

Stages of Adoption Adjustment

Resource: Brodzinsky, Schechter & Henig (1993). Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self

AGE OF ADOPTEE	PSYCHOSOCIAL TASKS (ERIKSON)	ADOPTEE ISSUES	PARENT RESPONSE
Birth through toddler years (ages 0 to 2 ½).	Trust vs. Mistrust Basic trust, attachment to primary caretakers.	Adjusting and transitioning to new a home and caregiver. Developing basis trust and secure attachment despite primary loss, especially in cases of delayed placement.	Nurturing, consistency, openness about adoption.
Pre-school years (ages 2 ½ to 5).	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt Initiative vs. Guilt Independence, competence in family.	Learning about birth and reproduction. Recognizing difference in physical appearance. “Why was I adopted?” “Where did I come from”?	Truthful answers to questions, open door for discussion.
Early grade-school age (ages 5-8).	Industry vs. Inferiority Self as part of peer group and increased competence.	Understanding the meaning and implications of being adopted. Questions regarding primary loss, sense of being “different”, issues of primary rejection. Coping with stigma associated with adoption.	Provide information, keep open lines of communication, and deal with feelings of rejection.
Pre-adolescence (ages 8-11)	Body changes, peer relationships.	Questions regarding birth family: talents, appearance. “How am I like my	Obtain concrete information to answer questions if possible.

		birth family”?	
Early adolescence (ages 12-15)	Ego Identity vs. Identity Confusion Sexual identity, focus on peer group above family.	More questions regarding birth family and early history, concern about divided loyalties. Connecting adoption to one’s sense of identity. Resolving family romance fantasy. “How do I fit in”?	Give permission to think about birth family.
Later Adolescence (ages 16-21)	Identity issues, future planning, peer relations.	Issues of search and reunion need for more detailed background information.	Help adoptee find information to assist search; provide any more detailed information.
Young adulthood (ages 20s and 30s)	Intimacy vs. Isolation Career exploration & formation of own family.	Genetic questions related to birth of own children. Further exploration of the implications of adoption as it relates to the growth of self and the development of intimacy.	
Middle adulthood (40s and 50s)	Generativity vs. Stagnation Career, family and retirement planning.	Concerns about health and mortality of birth parents; is it too late to find them? Reconciling the creation of a psychological legacy with one’s unknown past.	Support search information finding.
Later life (age 60+)	Ego Integrity vs. Despair Retirement, Health issues.	Genealogy and lineage questions may arise. Final resolution of the implications of adoption in the context of a life review.	

