

AAC Regional Conference Workshop – March 17, 2010



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1. Ice-breaker exercise and introductions: Write your story in 6-10 words!
 - a. Examples: Relinquishment hurt me deeply; miracle brought us together.
Still dizzy from running in circles.
Accepting reality helps heal my trauma.
 2. Theoretical Foundations: *Memories and Fantasies form the basis for many core beliefs!*
 - a. Types of memory [based on Howard Gardner's (1985) "Information Processing Approach"]
 - i. Short term – holds a limited amount of information for a short period of time (i.e., a phone number held long enough to dial it)
 - ii. Long term – a relatively permanent store of information that represents what most people mean by memory.

Implicit memory – occurs unintentionally, automatically, without awareness

Explicit memory – involves deliberate, effortful recollection of events.
 - iii. Biochemical elements of memory

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- Core patterns are “schemas that act as subconscious storage systems that preserve specific emotional learning from past resentments at feeling treated unfairly.” (Heather Carlini)
- “As we know birth mothers and adoptees have many triggers that remind them of past life situations related to adoption issues. Core Patterns are emotional habits. Every core pattern has its own neural circuitry, made strong through repetition of the pattern over the course of our lives. Each time the core pattern is triggered, we replay the familiar sequences of thought, feeling and reaction because that familiar chemistry is being produced in the body through the electrical charge of the emotion.”
- Core patterns include: abandonment, mistrust, emotional distance, social outcast, dependence, vulnerability, rejection, failure, enslavement, relentlessness (pressure), privilege/entitlement, and negativity/pessimism.

b. Memory strategies

- i. Rehearsal – repeating items one is trying to remember
- ii. Organization – classifying items into meaningful groups (i.e.: food, animals, sports)
- iii. Elaboration - actively creating meaningful links between items to be remembered. This is achieved by adding something to the items, in the form of either words or images.

c. Autobiographical Memories (Our memories help form core beliefs!)

- i. Are often complex integrations of multiple episodes occurring over time (Burt, 2003)
- ii. Are often negative (of former self), compared with our current perceptions (Berentsen & Rubin, 2002; Ross & Wilson, 2003). This is linked to perception of how distant the past self is from the current self.
- iii. People recall more information from their late teens and early twenties than any other time frame, except the near present (Fitzgerald, 1999; Rubin, 2002; Rybash, 1999).

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3. Core Beliefs Exercise

- a. Please list your core beliefs about:
 - i. What the experience of relinquishment/adoption says about you
 - ii. What the experience of search and reunion means for you
 - iii. What cannot be changed
 - iv. What can be changed
 - v. Your unverified/unfounded assumptions or beliefs
 - vi. How you handle change
 - vii. Your worthiness/capacity for meaningful relationships

4. Stations to wander between in the process of getting free(er)

- a. Data Blast - initial information overload, often mistaken for “integrating new truth.”
- b. Grief - the fact you’ve cried rivers does not mean you have grieved. Many of us were trained/trained ourselves NOT to grieve. Grief involves movement toward letting go (not just recognition of loss).

Kubler-Ross: *Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, Acceptance.*

Carlini: *Shock* -- when the adoptee is told he/she was adopted. The adoptee tries to block out any painful thoughts about being adopted. Adoptees create a façade by using defense mechanisms that create a false sense that allows them to pretend they

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are doing well, when they are not. The mother creates a “façade” to lock down her motions, “numbing out” in order to handle life.

Denial -- when the adoptee tries to block out any painful thoughts about being adopted. The mother will try to pretend the event never happened. Carlini says “Denial is the shock absorber of the soul.”

Anger -- the adoptee feels anger over abandonment and demonstrates emotional disturbances and behavioral problems. The mother’s anger is towards her family, society, the adoption agency. Initially the anger is displaced to others in her life. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder symptoms start to appear.

Remorse -- arises through the sadness of not knowing the history of the adoptee’s biological roots. As the mother awakens, it becomes the not-knowing of the life of the child and she may initiate a searching behavior.

Survival -- when the adoptee (or mother) reaches this stage, he/she has used many coping skills and ego defenses to hide feelings. The adoptee starts to notice the differences (though they don’t want to feel different from the adoptive family), so patterns himself after his adopters to accommodate their every wish. When this fails, the adoptee numbs out (or rebels) and turns to fantasizing about biological family. The mother has learned how to deny, adapt, pretend and numb out.

Recovery – the adoptee begins to examine and work through his/her feelings to resolve the inner turmoil. The mother begins to see how her younger self was fragmented and her emotional development was halted at the time of surrender.

Integration – the adoptee begins to take on new perspectives of her life as an adoptee and begins to integrate her biological self with her adopted self. The mother reframes the loss into the present.

c. Forgiveness – Definition: agreeing to live with the consequences of someone else’s (or our own) actions. Everyone does live with them, but not everyone agrees to do so. Resistance stifles forgiveness.

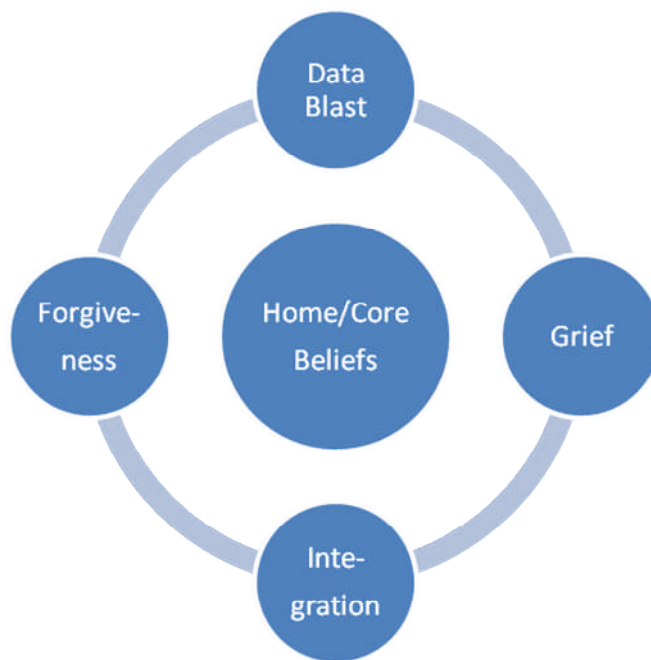
Greek word: literal translation “to send away”

Hebrew word: “to cover over” or “blot out”

d. Acceptance/Integration – Resistance and compartmentalization fade away.

Stations in the Freedom Quest

DECISIONS FOR ONGOING GROWTH AND REST ARE IMPLICIT IN THIS PROCESS!



5. Freedom and Expectations (See supplemental handout)

- a. Search and reunion do not necessarily free me from:

- b. Things FROM which I can become free:

- c. I can become free TO do the following:

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SOME REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS ABOUT TRUTH AND FREEDOM

A. Truth does NOT always free us from

1. Pain, Fear and Grief
2. Regret
3. Reality
4. Conflict
5. Relationship/memory patterns
6. The significance of lost years
7. Beliefs/associations based on bad information
8. The desire to be “fixed”

B. Truth CAN free us *from*:

1. Fantasy “Floatiness”
2. Ignorance and doubt
3. Anxiety related to not knowing
4. The power of secrets and blame
5. Disconnection from story and self
6. Shame and guilt
7. Internalized false societal messages (members of the triad inherently pose some threat to each other, normal people just “move on,” birth mothers don’t care about their children, adoption is the perfect solution

to everyone’s problem, the primary emotion all “good” adoptees should feel most of the time is gratitude, etc.)

8. Resentment .

C. Truth can free us *to*:

1. Form genuine identities
2. Accept and give love
3. Integrate all the people we call family into our lives.
4. Set boundaries and make choices in relationships
5. Voice our feelings and ask for what we want/need.
6. Treat ourselves and others with respect and care.
7. Put the past in its proper perspective, which means we base our memories and beliefs on valid information and experiences rather than fantasy
8. Reject unhealthy societal messages
9. Forgive others and embrace “the new normal.”
10. Wander between “stations” and feel free to retreat/rest
11. Become aware of our emotions and detox mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

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12. Learn, heal, change, let go, and
devote more energy to other priorities!
(i.e. GROW!)