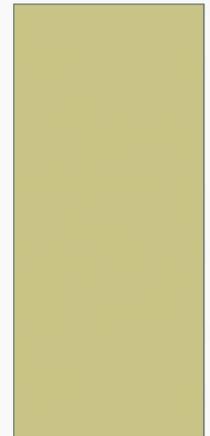


ADOPTIVE FAMILIES AND BIRTH FAMILIES

ENCOURAGING RELATIONSHIPS

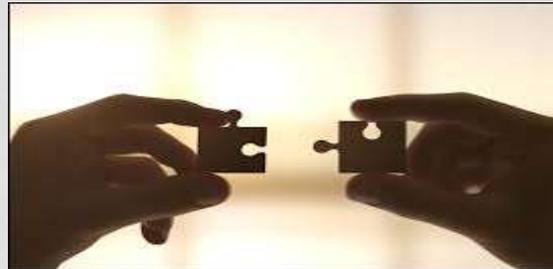






BENEFITS OF CONTACT

Neil and Howe (2004) see the purpose of contact as helping children meet three basic developmental needs – *'attaining good mental (achieved in the context of a secure relationship with sensitive carers), resolving issues of loss and trauma and achieving a strong sense of personal identity and genealogical connectedness.'*



'For children to see and experience their two families working together for their good, recognising their respect for each other and their respective points of view, experiencing them getting along sends children a powerful message: that they too can have good and positive feelings for both sets of parents, both families.'

BENEFITS OF CONTACT

BIRTH PARENTS, SIBLINGS AND EXTENDED FAMILY

- Child's emotional wellbeing
- Opportunity to develop and continue relationships
- Opportunity to develop more realistic identity, particularly cultural –where child is able to integrate two parts of themselves – the family they were born into and the family they are growing up in
- Adoptive family can support the child's narrative and meaning of how they have come into care and where come from

*If we do not honour our past, we lose our future
If we destroy our roots, we can not grow. -Hunderwasser*

EXAMPLES

- Development of values, e.g. kindness – who better to do this with than the child's birth family, who are often less fortunate than adoptive family (Helen, adoptive parent)
- Understanding the reasons why I'm in care, for myself and that it wasn't my fault (Shay, adopted young person)
- Although I wasn't living with my birth mum, knowing that she loved me in her own way (Khaled)
- Can bring stability to placement (Mason & Gibson 2004)



'GOOD' OR BENEFICIAL CONTACT

One of the factors which features in beneficial contact is the **relationship between the adoptive family and the birth family.**



'Outcomes were particularly positive when there was a collaborative approach between adoptive parents and birth parents.' (Carolyn Boyle 2016)

'Children were more likely to benefit from contact when adoptive parents had an open attitude towards contact and when birth relatives acceptance was high.' (Carolyn Boyle 2016)

How can this be developed when there is an unequal power base, differing backgrounds and, at times, differing views about best interests of the child, relationship styles, expectations, roles, change in entitlement

WHAT IS IT THAT PROMOTES THIS RELATIONSHIP?

- Openness in attitude and communication, accompanied by realistic empathy and compassion
- Respectful of birth family members and valuing what can be offered to the child – focus on what can be done, not what can't be done
- *'I have adopted the child but also the family'*
- Insight into own emotions about the birth family and capacity to manage for benefit of child
- Able to hold on to, sit with child's emotions, at times conflicting – excitement, anxiety, disappointment, sadness, confusion, anticipation, rejection – being realistic
- Capacity to develop good boundaries and open communication

- healthy entitlement, not fearful of what cannot offer child – birth –
- acceptance of who the child is and **where the child is from.**



BIRTH PARENTS

- Value and appreciate role of adoptive parents in child's life
- Stability in own life – even if it's for a period of time
- Able to acknowledge and manage own emotions of shame, guilt, loss and grief at time of contact
- Open to considering child's best interests
- Open to support
- Can see value they can bring to the child



WHAT HINDERS THIS RELATIONSHIP

'they might take me'

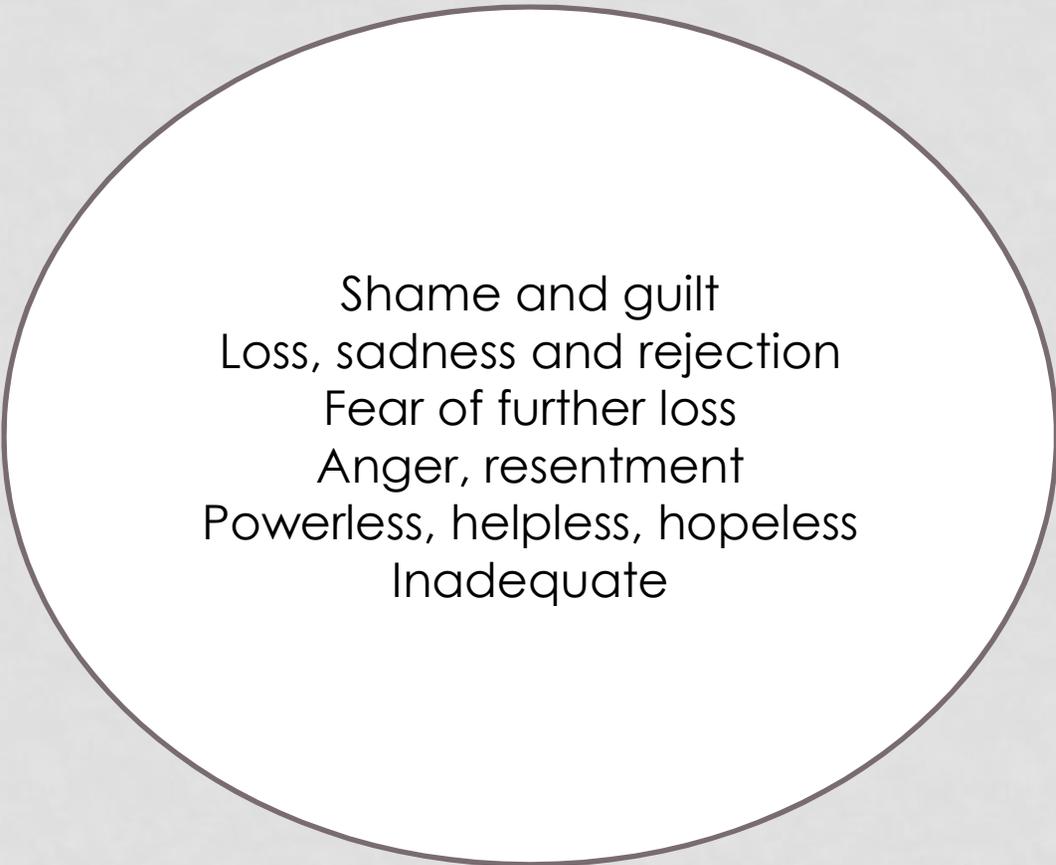
'they are weird'

'not sure how to relate'

'who are these people'

'they are bad'

'these are the people who hurt
me or couldn't take care of me or
abandoned me or rejected me'



Shame and guilt
Loss, sadness and rejection
Fear of further loss
Anger, resentment
Powerless, helpless, hopeless
Inadequate

Entitlement?

Fear of birthparents' role

Fear of challenging behaviours

And impact on child

Stressful, inconsistent and
unpredictable

Anger at what birth family did

Fear of child growing up to be like
birth family

COMMON FACTOR

FEAR

WHAT DO WE DO WITH FEAR ?

FIGHT FLIGHT FREEZE AVOID

SUPPORTS TO PROMOTE GOOD CONTACT

- Training – Participants who received training and support engaged in significantly more activities encouraging contact than those who did not (Sanchirico & Jablonka 2000)
- Caseworker training on openness, facilitating and encouraging the relationship and then stepping back
- Early involvement of AP in contact, slowly develop relationship over time
- Adoptive parents are provided with good information about the child's family, history and circumstances for the child coming into care and provided the opportunity to process this and make sense, give meaning, develop empathy

- Recognition that contact and relationships change over time, at these times all the parties may require support mediation, understand changes – post adoption
- Support to birth parents, e.g. transport and accommodation, involvement in decisions, communicate their value, provide opportunity to debrief, may require grief and loss counselling, understand child's responses and changes.
- Encouraging all the parties to make contact **FUN**

