

POST ADOPTION RESOURCE CENTER

Newsletter

“Not Your Average Parenting” Book Club

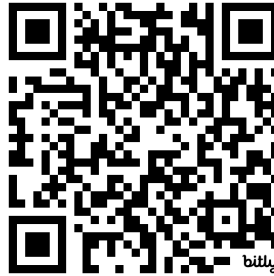
Adoptive, foster, kinship, guardianships parents and respite caregivers, please join us for a book club to explore books that offer insight, support and a sense of community. Child welfare professionals are also invited and welcome to attend.

Support groups and events are held in conjunction with MDHHS.

Last Tuesday of each month

12 p.m. or 6 p.m. Virtually

Link: <https://bit.ly/NYAPBookClub>



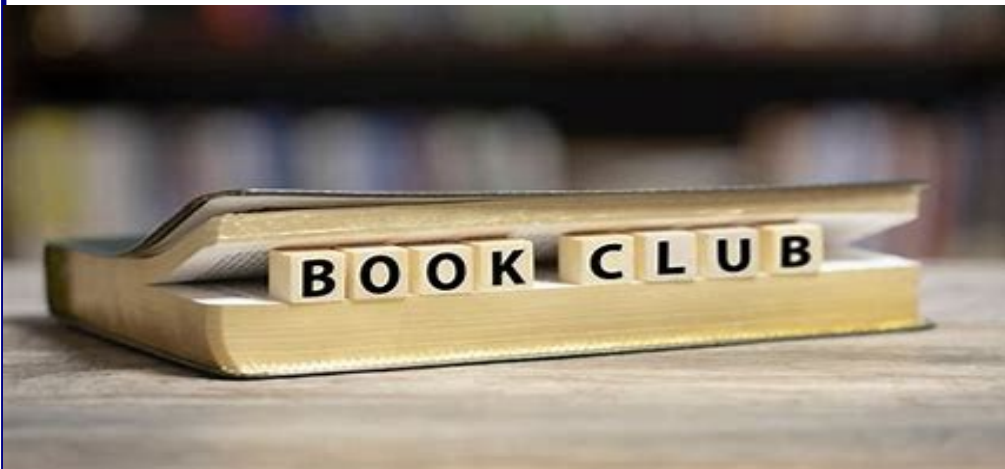
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**Contact a PARC
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Check out upcoming events,
webinars and resources on our
Facebook page:

U.P. Post Adoption Resource Center
<https://www.facebook.com/906PARC>

The Post Adoption Resource Center is a program of U.P. KIDS and is funded by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

Seven Core Issues of Adoption-Shame and Guilt

By Shifra Cooper, post adoption supervisor

At some point in your life, you have probably experienced shame or guilt as they are both social emotions that are common within interactions, society, culture, and even parenting styles. Shame and guilt are meant to prevent people from acting only in their own self-interests, being consciously aware of others and their impact on others.

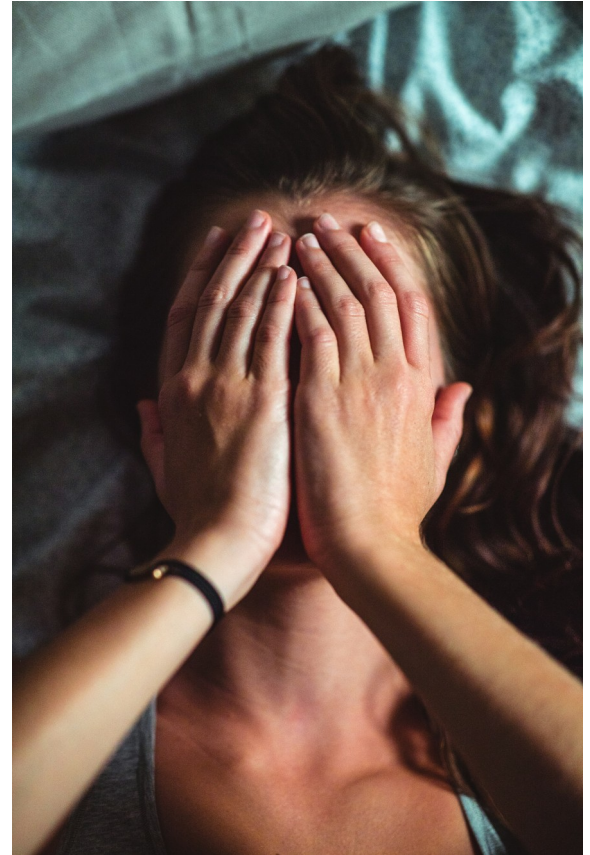
Guilt is adaptive because it makes us aware that our actions may impact other people. It relates to the act of doing by causing a person to feel remorse for something they have done, real or imagined. Shame is maladaptive, it's a deep and painful feeling that reflects how we feel about ourselves. It may make it easier to remember that shame is about being while guilt is about doing.

Shame begins with a negative reflection from others, when we receive shame from others, we internalize it, create a narrative around it, and begin to believe it. It can be caused by negative body language, negative tone, a denial of affection or attention, or derogatory words that demean a person. A person may experience stigmatization and stereotypes that come with shame for being who they are. A child, who is adopted, may experience stigmatization exemplifying the feelings of feeling unwanted, underserving while the stereotyping of their situation may cause.

When a child experiences intense shame from infancy into their formative years, their inner critic is developed, producing a negative and harsh view of themselves, their caretakers, and the world. Shame can become deeply embedded into the mind and the body, following a person through development and into adulthood. For adopted children, shame shapes the narrative that they are "not wanted," "not loveable," "not good enough," etc. They may silently or unconsciously believe it was their fault for being adopted and prevent or impact them from talking about themselves in positive ways, always being their own worst critic, regardless of the truth. Shame and guilt are often left in secrecy and not discussed, living within our bodies.

For adoptive parents, shame and guilt may be present in the inability to conceive and have their own biological child or when questioned about the adoption due to stigmatized and stereotyped language from society, friends, and even family. Adoptive parents may also experience shame and guilt within interactions with their adoptive child. There may be feelings triggered by the child and the feelings they have towards the birth parents of their adoptive child.

Birth parents may also feel an immense amount of shame and guilt for placing or losing their child. This is regardless of the circumstances being a choice or a loss of parental rights. For birth parents, shame and guilt may stem from a feeling of inadequacy because they were not able to meet the needs of their child, their pregnancy was unintended, or they felt like they were viewed as never good enough to be a parent. Birth parents who no longer have custody or parental rights of their children are often judged by friends, family, acquaintances, and society.



Seven Core Issues of Adoption-Shame and Guilt

By Shifra Cooper, post adoption supervisor

Shame and guilt may cause an adoptive child to feel undeserving of love, unwanted, or defective. They may feel different from other family members because they are not biologically related or came into the family at an older age. They may notice that they are treated differently by family members, internalizing the interactions. Adoptive children may truly believe, regardless of facts or circumstances, that adoption was their fault, caused by them, or that they could have done something to prevent it.

These feelings of shame and guilt are often internalized by all members of the adoption constellation. Internalizations may lead to feelings of depression, anxiety, anger, and grief. Constellation members, but especially adoptive children, may experience nightmares, lower self-esteem, and lowered sense of self-worth. For adopted children, they may also have trouble interpreting right versus wrong, difficulty with healthy relationships, difficulty with attachments, and experience trust issues. They may hold the belief that they are broken, unwanted, that they don't matter, or even at fault for their own history.

When we can recognize and are open to internalized feelings, healing can begin within the family unit. It begins with addressing self-esteem and self-worth through connectedness, acknowledging uniqueness, establishing power and independence, and creating sustainable positive role models. Additionally, the truth of adoption and emotions should be discussed with all involved openly and honestly in age and developmentally appropriate ways.

Ways to address feelings of shame and guilt:

- Improve self-esteem and self-worth
 - Develop connectedness.
 - Acknowledge uniqueness.
 - Establish and encourage personal power.
 - Form sustainable positive role models and encourage positive relationships.
- Be open and honest about adoption, discussing it with age-appropriate and clear, honest language.
- Challenge and reframe negative narratives.
- List five things that cause feelings of shame or guilt then question:
 - Do they relate in any way to the adoption?
 - How do they relate?
- Work within your family unit to acknowledge feelings of shame and guilt.
- Discuss feelings of inadequacy.
- Praise self and praise others in the adoption constellation, especially praise the adopted child.
- Practice self-care and self-nurturing strategies that improve the physiological system.
- Celebrate living in the present.
- Contact a mental health professional who is informed about adoption issues.



Roszia, S. K., & Maxon, A. D. (2019). *Seven core issues in adoption and permanency: A comprehensive guide to promoting understanding and healing in adoption, foster care, kinship families and third party reproduction*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Meet Our Newest PARC Staff Member

My name is Tylor Kistler, and I have worked at U.P. Kids for almost three years. I have spent most of my time here working in foster care, adoption, and family preservation and am so excited to step into the world of post adoption services. Similarly to my time at U.P. Kids, I have lived in the U.P. for about three years. I enjoy spending my time outdoors with my wife, Lily, and my dog, Ziggy. We go for hikes and bike rides and take endless trips to the beach. I also enjoy downhill skiing and softball. When I am not outside getting sunburnt, I enjoy relaxing indoors with a movie, book, or video game. I am thrilled to be joining this community and look forward to my time in the post adoption resource center .



Children's Healthy Sexual Development and Behavior

Shifra Cooper, post adoption supervisor

Healthy sexual development is a natural part of children's development. However, these conversations around sexual development and behavior can be uncomfortable, and at times, alarming. It's important that this part of development be discussed and viewed in a strength-based way that fosters safety, acceptance, and open communication. For the safety and emotional health of our children, it's essential that we have a comprehensive understanding of healthy sexual development and behavior.

In this article, we will highlight key ideas from Jerry Petersons training on Healthy Sexual Development (Birth to 17) from May 28th and The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) resource on sexual development and behavior in children to gain a comprehensive and trauma-informed understanding of how to support children's sexual health.

Before developmental stages and behavior are explored, it's important to recognize that curiosity is a natural part of human development. Children and youth often explore their bodies, relationships, and gender, which is not only expected, but also developmentally appropriate. Throughout stages of physical development, there is also sexual development that is shaped by age, experiences, and the environment. When caregivers can provide safe nurturing touch and honest communication, they are able to help support long-term physical and emotional well-being.

First, we should understand that typical sexual behaviors in children are spontaneous, mutual, age-appropriate, and easily redirected. These behaviors include exploring their own or others' bodies, asking questions about reproduction or gender, and even imitating adult roles during play. These behaviors are a normal part of development and are not necessarily signs of trauma or exposure to inappropriate content.

Children's Healthy Sexual Development and Behavior

Shifra Cooper, Post Adoption Specialist

Developmental stages:

Birth to age six:

- Children explore their own bodies and the bodies of others, which can include:
 - Touching genitals.
 - Enjoyment of being naked.
 - Showing curiosity about physical differences.
- How can you support?
 - Use accurate names for body parts.
 - Introducing concepts of consent and privacy.
 - Stay calm when these behaviors arise.



Seven to twelve years:

- This is the onset of puberty and increased interest in relationships. You can expect:
 - Masturbation.
 - Questions about reproduction.
 - Discussions of sexual development and sexual behavior with peers.
 - May begin to explore gender and sexual identity.
- How can you support? Without shame or fear-based messaging:
 - Discuss physical changes.
 - Discuss values.
 - Discuss boundaries.



Teens, ages twelve to seventeen:

- Adolescents often have a heightened awareness of:
 - Their bodies.
 - Personal Identity.
 - Gender identity exploration.
 - Sexual identity exploration.
 - Their romantic interests.
- They may also:
 - Engage in risk-taking behaviors.
 - Struggle with peer pressures.
- How can you support? Provide consistent and open conversations about:
 - Healthy relationships.
 - Consent.
 - Sexual orientation.
 - The influence of media, including pornography.



Children's Healthy Sexual Development and Behavior

Shifra Cooper, post adoption supervisor

Responding to Behaviors

It's so easy to react in the spur of the moment. It can be scary when you find your child engaging in an unexpected activity. In order to get the most accurate information and explore the issue through a trauma-informed lens, we have to stay calm, assess the situation, and engage in conversation.

Try to avoid yes or no questions and focus instead on open-ended ones like, "What were you doing?" or "Where did you get the idea?" These questions help you better understand the child's perspective and give space to discuss boundaries and verbalize expectations about what's appropriate in public and private spaces. This opens the door for ongoing, open, and supportive conversations.

Problematic Sexual Behaviors

It's important to acknowledge that while most sexual behaviors are completely normal, some may be considered problematic. These can include behaviors that happen frequently, involve coercion or secrecy, come with strong emotional reactions, or occur between children with a large age or developmental difference. Sometimes these behaviors can be a sign of trauma. They can also be the result of something less severe, like an unmet relational need, a lack of supervision, or simply not having the right information. That's why it's important that we respond thoughtfully and gather all the information we can, so we can approach the situation in a strength-based, trauma-informed way.

Special Considerations

The "bonding hormone," oxytocin, is released during physical touch and plays a key role in forming secure attachments. So, when children have lacked nurturing touch in their early relationships, they may seek physical contact in ways that seem dysregulated, like clinging, sexualized behavior, or struggling with boundaries. It's important for us, as caregivers, to recognize that some of these behaviors may be driven by a biological need for connection. When we understand the need behind the behavior, we're better able to respond with empathy and support.



Access to pornography is another sensitive issue—and one we need to talk about openly and honestly. The truth is, many youths will encounter explicit content online or through peers. That doesn't automatically mean something is wrong or that they're being deviant—it's often a part of normal exploration. The reality is that most of us carry tiny computers in our pockets, making access easier than ever, whether it's intentional or by accident. If a young person is found viewing this kind of material, it's essential to respond with openness and support. Creating a safe space and staying approachable makes it far more likely they'll come to us with questions, concerns, or for guidance in the future.

Children's Healthy Sexual Development and Behavior

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Addressing Biases

It's easy, as adults, to misinterpret behaviors based on our own experiences, understanding, or even discomfort. That's why it's so important to approach each situation with developmental awareness and to consider the possibility of trauma when discussing incidents, reporting concerns, or forming opinions. Using objective language and gathering all available information helps ensure that our responses are thoughtful, informed, and grounded in care rather than assumption.

What You Can Do

Normalize conversations early and often to support healthy sexual development and use accurate terms when answering questions. As caregivers, it's important to model healthy, respectful relationships and respond to children's questions without shame or fear. Let them know it's safe to talk to you about anything because trust and safety are built through open, ongoing dialogue.

In partnership with: Sexual Development and Behavior in Children Information for Parents and Caregivers. (n.d.). https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources/sexual_development_and_behavior_in_children.pdf

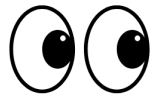


5-4-3-2-1 Mindfulness Grounding Technique

This grounding game can help the whole family find their way back to the moment. It's like a scavenger hunt for the senses.

Why does it work? It brings your body and your brain back together by focusing on your senses, almost like pressing the reset button.

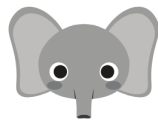
Try it together. You can do it out loud as a family or quietly on your own.



5 things you can see.



4 things you can touch.



3 things you can hear.



2 things you can smell.



1 things you can taste.

We Are Here For You!

- Let us know how we can help.
- What training topics interest you?
- What activities would you like us to host for your family?
- How can we help you through our support groups?
- Do you have ideas or suggestions?
- Contact us through email, phone, or our Facebook page.

