



Teen Adoptee Support Group:

Share Your Story, Your Way

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Teen Adoptee Support Group: Share Your Story, Your Way

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Thank you to those who are in the hard work. Thank you for being allies in supporting adoptees, journeying with them through the unspeakable challenges, and championing them on towards 'sharing their story, their way'. May they come to a deeply rooted healing and acceptance of all the many parts of their stories - unique and precious like valuable gems.



SAMPLE

Overview & Purpose



OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

The *Teen Adoptee Support Group: Share Your Story, Your Way* was created in 2021 by Sara Odicio, LSW, Founder of CORE of Adoption, LLC. This support group (SG) curriculum was created as a resource for adoptive parents and professionals who support adoptive families, specifically for teenagers, ages 13-17. The *Teen Adoptee SG: Share Your Story, Your Way* is intended to be used by a designated group facilitator (Facilitator) as a tool to help guide the group process and educational discussions between the teen adoptees (Participants) within a group setting, prioritizing safety and connection amongst one another. The *Teen Adoptee SG: Share Your Story, Your Way* is broken up into 8 sessions and designed to be executed through a private virtual setting, although it could easily be adapted for an in-person setting, as well.

EDUCATION STANDARDS

1. The Participants should be proficient in reading comprehension.
2. The Participants should be proficient in verbal and communication skills.
3. The Participants should be proficient in emotional and social skills.

GOALS/OBJECTIVES

1. Explore the 7 Core Issues of Adoption (Roszia & Maxon, 2019).
2. Learn ways to respond to insensitive adoption-related questions.
3. Process their personal adoption journey and ‘tell their story, their way.’
4. Hear and connect with others in a supportive and collaborative way.

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Electronic device with the ability to share contents on screen, utilize chatting features, utilize annotation features and record sessions for liability purposes.
2. C.A.S.E.’s (Center for Adoption Support and Education) workbook, *Beneath the Mask: For Teen Adoptees: Teens and Young Adults Share Their Stories* (C.A.S.E., 2018). The Participants DO NOT need the book to participate. Only the Facilitator needs the book.
3. Handouts and visuals as described in each session. All aHandouts are listed at the end of the curriculum.

WHAT FAMILIES HAVE SAID

"I appreciate so much, you having made this space for our adoptees to begin looking at their own adoption stories and beginning to process them in a way that feels comfortable and encouraging to them. I have really enjoyed seeing [my teen] begin to talk more openly and on a regular basis about adoption, and have opportunities for even the hard times to come up on a more regular basis so that we can experience pieces of grief and anger and let some of that emotion out of her mind and body...really, I am so pleased!"

"I am so thankful for this adoption support group! I think it is helping [my teen] move towards coming to terms with parts of her story."

"Thank you for the opportunities you provide for all these precious kiddos. The strength I see in [my teen] amazes me considering everything she's gone through - sadly, I think I'm just now allowing myself to see it. She's had that potential all along, but she either didn't have the right platform to have it shine through, or I was just blind to it. She's benefited greatly from the Teen Support Group and it's because of you and the peers she met via Zoom. I thank God that you were placed in our path! "

"[My teen] seems happier lately...a combination of things but I believe this group is a positive addition."

"[My teen] really benefited from being in the group and went from being hesitant to more satisfied to see she isn't/wasn't the only one to feel the way she did."

"[My teen] said it was fun... we didn't have a chance to even ask how it went before he volunteered that on his own. He liked meeting people who live all over the US."

"There's a part of her that is filled when she meets with other adoptees and I'm so thankful for this opportunity for her!"

SAMPLE



Session I

Session I

Purpose

In the first session, the goal is to build and facilitate rapport and connection between the teens. It's best to go into the first session assuming that most, if not all, of the Participants have never done a group like this before. If the Facilitator has access to the registration beforehand, familiarize yourself with the names and ages of the Participants. The first session consists of two main goals: 1) Create a safe and slow introduction, clearly stating the rules and expectations, and 2) Walk through the 7 Core Issues of Adoption (Roszia & Maxon, 2019) one by one.

Objectives

1. Learn the name, age, and type of adoption of each of the Participants.
2. Learn the features of the online virtual platform.
3. Understand the expectations of the group process.
4. Learn the 7 Core Issues of Adoption (Roszia & Maxon, 2019).
5. Learn what makes up the Adoption Triad (AdoptMatch, 2022).

Handouts Needed

1. *Beneath the Mask: For Teen Adoptees: Teens and Young Adults Share Their Stories* (C.A.S.E., 2018, p. 9)
2. 7 Core Issues of Adoption (Roszia & Maxon, 2019) PDF
3. Adoption Triad (AdoptMatch, 2022) PDF

Outline of Session

1. Introduction
 - a. Name
 - b. Age
 - c. Tuning in from
 - d. Type of adoption
 - i. international (outside of the U.S.)
 - ii. domestic (within the U.S.)
 - iii. adoption through foster care
 - iv. kinship care
2. Rules & Expectations
 - a. Be respectful
 - i. Respect for others
 - ii. Respect for yourself
 - b. Virtual platform etiquette
 - i. Use chat responsibly
 - ii. Private space
 - iii. Keep video on
3. Introduce Book
 - a. Used as a framework

- b. Reading stories written by adoptees
- c. *Before You Begin* excerpt (C.A.S.E., 2018, p. 9)
- 4. 7 Core Issues of Adoption (Roszia & Maxon, 2019)
 - a. Loss
 - i. Adoption Triad (AdoptMatch, 2022)
 - b. Rejection
 - c. Guilt/Shame
 - d. Grief
 - e. Identity
 - f. Intimacy
 - g. Mastery/Control
- 5. Q&A and Conclusion

Breakdown of Session

Introductions - The introduction is the first impression that the Participants will have of the group, and the feeling of comfortability and safety is vital to the group process. Take turns going around, and have each Participant (the Facilitator can go first) share their preferred name and/or nickname, as well as their age. Keep in mind that chronological age may be different from the developmental age emotionally and cognitively. Also, have the Participants share where they are tuning in from. Use the language of ‘tuning in from’ instead of the question ‘where are you from?’ It can be confusing to answer for adoptees since they may not be living in the same area they were born in and ‘from.’ Where they are tuning in from is a fun piece of information to share because it allows everyone to see the different states and timezones that are represented in the group. Each Participant can see that there are adoptees all over the nation! The last piece of information to share, type of adoption, may call for more assistance in answering. Explain to the Participants different types of adoption, such as international (outside of the U.S.), domestic (within the U.S.), adoption through foster care, kinship care, and others. Keep in mind that this is the first time the Participants will be asked to share so simple and brief answers are encouraged since there will be plenty of other opportunities to share in more detail. Keeping it brief may alleviate nerves for some and also keep it brief for others who want to share their whole story on the first night! For this opening ice breaker, each Participant will just share their name, age, where they are tuning in from, and their type of adoption.

Rules & Expectations - There are two main rules/expectations to take time in explaining. The first is the aspect of Respect. This means to be sensitive and respectful to the stories and information they share. This includes listening when someone else is speaking and showing support even if their story is different from yours. The Facilitator should remind the Participants that these stories are all very personal and individualized, and each teen deserves to be seen and heard. Respect also means to respect yourself and take care of yourself if you are feeling uncomfortable or triggered by any content. It would be beneficial to explain what a ‘trigger’ is with the group. First ask the Participants if anyone has a definition for the word, but the idea to present is that a trigger is a strong emotional or physical reaction that reminds a person of a hard past experience. The Facilitator can tell the Participants that it’s okay to make yourself comfortable by eating a snack, having a hot drink by your side, taking notes, doodling, or stepping away to take a break.

The second expectation is to go over etiquette for using a virtual platform. The Facilitator can explain the chat and how to use it appropriately and safely, as well as reminding the Participants to be in a private space. If they aren't in a private space, they should use headphones as it adds to the respect and privacy of the other Participants. It's recommended to remind the Participants to also keep their video ON as an expectation. Having the video on truly adds to the group process as it communicates focused attention. The more people that have their video on, the more others will be encouraged to keep theirs on.

Introduce Book - This part of the session is to give the Participants the rundown of what the 8 sessions will look like. Keep in mind that kids and teens who have experienced trauma tend to prefer knowing what to expect as to ease any uncertainty. Take this time to explain the purpose of the group. Discuss the book and how it will be used as a loose framework to give examples of how adoptees have chosen to tell their story. The Participants DO NOT need to purchase the book for the group as the Facilitator will 'share their screen' or provide handouts. The weeks will consist of reading certain auto-biographical stories of different teen adoptees. Eventually, this is to help meet the objective of having the Participants learn how to 'tell their story, their way.' Again, state the reminder that some content may be uncomfortable to think about and that the Participants should process outside of group time with their parents. Read the paragraph titled, *Before You Begin* (C.A.S.E., 2018, p. 9). This is to help explain the concept of each Participant having a trusted person in mind (parent, therapist, school counselor, etc.) to reach out to throughout the entirety of the group.

7 Core Issues of Adoption - This portion is the meat of the group. This first session may feel like the Participants are being fire-hosed with information, but going through each 7 Core Issue (Roszia & Maxon, 2019) is important to set the stage for the coming sessions. There are two points to make before diving into the core issues: 1) People other than those adopted experience these core issues, and 2) Not all adoptees experience the core issues ALL the time and in the same way as others. **Overall, the 7 Core Issues of Adoption are important to know because each one will come up within the adoption experience and journey in some way, shape, or form and in varying degrees.** The Facilitator can use the PDF handout to go through each core issue with the help of the Participants volunteering and reading one at a time. The following are suggested discussion questions to ask after reading each core issue's description:

1. Loss - Discuss the concept of the Adoption Triad (AdoptMatch, 2022) and use the PDF handout and ask, **'How would there be loss for each member of the Adoption Triad?'** Some of the Participants may have never thought of Adoption involving and starting with a Loss. There are more obvious Losses for birth parents and adoptees, but this question allows conversations to arise on how even adoptive parents have gone through Losses, even though it may seem they are the ones gaining. The Facilitator can use this moment to encourage the Participants to show empathy to each member of the triad. It may be especially hard to see the perspective of the Birth Parents and also Adoptive Parents depending on the state of their relationships with both.
 - a. Adoptees - loss of birth family, loss of birth culture, loss of trust/control
 - b. Birth Parents - loss of child, loss of reputation, feelings of guilt, loss of family & friends through decisions made

- c. Adoptive Parents - loss of expectations/hopes, possible loss of children through miscarriages or infertility, loss of family & friends through decisions made
2. Rejection - Discuss the deep sense of abandonment & isolation that can be felt in adoptees and how it can lead to how they interact and approach other interpersonal relationships. For those who are willing, ask, **‘Can you share a time when you felt rejected (not having to do with adoption)? Did it sting harder?’** Most of the Participants may express feelings of rejection by friends at school, so this discussion point is meant to relate the sensitivity of rejection from friends to the deep sense of rejection that they already experienced within their adoption stories.
3. Guilt/Shame - Discuss how feelings of rejection can often lead to experiencing guilt and shame. Remind the Participants that none of their reasons for adoption are their faults. It can be helpful to differentiate between Guilt & Shame by asking, **‘Do you think there is a difference between guilt and shame?’**
 - a. Guilt - responsibility of having done something wrong
 - b. Shame - guilty feelings of humiliation and worthlessness making it a part of ‘who you are’ (never okay!)
4. Grief - Discuss how grief can be experienced by anyone, but each person grieves differently. The Facilitator can tie in the 5 Stages of Grief (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance), making note that it’s not a step-by-step process as much as a journey of healing that ebbs and flows like a wave. It’s a helpful question to ask, **‘Why is Grief a separate core issue from Loss? What is the difference between the two?’** The point in asking this would be for the Participants to recognize that when there is a loss, one MUST grieve afterwards. Even if someone doesn’t think they are grieving, they are—it’s a matter of choosing to grieve healthily or unhealthily (the concept of ‘coping skills’ will be discussed in Session III).
5. Identity - Discuss how, without realizing it, adoptees are on a quest to understand who they are and where they fit in. Start at the basics of what a person’s Identity is through asking, **‘What things in life shape your identity?’** Some ideas would be environment, beliefs, experiences and biological features, hobbies, interests, roles, and more. The Facilitator can touch on how adoptees may look different from their adoptive families and introduce the concept of ‘transracial adoption’ or ‘transcultural adoption,’ meaning when a child of one ethnicity is placed in an adoptive family where the parents are of another ethnicity. (This will be an objective for Session II.) The topic of identity also can bring to surface general ‘big life’ questions, too, such as, “Who am I?” and “What is my Purpose?”
6. Intimacy - Discuss how the previous core issues can all build up to making it hard to develop close relationships. The Facilitator can ask, **‘Can you share who you’re closest to? What are they like? What is special about your relationship with them?’** The idea of asking these questions is to see how the Participants speak of their family and friends. Sometimes, teens will mention a friend that is their closest person, rather than a parental figure. Words such as trust

and acceptance may come up. The Facilitator can empathize and express that it's hard but special to find a person that values you as much as you value them.

7. Mastery/Control - Discuss the very important idea that so much of what has impacted adoptees is the result of other people's choices and decisions. Even if the decision was healthy and right, it was still out of the adoptee's control; it greatly dictated the direction of their life, leaving them with feelings of wanting to know, expect, and control life. The Facilitator can ask, **'What do you think is at the root of control?'** as well as, **'What areas do you seek to control?'** The root of control is fear of the unknown, which makes sense because adoptees were thrust into big transitions and changes at often young and formative ages.

Q&A and Conclusion - It is encouraged to leave the last five to ten minutes to debrief and check in on how the Participants are feeling. The Facilitator can ask, **'Did any of the 7 Core Issues stand out to you? If so, which one and why?'** The core issues will be A LOT of information to take in, so encourage the Participants to process it with their parents and/or a trusted adult after the session. The Facilitator is encouraged to send the PDF handout of the 7 Core Issues of Adoption to parents for them to observe. Overall, discussion of the core issues is supposed to put to words and create some meaning out of the struggles that may not have been considered to be connected to the adoptee's childhood trauma and adoption stories.

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