

# GRIEF & LOSS

## FOR BIRTH PARENTS



### GRIEF IS A VERY NORMAL RESPONSE TO ADOPTION-RELATED LOSS

The difficult decision to place a child for adoption leads to feelings of grief and loss for most birth parents. Though the grief felt by birth parents is similar in many ways to other losses, like the death of a loved one, adoption-related loss may not be seen in the same way by others. Birth parents and others in the adoption constellation may not feel they are given the time and space to grieve, which sometimes can make it difficult to heal. As a birth parent you may have very complicated feelings about your child's adoption – happy that they are safe in a loving family, and intensely sad that your child is not with you.



### DO BIRTH PARENTS EVER STOP GRIEVING THEIR ADOPTION LOSS?

Birth parents grieve losses that don't have a specific end, and you may feel the loss over and over at different points throughout your life. Your grief journey after placement will be an ongoing evolution as you become the version of yourself who exists as a birth parent in your child's adoption constellation.

The Growing Around Grief model by Lois Tonkin explains it well. People tend to think that grief shrinks over time. But for many, grief doesn't go away. Instead, we grow around grief. Your life grows around it as you embrace the best version of the life that's available to you.



## SYMPTOMS OF GRIEF:

Grief brings a few common symptoms:

- Sadness
- Fear and panic
- Shame and guilt
- Difficulty sleeping
- Anger
- Despair
- Change in appetite
- Poor concentration
- Nightmares
- Fatigue
- Sleep disturbances
- Panic attacks
- Depression
- Thoughts of self-harm or suicide
- Physical symptoms, like headaches, digestive issues, stomach pain, and heart palpitations



## STAGES OF GRIEF DURING ADOPTION PLANNING:

1. Denial – You may react to the loss with numbed disbelief or deny the reality of what is happening.
2. Anger – The reality of your available options may lead to a period of frustration and anger, both at yourself and at others who seem unwilling to help.
3. Bargaining – You may avoid adoption planning tasks as you desperately search for other options.
4. Depression – It is common to enter a phase of hopelessness about the lack of other options, especially as you anticipate how painful and difficult placement will be.
5. Acceptance – You will eventually reach a stage where you engage with the process of making a plan that fits your needs as well as possible.



## SELF-CARE IS IMPORTANT!

Be sure to focus on self-care during grief:

- Eating healthy
- Staying hydrated
- Keeping a healthy sleep cycle
- Regular exercise
- Time with friends
- Hobbies
- Getting into the sun
- Mindfulness

## WHAT CAN A GRIEVING BIRTH PARENT DO TO WORK THROUGH GRIEF?

There is no “cure” for grief, particularly the complicated grief experienced by birth parents. However, there are things birth parents can do to work through their grief and to gain some physical and emotional relief from their sadness.

- Connect with a counselor trained in adoption issues and grief.
- Join a support group with other birth parents.
- Find a supportive friend or family member to talk to about the child and the adoption.
- Seek out birth parent support on social media or podcasts.
- Ask your LFCS worker for help.
- Ask your child's adoptive parents for adjustments to openness, if you need more or less contact for a while.
- Talk with a doctor about medical treatment if depression or anxiety symptoms are interfering with daily life.