

**ADOPTING THE HURT CHILD: HOPE FOR FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL-NEEDS KIDS**

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**GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**SESSION 1:**

**PREFACE AND INTRODUCTION**

**What kinds of things prompted you to join this discussion group? Feel free to share information about your unique family situation that has something to do with adoption of a hurt child.**

**When you were reading the preface and the introduction, what came up that you could relate to in terms of your own experiences exploring adoption?**

**What did you think about the premises discussed on pages 16 & 17? Do you agree with them or not?**

## **CHAPTER 1: THE CHILD WHO WAITS-A LONG ROAD TO LOVE**

**How many of your children have had journeys similar to those of Sam, Timmy, Angela, Mark, Sally, Ted, and Mike?**

**How do think that their experiences have impacted their lives and your family? How did your expectations of adoption match the reality of what you are living with?**

**Did your social worker adequately prepare you for the adoption? Did you have complete disclosure of the difficult areas that you face?**

**SESSION 2:**

**CHAPTER 2: THE CHILD WITH ATTACHMENT DIFFICULTIES- COMMON BEHAVIORS OF KIDS WITH ATTACHMENT DIFFICULTIES**

**How many of you have children who have developmental delays? How does this affect how you parent them?**

**Do any of you have children who have been diagnosed with Reactive Attachment Disorder? In looking at the symptoms of this condition on pages 31 & 32, are these familiar to you? Do your children have some or most of these symptoms?**

**Which of these symptoms cause you the most difficulty on a day to day basis?**

**Which ones trigger your own feelings? Do any of them make you feel 'crazy'?**

**Which ones cause you to feel powerless?**

**Which ones bring-up anger?**

**How do you try to reduce your frustration? What gives you some relief?**

**If you are married, how do these problems impact your relationship?**

**Are you surprised about the split that may have occurred in your relationship?**

**What have you done to help this problem?**

**How often do you take time just to be with your spouse and/or your supports system?**

**SESSION 3:**

**CHAPTER 3-THE CYCLE OF BONDING-INTERRUPTIONS FROM ABUSE AND NEGLECT**

**Did you know just how important the early days, months, and years were for a child?**

**Do you think that your child's early trauma may have lifelong consequences for him/her as well as for the rest of your family?**

**Let's discuss all of the areas of a child's life which are listed on page 53.**

**Social/behavioral development**

**Cognitive development**

**Emotional development**

**Cause-and- effect thinking**

**Conscience development**

**Reciprocal relationships**

**Parenting**

**Accepting responsibility**

**How do you address difficult information about your child's birth family? Are you completely honest about this information?**

**How do you feel when your child expresses positive things about his/her birth parents when you know some of the horrible things that they did?**

#### **CHAPTER 4: THE TOLL OF IMPERMANENCE- A CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM IN CRISIS**

**Do any of you have children who were reunited with their birth parents before they were permanently removed?**

**How did reunification complicate the child's capacity to trust you? To attach to you?**

**How many people are in a kinship placement? How has this relationship affected your adoption?**

**How many different placements did your child have before being adopted? What were some of the reasons for their being moved so many times?**

**Let's talk about the kinds of things that sometimes develop as a result of repeated moves. Look at the list on pages 70 and 71.**

**What you think about the things listed on pages 75 and 76.**

**SESSION 4:**

**CHAPTER 5: PUTTING TOGETHER A FAMILY-ISSUES THAT AFFECT PLACEMENT**

**CHAPTER 6: DREAMS AND REALITIES-PHASES OF THE ADOPTION PROCESS**

**Let's talk about the process of your adoption. Here are some things that might facilitate our discussion:**

**How did you make the decision to adopt?**

**What were you told about your child before you made the decision to adopt him/her?**

**Do you think there were reasons you were selected other than what you were told?**

**How you feel your agency handled the entire adoption process?**

**Were you clear about the kinds of issues you would have trouble dealing with?**

**What were some of the things that you knew your family would not be able to live with? Have any of you had those issues emerge since you adopted?**

**Let's discuss some of the phases you may have experienced. These are discussed in Chapter 6.**

**The Emotional Roller Coaster**

**Gathering Information**

**Getting To Know Each Other**

**To Be or Not To Be a Family**

**SESSION 5:**

**NOTE:** If there are no participants who have adopted from other countries you can choose to move on to the next chapter and discussion.

**CHAPTER 7-INTERCOUNTRY ADOPTIONS-THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES**

**What countries are your children from?**

**Did your children experience trauma, i.e., abuse, neglect, or sexual abuse?**

**What kinds of problems does your child have that are related to the effects of being institutionalized?**

**Did any of you do any of the things listed on pages 117-120? What other things did you do that proved to be helpful?**

**Have people either outside of your family completely or your relatives made comments that were insensitive or hurtful? How have you handled these kinds of things?**

**If you have a trans-racial adoption, have you experienced things that you did not expect?**

**SESSION 6:**

**CHAPTER 8: GETTING USED TO EACH OTHER-EARLY ISSUES IN THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY**

**How did your child test your rules?**

**How long did it take for your child to psychologically 'move into' your family?**

**How does your child respond to global praise (as discussed on page 127)?**

**Let's look at the list near the bottom of page 128. Think about these questions in terms of your own life experiences. How do you answer these?**

**Has this discussion group provided support that has been helpful?**

**Many times, families who have very difficult children don't have time or don't make time to have fun. What do you do to have fun? Have you noticed that fun activities help everyone get some distance from the difficult times?**

**CHAPTER 9: SIBLINGS-THE OLD, THE NEW, THE FEELINGS!**

**How many of you adopted or are considering adopting a sibling group?**

**Has this been challenging?**

**What are the benefits? For the kids? For your family?**

**Does your child have birth siblings who have been adopted by another/other families?**

**Do you stay in touch with them? Do the kids want to maintain contact?**

**How do your adopted children relate to their new siblings in your family?**

#### **CHAPTER 10: GIVING YOUR CHILD A HISTORY-REGINA'S BAG OF TRICKS**

**Let's go through this chapter now and look at each of the very specific things that are presented.**

**Which of these things have you done?**

**Which have been most helpful?**

**Have you come up with other 'tricks' that have worked for your child and family?**

**SESSION 7:**

**CHAPTER 11: TREATMENT FOR THE HURT CHILD-MAKING IT EFFECTIVE**

**How many of you have taken your child to therapy?**

**Did you find any specific approach helpful?**

**Did the therapist seem to have adequate adoption related knowledge? Did the therapist seem to believe what you were telling them? Did they align themselves with the child?**

**How much did the therapist address trauma, loss, attachment, etc.?**

**Were you included in the treatment process?**

## **CHAPTER 12: WHEN ADOPTION FAILS-PARENTS AND KIDS IN CRISIS**

**When adoptive placements fail before legalizations, it is called disruption. When an adoption fails after legalization, we call it dissolution.**

**Has anyone experienced either a disruption or dissolution?**

**How did that affect the rest of the family?**

**Did you get support from other parties, i.e., relatives, adoption agency professionals, people in your faith based family?**

**Have some of you considered ending the adoption either before or after legalization?**

**Do you think that some children just can't live in a family situation?**

**What kinds of things might they do that would make it very difficult for any family to manage?**

**SESSION 8:**

**CHAPTER 13: WHEN ADOPTION WORKS-HEALING THE HURT CHILD**

**When did you believe that your child actually had become a member of your family and wasn't just a boarder?**

**When do you feel that you actually claimed your child as your own?**

**On pages 216 and 217 there is a discussion of Growth and Regression. Has anyone seen this process with your child/children?**

**Has anyone had a moment at which they internally shouted, “Finally she has made it!”?**

**CHAPTER 14: SUCCESS STORIES-FOUR FAMILIES WHO MADE IT WORK**

**Can you relate to any of these four families and their successful outcomes?**

**Did any of the stories remind you or your own success story?**

**Would anyone like to share your success story?**

## **CHAPTER 15: REFLECTIONS FROM THE TRENCHES-WHAT IT'S LIKE TO HURT AND HEAL**

**Many of you have your own reflections. In this closing session, it seems that it would be helpful if we discuss anything that may not have been talked about before now.**

**How has this discussion group been helpful?**

**Have the things that others have shared been useful for you and your family?**

**Do any of you have contact with each other outside of these meetings? Would that be helpful?**