they really don't understand and they don't really know your feelings. They never felt the same way. They're not from a divorced family—they don't feel the same way so it's not the same. Here, everyone feels what I feel, so I feel comfortable talking. It's much better than talking to anyone else.

Worker #1: You raised the issue last week of Diane and I both coming from one parent families and whether that was helpful or not helpful to people in this group.

Amy: I guess it is, sort of, because you seem to understand more of what it's like to be from a one-parent family. And you can't say "Oh well, you know, you'll get over it" and you know, all this that everyone says (with sarcasm)...(as in) "Don't worry, you'll get over it". So you know how it feels, so you help us, you know.

Worker #1: I guess I also don't feel pity; I don't think Diane feels that either.

Worker #2: Is that the kind of feeling you get from other people?

Mindy: Sometimes, it depends, I also pity myself.

Worker #2: What about this group, in terms of pity?

Mindy: It's not really pity. It's like we understand each other 'cause we're all going through the same thing.

Summary

"Families with adolescents can be described as being in a state of transitional crisis characterized by confusion."[3] In the one-parent family, the loss of a parent intensifies the confusion for these adolescents. The added stress of parental loss is most difficult for an adult as well as an adolescent. The youngsters, should be allowed to ventilate their feelings of guilt, anger, and hurt.[4]

"If we tolerate their anger, whether it is directed at us, at the deceased, or at God, we are helping them take a great step towards acceptance without guilt. If we blame them for daring to ventilate such socially poorly tolerated thoughts, we are blameworthy for prolonging their grief, shame and guilt."[5]

It is important to recognize that the experience of loss by death has many characteristics that are similar to those experienced by divorce. However, in the process of divorce, the parent is living, and the loss may be interpreted as an additional rejection.[6]

One of the major foci of this year's group has been to help these adolescents who have experienced the death or divorce of parents verbalize their feelings and work on the process of mourning. It is important to note that this mourning does not only occur with recent loss but often remains buried and festers over many years. This has been demonstrated by the content of group discussions during the past year.

In summary, the youth in the group have been able to share initial denial over parental loss, their embarrassment over coming from a one-parent family, anger at the remaining parent, the parent who has been lost, siblings, teachers and themselves. They have also discussed their guilt over causing the parental loss, of burdening the remaining parent and fear of the loss of the remaining parent. They found the "rap" group to be a place where they could talk about these issues, without being judged and ostracized for being different.

Groups like these are appropriate and necessary in the Jewish community center. The single-parent family is very much a part of the Jewish community. It is important to view the single-parent family as having additional needs and tasks that make it different from the two-parent family. Difference here does not necessarily imply pathology, but elements of some dissimilarity of experience.

[3] Frances H. Scherz, "The Crisis of Adolescence in Family Life," *Social Casework*, Vol. XLVIII, April 1967, p. 209.

[4] Elisabeth Kubla-Ross, *On Death and Dying*. Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., N.Y., 1969, p. 179.

[5] Elisabeth Kubla-Ross, *On Death and Dying*. Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., N.Y., 1969, p. 180.

[6] Reva Wiseman, "Crisis Theory and the Process of Divorce," *Social Casework*, April 1975, pp. 205-12.

Adoption and After

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While obviously, there is in adoptive parenthood an extra dimension differentiating it from the biological family, which must be recognized in order to be dealt with effectively, we know there are many couples who are able to recognize and deal with this extra dimension without undue anxiety to themselves or confusion to their children. However, long ago the numbers of couples coming back to the agency, years past legal adoption, made inevitable the conclusion that many were faced with anxieties and conflicts beyond their capacities to deal with alone and so we were spurred to develop our post-adoptive services program.

The title of this paper encompasses a broad subject. So much has been written and discussed regarding adoption, that I will attempt here only to do reasonable justice to the aspect of "after," at least by touching highlights.

Needs For Service After Legal Adoption

Louise Wise Services is now in its 60th year and has placed over 7000 children for adoption. We have always been committed to the concept that adoption does not end with the placement of a child or the signing of a court order, but that it is rather an ongoing part of family life, developing with growth and changes in the child, in the parents, in the relationships of each to the others and to the circumstances of their lives. Since about 1953, we have given considerable thought and put considerable effort into the post-adoptive needs of our families and at this point, although there has been a drop in the numbers of children placed for adoption, our post-adoptive services have actually increased. It has become abundantly clear that while, at least in the near future, there will be many fewer children needing adoption, agencies have a broad and significant service to offer as more and more families are encouraged to seek the help they so obviously need to meet situations special to adoptive parenthood.

We need also to relate to the large numbers of non-agency adoptors, who are often in special need of these services. While of course our agency has responded to spontaneous requests for help from such couples, we have also felt an obligation to the community at large and have reached out through various media publicity to give assurance that the agency offers a warm welcome to all adoptive families who feel a need for help.

While obviously there is in adoptive parenthood an extra dimension differentiating it from the biological family which must be recognized in order to be dealt with effectively, we know there are many couples who are able to recognize and deal with this extra dimension without undue anxiety to themselves or confusion to their children. However, long ago the numbers of couples coming back to the agency years past legal adoption made inevitable the conclusion that many were faced with anxieties and conflicts beyond their capacities to deal with alone and so we were spurred to develop our post-adoptive services program, which is at present a twofold one, consisting of individual counseling and group discussion series, each type of service designed to meet differing needs.

The individual counseling service evolved first and continues as an answer mostly to two classifications of people: one group consists of adoptive parents who are troubled by emotional, physical or behavioral difficulties of their children or with the relationships within the family. A second group consists of adopted adults who are seeking knowledge about their origins and of natural parents seeking information about the child they long ago surrendered. Expectedly, all the clamor of

* Presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Conference of Jewish Communal Service, Boston, June 2, 1976.

recent publicity around the question of sealed vs. open records has caused a substantial escalation in this second group.

Our individual counseling service is not seen as an ongoing therapy program, but rather as one which can either reduce the problem to manageable proportions within one to three interviews plus a psychological work-up where indicated, or as a diagnostic and referral process where the deap seated nature of the problem indicates need for more intensive help. A specially skilled worker is assigned to this demanding task and she has the resource of psychiatric consultation where needed. The service is free to agency adoptors, except for the psychological work-up. Non-agency clients are charged a modest fee.

Individual Counseling—Adoptees

In our experience, most adoptees who come back to the agency are not seeking to actually locate their birth parents, though this may have been their initial request, but are really seeking fuller and more satisfying information about themselves and their origins. We give general descriptive information, but mostly we dwell tactfully on what are usually areas of real concern—the life experience of the adoptee's natural parents at the time that he was conceived and the alternatives, or lack of them, which led to the conclusion that they were unable to assume the roles of parents and that in the best interest of all of them, he should be surrendered. With most of those who come with this need for information about their past, our sympathetic recognition of the validity of this need, the opportunity for airing their questions, their fantasies, their self-doubts, and our sharing of information short of identifying data is most often sufficient satisfaction. There is, of course, a small but vocal and highly visible group driven to the actual reunion with their birth parents, and whether this group will remain a small proportion as now or grow remains to be seen.

It should be pointed out, moreover, that while sometimes a need for more information about one's origins may originate in disturbed family relationships, this is by no means always so. Just as in families where the relationships are warm and positive, adoption does, nevertheless, impose on the parents additional dilemmas, so for the adopted child there are additional dilemmas imposed also. Some individuals handle this with a minimum of anxiety, others need help.

It is the position of the Child Welfare League of America and of most agencies that the law existing in most states, sealing adoption records, should not be changed. While we are not ready to take steps to change the laws, we do feel that we need to maintain a receptive posture, avoid rigidity and recognize changing attitudes of society, which call for more openness in many areas of life today. Studies of systems operating in Scotland, Finland and in a few states in our country, where an adult adoptee has access to his birth records, show that a remarkably small percentage take advantage of the opportunity and fewer still follow through to actually locating their natural parents. While we are not sure yet, if, or how the laws should change, we do believe that if such change should take place, there should be adequate protection for all *three* parties involved with some professional oversight. The adoptee's and the biological parents' wishes for privacy and protection from potential disruption in their lives need consideration as do equally the wishes and feelings of the adoptive parents.

Individual Counseling—Adoptive Parents

We have been discussing adoptees who came back to the agency for more information about their natural origins. While this group has grown lately, for the most part our post-adoptive individual counseling services involved adoptive parents seeking various kinds of help and they often came at a time of crisis. A presenting crisis might refer to deviational development on the part of the child or to disturbed family relationships, but often the crisis was related to anxiety about the telling of adoption: either as to the way in which the parents had handled it, with resulting problems, or their apprehension and resistance to doing so. We became more and more aware of the ongoing and sometimes repressed difficulties with which many adoptive families

struggle. Our experience reinforced the numerous studies which describe the persisting scars endured as a result of infertility. In the family study, workers conscientiously focus on exploring with the couple the special factors which adoption will present to them, including when, how and what to tell the child. However, while all of this certainly has its value and does leave some imprint, we have learned that the discussion in the study is to a great extent an intellectual exercise, since it takes place, of course, in an atmosphere devoid of the charged emotions which will be present in the reality situation.

The period immediately following placement, for most adopting parents, is a time to focus only on the fact that at long last, they are truly parents and to avoid as much as possible the whole topic of adoption. If they have adopted an infant, they have a few years in which they can remain in this somewhat blissful state. When their child reaches 3, 4 or 5 years old, and like all his playmates, becomes interested in babies, kittens and puppies and begins to ask questions about birth, parents are confronted with the fact that the time for "telling", that the moment of truth, perhaps pushed far into the background of their thinking for so long, has indeed now come upon them. Many couples can handle this, as stated before, without undue turmoil. For others, however, the rekindling of all the heartaches associated with their infertility is overwhelming. The tendency is to displace their need to protect themselves to the child, so that it becomes a need to protect their child from pain.

In the study process, the couple usually feels very much "on trial", especially in these days when for each couple, the chances of fulfilling their cherished dreams of a child are so slim. The couple is painfully concerned with presenting themselves as particularly adequate to the demands of parenthood in general and adoptive parenthood in particular and we need to convey to them our sense that adoption may well pose special demands and the agency stands ready to help them, if they seek us. Sometimes the knowledge that they have been chosen from among so many applicants who were denied can be a deterrent to acknowledging later that they are less than completely adequate. As we reassure them in the course of the study of the agency's realistic expectations and our availability at any time, they can more comfortably come back to us for help when they need it. In effect, this can be some degree of preventive therapy.

Group Discussions

As we gained experience, we came to realize that a major source of comfort and help was the assurance to parents that others suffered the same stresses as they, and we came to suspect that for many perhaps the sharing of their feelings and exchange of experiences with others in the same circumstances, might be far more effective than individual counseling. So, in 1955, we began to experiment with group discussions. At first, these were seen as adjuncts to casework in the period spanning placement and legal adoption. However, this proved to be less than fruitful, since in those days most of the children placed were infants and the telling of adoption was still far off in the future and still theoretical. What problems did arise, could well be handled in the usual casework process.

We were, however, receiving requests for help from people whose children were in the 3-6 year old range, that age where the child is verbal and curious about birth. Discussion series for this group were received enthusiastically and declared to be genuinely helpful. Many couples asked to come back at a later time when their children reached a different phase of awareness and as we extended the service, its value became increasingly evident and it has developed into a significant part of our agency's program.

A series consists, usually, of one discussion a week for three successive weeks. These are led by professional staff, trained for the program, and the groups are open to both agency and non-agency adoptors. We strongly urge attendence by both parents, but we do not turn anyone away if one parent finds it impossible to attend. We charge a fee of $20.00 per series for a couple, somewhat less

for only one parent. We have found that the optimal size is eight couples, never less than six. Usually, we attempt to compose the groups in terms of children's ages, as related to the level of understanding and interpretation that will be appropriate. In general, our groups, therefore, are made up of parents with children from the ages of 3-6, (the pre-primary group), those with children from 7-11 and those with adolescent children. We have also had, from time to time, some special groupings, such as those with children both by birth and by adoption or those who adopted transracially. As time has gone on, however, we have, for the most part, abandoned the special groupings as we have come to recognize that what seemed to be special problems are actually extensions of the major themes brought up by all parents.

As each of the children placed by our agency reaches 3 years of age, the parents receive notice that the agency is in process of forming these groups and they are invited to express their interest. At the same time, we engage in a modest publicity campaign, addressed both to agency and non-agency adoptors, with children of all ages. At the end of each series, the leaders are expected to briefly summarize the course of the discussions, noting special areas of interest, of resistances, and evidence of what movement took place. This synopsis helps the leader herself to evaluate her performance, it is useful as a teaching tool for future leaders and the summaries together give an over-all view of the scope of concerns felt at specific times and a historical over-view of some shifting emphasis as well as persisting, constant underlying strains.

The leader sets the tone and imposes just enough structure to provide focus and movement. She starts by having the group introduce themselves and tell something about their children: their age, their sex, if the family has children, both by birth and by adoption or any other pertinent information. The tone she strives for is one of easy, relaxed warmth, accompanied by a sense of serious purpose. She stresses that they are assembled obviously because all of them have some concerns special to adoption and the expectation is that by an open exchange of experience, feelings and even fears, they will be able to help each other. She makes clear that this is not a lecture series and that the agenda will consist of the topics which they themselves present. Practically always, after some initial awkwardness, a warm feeling of esprit de corps develops.

For herself, the leader maintains a goal of having the group eventually think of the telling of adoption, not as an isolated event, but rather as an ongoing part of the whole experience of the family and child living together. While many will have come for a ready-made set of formulae, they easily accept the explanation that because each of us has a different idiom, it is important for parents to use their own words, so that they sound natural to their children, who would otherwise quickly perceive any stiltedness or artificiality in their expression. The more difficult feat is to lead them to some realization as to what causes their "tremendous trepidation" as one parent expressed it. There are those who will over-emphasize the "differentness" of adoption and there will be those who will deny there are significant differences. For both, the deniers and the over-emphasizers, we have found that the group method has been extremely helpful in aiding them to uncover what we have come to see as the two main sources of anxiety: the recurring, often repressed, unhappiness re their infertility and their often unacknowledged, but complicated feelings in regard to the natural mother. When they have gained some insight into the roles still played in their lives by these shadowy specters, most of the questions with which they came begin to fall in place.

A Group Series History

A recent group discussion series illustrates the hold of these two persistent threads. It was somewhat atypical in composition as it was formed at the request of eight couples who lived at a distance from the agency and asked if we would conduct a series in their area. The group was therefore formed on the basis of geography, rather than on our usual criterion of the age of the children involved. The family situations varied widely. Three couples each had adopted three-year-olds. Three couples had children by adoption and by birth. Three couples had children from six to ten years old. Four of the eight couples had adopted from our agency and three couples had attended previous discussion series.

As the leader offered to list their special interests, the group was quick to respond. Couples with one young child raised the usual questions: When is a child old enough to understand? Won't it be a terrible shock? Will he love us less or fear we don't love him as much as if he were born to us? How to reassure both children when a family has a child by birth and by adoption? How to compensate for the inevitable feeling of adoption being different?

Those who had gone through this phase related troubling incidents with their older children. One eight-year-old, usually very amiable, had refused to be included in a class picture, would not give any reason and was so obviously upset that the teacher called the mother. The mother had no need to elicit the story. The child burst into the home, said she had refused to be in the picture because she knew it was to be published in the local paper, was afraid the biological mother would see it, recognize her and come for her. The parents had believed they had dealt with adoption very thoughtfully and they were feeling a sense of failure as well as of concern.

Another eight-year-old had become increasingly preoccupied with questions about his origin and when his mother commented on this, he said with intensity "it bugs me." She answered, "I understand, it bugs me too." She wondered, "Was that right?" Some felt the answer unnecessarily reinforced the "bugging"—attaching something troublesome to adoption. Others approved it as showing the mother's understanding and as being truthful, the most important factor in keeping open lines of communication.

Mrs. S. said they had a situation so special that perhaps it would not fit into the group's frame of reference. They had a ten-year-old daughter by birth and had had one late miscarriage and then a child who died almost immediately after birth. Their daughter had shared their anticipation of both births and had been much affected by the sad outcomes. Two years ago they went to Colombia and adopted an infant boy. They were told by the agency that he had been abandoned. How could you tell such a terrible thing to the boy himself or to their daughter? Should they make up a lie?

One couple had had strong conviction that they should be very free and open and had from an early age given their daughter, now eight, a great deal of quite specific information about the biological mother, and had been especially positive in terms of her decision to surrender. They were concerned because their daughter now talks about her adoption indiscriminately and they think excessively. Is this normal, or does it indicate anxiety? If the latter, why should this be, since they always painted both their role in wanting her and the biological mother's surrender in such positive terms?

One woman thought her own reluctance to open the subject related to the misgiving that the ultimate answer to why a child was surrendered must imply rejection, no matter how much you stress that the surrender was because of love. A father who had attended a previous series, answered by referring to the conclusion reached then, that a child can be confused and frightened by the thought of being sent away because of love. Presumably his adoptive parents love him. Will they, too, send him away? So how *do* you explain surrender? Does the natural mother really have a conflict?

This generated considerable give and take, some concluding that it is more truthful as well as helpful not to use the word love but to describe the biologically mother "neutrally" but positively as having acted out of concern.

Some took strong exception, expressing hostility to the biological mothers as acting generally only out of selfishness. Mr. S. bitterly referred to the abandonment of his child. The leader asked if he knew of any particulars, e.g. where had the child been left? He had been left on the steps of a large church, decently, but poorly dressed. Mrs. S. spoke feelingly of the abject poverty in Colombia, of the children seen everywhere begging and stealing. "Now that I think of it, maybe that's what my child was saved from." Several motives were contemplated: panic of a young girl, the strong stigma of illegitimacy in South America, the large families hard to support. The leader suggested keeping all this in mind and also considering the fact that the child had been placed on the church steps. There was general agreement this was indication of concern and that there was a difference in saying the child was "abandoned" from saying "he was brought to a church."

Mr. and Mrs. S. agreed this was all food for thought, but were still anxious about their original questions: what and when to tell.

Their ten-year-old daughter knew that the little brother whom she adores was adopted; they had described their journey to Colombia and their joy at first sight of him, but had never given any other particulars and the daughter had been asking questions which they had evaded. Once when they referred to the baby as adopted, she had said, "That's disgusting, don't say it to him." What could have stimulated such an expression?

Others referred back to their original questions which had not been resolved. The leader recognized that our involvement with the story of Mr. and Mrs. S. might not seem at first clearly related to the group as a whole. Yet, all of them, those with younger as well as older children, had shown concern as to just how to deal with the "other mother". Might it not help if they could all first clarify their own feelings for themselves? Was there much difference in the generally expressed conflicts regarding the "other mother" from the feelings expressed by Mr. and Mrs. S? There were spontaneous responses that, while nothing was settled, they were surprised at themselves and what they had revealed. They would have much to mull over.

At the second meeting, the leader restated that in the first session, while there had seemed to be considerable diversity of interest, in actuality their questions were interrelated in a large sense. Parents with young children had implied that their apprehension in opening the subject of adoption was to a great extent related to how they could present the natural mother and parents with older children were struggling with the same question, but on a different level, because their children were presenting them with new dimensions. Although some had given considerable thought to this in previous discussions, it seemed potentially fruitful to explore again this troublesome area. The leader proposed that they start at the very beginning, thinking of out-of-wedlock birth. Last week it had been suggested that one factor creating panic for the mother who abandoned her child could have been the stigma of illegitimacy. Our society today is supposed to be much more accepting. How do they actually feel? Much discussion led to a general feeling that whatever the general climate is supposed to be, in their circle out-of-wedlock pregnancy would be a disaster. This yielded expressions of sympathy for the predicament of an unmarried mother in the abstract, but when one man said, "I was furious at her for having a child to give up when we wanted one so much," many echoed him. Had this "jealousy" been one of their problems? Mrs. H. said very emotionally that she can't accept at all the concept of the biological mother's conflict, especially in the case of the mother of their adopted child. This was a 37-year-old woman who had had many previous liaisons, had at the time a relationship of five years' duration with the father of the child, who wanted to marry her. She wouldn't marry him, didn't have an abortion because of religious scruples, but had had no interest in the child, proved by the fact that she wouldn't consent to see him even once. Several people wondered whether perhaps she wouldn't consent to see the child because she was actually ambivalent. One man said she seemed like a woman afraid of close relationship; maybe that's why she wouldn't marry the man or see the child. The leader wondered if it were only the religious scruple barring abortion. Could she have had a need, at 37, to prove she could have a child? Mrs. H. said she knew the woman had been told when 17 years old that she would never be able to conceive. The leader suggested they think what effect this could have had on a girl of 17, the age of dating and of thoughts of marriage and children.

Mrs. O. said that she had been told at 16 that she would never conceive. She had been devastated, "never felt right again 'till I was married and my husband made me feel like a whole woman". This led to recognition that we can't really know all we need to know to judge anyone. The comments veered toward realization that they had tended to view the natural mother as a stereotype, either self-centered and completely shrugging off responsibility or sacrificing natural maternal instincts entirely in the interest of the child. They had had need to suppress the first image as destructive to their child and the second image had never really satisfied them, so they had been blocked.

There was a relaxation of tension, a sense of having cleared away some confusion, an appreciation that perception of the biological mother in a reality rather than stereotype context could help them be more comfortable in presenting her and her decision to their children. One man summed up that, "We all had hang-ups we were pushing out of sight." We left for the last meeting a development of the A B C's of adoption for the younger children, elaboration for the 7-11 age group and exploration of the much publicized search for biological parents.

Summary

I have attempted to describe the post-adoptive program as we have developed it at Louise Wise Services and to illustrate our conviction of the fact, stated in the beginning, that adoption does not end with the signing of the court order.

I have stressed the role of the group interaction as it encourages freedom to express repressed feelings and self-doubts, to promote insight and reinforce strengths. The leader's principle role is to develop focus in the discussion. Above all, however, she can help to dispel the anxiety with which many couples come for help. She can reinforce the fact that while certainly adoptive parents need to recognize and deal with some special problems, these are not of unmanageable magnitude, nor do they require unusual expertise. She can promote their confidence in feeling that if they have clarified their own thinking to a reasonable degree, know what it is they wish to impart and develop trust, they will be able to help their children, so long as they tell the truth and encourage communication. Even if, at some point, they feel that they have expressed themselves inadequately, it is never irreversible. One can always refer back to a conversation and amend or clarify it. Often parents have expressed gratitude for this one result of their attendance at a discussion series; the fact that they were helped to a much more relaxed attitude towards these problems, made them able to enjoy their parenthood so much more. If any service to parents can boast of this much help, it has indeed proved its value.