

A young child with curly hair is shown from the back, holding a large sunflower. The child is wearing a blue denim dress. The background is a bright, sunny outdoor setting with other sunflowers and green foliage. The text is overlaid on the image in a bold, red font.

Adoption: Developmental Ages and Stages

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What is ADOPTION?



What is ADOPTION?

- the act or process of adopting a child
- the act or process of beginning to use something new or different
- the act or process of giving official acceptance or approval to something



What is missing?

LOSS





What's in your
wallet?



Grieving a Loss

A background image showing two women from the chest up, facing each other and smiling. The woman on the left has long dark hair in a ponytail and is wearing a dark top. The woman on the right has long light-colored hair and is wearing a light-colored top. They appear to be in a conversation. The image is faded and serves as a background for the text.

Goals

- **Identify the gains and losses experienced by members of the adoption circle**
- **Understand the factors that affect the experience of loss.**
- **Recognize the signs of grief in adopted children at different developmental stages**
- **Identify situations that may trigger grief responses**
- **Develop strategies for helping children grieve their losses**

Gains and Losses

Gains

- Love home
- Prepared family
- Secure environment
- Sense of belonging
- Permanence
- Opportunity to share love



Losses

- Biological connection
- Choice
- Control
- Ability to get questions answered
- Social status
- Relationship with birth family
- Familiar people and places

Gains and Losses

Who am I?

**I miss my
mom.**

**I wonder
where my
brothers and
sisters are.**

**Will I ever
meet my
birth
parents?**

**Why didn't
she keep
me?**





Loss and the Adoptee

Loss and the Adoptee



- Loss is not permanent
- Realized after-the-fact
- Socially unrecognized

Loss and the Adoptee



Ages and Stages



Infants & Toddlers (0-2)

- Cannot understand abstract concepts
- Grieve loss of caregivers



Preschoolers (3-5)

- Literal & self-absorbed
- Like but don't understand adoption story
- Sensitive to differences



School Age (6-12)

- Understand adoption gains & losses
- Feelings of divided loyalties
- Curiosity about birth parents
- Ambivalence about adoption



Teens (13-18)

- Questions about identity
- Self-assertion
- Feelings of loss or abandonment



Adults (19+)

- Curiosity
- Anger
- Resentment
- Fear
- Guilt



Infants and Toddlers (0-2)

- Characteristics
 - Lack abstract thinking
 - Grieve loss of birth parent(s)/caregivers

Infants and Toddlers (0-2)

- Behaviors
 - Changes in eating and sleeping
 - Lethargy
 - Crying
 - Separation anxiety
 - Developmental regression



Infants and Toddlers (0-2)

- Strategies
 - Use patience, understanding and closeness
 - Have comfort foods
 - Provide consistent schedules and routines
 - Keep major changes to a minimum



Preschoolers (3-5)

- Characteristics
 - Literal and self-absorbed
 - Like but don't understand adoption story
 - Sensitive to differences





Preschoolers (3-5)

- Behaviors
 - Searching or pining
 - Excessive clinging
 - Separation anxiety
 - TANTRUMS

Preschoolers (3-5)

- Strategies
 - Tell the adoption story
 - Reaffirm closeness
 - Model ways to express feelings



School Age (6-12)

- Characteristics
 - Understanding adoption gains and losses
 - Feelings of divided loyalties
 - Curiosity about birth parents
 - Ambivalence about adoption



School Age (6-12)

- Behaviors
 - Daydreaming
 - Withdrawal
 - Obsessive questioning
 - Anger
 - Compulsive activities

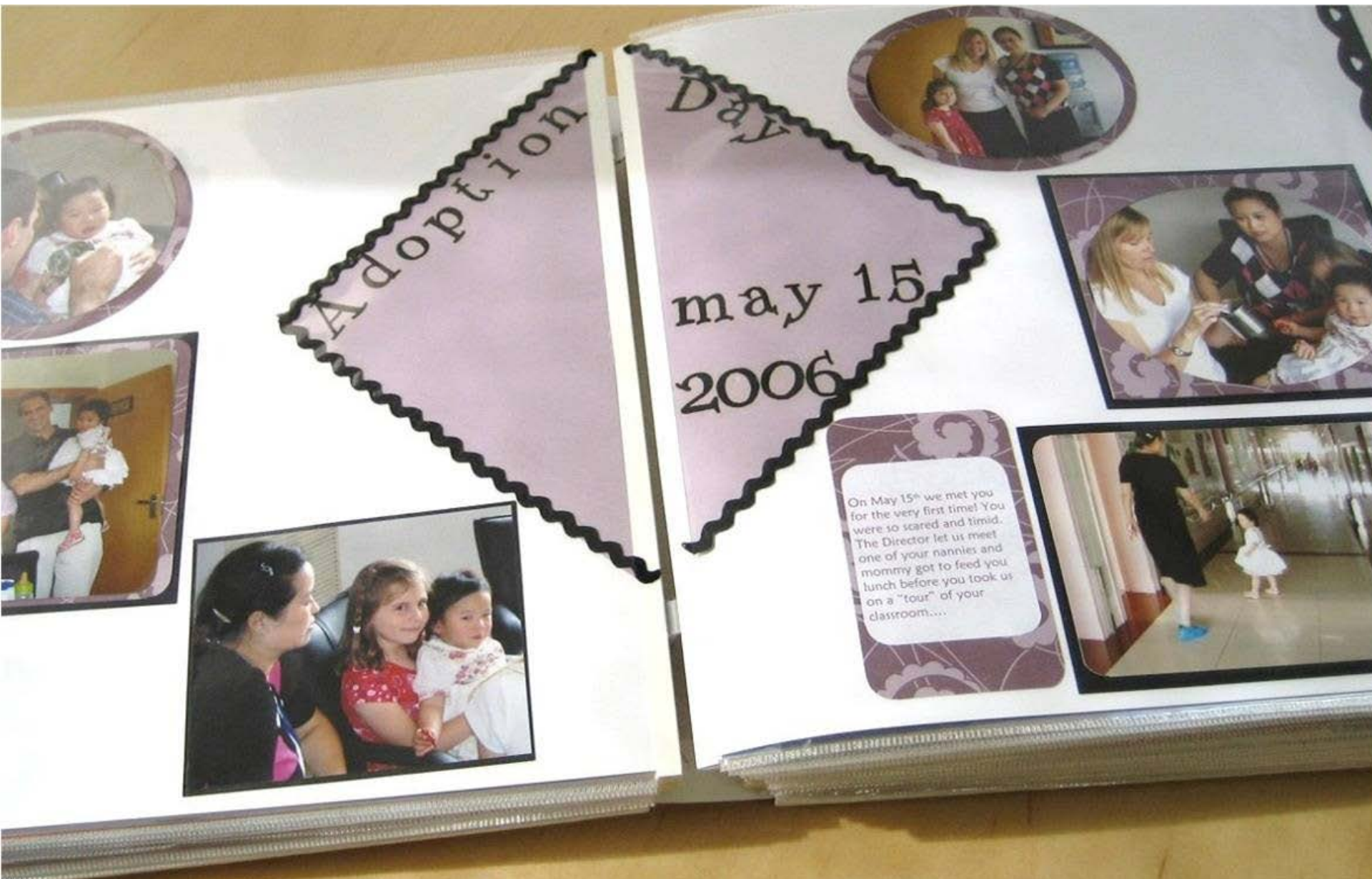


A woman with dark hair, wearing a green shirt, is giving a high-five to a young girl with long dark hair, wearing a pink shirt. They are both smiling and looking at each other. The background is a blurred indoor setting with yellow and blue elements.

School Age (6-12)

- Strategies
 - Encourage children to talk
 - Offer support and feedback

LIFEBOOKS



A young person with dark skin and short hair is sitting on the ground, leaning against a wall. They have their head buried in their hand, looking down with a sad or distressed expression. They are wearing a white t-shirt under a dark vest and blue jeans. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Adolescents (13-18)

- **Characteristics**
 - Questions about identity
 - Self-assertion
 - Feelings of loss or abandonment

Adolescents (13-18)

- **Behaviors**
 - **Rebellious or provocative behavior**
 - **Sullenness or depression**
 - **Sexual promiscuity**



Adolescents (13-18)

- **Strategies**
 - Encourage self-expression
 - Keep channels of communication open
 - Listen non-judgmentally



ADULTS (19+)

- Characteristics
 - Curiosity
 - Anger
 - Resentment
 - Guilt
 - Fear
 - Grief



ADULTS (19+)

- Behaviors
 - Difficulty maintaining relationships
 - Difficulty with intimacy
 - Difficulty maintaining jobs
 - Postpartum depression
 - Continued struggle with identity



ADULTS (19+)

- **Strategies**
 - **Be supportive**
 - **Share any information**



RESOURCES

- **Adoption Support and Preservation (ASAP Services)**
 - Statewide, state-funded, home-based services available to all adopted children (and subsidized guardianship). Parents can request services.
- **The Theraplay Institute**
 - Trainings for parents and professionals; Database of attachment-based therapists throughout the state.

RESOURCES

- **A Home Within**

- Free therapy for all current and former foster youth. Available only in Chicago and North Shore area. Parents, caseworkers, GALs can request services.
- www.ahomewithin.org

- **Adoption Learning Partners (ALP)**

- Online learning program on a variety of adoption-related topics. Some programs are free or are very reasonably priced. Would apply to non-adopted individuals as well.
- <http://www.adoptionlearningpartners.org/>

- **The Cradle-Center for Lifelong Adoption Support**

- Fee-for-service therapy for adopted children and families
- Offices in Evanston and Oak Park

Conclusion

“Though your child has experienced a tremendous loss, it is important to remember that, while we may have our unique needs and challenges, adoptees are not broken and should be loved, cared for, and treated as whole beings.”

—Christina Romo

