

Adoptive family life cycle (from Scott & Lindsay, 2003)

The stages of the typical adoptive family life cycle as set out below can be useful in thinking about the different processes parents and children experience on their journeys as an adoptive family. As with all stage models of development, these stages may not happen sequentially; you and your child may experience them in a different order, spend longer dealing with different stages, revisit a stage more than once, or miss out some altogether.

<u>Stage</u>	<u>Adoptive Parents' Tasks</u>	<u>Adopted Children's Tasks</u>
Pre-Adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coping with infertility and feelings of inadequacy as a man or woman, letting go dream of being a birth parent • Helping own parents and siblings, and children (if any), accept plan to adopt • Coping with prolonged evaluative assessments and anxiety of not knowing when they may be offered a child • Preparing for social stigma of adopting • Planning for lifestyle change, e.g. giving up job, change in relationship with partner. • Coping with feelings about accepting a child who may not be "ideal" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For older children, trying to cope with loss of birth parents and uncertainty about future • Coping with difficulty of knowing they will lose current foster parents • Coping with anxiety about future adoptive parents
Infancy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Taking on the identity of an adoptive parent and finding acceptable role models • Developing realistic expectations • Integrating the child into the family • Persisting with affection and establishing secure attachment, even if faced by personal disappointment. 	
Preschool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning the telling process. • Creating an atmosphere conducive to openness about adoption and talking about birth family 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning elements of adoption story • Questioning parents about adoption
Middle childhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping child accept the meaning of adoption, including loss of birth parents, possible anger (especially directed to adoptive mother) • Helping child develop a positive view of birth family. • Coping with any insecurity that telling may engender, worry child may want to leave or not love adoptive parents 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coping with adoption loss. • Exploring feelings about being given up by birth parents, developing an acceptable story around this • Coping with stigma of being adopted. • Validating dual connection to both families.
Adolescence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping young person develop own senses of identity including recognition of traits that may come from birth family; accepting difference from some of their values and style. • Supporting search interest and plans and developing realistic expectations • Coping with adolescent rebelliousness with a sense of proportion, coping with feelings that young person may wish to leave home as soon as possible, thus rejecting the love they gave. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring feelings about search process, finding balance between idealization and vilification of parents • Trying to understand extent to which feelings and behaviour are typical for adolescence and which may derive from being adopted