



# Adoption Connections of Oregon

## **Grief and Loss in Adopted Children**

By Susan Ward ©

As adoptive parents, our children's adjustment and confidence in their world depends upon our ability to identify their grief, assist them through their grief issues, and help them grow from that grief. This parenting responsibility begins when we adopt, and continues as we guide our children into adulthood.

As parents, adoption agencies, and social workers, we view adoption as happy, joyful. A child without a family now has one. A family yearning to share its love can now open its heart.

The topic of grief is not a topic generally discussed when considering adoption. It's not a regular topic in adoptive parenting classes. And books and websites seldom discuss an adopted child's possible feelings of loss, trauma, and grief.

Intellectually, we understand that babies and children experience feelings of discomfort, loss, and confusion during the first weeks and months after being adopted. Practically, though, do we allow and even create opportunities for newly adopted children to grieve their losses and their past? And throughout our children's lives, do we acknowledge and assist them with their grief?

If we adopt babies, we may mistakenly assume that our child's life begins with us. If we adopt an older child, we may wrongly assume that their past is now their past. Adopted children, however, bring multiple issues of loss with them into their adopted families, no matter what age they were adopted.

Childhood grief is often based on different issues than those that impact adults. Donna O'Toole, grief counselor and author of *Helping Children Grieve and Grow*, writes, "Especially for children a loss may be based on safety, comfort, and familiarity, rather than on what adults speak of as love or affection."

*Helping Children Grieve and Grow* lists six categories of childhood loss: relationship loss (usually people and animals); loss of objects that give comfort (toys, blankets, clothing); loss of a secure, familiar environment; loss of self (ways of being and doing that define us uniquely); loss of skills, abilities, and competencies; and loss of familiar habits and routine.

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ACO Newsletter  
Fall 2010

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***ACO is a non-profit organization of families and individuals, offering support, education, multicultural activities, and friendship for anyone touched by or interested in adoption.***

# Upcoming ACO Events

## Parent Salons

Sunday, Sept. 26<sup>th</sup>  
3:00 pm

Sue Barnhart's home  
1439 W. 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue  
Eugene, 97402

RSVP  
541-342-1953

Join in a discussion with  
adult adoptee Tosheba Richter



Sunday, November 21<sup>st</sup>  
1:00-4:00 pm

Michelle Cottrell's home  
816 Sundance,  
Eugene, 97405

RSVP  
541-689-1932

The selected topic will be  
"Dealing with racism while  
traveling and visiting  
relatives"



Join us for our annual Harvest Party

Saturday, October 9<sup>th</sup>

1:00 – 4:00 pm

At the Crum Family Farm  
25534 Hall Road, Junction City

snacks, arts & crafts, scavenger hunt, pumpkin painting

Be prepared for rain!



"Welcome to another school year! The ACO Education Committee is ready to help parents and teachers navigate adoptions issues in a variety of educational settings (K-12). We have several willing parents and educators who can facilitate small group and classroom presentations, meet with teachers, and provide written information to administrators and school staff. Please contact Lynne Lucas ([lynne.lucas@gmail.com](mailto:lynne.lucas@gmail.com)) if you have questions or requests. "



### **Pine Cone play group**

Sunday, October 23<sup>rd</sup>

3-5 pm

Contact Shula for details

541-484-1703



### **ACO t-shirts available for sale!**

Purchase your ACO shirt today!  
Men's, women's and children's sizes are available. Prices are \$10-\$12 per shirt.

Contact Elise to order your size.

541-554-1201

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Adopted and foster children, no matter what their age, embark upon their newly changed lives facing most of these categories of loss. They've lost their caregivers, their clothes and bedding, their familiar smells, tastes, and sounds; the way they do things; their ability to feel comfortable with their lives and language, and their daily routines.

Theresa Anderson, family counselor specializing in issues of adoption, attachment, and grief says, "Grief is THE core issue that adopted children deal with...grief and terror. Think about international adoption... You can't take a child from home, put them into an airplane, cross the world, surround them with 1000's of people at the airport, have them met by strange people, smells, textures, foods, and voices, and not expect them to be traumatized."

As adoptive and foster parents, we cannot overlook our children's grief because it is not easily seen or identified. In *Helping Children Grieve and Grow* Ms. O'Toole writes, "Children usually don't tell you they are grieving. You can tell by what they say and do." Examples of possible reactions of grieving children include anger, sadness, hyperactivity, changes in appetite, hoarding food, inappropriate emotional response, headaches, difficulty making decisions, regressive behaviors, and clinginess.

Children's responses to grief, though, may not fall within a list of observable reactions. Ms. O'Toole writes, "When children feel overwhelmed by intense feelings they may naturally make their world safe by distancing themselves physically or emotionally, by pretending or by denying the reality of the loss."

Ms. Anderson comments that trauma and loss can, and often does, interfere with a child's general development. She adds, "Children often cover trauma and grief with being perfect, with controlling others, or with being mad."

In *Our Own: Adopting and Parenting the Older Child*, Ms. Maskew writes, "Experienced parents recommend that you take the initiative in talking with your child about losses and grief. You cannot go around the pain and loss, you must go through it." Also, she reminds parents of the need to teach children about emotion words and expressions. "Kids who have been traumatized or abused or who simply did not have a stable early life may never have learned how to identify their feelings and their effects."

Even if we acknowledge and assist our children with grief and loss in the early years they live with us, that doesn't mean their grieving is over and done. The issues of loss, grief, and trauma that our children face upon adoption, do not disappear once they have adjusted to their new lives. Adoption-related grief issues are re-visited throughout their lives. Ed Entmacher, a North Carolina psychiatrist who works with children and families says, "Grieving over adoption issues doesn't happen easily or neatly. It has to be revisited over and over into adolescence and adulthood."

As an adoptive parent, read about grief and loss in children. Help your child to accept and grow from their grief. It's part of being an adoptive family.



cont.

Whether your child is newly home, or has been home for years, here are some tips for helping them to acknowledge, accept, and grow from their grief:

- Talk about your own and other people's losses and grief.
- Read books to your child about loss and grief and show how others have lived through their losses.
- Suggest that they keep a journal where they write or draw about their feelings.
- Find ways for your child to commemorate their past. Light candles, create a special section in their life book, and frame a particular drawing pertaining to their loss.
- Help them find positive ways to express their feelings: physical activities, praying, crying.
- Help your child learn to cry. Many of our children have been taught not to cry. Help them understand how healing crying is. Let them see you cry.

Your child needs you to be there, to listen, and to understand that their grief is as intense, even if different, to that of an adult's.

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Thank you!  
**Thank you!**

**Catherine Hatfield** for sharing your talents with us during your time as a board member. You will be greatly missed.

*Many thanks to Erika Leaf at Imagine Graphics for helping us purchase a banner*



## Volunteers needed

ACO is a volunteer based organization and we are looking for volunteers to help keep us successful. We are in need of volunteers for our committees: education, fundraising, outreach and scholarship. Your special skills and talents can help make a difference in the adoption community. It is a rewarding and fun experience!

Contact Elise for details  
541-554-1201

## Suggestions

Do you have suggestions for ACO events, gatherings, parent salons, play groups, workshops, etc? We would love our members input. This is your organization and we want meet the needs of your family. Please email your suggestions to [aco@peak.org](mailto:aco@peak.org)

## Book Reviews



By Sue Barnhart

[The Kid, What Happened After My Boyfriend and I Decided to Go Get Pregnant](#) by Dan Savage

You can check this book out of the Eugene Library. Those of you who turn to Dan's column every week in the Eugene Weekly will love this book. It is the true story of how Dan Savage and his partner adopted a baby boy through open adoption. They are gay and were afraid no one would pick them, but they were picked and the story of how it happened is very heart warming. I laughed out loud, cried, and wanted to discuss this book with everyone while I was reading it. In this book Dan is his usual funny, straight forward, write it exactly how he wants to self, which can be offensive to some, so beware. I personally highly recommend this book if you enjoy Dan Savage, or want to learn more about open adoption or gay people adopting. Just beware because you may both laugh until the tears are streaming down your face, and cry until you sob.

By Wendy Nastiuk

[Children of the Manse](#) by Lewis Richard Luchs

This book is written by a local author who was adopted along with his 3 siblings after their birth mother relinquished them to a children's home in the early 1940's. They were adopted by a Presbyterian minister and his wife in Ohio at the ages of 4, 5, 6 and 7. The minister and his wife embraced the challenges of loving and raising these four siblings. Mr. Luchs wrote this biography from his memories and by interviewing his siblings and birth relatives. His research also included reading the careful notes kept by the social workers who were crucial to the children's placement, as well as the journals his adoptive mother kept. This book is at times both heart-wrenching and heartwarming. It shows the resiliency of a family of children whose beginnings were both cruel and unfair.



## Cooking with kids

### Apple Pie Party Dip

Enjoy the flavor of a classic holiday dessert -- minus the baking! -- with this tasty fruit dip.

#### Ingredients

- 1 1/3 cups peeled, cored, and diced apples
  - 1 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
  - 2 teaspoons brown sugar
  - 2 teaspoons apricot preserves
  - 1/8 teaspoon cinnamon
- INGREDIENTS FOR CHIPS:
  - 5 (6-inch) flour tortillas
  - 2 tablespoons butter, melted
  - 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
  - 1 1/2 tablespoons sugar

#### Instructions

1. Combine all the dip ingredients in a bowl, then cover and refrigerate the mixture until chilled.
2. Brush the tortillas with butter, then cut them into wedges.
3. Arrange the wedges on a greased baking sheet, sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar, and bake at 350° F until golden brown, about 10 minutes. Let them cool before serving. Serves 4 to 6.

Adoption Connections of Oregon

P.O. Box 10581

Eugene, OR 97440

Email: [aco@peak.org](mailto:aco@peak.org)

[www.adoptionconnectionsoforegon.org](http://www.adoptionconnectionsoforegon.org)

For information about ACO please contact

Elise Crum at (541) 554-1201

\* Submit an article or advertise in this newsletter, please write Wendy Nastiuk at ACO's address or email her at [aco@peak.org](mailto:aco@peak.org) or call (541)741-3336.

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ACO Calendar

**Dates at a Glance**

September 26<sup>th</sup>- Parent Salon

October 9<sup>th</sup>- Harvest Party

October 23<sup>rd</sup>- Pine Cone play group

November 21<sup>st</sup>- Parent Salon



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