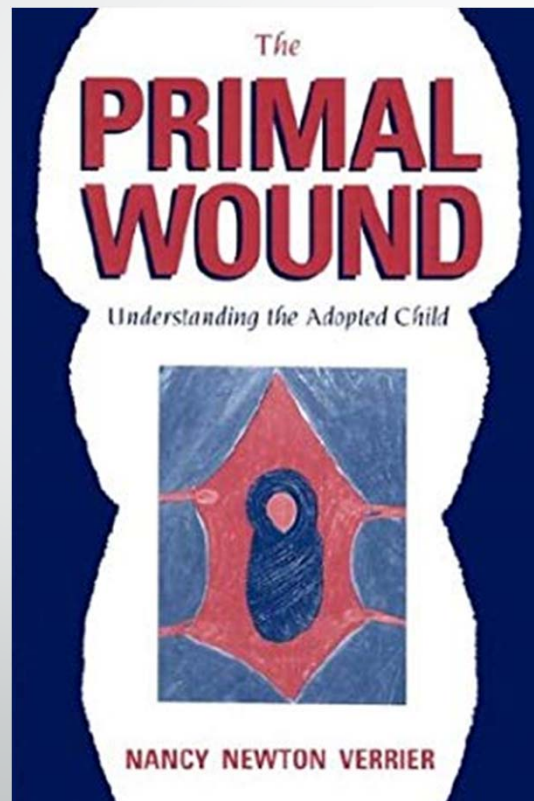
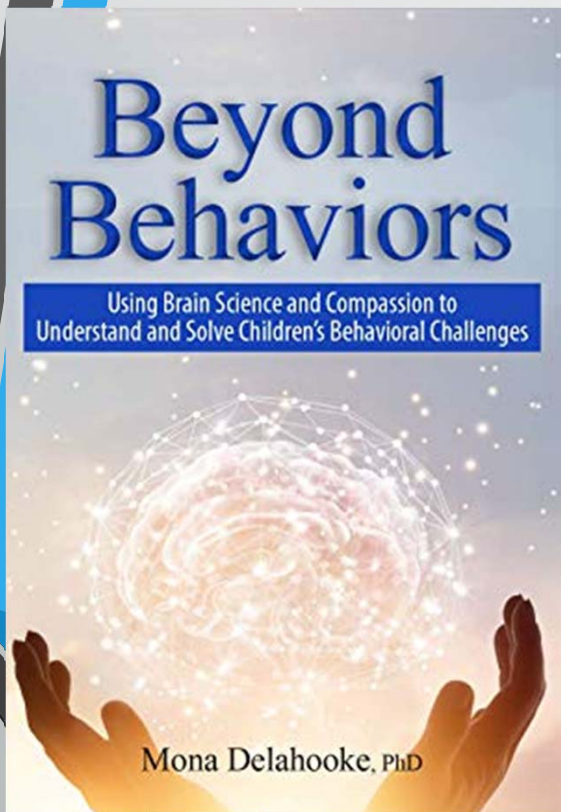


THE PODCAST
WHERE
ADOPTees
DISCUSS THE
ADOPTION
EXPERIENCE

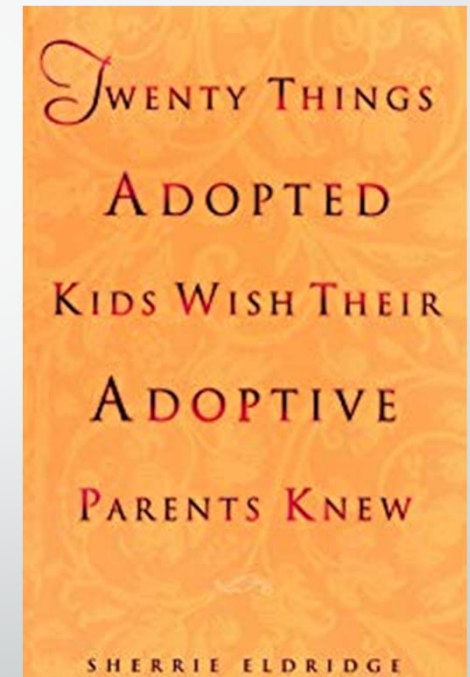
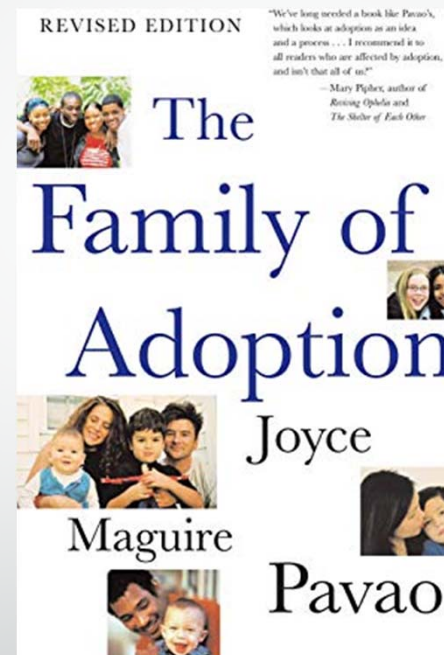
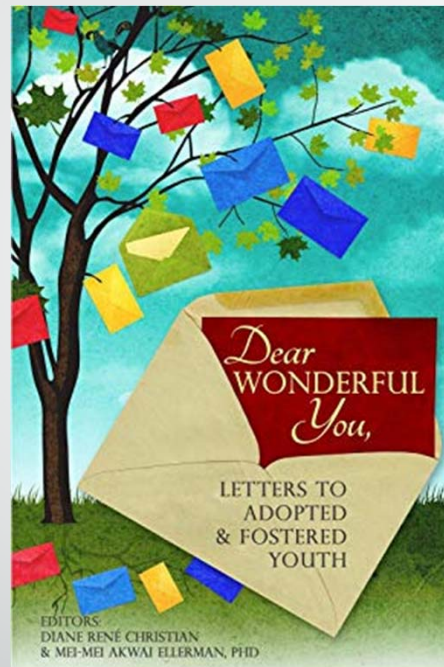
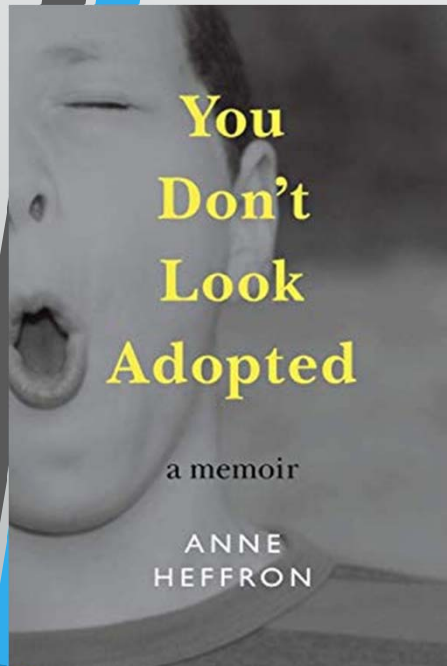
www.Adopteeson.com - Healing Series - search for "grief"

Janet Nordine, MS, LMFT, RPT
www.experiencecourage.com

Books for Understanding and Supporting the Child in Your Home



References



QUESTIONS AND THANK YOU



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Disenfranchised Grief in Adoption – Janet Nordine, MS, LMFT, RPT-S

July 1 and July 8, 2020 for the Adoption Exchange

References

Books –

Disenfranchised Grief

Disenfranchised Grief: New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice - by Kenneth J. Doka

Grief Is a Journey: Finding Your Path Through Loss - by Kenneth J. Doka

Parenting Children who are Adopted

The Primal Wound: Understanding the Adopted Child - by Nancy Newton Verrier - The Primal Wound is a book which is revolutionizing the way we think about adoption. In its application of information about pre- and perinatal psychology, attachment, bonding, and loss

Beyond Behaviors: Using Brain Science and Compassion to Understand and Solve Children's Behavioral Challenges – Dr. Mona Delahooke

The Connected Child – Dr. Karyn Purvis, Dr. David Cross and Wendy Lynn Sunshine

Books by Authors who are Adopted

The Girls Who Went Away - by Ann Fessler - the astonishing untold history of the million and a half women who surrendered children for adoption due to enormous family and social pressure in the decades before Roe v. Wade.

You Don't Look Adopted - by Anne Heffron – “As a child, I traded safety for silence. As an adult, I had no idea who I was, why I quit nearly everything I started, why I struggled with things that came more easily to my friends (jobs, relationships, finances, self-esteem), why I seemed hell-bent on throwing myself away.”

Why Do I Feel So Sad? A Grief Book for Children by Tracy Lambert-Prater LPC. An inclusive, age-appropriate, illustrated kid's book designed to help young children understand their own grief. The examples and beautiful illustrations are rooted in real life, exploring the truth of loss and change, while remaining comforting and hopeful.

Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew – Sherrie Eldridge

The Family of Adoption – Joyce Maguire Pavao

10 Foundations - FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE (NO MATTER WHAT'S HAPPENED) – Pamela Cordano, MFT

Podcast

Adoptees On – Episode 81 and 82 – Disenfranchised Grief with Janet Nordine, MS, LMFT, RPT-S

<http://www.adopteeson.com/>

Janet Nordine, MS, LMFT, RPT-S Website and Blog - [www. Experiencecourage.com](http://www.Experiencecourage.com)