To Recognize is to Heal
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Tell me about yourself

* How many foster parent?
* How many adoptive parent?
* How many child welfare professionals?
* Write down your loss(es) in 2018?

*Who is out there?
* Becoming an Adoptive Family: What is the experience really like?
* Think through the Process
* Expect an Emotional Journey
* Prepare for the Long Haul
* Care Coordinator and Diabetes Navigator (Raphael Health Center, Indianapolis, IN)

* Over 20 Years of Child Welfare experience

* Public Speaker (specialized in Balancing Mind, Body and Soul, Safe Tots, Working with Biological Families & Mental Health and African-Americans)

* Intro to the Presenter: Professional
* Mother (Birth, Guardianship and Adoption)
* Guardian to a special needs adult (former foster child) since 2005.
* Foster Parent (2001-2015)
* Adoptive Mom (1st adoption in 2008 and 2nd adoption in 2015)
The Objectives of the Presentation

* Define Grief and Loss and the Stages

* Understanding Children, Parents’ (Foster/Biological/Adoptive) Reaction to Separation

* Understanding Children and Biological Parent’s Reaction to Separation

* Helping Foster/Adoptive Families Cope with Grief, Loss and Separation

* Self Care tips, Support Suggestions and Activities
Loss is produced by an event which is perceived to be negative by the individuals involved. This can result in long-term changes to one’s social situations, relationships, or thinking.
* Grief is the emotional, physical and behavioral reaction to loss.
* Shock
* Anger
* Bargaining
* Depression/Sadness
* Understanding/Resolution

* **Stages of Grief and Loss**
Many people do not experience the stages of Grief and Loss in the order presented here and that is ok.

The key is to understand the stages, not to feel like you must go through them in a precise order.
Rather than a series of stages, think of the grieving process as a roller coaster, full of ups and downs, highs and lows.

Remember: Grief is a natural response to a loss
* It is hard to display your feelings
* Avoids others (family, friends, professionals)
* Deny the event happen
* Refusal to acknowledge
* Something that surprises and can upset people
* (D)on’t (e)ven k(n)ow (I) (a)m (l)ying about the reason for the loss
* You feel guilty about the loss
* You blame others for the loss
* Strong feeling of being upset because of something wrong or bad

*Anger/Protest*
* Try to “bargain” with whoever is thought to have the power to change the situation.

* To bring to a desired level

* Make promises to do what is necessary to get back whatever was lost (staying clean, no bad behaviors, even recant the abuse/neglect).

* Have a belief that a certain way of thinking or behaving will serve to prevent the loss.
* A state of feeling sad
* Withdrawal
* Change in eating patterns
* Change in sleeping patterns
* Thoughts of suicide
* Effects in personal life
* Effects in professional life

* Depression/ Sadness
* The person begins to respond to the people around him/her in a more “normal” manner
* The person begins to reorganize life and finds feeling of hope instead of despair.
* No longer sad, mad, or in shock

*Resolution/Acceptance/Understanding*
Remember, grieving is a personal process that has no time limit, nor one “right” way to do it.
When a child enters your home, whether through foster care or adoption, they come with a tremendous amount of grief and loss.
* As a child (before age 18 years old), which one of the losses on the next slide have you experience?

* As an adult, which one of the losses on the next slide have you experience?

* 1st Exercise
Losses that include birth parents, extended family, home, pets, neighborhoods, schools, friends, treasured belongings, and culture.
* Found the room(s) smell differently
* Couldn’t find the toilet in the middle of the night
* Hated the food being served in the home
* Wanted to turn on or off the lights
* The temperature in the home is uncomfortable
* Allergic and/or fearful of the pets in the home
* Bedtime of the family was a lot earlier or later than your own routine

* Please raise your hand if......)Have you ever had to stay at someone else’s home.
Now think about the child(ren) placed in your house
One Child, Two Worlds: Where Do I Fit? How Do I Fit?
Exercise 2 (List 2 of your losses)
Separation from persons to whom we are closely attached is always experienced as a loss.

The loss of one’s parents is generally the most significant loss a child/adult can experience.

When a child is removed from their parent(s), his/her attachment systems are challenged in a way that may affect their relationships for the rest of their life.

* The child’s reaction to separation
Did you know?

* In the past, Foster Parents were warned not to get too attached to the children in their care.

* It is now considered desirable that Foster Parents and Children attach to one another to nurture healthy future attachments for the child.
* Working with Behaviors

* Social Services Turnover

* Children come to Foster Care for numerous reasons. Some behaviors can be mild to extreme.

* Working in the Child Welfare System can be challenging and stressful which often leads to turn over

* The Challenges of Being a Foster/Adoptive Parent
* You can’t come visit if you are bringing “that kid”
* Bio kids ashamed of their foster/adoptive siblings’ behaviors
* Taking time off work

* Lack of qualified childcare
* Please give other examples

* Supports are lost
*Compassion Fatigue: “feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by suffering or misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the pain or remove the cause.

*Burnout: characterized as a cumulative events that are fueled by stress, supervision and highly demanding job.

*Let's Talk about what can happen to us
*The Challenges of Being a Foster/Adoptive Parent*

*Interacting with Birth Family*

*Be honest with yourself, talk it over with your social service supports or someone you trust*

*Keep appointments with the birth families and remain positive in front of your foster child(ren)*
The Challenges of Being a Foster Parent

Court System

An overworked Court system can really add to the challenge of foster parenting.

Remember the Judge has the final word on which direction a case goes, whether that be termination or reunification.
*The Challenges of Being a Foster Parent*

*Being Part of a Team*

- As a Foster Parent you are automatically a part of a team (You are a licensed professional)
- It can be difficult working with a team (social workers, court officials, therapist(s), birth family, etc.)
- Be prepared and show up with an open mind
* Loss of a child to another placement (relative, residential, new permanency plan even death)

* Loss of a child to reunification

* Loss of informal supports due to being a foster parent

* Loss of personal relationships (divorce, death of love one, employment, etc.)

* Loss of providers, case workers, team members, etc.

* Remember your kids experience loss too

* Various Losses for a Foster/Adoptive Parent
* Loss of informal supports due to being a foster/adoptive parent

* Loss of personal relationships (divorce, death of love one, employment, dream etc.)

**Open discussion or in groups**
Day to Day Decision making
Role and/or identity as a parent
Respect of family, community and friends
Loss of income and the related benefits
* “My” Statement
* “Where was I” pictures, discussions of family events
* “My identity” where do I fit in
* Am I ever treated differently
* Does adoption mean forever

**Child loss**
* Allow Yourself to Grieve
* First and foremost, you need to **grieve**. Allow yourself to grieve for all the various aspects of this loss. Grieve for:
  * The children you always dreamed of raising and will never know.
  * The life you had always planned to live.
  * The mother or father you expected to be.
  * The loss of the certainty and innocence of life.

* Not able to have children physically
When children are strongly desired and you learn you can’t have them, it is a deep and profound loss. It requires the process of grieving every bit as much as the death of a loved one does
* Interfere with attachment to other children/afraid to get close
* Take on a form of anger (resulting in complaints)
* Leave little energy for yourself, your family members (which can cause marital strain, parent-child difficulties)
* Prematurely withdraw emotionally from the child when a move is planned as way of warding off grief
* When the child wants more involvement with bio family

* Unresolved Grief for Foster/Adoptive Parents
Loss, regardless of the relationship can be difficult.

Let’s talk about some activities to help with the grief process for Foster/Adoptive Parent(s):

* Take care of yourself physically (Your mind and body are connected)
* Forgive (That also means forgive yourself)
* Share your pain with others you trust
* Tune into what you are feeling
* Don’t let anyone tell you how to feel (Your grief is personal)* Same loss different reactions
* Let yourself cry
* Have supportive people around you (Foster/Adoptive parent support groups, relative care support groups, Foster/Adoption Conferences resource parent trainings)
* Take time for yourself (Mommy/Daddy time out)
* Give yourself permission to take a break

* Loss, regardless of the relationship can be difficult. *
Never make a permanent decision for a temporary problem.

You will never see a rainbow if you don't have a few clouds.
I never doubt the existence of angels...

*In Loving Memory of My Angel: Mia 2003-2009*
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*Thank You