



DISRUPTION & DISSOLUTION: UNSPOKEN LOSSES

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**Part One:
Disruption and Dissolution-
Can a new beginning emerge from the ending of an
adoptive relationship?
(A journalistic overview)
by
Sheena Macrae**

FOREWARD

"Sheena Macrae's article about disruption and/or dissolution in adoptive families is a courageous piece of work. Sheena is "putting it out there" so that we can begin to really talk about the secret some parents live with. She has included facts, resources, and human perspective, and has raised issues that question parenting responsibility. Thank you, Sheena. I will

pass your article to those adopting in high risk situations. They often don't listen to my recommendations but maybe they will hear your words."

Doris Landry, MS, PC, Therapist specializing in Attachment & Adoption

INTRODUCTION

Adoption. A way of forming a family. Chosen by families who are sure that they can provide a loving home to a child who needs a "forever family"? Sometimes chosen when infertility closes "the bio route" to family. Sometimes chosen when bio kids are grown. Sometimes chosen because parents feel that no matter what, there is space in their home and hearts for a child "in need".

But sometimes, a child comes home with needs that overwhelm the new family. Needs that the parents may not have been made aware of prior to the adoption. Since in the USA there is no Federal oversight on either domestic or international adoptions, agencies are not required to be honest, or to give all the information about a child. It is the experience of many adoptive families that adoption agencies fail to provide potential parents with a full analysis of the child's needs. Sometimes, in the case of Inter-Country Adoption (ICA), agencies *cannot* provide this information because the sending country does not make it available. Families struggle; they haven't known the extent of the child's needs prior to placement. Counselling for parents through the adoption process and post-adoption help, seen as vital in retrospect, is often thin.

Sometimes difficulties arise in adoptive families. They arise because of the clash of cultures that occurs when children "arrive" from economically disadvantaged countries where poverty and lack of public education leave a child ill equipped to succeed here in America. Sometimes there are unrealistic expectations on the part of adoptive families, where a family "needs" a child to 'be grateful' for being rescued. Sometimes abuse, neglect and institutionalization leave a child with no experience in being part of a family. Sometimes, simply and catastrophically, parents and child are "out-of-sync" temperamentally, something not confined to adoptive families. Or it can be any combination of these factors. Sometimes, because of all this, families want OUT.

What happens to cause the breach in the family wall? What makes a disruption happen?

Expert adoption advocates like Nancy Spoolstra (www.radzebra.org; nancy@radzebra.org) insist that getting a "family fit" is one of the most critical factors in making an adoption work, particularly when parents legitimately nowadays desire *reciprocal relationships* with their adoptive children. There is an anticipation that the children will give as well as receive, become interactive in developing an existing family other than

parents will be enriched by their adoptive children as much as they enrich their children.

Some damaged children cannot.

Doris Landry, MS, PC speaks powerfully on this, stating that there is no prospective parent who could envisage the reality of some of the problems a hurt child brings to an adoptive relationship. She insists parenting any special needs child is a special and huge undertaking; it may challenge a family for life. She holds also the issues are parallel for birth-families and adoptive families... the element of surprise at issues can in stun in both.

Deborah Anderson, owner of some of the most effective and effectively moderated disruption-support listservs (see Resources) and mother to more than a few children from disrupted adoptions, speaks also to the fact that children with hurts often find family life unbearably difficult to accept. Deborah has committed herself to helping families with such children meet their children's needs...either in the first adoptive family, or, in another.

What happens between placement and reality that leads down the slippery slope to disruption?

Some thanks before we start....

Nancy and Deborah have been the load-bearing beams in making this Topic possible; as a list we owe them thanks for their frank and open comments. Leceta Chisholm Guibault also needs our thanks; her generosity and knowledge provided many of the links here. Genie Blalack and Julie Beem made changes for the better, in style and content. Carrie Kitze kept believing I could make it to the end. Doris Landry provided a generous assessment of the work as a whole.

Last but not least: Jean Macleod has played a serious game of virtual volleyball with me on this topic. We have exchanged so many mental hard balls I've lost count when any of mine hit goal. She and Nancy conferenced; I reaped the benefit.

Defining the problem

Families fall apart, often damaged by the emotional barrage of supporting a child they don't know how to support. Research (1) shows that more adoptions fail where the child has overwhelming emotional needs than if the problems are cognitive or physical. More adoptions also fail when parental expectation of the child doesn't match reality. Families unprepared to deal with children with severe attachment difficulties (full blown RAD) in conjunction with other severe behavioural problems (eg Bipolar Disorder, PDD) and with children suffering problems caused by illness (eg FAS/FAE) cannot cope. They don't know how to cope, they didn't expect to have to cope and they weren't taught how to cope. To preserve themselves from hurt,

some families move to remove the adopted child from their home and family. Parents and other siblings, both bio and adopted, may be in danger from the disruptive child. Intent to damage and consequential damage, both physical and psychological can be extreme.

A last resort, then, may be sought in **Disruption** (before the adoption is finalised & legalised) and **Dissolution** (when the adoption is dissolved through court process after finalisation). Both terms essentially signify that a proposed adoptive placement or adoptive relationship is terminated. The child involved is removed from the family and placed elsewhere, whether by the adoptive parents or by state or agency placement. But in no way, say the experts, can either the child or the parents carry on as if the adoption has never happened. The burden and scars are with both, and remain in perpetuity, even if mitigated by care and counselling.

And then.... Who are the parents who re-adopt the children from disrupted adoptions? What is the process for placing a child from a disrupting family? Who are the people who place the child? And who are the new parents?

Some Aims

This Guide will address some facts about disruption and dissolution, look at prevention and support, and look at means of helping parents and children as they deal with “the end of a dream”. Moreover, as a community involved in adoption parenting, we need to be asking ourselves how we prevent - on a daily basis - the crises that our fellow adopters who *do* move toward disruption and dissolution are facing. What makes the difference for us? And we need to ask, what we as a group can do, in the wider village of adoption, in what it takes to raise a child, to ease the pain of failed adoptions. For the parents and the children. To ease the burdens and scars, and perhaps see if any positives are there to be found from the relationship that ended.

Prospective adoptive families, whether of children placed domestically or through inter-country adoption need to plan how they hope their future child will fit in their particular family, given existing members and the family *ethos*. All adoptions carry hopes. They also carry risks. Risks increase when information on the children is not full, and where families plan on riskier types of placements, for example, of older children, of children from sending countries where care of institutionalised children is known to be patchy. And all the multiple possibilities of risks prospective parents can and should visualise and plan. Knowing the territory sketchily isn't the same as having a map, but it's a worthwhile advantage. So here, what we are addressing are issues that all adoptive parents should have in their parenting toolbox. If we don't need them, we can lend them to others.

In opening the discussion forum here, we will look at grief, relief, hurts and healing. Possibly our combined thinking will afford some fresh thoughts on how to support families, both parents and children, through disruption and dissolution.

In the adoption community it is more likely that the term 'disruption' will be used generically. For ease of discussion, the term **disruption** will be used to cover both disrupted (ended before finalisation) and dissolved (ended by a court post-adoption-finalisation) adoptions. Where the distinction is significant, the individual terms will be used.

Some facts

It's a fact (from domestic US placement research) (2) that around 10-25% of all adoptions fail prior to finalisation. The research suggests that adoption disruption rates for children with physical, mental health and developmental problems range from approximately 10% to approximately 25% (Festinger, 1990; Berry, 1997; George, Howard, Yu, & Radomsky, 1997). The rate is lower post-finalisation; it's lowest in "baby" adoptions after finalisation (1%)

The percentage failure rises the older the child is on adoption, the longer s/he has been in care and the greater the number of moves the child has experienced prior to the adoptive placement. This comment is based on domestic US statistics; please visit the following site for further information: http://naic.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/s_disrup.doc.

There is also increasing evidence being gathered from ICA placements, especially from research in placement into the USA from the former Soviet bloc countries, that disruption and dissolution is a growing problem in this specific adoption area (3). In addition, some disrupting families state that a Report on disrupted adoptions has been compiled by the US Consulate in Guangzhou regarding adoptions from the PRC. The Consulate is dealing with true disruptions in China, where the children never leave China with their proposed new families; the mismatch between reality and expectation was too high.

Agency statistics point to the fact that the growing number of failing ICA placements may be due to parents being unable to cope with the needs of children from institutions abroad, whether or not their agencies have made all the facts **available**. Agencies are coming under fire for not fully disclosing children's histories, and for not preparing families for adopting children from countries where conditions can be very poor. , Some people believe agencies should be more adept at helping client adoptive families formulate realistic aspirations for these children, given the disadvantaged start many of them have experienced. See (4).

Agencies are also coming under fire for continuing to seek to place children from overseas while not developing and devoting resources designed to maintain those placements (acknowledgment of the problem of preparing families without addressing the rift between pre-adoption prep, post-adoption support). The question is, why do they continue to place children without this? Nancy Spoolstra has raised this question in response to agency acknowledgement of placement difficulties; please see generally www.radzebra.org and the Attachment Disorder Network's bimonthly

Some considerations

Why is it that that some say agency preparation for adoption is lacking? Why do some experts feel that federal or national government should be more involved in determining who gets to adopt? Surely it is in the “best interests” of every child that when a birthfamily “fails”, the child should be offered a family through adoption? Why is it that some say that agency disinterest can exacerbate, through lack of information and support, a slide toward disruption; that agencies place little emphasis on post-placement services? Is it that most agencies have commercial ends, and these ends are better served by processing more adoptions, rather than fewer placements with a better chance of creating successful families? In looking at disruption, is it possible **not** to address the issue of monetary gain, the fact that many agencies are “for profit” and that adoption is a multi-million dollar business enterprise? Are agencies the best educators? Is this not a conflict of interest? And if they should not do it, who should? Should we rather be asking agencies and counselling services to work together?

At odds with this, perhaps, is the notion that all people with potential to be parents and the income to support it can expect placement. Is it perhaps this, a feeling of entitlement to adopt through desire to help, parent and “save” that drives many agencies and many adoptive families? Are agencies cashing in on hopes and ignoring realities, literally? Placements without pre-adoption information and post-adoption support make this *look* likely.

Families who have been compelled to disrupt and dissolve their adoptions would provide a great service to the adoptive community if they would come forward to describe **why** it happened. Only with their outspokenness driving legislation and process can we expect change. But **how** can we expect these families to be open when they are perceived as failing? **How** can the current climate regarding disruption be changed?

Nancy Spoolstra suggests that blaming agencies is, partly, providing a whipping boy. In discussions for this Topic, she underlined that in her experience **parents can't be prepared for what they don't/won't understand, for that which is beyond the general frame of reference of a pre-adoptive family.**

Nancy's website www.radzebra.org puns on the fact that difficult kids look like horses, but have a vital difference that most overlook... they are actually stripy zebras. Families expecting to adopt a cute little Shetland pony might find themselves with a less domesticated zebra instead. Zebras require different management techniques, specialized veterinary care, and possess “fight or flight” characteristics not shared by their more domesticated horse cousins. Although the zebra can be domesticated, it will always be a zebra—the first to startle and the last to relax when faced with stress or danger. Similarly, families must be prepared to seek specialized mental health care, parent traumatized children indefinitely, and share their home with very

high-maintenance children. **What are we looking for in assessing children that upon entering a family show themselves as hard to parent?**

Maybe one of the critical factors is that agencies and placing agent consider how suited pre-adoptive parents are to adopt? Even with the fullest of histories for a child, how can a placement team **know** for certain a family will cope? They can't. More tools are becoming available. There are many indications that parents' psycho-social profiles may illuminate how they will cope (or not) with problems post-adoption, and there is some movement to include these in pre-adoption profiles of the parents. The work of the Anna Freud Centre and the Coram Family (UK) on the key factors that make an adoption work deals directly with this issue. One of the major findings in their recent research is that the success of an adoption depends on the emotional health of the adoptive parents. An adult attachment interview was developed toward finding this. The hope is that using this tool proactively in the pre-adoption process, the huge emotional and financial cost of a disruption later on can be avoided, because the parents who adopt will be **capable** of dealing with whatever is thrown at them by their adopted children. Here's a link into the Anna Freud Centre: <http://www.annafreudcentre.org/adoption.htm>

And so, with a profile for the child and a profile for the parents, there is hope the match might work. It's a burden on the placing agencies. But it may mean less difficulty for a family in getting the desired reciprocal relationship.

And some families advise that in their case, no pre-adoption education was made available. This is at odds with standard practice in some countries other than the USA, where pre-adoption education is part of the Home-study process (eg UK and Australia). But the **quality** of that education can vary.... in many instances social services are not geared to the needs of ICA.

WHAT IS IT TO DISRUPT or DISSOLVE AN ADOPTION?

In administrative and legal terms, it means ending the technical relationship mapped out by law and process with a set of approved (pre-legalised) parents OR a legally acknowledged family. In emotional terms it means the end of some road has been reached, often due to irreparable damage to the relationship between parent and child, or the disintegration of the dream of the "happily ever after family".

For the Parents?

For the parents it can seem an admission of failure. This can be total, catastrophic, where all personal resources are used and gone, where the new child has totally undermined the safety of the entire family, emotionally and physically. It can mean financial difficulty, especially in the case of international placement where families can spend many thousands of dollars on the adoption, leaving little left to help the children post-adoption, or during and after a disruption. It can also mean quite legitimate feelings of anger that the child wasn't what the placing agency represented them to be...

In receiving all children into our families, birth and adoptive, foster and step, we make assumptions based on what we hear about the kid; even with bio kids we assume we hear our “genes” talking. These can be *false* assumptions. No child, not even a bio child, arrives as a perfect match. Families can’t work/gel until parents and kids give it a go. But is it harder on adopted or placed kids to be “moved on” if they don’t fit? Is disruption purely an option for adopted children? How do bio families cope with kids who act out and don’t fit? Are these the kids who are the peers of adopted children in state care and in residential treatment centres (RTCs) (5)?

For the parents also to take back a failing adoption to the placing agency and be accused of poor parenting is totally undermining. The parents of a child who is disruptive in the scale seen by specialists dealing with RAD and other personality disorders may need **evidence** to show their claims regarding the child are true. Nancy Spoolstra suggests that parents collect this evidence through documentation, video, and the attestation of professionals utilized by the family in the attempt to stabilize the child. Without this, the parents may be viewed as the people with the problem... **worse, parents can and do fall under criminal investigation for child abuse. The documentation is not so much to prove that the kid needs help as it is to keep the parent from being thrown in jail (the best defence is a good offense).** Jean Macleod notes that she has seen cases where child abuse allegations have been made, all the children have been removed, and the healthier children have suffered attachment strains because of the allegations of one child.

Moreover, some parents fear notifying agencies in case a further placement would be ruled out because a disruption had occurred. Yet both Deborah Anderson and Nancy Spoolstra counsel that with time and care, these are the very parents who can go on to create excellent adoptive families because they have taken time to examine their own issues and “hot buttons”, and determine where work is needed.

For the Children?

For the children? There are few reports detailing how these children cope. Children (no matter what is detailed in their paperwork) whose backgrounds prior to the disrupted placement resulted in the behaviours that underpin the disruption are indeed special needs children. Some are deeply hurt. The wounds may stem from deprivations (environmental, social, and nutritional), from birthparent abuse leading to physical and emotional deficits in the children, from abuses in previous care (adoptive, foster, institutional) and sometimes deprivation because nobody cared enough to heal the wounds. For some of these children the responses they developed as coping mechanisms became pathological, resulting in behaviours too crude to be accepted in our more social society.

Disruption means a loss to these children even if they “designed” their behaviour to avoid the sociability of family. Some children’s deprivations are so deep that family care is almost impossible for them to accept; they have travelled so far from being able to trust. But nonetheless these children are

entitled to leave the adoptive relationship with dignity and mementos (lifebooks, treasured goods); additionally, they are entitled to the best placement suited to their needs beyond the disrupting family.

For the Family?

The family will never be the same again. Other children in the family will have been affected by the arrival and then departure of a sibling. Just quite how this impacts on these sibs if they themselves have serious issues is a huge question. But families have to face this, and may need to provide therapy and counselling to address the damage caused by the disruption. How does seeing a sib leave impact a child who fears abandonment herself? Does it impact her relationship with her parents? How **could** it not?

The parents in disrupting families have to be immensely strong in their feeling that disruption is in the best interests of the family; for the parents, the children who remain and the child who is leaving. Parenting is about making tough decisions. This is maybe the toughest decision an adoptive family may ever have to face. Yet the adoptive parents *have* to take a strong position because often what lies behind the disruption is a family in crisis. Parents must decide what can be saved within their family and who and what can only be saved outside of it. (6)

Nancy Spoolstra suggests the following:

- a) **direct families to a validating place; she suggests her own on-line resource of Little Zebras (see Resources) but others exist too; some are hard-hitting, the issues are strong, the comments are strong... when you are drowning you need hard talk! It's the vital aqua lung, the survival mechanism;**
- b) **analyse factors leading to disruption and ACT, especially if damage to other family members is involved;**
- c) **validate the parents' feelings (acknowledge their pain and loss, their efforts at saving the placement, their sense of frustration); and**
- d) **work on the steps to protected disruption: use therapy to obviate, documentation to validate- and the police to corroborate...**

For the child who must be moved, parents have to make strong judgements about how and to where the child might be moved. Initially, to "try on" the notion of disruption, some parents remove their child to **respite care**, basically to see how the family does without the child and then to see how the family does again when the child returns. Respite care is available, but can be hard to access, and can be costly.

Beyond this stage, dealing with how to permanently place the child elsewhere is one of the fundamental burdens on the disrupting parents. The burden may be and perhaps should be shared with agencies, but the parents are the parents. It is their duty to be closely involved in the future welfare of their child, at least until that responsibility is fully assumed by others. Whether this is by an agency, by state care systems, by private arrangements... the burden of **how** to make the placement remains rightly on the parents.

Description of the process to make a re-placement and the alternatives in the US system are given below and referenced in Resources.

For the UK, direction was sought from the Team Leader of a Local Authority Placement Team (ICA & Domestic), referenced from Government guidelines and the comments can be found in the textnotes at (7).

Nancy Spoolstra notes that *disruption* (pre-finalised adoption ending) will not incur the cost of supporting a child to adulthood if no further family is found, but *dissolution* will. In dissolutions, if there is no re-placement family found, the adoptive family remains financially responsible for the child till that child becomes a legal adult.) (This can and does vary depending on circumstances. If a child was adopted from 'the system', and the agency failed to disclose all the data, and a lawsuit is pending, the disrupting family most often **does not** pay for the child's expenses).

For Sanity?

Experts agree that any disruption is a trauma to all involved. Recovery is slow, and like all loss, recovery passes through stages. These stages are necessary and are best accomplished with support, care and counselling. As a former family therapist who specialized in how grief affects families, as well as a mom of many adopted from disruption, Deborah Anderson has written a detailed statement on this; please find this given fully in **Part Three** below.

For parents, it is of paramount importance to acknowledge that if all possible routes were followed to avoid disruption, and it was eventually sought for the safety of the family, there is NO damage underwritten about their parenting ability. Skills may have been lacking, and had training and support been provided it might have saved the adoption... But the ability to parent encompasses the saving family. Disrupting parents need to acknowledge that fact. Strong tough parents with good self-esteem can do this. Parents who disrupt may not initially feel good or strong or tough. If they are supported in their decision, they can regain their stability. Support comes from being in safe supportive counselling and groups where parents can address their feelings.

TOOLBOX 1: WHAT ARE THE CONSIDERATIONS NEEDED TO KEEP AN ADOPTION WORKING?

Support

Experts now say that “all adoptions involve special needs kids”. A child entering an adoptive family comes with heavy baggage from the past. Probably many involve families with special needs too, in how they desire to form a family. It’s unusual to adopt, even now. Few adoption specialists currently believe that post-adoption love and a little luck will guarantee success. In the past five years, Internet communication and networking within the adoptive community have helped adoptive families understand how unrealistic it is to expect that love will fix anything.

But it’s hard to break silence and admit that a child or a family need help when previously the family had been whole and healthy... **Families considering disruption are talking about and dealing with different issues than families whose children exhibit behavioural “issues”. The families contemplating disruption are families for whom the last straw has been pulled. These are families abused by the child, where the child may under duress of attachment disorder (RAD) or mental illness cause harm to others and to him/herself, may sexually molest, be without conscience and be attempting to cause the disintegration of their homes. For some years, families who spoke out were subjected to humiliation by being labelled as failed parents. It took time to get a sea-change; it may be happening now, through integrated online support.**

So what is the bottom line on making a strained adoption work? Is it support and knowledge of how to handle the financial and emotional implications for getting that support?

Agencies

Agencies and government facilities (state and national) should offer in-depth support. Many feel they fail. But if agencies had teeth would prospective parents accept expert input into how agencies *should* act? Would an agency trying to run an adoption program AND be selective about adoptive parents end up being a case of the maniacs running the asylum?

Nancy Spoolstra suggests that agencies should consider

- parents’ motives to adopt; how closely their expectations will match their potential reality
- adult attachment profiling;
- fit (quality and appropriacy) between adoptee and family (critical);
- how to teach attachment-parenting techniques

Nancy also suggests that agencies acknowledge potential problematic placements. On her list of “red flags” are parents who are planning an artificial twinning (new kid matches age of existing child in family), parents who are pregnant yet adopting, and parents who wish to adopt out of birth

order... It's not right to say that these are criteria that rule out a placement, more that the agency **looks** at the proposal closely from the perspective of family rather than agency \$\$\$ success.... All these factors are, in Nancy's experience, areas where families are vulnerable. Explaining the **why** of these criteria is also critical. Many pre-adoptive families have never had a rationale given as to why artificial twinning is a red flag (parents can't cope?) or why adopting out of birth order is too (affects sib dynamics?). Responsible discussion and responsible pre-adoption education should be looking at this.

It's critical that agencies assume a more specialized approach to pre-adoption assessment, looking at the families' strengths, support system, willingness to access services, **and** look at what services are available for them post-placement. What is not a good factor in one family, eg, adopting out of birth order, may actually be a strength in another because of circumstances. There is no given set of rules, just guidelines, or maybe the guidelines are the wish-list! Agencies need to get a true feel for the family dynamics of the prospective adoptive family, children too. Is it wrong for instance to let a sibling-to-sibling bond form first? That may happen when there are kids proposed of ages that can reach out to each other once the adoption is made. Experts believe **this** allows a child to heal from past abuse/neglect and begin to form healthier attachments.

List-servs

In the perceived failure of the above to meet the support requirements of adoptive families, a plethora, **a virtual village encompassing the globe has built a sophisticated set of networking connections which in themselves and individually may remain private or open. The pain of a child who has disruptive behaviours can be discussed and aired and hands-held with those who understand. Parents can access the how-tos and where-tos of surviving this.** The fact that it is online support means that it is at once personal and anonymous, which perhaps makes it easier to talk the raw talk that many parents have about their children.

FIND a list-serv... there are lists in the Resources section.

Workshops

Spin-offs of concerned groups helping kids settle into family and what to do if they cannot. In resourcing families not yet committed to disruption, the direction is to listservs, websites and conferences dedicated to helping parents find help for difficult kids. Please see the Resources section generally.

Counselling

Many families with children whose behaviour is impacting negatively on the family at the critical stage of deciding to disrupt and those who are post-disruption need help with feeling their parenting has been sound, even if a

disruption occurs. Experts believe that family hurt can only be healed through letting grief take its course.... Parents need to remember also to seek counselling for themselves. Children cannot be helped where a parent is “unavailable”. The disruptive behaviours of the child and the process of disruption can or may re-trigger any personal losses felt previously by the parents. See Resources (8).

Respite Care

Families working with hard-to-settle kids find that respite care can be a saving option. Whether the child is taken into temporary or long-term care by the state, private residential treatment centres (RTCs (5)) or by a respite family arranged by the parents, the break can often be vital for parents and children. Some respite carers are themselves parents to challenging kids; it's important that the child is placed where his needs can be seen if perhaps not met.

Therapeutic Care for the Kids

Many families find relief and empowerment when an appropriate therapist is found for the family and the child. Many families speak of the bittersweet finding that a child has a real and treatable disorder or illness. But facing this with the support of trained therapists often means that the family can work WITH the child with some hope of success and obviating the need to disrupt. Finding the right therapist for a child is often best found through word of mouth and experience. Here, listservs like Nancy Spoolstra's **Little Zebras**, Deborah Anderson's **Help With Disrupting in Adoption and Adopting Hard to Place Children (all at yahoo groups)** and the well thought of **Attach China** come into their own, where families can discuss the benefit, cost and drawbacks of various types of pre-disruption care. The work and techniques of Nancy Thomas have benefited many children with severe RAD, and thus considering her therapeutic direction might be very worth while. Find Nancy Thomas at www.attachment.org

Finance

Nancy Spoolstra notes that in US domestic adoptions, it is possible for families to insist **on writing in a subsidy agreement** into the adoption decree when adopting from the foster care system- this helps pay for any future therapeutic care/residential treatment. She notes however that in the US for international adoption it can be hard to get state or federal funds for care. Accessing funds from SSI (USA social security disability) in the mental health capacity can be done - but requires a good lawyer.

In the UK recent post-Hague Convention legislation means that domestic AND international adoptions can both access critical support funds for adoption crises if a proper case is made out through the placement team overseeing the adoption and where that team accept the findings presented by the family. Might this mean the family needs to get expert witnesses in, buy

professional attestation first in order to access the funds? The legislation is new; most placement teams can't answer this as yet.

Whatever the circumstances, the families have to be **pro-active** and aware of their rights.

TOOLBOX 2: WHAT ARE THE CONSIDERATIONS NEEDED TO LET AN ADOPTION GO?

If it is difficult for families to break silence and come forward to access support when a child has disruptive behaviours, those who work in the field of adoption disruption and dissolution say it is to the *n*th degree harder when a feeling is formed that a child must be removed from the family. Nancy Spoolstra says that when a family is “talking disruption”, it generally means that family intends to move all the way along the line.... It can be a strong indicator that the situation has become so critical, it may be impossible to recover.

ALL the same tools as outlined above are advocated. Letting go means, however, that the family acknowledges that it cannot cope. Disruption is no longer a dirty word. It is seen as the only solution

Support, Workshops, Counselling

All of these come recommended by the experts in the field and those families brave enough to speak. Many families tell of years of shame, of family dysfunction after the disruption because what was involved in disrupting tore at the seams of what has been described here as the family ethos. This can be avoided if the routes to accessing support are made available.

Placing agencies need to be involved, **and for many reasons, most** often are not. What needs to happen is a major upping of the level of information that comes home with kids, and having supplied that, the placing agency then supports the family it gave the green light to in the adoption process. Research suggests that when parents have good access to information, and social workers work to match child to expectation (9), the adoption is less likely to disrupt. But in the UK, where legislation out to review seeks to provide this in the case of international adoption as well as domestic, adopters are up in arms. They suggest that this will discriminate against international adoption precisely because the information can't be made available. Catch 22. And a point of discussion that needs to be aired.

Nancy Spoolstra advises:

a) Connect parents with a list-serv that provides support and helps parents become strong enough emotionally to either become more effective therapeutic parents or end the placement.

b) Analyse the factors leading to disruption in order to afford parents information on which to make decisions:

- Sibling safety involved? Get pro-active immediately!
- Families should be prepared for the “Mack Truck Syndrome” – the emotional pain/loss that hits unexpectedly after the child has left the home and the family begins to regroup.

c) Validate parents feelings

d) Determine what protective legal steps to take:

- get THERAPY for both parents and child- use therapeutic parenting techniques
- DOCUMENT all problems and disturbances in detail (plus use video)
- call POLICE as necessary, every time, get report

Letting Go

It is been salutary to note the differing responses parents have to dealing with the fact they had a child placed in the family, and then had this fact erased by law. Some, maybe tougher skinned, refer to the child of the disruption as just that - *the child*. Others, more distraught, refer to the lost child as “my son/daughter”. Is it that these latter parents are at war, one partner pushing the disruption, the other committed to the support level discussed under “considerations needed to keep an adoption working”? Many adoptive families carry the idea of this child in their head to the end of their days. **We are privileged to have as PART TWO here a letter from a mother who still mourns her lost daughter....**

How do parents reach consensus about disruption? And if they do not, and there is a winner who decides for disrupting, how do “the losers” in that family fare? If there are children in that family and these children have issues anyway, what does this family war do to whatever ethos that family had? There will be mistrust, hate, possibly divorce, and most certainly impact on the children who remain in the family. How can this be avoided? Maybe it can't. Maybe no relationship is perfect. Maybe the burden (of a hard-to-parent child) reduces a less than whole, integrated and thinking couple of parents to pulp?

The basics of a successful adoption maybe having the children fit within a family that is sure of what it wants to be. We need to learn this sureness

before we adopt at all, and certainly before we attempt to adopt children whose histories are patchy. Does this mean all adoptions could be in doubt? Without strong parenting that knows its own roots?

Probably.

How many disruptions though are just plain people who got in over their heads? People parenting kids because they want a family, rather than meeting head-on the fact that their own losses will engage with the losses of the very kids they set out to place in their family?

And also: how many children will, in fact, go on to thrive in another placement beyond the disrupted placement? Sometimes, a family fit **can** be found in another family. Letting go may be tough, but also it may give a potential for the family and the child to heal and be healed without each other. Doris Landry holds that the words "family fit" don't encompass the whole when it comes to a new and healing family for a child from a disruption. Rather, she holds that success best comes when the new parents get into parenting with eyes wide open, knowing quite precisely that therapeutic care will be needed, and that only by having the resources to reduce the risks of failure ready will success follow.

Therefore, a critical part of letting go comes when the family says Goodbye to the child. It should be brief, and as positive as can be achieved, with a wish (and thus permission) that the child be happy with the new placement. Sorrow that the placement did not work out is also necessary, and if this is tied to the positive hope for the future, the child may leave with the understanding that events did not work out, not that s/he will always be a failure.

Many families make peace with this process by seeing themselves as the 'bridge' between a child's first life and their new (and hopefully successful) life.

Talking to agencies, changing their role to a more pro-active one?

This is critical. We need as full as dossier on the kids as possible. They must in ICA and domestic placements ask always for more. Sure, we provide a service in adopting kids in need. Sure, it's something we want Bottom line, though, is can we meet the individual needs without the fullest of dossier support and then the fullest of support as we work issues through with the kids?

THE PROCESS

The following is NOT meant to take the place of legal advice from a qualified and experienced adoption attorney, and personal research into parents' legal or other responsibilities

The process of disruption and dissolution can in the USA be achieved by public and private means. Where an adoption is finalised, severance of parental rights will have to be sought through a court order, but moving towards this can be achieved either through agency assistance, state assistance or through private negotiation (if a new home has been found for the child) through a Family Law Attorney.

Writers in the sphere of disruption and dissolution are outspoken that to use agency or state placement teams in a disruption **can be fraught with hidden emotional and legal dangers**. Leaving the child to agency care or state care without a decision as to the child's future can be **(and very often is)** construed as criminal abandonment. And families remain responsible for their children's financial stability without a re-placement order. Private placements allow the disrupting families to ensure secure placements for their children without the deep hurt of being called inadequate by state or agency teams. More importantly, **a private placement keeps the child from going into a childhood of residential care, which is pretty much the only option for kids at this level of hurt**. Thus, some writers advocate the private route. Others do not, urging that unless state considerations are met in full, the child and the disrupting family are both at risk. (10)

At all times families **should** follow legal practices governing moving children out of a family, in particular the Inter-State Compact on the movement of children (a guardianship measure). Nancy Spoolstra recommends that private re-placements work best if a facilitator is used, one particularly that knows the new family willing to take the child. She also notes that private placement can be "buyer-beware" unless the facilitator has experience and integrity.

The Private Placement Process

Here (from Deborah Anderson) is a short synopsis of the private placement process:

- once a decision to disrupt is made, the family retains an experienced adoption attorney (preferably the American Academy of Adoption Attorneys)
- working through the facilitator, a few re-placement families are referred or located. The family/attorney start liaison with these families
- the prospective families send their home-studies to the attorney for review
- a family is chosen, and the first family begins direct communication with them

- prior to placement/firm acceptance all medical/psychological/education are made available to the prospective family, reducing the risk of further disruption
- once a firm commitment is made, transition plans are made
- at the time of placement, clothing and personal possessions are sent with the child
- a family member escorts the child to the new home. In some instances a guardianship order is made and the child is taken to see if the placement will work out. In others, families file for the ICPC (Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children) which adds a fee and takes time to complete, but allows the transfer without guardianship.
- the disrupting family are responsible for the financial security (medical expenses etc) of the child till severance. In NO circumstance can an ICA family request repayment of the costs of the ICA. This is tantamount to child selling.
- after six months, the new family files to adopt the child, using their own attorney in the State in which they live with the child
- the disrupting family severs parental rights through *their* attorney, and generally the adoption is finalised six months after this.

Other routes, other considerations

Nancy Ashe (editor at www.adoption.com) and Rita Laws detail how the process of disruption is conducted if the private route is not chosen: details can be found at:

<http://library.adoption.com/Failed-Placement/What-to-do-When-Your-Adoption-is-Failing-A-Parents-Guide-to-Adoption-Disruption-Dissolution/article/5178/1.html>

In ICA it is not a solution to return the child to the mother-country *unless* agency or sending government have a further placement for the child, and this has been negotiated.

It should also be noted that in a post-finalised adoption unless and until legal dissolution is achieved, parental rights severed, and the child found a new adoptive home, the adoptive parents remain responsible for the financial welfare of the child till that child reaches adulthood.

RE-PLACEMENT ***Post-Dissolution***

Private versus public routes

There is a lot of information available online about placing kids beyond the family that disrupts. It perhaps should be written in bold large print that disruptions are not a cheap way to pick up kids (generally Caucasian) from ICA or indeed any placement. Children from disrupted adoptions need

specialised parenting, parents with clued-up conscience about what the kid has been through and who know parenting from the experience of doing it with other kids. Do children from disruptions need families with other children in them...who are themselves also tough kids? Is asking such odd, or brave?

Expert opinion is that hard kids are basically needful of tough parents that will serve them well: the kids learn what family means in a family that can offer the goods (12). Deborah Anderson holds that children from disrupted options need specialised parenting, parents with clued-up conscience about what the child has been through and parents who know parenting from the experience of doing it with other kids. She feels, in a nutshell, that children from disruptions need families with other children in them...and perhaps other tough kids. Is this odd, or brave? One of the reasons she believes her first family of attachment disordered children succeeded was that they were placed in a larger family with other children who'd survived and succeeded. She notes that her children were able to bond first with another sibling and only then with a parent. She holds that placing a child in a family with none or only one or two other children, where they receive an over-abundance of parental care can be tragic for children with issues of abandonment and loss

Re-placement can be done through agency work and state placement or privately. Experts say this costs \$\$\$ exponentially, may not work out well and may remove any decision-making power of the child's onward placement from the disrupting parents. The cost of hiring an adoption lawyer and a placing agency can be overwhelming to a family who have already used up funds in making the adoption...

It's advised by some workers in the field that personal placements are better. The disrupting families get to "interview" prospective adopters. This works in the US so long as all local regulations are adhered to, that the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children from home to home is adhered to, and/or proper Guardianship arrangements are set up and adhered to and proper financial arrangements made for the care of the child. Costs are still incurred, but Deborah Anderson says **that in most cases** the cost to a disrupting family who chose attorney/private placement should not exceed \$2000 (without ICPC).

Most of all, families find some dignity in the transfer, they get to decide which of a few families can make it work for their disrupted child and **to have some control over the process which is totally lacking with agency or other involvement.**

Overview from abroad

In the UK and in Australia placing a child from a disruption and working toward disruption cannot be done privately. A family approaching the possibility of disruption must be in touch with social services, and in Australia the Government Agency for adoptions is also involved. It is likely that the child will be placed with foster parents until a new placement can be found. The burden of finance for the disruption, once a court has made the order, falls on

the public purse because the social workers and placement teams are mandated with ensuring the placement in the first instance.

Under recent legislation in the UK, post-adoption support and crisis counselling prior to the disruption are available through the placement agency, as are resources to support the crisis of the behaviours making the adoption enter a critical stage. These may be accessed through public funds if the placing agency accepts the case merit.

RE-PLACEMENT

Post-Disruption

In the case of an adoption that has not been finalised, the process of disrupting is simpler, because placing agencies retain involvement in the adoption until legalisation. In some cases, families report that agencies “simply took the child in” and the parents were left empty-handed. No counselling, simply removal of the child. The disrupting family simply were left bereft.

In ICA cases, where disruption occurs prior to leaving the sending country, negotiations will take place with the authorities. Again, families will be left empty-handed, and the child returned to the sending country carers. The parents cannot expect any voice in how the child may or not be re-placed, although some families have managed to hear through the grape-vine how their disrupted child has fared in a re-placement.

In the framework of disruption, parents wonder if they will be able to adopt again. Will a disruption leave a stain on their potential to ask for another placement? In ICA, where a serious problem in the health of the child is discovered and this was not made material in the referral papers, it is very likely that the sending country will allow another referral, although not necessarily immediately. In most other cases, it will depend on the individual circumstances of the disruption. Many families do go on to adopt again.

In some instances, families have come to know that the children who were removed from their family either in the sending country OR pre-legalisation have been adopted again. Families find it stressful but rewarding to know their child is thriving elsewhere. One family, where the decision to disrupt was carried by only one parent is some years later still hurt. The mother, who still considers the child of the disruption her daughter writes to say she waits to hear snatches of news about her child, but dares not ask permission to meet the child. This is tragic. She tells her story in **PART TWO**

THERAPEUTIC PARENTING OF THE POST-DISRUPTION CHILD

Should an attempt be made to keep contact with the child post-disruption? Some families speak to the value of this; others suggest a clean break is necessary. Certainly, when the disrupting child has been abusing others in the family, contact should probably be terminated. Nancy Spoolstra believes that in some situations, it is in the best interests of the child and the disrupting family to maintain an “open adoption”. Certainly, she recommends that the replacement parents be open to contact with the disrupting family, allowing the child to retain a connection with the previous family. Deborah Anderson recommends that clear boundaries be agreed upon **before** placement in the new home to avoid contentions and more stress later. Written agreements, signed by all parties can ease the transitions, mitigate fears and lead to a more successful transition.

It's therefore thought important that the child be allowed to hold on to the fact that there had been a placement which failed, and that part of his/her history is always a part of her/him. Lifebooks should be updated to chronicle the disrupted placement, and in the new family, the child should be permitted to talk of the time there. Helping the child come to terms with the disruption is critical for a secure onward placement. Helping the child with the behaviours that caused the disruption is also vital, so the post-disruption family should be prepared to use therapy (as recommended) for their new child.

THERAPEUTIC CARE FOR THE POST-DISRUPTION FAMILY

How do families cope with talking disruption to vulnerable children who remain in the disrupting family? What if the essence of settling these children has been the notion that **this** (adoptive) family is the forever family? How is this sustained through a disruption? (6)

Even, for families with adopted or vulnerable kids who are close to a disrupting family, **how** to we talk to our kids about what is happening, albeit at a remove?

We cannot use other routes for family dissolution that involve parents (like divorce or separation) because there it's the **parents** who have the problem, and both parents can reassure the child of continuing love, despite any split between them.

How do we tell our kids another child is being moved out of a family we know?

Maybe the easiest is the simplest, because children tend to sense danger. If we say a child can't stay because how s/he is unsafe in the family, then it is possible children sense danger and protection and move to “understand”. Most kids want to feel safe. But at any rate, at this stage, therapy, theraplay and a deal of talking are called for... A child who fails to react may be a child who needs more intensive therapy, because s/he cannot access what are the dangers of disrupting from the family as well as the fact of it... One child blocks seeing disruption, another is sent in a tailspin **in case** it happens because his/her own issues of loss are not yet resolved

SELF-DISRUPTION

Many (but by no means all) adult adoptees speak frankly of the poor feeling of fit they had in their adoptive families. Many have a deep feeling of psychic homelessness (11), and many have removed themselves from the adoptive home-as-sanctuary now they are adults. Some speak of a terrifying need as teens to self-hurt. Some speak of a need to turn from their adoptive parents with a ferocity that shakes them. The anger appears to be a deep reaction to a feeling of being bereft of a family that truly understands and supports. Many adult adoptees speak of a feeling that they would rather **not** have been adopted at all than have been adopted into their particular adoptive families.

Hearing this spoken by some very intelligent mature adults brings the discussion full circle. What is critical to making an adoption work is getting family fit. Whatever are the means to make this possible? Does it mean adoption should be same race adoption only, or severe curtailment of the inter-country adoption programmes? This in its fullness is beyond this discussion.

What this discussion is founded on is how adoptive families find, fund and use support to make sure of family fit, and to secure a good feeling family ethos for all family members.

END-GAME: Journey's End or a new beginning?

It looks likely that what **must** be addressed is development of post-adoption services *from agencies* to encompass the growing diverse needs of post-adoptive families, particularly those who have adopted internationally. Agencies need to wise up to a growing awareness that disruption is not so much a failed family, an opting-out cop-out family, but families in over their heads.

Add to that a need for a specified legal process to access legal help from social services (see (7) in **TEXT NOTES** on the UK model which attempts to address this) so that advocacy for help and support is a due process.....

Then add to that a parent script to speak to: don't be afraid to **get help**. Adoption parenting is not easy. Taking professionals on board is not an admission of failure, it is an affirmation that things **can** work. With professional help, it is possible that families can grow strong again and avoid the devastating loss of a child. And with professional help, if a child **has** to move to a new family, the new parents will have the resources to deal with their new child... with eyes wide open to the challenge.

Moving away, moving out.... sometimes these are the only ways possible for a chance of survival and new growth. But growth from loss is unbearably painful even if necessary.

QUESTIONS

1. What resources do you think are required in evaluating parents pre-adoption so that they will be capable of the strong parenting many adoptive placements require? Required attachment/stability evaluation as part of the Homestudy?
2. What resources were available to YOU when you adopted?
3. Did you personally consider a worst case scenario? What do you think you would have done/might do if faced with a child you just couldn't adopt?
4. Did you research these issues on your own? Did you HAVE to do this because there was no education on offer?
5. What more can placing agencies do to offer parents pre-placement adoption training?
6. What more info should agencies offer parents about the children? How can this be achieved in ICA?
7. What is the BASIC MINIMUM you think should be required in pre-adoption education? Reading? Classes?
8. What type of post-adoption support should agencies be offering to cushion families with hard to settle children? Should there be mandatory courses? Should these be nationwide, imposed by federal law?
9. What value should be placed on private sources for support in disruption and dissolution?
10. What value should be placed on online support?
11. What value should be placed on online help for onward placement of children post-disruption?
12. What questions can WE as a group ask ourselves in thinking about friends who are right now doing tough parenting, maybe seeing their family bend under the weight of a difficult placement? How can we break the silence and hold out our hands?
13. How can we support families in the process?

- 14. How can we support the children and the post-disruption parents?**
- 15. How can we support families who offer homes to post-disruption children? What are the facilities and training required to make this adoption work?**

Part Two: A Mother's Story

**Given in generosity by a mother who still mourns her
child-
Lost to Disruption**

The author has sanctioned publishing her letter....

We disrupted the adoption of our second daughter after two weeks with her in China. My husband refused to bring her home. Against my will, I got on a plane and returned her to her orphanage while my husband and five year old daughter (adopted from China four and a half years earlier) waited for me at

the White Swan. It was a nightmare then and remains a nightmare that replays itself periodically even now... three years later.

It was awful for everyone. The pain of our disruption will remain in my heart and soul as long as I live.... even though I knew her for less than two weeks, even though several years have since passed, even though I know another family has chosen to parent her, even though she has been *replaced* by another child. The pain of our parting is relived in its fullest ever time I recall the event. The disruption has strained every relationship in our family. It has brought our marriage to near dissolution. It has destroyed my self respect. It has destroyed the respect I once had for my husband. It has increased the anxious attachment of our older daughter. It has interfered with attachment in our younger daughter. The shame of not standing up for a little girl, the shame of not standing up for myself, the shame of giving in to my husband whose views I did not share. Not too many people really understood at the time it happened. People said stupid things. There was a lot of pain. There still is a lot of pain. It won't ever go away.

In the time that we had her, I had fallen in love with her. I carried her everywhere. I connected with her. I walked her up and down the hallways at night, singing to her to comfort her. Every night I was the last Mom out there in the hotel hallway. She was my daughter.

My husband did not have the same experience as I. He saw and interacted with a child who did not seem *right*. He saw what I can only describe as a brain that wasn't working right. I don't even remember the earliest *signs* but I do vividly recall when she freaked out on the airplane, froze on the bus, gouged my face and chest with her fingernails...

My husband's decision to not bring the child home was based in anger and fear. Anger at the perception of being lied to and being unsupported by our agency. Anger at the perception of being lied to by the Chinese provincial officials and orphanage staffers. Anger at feeling pressured by our agency's facilitators to bring the child without fully understanding the nature of her issues. Minimizing her seizures(?) or panic attacks(?) and unusual behaviors. Anger at our facilitator's inability to work with us in getting the medical help we needed/wanted at the time. Fear of not knowing what was wrong and not being able to get a diagnosis. Fear of possible heavy metal poisoning. Fear of a brain possibly affected by early abuse. But mostly fear of the unknown heightened by our inability to find out. Fear of how her issues might affect our family in the future.

Still I wanted to bring her home. My husband threatened to leave me if I did. I had to choose between my existing family and this one little girl and I only had a few short hours in which to do it ... with no medical information and no reliable advice. A phone conversation with the SOS doctor on duty in Guangzhou led us to believe that the medical tests we wanted could be ordered but the results could not be trusted. We would have to fly to Beijing or Hong Kong for CAT scans, MRI's, blood work.... We were scheduled to leave China in two days. Our doctor in the US could not help. The doctor in our

travel group could not help. Our agency did not help. It was too much to handle. I was confused, frightened and devastated. I froze. I have never felt so helpless. I made the decision to return her to the orphanage. I had to get on a plane and fly with her back to the province and dissolve the adoption. I had to meet with the orphanage staff and the provincial officials in a dirty airport hotel room and sign and fingerprint the papers. It was the most horrible, sickening thing I have ever done. Then they took her away from me. My baby. The pain will forever live in my heart. It was wrong. She was my baby. I will forever regret making that choice.

Since that time, I have learned that she has SID. I don't know whether there is anything else. I have been very careful and have not asked much of her current family. I simply thank God that they love her, understand her special needs and are providing appropriate therapy. Truth be told, more than anything I would love to visit her... but I am afraid to even ask her Mom if it would be O.K.'d

And now, three years later, my two adopted daughters and I are finally seeking therapy. Anyway, I hope this helps in writing your topic on disruption. I don't want to "go public" with our story.... but maybe there is something in it that can be of use to someone... I don't know what... Please don't use my name.

Thanks.

Part Three: Coping with Grief and Loss, Healing the Grief

**By
Deborah Anderson**

From the moment we are born into this physical world, we are subject to growth and change in all areas of our lives: emotional, physical, social and spiritual. Change can be something we actively seek, or it can be thrust upon us from outside in ways that are difficult to understand.

As babies, we have no control over our physical environment. Our parents and care givers are responsible for meeting our needs for food, warmth, love and safety. As we grow into children, adolescents and adults, we move into areas of more responsibilities. As we advance into old age, we come back full circle. All this is as it should be.

All change is about the loss of what is current, moving forward into what is new or different. Irrespective of our physical age, ethnic background or residence, some changes occur over which we have no influence. The loss of family and friends is one of them. This may happen through illness, accident, violence, suicide or the ending of a relationship like marriage. When the loss is related to the loss of a relationship formed by adoption, and the loss of the dreams that went with it, we may find that others do not understand our grief. We may be judged, or condemned, or isolated, or ignored.

The following is a work in progress on grieving the loss of a relationship that ends due to disrupting an adoption, for whatever reasons. It is meant as a resource only. Please take the parts that are helpful for you and leave the rest behind. I welcome suggestions, comments and feedback.

When we grieve, as we do when a relationship is lost, ends or changes, we often grieve the loss of the dream we had about the relationship. This includes our ideas about our future as a family, seeing a child grow up, go to school, graduate, marry, and give us grandchildren. It may include the parts of the relationship, like a child loving us, calling us mom or dad, giving us hugs, appreciating the sacrifices we made to bring that child to our family.

Adoption and in particular, disrupting an adoption, and our related experiences in this devastating process forever alter the fabric of our lives in so many ways, regardless of our personal beliefs or lack of personal beliefs.

Since we are all Human Beings, we all respond to change, loss and grief in a more or less similar manner. It is generally accepted that coping with grief and loss involves six stages. There is no set time for each one to take. Individuals, even from the same family, may spend different times in each one.

Some may remain stuck in any one of the six, or progress rapidly through all. Because no two people are alike, each of us has different ways of expressing our feelings, different ways of acting out our pain, but overall, we follow the same. By having an understanding of the process involved in grief, loss and change, and having information about the resources available to us, we can make informed choices, assist our families and friends in making better choices and improve the quality of our lives.

Stages of Grief and Loss

Stage # 1: Shock, Denial and Isolation. Shock, denial and the need to be alone are normal, biological, systemic reactions to trauma and pain. None of

us who have experienced disrupting an adoption can say we have not been traumatized and hurt.

These children seem to have an innate ability to find all our vulnerabilities and use them to hurt and wound us. Denial is a means to refuse to accept the reality of the traumatic event, illness or death. Denial becomes a buffer, a breathing space, to accept the alteration to our personal reality that the loss creates for us. Our need for isolation may take many forms: staying in our rooms, avoiding discussing our feelings, staying very busy, refusing to answer the phone or talk.

Stage #2: Anger. Anger is a feeling. All our feelings and emotions are given to us by our Creator. In and of themselves, they are not good or bad. They just are. It is how we choose to act or react that creates a positive or negative energy (and consequences) not only for ourselves, but for others around us.

When we have been living with a child with multiple mental health issues, we may have found ourselves hiding our feelings behind various masks, or pretending that we are not hurt, wounded, lost, in pain, sad, angry, or a thousand other combinations of feelings. When we first leave the relationship whether our choice or our partner's, we may find ourselves experiencing all the feelings we have hidden away or repressed. The average life of a feeling is, at most, about eight minutes, unless we continually re-escalate our feelings by self talk. Self talk is the background thoughts we have inside our heads. It can be really crucial to find resources such as counselling/therapy and other support groups where it is safe to share our feelings.

Stage #3: Bargaining. During this stage we try to bargain with God (Creator) or whatever we envision as our higher power to change the event, influence our futures or take away the pain. If I never...God will...As this relates to this child, we may bargain our way back into continuing to parent this child, at the expense of other relationships, we may find hope in small changes, where there really was no change, over and over again, thinking if only we 'can do it right' that the child can continue in our family, that we can continue to parent this child.

Stage # 4: Depression. Symptoms include: withdrawing from friends, family, social activities, abuse of alcohol, drugs, feelings of exhaustion, sleeping long hours, and others. Our feelings are numbed, minimized, and diminished. Our feelings are pushed down, made very small, possibly because we are carrying so much pain that we cannot believe we will ever get through it, or that it will ever hurt less.

Stage # 5: Acceptance. This means coming to terms with our loss, the feelings associated with it, accepting the changes that have occurred, and moving on with our lives. This does not mean that we stop caring about the child, but accept that the best choice for this child is to find a family with different resources and strengths, which can help this child, heal and grow healthier than we were able to do.

Stage #6: Hope. This means moving past the acceptance of the loss to finding some meaning or reason, learning or discovering the thread of meaning that ties together our past, present and future. It usually means taking time to look after ourselves, heal, continue or begin counselling and therapy to deal with our own fall out from the trauma we have experienced.

You Can Help

If you are a friend or family member of someone who is experiencing grief, you can help. The following are suggestions as a point of beginning.

Say: I'm Sorry.

Let them talk. Share with them about the person or the relationship. Share personal memories, both happy and sad, with them.

Help out with every day tasks, like household chores, errands, cooking, laundry, child care, etc.

Let them know who is available in the community as a resource: community health workers, counsellors, ministers, teachers, human resource workers. Encourage them to get professional help when needed.

Help them understand that the feelings of sadness, anger, and disorientation are normal and won't last forever.

Everyone has their own unique way of coping and healing, in their own way and time. Be patient.

Accept the person without judging their actions. Provide emotional support and encourage them to make healthier and safer choices.

Be responsible for your own health: emotional, physical, and spiritual.

Our lives will never be 'the same' as before. Each day will bring new challenges, new strengths, and new experiences. But we can and should build on our past, ALL of our past to enrich and strengthen our 'now' and our families. As much as we carry these losses in our hearts and spirits, we must remember to give thanks and appreciation to our Creator for the gift of our own lives, each and every day.

Over time we will reweave the tapestry of our lives in new and beautiful patterns, not the same, but different than before. Making meaning from our personal experiences in light of such overwhelming feelings of grief, loss, failure, takes time and support from others who've 'walked that road'. Be kind to yourself as you move through this process.

Respectfully
Deedee (Deborah Anderson)

Part Four:

RESOURCES

CRITICAL RESOURCES

www.radzebra.org Nancy Spoolstra

<http://library.adoption.com/Failed-Placement/What-to-do-When-Your-Adoption-is-Failing-A-Parents-Guide-to-Adoption-Disruption-Dissolution/article/5178/1.html>. Nancy Ashe and Rita Laws: Parents' Guide to Disruption

<http://www.futureofchildren.org> Claims to provide research and analysis to promote effective policies and programs for children. Nancy Spoolstra endorses this site.

<http://www.adoptiondisruption.com>
Excellent site which looks at myths and realities in disruption, with good links onward.

<http://www.attachment.org> Nancy Thomas website, guide for strong therapeutic care. This lady's therapy has literally saved lives.

TIM O'HANLON writes on accessing federal subsidies for parents to help children. Recommended: The Subsidy guidebook is written for adoptive parents, attorneys and the friends of adopted children. It attempts to provide readers with a map through each phase of the federal Title IV-E adoption assistance program: eligibility; the amount and types of assistance; appealing agencies decisions and applying for assistance after the adoption is finalized.

[Accessing Federal Adoption Subsidies](#)

by [Tim O'Hanlon](#), [O'Hanlon](#)

Paperback - March 1995

List price: \$12.95

[Adoption and Financial Assistance : Tools for Navigating the Bureaucracy](#)

by [Rita Laws](#), [Tim O'Hanlon](#)

Hardcover - September 1999

List price: \$59.95

[Adoption Digest: Stories of Joy, Loss, and the Journey](#)
by [Tim O'Hanlon](#), [Rita Laws](#)
Paperback - October 2001

TEXT NOTES

(1)

http://sswnt7.sowo.unc.edu/fcrp/Cspn/vol1_no4/why_do_adoptions_fail.htm Speaks to the factors underlying disruptions, and looks at evidence which suggests that children with emotional problems (and parents too!) are most likely to present in disrupting adoptions. For a different view, which puts the spotlight on parents not trying hard enough to assimilate the child into the family, see <http://library.adoption.com/Adoption-Risks/Disruption-or-Dissolution/article/1729/1.html>

(2)

http://www.parentsoup.com/adoption/resources/articles/0,,162151_180810,00.html. Speaks to factors governing disruption and dissolution, with some statistics.

http://statistics.adoption.com/disruption_dissolution.php Speaks to dissolution statistics and factors

(3) <http://travel.state.gov/safeguards.html> US State Departments considerations on international adoption

<http://www.nurtureadopt.org/af/adoptiondisruption.htm>. Deborah Anderson's article, speaking to the dark side of international adoption, and the fact that families are admitting a need to disrupt adoptions. Contains links to listservs which offer help and how to disrupt. Agencies placing children from the eastern European bloc are now speaking out, because of a massive increase in disruptions sought. Barb Holtan from Tressler Lutheran Services wrote graphically on the subject in an SOS magazine quoted by Nancy Spoolstra in her website magazine, the Attachment Disorder Network.

See also Cindi Lash's article, which deals directly with the crisis in adoptions from the eastern European countries: <http://www.post-gazette.com/headlines/20000814russiadaytwo1.asp>

(4) <http://www.karensadoptionlinks.com/disrupt.html> General site, speaks to a need to seek advice from agency and social worker; has general process listserv advice, and useful links to Residential treatment Centres (which could shelter a child post-disruption if no further family is found (parents liable for cost) OR provide respite and staying the disruption

(5) http://www.health-information-resource.com/web/residential_treatment_centers_71.asp Advice on choosing RTCs

Doris Landry notes that bio kids who act out and don't fit may indeed be found in RTCs. She cites the RTC of Villa Santa Maria in New Mexico in particular and lists Vera Fahlberg's *Residential Treatment* as detailing the attachment model used there.

(6) http://www.mnasap.org/information/Factsheets/Adoption_Disruption.pdf Preventive measures, and after care for parents and children in dissolutions and disruptions

(7) UK procedures and statistics for disruption and dissolution: as spoken by a senior Placement Officer in a Local Authority Placement Team dealing with both domestic and ICA

Local Authority Placement Teams have their own internal disruption procedures, which really only detail the respective roles of the different social workers in the event of disruption, and how to take the matter back to adoption panel; this will decide what steps are to be taken with the family "in crisis". The procedures are written to take account of the Adoption Act 2002, and National Adoption Standards Act 2002 which give national guidance.

DfES at <http://www.doh.gov.uk/adoption/> AND SPECIFICALLY at <http://www.children.doh.gov.uk/adoption/consult.htm>

has information about disruption rates for adoption which might be worth a look.

New post-adoption regulations have created a responsibility for adoption agencies to provide post-adoption support services to adopters, including inter-country ones, to work to avoid disrupted placements. In practice this is in its early stages, and the thinking is further developed in relation to domestic placements, each of which will need its own specific adoption support plan.

However, there is an implication that all adopters can return to the agency at any time following adoption, to request assessment and support with adoption issues. New adopters will become aware of this as it will be discussed and indicated during assessment and at point of placement. For 'older' placements I expect that there will be less awareness given that in most instances we are no longer actively involved.

Please note that the Government Department concerned with adoption has been moved from DOH (Dept of Health) to DfES (Dept for Education and Skills) and the web pages are in flux.

Support groups such as OASIS (Overseas Adoption Support & Information Service) take calls and provide telephone crisis help for families in need, often as the first port of call before a commitment is made to talking to social services Placement Team workers. UK families can find them direct on 0870 241 7069.

(8) Adult Attachment <http://attachment.adoption.com/adult.php>;

Corrective Attachment Therapy for Adults and Couples
<http://attachment.adoption.com/corrective.php>

Daniel Siegel and Mary Hartznell: *Parenting from the Inside Out, How Deeper Self-Understanding can help you Raise children who Thrive*

Debra Wesselmann: *The Whole Parent: How to become a terrific parent even if you didn't have one*

(9) http://sswnt7.sowo.unc.edu/fcrp/Cspn/vol1_no4/why_do_adoptions_fail.htm. Practice Notes for NC Child Welfare Social workers, speaks to the fact that adoption work *best* with a fit between fail and child, fail if there isn't, and that placement workers need to match the info on both to facilitate success

(10) <http://library.adoption.com/Failed-Placement/What-to-do-When-Your-Adoption-is-Failing-A-Parents-Guide-to-Adoption-Disruption-Dissolution/article/5178/1.html> Nancy Ashe and Rita Laws on a Parents' Guide to What to do if Your Adoption Fails

(11) Rene Hoksbergen *Child Adoption* Jessica Kingsley 1994

(12) <http://www.attachment.org> Nancy Thomas website, guide for strong therapeutic care. This lady's therapy has literally saved lives.

LIST SERVS AND SUPPORT GROUPS FOR PARENTS WHO MAY NEED TO DISRUPT AN ADOPTION AND PARENTS WHO WISH TO ADOPT FROM A DISRUPTION

Therapeutic parenting support:

<http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/LittleZebras/>

Adoption Preservation - support for parents with difficult children 457 members <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/adoption-preservation/>

Adopt from Disrupted Adoptions (for families needing to disrupt and are looking for a family and for families wishing to adopt from a disruption) 492 members
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/adoptfromdisruptedadoptions/>

Adopting from Disruption (for families needing to disrupt and families looking to adopt from disruption) 54 members
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/adoptingfromdisruption/>

Adopting from Disrupted Adoptions 81 members
http://groups.yahoo.com/group/adopting_from_disrupted_adoptions/

China Disruptions (for families that adopted a Chinese child from a disruption) 14 members
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/chinadisruptions/>

Disrupted Adoptions (support for families who have or are considering disruption) 55 members
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/disruptedadoptions/>

Help with Disrupting an Adoption (support for families considering or have disrupted an adoption) 109 members.
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/HelpWithDisruptinganAdoption/> Owned by Deborah.. Its sister list provides a forum for disrupting families to “advertise” their child to families hoping to adopt from a disruption:
<http://groups.yahoo.com/AdoptingHardToPlaceChildren>.

Parenting Children adopted from Disruption
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/parentingdisrupted/>

Respite before Disrupting

Deborah Anderson (deedee@aco.in.com) offers free advice and help for families seeking respite care prior to disruption

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Sheena Macrae is a full-time mother to two children adopted from China, and part-time freelance writer. She has been published in the adoption journals *Adoption Australia*, *Adoption Today (UK)*, *CACH (UK)*, *China Connection (NE)* and *Mosaic (UK)*. Her work also appears in *Adoption (Changing Families, Changing Times)* (ed) Douglas and Philpot, Routledge 2003. Forthcoming in a book to be published in China (in Chinese) are two of her articles on revisiting China with her Chinese-born children.

Sheena holds an MA First Class Honours in English Language & Literature from Edinburgh University and also a PH.D in diachronic language change, which began a great interest in child language acquisition and its psychological underpinnings. Her early career reflected her interest in language; she worked as a University lecturer (Edinburgh), a Senior Researcher with the Scottish Education Department's Think-Tank and as a Dictionary Editor (University of Madison/Wisconsin).

Her adoption work includes a spell as ICA Country Fact-Sheet Editor for a UK adoption support group, work with Adoption UK and the UK adoption government department in consultation response and research for ICA and lobby work with the UK Immigration Department for issues relating to nationality and children adopted from China. She has close links with her local authority adoption placement team, and works with them in their educational programme for prospective inter-country adopters. Recently, she has worked as the online Topic editor for an adoption listserv (supported by EMK press).

In her remaining time, she walks her dog, goes to the gym daily and delivers her children to school and their sporting pursuits of tennis, swimming and football. Luckily, her husband has a very full career himself and understands full days.

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