



# A Workshop for Parents & Children

## FACILITATOR MANUAL



CENTER FOR CHILD  
& FAMILY HEALTH



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# Facilitator Manual

# INTRODUCTION



FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# WHAT IS LEAF?

Learning and Empowerment for Adoptive Families (LEAF) is a 10-module group education and support intervention created by the Post Adoption Support Services team at the Center for Child & Family Health (CCFH). LEAF was created to fill a need to provide adoptive families with the language and skillset to effectively communicate about adoption, deepen their understanding of the impact of their adoption on their lives, and help them connect to other families.

The content of LEAF is based on research, clinical expertise, and lived experience of adoptive family members to address the unique needs of adoptive families. The group model of providing social support, normalization, and reducing isolation is a critical component of the intervention. This curriculum teaches parents and children about common issues that can result from building a family through adoption, such as grief and loss and connection with birth/first families.

## WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN LEAF?

Although LEAF was originally designed for children aged 7-17, we have found through our clinical experience that children receive the maximum benefit when they are **ages 10 – 17**. Although there are developmental modifications for communicating about adoption at any age, the curriculum of this particular group includes abstract concepts and requires regulatory capacities that are best accessed by children in this age range. LEAF was designed in the context of a post adoption program, which due to funders' restrictions was exclusively for families with finalized adoptions, through any pathway to adoption (foster care, kinship, private domestic, international, etc.). Although the language reflects adoption specifically, the curriculum could be modified for other types of permanency (e.g., guardianship, informal kinship care).

LEAF is a family intervention that aims to enhance parent-child communication about adoption and therefore, we require that each child participating have at least one parent participating with them. To achieve maximum benefit, we recommend having at least one parent per child in the group, so that Family Together Time may be focused exclusively on that child. For families with multiple children who have been adopted in the LEAF age range, parents may repeat the group with different children. If that is not possible, facilitators may modify Family Together Time structure to meet families' needs. We do allow parents to participate in LEAF without children present. If there are two parents in a family, it can definitely be beneficial for both parents to participate in LEAF to experience some consistency as they try new parenting strategies.

We recommend using a screening process to determine if a family is a good fit to participate in a LEAF group at a particular time. Decisions about readiness to participate



in LEAF are based on clinical judgment. LEAF is not an intervention that explicitly addresses or treats complex trauma, FASD, or any other condition, but it was intended to be administered with principles of trauma-informed care and support for neurodivergence. For families where there is a clinical need for LEAF, but they are not ready for a group setting, LEAF may be administered individually with some modifications. Although facilitators may recommend individual treatment for children with extreme behavior problems that that would make it unsafe for other children or very difficult to learn, we have found that most children with behavioral issues can be accommodated in a group with a safety plan. Other examples of cases that may benefit most from individual as opposed to group treatment are children who are extremely distressed talking about adoption, or who have just recently learned about being adopted, and families in crisis.

Finally, we recommend families attend as much as possible of the LEAF group in the interest of group cohesion and to benefit from the curriculum. The content of each session builds on the content of the previous session. It is recommended that facilitators offer make up sessions when possible. Families who have missed more than two sessions of the group may benefit from starting in a different group.

## WHO SHOULD FACILITATE LEAF?

Although the facilitation will vary based on the group, we have found that at least **four facilitators** are recommended for a successful group. We recognize this is a large commitment of resources.

### Parent Group

Two facilitators are recommended for the parent group, including one clinician (referred to as “clinical facilitator”) and a second facilitator, ideally one with lived experience as an adoptive parent (referred to as “parent facilitator”). The clinical experience is very helpful in teaching certain concepts and in facilitating positive group dynamics. It is recommended that clinical facilitators have experience in group interventions, experience in providing adoption-competent mental health, and experience in trauma-informed therapy models (such as Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency, or ARC). Parent facilitators should have exposure to the material (ideally participating in a LEAF group before facilitating) and experience practicing the strategies with their children.

## Child Group

It is necessary to have at least two facilitators for the child group. Depending on group size and composition, more facilitators can be helpful, especially when children have needs that benefit from individual attention (e.g., low reading or writing ability, or behavioral needs). It is helpful for facilitators to have experience facilitating group interventions with children and experience with adoption-competent mental health, as well as childhood trauma and supporting children with special needs. We recommend at least one lead facilitator be a licensed mental health clinician, and additional group support staff may be trainees, interns, or other staff, as long as they have appropriate training and experience to respond to children in a trauma-informed way using positive behavior management strategies.

## SAMPLE WEEKLY SCHEDULE

LEAF is best facilitated with one module per week to allow parents to practice skills between groups and develop relationships over time. We have provided an example schedule below. We do strongly recommend including a group meal, as this allows for informal social time for participants to speak freely and socialize.

Below is a sample schedule for groups 1-9. Please note that session 10 has a different schedule as described in the Facilitator's Manual.

<b>5-5:30 PM</b>	Facilitators arrive and set up
<b>5:30-5:50 PM</b>	Dinner
<b>5:50-6 PM</b>	Facilitators introduce coping skill to parents and children as families finish dinner
<b>6-6:05 PM</b>	Transition to separate groups (bathroom break for children)
<b>6:05-7:00 PM</b>	Parents & children meet in separate groups
<b>7:00-7:05 PM</b>	Transition to Family Together Time
<b>7:05-7:20 PM</b>	Family Together Time, facilitators sit with families
<b>7:20-7:30 PM</b>	Families exit
<b>7:30-8 PM</b>	Facilitators clean up and debrief

## GUIDANCE ON FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

As parents are practicing new skills and children are sharing aspects of their adoption journey, it can be very helpful for facilitators to sit with families to support them. Both parents and children may be in a very vulnerable place as they are trying out new ways of communicating with each other. How to structure this time will depend on your



group, but one possibility is to assign each facilitator to one or more families that they will consistently join each group. The goal is to scaffold the interactions and support parents when they get stuck. Facilitators should take care not to take over the interaction, which can leave parents feeling ineffective. However, they may need to get the conversation unstuck by asking some questions or stating observations. In some situations, facilitators may assist with calming when emotions are high or in situations when family relationships are strained. Facilitators may need to provide parents with individual support if they are having a hard time with the skills and are, for example, expressing criticism of the child's work. Facilitators may also support Family Together Time by noticing children's energy levels. Sometimes children are simply out of focus by the end of a long day and facilitators can give parents permission to leave early.

### MID-WEEK CALLS

We recommend setting up individual check-in calls with each parent between groups. These can be limited to 15-minute slots for each parent. Although scheduling can be a challenge and all parents may not attend the calls, the opportunity to talk with a facilitator to deepen their exploration of the concepts and discuss any questions or concerns can be very valuable for parents. The Parent Facilitator's Manual includes example prompts for each week's call.

### LEAF MATERIALS

In addition to this Facilitator Manual, each parent and child attending LEAF should be provided with a workbook. These workbooks have sections where participants can write their responses to each session, and for parents only, reflect on the concepts of LEAF between groups. Children do not have between-group assignments, as not to add to additional burdens for families (on top of school homework, for example). Therefore, we recommend child workbooks be collected by facilitators between sessions and sent home after the last group. Parents should take their workbooks home for their home practice/reflections.

Within the facilitator manual, you will find example scripts with language (*in italics*) that you might use to explain a certain concept. Feel free to use your own words, but we thought these might be useful, particularly the first time facilitating this group.

Other materials needed include general supplies for activities and prizes, which we recommend to bring each week, as well as module-specific activities. The materials for specific modules that need to be printed are included in the LEAF Group Materials document, found on CCFH's website.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS OF CHILD GROUP

Behavior management is an important part of ensuring a successful group. Facilitators should practice the principles on which LEAF was founded in their management of the group. For example, using the 3 C's can be helpful for facilitators to calm themselves, help children to co-regulate, validate children's emotions, and then correct if needed.

Facilitators have flexibility to choose whatever system they prefer or that they think will be appropriate for their group's developmental level. However, it is recommended to choose some method of responding to behavior and implementing it on the first session. We suggest using individual reinforcers, such as wristbands that each child earns for responding to questions, sharing examples, or compliance with group rules. Children with difficulty complying with group rules may need additional positive attention and rewards. An alternate behavior management system is a group system of earning points. Facilitators can set a goal to earn a certain number of points and the entire group earns a prize contingent on meeting that goal.

Remember that for groups during the evenings, children may have a hard time sustaining attention and focus. Providing movement activities is a good way to start the group, and feel free to repeat these or use optional activities when energy is high. The behavior management approach used in LEAF is focused on meeting children's neurodevelopmental needs. Positive reinforcement can be very motivating for children, but when children in the group have brain differences such as executive functioning delays, it is important that group expectations align with children's capabilities.

For violations of group rules that are harmful to other participants (e.g., bullying, aggression towards others), you may need to implement warnings and possible removal from group. It is recommended that this type of consequence only be used for harmful behavior (not, for example, silliness or running around). Any verbal warnings should be given in private, if possible, to minimize embarrassment. Children may also be removed from group temporarily (at a separate table with a facilitator, or meeting in the hall with parents), with a focus on regulation first, and then restorative correction practices when needed.

Other trauma-informed care practices that can be used in the group include giving choice and control whenever possible- all group sharing should be optional. Physical safety is also important, which can include rules such as not allowing a child to be alone with an adult, using the bathroom one at a time, etc.



## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS OF PARENT GROUP

Try to start each module on time and keep reviews on track. As parent relationships grow over the weeks, it may become harder to cut off conversation. This informal social time is very important, and this is why we recommend beginning each group with a meal.

In each module, the practice for Family Together Time is often at the end, so that parents can try out strategies they've learned that night. Even if you are deciding to allow a certain activity to run long or a conversation to go deep, make sure that practice for Family Together Time is not the activity you skip to make up time.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

LEAF would not have been possible without the funding of the Post Adoption Support Services program provided by the North Carolina Division of Social Services within the Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS). This grant funded the provision of LEAF to hundreds of participants at no cost to families.

The curriculum was developed, evaluated and revised by the Post Adoption Support Services team. The following list includes some of the most substantial contributors to the development of LEAF:

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Substantial contributions were also made by the following clinicians and staff: Mary Kate Humphrey, Katie Linn, Lizzy Bain, Kara Pearce, Maria Lent, Grace Stephenson, Julie Hansford, Ginelle Hines, and Jessica Burch

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Most importantly, we would like to acknowledge each and every family who showed up with bravery and vulnerability to share their adoption journey with us and each other. This curriculum is for and because of them.

MODULE I  
**INTRODUCTIONS**



CHILD  
FACILITATOR





# MODULE I: INTRODUCTIONS



## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Pens/Colored Pencils/Markers
- Dry Erase Board and/or Flip Chart
- Dry Erase and/or Flip Chart Markers
- Behavioral tokens/Wristbands (if using)
- Prizes
- Masking Tape
- Child Workbooks
- Fidget Toys
- Coping Cards: Belly Breathing\*
- Name Tags or Name Tents
- Poster Board for Group Rules
- 2-inch Binder Ring Clips



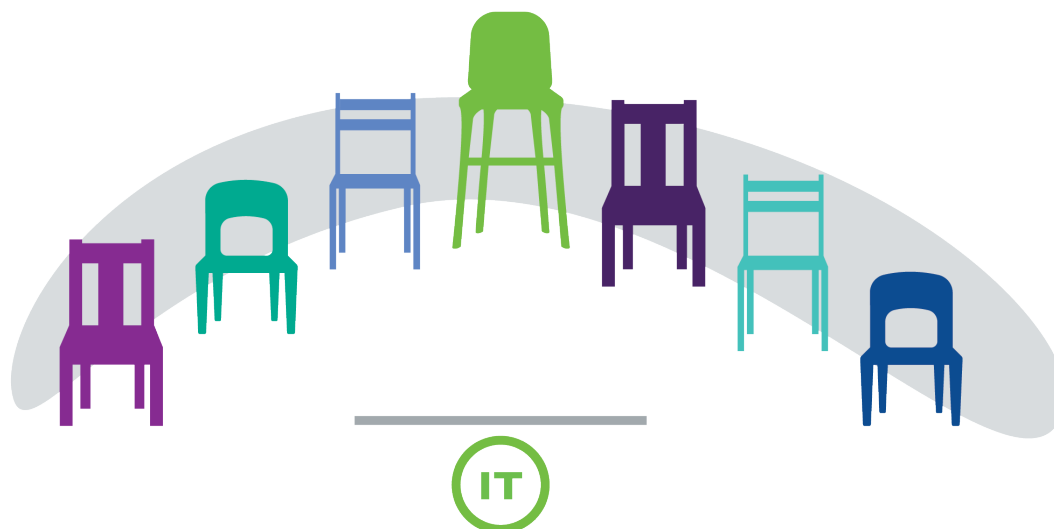
\*Note: Any materials that need to be printed each week such as coping cards, game cards, handouts, etc., can be found in the LEAF Group Materials document.

## COPING SKILL INTRODUCTION & GROUP OVERVIEW

- Each module during dinner, before parents and children separate, facilitators will begin the transition from dinner to individual groups by teaching a coping skill to the entire group (parents and children).
- Instructions for each coping skill are found in the back of the LEAF Facilitator’s manual and instructions for printing the coping cards are found in the Group Materials document.
- During the first group, facilitators will welcome families and provide a bit of information. More detail will be provided in parent/child groups.
- Remind participants about the weekly schedule (every week for 10 weeks, start and end times), including the time they are expected to arrive.
- An example schedule is provided in the introduction section
  - Note the importance of the shared meal and arriving on time.
  - Parents and children meet separately.
  - Describe family together time at the end of each group – where children will share parts of the My Adoption Story they completed and parents will practice the skills they are learning. Facilitators will sit with families to support them.
  - Point out the rooms where each part of group will take place.
  - Describe how you will mark transitions (e.g., playing a chime sound, or having the child facilitator walk into the parent room to get parents) and that it is important to keep transitions timely so that there is enough time for each part of the group.
- Provide any ground rule that pertain to the large group dinner time (ground rules for the separate parent and child groups will be provided in those groups). Recommended rules are as follows:
  - After the groups separate, children will not have access to food (it should be served in a different room than child group) as it can be very distracting for the children.
  - Parents are responsible to supervise what children are eating (facilitators will not be aware of family rules or dietary restrictions).
  - Please be on time as much as possible. Notify facilitators if they need to miss or are running late (we recommend sharing a cell phone number of a facilitator for this purpose). If a family is late, facilitators could offer to set aside a plate for them.
- Provide any relevant logistical information about restrooms, accessing the space, etc.
- Facilitators will then introduce the first coping skill and transition to separate groups.

### “LIKE ME” GAME (adapted from Waterman & Walker, 2009)<sup>1</sup>

- This game serves as both a name game and a way to get to know the individual participants by finding out how much “like me” they are.
- Setup: Place chairs in the shape of a horseshoe, with one fewer chair than there are group members. Place masking tape in a line across the top of the horseshoe (see picture below).



- Instructions: One person (“it”) stands in the empty space at the front of the horseshoe (behind the masking tape line). The “it” person says their name and something about them self, such as, *My name is Mary and blue is my favorite color*. Participants who like the color blue stand up and move behind the masking tape, while the “it” person takes a seat. Once the “it” person is seated, they will say “GO,” and everyone that was “like them” will then scramble to sit in one of the remaining chairs. The person left standing becomes ‘it’ and then has to share something about them self and find out who else is like them.
- Tips for the “Like Me” game:
  - Demonstrate how to play by having one of the facilitators be “it” for the first round.
  - If a participant says something and no one has it in common, that person gets to go again! (And we get to learn more about them.)
  - Facilitators may need to help some participants with suggestions such as, *What are some things you like to do? or Do you like pizza?*

- Try and introduce adoption issues at some point throughout the game, if participants do not bring it up. For example, *What about adoption? Isn't that something you might have in common?*

## DISCUSSION: REASON FOR GROUP

- Engage in a discussion with the group about the purpose of LEAF. Some possible questions to ask include:
  - *Who knows why we are all here today?*
  - *Who knew before now that you were coming to an adoption group today?*
  - *Did anyone have worries about coming tonight?*
  - *Who knows other kids or adults who have been adopted?*
  - *Has anyone ever been in a place where everyone was adopted?*
  - *Why do you think it is important for kids who are adopted to come together?*
- Summarize the discussion.

### Example Script:

*It is important to surround yourself with people that understand. You can learn from each other and share your experiences, which often helps you make sense of your own story. You are able to see that you are not alone when it comes to being adopted.*

## GROUP OVERVIEW

- Remind children of the days and times of the group for the next 10 weeks
- Orient children to the binders. Share that they will be collected each week
- Share the weekly schedule. For example, each group begins with dinner. Then we go into our separate groups for parents and kids. You need to finish your dinner before we separate. At the end of the evening, you will go sit with your parents and share something from your group.

## GROUND RULES

- Create a list of ground rules with suggestions from the group. Write them on a large poster board to bring to each week of group.

### Example Script:

*An important task for our first group session is to come up with some ground rules. Ground rules make sure everybody feels safe and like they are treated with respect. Let's come up with some rules together that we can all agree to follow.*

- Add the following rules to the list if they are not suggested by the group:

#### 1. Confidentiality/What happens in group stays in group

##### Example Script:

*In a group like this, we want everyone to feel safe sharing their feelings and thoughts. How would you feel about sharing if you learned that someone in the group told a friend at school about what you talked about? That is why we ask you to keep what happens in group in group and not talk about what is said to anyone other than your parents.*

*As the group leaders, we are not going to talk about what is said in the group either, unless there is an issue of safety (someone talks about hurting themselves or someone else, or that someone else is hurting them). We are not going to tell your parents everything that you say in here, but we are going to tell them about the lessons we learn, and you will actually get a chance to share things with them at the end of each group.*

#### 2. Permission to pass on sharing

Note that this rule gives participants permission to pass only on sharing their story with the group. Participation in the group activities including completion of the worksheets is essential for participants to get the most benefit from the group and therefore, strongly encouraged.

##### Example Script:

*We encourage you to be brave and share when you can, but if there is ever something personal that you don't want to share with the group you can say "pass."*



### 3. Take care of yourself

#### Example Script:

*If you need to use the restroom, raise your hand and let one of the facilitators know. Only one person is allowed to use the restroom at a time. If you are having a difficult time or begin to feel stressed, let one of us know if you need to take a break or need to talk individually at any time. We are here to help you.*

### 4. Agree to disagree

#### Example Script:

*It is possible that someone in the group will say something that you disagree with. It is okay to disagree, as long as the opinions of others are respected.*

### 5. Be respectful/Speak kindly to others

#### Example Script:

*It is very important that we are kind to each other in this group. That means listening while others are talking, not making fun of anyone else, not engaging in name calling, and not cursing or using bad language.*



## Developmental Considerations

For younger participants, you will likely need to include additional ground rules such as, keep hands and feet to yourselves, contain bodily functions (i.e. spitting or farting), one person talks at a time, etc. For older participants with cell phones, it is recommended to add a group rule about not using devices during group, and even collecting these devices before group if needed.

## Promoting Positive Behavior

- Facilitators have flexibility to choose whatever system they prefer or that they think will be appropriate for their group's developmental level. However, it is recommended to choose some method of responding to behavior and implementing it on the first session.
- We suggest using individual reinforcers such as wristbands, stickers, or marbles in a cup that each child earns for sharing or compliance with group rules. Take care to look for positive things to reward for children with more behavioral difficulty. For other behavior management suggestions, please see the Introduction in the Facilitator Manual.

- Explain your system of reinforcing group rules to the participants.

### Example Script:

*Each week whenever we see you following the ground rules we just created (refer to the poster), you might get a wristband. If the group follows the ground rules, everyone will get a prize at the end of the night. It is important to help each other follow the rules.*

## HIGH FIVE-FACTS ABOUT ME

- Introduce the activity by showing the hands that facilitators have made as examples. Facilitators should try to include something related to adoption, if not personal, then professional.
- Encourage participants to share something about adoption on their hand. Give examples of sharing: *“I was born in Ethiopia”* or *“I was adopted by my grandparents.”*
- Ask participants to turn to the hand on **page 5** of their workbook and write something about themselves on each finger that they would want to share.
- Once everyone has had time to complete their hand, ask participants to share with the group. Do your best to encourage each participant to share at least one thing but remember they can pass on sharing if they prefer.

## COPING ZONES

- Explain the Coping Zones to participants.

Have participants turn to **page 6** of their workbook. We also recommend you print the large poster in the LEAF Group Materials document and post it up each night for reference throughout the group.

### Example Script:

*Today you are going to learn how to check in with yourselves using the Coping Zones. Checking in with yourself is much like taking your own temperature. We are going to learn a lot about coping with feelings in this group and it is possible you will have some big feelings come up as we talk about adoption. We want to teach you how to use the Coping Zones tool to identify how you are doing and to manage those big feelings when they come up.*



When you are in the **Green Zone**, you are generally feeling OK and can get things done or learn. That does not mean that things are perfect; it means that even when you are facing challenges, you still feel capable of managing the challenge.

<b>RED ZONE</b>	<p>You are out of control. You want to fight or run away. You may feel rage or panic.</p>	
<b>Getting Warmer</b>	<p>You are getting out of your green zone and may be feeling scared, stressed, irritated, excited or silly. Now is a good time to use a coping skill!</p>	
<b>GREEN ZONE</b>	<p>You can deal with what is happening in your life. Your brain is relaxed enough to learn. You might have feelings, but you can handle them.</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div data-bbox="342 1115 570 1262"> <p>Sometimes your green zone is big and it is easier to handle stress.</p> </div> <div data-bbox="607 1073 938 1310"> </div> <div data-bbox="943 1115 1227 1262"> <p>Other times your green zone is smaller. Little things may bother you a lot.</p> </div> </div>	
<b>Getting Cooler</b>	<p>You are starting to feel checked out. Now is a great time to do a coping skill!</p>	
<b>BLUE ZONE</b>	<p>You are shutting down or checked out. You may be overwhelmed by what is happening around you, so you disconnect. You may feel spaced out, numb, or frozen.</p>	

When a challenge bumps you out of your Green Zone, your body gives you clues to let you know you may need a break or to use a coping skill to get back into the Green Zone.

If something bumps you into your **Getting Warmer Zone**, you may notice an increase in energy or difficulty coping with what is going on. You may have a harder time sitting still or calming down or start to feel like you want to fight or run away. You may start to feel a bit agitated, stressed, or worried; or even too silly or excited.

In the **Red Zone**, you are out of control. You may feel like you want to fight or run away. You may feel rage or panic and feel completely out of control. This may sound scary, but we all get in the red zone sometimes. When we are in the Red Zone, we don't have access to the thinking part of our brain, which sometimes makes us do things to get in trouble. (Facilitator, give example here.)

When do you think is a good time to do a coping skill, like the one we practiced tonight? (wait for responses) It is much easier to get back in the green when you are getting warmer and before you are all the way in the red zone.

If you are bumped into your **Getting Cooler Zone**, you may start to lose energy or focus. You may notice yourself feeling overly tired, quiet, disconnected, and checking out of whatever is going on around you. When you are all the way in the **Blue Zone**, it can feel like sadness, numbness, or like you are generally shut down.

- Engage in a discussion about how to recognize what zone you are in.
  - How do you know when you are in the **Green Zone**?
  - What happens to your body when you are in the **Red Zone**?
  - What do other people see when you are in the **Blue Zone**?








### Developmental Considerations

Some younger participants may not understand all of the concepts discussed about the coping zones. In particular, the blue zone is hard to understand for those who haven't experienced it. It is okay if all participants do not completely understand this concept right now. Next week, in Module 2, we will talk in more depth about the coping zones and ways kids can use coping zones to monitor how they are feeling. Their parents will learn the same concept in their group, and if they continue to use it at home, kids will understand more over time.

## CHECK YOUR ZONE

Ask participants to open to **page 7** in their workbook and reflect on tonight, the first night of group, and then tell them to mark what zone they are in right now

				
<p><b>RED ZONE</b></p>	<p><i>Getting Warmer</i></p>	<p><b>GREEN ZONE</b></p>	<p><i>Getting Cooler</i></p>	<p><b>BLUE ZONE</b></p>

## PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

- Briefly explain Family Together Time.

### Example Script:

*Each week, we will cover a different topic related to adoption and you will complete a worksheet that relates to that topic. The handouts in your workbook helps you apply the topic learned that week to your own adoption story. At the end of each group, you will share your My Adoption Story worksheet with your parent(s) during Family Together Time.*

*The goal of Family Together Time is to become more comfortable talking about adoption with your parent(s) and to share things that might not otherwise come up in conversation. Talking about adoption with your parent(s) is not always easy, but these worksheets will help guide your conversations and help you share some of your thoughts and feelings about adoption.*

*Tonight, you will be sharing the hand that you just created. You might not talk too much about adoption tonight, depending on what you put on your hand, but each week after tonight, adoption will be the main theme of all the things you share during Family Together Time.*

- Tell participants that they will be sharing their High Five: Facts About Me worksheet with their parent(s) during Family Together Time.
- Ask participants:
  - How are you feeling about sharing your worksheets with your parents?



**Facilitator Tip:** After Family Together Time each week, collect all the child workbooks. Facilitators will bring them back every week. This helps to ensure that participants have their workbooks each week to fully participate in group. Participants will be able to take their workbook home with them after the group is completed.

## COPING PRACTICE

- Pay attention to the time and transition the group to this activity about 3-5 minutes prior to the end of the group.
- It is important to close out each group with a relaxation activity in preparation for the upcoming Family Together Time.
- Walk through the coping skill that was taught during dinner and/or do another relaxation activity (examples: calming music, guided meditation, yoga, gratitude practice) to prepare the participants for Family Together Time.





MODULE 2

# LEARNING ABOUT ADOPTION



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# MODULE 2: DEALING WITH STRONG FEELINGS

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Pens/Colored Pencils/Markers
- Dry Erase and/or Flip Chart Markers
- Behavioral Tokens/Wristbands
- Prizes
- Child Workbooks
- Coping Zones Poster
- Group Rules
- Fidget Toys
- Coping Cards: Finger Breathing
- 2-3 Assorted Balls for Warp Speed
- Paper Plates or Half-Circle Shaped Cardboard for the Zone-O-Meter
- Single Hole Punch
- Brads
- Pre-cut Arrows for Zone-O-Meter
- Laptop and Speaker, Projector/Screen, and Extension Cord for video sharing

## REVIEW OF GROUND RULES

- Before bringing out the Ground Rules poster, engage the group in a group rules pop quiz and ask if anyone is able to remember any of the rules they agreed to follow last week.
- Using the ground rules poster created the previous week, walk through the rules that the participants created. Make sure to point out any rules they may have missed during the pop quiz.
- Review your specific behavior management system and remind participants that they can receive wristbands/points/stickers for following the rules and for participating in group.

## WARP SPEED

- This game is a fun and active way to help participants to continue learning names and start connecting with each other.
- Setup: Ask participants to sit in a circle on the floor. Bring the 2-3 assorted-sized balls with you and find a place to join the circle. Before beginning the game, ask each participant to share their name with the group (especially important if there are new group members).
- Round 1: Explain that each person will choose someone across from them in the circle, say their name out loud and then pass them the ball. They cannot throw the ball to the person sitting next to them in the circle and they have to throw it to someone who has not yet been passed to. The facilitator will choose a participant, say their name and then pass them the ball. Continue this process until everyone has caught the ball and passed the ball once. The last person will throw the ball to the facilitator that started the game.
- Round 2: Instruct everyone to remember who threw them the ball and who they threw the ball to and go through the sequence again.
- Round 3: Now that everyone knows the sequence, share with the group that the goal of the game now is to get through a whole round as fast as possible.
- Tips and Variations for Warp Speed:
  - After round 3 you can time how long it takes to complete the round and then challenge them to beat their time.

- Gradually add balls into the round (i.e. multiple balls are being thrown across the group at the same time).
- Try a round where everyone must be silent and talk about how that changes the game.

## AWARENESS OF OUR ZONES

- Re-introduce the coping zones. Ask participants to turn to **page 6** in of their workbooks and/or use a large coping zones poster as reference.

### Example Script:

*We are going to spend a little more time today learning about the different coping zones and what to do when we get bumped out of the green zone.*

*Last week, we introduced the concept of coping zones as a way to check in with yourself. When you are in your green zone, you are ready to learn, and you feel like you can manage your feelings. In general, you want to stay in your green zone but when we have really strong feelings, it can be hard to manage. Talking about and/or thinking about your adoption can often bring up really strong feelings for kids. Whatever the reason, when it gets too difficult to manage these feelings, we can get bumped out of the green zone and into either the red or blue zones.*

*When you are in your blue zone, your energy is very low. You might feel disconnected or checked out. When you are in the red zone, you often feel out of control, and it can be hard to think. If you don't feel like you are all the way in the red zone (out of control), but you are starting to get upset, you might be in the getting warmer zone. If you are starting to check out or feel low energy, but you're not all the way in the blue zone, you might be getting cooler. These are great zones to use a coping skill.*

- Explain what happens in our brains and bodies when we get bumped out of the green zone. Emphasize that when we get stressed and overwhelmed (i.e. bumped out of our green zone) and “flip our lids,” we don't have access to the smart, thinking part of our brain.<sup>2</sup>

### Example Script:

*When we get bumped out of our green zone, our bodies react like we are in danger, and our brains are actually not capable of thinking clearly. It's*

*important to recognize this so that you can learn what you need to take care of your brain and body.*



- Use the hand model of the brain by Dan Siegel to demonstrate “flipping our lids” or show the Hand Model of the Brain video (link in the Group Materials document).

## COPING ZONE-O-METER ACTIVITY

- Pass out half-moon shaped cardboard pieces or paper plates folded in half.
- Have participants divide their plate into 5 sections (can have pre-printed or drawn dotted lines).
- Starting with the blue zone, have them color and/or write or draw what it feels like to be in the blue zone. Remind participants that they can use the Coping Zones poster or the handout on **page 6** in their workbook for reference.
- Repeat with getting cooler, green zone, getting warmer, and red zone.
- Have participants fix pre-cut arrows with brads to their zone-o-meter, using a single hole punch.
- Demonstrate use of zone-o-meter to check in with themselves and if needed, lead the group through a coping skill to help them regulate.

## KNOWING MY ZONE: SOCIAL STORIES

- Explain that the first step to staying in the green zone is getting really good at knowing which zone you are in. Use the social stories on **page 13** of the Child Workbook, to help participants understand ways people may act when in each of the different zones. Read aloud each story and ask participants questions such as the following:
  - *What zone was this person likely in?*
  - *How could you tell?*
  - *What were they thinking?*
  - *How were they feeling in their body?*

- *What did they do?*
- *Have you ever felt like this?*
- *What is the same for you or different?*
- **Social Story 1:** James comes home, and his mom scolds him for his room being a total mess. She says he can't go out and ride bikes until it is clean. He feels angry at her. He thinks that she is so unfair and is always picking on him. He even thinks she must not love him to treat him this way! He yells at her, and she shouts back, which makes him even more mad until he goes up to his room and slams the door and starts ripping everything up! His face is hot; he wants to punch someone! He slams things on the ground and screams! What zone might he be in?
- **Social Story 2:** Kayla gets called downstairs to talk to her parents after they read her diary. She is so worried about what they have found, she doesn't think she can handle facing them. She wants to run away and hides her face as they talk. She stops looking at them and hangs her head down. Even though they are talking she goes into her own world and doesn't really hear what they are saying. What zone might she be in?
- **Social Story 3:** Lila was feeling really embarrassed and mad after her teacher pointed out her mistake in front of her whole class. She feels her cheeks turn hot, her fists ball up, and her stomach tense up. She is thinking that she really didn't like what her teacher did! She knows she is mad, so she takes some deep breaths before she gets out of control. She is a little quieter in class for the rest of the day but doesn't get into trouble for acting out. What zone might she be in?



### Developmental Considerations

Depending on the age of the kids in the group, this activity can be modified to make it more engaging.

- For younger children, have them act out the social stories in groups rather than read them aloud.
- For older children or teens, spend more time with the discussion portion or ask participants to share their own experiences and skip the example stories.

## THINGS THAT BUMP ME OUT OF MY GREEN ZONE

- Explain stressors and how they impact our ability to regulate our emotions. Ask participants if they have ever heard of a “stressor” before. Depending on their answers, provide some of the following information.

### Example Script:

*A stressor is something that causes someone to feel strong emotions and is likely to bump them out of their green zone.*

*Examples of stressors that can bump people out of the green zone are getting in trouble, being really hungry (or hangry), feeling singled out (like you are the only one treated unfairly), feeling like you don’t fit in, or being tired.*

*Can you think of others? Are there any specific stressors related to your adoption that you have noticed? Sometimes kids get stressed when their parents try to talk to them about their adoption or when they are reminded of their past. Other times, kids get stressed when they feel like they are different or don’t fit in because of adoption.*

- Ask participants to generate a list of things (i.e. stressors) that tend to bump kids out of their green zone and write them on the board. Reference social stories for ideas if they get stuck.
- Ask participants to turn to **page 14** of their workbook and check the things that are stressors for them. Allow participants to share what their stressors are with the group.

## MAKING A PLAN

- Explain to participants that after they are good at knowing what zone they are in, the next step is having a plan for what to do when they get bumped out of their green zone.
- Explain that we might use different strategies for when we are starting to get into our red zone and we need to bring our energy down versus when we are in the blue zone and need to bring our energy up.

- Ask participants: *What are some of the strategies you can use to help you cope with strong feelings when you are in the **red zone** and you need your energy to come down?*

Possible responses:

- Take a break from the thing that was making you upset (set a timer if it is something you must do)
  - Run, do jumping jacks, dance, do push-ups, lift something heavy
  - Use a deep breathing skill
  - Get a hug (from a person, pet, or soft toy/comfort object)
  - Give yourself a butterfly hug, swing, anything else that helps your body calm down
  - Eat a snack or take a rest if you're tired or hungry
- Ask participants: *What are some of the strategies you can use to help you cope when you are in the **blue zone** and your energy is low?*

Possible responses:

- Belly Breathing/Finger Breathing
  - Blowing bubbles
  - Taking a break/space
  - Talking with someone
  - Getting a hug
  - Listen to music
  - Run/jumping jacks/exercise
- Ask participants to turn to **page 14** of their workbooks and complete the activity to select strategies they would like to try.
  - Allow time for them to share with the group. Sharing can be helpful as it gives them practice sharing parts of their story, which they will be asked to do during FTT.



## Developmental Consideration

For teens and older participants, lead a discussion about how sometimes default strategies can actually work against us. Suggest that participants focus more on strategies that are healthy and don't have negative consequences.

### Example Script:

*Sometimes your go-to strategies actually work against you, which means that what you feel like doing may make you feel worse. For example, when you are in the blue zone and you get on your phone and totally check out for hours or use social media to communicate when you are angry, or you may pick a fight with someone when you are in your red zone.*

## WHAT MY PARENT(S) CAN DO

- Lead a discussion with the group about how to get help from their parents including effectively communicating their needs and what parents can do that helps them regulate in different zones.

### Example Script:

*Have you ever had someone notice that you were bumped out of the green zone and try to help, but instead of helping, they made you feel worse? Imagine how you might feel if your parent said to you (in an angry tone), "You need to CALM DOWN!" Does that tend to make you feel better or worse?*

*It is important to tell others what you want/need, so that they can help, but it can be difficult. These conversations should ideally happen while you are in your green zone. If you are in your red or blue zone and have "flipped your lid," it will be harder to tell them how to best help you.*

- Ask participants to turn to **page 15** in their workbook and look at the list of things parents can do to help. Have them place a check mark next to the strategies they think would be good for their parents to try.
  - *What are some things that your parents or other adults can do to help when you are out of your green zone?*
- Describe effective communication strategies, such as "I feel" statements

### Example Script:

*One way to communicate your needs is by using “I feel” statements, which require you to share your emotion and state what would be helpful to you. For example:*

*“When you leave me alone, I feel lonely and scared. Can you please call or text me every few hours so that I know you are OK?”*

- Practice using “I feel” statements using the scenario below:
  - Tonya had a really bad day at school and came home feeling very grumpy. Her green zone was very small, and even little things set her off. She felt bad being this out of control but couldn’t seem to stay in the green zone for long. Her mom asked her, “What’s wrong, honey?” Tonya snapped back, “leave me alone!” and went to her room and slammed the door. Then she felt sad and lonely.
  - Instead of yelling and slamming her door, how could Tonya talk to her mom about how she’s feeling and what she needs?

### PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

- Explain the family regulation plan.

#### Example Script:

*During Family Together Time, you will meet with your parents and use what you worked on today to create a family regulation plan. Everyone gets bumped out of their Green Zone, including your parents. They are coming up with their own strategies to get back into their green zone and you are going to create a plan to use together at home. It won’t work perfectly right away, but everyone can get better at getting back in their green zone with practice.*

- Ask participants:
  - *How are you feeling about creating the family regulation plan with your parents?*
  - *Do you have any worries?*

### CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to turn to the zone check on **page 6** of their workbooks or use the zone-o-meters they made earlier and think about our conversations about ways



kids can get bumped out of their green zone and what strategies can be helpful when they are in the red or blue zones.

- Have participants place a check mark in second row of white boxes to show which zone they are in right now.

## COPING PRACTICE

- Pay attention to the time and transition the group to this activity about 3-5 minutes prior to the end of the group.
- Walk through the coping skill that was taught during dinner and/or do another relaxation activity (i.e. play calming music, lead a guided meditation, practice yoga, engage in a gratitude activity).



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MODULE 3  
**EMOTIONS**

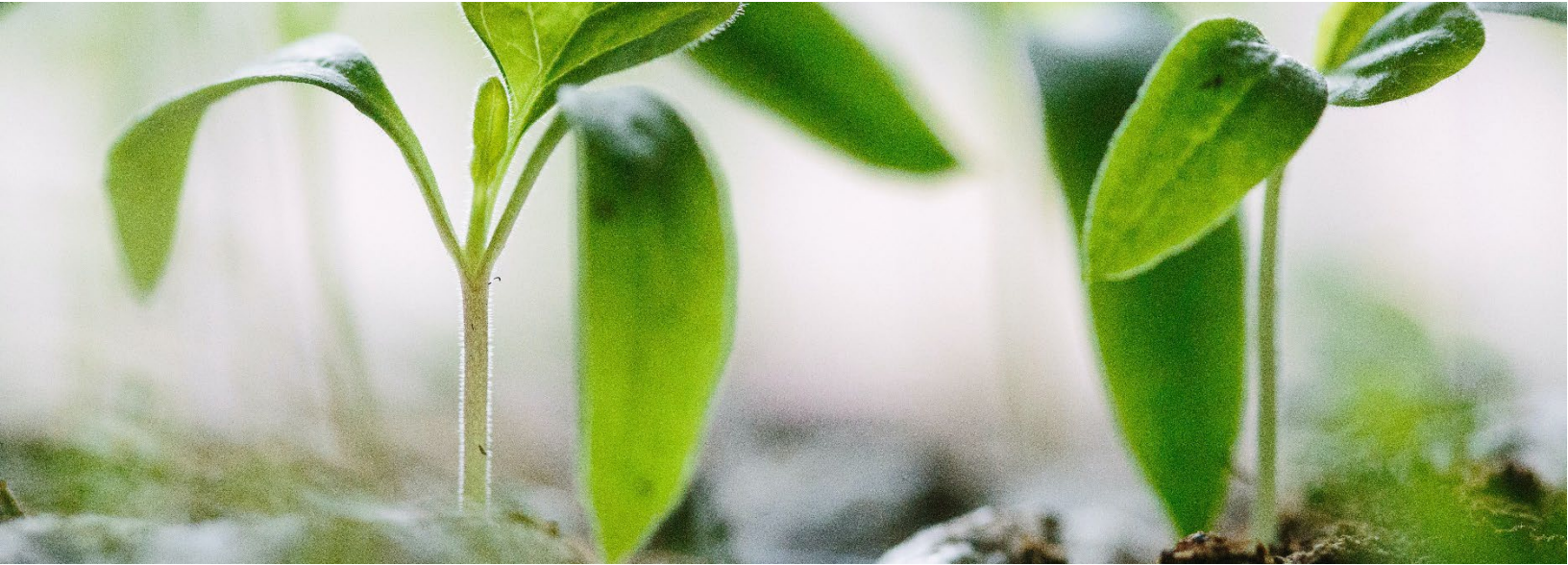


CHILD  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 3: EMOTIONS



## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Pens/Colored Pencils/Markers
- Dry Erase and/or Flip Chart Markers
- Behavioral Tokens/Wristbands
- Prizes
- Child Workbooks
- Coping Zones Poster
- Group Rules Poster
- Fidget Toys
- Coping Cards: Stretching
- Emotions Charades Cards
- Any Materials for Optional Activities if using (books, feelings thumb ball, etc.)
- Example My Adoption Story: Emotions
- LEAF Feelings Game (*2 full games recommended for groups of more than 6*)
  - Game Board
  - Game Pieces
  - LEAF Cards
  - Dice (2)

## CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Have participants open their workbooks and turn to **page 17**. Ask the group to think about how their day has been today and decide which zone they are in right now.
- Ask participants to place a check mark in first row of white boxes on their zone check to show which zone they are in right now.
- Take a quick glance at which zones participants are in. If a participant marks themselves in any zone other than green, do a group coping activity.

### Example Script:

*This is still a new group to each of you and sometimes anxiety about new things can make it hard to stay in your green zone. Let's practice the coping skill we learned after dinner and see if it helps your energy to move back into the green zone.*

- Let participants know that facilitators are available if they ever want to talk about their zone, either during group or after. Participants know that facilitators are available if they ever want to talk about their zone, either during group or after.

## RECOGNIZING EMOTION WORDS

- Prior to the group starting, go through the emotion charades cards and pre-select the emotions listed in their My Adoption Story: Emotions worksheet (i.e. Proud, Happy, Scared, Lonely, Frustrated, Sad, Angry, Worried, Confused, Guilty, and Rejected) as well as a few others that may have come up for your group
- Older kids may have time to review all the emotions. Use your best judgment on developmentally appropriate language depending on your specific group.
  - Introduce emotions as the topic for this week's group.



### Example Script:

*This week we're going to be focusing on emotions related to adoption. Before we get started with our game, we are going to take a couple of minutes and talk about each of these feelings to make sure that we all understand what they mean. This is really important because we all have these feelings, but sometimes they can be hard to identify.*

- Using the emotions charades cards, review each of the feelings with the participants. Begin by asking participants if they can explain what the feeling means and/or give an

example. Be ready with a few examples of each feeling, just in case kids get stuck and struggle coming up with their own example.

- Definitions and examples of each feeling are below:
  - **Happy:** Pleased, glad, or joyful. You might feel happy when you are having fun or when you get something you like, like a hug or a gift.
  - **Proud:** Feeling good about something you did well. You can also be proud of someone else. Your mom or dad might say they are proud of you for completing an extra hard assignment.
  - **Scared:** To be afraid or frightened. You might be scared about hearing a noise in the night or about something bad that could happen.
  - **Worried:** Feeling a little bit scared or nervous about something that hasn't happened yet (like a test or knowing you are going to get in trouble for something). You can also feel worried about something dangerous that may not happen (like worrying about your mom getting in a car accident).
  - **Frustrated:** Feeling a little bit mad when you are unable to get what you want or reach your goals. For example, if you were trying really hard to do a math problem, but you just couldn't get the answer right could be really frustrating.
  - **Angry:** When things are not going your way, anger is a strong feeling that may lead you to lose your cool. You may want to yell, stomp, or hit. You may feel angry when things seem unfair.
  - **Sad:** Feeling unhappiness, grief, or sorrow. You may feel sad when you have lost something you cared about or when you miss someone you love. Your energy may be low in the blue zone.
  - **Lonely:** Feeling like you are not connected to others, even if they are physically around you. You may feel lonely if you feel like others don't like you or understand you.
  - **Rejected:** This is like sad and lonely, but specific to when you feel like other people don't like you or accept you for who you are. For example, you might feel rejected if your friend didn't invite you to her birthday party.
  - **Confused:** Being unsure, like you don't understand what is happening.
  - **Guilty:** Feeling bad for something you think you have done wrong, like breaking the rules or hurting someone else's feelings.

- **Annoyed:** Feeling a little bit bothered or irritated, like when someone keeps tapping their pencil while you're trying to concentrate.
- **Disappointed:** Feeling let down because something didn't turn out the way you hoped. For example, you might feel disappointed if a sleepover got canceled that you were really looking forward to.
- **Overwhelmed:** Feeling like too much is happening all at once, and it's hard to handle. You might feel overwhelmed if you have a lot of homework, chores, and sports practice all in one day.
- **Hopeful:** When you believe something good could happen in the future. For example, you might feel hopeful before trying out for a team because you think you might make it.
- **Embarrassed:** Feeling uncomfortable or silly when you think others are laughing at you or noticing a mistake. For example, you might feel embarrassed if you trip in front of your class.
- **Surprised:** Feeling sudden and unexpected emotion when something happens you didn't see coming. You might feel surprised if someone throws you a birthday party or if a loud noise happens suddenly.
- **Loved:** This is when you feel cared about and important to others. You might feel loved when someone hugs you, says kind words, or spends time with you.
- **Ignored:** Being left out or not noticed, even when you want attention. For example, you might feel ignored if you raise your hand in class and the teacher doesn't call on you.
- **Bored:** Feeling uninterested or restless when nothing seems fun or exciting. You might feel bored if you have nothing to do and don't know how to keep busy.

### Developmental Consideration

Younger kids may prefer to review feelings using a book such as *The Way I Feel* by Janan Cain<sup>3</sup> or *The Color Monster* by Anna Llenas. Read the book aloud and engage in small discussions with participants about ways to differentiate between feelings.

## EMOTIONS CHARADES

- This is a fun way to talk about how to know what feeling someone is showing. It also highlights the importance of facial expressions and body language in understanding someone's feelings.
- Instructions: One person selects a card from the pile and then acts out the feeling on the card, while the rest of the group attempts to guess the emotion they are acting out. One of the facilitators should demonstrate for the first round.
  - Once the emotion is guessed correctly, the next person gets a chance to act out another feeling.
  - After everyone has had a turn, lead a short discussion on their experience observing and acting out emotions.

### Example Script:

*Some emotions can be really easy to recognize or show, while others may be much more difficult. Which emotions were “easy” to observe and/or act out and which emotions were “hard” to observe and/or act out? Were there any feelings that looked similar?*



### Developmental Considerations

- There are many ways to teach feelings identification. Facilitators are welcome to choose a different strategy depending on the age and interests of their group.
- For teens, facilitators may want to purchase a feelings thumb ball and pass the ball around and have them name a time when they felt the feeling that their thumb touches. Other games could involve matching emotions to different music.

## ADOPTION FEELINGS BOARD GAME

- Setup: Put the game board on the table and ask participants to take a seat around the game. Ask participants to select a game piece. If the group is fairly small, we encourage facilitators to play as well. If you have a particularly large group of 8-10 members, it may work best to separate into two smaller groups. Please note that this would require two full sets of the game.
- Instructions: Participants will take turns individually rolling the dice and moving their game piece across the board. The game ends when the first participant gets to the end space or (more commonly) the time allotted in the group runs out.

- Different spaces participants can land on:
  - Feelings Face (angry, sad, happy, worried, scared): Share a time you had that feeling.
  - LEAF Space: Pick up a LEAF card and have them read the adoption scenario aloud. Ask the participant how he/she would feel in that situation. Then ask other participants to share how they would feel.
  - Go Back: Move your game piece back on the board the stated number of spaces.
  - Roll Again: Roll the dice one more time.
- Tips for the Adoption Feelings Board Game:
  - Make sure to talk about and normalize that people will have different feelings in the same situation and that you can have multiple feelings at the same time.
  - Bring in the Coping Zones by having participants share what zone they might be in if this situation happens to them.
  - If participation is low, encourage participants with points/tokens for sharing.

## MY ADOPTION STORY: EMOTIONS

- Ask participants to turn the My Adoption Story: Emotions handout on [page 23](#) in their workbook.
- Explain how to use a thermometer to show the strength of their feelings.

### Example Script

*We often use thermometers when we talk about the strength of feelings we have about something. Typically, if you put a zero on your thermometer, it means you do not have any of that feeling. If you put that feeling at a 10, it is the highest it can possibly be. For example, when I was about to meet a new group of friends, my happiness level might be at an 8 because my friend who is introducing me told me they are really nice. I might also put a 4 for worried because I hope they will like me and don't want to say anything wrong. For this worksheet, we want you to think about being adopted and then rate each of these feelings on a scale from 0 to 10 with 0 meaning that you do not*

*experience that feeling at all related to adoption and I0 meaning that you feel that way a lot.*

- After participants have completed their thermometers, point out the three questions below the thermometers and ask participants to answer those questions as well. It can be helpful to read the questions out loud, but not necessary.
- Once they are done with their worksheet, ask participants to share what some of their “big” and “little” feelings are with the group.

### Developmental Considerations



Younger children may have difficulty understanding the concept of a thermometer. You can try simplifying the thermometer to small, medium, or big feelings with examples, using cups of water to show different levels of fullness, or simply use thermometers as check boxes (some children may not be developmentally ready to fully understand gradations of emotions, and that’s okay!)

### PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

- Participants will share their My Adoption Story: Emotions worksheet with their parents during Family Together Time.
- Ask participants how they might feel sharing this information with their parents:
  - *How do you think your parents may react?*
  - *Might it be hard for them to hear you feel sad, etc. about parts of your adoption?*
  - *Why is it important to share hard feelings?*

### CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 21** and think about our conversations learning about adoption and completing their My Adoption Story: Emotions Worksheet

#### Example Script:

*For many of you, this may be your first time thinking about your adoption in different ways. For some of you, this may be your first time talking about your adoption in a group with others. As a result, it would make sense to have some*

*strong feelings come up. Doing a zone check like we are about to do is a good way to check in with yourself after potentially difficult tasks. If you are in the Green Zone and “Good to Go,” great! If you are bumped out of your zone, that is OK too! Now that you know how you are doing, you can decide what you might need.*

- Have participants place a check mark in second row of white boxes to show which zone they are in right now.

## COPING PRACTICE

- Pay attention to the time and transition the group to this activity about 3-5 minutes prior to the end of the group.
- To get participants ready to engage in Family Together Time, walk through the coping skill that was taught during dinner and/or do another relaxation activity (i.e. play calming music, lead a guided meditation, practice yoga, engage in a gratitude activity).



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MODULE 4

# DEALING WITH STRONG FEELINGS



CHILD  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 4: LEARNING ABOUT ADOPTION



## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Pens/Colored Pencils/Markers
- Dry Erase and/or Flip Chart Markers
- Behavioral Tokens/Wristbands (if using)
- Prizes
- Child Workbooks
- Coping Zones Poster
- Group Rules Poster
- Fidget Toys
- Coping Cards: Gratitude
- Example My Adoption Story: Facts About Me
- Family Pictures
- Snowflake Activity: Blank Sheets of 8.5x11 paper (one per participant)



## CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 29** and think about how their day has been today and decide which zone they are in right now.
- Have participants place a check mark in first row of white boxes to show which zone they are in.
- Take a quick glance at which zones people are in. If a participant marks themselves in any zone other than green, do a group coping activity.

## SNOWFLAKE ACTIVITY

- This fun activity highlights the importance of clear communication and following directions.
- Setup: Give each participant a blank sheet of paper.
- Instructions: Ask participants to work on their own and follow the directions you are about to give. They are not able to ask any questions from the facilitator or of other group members.
- Give the following directions quickly, without any additional explanation or clarification.
  1. Fold the paper in half and tear off the top corner.
  2. Fold it in half again and tear off the top corner.
  3. Fold it in half again and tear off the left corner.
  4. Rotate the paper to the right three times and tear off the bottom corner.
  5. Fold it in half again and tear off the middle piece.
- Ask participants to unfold each of their papers and compare their snowflakes with others in the group.
- Engage the group in a short discussion:
  - *If everyone followed the same instructions, why do you think everyone's snowflakes look different?*
  - *Do you think it would have been different if you could have asked some questions?*

## DEFINING ADOPTION

- Begin by leading a discussion about the meaning of adoption. Write participant responses on the board/flip chart.

### Example Script:

*It is important to think about adoption and what that word actually means to you. Adoption means different things to different people, so there is not one definition that will fit for everyone. How you define and/or understand adoption is shaped by your own experience of being adopted.*

*Keep in mind that the meaning of adoption will change over time as you learn about, understand, and process more of your adoption story.*

*What does adoption mean to you?*

- Possible definition of adoption: Adoption is when a child is raised by someone other than the parent(s) who gave birth to them.

## ADOPTION TERMS

- Talk with participants about some common adoption words and what they mean.
- Ask participants to turn to **page 31** in their workbooks. They can take notes or just listen and share their thoughts out loud.
- It is not necessary to cover every word but be mindful of what you know about participants so far, and make sure to discuss the terms that apply specifically to the participants in your group.
- Sometimes kids may want to point out differences in their own families or share things about their own families or their adoption stories. That's okay, but it is important to be mindful and not share information about a child's story that has not already been shared by them.

### Example Script:

*We have learned that everyone in this group has adoption in common, but we also know that our families are all different. You all have families that were formed by adoption, but there are different ways that families can come together. We are going to talk about some of those ways, and you may learn a little more about each other. Remember that it is important to respect all different kinds of families!*



- Before reading the definitions, ask kids what they already know about each term.

### Example Script:

*It is possible that you have heard some or even all of these adoption terms. It is common for people to assume that you know what these words mean, but it is likely that no one has ever talked to you and explained them. All the terms we are going to review relate to different kinds of adoptions, the different ways adoption can take place, and what the level of communication is between families involved in adoption.*

## Birth Parents

- Ask: *What are the words you use in your family for the parent(s) who gave birth to you?*
- Possible responses other than birth mom/dad include tummy mommy, his/her first name, my first family/parent, (for teens, biological parent), etc. If someone raises the term “real parent,” discuss that this can be a confusing term, because your parent(s) who adopted you is very real!

## Foster Care

### Example Script:

*Has anyone ever heard the term foster care before? What do you think it means?*

*Foster care is when a child is not able to live with his or her birth family because a judge decides it is not safe. Children go to live with a foster family, including foster parents and sometimes other children. Sometimes a child is in foster care for a short time, and other times a child may be with a family for a long time or even adopted by that family.*

## Age at Adoption/Infant Adoption

### Example Script:

*How old are kids when they are adopted?*

*Sometimes kids can be adopted as babies- right when they are born. Sometimes a birth parent makes a plan of adoption because they are not able to raise their child and want someone else to. The birth parent may choose the adoptive parent(s).*

*Kids can be any age when they are adopted. Even adults can be adopted!*

**Information on Birth Families** (note: detailed information about closed vs. open adoptions is more appropriate for teens)

**Example Script:**

*What might kids know about their birth families?*

*Do they always know their birth parents' names or what they look like?*

*A closed adoption means no identifying information (like a person's name or address) about the birth family or the adoptive family is shared between the two families. After the adoption is finalized, the child's records are sealed, and no one can access them until the child turns 18.*

*An open adoption means identifying information can be shared. This type of adoption often includes visits with birth families or some kind of periodic contact (i.e. monthly, yearly, letters, pictures, phone calls, etc.). Even in an open adoption, kids can only get access to their records after they turn 18.*

**Adoption by a Relative or Stepparent**

**Example Script:**

*Can kids be adopted by people they already know?*

*When birth parents are not able to raise their kids, other family members, such as a grandparent, aunt/uncle, or cousin, might be able to adopt them. This is sometimes called "kinship" adoption. Kids may also be adopted by someone who is not a biological relative, like a friend of the family or godparent.*

*A person can also be adopted by a stepparent. This can happen when parents get divorced and when they remarry. The stepparent may choose to adopt their stepchild (Ex. Dad re-marries, and then stepmom adopts dad's kids).*

**International Adoption**

**Example Script:**

*Where are kids born who have been adopted?*

*Can kids be adopted from a different country?*

*Parents from one country can adopt a child from a different country. In the U.S., kids can be adopted from countries all around the world. Some kids live in foster families before they are adopted, and other kids live in children's*



*homes with lots of kids together (also called orphanages) where grown-ups who work there take care of them.*

## **Transracial Adoption**

### **Example Script:**

*Can kids be adopted by parents who are a different race?*

*Yes, there are all sorts of similarities and differences among kids and the families who adopt them. One of the differences that can be the easiest to see is that some kids are a different race from their parents.*

## **FAMILY PHOTOS**

Use photos of adoptive families printed from the group materials document to spark discussion about different family structures and adoption terms that were just talked about. Below are some options for facilitating this activity:

- You can give each participant a single picture or pass the stack of pictures around and ask each participant to take one from the pile and ask them to comment on what they notice about their family photo.
- You can also print full-page photos of each picture and tape them to the wall around the room. Have participants walk around to look at the different families (like a “gallery walk”).
- Engage participants in a discussion:
  - *Are there families in these pictures where the kids look very different from the parents?*
  - *Are there families in these pictures that look similar?*
  - *What do you notice about the parents in these pictures? (i.e. one parent, same sex)*
  - *Did you notice any similarities or differences to your own family in any of these pictures?*
- Conclude the activity by affirming that adoption and families can look very different and there is no wrong way to form a family.
  - *Even though these family photos look different, they all have adoption in common.*

- *There is no right way for a family to look, but sometimes people looking at a family from the outside will see them and make judgements or ask questions. We will talk more about that later in the group.*

## MY ADOPTION STORY: FACTS ABOUT ME

- Ask participants to turn to My Adoption Story: Facts About me worksheet on **page 32** of their workbooks.
- Give participants time to complete their My Adoption Story: Facts About Me worksheet, on **page 32**.
- Once everyone has had a chance to complete their worksheet, show a completed example of a My Adoption Story: Facts About Me worksheet to the group.
  - You can use the example provided in the LEAF Group Materials document or if you have someone with lived experience facilitating the group (i.e. they are adopted or they have children who are adopted) they can fill out an example worksheet. This helps participants understand how much information to include and also models sharing for the group.
- Ask participants if anyone would like to share their responses with the group. Giving a point/token/wristband for sharing can be a good way to encourage more sharing, although, sharing is not required.

## PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

- Participants will share their My Adoption Story: Facts About Me worksheet with their parents during Family Together Time.
- Ask participants:
  - *How are you feeling about sharing your My Adoption Story: Facts About Me worksheet with your parents?*
  - *Have you talked to your parents about some of these things recently?*
  - *How might your parents respond to information that you couldn't remember or maybe don't know?*



## CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 29** and think about our conversations learning some adoption specific terms and completing their My Adoption Story: Facts About Me worksheet.
- Have participants place a check mark in second row of white boxes to show which zone they are in right now.

## COPING PRACTICE

- Pay attention to the time and transition the group to this activity about 3-5 minutes prior to the end of the group.
- To get participants ready to engage in Family Together Time, walk through the coping skill that was taught during dinner and/or do another relaxation activity (i.e. play calming music, lead a guided meditation, practice yoga, engage in a gratitude activity).



CENTER FOR CHILD  
& FAMILY HEALTH



MODULE 5

# THOUGHTS & WORRIES ABOUT ADOPTION



CHILD  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 5: THOUGHTS & WORRIES ABOUT ADOPTION



## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Pens/Colored Pencils/Markers
- Dry Erase and/or Flip Chart Markers
- Behavioral Tokens/Wristbands
- Prizes
- Child Workbooks
- Coping Zones Poster
- Group Rules Poster
- Fidget Toys
- Balloons/Beach Ball
- Coping Cards: 5-4-3-2-1
- Adoption Thoughts and Worries Scenarios
- Example My Adoption Story: Thoughts on Adoption

## CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 37** and think about how their day has been today and decide which zone they are in right now.
- Have participants place a check mark in first row of white boxes to show which zone they are in.
- Take a quick glance at which zones people are in. If a participant marks themselves in any zone other than green, do a group coping activity.

## AIR BALL

- Setup: Inflate a balloon or beach ball and ask participants to stand in a circle.
- Instructions: Explain that the goal is to hit the balloon/ball as many times as possible before it hits the ground. Throw the balloon in the air and hit it across the circle. Begin counting out loud as the balloon is hit and continue counting until the balloon hits the ground.
- Air Ball Rules:
  - Participants hit the ball one at a time
  - Each person can hit the ball only once (i.e. they cannot hit the ball twice in a row)
  - The ball is still in play if it hits a table, chair, wall, etc.
- Variations: Have participants play with only one hand or on their knees

## COMMON THOUGHTS OF ADOPTEES

- Introduce the topic of common thoughts and worries related to adoption.

### Example Script:

*So far, we have talked about our emotions and how we can have feelings related to our adoption story. Today we are going to talk more about how our experience with adoption can impact what we think. Although we all have different experiences and life stories, there are some common thoughts related*

*to our experience of adoption. You may relate to some of these and not others, and they change over time.*

- Give each participant one of the adoption thoughts and worries scenarios and ask them to read their scenario aloud one at a time.
- Children can find the thoughts from the scenarios on **page 39** in their workbooks (and below for facilitator reference).

### Common Thoughts and Worries for Kids Who Have Been Adopted

- Fiona has two younger biological siblings that still live with her birth mother. On social media, her biological family looks happy and her birth mother looks like she is doing well. Fiona thinks, **“There must be something wrong with me that she has other kids but didn’t want me.”**
- Joshua was adopted when he was 4. His mom had to go to the hospital for a minor surgery, which made him very afraid, even though his dad told him she will be fine. He thinks, **“I’ve already lost one family, what if I lose this one too?”**
- Jackson was adopted 4 years ago. He knows his birth mother didn’t always make good choices and couldn’t take care of him, but he still really misses her. He doesn’t say anything to his adoptive mother because he worries that she might get upset and thinks, **“I can’t bring up my birth mom because my mom will think I am not happy that I was adopted.”**
- Tia was born in South America and was adopted when she was a baby to a white family. She is embarrassed that she doesn’t speak Spanish and doesn’t eat the same foods as her Latina friends at school. Her friends tease her for being “too white”. She thinks **“I am different than everyone else. I don’t fit anywhere.”**
- Theo is black and was adopted by a white family, including his brother and sister who are his parents’ biological children. Every time they get good grades or sports awards, he thinks, **“I don’t really fit into this family. My parents will never really love me as much as their birth kids.”**
- Sasha was in foster care before she before she was adopted. She tries really hard to get perfect grades and works hard to make her parents happy and really struggles when she makes mistakes. She thinks, **“I don’t want to be too difficult because then my parents won’t want to keep me.”**
- Mae worries so much about her birth sister. When they lived in the same home, Mae made sure that she ate and had clean clothes since her parents were using drugs. She thinks, **“If I am not there, who is going to take care of my sister? Something bad will happen to her.”**
- Tyrell’s birth parents did not take care of him and he had to take care of his siblings. Since then, he has also had multiple homes in foster care. He has a hard time trusting people who are

supposed to take care of him. He thinks, **“I can take care of myself. I can’t rely on parents because they always let you down.”**

- Sam and her sister were both adopted from different families. Her sister has visits with birth family, who all look alike. Seeing them together makes Sam feel jealous and sad. She thinks, **“How am I supposed to know who I am if I don’t know where I came from?”**
- Patrick was adopted when he was seven. He remembers his birth mom doing drugs and his birth dad hurting him, his siblings, and his mom. He is 14 now and is doing well in school and sports, but he sometimes gets in trouble for losing his temper. He thinks, **“I am destined to turn out like my birth dad and hurt people.”**
- Engage participants in a discussion about the scenarios as they are read aloud, by asking questions such as:
  - *Has anyone ever had that thought or a similar thought before?*
  - *What feelings might this thought bring up?*
  - *How could this thought be related to this character’s adoption experience?*
- Brainstorm a list with the group of other thoughts/beliefs about adoption and write them on the board.

## WHAT TO DO ABOUT YOUR THOUGHTS

- Normalize the thoughts discussed and suggest strategies to process emotional responses and/or challenge any thoughts that are not helpful or accurate. **Example Script:**

*It is completely normal for kids who have been adopted to have thoughts like these. Some of these thoughts can feel really heavy and leave us feeling pretty bad about ourselves. We don't have to stay stuck with them forever, though. There are three important ways to cope when we feel these thoughts come up: "name it to tame it" and think about the whole story.*

1. **Name it to Tame It:** By simply naming our feelings (reference feelings chart on **page 40** of their workbook), we can actually take some of the power away from the strong feelings. It is okay to allow yourself to feel whatever feeling that thought brings up. Feelings don't last forever, and sometimes when we let them out, we take away their power. If you still feel stuck, you can use some of the coping skills from this group.
  2. **Question Your Thought:** Ask yourself, "Is this the whole story?" While there can be some truth in what we are thinking, sometimes it's not the whole story.
  3. **Talk to a parent or another trusted adult** if your thoughts seem to be stuck or are leading to big feelings or otherwise hurtful to you.
- Teach children about how to question their thoughts by looking back at some of the scenarios:

### **Example Script:**

*Let's practice with Fiona's thought as an example.*

*Fiona has two younger biological siblings that still live with her birth mother. On social media, her biological family looks happy and her birth mother looks like she is doing well. Fiona thinks, "There must be something wrong with me that she has other kids but didn't want me."*

*What might you say to Fiona if she had this thought? Could there be more to the story? [wait for responses, follow up with additional questions as needed]*

*Could there be other reasons Fiona's birth mother was able to parent her younger siblings but not her?*

*Could the reason that Fiona couldn't stay with her birth mom be about adult reasons that had nothing to do with her?*

[Possible responses: Maybe she was young and not ready to be a parent. Maybe she had some problems that made her unable to take care of Fiona properly, but maybe she later had some help or made some changes before her siblings were born]

Repeat with other examples as needed for your group.

*Questioning our thoughts doesn't take away all of our feelings about the situation, but it can be a way to see a situation differently.*



### Developmental Consideration

- You may want to consider more sophisticated strategies for questioning thoughts with older participants and teens, such as the best friend approach.

#### Example Script:

*It can be helpful to think about what you would do if your best friend had this thought. What would you say to them? For example, if your best friend said, "I must've been bad to deserve abuse as a child." What would you say?*

*You can also ask yourself some of these questions:*

- Is this helping me?
- Is this true?
- Am I being too hard on myself?
- Am I being too hard on the others involved?
- Does this still fit with my life now?
- Could there be more to the story?

### MY ADOPTION STORY: THOUGHTS ON ADOPTION

- Ask participants to turn to the My Adoption Story: Thoughts on Adoption worksheet on [page 39](#) of their workbook. Point out the list of common thoughts related to adoption.

- Prompt participants to check at least three of the thoughts listed that they identify with or relate to most. Remind them that these are the same thoughts from the scenarios we read earlier.
- Ask participants to decide which of the thoughts they identified with most and write that letter on question number 2 on their worksheet. Ask participants to keep this thought in mind and answer the remaining questions on the back of their worksheet.



### Developmental Consideration

Younger children may not be able to think differently about their thoughts without a great deal of scaffolding and individual attention. Remember that your job is not to entirely convince them that their thoughts are wrong, and it is okay if you are just “planting seeds” at this point.

### PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

- Participants will share their My Adoption Story: Thoughts on Adoption worksheet with their parents during Family Together Time.
- Ask participants:
  - *How do you feel about sharing your My Adoption Story: Thoughts on Adoption worksheet with your parents?*
  - *Have you shared this thought with your parents before?*
  - *Are there some thoughts that might be harder to talk about than others? For example, kids sometimes find it difficult to talk with their parents about their birth families. Normalize these difficulties as they come up.*

### CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 37** and think about our conversations today about common thoughts and worries about adoption and completing their My Adoption Story: Thoughts on Adoption worksheet.
- Have participants place a check mark in second row of white boxes to show which zone they are in right now.



## COPING PRACTICE

- Pay attention to the time and transition the group to this activity about 3-5 minutes prior to the end of the group.
- To get participants ready to engage in Family Together Time, walk through the coping skill that was taught during dinner and/or do another relaxation activity (i.e. play calming music, lead a guided meditation, practice yoga, engage in a gratitude activity).





MODULE 6

# QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION



CHILD  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 6: QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION

## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Pens/Colored Pencils/Markers
- Dry Erase and/or Flip Chart Markers
- Behavioral Tokens/Wristbands
- Prizes
- Child Workbooks
- Coping Zones Poster
- Group Rules
- Fidget Toys
- Wooden Stacking Block Game
- Coping Cards: Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Adoption Question Cards
- Book: Rosie's Family by Lori Rosove
- Alternate Teen Book: Beneath the Mask: For Teen Adoptees 18
- Example of My Adoption Story: Questions About Adoption and Adoption Questions Puzzle

## CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 45** and think about how their day has been today and decide which zone they are in right now.
- Have participants place a check mark in first row of white boxes to show which zone they are in.
- Take a quick glance at which zones people are in. If a participant marks themselves in any zone other than green, do a group coping activity.

## ADOPTION STACKING BLOCKS

- **Setup:** You will need to ask participants to sit at a sturdy table or on the floor. Stack the wooden blocks to form a tower. Each row has three blocks, and the rows alternate directions every layer.
- **Instructions:** Participants will take turns removing a single block from any layer, except the top. The same block must then be placed on the top of the tower, making sure to keep the blocks alternating directions on each row.
- At the end of their turn, the participant will pull an adoption question card and read the question on the card aloud and then say whether or not they have had the same question. The rest of the group can also choose to answer. The game ends when the tower falls.

**Facilitator Tip:** Go through the question cards before the group starts and put some of the questions you have heard in the group thus far or the ones that you think may apply to this specific group on top.

- **Rules:**
  - Remove one block at a time
  - A block cannot be removed from the top of the tower
  - Only one hand can be used to move a block (your other hand cannot be used to stabilize the tower while you pull out a block)

## ROSIE'S FAMILY: AN ADOPTION STORY BY LORI ROOVE

- Read *Rosie's Family: An Adoption Story* out loud to the group, asking questions throughout the book and encouraging discussion.
  - *What do you notice about Rosie and her family?*
  - *Does anyone in this group have brothers and/or sisters? Are they also adopted?*
  - *Does anyone else feel confused about adoption sometimes?*
  - *Rosie says she asks a lot of questions. Do any of you ask your parents questions?*
  - *Is it easy to ask questions about your adoption?*
- As Rosie's questions from the book are read aloud, write the question on the board and ask participants to raise their hand if they have also had the same question. The questions in the book are listed below:
  - What was I like when you first brought me home?
  - Are you my real parents?
  - What were my birth parents like?
  - Where did I live before?
  - Do I really belong in my family?



### Developmental Considerations

- Instead of reading *Rosie's Family*, distribute copies of the teen stories from *Beneath the Mask* book. You can choose to distribute the same story or different stories to each participant. Here are the stories from the book that fit well with our activity about questions about adoption:
  - Skyler, age 18 (page 46-47)
  - Anna, age 22 (page 41-42)
  - Tatyana, age 19 (page 43-45)



- Give participants a copy of the story. Instruct participants to follow along as the story is read aloud by the group and/or to read silently to themselves. Ask participants to underline the questions they hear or read in the story.
- Engage in a group discussion.
  - *What questions about adoption came up in the story?*
  - *Did anyone feel some of the same things as Skyler/Anna/Tatyana?*
  - *What parts of their stories did you find helpful to hear?*

### BRAINSTORM OTHER QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION

- Ask participants to list questions they heard from *Rosie's Family* or *Beneath the Mask* and write the questions on the board.
- Have participants brainstorm other questions children may wonder about their adoption story and add them to the list on the board. Lots of questions were brought up in the stacking blocks game, but additional questions can be found in their workbooks on **page 46**.
- Reference the questions and ask:
  - *Have you ever had any of the same questions about your family or your adoption? Which ones?*
  - *Did anyone hear some questions they have never thought about before, but now want to find out?*
  - *What other questions about your family and/or adoption have you had?*
- Lead a discussion with participants:
  - *Has anyone ever asked someone any of these questions?*
    - *Was it easy or difficult to ask the questions?*
    - *Who did you ask?*
    - *Were you able to get answers to any of your questions?*
    - *How did it feel when the answers were not available?*

- *Has anyone ever asked a question that you already knew the answer to?*
  - *Why do you think you ask questions you know the answer to? How did the person you asked react?*
- *Has anyone ever asked a question that your parents could not answer? How did that feel?*
- *Does having any of these questions make you feel a certain way?*
- *Does anyone remember the thoughts and worries we talked about last week and the emotions we talked about the week before that? Sometimes our questions can bring up these big feelings and worries, like [which kid example was this? say name] feeling rejected when she wondered why her birth parents kept her siblings and not her. Having these big feelings is totally normal.*

## MY ADOPTION STORY: QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION

- Ask participants to turn to the My Adoption Story: Questions About Adoption worksheet on **page 47** in their workbooks.

### Example Script:

*We have talked about a lot of different questions so far tonight and I have heard many of you say that you have or have had similar questions. Right now, think about the questions you have specifically about your birth parents. Sometimes, questions about birth parents can be the hardest ones to ask and can bring up a lot of big feelings. Writing them out can sometimes make it easier to ask.*

- Ask participants to write the questions they have about birth parents on their worksheet.

## QUESTIONS PUZZLE (Adapted from *Beneath the Mask: For Teen Adoptees, C.A.S.E.*)<sup>1</sup>

- Ask participants to turn to the My Adoption Story: Questions Puzzle on **page 48** in their workbooks.
- Instruct participants to write the facts they know about their story in the puzzle pieces with one color ink and the questions they still want answers to in the puzzle with another color ink. This activity was developed from *Beneath The Mask*.<sup>1</sup> Use the legend at the top of the worksheet and color in which color you are using for

pieces of your story you already know and which color you are using for the questions you still have.

- Blank spaces can be left and represent the questions they may have in the future.
- After giving participants several minutes to complete their puzzles, walk through an example of a completed puzzle.
- Ask participants to share their puzzle with the group.

## PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

- Participants will be sharing their My Adoption Story: Questions About Adoption worksheet and their Questions Puzzle with their parents during Family Together Time.

### Example Script:

*Tonight when you share your questions about adoption with your parents, keep in mind that they might not answer them and/or they may not know the answers to your questions. It is difficult when we have missing information about our stories, but that does not mean the question should not be asked. Sharing your questions, whether they have answers or not is beneficial.*

- Ask participants:
  - *How are you feeling about sharing your puzzles with your parents?*
  - *What are your worries?*

### Example Script:

*It is common for kids to feel worried about talking about birth families and their adoption story with their parents. Some kids worry about hurting their parents' feelings. We talked about this thought last week with Jackson, who worried that his adoptive parents would think he is unhappy if he brings up his birth mom.<sup>1-9</sup>*

*Sometimes kids worry because it can bring up big emotions in them that can be hard to manage. We have talked a lot in this group about managing strong feelings. Remember your strategies and use them, if needed. It is also OK to share some of your questions tonight and save others for a different time.*

- Remind participants that their parents are coming to this group to learn new skills for managing their feelings and helping them support their children in asking questions!

### CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 45** and think about our conversations about common questions kids have about adoption.
- Have participants complete their My Adoption Story: Questions About Adoption worksheet and Adoption Questions Puzzle.
- Have participants place a check mark in second row of white boxes to show which zone they are in right now.

### COPING PRACTICE

- Pay attention to the time and transition the group to this activity about 3-5 minutes prior to the end of the group.
- To get participants ready to engage in Family Together Time, walk through the coping skill that was taught during dinner and/or do another relaxation activity (i.e. play calming music, lead a guided meditation, practice yoga, engage in a gratitude activity).



MODULE 7  
**LOSSES & GAINS**



CHILD  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 7: LOSSES AND GAINS



## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Pens/Colored Pencils/Markers
- Dry Erase and/or Flip Chart Markers
- Behavioral Tokens/Wristbands
- Prizes
- Child Workbooks
- Coping Zones Poster
- Group Rules
- Fidget Toys
- Coping Cards: Yoga
- Example My Adoption Story: Gains and Losses
- Phone or Radio to Play Music
- Materials for Grief and Loss Jars:
  - Plastic Jars/Mason Jars
  - Wooden Craft Sticks (wide)
  - Permanent markers
  - Small Colored Rubber Bands (optional)
  - Optional materials for decorating jars:
    - String/Yarn
    - Foam with Adhesive Baking
    - Pipe Cleaners
    - Stickers
    - Glue Dots/tape
    - Colored Puff Balls
    - Washi Tape



## CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 53** and think about how their day has been today and decide which zone they are in right now.
- Have participants place a check mark in first row of white boxes to show which zone they are in.
- Take a quick glance at which zones people are in. If a participant marks themselves in any zone other than green, do a group coping activity.

## MUSICAL CHAIRS

- Setup: Arrange chairs (one less than the number of people playing) in a circle with the seats facing outwards.
- Instructions: Start playing the music and have participants walk around the chairs while the music plays. When the music stops, everyone must immediately try and sit in a chair. The one person left standing is out. Remove a chair after each round and continue playing until there is only one person left sitting in a chair.
- Variation: Do not remove a chair each round so that everyone can continue to play.

## DEFINING GRIEF, LOSS, & GAINS

- Discuss the connection between adoption and losses/gains.<sup>1-2</sup>

### Example Script:

*Adoption comes with losses and gains. Losses are people or things that we had before adoption that we don't have anymore. Gains are things that we didn't have before that we have now. For example, someone who is adopted might have lost seeing a birth parent every day and might have gained a new brother. It is common for people to celebrate what we gain through adoption but you often don't get the same chance to express how you feel about your losses in adoption.*

- Ask participants for examples of losses and gains and write responses in 2 columns on the board. Note: this list generated by the group will be used for the MyAdoption Story: Gains and Losses worksheet, so do not erase until group is over.

- Define grief.

**Example Script:**

*Grief is the thoughts, feelings, and reactions that we have when we lose something or someone important to us. We sometimes think about grief as how we feel when someone dies, which it can be, but it also can come from other losses.*

*Everyone has losses in their lives, and grieving is actually a healthy way to respond to those losses. If we put the losses away and don't let ourselves grieve, we carry the losses with us. When we have another loss, the first loss is still there, and our grief gets bigger and bigger.*

- Define Ambiguous Loss. For younger children, you may choose to use the term “Confusing Loss.”

**Example Script:**

*There is a special kind of loss that can come with adoption: Ambiguous Loss, which means loss with confusion. It can happen when kids are unsure if someone is alive or if they will ever see them again. It can also happen when they have lost someone they never got a chance to know. Ambiguous loss is also the uncertainty that comes from having missing pieces to your puzzle and not knowing if you will ever have all the answers.*

## LOSSES & GAINS JAR

- Ask participants to review the list of losses and gains made by the group and reflect on their own personal losses and gains related to their adoption.
- Ask each participant to choose two different colored markers and give them several Jumbo Craft Sticks. Have participants write their gains in one color and their losses in another color.





- Optional: For each stick (gains and losses) ask participants to indicate the feelings they have about each loss and gain by adding the corresponding color rubber band to the end of their stick.

**YELLOW** Happy

**PURPLE** Proud

**RED** Angry/Frustrated

**BLUE** Sad

**GREEN** Scared/Worried

**PINK** Embarrassed

**ORANGE** Other

- After their sticks are complete with losses/gains and feelings, ask participants to add their sticks to their jars and allow them to decorate their jar with any of the provided materials.

## MY ADOPTION STORY: GAINS AND LOSSES

- Instruct participants to list their top losses and gains on their My Adoption Story: Gains and Losses worksheet on **page 55** in their workbooks.
- For each of their losses and gains, they will also check their feelings (note that if they did the optional rubber band activity, they may skip the worksheet as it essentially duplicates this activity).

## MY ADOPTION STORY: GRIEF REMINDERS

- Define Grief Reminders:

### Example Script:

*Nobody's grief process is the same and grief has no defined beginning and end. After the initial loss, when the feeling is typically strongest, grief comes and goes in waves. When something happens that reminds the person of their loss, it is called a grief reminder. Grief reminders can be important life events like weddings or graduations. They can also be seasonal and include the time of year when you were adopted, or major holidays and birthdays. Although we might want to hide our grief, it is actually really important to talk about it. Most grief can be managed by having someone to share your feelings with or engaging in some kind of ritual that acknowledges the loss.*

- Ask participants to open their workbooks to **page 56** and look at the list of common grief reminders for kids. Ask participants to place a check mark next to the ones that apply to them.
- Ask participants to share if they want to.



### Developmental Considerations

- The concept of grief reminders may be harder for younger children to understand. If your group is younger, it is okay to skip this section.

### PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

- Tell participants that they will be sharing their My Adoption Story: Gains and Losses worksheet (or jar with feeling bands) as well as their My Adoption Story: Grief Reminders worksheet with their parents during Family Together Time.
- Ask participants:
  - *How are you feeling about sharing your grief and loss jars and your grief reminders with your parents?*
  - *What are your worries?*

### CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 53** and think about our conversations about common questions kids have about adoption.
- Have participants place a check mark in second row of white boxes to show which zone they are in right now.



## COPING PRACTICE

- Pay attention to the time and transition the group to this activity about 3-5 minutes prior to the end of the group.
- To get participants ready to engage in Family Together Time, walk through the coping skill that was taught during dinner and/or do another relaxation activity (i.e. play calming music, lead a guided meditation, practice yoga, engage in a gratitude activity).





MODULE 8

IDENTITY & BIRTH FAMILY CONNECTIONS



CHILD  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 8: IDENTITY & BIRTH FAMILY CONNECTIONS



## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Pens/Colored Pencils/Markers
- Dry Erase and/or Flip Chart Markers
- Dry Erase Board and/or Flip Chart
- Behavioral Tokens/Wristbands
- Prizes
- Child Workbooks
- Coping Zones Poster
- Group Rules
- Fidget Toys
- Large Rubber Bands
- 3-Inch Piece of String (one per participant)
- 24-36 Plastic Cups
- Pieces of Me Activity (one per participant)
- Tape or gluesticks
- Laptop and Speaker, Projector/Screen, and Extension Cord for video sharing
- Coping Cards: Rainbow Breathing
- Example My Adoption Story: Pieces of me Pieces of me
- Example Family Tree

## CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 61** and think about how their day has been today and decide which zone they are in right now.
- Have participants place a check mark in first row of white boxes to show which zone they are in.
- Take a quick glance at which zones people are in. If a participant marks themselves in any zone other than green, do a group coping activity.

## CUP STACK



- The goal of the game is to create a pyramid (3 cups on the bottom, 2 cups on the second row, and 1 cup on the top) as a team using only a rubber band with strings.
- Setup: Divide participants into groups of about 3-4 people each. Place a stack of 6 plastic cups upside down on the table in front of the group. Give each participant a small 3-4 inch piece of string and ask each of them to tie the string to the large rubber band.
- Instructions: Group members must work together, pulling only their strings to expand the rubber band around the base of the cup and then work together to lift the cup and place it on the table. They must move each cup and stack them into a pyramid shape.
- Variations:
  - Time the groups and see who can build their pyramid the fastest.
  - Challenge the groups to stack their cups in less than a minute.
  - Challenge the groups to stack and unstack the cups in 1 minute.
  - Ask participants to do one round without any talking and discuss how this impacted the group.
  - Do the same game with small paper cups to add an additional level of difficulty.

## IDENTITY AND ADOPTION

Define identity and explain importance in adoption.<sup>1</sup>

### Example Script:

*Identity is a sense of who we are as people, both in how we are unique as individuals and how we are like other groups. “Who am I?” is a question that many people often ask themselves, but this is especially true for individuals who have been adopted.*

- Ask participants to tell you some things that make up a person’s identity and write them down on the board.
- After writing down their ideas, add any of the following that were not mentioned. You may need to define some of the terms that group participants might not know.
  - Physical traits / looks
  - Personality traits
  - Gender
  - Sexual orientation
  - Abilities and talents
  - Relationships (friend, sister, etc.)
  - Race/ethnicity
  - Interests
  - What matters to you
  - Dreams and desires
- Discuss how we develop some of the things that make up our identity.

### Example Script:

*We all look to our parents and family to compare how we are similar and how we are different. A person who has been adopted has at least two families to consider. What can make this even more difficult is not having a lot of information about your birth family instead of having birth and adoptive families that can be very different from one another. Having two very different families can often make kids feel like they do not fit in anywhere.*



## RACE AND ADOPTION

- Expand on the concepts of race and ethnicity as aspects of identity.

### Example Script:

*Race and ethnicity are both key parts of our identity. Race is a way of grouping people based on their physical characteristics such as skin color or hair texture that are inherited from your biological parents. Although race isn't a scientific way to group people, it has been used by society to treat people a certain way. What are some examples of different races that might be part of someone's identity? Can people identify with more than one race?*

Possible responses: Black / African-American, White / Caucasian, Asian-American, American Indian / Native American, Biracial, Multiracial

- Include definitions for the following terms as relevant for your group:
  - *Ethnicity is a part of our identity that involves being part of a group of people with shared language, traditions, or ancestry. Examples of ethnicities include Irish-American, Cherokee, Hispanic, and Russian Jewish.*
  - *Culture is pattern of behavior shared by a group of people, such as what they eat, how they talk, what they celebrate, and social customs they follow (including the unwritten rules of how to interact with people, like how close to stand while talking).*
  - *Ethnicity and culture are similar, but ethnicity is based on a group you were born into, whereas culture is more flexible, and can be learned (for example, a workplace or school can have its own culture).*
- Discuss the impact of transracial adoption on identity.<sup>2</sup>

### Example Script:

*Transracial adoption is a term that is used to describe when a child who is adopted has a different racial identity than one or more of their adoptive parents. Being part of a transracial family can lead to complicated feelings. Some kids may feel like they have some things in common with other people who share their birth race and some things in common with others of the race*

*of their adoptive family. Having differences that other people can see and comment about can also be hard to deal with, which we will talk more about next week.*



- Watch the video about Transracial Adoption and Racial Identity (Link in LEAF Group Materials document).
  - After showing the video, ask participants: *Do you identify with the thoughts and feelings of the individuals in the video? How so?*
  - Some of the common thoughts and feelings of transracial adoptees from the video are listed below (and on children’s workbook, page 48). 11-18 If any of these are not brought up during the above discussion, make sure to bring it up and ask if anyone identifies with these statements. If anyone identifies with these statements.
    - Some kids may feel like they don’t fit in with kids who look like them (For example, if they are Black and their parents are White, they may get to school and feel like they don’t fit in as well with other Black kids raised by Black parents). are Black and their p
    - Some kids may struggle because most people around them don’t look like them (“I’m surrounded by White people all the time!”).
    - Other people may question their identity (“You’re not really Korean”).
    - Some kids question their own identity- they look one way, but feel disconnected from that culture (“I know I’m Mexican, but I don’t speak Spanish or eat the same food or act the same as the other Latina kids at my school.).
    - For kids who don’t know part of their racial identity, it can feel even harder to fit in.
    - Being part of a multiracial family can make kids feel like they don’t fit into a “check box” like other kids.
    - Some of these differences can make kids feel weird, lonely, or like others don’t accept them.i kids feel weird, lonely, or like others don’t accept them.
    - Sometimes kids find things about their multicultural identity that makes them feel special or unique.

## MY ADOPTION STORY - PIECES OF ME

This activity was adapted from the “Game of Discovery” (Waterman, Langley, Miranda, & Riley, 2018).<sup>5</sup>

- Give participants a set of possible aspects of one’s personality from **page 64** of their workbook. Note that there are blank spaces to fill in aspects of their identity that are really important to them.
- Go over each of the aspects with the participants. Ask participants to turn to **page 65** in their workbooks and think about the different aspects of identity and which ones apply to them as individuals. Have participants reflect on what they think or know about their birth parents and also which aspects of their identity could apply to both them and their birth parents.
- Once participants have figured out which aspects of identity go in which space, they can use the tape to attach them to their worksheet.
- Share an example of the My Adoption Story: Pieces of Me worksheet and then allow participants to share one item from their My Adoption Story: Pieces of Me worksheet with the group.



## HOW DO YOU DEFINE FAMILY?

- Talk about how someone might define family.

### Example Script:

*We know from our earlier conversations that every family is unique in terms of how they came to be a family and possibly how they look. We also know that families have different traditions, cultures, beliefs, religions, backgrounds, races, etc. Part of what makes a family unique is how we individually define it and who we include in our family.*

- Engage participants in a discussion about how someone might define family.
  - Ask participants: *When you think about family, what comes to mind? How do you decide who is part of your family and who is not?*

- Ask participants to turn to **page 66** in their workbooks and write down what family means to them.

## FAMILY TREE

- Introduce the Family Tree activity.

### Example Script:

*Some of you may have been asked to do a family tree before in school and for some of you, it may have been really difficult. Often when kids who are adopted are asked to create a family tree, it brings up a lot of feelings and worries. Some kids wonder:*

- *Who should I include?*
- *Will I have to share that I was adopted?*
- *What will others think about who I choose to include?*
- *What does it mean if I do not include certain people?*

*Who you choose to include on your Family Tree is up to you, because it is based on your definition of family and belongs to you. You can choose to include your biological family, adoptive family, extended family (bio family or adoptive family), friends, or people who are important to you. Your idea of family and/or who you choose to include on your Family Tree will often change over time.*

- Show an example of a completed Family Tree.
- Ask participants to complete their Family Tree on **page 67** of their workbooks, using family as they defined it.
- Remind participants that they will have the opportunity to share their Family Tree during Family Together Time.
- Ask participants to share their Family Tree with the group, if they feel comfortable.



## PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

- Participants will share their My Adoption Story: Pieces of Me worksheet, their definition of family, and their Family Tree with their parents.
- Ask participants how they might feel sharing these items with their parents.
  - *How do you feel about sharing each of these things with your parents?*
  - *Are there any parts that you think might be hard to share or certain parts that your parents might disagree with? Might it be hard for them to hear you feel sad, etc. about parts of your adoption? Why do we share hard feelings?*

## CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 61** and think about our conversations about your birth family and identity and completing their My Adoption Story: Pieces of Me worksheet as well as their definition of family and their family tree with their parents.
- Have participants place a check mark in second row of white boxes to show which zone they are in right now. of white boxes to show which zone they are in right now.

## COPING PRACTICE

- Pay attention to the time and transition the group to this activity about 3-5 minutes prior to the end of the group.
- To get participants ready to engage in Family Together Time, walk through the coping skill that was taught during dinner and/or do another relaxation activity (i.e. play calming music, lead a guided meditation, practice yoga, engage in a gratitude activity).



CHILD  
FACILITATOR  
MODULE 8





MODULE 9

# COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY



CHILD  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 9: COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY



## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Pens/Colored Pencils/Markers
- Dry Erase and/or Flip Chart Markers
- Behavioral Tokens/Wristbands
- Prizes
- Child Workbooks
- Coping Zones Poster
- Group Rules
- Fidget Toys
- Coping Cards: Lazy 8 Breathing
- Laptop and Speaker, Projector/Screen, and Extension Cord for video sharing
- I-2 Foot Rope (one per participant)
- W.I.S.E. Up Pocket Cards



## CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 73** and think about how their day has been today and decide which zone they are in right now.
- Have participants place a check mark in first row of white boxes to show which zone they are in.
- Take a quick glance at which zones people are in. If a participant marks themselves in any zone other than green, do a group coping activity.

## HUMAN KNOT

- The objective of the game is to untangle the group without letting go of the ropes.
- Setup: Ask participants to stand in a circle and give each participant a short rope and have them hold it in their right hand.
- Instructions: Ask each participant to reach across the circle and grab the rope of someone not directly next to them.
- Rule: If a rope is dropped, the group must start again from the beginning.
- Variations: If the group is easily successful, ask them to try it again without talking. You can also have them do the activity without ropes, if appropriate.
- Lead a short discussion/debrief:
  - *Was this difficult?*
  - *What feelings came up for you?*
  - *Was it ever stressful/frustrating?*
  - *What made it easier? Harder?*

## GROUP TERMINATION DISCUSSION

- Lead a discussion to prepare participants for the end of the group next week.

### Example Script:

*Next week will be our last week together. It is hard to believe that we have spent the last 9 weeks learning about adoption, talking about adoption, and hearing each of your*

*adoption stories along the way. You all have done a lot of work, which has not always been easy. I'm grateful to each of you for sharing and proud of the hard work you've done.*

*What feelings are you are having about the group ending?*

## PEOPLE ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS

- Lead a discussion about common questions that children who are adopted are asked.

### Example Script:

*It is common for kids who have been adopted to be asked questions about their family and their adoption story. Some common questions are:*

- *Is that your real mom?*
- *Why were you adopted?*
- *Is that your real sister? She doesn't look like you.*
- Engage participants and ask them to give other examples of questions they have been asked or comments they have heard before. Write their responses on the board.
- Ask participants to turn to **page 74** in their workbooks and read through the list of questions/comments that adopted people often hear.
- Ask participants to put a check mark next to the questions/comments that they have heard or been asked before.
- Encourage participants to share one comment or question they have heard with the group as well as how it made them feel and how they responded.

### Questions / Comments Adopted People Often Hear

- Your mom/dad doesn't look like you. Are you adopted?
- Is that your real mom/dad/sister/brother?
- What happened to your birth parents?
- Why were you adopted?
- Why did your parents give you up? Did they not want you?
- Do you want to meet your biological family? What would you say to them?
- Do you have any pictures of your first family? Can I see them?

- Where are you from? Are you American?
- Do you like being adopted?
- Did you have another name?
- When did you find out you were adopted?
- How old were you when you were adopted?
- Don't you feel lucky you were chosen?
- What's it like being in an orphanage?
- Did your parents have to pay for you?
- Did you have to live in foster care?
- Don't you think you are better off being adopted?
- I wish I was adopted.
- I have a step parent so it is kind of like I am adopted.
- Do you ever wish you could live with your other family?
- Do you think it would be easier if you lived in a family that was your same race?

### Optional PowerPoint Activity

- Instead of the discussion you can show the PowerPoint titled "Questions Adopted People are Sick of Answering" (Modified from original source, Louis Peitzman, 2013), which can be found in the LEAF Group Materials.
- As you go through each slide of the PowerPoint, read aloud the question people often hear and highlight the responses in the gif images. Ask participants if they have heard this before, how it made them feel, and how they have responded.

### IMPACT OF COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

- Next, discuss possible emotional responses to these comments and questions.

#### Example Script:

*How do you feel when you get asked about adoption? [Pause for responses]*

*Kids often have mixed feelings about being asked about their adoption – sometimes they can be happy or proud, other times they can be frustrated and confused. How you feel probably depends on the situation, who is asking, where you are, your age, etc.*

*Why do you think other people ask these questions?*

Possible responses: They are curious, they care about you and want to know about you, they are trying to make you feel bad, they don't know about adoption

*Sometimes people may have good intentions, like just being curious or they are your friend and they want to know about you. Even if they have good intentions, could the comments and questions still be hurtful?*

*Sometimes people may not know about adoption and may ask a question that shows they don't understand. You have a choice about how to respond.*

*If you think someone is intentionally mocking you or bullying you because of adoption, it is a good idea to talk with a trusted adult to get some help.*

## RESPONDING TO COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

- Discuss how to respond to these comments/questions using the W.I.S.E. Up™ curriculum developed by the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.)<sup>2</sup>.

### Example Script:

*Now that we have talked about the kinds of things you hear people say and how they impact how you feel, we want to share with you a super simple way of thinking about how you could respond to questions about adoption if you ever get stuck. The great thing about it is there is no right or wrong way and it is completely up to you as to how you want to respond.*

- Give participants the W.I.S.E. Up pocket cards.
- Present different ways to respond to questions about adoption:
  - W** - Walk Away
  - I** - (say) It's private
  - S** - Share Something
  - E** - Educate them.

## W.I.S.E. UP CHARADES

- Using the list of common questions and comments adopted people hear on **page 58** of the Child Workbook, ask participants to choose a question randomly, read the question aloud to the group, and then act out how they might respond to the question or comment provided using one of the W.I.S.E. Up methods.



- Ask the remaining participants to guess which W.I.S.E. Up method was used. Optional movement activity: have participants show their guesses by moving to different corners of the room.
- Make sure that kids know that they have a choice and a voice. Empower them to answer in a way that makes sense for them.
- Talk about differences in responses depending on who asks, mood, etc. For example, talk about how our boundaries might be smaller (sharing less information) with strangers, and we may be more direct with our friends. We also want to be more respectful with adults, whereas our responses to other kids might be different.
- Continue going through several of the common questions asked of adoptees so that participants have a good understanding of the multitude of ways one could respond using the W.I.S.E. Up method.

### MY ADOPTION STORY - W.I.S.E. UP

- Ask participants to turn to **page 76** in their workbooks.
- Ask participants to write a question they have been asked or comment they have heard into the speech bubble and complete the rest of the handout by describing how they would respond to that question/comment.

### PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

- Tell participants that they will be sharing their My Adoption Story: W.I.S.E. Up worksheet with their parents during Family Together Time.
- Ask participants:
  - *How are you feeling about practicing W.I.S.E. Up with your parents?*
  - *Your parents are going to ask you how you might like them to support you when you get comments and questions about adoption. How might you respond?*

## CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 73** and think about our conversations learning ways to respond when you are asked questions about adoption and completing their My Adoption Story: W.I.S.E. Up<sup>10</sup> worksheet.
- Have participants place a check mark in second row of white boxes to show which zone they are in right now.

## COPING PRACTICE

- Pay attention to the time and transition the group to this activity about 3-5 minutes prior to the end of the group.
- To get participants ready to engage in Family Together Time, walk through the coping skill that was taught during dinner and/or do another relaxation activity (i.e. play calming music, lead a guided meditation, practice yoga, engage in a gratitude activity).



MODULE 10

# REVIEW & CELEBRATION



CHILD  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 10: REVIEW & CELEBRATION



## MATERIALS NEEDED

- Pens/Colored Pencils/Markers
- Dry Erase and/or Flip Chart Markers
- Behavioral Tokens/Wristbands
- Prizes
- Child Workbooks
- Coping Zones Poster
- Group Rules
- Fidget Toys
- LEAF Review PowerPoint
- Laptop and Speaker, Projector/Screen, and Extension Cord for video sharing
- 2-4 Small Dry Erase Boards (or laminated sheets of white paper)
- Certificates
- Paper Leaf Cut-Outs for Closing Ceremony
- Facilitator Completed LEAF cut out



Tonight's timeline is different than in previous modules. You may create your own flow or follow the timeline below

Time	Parents	Children
First 30 minutes (5:30-6)	Dinner all together as usual	
Next 45 minutes (6-6:45)	Parent content: Welcome Review Prep for FTT Evaluations	Child content: Review game Prepare for FTT
Rejoin groups (5 minutes)	5-minute transition, sit in family units	
Family together time (10 minutes)	Parents and children share final reflections	
Big group closing (30 minutes)	Cake and certificates, placing leaves on tree and sharing, facilitator dismissal	

## CHECK YOUR ZONE

- Ask participants to open their workbooks and turn to **page 81** and think about how their day has been today and decide which zone they are in right now.
- Have participants place a check mark in first row of white boxes to show which zone they are in.
- Take a quick glance at which zones people are in. If a participant marks themselves in any zone other than green, do a group coping activity.
- After the zone check, conduct a quick review of the coping skills taught during LEAF and practice.
  - Ask participants to try to name one of the coping skills from previous week and demonstrate it for the group or say when it has been helpful for them.
  - Or, ask participants to flip through the coping cards on the binder ring and vote on their favorite and then have the group practice that skill.

## LEAF REVIEW GAME

- Set Up: You will need the laptop and projector to display the LEAF Review Game (adapted from Jeopardylabs).<sup>1</sup>

- Introduce the activity, explaining that the goal of the game is to review the material we have discussed over the last 9 weeks of group.
- Instructions: Split participants into 2 or 3 teams, depending on the size of the group. You can have participants count off to determine the groups. In some groups, we have found it best to determine the groups ahead of time as this helps to make sure that groups are equal in terms of age range, development, and behavioral needs.
- Give each team laminated white sheets or dry-erase boards and dry erase markers.
- Ask one question at a time (you may pick at random or have teams take turns picking).
- Each team will work together to come up with the answer and then write their answer on their dry erase board. Set a timer for 1 minute (or longer, depending on your group) for each question. Optional music can be played during the minute.
- Repeat until all questions are answered or until time for the activity runs out.
- Each team will get points for every correct answer. One of the facilitators should keep track of points on the board. Depending on group dynamics, you may choose to not keep score.
- You can choose whether you want to give a small prize to the winning team or everyone at the end of the game.

## MY ADOPTION STORY - LEAF REFLECTIONS

- Ask participants to turn to **page 82** in their workbooks.
- Have participants complete their last My Adoption Story: LEAF Reflections worksheet.

## PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME AND CLOSING

- Let participants know each parent and facilitator will share one reflection with the big group. Encourage each child to share, although they can choose to share with the entire group or to pass.



- Together, parents and kids will share their favorite thing about the LEAF group, one thing they learned at LEAF group, and something they are proud of. These will be written on leaves and placed onto the LEAF tree at the end of the group at the closing ceremony! (see LEAF Group Materials). Demonstrate leaves with prompts.

### CHECK YOUR ZONE: FINAL WEEK CHECK-IN

- Ask participants to turn to **page 81** in their workbooks and rate where they are now that we are at the end of group.

Ask participants:

- *How are you feeling about group ending?*
- *Do you have any worries about group ending?*
- *Would you like to stay in touch with anyone?*

### COPING PRACTICE

- Pay attention to the time and transition the group to this activity about 3-5 minutes prior to the end of the group.
- Walk through the coping skill that was taught during dinner and/or do another relaxation activity (examples: calming music, guided meditation, yoga, gratitude practice) to prepare the participants for Family Together Time.

### TRANSITION BACK INTO LARGE GROUP, WITH FAMILIES SITTING TOGETHER

### FAMILY TOGETHER TIME: LEAF REFLECTIONS

Parents and children share their LEAF reflections with each other. Parents present their child with the leaf that shares what they are proud of them for.

## GROUP CLOSING CEREMONY

As tonight comes to an end, it is important to mark all of the work each person has done. We suggest acknowledging the hard work and growth of everyone. You may choose to modify this to fit the needs of your group.

- Pass out certificates and cake to everyone to thank them for their hard work.
- Call each family up for a certificate and if they are willing, to share what they wrote on their leaf as a final reflection.
- Then each family member may tape their leaf to the large tree on the wall.
- After all parents and children have shared, the parent and child facilitators should share their pre-written leaf reflection as well and share with the large group. When finished, all can see the large growth of the tree as a physical marker of internal workings.
- Close by thanking everyone for their time and energy or other closing thoughts.





# MODULE I

# INTRODUCTIONS

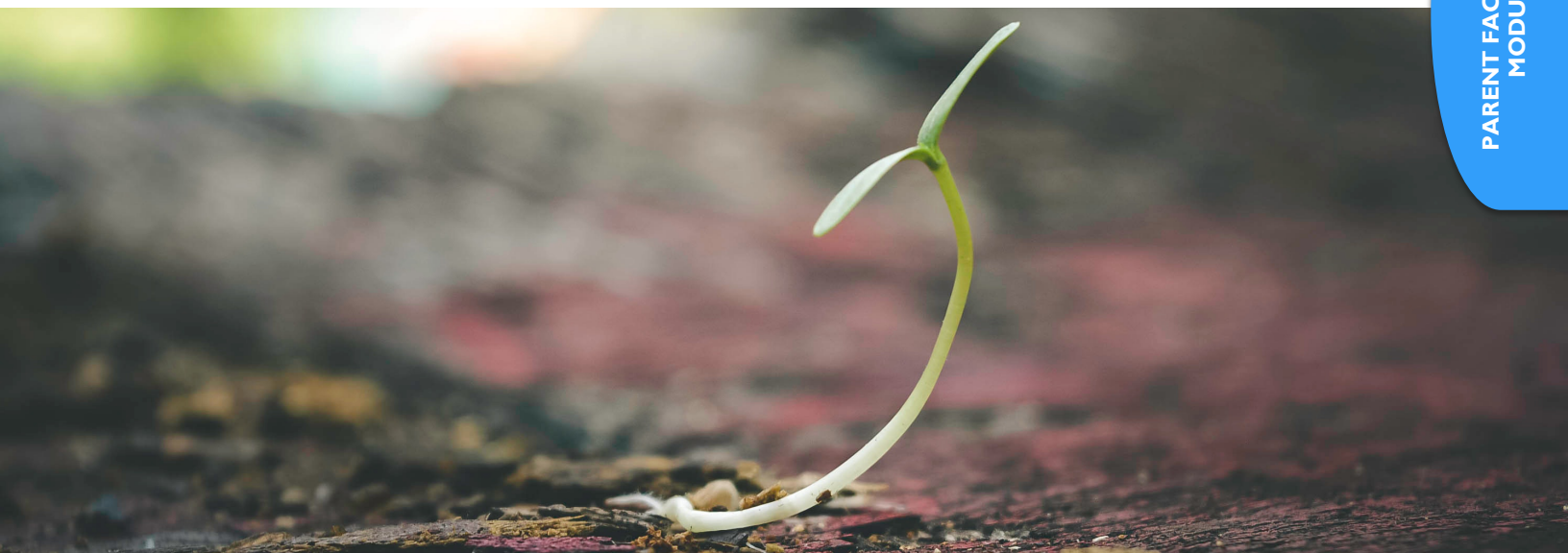


PARENT  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE I: INTRODUCTIONS



## MATERIALS LIST

- Pens/markers
- Prizes, slips of paper, and container (small bucket, coffee tin, etc.) for prize drawing
- Giant Post-Its/whiteboard and markers
- Fidget Toys
- Name displays or name tags
- Parent workbooks
- Facilitator copy of hand worksheet
- example

## WELCOME

- Facilitators briefly introduce themselves and their role. Participants will have an opportunity to introduce themselves shortly.
- Each week, facilitators will lead an opening activity. We suggest a prize drawing (described below), but feel free to use your own ideas.
- Prize Drawing: Have parents write their names on slips of paper and place into the bucket. This week, parents should write their name on one for being in attendance.



Moving forward, parents can qualify for two slips – one for attendance and a second slip if they completed their home practice/reflection. Facilitator draws 2 names and passes around prize bag for winners to select a prize. Prizes can be self-care items (e.g., fidgets, lotions, coffee mug, candy, etc.).

## INTRODUCTION TO THE GROUP

Welcome participants to Learning and Empowerment for Adoptive Families (LEAF). Inform them that they will be introducing themselves after a brief review of what to expect in the group. There are notes for them to follow in their workbook (pages 3-7).

### What is LEAF?

Facilitators briefly introduce the LEAF program and describe the goals of LEAF.

#### Example Script:

*LEAF was developed by the Center for Child & Family Health's Post Adoption Support Services to help empower, support, and unite parents and children as they explore their thoughts and feelings related to adoption.*

*LEAF has 3 primary goals: Connection, Communication, and Coping.*

- 1. Connection: We hope to help the families in this group connect to each other to share common experiences and ideally, continue these meaningful relationships beyond the group. We also want to build connections within each family unit, so that children and their parents connect on a deeper level about adoption.*
- 2. Communication: We hope to facilitate open communication as well as increased comfort talking about adoption at home and in the community by gradually helping parents and children navigate adoption-related topics. The conversations that begin in the group will hopefully be a springboard for additional adoption conversations at home. We will also touch on communicating outside the family as a way to help children and parents feel more confident speaking up about adoption.*
- 3. Coping: We hope to teach children and parents some strategies for managing strong feelings. More specifically, children will practice identifying their feelings and using strategies in the moment to help them cope with these feelings. Parents will learn the same strategies as a way to reinforce their use at home.*

## Group Logistics

Introduce the group's designated day and time, as well as how the group content is divided. Note that some of this information may be reviewed during large group, so feel free to be brief while emphasizing important points for parents.

- Note start and end time for your group. Parents can fill in the times and day of week in their manual on **page 4**. Note that the group will start and end on time.
- If providing dinner (highly recommended), note the time for dinner and that this meal is an important chance to socialize and it gives the children a chance to eat as they won't have the opportunity to continue their meal during group.
- Describe the structure of the group- split into separate groups for parents and children and then transition to the final activity.
- Each group ends with Family Together Time, where you and your child come together. Your children will share their adoption story that gets developed week by week and you get to practice the skills we discuss in here. A facilitator will often be sitting alongside you to provide you with additional support. The goal is that these conversations will be a springboard into other conversations that will be had in the home during the week.
- Describe the role of facilitators in talking with parents if something difficult came up for their child and helping to facilitate Family Together Time.

## Parking Lot

Introduce the Parking Lot. This will be the holding place for content when time is limited, or when someone asks a question regarding content that will be covered in subsequent sessions. Make sure facilitators review all parking lot questions and comments by the conclusion of the group. The Parking Lot can be on a white board, giant post-it, etc.

## Home Practice Assignment

Home Practice is a tool to help parents prepare for upcoming content, continue reflecting on new material, and help them to implement concepts addressed in the group. Home practice will only be assigned to parents. The home practice will be discussed at the beginning of each group to give participants a chance to share what they did well or lessons they learned with the group. If you have any specific questions about the home practice with your family, you can use the mid-week calls to process things with one of the facilitators.



## Midweek Calls

Introduce Midweek calls. Midweek calls are a 15-minute weekly call where parents and facilitators will review home practice and talk about any individual questions or concerns about content from the group. Some midweek call prompts and guidance for facilitators have been provided at the end of each module. Midweek calls are aimed to be helpful, supportive, and a place for questions/concerns to be addressed.

Pass around a sign-up sheet to have parents select slots with times that work for facilitators. Alternatively, facilitators may choose to use an online sign-up program. They have space on **page 4** in their workbook to write down the time of their mid-week call with one of the facilitators.

## Ground Rules

Introduce ground rules and why they are important. These rules create a safe space and encourage people to share openly and support each other. The following ground rules have been suggested in previous LEAF groups. Have these pre-written on paper that can be prominently displayed each week. Facilitators may choose to solicit additional rules from group, if time permits.

Suggested ground rules with example scripts:

1. Confidentiality — *We, as facilitators, will keep things that are shared in group confidential. Although we cannot guarantee confidentiality in a group setting, we ask that you each make sure not to share anything another parent says with anyone outside the group.*

*\*Share the limits of confidentiality in accordance with your agency's policy, ethical guidelines, and state laws regarding mandated reporting/confidentiality.*

**Possible example:** *It is important to note that we will keep what you and your children share with us confidential, unless we have reasonable belief that a child is being abused or neglected, that you want to harm yourself or others, or we are subpoenaed by court. Note that we are mandated reporters, which means that if you disclose child abuse in the group, we are required to make a report to child protective services.*

2. Try to refrain from giving advice — *There is a lot of wisdom in the room, and although we want you to learn from each other, we suggest that instead of saying "You should," or "You just need to," say, "What worked for me..."*  
*Everyone is different!*

3. Step up, step back — *We ask participants to be aware of how much they are choosing to share. There may be times that we ask quieter participants to be brave and “step up” to share something, and we may also ask more active participants to “step back” to make room for those who are a little more reserved. We don’t mean to put anyone on the spot or shut anyone down, but we will try to strike a good balance!*
4. Real talk — *We ask you to be vulnerable in sharing your experience. If you keep it real and honest, we can all learn from our mistakes and grow together. There are no perfect parents!*
5. Take care of yourself in the moment — *Take breaks as needed. At times, this group might stir up some emotions in you. When this happens, we encourage you to take care of yourself. If you need to pull one of us aside, please do.*

### Group Content

Provide a brief overview of group content. Orient parents to notebooks and remind them to bring them each week. Direct parents to the handout (pages 5-7) that provides details of each session for parents and children.

#### Example Script:

*For the first few weeks, we will focus on providing you an overview of skills we call the 3 C’s. The 3 Cs are skills for supporting your children through strong emotions, and stands for CALM , CONNECT, and CORRECT These will be helpful in navigating conversations and emotions that are unique to adoption. Throughout, we will give you opportunities to practice these skills in preparation of talking with your child about their adoption story. Then, we will explore your adoption story as a parent and discuss common thoughts and worries that affect adoptive children and families, including how these manifests into behaviors. The last half will be spent on other topics that adoptive families face, such as the questions you encounter in the community, losses and gains in adoptions, identity (as adoptive parents and kids), transracial families, and encourage you as a strong advocate for your family. We will close out our time together with a celebration for all you have shared, learned, and explored with your child and the group.*

### ACTIVITY: HIGH FIVE FACTS ABOUT ME

- This activity will introduce participants to each other. They will learn some commonalities with other parents and build group rapport.
- Pass around markers and direct participants to (page 8) in notebook with hand drawing. Give directions as follows:

- *On each finger, write something that you would like to share with the group about you. This could be a fact about your identity as a parent, you as a person, a hobby, favorite things, etc.*
- *Your children will be completing the same activity in their group. Parents and children will share their “high five” with each other during Family Together Time. Don’t put anything on your hand that you don’t want your child to see!*
- Facilitators should make a copy of the hand worksheet to create an example to share with the group. Ideally, a facilitator with lived experience as an adoptive parent can model sharing facts about adoption and their family. Facilitators without lived experience can share their connection to adoption, professional or personal.
- Give parents about 5 minutes to complete their hand.
- Have each parent share their name, their child who is in the group with them, and who else is in their family. Then, share one or two of their fingers with the group. There is space in their parent workbook on **page 9** for parents to take notes on who else is in the group.

## INTRODUCE COPING ZONES

The Coping Zone is a very important concept used throughout the group. It is based on concept of the “Window of Tolerance” coined by Dan Siegel in his 1999 book titled *The Developing Mind*.<sup>1</sup> Tonight, you will provide a brief overview of this concept, and you will dive into more detail next week.

### Example Script:

*This concept will be taught to both parents and children. It will be used as a tool to check in with where each person may be and to prompt the use of coping skills as needed. The Coping Zone will be useful as parents and children talk about adoption in this group, as well as on a daily basis at home.*

The **Green Zone** is where you want to be parenting most of the time.

- *You have access to the thinking part of the brain which is responsible for empathy, intentional parenting strategies, and emotion regulation.*
- *You are experiencing different feelings, even negative ones, but overall, you are in control of your actions. You can handle big emotions and behaviors in your child. For example, you are annoyed at your child for asking to*

watch videos on your phone for the 15th time during dinner, but you are still able to eat dinner and stay relatively calm.

The **Red Zone** is when you feel intense emotions and get beyond your ability to control yourself. Dan Siegel calls this “flipping your lid” because you don’t have access to your thinking/rational brain and your emotions are driving your actions.<sup>2</sup>

- This is similar to the “fight or flight” of fight, flight, or freeze response. You may notice your heart beating faster or increased breathing as your body is flooded with stress hormones.
- You may notice your thinking becomes focused on dominance or winning the power struggle and you lose sight of the big picture (e.g., Does it really matter what socks your child is wearing?).
- Some people feel rage or intense anger. You may notice the “voice of reason” telling you to let go, and this only makes you madder.

The **Blue Zone** is when you check out, disconnect (physically present but psychologically absent), or physically disconnect (e.g., get on your phone).

- Your mind may go blank or you may feel passive and give up. You may give your child the cold shoulder. Thoughts may be “do whatever you want,” or “I don’t care anymore”.
- This can be like the “freeze” of fight, flight, or freeze response.
- Being in the blue zone can create resentment in relationships and contribute to feeling bad about yourself.

Since the green zone is the optimal place for parenting, we will talk more next week about ways to stay in the green zone. There are two primary approaches:

1. Be able to use strategies in the moment when we notice we are getting out of the green to regulate ourselves and ...
2. Widen our tolerance of difficult scenarios. Our green zone gets smaller when we are tired, “hangry,” or in response to our emotional triggers. We’re going to think about ways to widen our green zone.



## HOME PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT

Ask participants to complete a handout on times when are they more prone to going into the red or blue brain zone. Reference [page 11](#) of their parent workbook. Parents should complete this assignment between now and next week's group.

## PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

Remind parents that FTT gives them an opportunity to practice skills and tools discussed in this group with the support of the facilitators.

- Explain the content of this week's FTT is sharing the hands created in parent and child group.
- Direct parents to conversation starters on [page 12](#) or their manuals.
- Instruct parents to show curiosity and use a positive tone, taking care NOT to correct any misinformation. The purpose of this activity is to build connection, not to have all the facts correct.
- Parents can make observations about what their child wrote and note any similarities to their own hand.
- They can ask about similarities and differences to other group members.
- Parents can ask questions about what the group was like for the child. If a child is quiet or hesitant to share, parents can make an observation about their energy or possible coping zone and revisit the activity later at home.
- The facilitators will be sitting with families for part of the time to support parents and help to scaffold their success. This means that sometimes facilitators might prompt parents or ask a question to help jumpstart the conversation.
- Facilitators should model using the 3 C's even though we haven't yet taught parents about them. Use your clinical judgement to support a family when the child or parent is becoming dysregulated or needs to end FTT early.

### MIDWEEK CALL GUIDANCE: MODULE I

- Reiterate purpose of call. Review home practice (handout on zones). Even if participants have not written anything down, they can still participate in the conversation with you. Possible review questions:
  - What patterns did you notice about yourself when you tend to get out of your green zone (e.g. time of day, physical states like hunger, pain, being tired, and/or emotional states like being stressed)?
  - What specific things do your children do that tend to send you out of your green zone (e.g. aggression, ignoring you, and/or misbehavior in public)?
  - Do you tend to go in the red zone, blue zone, or both? What are your clues that you are in those zones?
- If applicable, remind that they will have quarterly check-ins with child group facilitator, but tell them if they have concerns or need to request an earlier consult with them, they can.
- Remind them to attend every week, on time if possible. If they can't make a week, they should let you know.



MODULE 2

# LEARNING ABOUT ADOPTION



PARENT  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 2: PARENT REGULATION

## MATERIALS LIST

- Paper
- Pens
- Prizes, slips of paper, and container (small bucket, coffee tin, etc.) for prize drawing container
- Pre-made poster of coping zones
- Whiteboard or poster paper and markers
- Fidget Toys
- Name displays or name tags
- Extra Parent Workbook (for any new participants)
- Family Plan Handouts
- Laptop, Projector, and Speaker for optional videos

## WELCOME

Conduct welcome prize drawing or other opening ritual.

- Ask parents to write their names on up to two slips of paper (one slip for being present and one for completing the home reflection).
- The facilitator draws two names for prizes.



## REVIEW HOME PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT

Review the Home Practice handout from last week on **page 11** in parent workbooks. Parents were asked to reflect on their patterns of getting out of the green zone. Ask a few volunteers to share patterns they noticed. Parents who were not able to complete their home practice may use this time to write down their thoughts.

Ways to facilitate the review include:

- Do a show of hands for parents who identified times when they went into the blue zone, red zone, or both to normalize that it is very common in parenting (Do this if you anticipate being short on time!).
- Ask for one or two parents to share what they noticed.
- Ask the facilitator with lived experience as an adoptive parent to share their answers to build a sense of safety in sharing.

## THE 3 C'S – CALM, CONNECT, AND CORRECT

Provide an overview of the 3 C's - steps to handle strong feelings.

1. **CALM** – Parents first need to regulate themselves before helping their children regulate.
2. **CONNECT** – Show empathy and validate by acknowledging that what your child is feeling makes sense.
3. **CORRECT** – Help your child to solve problems. Provide corrective information that reassures your child (but don't sweat the small stuff). Correct problematic behavior, if necessary. Sometimes connection is enough, and correction is not needed.

### Example Script:

*The 3 C's are the steps we have come up with to help you learn how to handle strong feelings. Step 1 is **CALM**. In order to help our children, we need to be regulated first. In Step 2, you **CONNECT** to your child by helping your child identify their feelings and validating those feelings. Step 3 is to **CORRECT**. We use the term "correct" as a catch-all for the parts of responding to big emotions that require the thinking brain. Sometimes, that can look like collaborative problem-solving- working with your child to make a decision or respond to a situation. Sometimes it looks like a relationship repair with your child, where you are making up from a conflict. Other times it can involve a parent providing a boundary to correct a behavior or provide corrective information.*

*The 3 C's were influenced by several different models used in therapy and parenting, including John Gottman's Emotion Coaching<sup>1</sup>. We will be using the*

throughout the LEAF group to address strong feelings that might arise related to adoption, but it can also be used every day with emotions related to anything else. We will be spending the next several weeks going into great detail about each of the steps, starting with Step 1: **CALM**, tonight.

## WHY CALM? RATIONALE FOR PARENT'S SELF-REGULATION

Throughout this group, the children will talk about their adoption story and reflect on their thoughts and feelings they have unique to their adoption. The first step is for parents to remain calm so they can *respond* versus *react*.

Begin by asking parents why they think this might be important. Cover some of the following points if they are not raised:

- When parents are in the green zone, they can access the thinking part of their brain to respond effectively to their child. Both children and parents don't have access to the thinking part of their brain when they are very upset.
- Optional: Include video of Dan Siegel demonstrating "flipping your lid" (link can be found in the LEAF Materials Document)
- Staying calm helps parents connect to their kids. **Connection lives in the green zone.**
- When kids are upset, parents can actually help kids get back in the green zone by regulating themselves first- this is sometimes called "co-regulation."



### Example Script:

*As human beings, our zones are influenced by what zones other people are in. We can be soothed and regulated by a calm, caring friend or family member and we can be sent into the red or blue zone by someone else who is upset. We are starting with parents' own zones so that they can be a regulating presence for their children. When parents help their children get back in the green zone by being calm and connected, this is called co-regulation.*

## What Makes Self-Regulation Hard?

Ask participants for input, and cover the following points if not raised:

- Staying calm in the face of a child's strong emotions can be one of the hardest things a parent can do.
- When kids have big feelings, they often communicate through their behavior and by directing emotional reactions (such as anger) at their parents. It is very hard to stay calm in times like these.



- Over time, if parents experience chronic stress in response to their child's behaviors without enough support, this stress response can actually alter their biology, changing their daily level of stress hormones.<sup>2</sup>

### Self-Regulation and Adoption

Although staying calm can be challenging for any parent, there are some extra layers of complexity for children who have been adopted.

- Trauma – We learn self-regulation in the context of early relationships. For children who have experienced repeated traumatic events within their early caregiving environments (such as neglect or abuse), their brains become wired to survive those dangerous circumstances. Trauma can cause multiple changes in brain structure and functioning and the body's stress response<sup>3-4</sup>, which means that children can have a harder time staying in their green zones.
  - Children can also get bumped out of their green zone by things in the everyday home life, like a grumpy or tired look on their parent's face. Children who have experienced trauma may get bumped out of the green zone by interpreting your emotions, even if they are misreading your cues.
  - Seeing parents in the red zone could be very frightening as they could remind a child of being abused. Kids who have been physically abused may be quicker to detect angry looks on a parent's face, even if you aren't really angry.<sup>5-7</sup>
  - Parents in the blue zone may seem checked out and flat, which could remind a child of a parent who was unavailable to meet their needs (e.g., impaired or mentally ill), which can be very distressing and even life threatening.<sup>8</sup> These trauma reminders are **not your fault**, but we do need to be aware of what may come up for your child.
- Neurodivergence – Children who have been adopted are much more likely to have prenatal exposure to alcohol and other substances<sup>9-11</sup> and are at increased risk for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, mental health diagnoses<sup>12</sup>, and other neurological disabilities that can make it harder for them to regulate their emotions. Their green zones may be smaller, emotional meltdowns may be bigger, and it may take them longer to get back in their green zone when they get bumped out.
- Triggers Related to Adoption – The experience of being adopted can lead to some intense emotions for some children.<sup>13</sup> Emotions related to grief and loss could be triggered by even positive experiences (for example, a birthday party in their honor



can bring up the loss of what they missed out on before). We will be talking about many more examples in the next few modules.

- Although it may seem discouraging to hear all the ways that children’s ability to regulate can be impacted by things in the past that we cannot change, it is never too late to change our biology! Although we cannot erase the impact of the past, children can learn to regulate in the presence of a calm, caring parent, which can help them become more regulated over time.<sup>14-15</sup>

## HOW TO CALM: EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGIES

Explore how parents can remain in the green zone as much as possible. The two types of strategies are:

- Getting back in the green zone- These are intentional strategies to get back in the green zone when you get bumped out.
- Widening the green zone- using intentional strategies to make the green zone as wide as possible

## GETTING BACK IN THE GREEN ZONE

- Explain that awareness of one’s patterns getting in the red or blue zone is essential to creating a plan to cope. Parents and children will be doing parallel work in this session to understand their zones and come up with ideas to cope if they are in the green or red zone.
- Briefly review home reflection assignment from last week that asked parents to think about their patterns.

## Parenting Stressors

- Everyone has particular things that tend to bump them out of the green zone. Many of these are specific to parenting, like children whining or ignoring them. Parents should be aware of the particular things their children do that bump them out of the green zone, so that they can be prepared to calm themselves.
- Lead a brief conversation about aspects of parenting that can bump participants out of their green zone. Note that this conversation is going to stay in the parent group and not be shared with children. Talking with other parents can be very validating if others have similar stressors. However, for Family Together Time, we want to open communication, and if the child gets the message that they are to blame for the parent’s emotions, this is likely to increase shame and shut the conversation down.



## Making a Coping Plan: Preparing for Family Together Time

- Parents will complete pages in their workbooks that will be used together with their child to create a family regulation plan (**page 23 in Parent Workbook**)
- On **page 20** of their workbooks, have parents complete a checklist of stressors that bump them out of their green zone (not about parenting) to use for Family Together Time.

Example stressors from parent workbook:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Early morning</li><li>○ Before bed</li><li>○ Right after school/work</li><li>○ Being tired</li><li>○ Being hungry</li><li>○ Extra stress because of work</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Sense of urgency/not enough time</li><li>○ Not feeling good</li><li>○ Feeling overwhelmed</li><li>○ Feeling overstimulated</li><li>○ Other:<br/>_____</li></ul> |
|--|---|

- When participants know more about stressors for themselves and their child, they can make a plan (e.g., have a protein bar bedside) or decide what battles to pick (e.g., not to talk to child about their homework first thing in morning).
- Have parents brainstorm a list of ways they could cope if they are starting to get in the **red zone**. Have them complete the checklist on **page 20** of their workbooks.
  - If parents are in the red zone due to a conflict with their child, the best strategy is space and time. Ideally, they should spend at least 20 minutes engaged in a distracting task (i.e., not ruminating) to allow their cortisol levels to lower so they can respond intentionally.<sup>16</sup>
  - It is not always realistic that parents can walk away from parenting for that long. If they cannot physically take a break, they should take a break from the conflict if possible. Until they are calm, they should try to minimize decision-making or negative interactions like arguing. This isn't giving up, just hitting pause until your frontal lobe is with you. Ask parents to problem solve together for options they can do without leaving the child alone.



Example **red zone** strategies from parent workbook:

- Take a break from the thing that was making you upset (set a timer if it is something you have to do)
  - Run, jumping jacks, dance, push-ups, lift something heavy
  - Use a deep breathing skill
  - Get a hug (from a person, pet, or comfort object)
  - Use positive thinking (I can do this, I am strong, I am loved, etc.)
  - Give yourself a butterfly hug
  - Eat a snack
  - Take a rest
- Review possible coping skills for when they are in the **blue zone**, opening up discussion on other strategies they have worked. Have parents complete **page 20** of their workbooks.

Example **blue zone** strategies from workbook:

- Find a favorite smell, taste, or touch (make a sensory kit with a pencil box and your favorite things)
  - Notice 3 things you see, hear, and feel
  - Take a walk outside
  - Dance to a favorite song
  - Do a stretch/yoga pose
  - Drink ice water
  - Get a hug / talk to someone
  - Take a break to do something you enjoy (like a puzzle or game, set a timer).
  - Eat a snack or take a rest if you're tired or hungry
- Complete the last section on **page 21** about what they might find calming for someone else to do. Note that the point of this activity is not to make it children's responsibility to calm their parents down, but to open up a discussion on some similarities and differences in what family members may find calming. For example, a child may want closeness whereas a parent wants space. Understanding these differences can help children de-personalize when parents need to use a coping skill to calm down (e.g., instead of "I'm a bad kid for getting my parent so upset," realizing getting upset is part of being human and everyone needs coping skills).

Example communication strategies from workbook:

- Ask, "It seems like you're getting out of your green zone, how can I help?"
- Give me space
- Stay close
- Stay quiet
- Do a coping skill with me



- Ask, “What do you need right now?”
- Offer a hug/backrub
- Listen to my feelings
- Do a fun activity with me
- Try not to say or do this:  
\_\_\_\_\_

## WIDENING THE GREEN ZONE

Lead a discussion on things parents can do to help widen the green zone.

- They may want to think about what makes their green zone shrink, like being tired, hungry, stressed, etc. (refer to the checklist they completed for home practice), Physiological factors are often underestimated, but when people are tired, hungry, in pain, etc., the green zone gets smaller (Facilitator may want to use personal example here).
- There may be many things that shrink their green zone that are out of their control, but there may be other things they can control. For example, a person may experience chronic pain that shrinks their green zone, but they may know things they can do like physical therapy exercises that can help. Ask parents for examples of things they can do to increase their wellness (such as walking the dogs, drinking enough water, eating food they enjoy and makes them feel good).

## HELPING YOUR CHILD TO CALM: CO-REGULATION

Once parents are in their green zone, they can then help their child to get in their green zone, also known as co-regulation.

- Co-regulation happens when a calm, caring loved one helps a person to calm by offering support and connection.
- We all can use co-regulation throughout our whole lives with supportive friends, partners, and even co-workers, but it is essential during childhood, when children are unable to regulate themselves.
- The science behind co-regulation shows that we can change the physiological stress response of another person through our own calm presence. As humans, we have “mirror neurons” that pick up on other people’s emotional states and respond by becoming more stressed or soothed.<sup>17</sup>
- When we co-regulate in a stressful situation, instead of the stress hormones secreted when a person is in fight/flight/freeze (which can have long-term health consequences over time), when we are co-regulated we go into “affiliate” or “tend



- and befriend” mode, and secrete the hormone oxytocin (which has positive health benefits).<sup>3</sup>
- Discuss some ideas for how to help a child get into the green zone. Examples are offered below.
  - Offer a hug, a touch on the shoulder, just sit beside them, or offer a sensory experience.
  - Parents communicate they are there for their child, even if their child needs space (e.g., “I’ll be right here with you”, or “I know this is hard, I’m here for you”).
  - Parent takes deep breaths (or does another coping strategy) in front of the child.

### A Few Other Key Points about Co-regulation to Cover:

- The strategies you choose are going to be individual to your child. What works well for one child may make another more upset. Think of yourself as a scientist testing different strategies and notice the effect.
- Different coping skills are going to be more effective in different zones. For example, some children may appreciate a kind word or gentle touch when they are in the getting warmer zone, but not if they are fully in the red zone.
- Sometimes what we *don’t* do is just as important as what we do. Remember that the thinking, logical brain is only fully available in the green zone. When children are out of their green zone, avoid demands, instructions, overstimulation, or lessons for the short term (they will be more effective later). The phrase “**put down the rope**” can be helpful in remembering to avoid power struggles.
- Another pitfall to avoid is the less than helpful phrase “calm down!” When we try to get children to use coping skills through a demand, we are inviting a power struggle. Instead, try simply saying out loud what you are doing to calm yourself (e.g., “I’m going to take some deep breaths to see if I can get my heartbeat to slow down”). If appropriate, you could invite them to join you (e.g., “I’m going to take a couple laps around the house to calm down, would you like to come?”).

### Example Script:

*Up until this point, we have focused on you getting back in your green zone as the first part of CALM. The next part is helping your child to get back in their green zone, which is also known as co-regulation. Children and teens may not be able to communicate their needs when they are very upset, so try simply*



*offering a hug, modeling a coping strategy, or simply wait close by without talking. Think of yourself like a scientist- you are experimenting with what works with your child and for you too. What works at one time might not always work, but the idea is to try to help them calm before moving to connect.*

*Sometimes what we don't do is just as important as what we do. With co-regulation we want to avoid getting into power struggles while anyone out of the green zone. Beware of the pitfall of trying to help your child calm down and ending up in a power struggle by insisting your child use a coping skill (e.g., "go to your room and do a coping skill!" or the less-than-helpful phrase "calm down!"). Instead, try simply saying out loud what you are doing to calm yourself.*

## HOME PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT

For home practice, parents are asked to try out some strategies for the **CALM** step and note what worked and what did not. Ask parents to make notes about what seems to be more or less effective on **page 20** of their workbooks. Parents should complete this assignment between now and next week's group.

## PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

Explain to parents that tonight, their children are talking about self-regulation and will be exploring how they can support them when they are upset. Together, families will be completing a family regulation plan. As a reminder, parents should take care not to share too much about being triggered by their behaviors.

### Example Script:

*Tonight, your kids have an activity to identify what their zones feel like in their bodies, and triggers for getting upset. Your perception of when they get upset may be very different from what they have identified (and you are likely right!), but remember that Family Together Time is a time to listen, not to teach.*

*The next part is about their plan for regulating themselves in the different zones and what they might like from you. First, try validating their perspective (e.g., "I also need space when I get upset"). Then spend some time asking about what you can do to be supportive. Try to resist getting defensive. If your child shares something that they need, you can talk through how they could communicate to you (e.g., hand signals that they need space versus a hug).*



## MIDWEEK CALL GUIDANCE: MODULE 2

- The home practice for this week is to try out calming strategies for themselves and their child. Possible prompts are below:
- *Are there strategies you have found effective in calming yourself?*
- *How is it going trying co-regulation with your child? Have you noticed things that make them more upset?*
- *Have you tried the family regulation plan? Are there any communication patterns you've noticed that are either helpful in calming or tend to make family members more upset?*
- *For parents with a parenting partner in the group, are there communication strategies that you have tried with each other that are helpful in co-regulating each other?*
- *Is there anything you've tried to help widen your green zone? Is it hard for you to make your wellness a priority?*



MODULE 3  
**EMOTIONS**



PARENT  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 3: CONNECT TO YOUR CHILD



## MATERIALS LIST

- Pens
- Prizes, slips of paper, and container (small bucket, coffee tin, etc.) for prize drawing container
- Whiteboard or poster paper and markers
- Fidget Toys
- Name displays or name tags
- Laptop and Speaker, Projector/ Screen, Extension Cord for video Sharing
- Practice scenarios on notecards

## WELCOME

Conduct prize drawing (described in previous modules) or other welcome ritual.

## REVIEW HOME PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT

Review home practice, which asked parents to practice the **CALM** step. Model validation as you give them encouragement. This step is very challenging and takes time and practice.

Some questions to ask the group might include:

- *What did you try to get back in your green zone? What worked? What was hard?*
- *How did it go practicing co-regulation with your child?*
- *Did anyone try anything to widen their green zone?*

## 3 C'S OVERVIEW

Review the 3 C's, making sure to summarize the **CALM** step, which was discussed the previous week. Then, explain that the connect step will be the focus of this module.

1. **CALM** – Parents first need to regulate themselves before helping their children regulate.
2. **CONNECT** – Show empathy and validate by acknowledging that what they are feeling makes sense.
3. **CORRECT** – Help your child to solve problems. Provide corrective information that reassures your child (but don't sweat the small stuff). Correct problematic behavior, if necessary. Sometimes connection is enough, and correction is not needed.

## STEP 1: CALM YOURSELF

### Example Script:

*Last week, we talked about the importance of remaining calm and regulating yourself, before helping your child regulate themselves when they experience big emotions. Today, we are going to talk about how you can connect to your child when they have any big emotion, but for this group, connecting to your child is especially important as they talk about their emotions related to adoption.*

## STEP 2: CONNECT TO YOUR CHILD

Explain what the **CONNECT** step is and why connection is important.

### Example Script:

*Step 2 is **CONNECT** to your child. This step is all about communicating that you understand your child's perspective and you are on their team. Connecting to your child when they have big feelings can be very difficult. Sometimes they may push you away when they really need support. Other times, they may communicate through unacceptable behavior/attitudes. However, when you prioritize connecting to your child when they have big emotions, you are building a trusting, healing relationship where they can feel truly understood and cared for.*

Describe what the **CONNECT** step looks like. There are many ways to connect with children. For the purpose of time, we will focus on validation. Validation only works when parents are in their green zone and willing to engage in empathy and curiosity with their child.

### Example Script:

*Although there are different ways to connect with your child when they are experiencing difficult emotions, we are going to focus on an important tool: validation. Validation is the recognition and acceptance of another person's perspective as understandable. It is a way to communicate acceptance – all feelings are okay to experience and express. Validation requires you to stay calm, to be aware of what your child is experiencing (observing their tone of voice, facial expression and body language), to name the feeling you think your child is feeling, and to accept their feelings as valid.*

*Accepting their emotion doesn't mean accepting all behaviors that come with it- we will talk about this next week with the **CORRECT** step. All feelings are acceptable; all behaviors are not.*

*Accepting their emotion also doesn't mean you agree with it. Children and teens may get upset about things that do not make sense to adults. It is very common to respond to your child's difficult feelings by trying to make the expression of emotion stop (e.g., crying, shouting, whining). With validation, you don't need to agree, but you don't argue or try to change the feeling, you accept it for what it is and support them through it. Validation likely a very different way of responding to feelings than how most of us were raised.*

*When you validate another's feelings, you communicate empathy. Empathy shows others that you **SEE** them and can appreciate their perspective.*

## Pitfalls of Validation

The **CONNECT** step can be very easy to understand, but very hard to do in the face of challenging emotions in your child. Often, when children are expressing strong emotions, our first instinct is to solve the problem, teach a lesson, or try to stop the emotional expression (e.g., whining, crying), rather than attend to the emotion.

The list of common invalidating responses is provided on **page 29** of the parent workbook to help 1) recognize things people say and do all the time that are actually invalidating and 2) normalize that these are very common. It is important to present these in a way that is not shaming parents for messing up, but rather gently trying to shift towards validation. Have parents share if they use any of these themselves or recognize them how they were raised. Facilitators should share their own validation pitfalls to normalize.

- **Dismissing the emotion:** “It’s okay, don’t be sad” or “You don’t have to worry about that.” or “Oh please, you aren’t really sad, you were laughing a minute ago.”
- **Minimizing:** “Why are you crying, it’s really not a big deal?” or “He wasn’t mean, you’re being too sensitive!”
- **Jumping to problem solving:** “Your toy broke, no big deal, we’ll get you another one!” or “Oh you miss your sister? Why don’t we try to call her foster mother?”
- **Distracting/moving on too quickly:** “Let’s get ice cream!” or trying to make them laugh while they are still crying.
- **Punishing or ignoring the expression:** “Stop that whining!” or “I’m not going to talk to you until you stop crying.”
- **Silver lining/rose-tinted glasses:** “At least you still have your other doll.” or “Don’t worry, this will get better when you get to high school.”
- **It could be worse:** “You should be glad you get to see them at all. Your sister has no contact with her grandparents.”
- **Teaching a lesson:** “Well maybe if you weren’t so mean to them, they would let you play more.” Or “This is why I told you not to climb on that.”
- **Arguing the facts/explaining/defending your position:** “It is not unfair, you just had a turn!” or “It’s not that you can never have a sleepover, remember what I told you about planning ahead.”
- **Invalidating non-verbals:** When your mouth is saying validating words, but your tone or body language show disengagement or disapproval



As an example of validating and invalidating responses, show the 3-minute video from Brené Brown found in the [resources document](#) for module 3.

## NAME IT TO TAME IT

Explain the concept of “Name It to Tame It”<sup>1</sup>, as part of validation. Refer parents to the handout on various emotion words/faces in their workbook on [page 30](#) to use as a reference for the multitude of emotions we all may experience.

### Example Script:

*When validating your child, it is important to use emotion words to try to help understand your child’s feelings. Your children are practicing emotion words tonight in their group, using the handout you will find in your workbook. “Name It to Tame It” is a phrase coined by Dr. Dan Siegel in his book, “The Whole Brain Child.” It is based on research that shows that simply naming the feeling we are experiencing actually tames the power of that emotion in our brains.*

*When you notice your child is having a strong emotion, try labeling their feeling based on their body language and the situation. We hope that by giving them language, in time, children will TELL us instead of SHOW us what they are experiencing. Use emotion words like the ones in your workbook and be curious. You could say something like:*

- *“I’m noticing your voice is louder. I wonder if you’re feeling angry? I feel angry when that happens to me too.”*
- *“It seems like you’re really frustrated with that. I get frustrated too when things don’t work how I thought they would.”*
- *“I wonder if you might be feeling scared. It was a scary situation. I’m here with you.”*

## PRACTICE SCENARIOS

The next two activities will be very important opportunities to allow participants to practice validation. It is usually easy for parents to understand the concept of validation, but much harder in practice. If you are short on time, focus practice with adoption-related examples to prepare for Family Together Time.

## Adult Practice Scenario

Read this scenario asking for possible responses from the group.

*Your partner is running late to leave on a business trip and misses their flight. They call you, furious about the traffic, the parking, and the inept airline employees, and so on. How do you respond?*

- Possible invalidating response: *“I told you to leave earlier! You need to listen to me and start leaving on time!”*
- Using validation instead: *“Oh man, I’m so sorry that happened to you. I hate missing important deadlines- it is so stressful!”*
- Note: In the first scenario, the partner can channel all of their anger at you for calling them out and focus on the conflict. In the second scenario, you are calmer and your partner can then think for themselves about what they need to do differently next time.
- Tell parents, *“Now re-imagine this scenario as if you are talking to a friend who has called with the same problem. We are often very good at validating our friends when we don’t feel like we are responsible for the outcome.”*

If time allows, you may also practice with adult scenarios generated by the group. Ask if anyone will volunteer to share a time they were upset in the past week and what was helpful or hurtful in the responses they received from friends, coworkers, or family.

## Child Practice Scenarios

The scenarios below are things children may say that it would be easy to argue with or try to fix. Instead, help parents try to stick with validation. Facilitators should coach parents to stay away from invalidating pitfalls and instead, connect with the emotions.

You can facilitate this activity in a large group, having parents take turns responding to the prompts. If you have a very large group, this activity could be done in pairs or small groups, but make sure to review some of the possible responses below in a large group debrief.

If you are short on time, focus on the adoption scenarios in the large group to practice for Family Together Time.

Possible responses are there for facilitators to consider, but it is not necessary to read these verbatim if participants come up with other validating responses.

- **Your child feels sad about not living with birth parents and says, “I wish I could be with them.”**

- Possible Response: *“You are feeling sad that you don’t live with your birth parents anymore. They are important to you and it is sad to not live with them.”*
- Note: Try not to argue. This is not the time to explain how they were abusive / neglectful or the time to convince them that they are safer with you (you can circle back to some of this in the correct step). Also, you don’t need to agree. You don’t need to say they should be with their birth parents.
- **Your child says they are the only kid they know who was adopted. (You know for a fact that their cousin and one of their friends from soccer were both adopted.)**
  - Possible response: *“I wonder if you are feeling different from your friends. It is hard to feel different or when you don’t belong. I don’t like it when I feel that way either.”*
  - Note: You don’t need to correct them- focus on the feelings, not the facts. Right now, stay with them in their feelings of being othered or left out.
- **Your child is yelling, “I hate this house and I hate you! You never let me see my sisters!” after a visit with their biological siblings. Despite your best efforts, the visits have become less frequent lately.**
  - Possible response: *“I’m noticing you are having some big feelings right now. I wonder if you’re really missing your sisters. I know it hurts you don’t get to see them more.”*
  - Note: You might be tempted to get defensive here about how this is not your fault. You may even be tempted to fire back something sarcastic or point out the ways that they have it better than their sibling. Hold off on “fixing” it or trying to convince them of your perspective. You can problem solve with them AFTER you have validated their feelings of loss. You may also need to wait until they are in the green zone to validate.
- **Your child says, “I’m always in trouble! You love your birth kids way more than me because I’m not your real child!”**
  - Possible response: *“I know that you feel different and rejected sometimes.” (then correct, with I love you just the same)*

- Note: It might be tempting to defend yourself or even explain yourself that they are always in trouble because of their behavior. Remember to connect before you correct.
- **Your child says that they feel guilty that they have so much stuff, when their family back home is so poor.**
  - Possible response: *“It makes sense that you worry about your family. I wonder if you are feeling guilty that your experience is so different from theirs?”*
- **Your child is upset about forgetting to turn in a homework assignment and getting a zero. She says, “I’m so stupid! I’m gonna fail!”**
  - Possible response: *“I know you are really upset about that zero, because doing well in school is really important to you.”*
  - Note: You might be tempted to jump right into problem-solving (“Let’s make sure I check your assignments.”), lecturing (“I told you so.”), or reasoning/ silver-lining (“You’re not going to fail, it’s just one grade.”).
  - This is an example where you would likely want to use the correct step to reassure your child they are not stupid and perhaps do some collaborative problem solving about ways to remember homework.
- **Your child is screaming because you wouldn’t let him watch more iPad because it’s dinner time. He says, “You never let me do what I want!”**
  - Possible response: *“You’re really mad because you want to keep watching your show. I feel mad too when I don’t get to do what I want.”*
  - Note: You might be tempted to argue, make your case, get mad, or give in. Notice you are NOT letting him watch more iPad, but you aren’t arguing (“Yes I do let you do what you want! You’ve already been watching the iPad for 2 hours today!”).
- **Your child says, “I hate going to this school where everyone is white and I’m the only black kid.”**
  - Possible response: *“That must be really hard to feel different than everyone else.”*

- Note: You might be tempted to problem solve right away, or argue with them (point out the one other black child in their school), but try to stick with validation.
- For parents who are white with children of color, try to use validation without assuming you personally share their experience. Avoid what Dr. Ken Hardy refers to as “privempathy”- trying to empathize when you are in a position of privilege – e.g., “I know it is hard to be the only white person, like when I took you to that black church.”

Have parents notice which scenarios were easier or harder for them to validate. Some parents say it is easier to validate the big adoption-related feelings rather than day-to-day scenarios. Other parents can find sadness easier to validate than anger, etc. It can be helpful to be aware what pitfalls parents may fall into so they can try to avoid them.

## HOME PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT

Briefly review home practice:

- Continue to practice calming for yourself.
- Reflect on a time this week your child is upset, and you tried the first two C’s: **CALM** and **CONNECT** (refer to workbook on [page 32](#)).
- Notice any of the validation pitfalls you tend to fall into.

## PREPARE FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

First, review what children did in their group. Children expanded their knowledge on emotion words through games and activities and then reflected on emotions related to their adoption. **The hard truth is that not all emotions related to adoption are positive<sup>2</sup>.** But the good news is that the more parents validate their emotions, the more likely children are to keep sharing!

Prepare parents for tonight’s Family Together Time (FTT). Children will share their My Adoption Story related to emotions they have experienced related to their adoption. Parents’ job during Family Together Time will be to practice the first two C’s- **CALM** and **CONNECT**.

Review the handout from the child group and have parents reference [page 31](#) of their workbook for conversation starters. Ask parents to discuss how they might feel if their child indicates feeling sad, guilty, angry, etc. Then refer them to practice validating, not trying to argue or fix.

### MIDWEEK CALL GUIDANCE: MODULE 3

- Ask parents to review a time when their child was upset and they tried any of the 3 C's. If they didn't try anything yet, that is okay. Ask them if they would be willing to reflect on a time their child was upset when they could have used some of the 3 C's.
- Did they calm themselves? How were they feeling? If they had a do-over what could they have done?
- Did they try any of the connect strategies with their child? If not, talk through what it would look like to:
  - Co-regulate/help my child calm down
  - Name it to tame it
  - Validate
- If they didn't try much, provide support. Noticing opportunities to calm and connect are the first steps in learning the 3c's. Help parents be very patient with themselves as they are learning something new. Provide a lot of praise for even small steps - like taking a break when they were about to scream at their child.
- If they did try strategies, how did it go?





MODULE 4

# DEALING WITH STRONG FEELINGS



PARENT  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 4: CORRECT & PRACTICE



## MATERIALS LIST

- Pens
- Giant Post-Its/whiteboard and markers
- Prizes, slips of paper, and container (small bucket, coffee tin, etc.) for prize drawing
- Whiteboard/poster paper and markers
- Fidget toys
- Name displays or name tags
- Laptop and Speaker, Projector/ Screen, Extension Cord for video Sharing

## WELCOME

Conduct drawing for prizes for being present and for completing home reflection as described in previous modules.



## REVIEW HOME PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT

Review home practice assignment to practice the first two C's at a time their child was upset (calming and connecting). Ask for examples of successes and struggles.

- For the **CALM** step, is anyone doing anything to widen their green zone?
- How is it going to help **CALM** your child?
- How did it go trying some of the **CONNECT** strategies
- Did anyone notice the pitfalls of validation?

Remind participants that trying a new strategy can be challenging and that even noticing a missed opportunity for connection is an important step toward using skills more frequently and effectively.

## GRATITUDE PRACTICE

Tonight's coping skill introduced a gratitude practice. Parents are provided with more information here about the benefits of gratitude and the Three Good Things<sup>1</sup> activity.

### Example Script:

*Tonight's coping skill introduced the Three Good Things activity. Gratitude is actually an incredibly powerful tool for widening our green zones. As the positive psychology professor Barbara Frederickson<sup>2</sup> said, "The negative screams at you, the positive only whispers". There is a growing emphasis on the benefits of gratitude. By focusing on gratitude, we can turn up the volume on experiences that bring us joy and turn down the volume on the day-to-day grind and experiences that make us feel disconnected and depressed.*

*The Three Good Things practice is a seemingly simple activity. For at least two weeks, ideally within 2 hours of bedtime, you will write down 3 good things that occurred in your day and your role in making them happen. Duke did a study of the Three Good Things and found it to be as effective as Prozac when done daily for two weeks. Some examples of this practice include; "I had a delicious cup of coffee and I took time to notice that it was yummy." OR "I didn't "pick up the rope" and offered a hug to my child instead of addressing their eye roll."*

*What can be hard is building it into your daily routine, and this group is an opportunity to build your practice if you choose. By teaching both children and parents, our hope is that you can build gratitude into your family routines. For example, during dinner, each family member could share one of their good things from that day.*

## INTRODUCE STEP 3: CORRECT

Briefly review the 3 C's.

1. **CALM** – Parents first need to regulate themselves before helping their children regulate.
2. **CONNECT** – Show empathy and validate by acknowledging that what they are feeling makes sense.
3. **CORRECT** – Help your child to solve problems. Provide corrective information that reassures your child (but don't sweat the small stuff). Correct problematic behavior, if necessary. Sometimes connection is enough and correction is not needed.

Introduce the **CORRECT** Step, referencing **page 38** in their workbook.

### Example Script:

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> step of the 3 C's is **CORRECT**. This optional step is where you provide some sort of adult guidance to help solve a problem or teach your child.*

*This step comes last for two reasons. First, once kids are calm, they will have access to the part of their brain that can engage in learning and constructive problem-solving. Second, when kids feel like they are seen, heard, understood, and cared for, they will be much more willing to accept adult input and guidance.*

*Step three is optional because sometimes you don't need this step. Often, when children are back in the green zone (**CALM**) and feel supported by understanding and empathy (**CONNECT**), they are able to solve problems for themselves. As an example... [use example below or facilitator provides their own example] When picking up her teen and younger child from school, one parent described her daughter's irritated and short tone she got into the car. The parent noticed herself feeling defensive when her teen then told the youngest to "shut up" in response to being asked "what's wrong with you?". Instead of reacting with a stern "fix your attitude", the parent decided to take a breath, turn up the radio for a few minutes, and eventually asked casually, "tough day?". The teen burst into tears and explained that her Spanish teacher does not like her and unfairly graded her verbal exam poorly. Although the parent knew that her child typically puts most of her efforts into her core subjects and tends to wing it in her electives, she responded, "I know how much your grades mean to you". Her daughter nodded and seemed to calm down. After a moment of silence she asked, "Do you think I could practice with Titi Xia over zoom a few times so I can get better?" The parent smiled and responded, "That's a great idea. I'm sure she'd be excited to help you!"*



*Simply connecting and being with the child through the storm of difficult emotions freed her up to solve her own problem. It is a bit counter-intuitive, but if the parent had insisted that the child fix her attitude, she may have focused more on the power struggle with her parent (mom is so mean, doesn't understand me, etc.), which would make it harder to learn from her mistakes and take accountability for her actions.*

## HOW TO CORRECT

Describe the possible strategies for correction that might be needed, depending on the situation. Feel free to explain in your own words, or use example scripts below:

### CORRECT as a Consequence for Behavior

- Sometimes **CORRECT** means that you need to respond to behaviors with a consequence. When a consequence is needed, try to stay calm and express disapproval of behavior while accepting the emotions that may have led to the behavior. *I understand why you were so mad and that you thought I was being unfair. But when you curse at me and call me mean names, it makes it hard for me to hear your side of things”.*
- Consider letting go of things that are unpleasant, but that are an acceptable part of emotional expression (stomping, yelling, or rolling eyes are frustrating behaviors, but may not need a consequence). Letting go can be hard (can feel like losing or being permissive). When you “drop the rope” and let go of the power struggle, you can save yourself and your child additional frustration.
- When considering appropriate consequences, it can be helpful to ask yourself “What is the most important thing I hope my child learns from this interaction?”, which may influence which correction strategy you choose.

### CORRECT as a Collaborative Problem-Solving

- Sometimes you can work together with your children to develop a solution when they are ready and only if they want your input. *“I know it’s hard that you haven’t seen your birth siblings in such a long time. Do you have ideas about ways to connect with them?” If not, you can suggest an idea: “What would you think about writing them a letter.*
- Collaborative problem-solving is a great strategy to try when there is something that needs to change, but you have some flexibility about how it needs to look. Whenever possible, giving your child input, choice, and control increases the likelihood they will cooperate and builds their self-esteem.

## CORRECT as Providing Corrective Information about Adoption

- Sometimes **CORRECT** means that you want to gently address adoption-related thoughts and worries. If your child is worried that they might lose you, you could provide reassurance that you will always be their parent.
- You may not need to provide correction about details of their story (e.g., they remember living in a blue house, but you know it was white). However, it is important to provide reassurance about the big things (e.g., I love you just as much as my birth child).
- If your child has more questions about their adoption story, discuss a plan with your partner, child’s counselor, or support person about the best way to answer their questions in a developmentally appropriate way and calm time. We will talk more about answering questions in Module 6.

## CORRECT as a Relationship Repair

A relationship repair can mean apologizing if you lose your cool or unintentionally hurt your child’s feelings. Apologizing to your child models taking accountability. It is very important to apologize for your part of a conflict without demanding an apology from your child.<sup>3</sup>

- Apologies can involve a very short explanation, but not excuses
- Apologies do not involve defending your perspective or trying to justify your behavior
- See examples of good and bad apologies in their workbook **pages 38-39**.
- Good apology example: “I am really sorry for yelling at you. I was really tired and in my red zone, and I flipped my lid. I know it can be scary for you when I lose my cool. Next time, I will try to calm down first and then come talk to you.”
- Bad apology example: “I am sorry if I hurt your feelings. I shouldn’t have yelled, but I was really upset that you made the whole family late. You know being on time is really important to me.”
- A repair can address how you want to make it right or do it differently next time. (e.g., I’m working on keeping my cool. Next time, I’m going to try to use a coping skill to calm down instead of yelling). Make sure you follow through to show you really mean it.
- A repair can involve physical touch, quality time together, and/or affirmations of love and connection.



## PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER: VIDEO EXAMPLE (10 MINUTES)



Facilitators introduce, show, and reflect on Becky Bailey’s “Anger” video (see Materials List).

While participants watch the video, instruct them to take notes on their handout on **page 39-40** of their workbooks. The video illustrates common ways that parents respond to anger (there is also a similar video on sadness).

After the video, very briefly tie the responses to a child’s emotion to the Pitfalls of Validation shared from module 3 (the Ignore, Save, Punish, and Dismiss examples from the video). Although time will not allow for an in-depth discussion of these responses, participants can take notes in their workbook on **pages 39-40**.

Lead a discussion on the Coach part of the video aligns with the 3 C’s.

- *How did the parent use co-regulation?*
  - **Possible responses:** She used a calm tone of voice, physical touch, breathing.
- *How did the parent connect to her child?*
  - **Possible responses:** Mom used reflective listening (summarizing what she is hearing), “name it to tame it”, stopped what she was doing, gave eye contact, nodded. Showed interest but didn’t take over the interaction with tons of questions.
- *How did the parent use the correct step?*
  - **Possible responses:** Focused on calm and connection before correction (i.e., did not engage in power struggle, or “pick up the rope” and tell her to “calm down” and pick up her bag before first connecting with her child). How might that same request have gone if she focused on it first?
  - Parent also waited to fully understand the problem before engaging in collaborative problem solving about ways to build the child’s confidence.

## PUTTING THE 3 C’S ALL TOGETHER: ADOPTION SCENARIO

Facilitators revisit all the steps and practice putting it all together with the example below. You may ask for volunteers (or facilitators) to act out or read from the script. Direct parents to take notes on **page 40-41** in their workbook.

**The Scenario:** Zoe is getting picked up from a birthday party by mom. She gets in the car and slams the door with a grumpy look on her face.

**Mom:** (cautiously) How was the party?

**Zoe:** Are you serious?!? It was terrible. I can’t believe you made me go!

**Mom:** Made you go? I didn't... (takes a deep breath). Honey, you seem really upset and I'm guessing it was not a fun time.

**Zoe:** Those girls are so mean! You don't care how hard it is for me to make friends at this school. I hate this place! I don't fit in with ANYONE. You just want me to be miserable!

**Mom:** (pauses) Do you want to talk about it? (Zoe shrugs.) Well, that's ok. I remember being your age and feeling like I fit in was *everything* to me. Anything that made me stand out was so embarrassing. I wonder if being the only black child of a white mom makes it extra difficult for you.

**Zoe:** (starts to cry, nods)

**Mom:** I don't always understand everything you're going through, but I'm here if you ever want to talk.

After the role play, ask participants to identify where they saw the 3 C's. Lead a conversation with the following questions.

### Step 1: CALM

- *What might mom be feeling?*
- *What might she need to do to regulate herself before engaging with Zoe?*

### Step 2: CONNECT

- *How did mom validate Zoe's perspective?*
- *We don't know exactly what happened at the party, but based on what she did share, how might Zoe be feeling? Can you relate to that feeling (thinking of your teen self)?*
- *Are there some reasons that it might be especially important to Zoe because of her adoption?*
- *Note dynamics of transracial adoption- mom connected to Zoe without sharing her lived experience as a Black child of a White mother.*



### Step 3: CORRECT

- *Correct behavior - did you see mom “put down the rope” and avoid a power struggle?*
- *Collaborative problem-solving - how did mom offer to support Zoe in a collaborative way?*
- *How do you think it would’ve gone if mom had skipped connecting and gone right into problem-solving mode?*

Wrap-up this activity by checking in with parents and share that the participants will begin to try the 3 C’s for home practice and will be discussed on the midweek call.

### PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

Review what kids learned this week (Module 4 kids learned about adoption-related terms, see handout on [page 42-43](#)). These terms are important to give kids some language to understand their experience and spark conversation on their similarities and differences. Tonight’s My Adoption Story asks kids to share some details related to their adoption).

When kids share their My Adoption Story during Family Together Time, this will be an opportunity for parents to practice the 3 C’s. Review the “Roadmap for Family Together Time” ([page 44](#) of parent workbook) that gives participants concrete suggestions for supporting kids in sharing during this group. Facilitators should summarize the roadmap. Focus on the use of validation as a key part of tonight’s Family Together Time. Point out the example phrases to try if they see missing information or misinformation on their child’s story ([page 44](#) of parent workbook).

#### Example Script:

*Be curious: Sometimes people think that curiosity means asking a bunch of questions. That’s one way of being curious, but it can actually undermine communicating acceptance. Again, think about this as an adult- when people ask you a ton of questions when you’re telling a story, what do you think? It’s exhausting! Instead, try just asking one or two questions and see how they respond. You can also show interest by describing what you see.*

*Remember to connect before correcting. Focus on putting yourself in their shoes and validate how they might be feeling and why it makes sense from their perspective. Avoid making any corrections to details of their story.*



*If you feel like you need to **CORRECT**, ask, “would you like to hear what I remember about that?” If they say “no”, let it go! It is more important for them to have control of their story than to have every detail correct.*

*Try to avoid minimizing their emotions or rushing straight to problem-solving.*

## HOME PRACTICE REFLECTION

Direct parents to **page 45-46** of their workbook with some reflection questions about using the 3 C's at home.



#### MIDWEEK CALL GUIDANCE: MODULE 4

- Review home practice (reflection questions on 3 C's).
  - Which step has been the hardest for you?
  - What are you doing well with the 3 C's?
  - How were emotions handled in your family of origin? Was your family loud and expressive? Were you punished for certain emotions?
  - Which emotions in your child are harder for you to handle?
  - Do you notice yourself doing any of the common pitfalls of validation or responses from the video (save, dismiss, ignore, punish)?
- If you have time, you can reflect on Family Together Time from the previous group.





MODULE 5  
**THOUGHTS & WORRIES  
ABOUT ADOPTION**



PARENT  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 5: THOUGHTS & WORRIES ABOUT ADOPTION



## MATERIALS LIST

- Pens
- Slips of paper, two different colors
- Prizes, slips of paper, and container (small bucket, coffee tin, etc.) for prize drawing
- Whiteboard/poster paper and markers
- Fidget toys
- Name displays or name tags
- Post-it notes
- Prize Drawing
  - Prizes
  - Slips of paper



The most important part of tonight's curriculum comes at the end practicing for Family Together Time. Please allow up to 20 minutes for practice and preparations even if you need to cut other things.



## WELCOME

Conduct drawing for prizes for being present and for completing home reflection as described in previous modules.

## REVIEW HOME PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT

Ask parents to reflect on their common responses to strong emotions and to practice the 3 C's. Possible review questions are below:

- *Can anyone name the 3 C's?*
- *What has been hard about trying the 3 C's? What is going well?*
- *Has anyone noticed the validation pitfalls they tend to fall into?* (Facilitators may share their own experiences or otherwise normalize that these patterns are very common and the first step is to recognize.)

## INTRODUCE THOUGHTS AND WORRIES RELATED TO ADOPTION

Introduce the topic by explaining the topic of the children's group: common thoughts and worries related to adoption. The goal is to enhance parents' ability to **CONNECT** with their children by deepening their understanding of how adoption can influence a child's worldview and behavior.

### Example Script:

*Tonight, we are going to talk about common thoughts and worries related to adoption. We are then going to practice using the 3 C's when responding to thoughts like these. In group tonight, your child will be reviewing common thoughts and worries that can come with being adopted and seeing which ones resonate the most with them. Not every child thinks all of these things, and it changes with development, but these are some thoughts that we have seen come up for many children who have been adopted.*

Ask parents to review the list on **page 52-53** of their workbooks (also below for facilitator reference, along with themes).

Ask participants:

- *Have you ever heard thoughts like this from your child?*
- *How could some of these beliefs make sense in light of children's experiences?*
- *What feelings might accompany these thoughts?*



Explain that it can be hard to hear your child having some of these thoughts and the difficult emotions that may go along with them, but they are very common and make sense given many children's adoption stories.

### A DEEPER DIVE: CORE BELIEFS

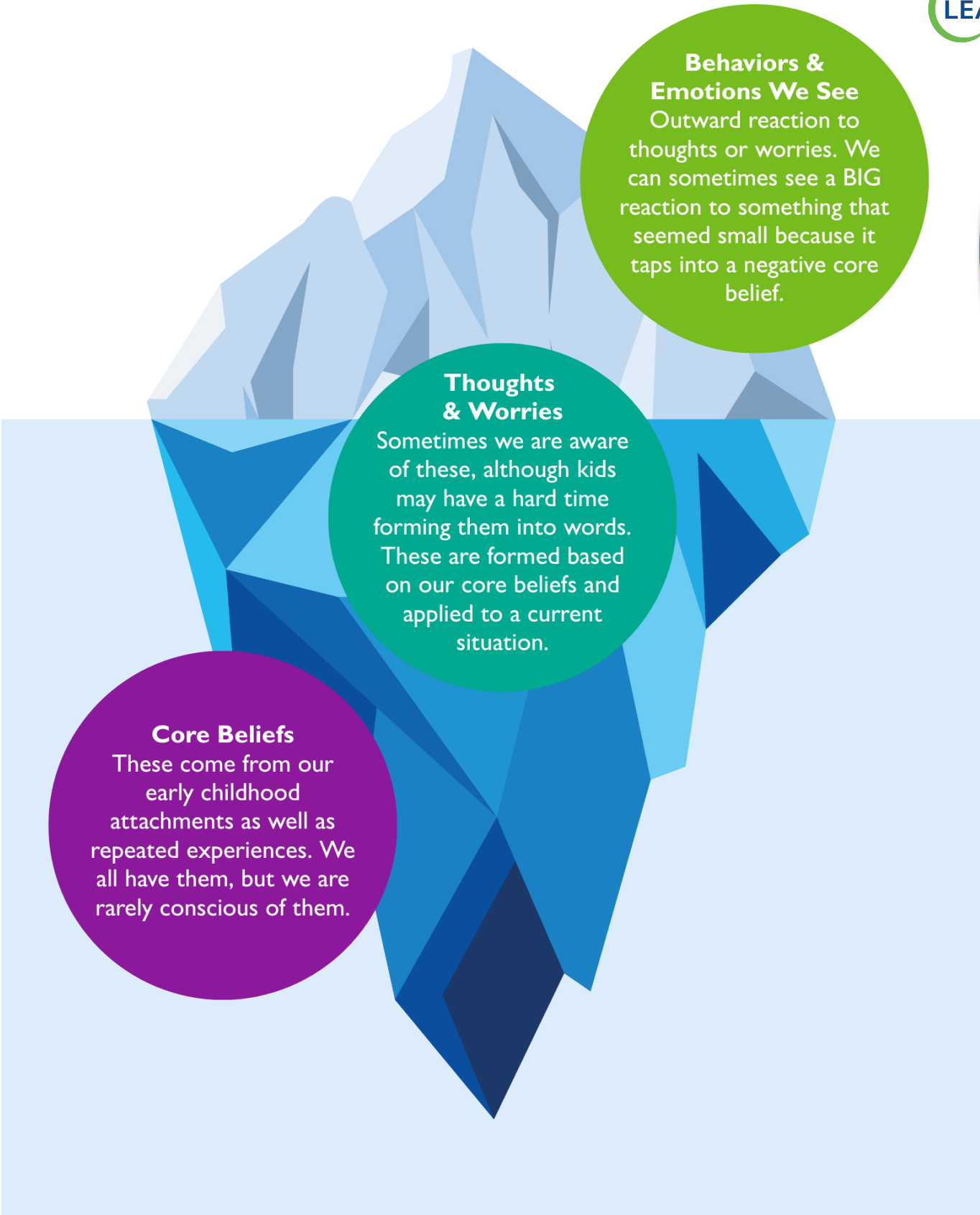
Explain the concepts from this module have been adapted from Aaron Beck's work on cognitive behavioral therapy<sup>1</sup>, Roszia & Maxon's *Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanency*,<sup>2</sup> Riley & Meeks' Six Stuck Spots of adoption<sup>3</sup>, and National Child Traumatic Stress Network's Invisible Suitcase.<sup>4</sup>

Note that the distinction between core beliefs and thoughts and worries may be murky and it is not essential for the purposes of this group that parents identify whether their child's thoughts reflect a deep core belief or conscious thought/worry.

#### Example Script:

*We all learn lessons about ourselves, other people, and the world around us from our early experiences, and these inform what some psychologists call CORE BELIEFS. They are thought to be at the core of how we see the world and interpret daily life, but we are often unaware of them. They are often general about ourselves ("I am... capable/incapable, worthy/unworthy of love"), others ("Other people are good/bad, trustworthy/scary, etc."), and the world in general ("the world is safe/dangerous, fair/unfair). These core beliefs can be positive or negative, although we will focus more on the negative ones here because those are the ones that can cause problems in kids' lives. Early relationships with our first family are particularly important in forming our beliefs- even early experiences that we don't remember. We tend to hold on to these beliefs after they no longer fit, rejecting evidence to the contrary. If you look at your workbooks, [page 54](#), there is an image of an iceberg. You can see core beliefs at the bottom, far below the surface*

*For some kids who have been adopted, their core beliefs can be influenced from the experience of losing a first family, and sometimes many other losses. For kids with a hard time regulating their behavior, they can have repeated experiences that can form and confirm these core beliefs (such as when a kid with ADHD or FASD gets in trouble repeatedly). Although every adoptee is different, there are some common patterns that adoption experts have termed "core issues of adoption" or "stuck spots."*



**Behaviors & Emotions We See**  
Outward reaction to thoughts or worries. We can sometimes see a BIG reaction to something that seemed small because it taps into a negative core belief.

**Thoughts & Worries**  
Sometimes we are aware of these, although kids may have a hard time forming them into words. These are formed based on our core beliefs and applied to a current situation.

**Core Beliefs**  
These come from our early childhood attachments as well as repeated experiences. We all have them, but we are rarely conscious of them.

*The next layer is THOUGHTS and WORRIES. These are connected to our core beliefs because that is the lens through which we see the world. While core beliefs are usually outside of our awareness (unconscious) and generalized, our thoughts and worries are in our awareness (conscious) and about a specific situation.*

*The top layer is what we see play out in our lives – our BEHAVIORS or actions. If you see a behavior that seems like a big reaction to a minor situation, it's time to get curious and think about whether there could be any core beliefs, thoughts, or worries being pushed on. Use your child's story as a guide to understand their core beliefs. Behavior doesn't come from nowhere- it is usually geared towards meeting a need. Be curious and reflect on patterns you notice about what may be underneath the behaviors.*

*If a child has a deep core belief that parents always leave, then in a situation where his parents go out on a date he may have thoughts like, "they are never going to come back! What if something bad happens?" Then when they come home, feeling relieved and then angry, he may have meltdown and refuse to go to bed. Taken at face value, this seems out of place or like willful misbehavior. But when we look at what may be below the surface, it starts to make more sense.*

Ask parents to reflect on a situation where there was a big response or a challenging behavior and brainstorm as a group what the underlying need could have been. Focus on potential core beliefs, thoughts, and/or worries that could have contributed to the behavior.

## WHAT TO DO ABOUT THESE WORRIES

Share with parents the strategies children are learning for coping with these thoughts and worries – name it to tame it<sup>5</sup> and asking, "Is that the whole story?". Parents can also use their actions over time to disconfirm negative beliefs. Have parents follow this content on [pages 55-56](#) of their workbooks.

### Example Script:

*So, what do we do now? It's not so simple to just tell kids not to believe what they've learned. You might wish you could just erase every negative experience they've had, but it doesn't work like that. When we rush in to try to comfort them in the face of some beliefs that can be very upsetting, sometimes we can invalidate their experience and make them less likely to share with us in the future (remember the pitfalls of validation). What we can do is to try to gently process and reframe their experiences with consistent action and affirmation over time.*



We are going to ask you to try to use the 3 C's in response to your child's thoughts and worries related to their core beliefs. Here are two strategies your children learned tonight, with how you can respond with the 3 C's. Remember to **CALM** yourself first too!

**Name it to Tame it:** Remember this? Kids learned that naming their emotions can take away some of their power. Now your job is to **CONNECT** with your child and communicate that whatever they might be feeling is understandable. This may be hard, but it is so important to resist the urge to try to save (Well if you're worried about that, I'll just...), dismiss (Oh, you don't need to be worried about that), or get defensive (Why would you think that after everything I've done for you?).

**Is that the Whole Story?:** Next, you may engage in some gentle questioning using the **CORRECT** step. Your child may come to some of these ideas on their own, in which case you can just show curiosity and support. In your workbook on **page 56** you have some prompts for asking questions related to "Is that the whole story?" While there can be some truth in what the thoughts and worries your child is experiencing, sometimes it's not the whole story. For example, it hurts that their birth parents couldn't keep them, but maybe there were reasons that were more about the birth parents than your child. Maybe birth parents were young and not ready to be parents. Maybe they lived in a dangerous environment, and they couldn't keep your child safe. Remember that you don't need to convince them or try to change deeply held core beliefs all at once, but you can plant the seeds to look at the situation differently.

**There is also one additional "bonus" strategy that you as parents can use by your actions over time.**

**Evidence to the Contrary:** Thinking about your child's possible core beliefs, how can you show the opposite is true? For example, if your child thinks parents cannot be trusted, how can you show them through repeated experiences that you are trustworthy? If your child thinks he or she has to be perfect, how can you show them that it is safe to make mistakes? If your child is worried parents will reject him/her, then how can you communicate unconditional love and acceptance? Keep in mind that this isn't an instant process- it can take years. It is important to try your best to avoid words and behaviors that confirm their negative beliefs. Sometimes kids have learned it's not safe to directly express their needs so they have learned to mask their true need (this may look like acting as if everything is fine or pushing parents away).



Note to Facilitators: Some parents may be concerned that by talking about these worries, we are making them bigger. Research on adoption shows that open communication about these issues leads to better adjustment for children.<sup>6</sup> Although it does seem scary to talk openly about some of these issues, by shining a light on them and bringing them to the surface, you can confront worries and fear and keep them from popping up unexpectedly later or influencing behavior underneath the surface negatively. For more information, see the reference list for this module.

### PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME (15 MINUTES)

Engage parents in practice around using the 3 C's in response to what their children share in Family Together Time. The biggest challenge for many parents will be to hold back on the **CORRECT** step (if it is needed) to first focus on **CONNECT**.

#### **CONNECT** before **CORRECT**.

First, facilitators should demonstrate use of the 3 C's with one of the phrases on the children's handout.

#### **Example Script:**

*Look at the list of common thoughts and worries on page 52-53. First, we will demonstrate how we might use the 3 C's in response to a child checking the thought, "My birth family didn't keep me because they didn't want me. Something must be wrong with me."*

- **First CALM:** *Think to myself, "This hurts to hear, but this is her story. I didn't cause it, and I can't fix it, but I can be alongside her and support her as she navigates these big feelings."*
- **Next CONNECT:** *Say to child, "I see you checked that this makes you feel sad. I totally understand how your birth mom not being able to raise you is really sad- I'm sad about it too."*
- **Then CORRECT,** *if needed. "I see these questions about wondering if there were any adult reasons that your birth mom wasn't able to raise you. What did you think about that?" If child is quiet, you could try, "I wonder if it had anything to do with her being 17." You can also remind your child of your unconditional love with something like, "I love you forever, no matter what, and there is nothing you can do to change that."*

*Now, please take a few minutes (either with a partner or on your own) to write out a possible response to your child if they checked the thought on the index card. After a few minutes, we will share with the group so everyone can problem*

*solve together. If you hear any phrases you think could work for you, jot them down.*

Next, using the example scenarios of common beliefs and worries, have parents practice using the 3 C's in response to the common thoughts. This activity can be done in the large group or in small groups/pairs, with a large-group report out. Parents may benefit from writing some key phrases of validation on post-its to take to Family Together Time.

However you choose to structure this activity, **it is essential to have parents practice generating some possible responses to the common thoughts and worries.** Parents will usually need scaffolding to use the 3 C's successfully (e.g., reminders to pause in connection before moving to correct, resisting validation pitfalls). Be sure parents have facilitator support during Family Together Time. We do not want parents to inadvertently hurt their children by their response to these common worries.

### HOME PRACTICE REFLECTION ASSIGNMENT

Direct parents to [page 58](#) to review home practice reflection. For home practice, parents are asked to continue their self-care challenge and to reflect back on a time their child was displaying large emotions. They are asked to explore what might have been below the surface and if it was related to a core belief. Parents are asked to continue to attempt to apply the 3 C's or even notice a time when they could have used them and build awareness for next time.

**MIDWEEK CALL GUIDANCE: MODULE 5**

- Review their child's possible core beliefs. Was their guess about some of their child's beliefs similar to what was shared during FTT? Remind parents that some children may not be developmentally able to reflect on their own beliefs yet.
- Go through some examples of big emotions this week. Is there anything underneath the surface that could connect to adoption?

If call is with child group facilitators:

- Provide a brief summary of content covered with children over the past 5 weeks.
- Give them a bit of information in their child gains in participating in the group.



CENTER FOR CHILD  
& FAMILY HEALTH



MODULE 6

# QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION



PARENT  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 6: QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION

## MATERIALS LIST

- Pens
- Prizes, slips of paper, and container (small bucket, coffee tin, etc.) for prize drawing
- Whiteboard/poster paper and markers
- Fidget toys
- Name displays or name tags

## WELCOME

Conduct drawing for prizes for being present and for completing home reflection as described in previous modules.

## REVIEW HOME PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT

Last week, parents were asked to reflect back on a time their child was displaying large emotions. They were also asked to explore what might have been below the surface and whether might have been related to a core belief. Have parents discuss how they applied the 3 C's.

Possible Discussion Questions:

- *How has it been trying the 3 C's at home with yourself and your child?*
- *Has anyone continued writing their 3 Good Things? Tell the group what's been working for you.*
- *What, if anything, has shifted after learning about common thoughts and worries your child's may experience?*
- *Has anyone tried something to widen your green zone?*

## QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION

Describe the importance of questions about adoption and open communication of a child's story.

### Example Script:

*Questions are a normal part of adoption. Every child that has been adopted has questions. Some questions are on surface-level details (e.g., do I have the same skin tone as my birth mom), while others are really deep and sometimes difficult to answer (e.g., why was I adopted?). Just because kids don't bring up topics/questions, doesn't mean they aren't thinking about them. Sometimes they avoid asking questions because they are avoiding their own discomfort or because they don't want to hurt their parents.*

*It is also common for kids to ask the same questions over and over again. So, even if you answered their question once or even if you talked about it at length, it is likely that it will come up again. Sometimes kids need to hear their story repeatedly in order to understand it and as they get older, they may be able to understand it differently. Research on adoptees' questions found that most had at least one question about their adoption related to why birth parents were unable to care for them, details about birth parents, more information about events in their past, the existence of siblings, and the current whereabouts and wellbeing of birth family members.<sup>1</sup>*

## RATIONALE FOR OPEN COMMUNICATION IN ADOPTION

Describe the importance of open communication in adoption.

### Example Script:

*Research shows that when parents communicate openly about a child's adoption story and all the emotions it can bring up, children benefit in several ways. Adoption communication openness is linked with fewer behavioral problems, less distress around ambiguous loss, positive identity development, higher satisfaction with birth parent contact and general life satisfaction, stronger attachment to adoptive parents, and improved psychological adjustment.<sup>2-8</sup>*

*Even though open communication is healthy, it is very challenging. It is very common for parents to withhold information, usually because they are worried that the full story could be harmful to their child. Another reason it can be hard to share some of the details of your child's story is that there can be really difficult aspects of their story that make the adults uncomfortable. Not knowing exactly what to say and holding difficult truths is very common, and you are not alone.*

*Experts recommend communicating openly about the details of your child's story as early as possible in developmentally appropriate ways.<sup>9</sup> This helps to normalize talking about adoption, it shows your kid that you can handle their tough questions and are willing to talk about their birth parents. It is okay if it feels awkward or uncomfortable at first. You'll both get better as you practice.*

*Why is providing answers to their child's questions important?*

- *It's THEIR story and even painful information can provide them with understanding.*
  - *For example, even if they were conceived when birth mother was raped or a victim of incest, this information could help them understand birth mom's life/decision to adopt.*
- *If children find out because someone else told them (someone else knows the story) or it can be found on the internet, then if they didn't hear from you, it can erode their trust in you.*
- *Some parents feel like they need to wait until the right time (e.g., when they turn 18), but we have found that waiting until adulthood can make kids feel resentful that parents withheld. So, in general, the earlier the better.*



## COMMON QUESTIONS LIST ACTIVITY

Begin by asking parents to brainstorm a list of questions they have been asked or think their kids might have.

After they have generated a list, refer to the list of common questions in their workbooks on [page 64](#).

- Why did my birth parents (place me for adoption/not fight harder to keep me)?
- Will I ever see my birth parents/siblings again?
- Do they (birth parents) think about me? Do they have any regrets?
- What is birth mother/father's name?
- Who do I look like?
- Do my parents have similar health issues that I have?
- Would you love me more if I were your birth child?
- Why did some of my birth siblings stay with birth parents and not me?
- What would my life be like if I hadn't been adopted?
- Why did they hurt me?
- Where are my birth parents?

Then, have parents take a few minutes to write or circle specific questions they think their child might have about adoption on [page 64](#) of their workbook. This could be something they have asked before, or the most difficult piece of information that parents haven't shared with their child (so parents can practice here!). If parents don't know, pick a question from the list.

Write this question on the parent handout on [page 64](#). Acknowledge that if they are writing their child's personal story in this notebook, they need to take care to keep it private.

In addition to the practice they are doing in this module, they may want to take some time at home to write a more comprehensive list of all the questions they can think of



that their child may ask, and think through how they might respond with a partner or trusted friend or provider.

## HOW TO ANSWER HARD QUESTIONS

Share information about how to answer hard questions. Have participants turn to **page 66** of their workbooks. The workbooks include Smalley & Schooler’s guiding principles for talking about adoption. Highlight a few such as the following:

### Example Script:

*Tell the truth in a neutral way. It can be helpful to remember that “behavior makes sense”, even if birth parent decisions were harmful, there are usually reasons that make sense given their life experience (e.g., using drugs to cope with their own childhood trauma, which is not a good coping skill, but may have been all they knew how to do without therapy or groups like LEAF).*

*Give details as developmentally appropriate, for example, if your child’s family history contained rape/sexual assault to a birth parent, but they don’t understand sex yet, you might explain that the birth parent was hurt and give more details as they ask questions or understand more with time. As another example, when children are really young, explaining that they were removed by child welfare because their previous home was “not safe” can be enough information, but for an older child, that could mean anything, and it is actually really helpful to understand details such as, your parent was not able to complete their reunification plan, which included drug treatment.*

*A lack of details can actually increase stress. For example, if you tell a child that your birth family couldn’t raise you because they didn’t have enough money, then the child could overhear conversations about the electric bill and become very worried. More details about the past can help them differentiate the past from the present.*

*Your emotional tone is crucial- it communicates way more than your words about how open you are to talking about it. It makes sense if you aren’t comfortable- there are some details that no one would feel prepared to talk with children about! However, when you use your supports and professional guidance, you can become more comfortable and confident sharing information.*

## USING THE 3 C'S IN RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS

Describe how the 3 C's can be used as a guide in responding to their child's questions.

### Example Script:

- The first step of the 3 C's is **CALM**, which is all about how YOU as parents are feeling. What are other feelings that come up for you when you think about questions your child may have?

Provide a few examples to normalize emotional reactions from parents, such as:

- If a child wants to know why a birth parent kept a sibling but not them, the parent could feel grief about their child being rejected.
  - If a child wants to know details about birth parents, this could lead to anxiety that the child will search for them online.
  - Frustration that they need to hear the reason for adoption over and over again.
- Intense emotional reactions to your child's history and birth family information are really common and it is so important that parents are able to express their true feelings (that are not helpful to share with their child) with people who get it. Having a space to get support, such as therapy or groups like LEAF, can help you process your emotions so when you talk to your child you are better able to focus on their needs.
  - The next step is to **CONNECT**. Try to empathize with your child's perspective. What feelings might be beneath this question? Sometimes there is a deeper question or core belief underneath the question they are asking. (Give example, such as, "Why is my parent in jail?" They may know the crime committed, but there may be a deeper "why" question, such as "Is my parent a bad person?" and then under that, a core belief, "If my birth parents are bad, I might be bad too."). You may want to ask your child, "Have you ever wondered...?"
  - Finally, **CORRECT** if needed. Do you want to answer the question? Let them know you will talk more later? Provide gentle correction to a negative belief from their suitcase<sup>16</sup> ("I know we don't know what your birth mother was thinking, but I believe she loved you very much and she had a really hard life.") Or if you think they might need reassurance, you can provide it.

## HOW TO ANSWER CHILDREN'S QUESTIONS – PREPARING FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

Facilitators will prepare participants for Family Together Time first in order to have more time for parents to practice how to respond to their child's questions.

### Example Script:

*In the child group, children are identifying questions they have related to their adoption. We are going to help you prepare how to respond. Remember, responding with the 3 C's means validating their perspective and accepting their questions. Your goal is to use these questions as an opportunity to connect with them. You don't necessarily need to answer their questions tonight. We will give you support and guidance.*

Demonstrate the handout(s) from the child group that children will share.

Ask participants to come up with a question they think their child might ask and write it on [page 64](#) of their workbooks.

In determining how they might respond tonight, we provide guidance based on whether their question falls into **one of three categories** (parents can follow along on [pages 65-66](#) of their workbooks):

- Parent knows the answer and is comfortable answering (for example, they ask, "What was my last name when I was born?" and you have already shared this information with them).
  - **Say:** "Would you like to know what I remember about that?" If they say "NO," leave it. If they say "YES," answer it!
  - **Avoid:** Saying "You already know the answer" OR "I have already told you this a billion times before."
- Parent knows the answer, but they are unsure how to talk with their child about it, uncomfortable, or need more time to think about how to answer
  - **Say:** "That's a great question! I wonder if that makes you feel...". OR "I know it's important to you to get this information, let's talk more at home." (Note that if you offer to talk more at home, you will need to follow through).
  - If you do decide that you want to share some information in response to one of their questions, we encourage you to take some time to prepare for this

discussion. Use resources such as talking with a partner, therapist, or other trusted adult; talk with facilitators on the midweek call; or write down how you might like to respond and practice.

- Parent does not know the answer
  - Focus on the connect step to try to validate the emotional impact of the missing information.
  - **Say:** “I wish I knew more about your birth parents, too.”
  - **Say:** “I wonder if it has been really hard for you to not know more about your story. “
  - Remember to wait to **CORRECT**. In many cases of missing information, there is not a way to find out more, but in some cases, you can support your child in searching for more information or answering questions with general information. For example, if you know that a child was in foster care and not able to go back with a birth parent because they did not complete a reunification plan, but you have no information about what exactly they didn’t do and the records are sealed, you could look up information about reunification plans in general, and what they typically include.

Next, ask participants to discuss questions and concerns about what they think their child might ask. Facilitators should offer additional support in parents' specific questions both in this group and during mid-week calls. Participants can write their thoughts on **page 64**.

Have participants practice writing out how they might respond to their child tonight on **page 65** of their workbooks. Allow some time for sharing for parents who are stuck to get group support on how they might respond.

## HOME PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT

Parents are encouraged to continue working on the 3 C’s and widening their green zones. For their reflection, they are asked to think back to their child’s questions and answer the following questions: What was your reaction to your child’s questions? Was there one that was really hard for you? How do you plan to handle it?

### MIDWEEK CALL GUIDANCE: MODULE 6

- Review questions that came up during FTT or other hard questions they have heard. How are they feeling about the question? Bring up ties to stuck spots for both parents and children if relevant.
- If children did not bring up questions, or only a surface question, you can focus on questions you think they might ask or one you hope they never do.
- Talk with parents about handling their response to questions. Offer an extended time if parents need individual guidance on sharing information, particularly difficult information with their children. This could also be done in therapy if there is an adoption-competent clinician.
- For non-clinicians conducting midweek calls, feel free to share your perspective, and don't hesitate to rely on your clinician colleagues if it feels clinical and/or you aren't sure how to answer.



MODULE 7  
**LOSSES & GAINS**



PARENT  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 7: LOSSES & GAINS



## MATERIALS LIST

- Pens
- Prize Drawing
  - Prizes
  - Slips of paper
  - Container
- Whiteboard/poster paper and markers
- Fidgets
- Name displays or name tags
- Example gains and losses jar (instructions in Child Group Facilitator's Manual)

## WELCOME

Conduct drawing for prizes for being present and for completing home reflection as described in previous modules.



## REVIEW HOME PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT

Facilitators process the parents' experiences with hearing their child's questions.

### Possible Discussion questions:

- *What was your reaction to their questions?*
- *What made it hard?*
- *How did you decide what to share and what not to share?*

Briefly check in around ongoing practice with the 3 C's and widening their green zones.

## OVERVIEW OF GRIEF & LOSS

Discuss grief and loss and define some specific terms that are important in understanding adoption-specific grief and loss.<sup>1-2</sup> It is suggested to provide parents with a supplemental handout (see ambiguous loss article from Families Rising article).

### Example Script:

*Why talk about grief and loss? Loss is inherent in adoption for all members of the adoption constellation: birth parents, adoptive parents, children of these families, and extended families. As a society, we often embrace and celebrate the positive aspects of adoption with "gotcha day" celebrations, etc. However, the loss is not as commonly recognized.*

*Grief is the reaction of emotions associated with a loss. It is different for everyone and has its own timeline. There are 2 primary sources of grief for adoptive parents: 1) parent's response to their child's losses and 2) parent's response to their own losses.*

*In the child group, the children will be doing an activity about the things that they have lost and gained. Common things children state they have lost include toys, birth family, places, and less obvious like their last name (or former name if changed at adoption), food they used to eat, being able to fit in with their family (especially in transracial adoptions). A list of common losses and gains from previous groups is on [pages 71-72](#) of your workbooks.*

*Ambiguous loss is a term that can be understood as loss without closure, that can be uncertain and confusing (see supplemental handout).<sup>3</sup> In adoption and foster care, this can happen when a person is physically absent, but psychologically present. For example, the birth parents may be walking this*

*earth somewhere, but kids don't know if they will ever see them again, so there is no closure. When losses are ambiguous, it can be harder to grieve.*

**Child examples:**

- *Birth relatives are alive, but they do not have a relationship with them or see them regularly.*
- *Wondering if the loss is temporary or if there is hope for seeing them again.*
- *Longing to be with their birth family, even when they've been hurt by them.*
- *Sadness by not knowing birth family or important details about their history.*

**For parents:**

- *Sadness for an idea of who this child might have been without prenatal exposure to drugs/alcohol or a trauma history.*
- *Lack of medical or genetic history may make health decisions difficult.*
- *Loss of a "normal" family narrative or experience (pregnancy, birthing, early childhood raising).*

**Disenfranchised grief:** *Many adoption-related losses go completely unrecognized by society (there are no sympathy cards or casseroles). Parents might not even be comfortable sharing their grief with those closest to them. Their role as adoptive parent often is revered. People say, "oh what a good thing you are doing for those kids" or commonly reported, "those kids are so lucky" (also called the "halo effect"<sup>4</sup>). Parents might not be comfortable sharing when things are tough. An example for kids includes the unrecognized loss around adoption amidst the adoption ceremonies and "gotcha day" celebrations. For parents, this can look like experiences with infertility or failed adoptions that may be mourned privately. These losses may be hidden from one's support network or minimized by others who do not understand.*

*These types of grief are important to understand as you navigate through them. Adoption-related grief can be extra confusing or isolating for adoptive children and parents alike. While we must always hold children's adoption related losses in the center, it is also important to make time, with yourself, your partner, a loved one, or a therapist, to acknowledge and navigate your own grief around your adoption story as a parent. Once you understand what you are going through as grief, you can address it through some of the strategies provided in this module.*



## ACTIVITY: PARENTS' LIST OF LOSSES & GAINS

Facilitators record a list of losses and gains by asking parents to name things that *they* (not their kids) have lost and gained because of their adoption. Examples may be tangible things like people, places, things, or could be less tangible like freedom, parenting confidence, relationships with extended family, privacy, and control. Parents can record some of their losses/gains on **page 73** of their handouts.

### Example Script:

*This activity is parallel to what the children are doing in their group, but this part is focused on you. Think about your transition to parenting through adoption. What did you lose? What did you gain?*

*All parents may have some losses, like free time to pursue their interests. Some of these may be on your list. There are also some special losses that can be unique to becoming a parent through adoption, such as infertility, loss of a biological connection to a child, loss of dreams or plans, loss of social connections, loss of what you thought was true (due to learning about child abuse, orphanages, etc.)*

## DISCUSSION ON GRIEF OVER UNMET EXPECTATIONS

One particularly important source of grief for parents is how they feel when they have to reconcile when their expectations don't match reality.<sup>5</sup> Facilitators open a discussion on grief related to unmet expectations. Direct parents to **page 73** of their workbooks. They may choose to mentally check off the ones to which they relate (may not want to write if children may have access to parent workbooks). Read the examples under the child category below and then ask participants if anyone relates to these or can think of other unmet expectations about their child. Repeat for self and family/society. Facilitators with lived experience as adoptive parents can lead by sharing some of their examples to normalize some of these beliefs.

### Example Script:

*Loss is at the beginning of every adoption journey. Often, grief as an adoptive parent is working through our own "shattered assumptions"<sup>5</sup> of what we thought our parenting journey would entail. You may be grieving the loss of unmet expectations - things about yourself, your children, and your relationships with others that are different than what you expected. First, we want to validate that this is normal.*

*Read the list of unmet expectations. Which of these (or others) have you felt?*

#### Unmet expectations about **my child**:

- My child's behavior is completely unacceptable - it does not fit with my values and expectations.
- I should feel love and connection to this child (if applicable, in the same way I would to a birth child).
- I expected my child's behaviors would return to "normal" after several months/years in a safe place and would be easier to manage.
- I didn't expect this child would still think about his/her birth parent when I'm doing so much for him/her every day.
- I did not plan on adopting a child with such high needs (or for their needs to stay so high for so long).

#### Unmet expectations about **myself as a parent**:

- I used to think I was a pretty good parent, but this kid has me feeling completely inadequate.
- I must be doing something wrong that this kid... (doesn't trust me, continues to act out, etc.).
- I'm not a parent biologically in the way I expected- I lost a child or struggled with infertility.
- I should never feel any regrets or ambivalence in adopting this child with a traumatic past.
- I thought my love would be enough to heal this child.

#### Unmet expectations about **my family and society**:

- I thought my community would validate my role as parent and support us.
- I anticipated that my child would fit well into our extended family and friends and be welcomed by them.
- I expected that my child would fit into the routines and expectations of our family.
- I didn't anticipate having to protect other family members from this child's behaviors.
- I expected the adoption process would be straightforward, but instead I feel wronged/duped by the system.
- I assumed we would eventually be able to function like a "traditional" family.



Next, discuss how unmet expectations can be hard to acknowledge, can be tied to core beliefs, and can impact parenting.

**Example Script:**

*These unmet expectations are in the room when we are parenting. Remember the iceberg we shared last week, with core beliefs that are formed based on our life experiences? Although many core beliefs are formed based on early childhood, we also form beliefs based on adult experiences, like parenting. What you see at the tip of the iceberg (your actions and reactions to kids' behaviors) can be tied to your thoughts and core beliefs about yourselves as parents. And many times, when you get out of our green zone, one or more of these unmet expectations is at the core.*

*For example [use this example or your own], if my child tells lies, I may interpret this behavior to mean that she STILL doesn't trust me, and I'm completely ineffective as a parent or even feel like I'm a bad parent. Then, I might be feeling ashamed, hurt, angry, or regretful. I am much less likely to be in my green zone, and I certainly won't have the capacity to be curious about my child's core issues that may be at play and respond effectively.*

## COPING WITH PARENTS' GRIEF

**Example Script:**

*When you have come to terms with your own feelings about your story and what you have been through, you can support your child through theirs. But if grief and distress remain, it can block you from fully supporting your child.*

*Acknowledge that your journey has changed who you are. You are not the same person you were prior to parenting a child with a traumatic background. You have seen and experienced life differently and have gained new skills and identity pieces. We will talk more about this next week.*

Review concrete strategies for coping with grief:

- *Acknowledge and allow the grief- feel your feelings, pay attention to what triggers your grief.*
- *Practice self-care and increase your be kind to yourself when you are feeling triggered by your grief.*

*Find people who “get it” and be honest with them. Reach out often.*

- *Talk about it with people who have earned the right to know your story. Be authentic and vulnerable with those emotionally safe people (for both you and your child).*
- *Manage expectations- this will be the focus of next week.*
- *Recognize the evolution of grief- there are no rules to it. This means it doesn't follow a traditional path or just resolve. Often times it will ebb and flow, fading for a while, but coming back when you face a new challenge. It's okay if it feels like an emotional rollercoaster ride. It can't be solved, but you will grow from it and emerge a different person.*

*Reach out to a counselor/medical professional when needed.*



## DISCUSSION: SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD IN GRIEF

First, participants will acknowledge potential losses for their child. In this module, children are making a list of losses and gains. Point out common examples shared by children in previous groups (listed below and on parents' workbooks [page 75](#)). Encourage parents to expand on this list, especially with other less tangible losses, like loss of control, privacy, trust, etc. Ask participants to identify which losses might be most relevant for their child.

LOSSES	GAINS
Identity, last name	New parents, siblings, family
Physical contact with birth parents	New people that love me
Death of birth parent/family member	Pets
Siblings	Grandparents/extended family
Pets	Friends, neighbors
Grandparents/extended family	Toys
Possessions, toys, photos, memories	Safety
Tradition, language, foods, "people that look like me"	New traditions, new languages
Friends, neighbors	

Using the 3 C's, facilitators lead a discussion on how parents can support their child in grief.

1. **CALM:** Acknowledge and address parent's own feelings. A child's loss can bring up big feelings for parents. An example might be if a child is sad about losing a birth parent, but for the parent, it brings up their expectation that they would be honored and appreciated for all of their daily sacrifices. Get support from an adult who understands what you are going through.

**CONNECT:** Parents are encouraged to try to demonstrate acceptance for however their children are feeling about their losses. Parents may connect to their own experience of grief of losing a loved one to relate to how a child may be feeling. Use discretion about whether sharing these losses aloud with your child would help connect to your child's experience (versus taking over the interaction).

However, parents SHOULD NOT share their loss when their loss is about their child because it might add to their negative core beliefs and shame the child (e.g., money you spent, we used to have fun in this house, no more time with siblings). Note that shame does not promote better behavior and connection- it does the opposite!

2. **CORRECT:** May not apply here! Holding space for grief means acknowledging that it is a valid response to a loss, and as much as parents want to fix things Trying to "correct" grief only minimizes it and both parents' and children's grief are real and worthy of feeling. Remind parents validation pitfalls resist the urge to paint a silver lining or minimize their loss.

## PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

For family together time, the children are going to share a gains and losses jar based on their own experience. They put losses and gains in a jar and then write about their feelings about some of their losses and gains.

Using a role-play, facilitators illustrate how parents can apply the 3 C's to processing the grief jars. Demonstrate with an example jar. In this example, a child shares a loss that is "my mom" and the child's feelings are sad and angry.

### Example Script:

1. **CALM:** *How might the mom feel upon seeing the words "my mom" as a loss in their child's jar?* (Possible answers: sad, jealous, resentful).



2. **CONNECT:** *How can you respond in a way that validates the child’s loss rather than jumping in to try to fix or dismiss their grief (like “you have a mom right in front of you!”)?*
  - “I see you wrote...”
  - “I can understand why you would feel sad about that.” OR (Connect based on your experience of a loss unrelated to your child).
  - “Thank you for sharing.”
3. **CORRECT:** *Use sparingly! It is really hard, but we can’t fix grief, so just try to sit with it. There might be opportunities later for problem-solving, for example, if they wanted to write a letter. We also might correct if they appear stuck on a particular piece and need more information or they have misinformation, etc.*

## HOME PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT

Parents are encouraged to reflect more on their adoption story as a parent and their expectations (where some of their expectations come from, and how they feel when they don’t match reality). They are also asked to think about their child’s reaction to loss.

### MIDWEEK CALL GUIDANCE: MODULE 7

- Ask about their own losses. Did any of the unmet expectations in particular resonate with them?
- Remind parents to complete their own “My Adoption Story” home practice and reflect on how their unmet expectations impact their parenting.
- Reflect with parents on how their child has coped with loss and ask how they have responded.
- How do you think family together time is going? What are you learning about your child? About your own reactions to what your child is sharing?



**MODULE 8**

**IDENTITY & BIRTH FAMILY CONNECTIONS**



**PARENT  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL**





# MODULE 8: IDENTITY



## MATERIALS LIST

- Pens
- Prizes, slips of paper, and container (small bucket, coffee tin, etc.) for prize drawing
- Whiteboard/poster paper and markers
- Fidget toys
- Name displays or name tags

## WELCOME

Conduct drawing for prizes for being present and for completing home reflection as described in previous modules.



## HOME PRACTICE REVIEW

Review home practice. Ask for general reflections regarding last week's group. The participants' reflection on their unmet expectations will inform this week's discussion.

### Example Script:

*Last week we asked you to reflect on your own adoption story as a parent and shattered assumptions<sup>1</sup> that you have experienced in your parenting. Did you discover any that affect your day-to-day parenting? What has felt like the hardest expectation for you to grapple with?*

## A WAY FORWARD WHEN EXPECTATIONS ARE KEEPING US STUCK

Part of unpacking expectations is examining what comparisons parents are making. If parents stay stuck in comparing the present reality with unreachable expectations, stress and unhappiness will occur. Facilitators will explore with participants how to adjust their expectations to their current reality.

Facilitators lead parents through a discussion on reframing the following expectations.

Shifting expectations of their **child**:

### Example Script:

*When you have expectations about how you “should” feel about your child, where do they come from? Some may be comparisons to the way you feel about another one of your children (through birth or adoption), the way you saw relationships in your family, or looking at friends, etc.*

*Attachment doesn't always look the same. It is okay not to like your child all the time. You may be expecting the swell of huge feelings of love that's so big you think your heart might explode, but some days, the joy and connection might come in little pings instead of huge bursts. They will slip by completely unnoticed if you aren't really looking for them.*

- *What are some ways you celebrate, embrace, enjoy, or delight in your child? How do you parent “the kid in front of you” versus the kid who you may wish they are, or used to be, or could be?*

### Shifting expectations of **other people**:

#### Example Script:

*You may be grieving the loss of support you thought you might have, or the loss of some relationships (e.g., your extended family has not been supportive, and you've scaled back on time spent with them). There may be other relationships that are not what you expected, but they are still supportive in some way. For example, if your parents aren't involved in the way you wish they were, how can you readjust your expectations for them? Also, there may be new relationships where you have found support - such as this group!*

- *What are some new relationships, stronger relationships, or built community that have been formed through your family's growth? Fill in the chart on **page 82**. You may even find someone from this group fills in an empty space for you!*

### Shifting expectations of your **family**:

#### Example Script:

*This evening, your children explored their working definition of "family." As adoptive families, you now realize that being related by genetics is only one way a family is formed.*

- *How would you define family? Has this changed since you became an adoptive parent? Be prepared to share this definition with your child tonight during Family Together Time.*

*Another part of shifting your expectations for your family is understanding what is and isn't serving your family. Give yourself permission to say "no" to things that don't work for your life now and think about what actually works for you and your family. Maybe there is a shared activity that everyone enjoys (or at least tolerates!) or maybe you can think about time away as adults instead of as a whole family.*

- *What are new routines that support your family's needs today? What have you created that helps the days, weekends, or activities run smoother?*



Shifting expectations of **yourself**:

**Example Script:**

*No parent is exactly who they thought they would be, but if you are looking for it, you may actually have strengths that you hadn't realized. The following questions will be on your home practice for this week, but what are some initial responses?*

- *What are you good at as a parent? What personal strengths do you bring to the table? Patience, creativity, empathy, strong boundaries, good listening, advocacy, wisdom etc.*
- *How do you show love to your child? For example, physical touch, playing sports, play time, food, gifts, being a good listener, teaching life skills, making sure they look good, providing fun experiences, or celebrating birthdays or holidays.*
- *What strengths do you bring to handling really tough scenarios with my child? What have you learned along my adoption journey?*
- *What are your supports and how do you use them? Relationships with friends and family, support groups, mental health providers, faith community?*
- *What are some values that you have because of your upbringing that you want to pass along to my children?*

## HOME PRACTICE ASSIGNMENT

Parents are encouraged to think a little more about how their identity as a parent has been challenged and strengthened through adoption. Give the home practice assignment to reflect more on these questions on **page 83** in their parent workbook.

## SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

Guide participants through a discussion on ways to support their children's identity as it relates to being adopted. Demonstrate the handout from the Pieces of Me activity that children are completing and will share in Family Together Time.

### Example Script:

*Identity development is a lifelong process, and it includes all of the aspects of who we are as people, including race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and other things that are important to us as individuals or as part of a group. There are some complexities to answering the question “who am I” when it comes to being adopted, especially in light of unanswered questions about the past, grief and loss, and integrating aspects of multiple families into one’s own self.*

*There are many social influences that build our sense who we are- take a moment to think about some of your characteristics and how they were influenced by important people in your life. You may be able to think of ways that your family growing up influenced your identity- both in terms of ways you are like other people in your family and in ways you are different. For adoptees, some of the tasks of forming their identity will be addressed in answering the question “who am I like?” in relation to two families. In tonight’s group, children will complete the “Pieces of Me”<sup>2</sup> activity to explore this question.*

*Here are some suggestions for strengthening your child’s identity.*

- *Open communication with you about adoption is perhaps the most important tool in helping your child form a positive adoptive identity.<sup>3-6</sup> We know this is easier said than done!*
- *A positive adoptive identity includes finding ways to incorporate both birth and adoptive families into a sense of who they are.<sup>7</sup>*
- *Recognizing and confronting negative beliefs, stereotypes, and bias against adoption will be important in building their confidence. We will talk more about specific strategies next week.<sup>8</sup>*



- *Explore any biases that you may hold, even those under the surface, about your child's birth family, or others.*

### **Identity in Transracial / Transcultural Adoption**

In addition to identity as an adopted person, children also develop their racial identity in the context of their families and other people. This task can be extra complicated for adoptees, as adoptive families may have a cultural identity that is different from the birth culture of the adoptee.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Example Script:**

*Parents of transracial or other cross-cultural adoptions have the additional task of helping their child develop a positive racial and ethnic identity when they themselves do not share in their child's race / ethnicity.*

*Part of supporting their identity development will be facilitate open conversation about transracial adoption. In tonight's group, children are exploring more about their identity as an adopted person as well as their racial and ethnic identity. Children adopted by parents of a different race may have many feelings around being different from their adopted parents and/or siblings. All of these feelings are okay and worthy of being validated. See examples of common feelings of transracial adoptees on [pages 84-85](#) of your workbooks.*

[A few examples are included below for facilitators]

- *Some kids may feel like they don't fit in with kids who look like them. For example, if they are Black and their parents are White, they may get to school and feel like they don't fit in as well with other Black kids raised by Black parents.*
- *Some kids may struggle because most people around them don't look like them ("I'm surrounded by White people all the time!")*
- *Other people may question their identity ("You're not really Korean").*
- *Some kids question their own identity - they look one way but feel disconnected from that culture ("I know I'm Mexican, but I don't speak Spanish or eat the same food or act the same as the other Latina kids at my school,")*

Lead a discussion about what parents can do to promote children's positive identity development in the context of transracial adoption.<sup>10</sup>

*Here are other strategies parents can do to promote their child's positive identity (follow along on **page 85** of your workbooks):*

- *Become comfortable talking about cultural and racial differences in your family.*
- *Help your child see members of their racial/ethnic identity in meaningful and important roles in their lives, such as doctors, therapists, clergy, etc.*
- *Find and spend time in spaces where other people have their shared identity (church, school, scouts, extracurricular clubs, etc.).*
- *Connect with adults and other children with shared identity to spend time with them in real relationships.*
- *Help children to understand the negative power of stereotypes and actively explore the alternative.*
- *Prepare your child for discrimination and give them strategies to respond.*
- *Attend celebratory / cultural events related to their social identity.*
- *Educate yourself on your own history, culture, biases, etc.*
- *Use the 3 C's to talk about race, adoption, and identity. It is okay to feel uncomfortable or awkward in having these conversations. Keep trying. Make repairs as you need to.*

*What else have you tried in your family to promote your child's positive identity?*

*What challenges have you faced? For example, what do I do if my child does not want to engage in the cultural activity?*

*We know that many of these suggestions are not easy. We encourage you to seek additional support and resources to support yourself and your child!*



## PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

Prepare parents for the Family Together Time by reviewing the My Adoption Story (Family Tree and Pieces of Me). Children explore their identity in connection to both birth and adoptive families. Parents may need some time to talk about their feelings about birth family connections and how they can be supportive for their children, even if they have strong feelings.

Sometimes completing family trees can be emotionally challenging for children and parents alike. Share some examples from past groups:

- Some do not include their birth family or ONLY include their birth family
- Some include people parents never thought of as family

### Example Script:

*How might you feel if what your child shares is different than what you want it to look like?*

*How would you respond to your child if they left off several key family members and put some random people on there (i.e. a friend from school or a lady from church/community)?*

*How may you feel if your child suggests nothing about them came from you (or nothing came from their birth parents)?*

*Remember to use your 3 C's when responding to their family tree and pieces of me. Stay calm and try to connect to your child. How might you resist correcting the details and remain curious?*

- *“Oh, I see you put...”*
- *“So to you, that person is family, and family is how you define it.”*
- *“It seems like you chose not to put some of your birth family, and we know that sometimes you don’t really feel like talking about them, and that’s okay.”*
- *“I wonder if your eye color came from your birth parents?”*

### MIDWEEK CALL GUIDANCE: MODULE 8

- Talk with the parent about ways they have shifted their expectations and what additional work might be needed to process grief.
- Spend some time asking about their strengths they have identified using the questions from their home practice.
- Discuss any challenges or supports needed for supporting their child's identity development.



MODULE 9

# COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY

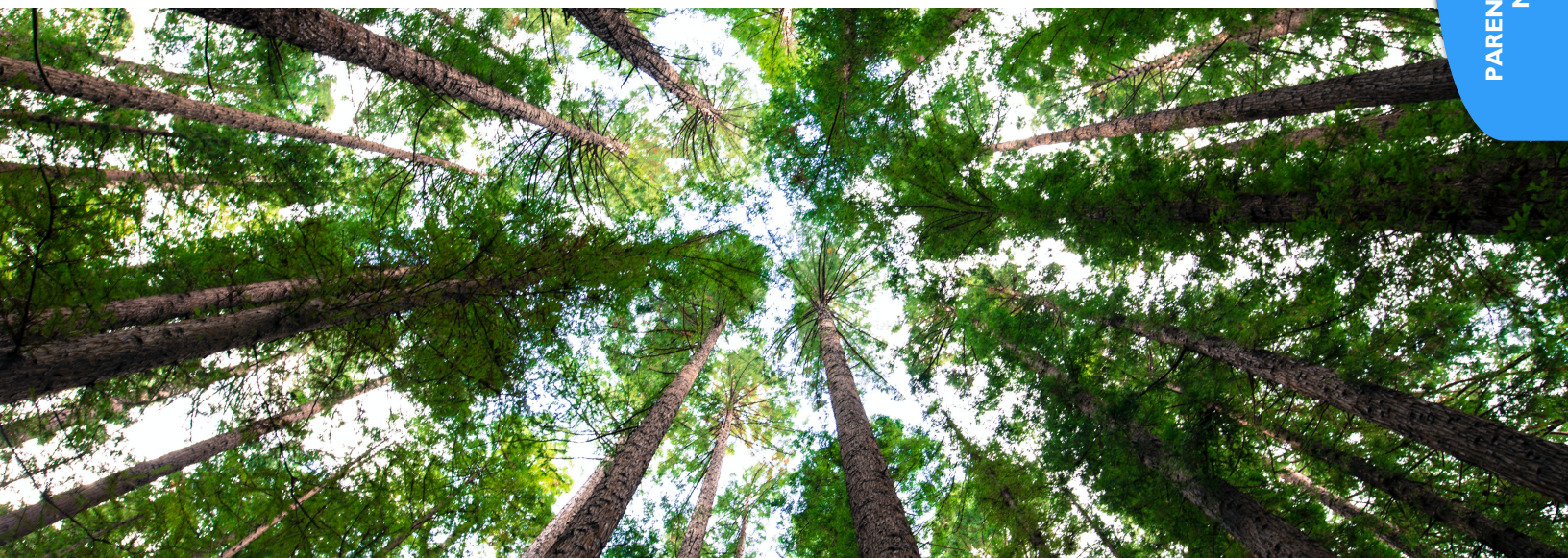


PARENT  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 9: COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY



## MATERIALS LIST

- Pens
- Prizes, slips of paper, and container (small bucket, coffee tin, etc.) for prize drawing
- Pre-made posters of ground rules
- Whiteboard/poster paper and markers
- Fidget toys
- Name displays or name tags
- Laptop and Speaker, Projector/Screen, Extension Cord for video Sharing

## WELCOME

Conduct drawing for prizes for being present and for completing home reflection as described in previous modules.



## HOME PRACTICE REVIEW

Review home practice reflection from Module 8.

### Example Script

*Last week we asked you to reflect on your identity as parents and how adoption has impacted it. Were any of you surprised by the strengths you've gained or honed during your parenting? How did it feel to name your own strengths? Were you able to reflect on your support system and how it is beneficial to you and your family?*

## ADVOCACY IN ADOPTION

Facilitators introduce the topic of advocacy - talking about adoption (including your family's personal story and/or adoption in general) with others outside of your family.

### Example Script:

*We've talked quite a bit about communication within your family, but tonight we are going to switch gears and discuss talking about adoption with those outside of your immediate family. There are probably lots of ways you are an advocate for your child, working hard to get their needs met with schools, medical systems, and others in the community.*

*In LEAF, we are going to focus on being an advocate when talking to others outside of your immediate family about adoption. Last week, we talked all about identity. Being part of an adoptive family is part of your identity and your child's. Although in this group, we strongly affirm that forming a family through adoption is just as valid and worthy as all families, the tough reality is that being adopted is something that is still misunderstood, stigmatized, and even mocked in society.*

*People make judgments about adoption and your family based on their own biases. Even so-called "positive" judgments can be difficult. For example, assumptions that you are "saints" for adopting and that your child is so "lucky" can leave you and your child feeling like they don't have room to struggle or grapple with loss and the complexity of adoption.*

Open up a brief discussion by asking some of the following questions.

- *How has your family handled talking to others about adoption? Extended family? Biological children?*
- *How accepting is your extended family/community of your child or your role as parent?*
- *What beliefs or misinformation have you encountered from others about adoption, such as the importance of “blood” connection?*
- *What are some challenges in advocating for your adopted child or your role as a parent within your family? Holding boundaries with people you love, want to protect, have complicated relationships with, etc.*
- *From your perspective, how does society see adoption? How does your faith community, if applicable? How does your child’s school? Friends?*

## IMPACT OF COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS

Discuss questions/comments families frequently encounter. Explain adoption microaggressions.<sup>1</sup>

### Example Script:

*Every day, families formed through adoption face questions/comments. They range from curiosity to intrusion. While some people might elevate your status as parents to that of “saints”, others might ask questions that make it appear that the only way they learned about adoption was in the movie “Annie.” These comments/questions can lead to complicated feelings for both you and your child, but they are often more painful when made by someone in your family or community. This can lead to adoptive families feeling isolated and misunderstood.*

*Why do people ask these questions?* [Pause for responses if time allows]

Example responses: genuine curiosity, someone caring about you and wanting to know more about you, lacking information about adoption, lacking perspective on how receiving those questions might feel, negative beliefs about adoption (whether they are aware of them or not), intentional bullying.

*Regardless of the other people’s intentions, the impact of these comments and questions can be quite hurtful. Researcher Amanda Baden<sup>1</sup> and others studied the types of comments adoptees and their families receive.*



*The purpose of sharing this information isn't to go into great detail about the different terms/categories, but rather to emphasize that these comments can be common, and if they make you or your child upset or uncomfortable, it is not your fault and you have a choice about how to respond.*



### Optional Video

Facilitators may choose to show one of the videos listed in the LEAF Group Resources, but take care to preview for appropriateness for your audience, both videos contain adult materials.



## WISE UP: A TOOL FOR SELF-ADVOCACY

Introduce W.I.S.E. Up™,<sup>2</sup> a tool developed by the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.) to approach questions and comments adoptive families face. In the child group, the children are being taught this as a way to approach questions and comments made by others.

W.I.S.E. stands for:

- W** - Walk away
- I** - It's Private
- S** - Share something about yourself/your story
- E** - Educate them

Lead parents in a discussion on how they can use W.I.S.E. Up for themselves and support their children in using the framework.

### Example Script:

- *If you are going to choose Share or Educate, what communication skills are critical?*
- *How do you support your kids when they encounter questions that may be perceived as microaggressions (e.g. statement of discrimination against a marginalized identity, whether intentional or unintentional)?*
- *How do you decide when you may want to intervene (e.g., kids are bullied or when other kids are being unkind)?*
- *In advocating, how do we maintain our boundaries and also teach our kids our values of respecting elders, being kind to others, etc.?*



## PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

Parents and children will explore different scenarios and choose which approach they would use based on the W.I.S.E. Up framework.

Parents may not have heard these questions/comments prior so they may need to practice 3 C's to stay calm and connected. Remember there is no right choice in responding with W.I.S.E. Up – all are acceptable.

### Example Script:

*Your child is going to share comments or questions they have heard or received about adoption in the past. They will then share which of the W.I.S.E. Up strategies (walk away, it's private, share something, educate), they'd use if they heard that comment. Use the 3 C's to stay calm and connect with your child's feelings. Refrain from correcting what they wrote, only provide correction if you think there are major issues they need clarified.*

*After they share their worksheet, we want you to choose a few comments/questions to role play how to respond as a family. Read over the list on [page 90](#) and pick a few to practice that might apply most for your family.*

*First, ask your child how they might respond using W.I.S.E. Up. Remember, there is no right or wrong choice here, although their response could open up a conversation about things that may be more appropriate to keep private with strangers, etc.*

*Next, ask your child for their input on how they would want you to Respond if you were together and heard that comment. Try to be open to their input without correcting. Remember, it is important for your child to have control over their adoption story. This is a great opportunity to show how their voice matters in your own responses to questions/comments from other people.*

### Comments and Questions to Practice for FTT

1. A kid at scouts says, “Hey, you and your mom look nothing alike. Is that because you are adopted?”
2. An adult at church asks the parent in front of the whole family, “Why would someone want to adopt?”
3. A friend at school comes over to hang out and asks, “Is that your *real* sister/brother? She/he doesn’t look like you.”
4. A co-worker of the parent says to the child, “Your parents are awesome. You are so lucky that they adopted you!”
5. A lady at the grocery store says, “Do you think white people shouldn’t adopt other races?”
6. A 5-year-old cousin asks, “Why were you adopted?”
7. A kid in the neighborhood asks, “Where are you from? Are you American?”
8. A kid on your soccer team asks, “Do you know your real mother and father?”
9. A kid in the neighborhood asks, “Do you consider yourself white since your family is white?”
10. An adult from church asks, “Isn’t it really hard to adopt kids? How much does it cost?”

### PREPARE FOR FINAL SESSION

Discuss the plan for Module 10, the final LEAF group, with parents. Prepare parents to think about what they will share about (refer to [page 92](#) in workbooks).

Provide any additional details as relevant, such as noting the different schedule and asking for dietary restrictions if celebrating with cake.

### Example Script

*Next week will be our last week. We want to celebrate the hard work each of you and your child have done. In our final session, we will invite both parents and children to share how this group has impacted them. We will have time to complete this activity next week, but we ask you to give some thought to what you might share.*



*We would especially like you to consider what you might share that you are proud of your child for. Your child has been brave and vulnerable to participate in this group and explore their adoption story. It is very important to keep this feedback purely positive. The celebration session at the end of the group is not the time for teaching a lesson or encouraging change. Find something genuine you can say about your child.*

Inform parents that part of the end of the group involves completing an evaluation. Describe the evaluation using positive terms, emphasizing its importance. In addition to the script below, note any other specific uses of the evaluation data. Please modify this script depending on how you are doing the evaluation in your group.

### **Example Script**

*We would like to ask you to complete a brief survey (5-10 minutes) telling us what you think about the LEAF group. The evaluation is voluntary, meaning it is your choice if you complete it or not. It is completely anonymous; we do not ask for your name or your child's name. We ask that you to complete this on their own after tonight, if at all possible, because we have gotten feedback that participants prefer to take time to think and write on their computers, instead of rushing to complete it during the last night of group. Please know that participant feedback has been used at every step of LEAF development to make improvements (and will continue to be used this way) and when we have data to support the effectiveness of this intervention, it increases the likelihood that funders can support us in continuing to offer this group.*

*We will also allow time during session 10 to complete the evaluation, and if you prefer to complete it during the group time, feel free to bring a device that can connect to the internet, such as a laptop or tablet.*

### MIDWEEK CALL GUIDANCE: MODULE 9

- Facilitators help construct, edit, provide feedback on their letter of appreciation.
- Remind parents to come with the letter of appreciation completed and they will have time to “workshop” it among their peers.
- Ask for brief reflections on group ending & plans to sustain what they have learned, including 3 C’s and self-care plan.



MODULE 10

# REVIEW & CELEBRATION



PARENT  
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# MODULE 10: REVIEW & CELEBRATION



## MATERIALS LIST

- Pens
- Prizes, slips of paper, and container (small bucket, coffee tin, etc.) for prize drawing
- Whiteboard/poster paper and markers
- Fidgets
- Name displays or name tags
- Certificates
- Cake (or other final reward to celebrate group closing)
- LEAF cut outs for final reflection
- Final LEAF reflection filled out by each facilitator
- Tree to affix leaves



Tonight's timeline is different than in previous modules. You may create your own flow or follow the timeline below.

Time	Parents	Children
First 30 minutes (5:30-6)	Dinner all together as usual	
Next 45 minutes (6-6:45)	Parent content: Welcome Review Prep for FTT Evaluations	Child content: Review game Prepare for FTT
Rejoin groups (5 minutes)	5-minute transition, sit in family units	
Family together time (10 minutes)	Parents, children, and facilitators fill out leaves (reflections of LEAF)	
Big group closing (30 minutes)	Cake and certificates, placing leaves on tree and sharing, facilitator dismissal	

## WELCOME

Conduct drawing for prizes for being present and for completing home reflection as described in previous modules.

## EVALUATION SURVEY

If parents did not complete the evaluation survey after week 9, allow time as they are coming in to complete the survey.

## DISCUSSION: LOOKING BACK AND MOVING FORWARD

Facilitators lead a discussion on the impact of LEAF for themselves and their family unit. Starting broadly and then moving into the concepts below as time allows.

### Example Script:

- *What concepts have stuck with you?*
- *What shifts have you noticed within yourself? With your child?*
- *Have there been any shifts in communication patterns in your family?*

## Review of 3 C's

Facilitators lead a discussion around the 3 Cs to review the content of the group and how they would like to continue using it moving forward. Parents may jot down responses in their workbook, [page 98](#).

### Example Script:

**CALM:** *The first C was all about regulating yourself first to then helping your child to regulate. We talked about ways to stay in the green zone, how to widen your green zone and ways to get back in the green after you get bumped out by a stressor. After you are calm and using your thinking brain, you are more able to connect with your child. You created a family coping plan to help you and your child regulate.*

- *What have you learned about yourself in terms of coping with strong feelings and trying to stay in your green zone?*
- *What have you learned about your child's ability to stay in the green zone and cope with strong feelings?*
- *What has worked for you to widen your green zone? Are there any wellness activities or strategies that have helped you?*

**CONNECT:** *After you are calm and using your thinking brain, you are more able to connect with your child. We talked about using strategies like naming our emotions and validating our child's feelings to connect to your child in times of big emotions.*

- *Validating that all emotions are acceptable is a very different way of parenting than how most of us were raised. What successes and challenges have you faced with validating?*
- *Have you noticed yourself trying to avoid any of the pitfalls of validation?*
- *What is the most important thing you want to remember from this group about connecting to your child?*

**CORRECT:** Lastly, we talked about correct, the optional step that comes after everyone feels calm and connected. We talked about how this can look, including a relationship repair, helping your child problem-solve, providing some corrective information or giving a consequence.

- Sometimes the hardest part of correct is to hold back on teaching until everyone is calm. Has anyone found a way to be successful with this?

### Review of Communication About Adoption

- We know that some of these conversations can be tricky, for example questions about birth parents, feelings around losses, etc.
- How are you feeling confidence-wise around leading some of these adoption conversations with your child? Has anything shifted throughout group?
- How do you plan to continue having adoption-related conversations now that the group is ending?
  - Possible responses: Watch movies that address adoption, make dates to look at pictures, create a Lifebook together, or bring up adoption when kids might be thinking of it—set dates on calendar or holidays.
- What are some ways your perspective has shifted about talking about adoption outside the family?

### STAYING CONNECTED

Facilitators make a plan to connect parents with each other, in whatever way fits for your group. Some groups have opted to exchange contact information, others have chosen to form a private social media group, some families have planned to gather quarterly at a neutral location, etc. Facilitators are encouraged to create a voluntary sign-up sheet to share contact info after group and pass it around at this time.

#### Example Script:

*If you've benefited from talking with the other parents in this group, we want you to stay connected to other families. As the saying goes, it takes a village. How do you plan to help stay connected and build a build a network of people who get it- for you and your children?*

## PREPARE FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME & CELEBRATION

Parents and children will both fill out LEAF reflections in their individual groups. They will then share these with each other during Family Together Time. Facilitators will also share a LEAF reflection, so make sure you write yours on a printed leaf.

Parents will specifically share an additional LEAF with their child about something they are proud of their child for that is purely positive. This was given as home practice for week 9, but make sure to remind parents of the instructions and give some extra time to complete it. Take time to review parent reflections about their child to make sure what is written is helpful and appropriate for their children to hear. Each person will have the opportunity to share one reflection with the large group during our celebration.

### Example Script:

*The LEAF reflection is a joint activity that you will both complete and share with one another. During Family Together Time you will each pick one of your reflections to write on a printed leaf. When we have our final celebration, we will build a tree with our leaves and share one reflection with the group (if you are willing). Think about what is safe to share in front of the children (nothing about your struggles with their behavior, etc.).*

*Parents will also complete a second leaf to be shared just with their child. Make sure this is purely positive- this is not the time to correct!*

## \*\*\*TRANSITION BACK INTO LARGE GROUP, WITH FAMILIES SITTING TOGETHER\*\*\*

### FAMILY TOGETHER TIME: LEAF REFLECTIONS

Parents and children share their LEAF reflections with each other. Parents present their child with the leaf that shares what they are proud of them for. Each family member writes one of their reflections on a leaf cutout to share.

## GROUP CLOSING CEREMONY

As tonight comes to an end, it is important to mark all of the work each person has done. We suggest acknowledging the hard work and growth of everyone. You may choose to modify this to fit the needs of your group.

- Pass out certificates and cake to everyone to thank them for their hard work.
- Call each family up for a certificate and if they are willing, to share what they wrote on their leaf as a final reflection.
- Then each family member may tape their leaf to the large tree on the wall.
- After all parents and children have shared, the parent and child facilitators should share their pre-written leaf reflection as well and share with the large group. When finished, all can see the large growth of the tree as a physical marker of internal workings.
- Close by thanking everyone for their time and energy or other closing thoughts.







# Coping Skills



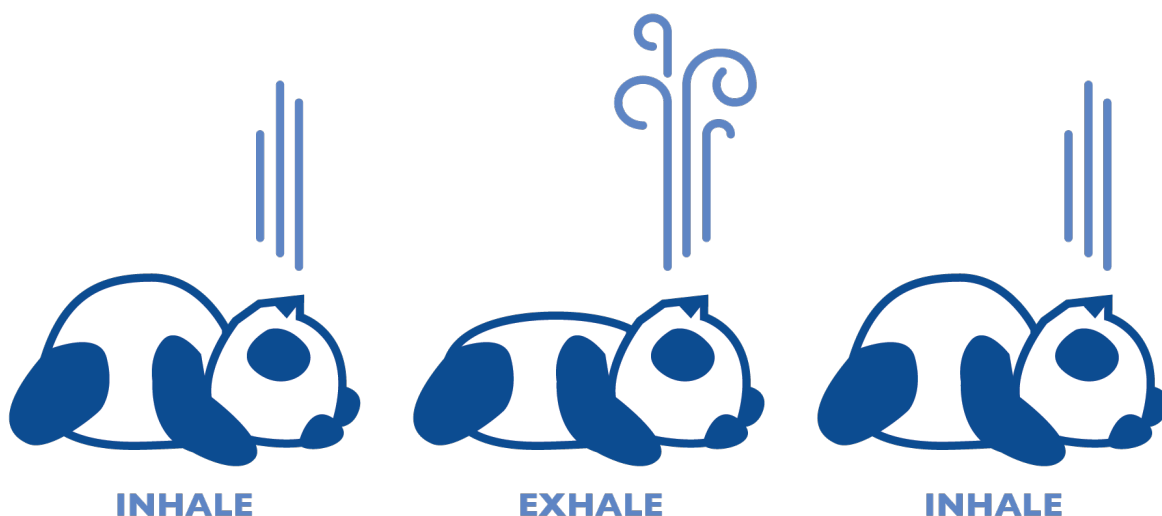
FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





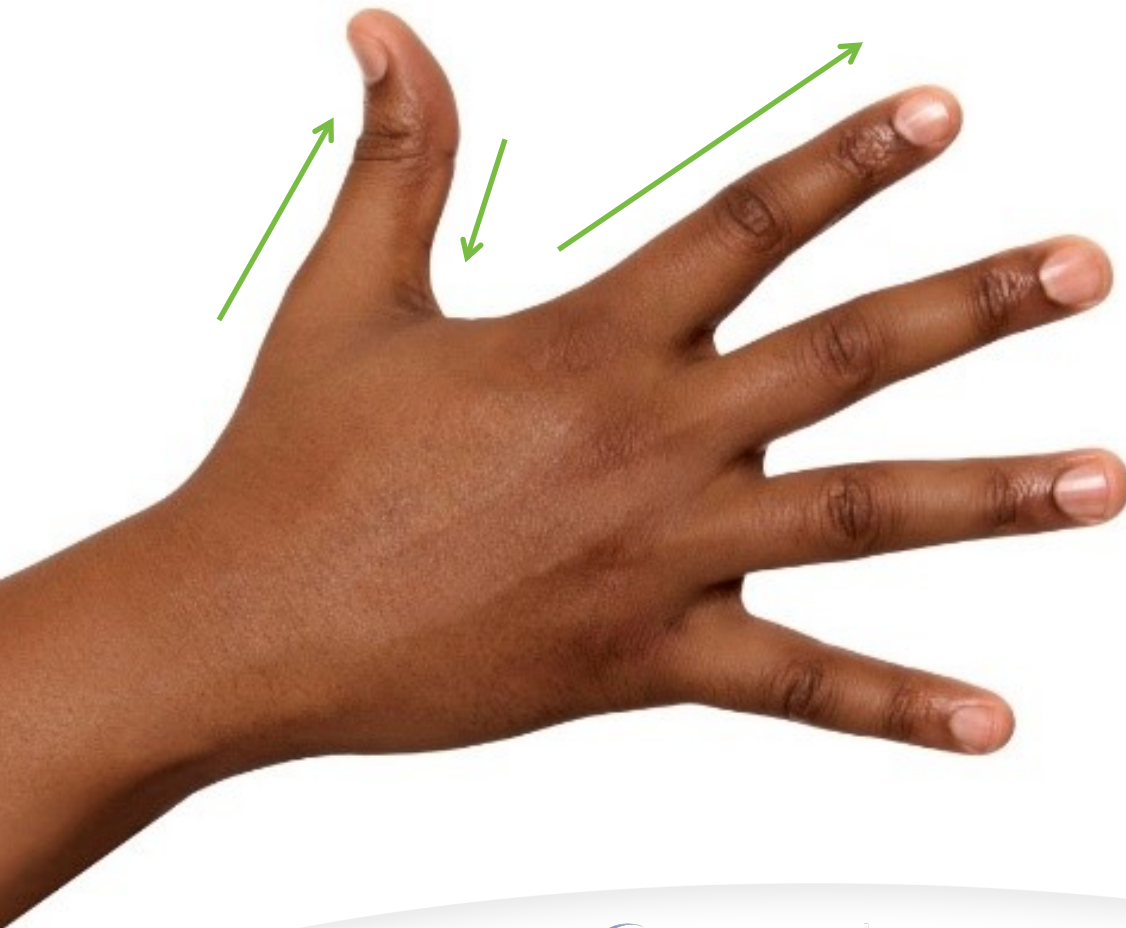
# BELLY BREATHING

- Belly breathing is a great way to help your body get in a calm, relaxed state. It is the opposite of how we breathe when we are stressed (taking shallow breaths into our chest). Instead, breathing deep into our belly sends a signal to your brain to be relaxed.
- Sit comfortably, with your knees bent and your shoulders, head and neck relaxed. This is also effective when lying on your back with knees bent.
- Place one hand on your chest and the other just below your rib cage. This will allow you to feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.
- Take a slow breath in through the nose (for about 4 seconds) – your belly should move out and your chest should remain relatively still. Imagine you are inflating your belly like a balloon.
- Exhale slowly through the mouth (over about 4 seconds) – your belly should move back down and your chest should still be still.
- Repeat for at least 5 to 10 breaths.



# FINGER BREATHING

- Finger breathing is a great way to help you stay focused on belly breathing for at least ten breaths.
- Sit comfortably in your chair with your feet flat on the floor.
- Focus on your breath, in and out, in and out.
- Now put your hand in front of you with your fingers spread wide.
- Starting at the base of your thumb, trace around your fingers with the pointer finger on your other hand.
- As you breath in, go up the side of your thumb.
- As you breath out, go down the other side of your thumb.
- Trace each finger, breathing in as you go up and breathing out as you go down.



# STRETCHING

- Stretching is a great way to pay attention to your body and unwind from stress. Remember that for each of these stretches, listen to your body and only stretch in ways that feel good for you.
- Sit comfortably in your chair with your feet flat on the floor. Sit up nice and tall. Take a deep breath in and a long exhale out.
- Drop your chin to your chest and begin to nod your head slowly. Slowly move your head left to right. Draw small circles with your nose in one direction, then the other.
- Bring your right hand to the outer edge of your left leg and bring your left hand behind you for a gentle twist. Inhale and stretch tall as you twist. Exhale and lean deeper into your twist (if comfortable). Then release back to center. Repeat on the other side.
- Grab your chair with your left hand and reach your right hand up and over. For a deeper stretch, move your left hand over to the right arm of the chair. Slowly release back to the center and then repeat on the other side.
- Send your fingertips out and drop the right arm underneath the left, interlacing your fingers. Breathe in and out as you feel the stretch. Release and then repeat with the left arm underneath.
- Move to the edge of your chair and interlace your fingers behind you, if that feels good for you. Make sure to keep your shoulders down. Slowly bend forward with your arms still behind you. After a few seconds, release.
- Slide to the back of your chair for a gentle supported back bend, interlacing your fingers if you would like. Take a deep breath in and then exhale and release.
- Now cross your right ankle over your left leg, rotate your ankle and then fold forward, if that feels comfortable for you. Breathe slowly in and out. Release and then switch legs.
- Get comfortable in your chair and take a moment to notice how you feel.



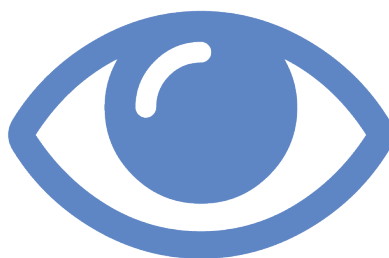
# THREE GOOD THINGS

- It is very easy for everyone to get stuck in thinking about things that are going wrong, or things that we wish were different, which doesn't always feel good. This coping skill is about taking time to recognize things that are going well. Gratitude, or thankfulness, is all about shifting our focus to the good things in our lives.
- Start by thinking to yourself of one good thing that happened in your day today. It can be a really great thing, or any small thing that made you smile. Even little things like having something you liked in your lunch, a teacher helping you out, getting a little time with a friend, doing well on a task, or even having hot water for a shower can all be good things.
- Next, think about *what is your role in this bringing this good thing about?* Even if you didn't cause the good thing, you may have a role in enjoying it. For example, if the sun was shining, you took a moment to feel it on your skin. Or if you had a fun moment with a friend, maybe you took the time to connect with them.
- Ask for volunteers to share one of their good things.
- To practice this at home, notice three good things that happen each day and your role in bringing them about.
- This practice is extra effective when done before bedtime, but it is beneficial anytime that works for your family. You can write your three good things down for yourself, or bring them into a family routine, such as dinner time.



# 5-4-3-2-1

- This is a grounding mindfulness technique, which is a way of getting us out of our heads and paying attention to the world around us. Using our senses is a great way to be more mindful, which can help us be calmer and more focused.
- Instruct the group that this is going to be a mental task, we are going to name the things we observe silently. We are going to try to simply notice things around us without judging if they are good or bad or if we like them or not.
- First, look around the room and name five things you see (e.g., I see a book, I see a tree, I see a table).
- Next, silently name five things you hear (e.g., I hear the clock ticking, breathing, cars outside, their own heartbeat, etc.)
- Now, name five things you physically feel. These things can be internal or external. (e.g., I feel a rumble in my tummy, I feel the chair underneath my legs, I feel my sweater on my arms, I feel the breeze from the fan). It is okay to repeat yourself if there aren't five different things.
- Repeat each step with four things you see, hear, and feel. Then three, two, and one.



# PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

**Hands & Arms:** Pretend you are squeezing a whole lemon in each hand. Squeeze it hard, trying to get all the juice out. Feel the tightness in your hand and arm as you squeeze. Now drop the lemon and relax. Repeat two to three more times.

**Arms & Shoulders:** Pretend you are a furry, lazy cat. You want to stretch. Stretch your arms out in front of you. Raise them up high over your head. Way back. Feel the pull in your shoulders. Stretch higher. Now just let your arms drop back to your side. Okay kitten, stretch again. Repeat.

**Shoulder & Neck:** Try to make your shoulders touch your ears, tightening the muscles in your neck and shoulders. Now relax. Repeat two to three more times.

**Jaw:** Pretend you have something in your mouth that is very hard to chew and bite down on it as hard as you can. Now relax. Now open your mouth as wide as you can. Now, just let your jaw hang loose. Repeat two to three more times.

**Face & Nose:** Pretend that a fly has landed on your nose. Try to get him off without using your hands. Make as many wrinkles in your nose as you can. Scrunch your nose up real hard. Now relax. Oops here he comes back again. Repeat two to three times.

**Stomach:** Pretend there is a cute baby elephant coming your way, but he's not watching where he's going. He doesn't see you lying there in the grass, and he's about to step on your stomach. Don't move. You don't have time to get out of the way. Just get ready for him. Make your stomach very hard. Tighten up your stomach muscles real tight. Hold it. It looks like he is going the other way. You can relax now. Let your stomach go soft. Let it be as relaxed as you can. Oops, he's coming this way again. Get ready. Repeat two to three times.

**Legs & Feet:** Pretend you are standing on your favorite beach with the sand between your toes. Squish your toes down deep in to the sand. Push down, spread your toes apart, and feel the sand between your toes. Relax your feet. Repeat two to three times.

*Adapted from Carkhuff, R.R. (1969). Helping and human relations, Vol. 1, New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston and Fitzgerald, M. (n.d.). Relaxation Script for Younger Children. [www.depts.washington.edu](http://www.depts.washington.edu).*



# RAINBOW BREATHING

- This is another fun variation of belly breathing that also incorporates some movement and stretching.
- Begin by sitting on the edge of your seat with your back straight and your feet flat on the floor. Make sure you have enough space around you to reach your arms out to the side.
- Close your eyes, if that is comfortable for you.
- Let your arms hang down at your side. Open and close your hands a couple of times to warm up your body.
- Turn the palms of your hands so that they are facing forward and stretch your fingers long.
- Keeping your arms straight, slowly float them up from your sides. Feel how wide you can reach to the side and then up. Reach a little higher if it feels comfortable.
- Now let your palms come down to your sides.
- This time, we are going to match our breathing with our movement.
- Turn your palms out and reach wide for a bigger rainbow as you breathe in. Once your arms are up, exhale slowly while bringing your arms down by your side.
- Repeat a minimum of 5 times.



# YOGA POSES

- These poses may be familiar to anyone who has done yoga before. These poses can help reduce stress by helping us focus on our bodies. They have the benefits of stretching and using our muscles, which signals our stress response to turn off.
- Remember to listen to your body and only move in ways that are comfortable for you.

## MOUNTAIN POSE

- Stand with your feet at hip width distance apart. Imagine your feet are connected to the earth, strong steady and grounded. Stand up straight with your arms at your sides. Turn your palms forward and spread your fingers. Lengthen your spine by making your head tall. Stand firmly, like a strong mountain.

## TREE POSE

- Next, look ahead to find a focus point (an object that is not moving). Shift your weight to stand on one foot, bringing the other foot to the inner ankle, calf, or thigh of your opposite leg. Stand tall like a tree. Imagine your roots growing deep into the earth and nourishing you. Bring your hands together in front of your heart. Feel your head growing tall, like a strong tree. If you like, extend your arms up like branches, stretching up towards the sun. Pick an object to focus your gaze on. Take a few deep breaths and repeat on the opposite leg.

## WARRIOR POSE

- Step your left foot back behind you, turning your foot out to the left. Bend your right knee and sink your hips down. Raise your arms, extending your right arm in front of you and your left arm behind you. Hold your pose for a few slow, deep breaths, feeling your strength supporting you.

## OPTIONAL ADDITIONAL POSES

- Invite participants to lead the group in any of their favorite poses, if they know any. Other examples are below.
- **Bridge pose:** lie on your back with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor. Lift your hips off the ground.
- **Cat-Cow pose:** Lower down to the floor on your hands and knees (table pose). For cat pose, arch your back and tuck your chin, as you take a breath. Then, move into cow by raising your head and hips, lowering your back. Gently move back and forth at your own pace.

- **Downward-facing dog:** From table pose, raise your hips into the air. Straighten your legs as much as possible, feeling the stretch in your hamstrings. Press into the ground with your arms, holding the stretch for a few breaths.
- **Upward-facing dog:** Lower your hips to the ground and press into the ground with your hands. Arch your back and lift your head.
- **Child's Pose:** Sit back on your heels and stretch your arms forward, lowering your upper body to the floor.



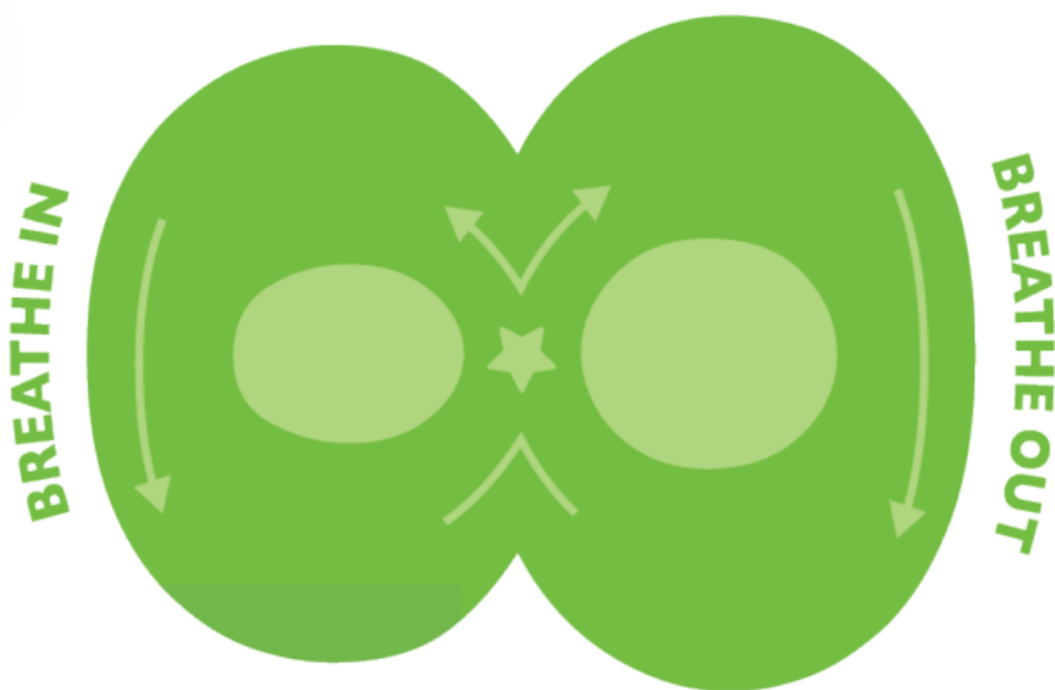
# MUSIC MINDFULNESS

- This a mindfulness exercise which is where we focus our attention on one specific thing at a time. When we use mindfulness exercises regularly, we can become more focused and less stressed, and it can help us stay healthy!
- Facilitators will pick an uplifting song (such as Stronger by Kelly Clarkson) to play for the group.
- Pick one word in the song (e.g., you) and ask participants to focus on that word and count the number of times the word occurs in the song.
- After paying the song aloud for the group, ask how many they heard and provide the accurate count.
- Process what got in the way and/or helped with focus.



# LAZY 8 BREATHING

- Put your finger on the star and slowly take a deep breath in as you trace the left side of the figure 8.
- As you cross over to the other side, breathe out slowly as you move your way around the right side of the figure 8.
- Repeat this 5 or more times.



# BUTTERFLY HUGS

- This technique is great for self-soothing and helping you get back into your green zone. It reduces your body's stress response and helps you to relax.
- Begin in a comfortable seated position. Sit up nice and tall.
- Place each hand on your opposite shoulder, like you are giving yourself a hug.  
**Alternate position:** Hold your hands out in front of you with your palms facing towards you. Interlace your thumbs, with your fingers out like a butterfly. Place your butterfly on your chest.
- Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose, out through your mouth.
- Gently tap your left hand, then right. Continue gently tapping back and forth for a few slow, deep breaths.
- You can say to yourself, "*I am safe, I am loved, I am enough.*"
- When you are done, let your butterfly fly away, or just relax your arms by your sides.



# BODY SCAN

- This is a mindfulness and relaxation exercise that helps you focus on how your body is feeling. If you notice any tension in your body, you can use this exercise to relax.
- Begin by sitting comfortably in your chair. Close your eyes if that is comfortable for you.
- Imagine a warm, glowing band of light around your head like a halo.
- Visualize the band of light starting with your head, going down your face and neck, stopping at any part of your body where you feel tension or stress. Take a slow, deep breath and feel the warming light melting the tension away.
- Move slowly down each part of your body until you reach your toes.
- Then scan back up from your toes to your head, stopping anywhere you feel tension or stress.
- Once you have finished your body scan, open your eyes and notice if you feel any different.





# M&M POSITIVITY

Distribute fun-sized bags of M&Ms. Have each participant pick an M&M from the bag without looking. Come up with one positive thought based on the color.

**Note:** if candy is not appropriate for your group, you could use dice and assign numbers one – six for each positive thought below.

## YELLOW

*Something I'm proud of today*

## ORANGE

*A hope for the future*

## RED

*Last time someone was kind to me*

## BROWN

*Something I like about myself*

## BLUE

*Something I'm grateful for*

## GREEN

*A time I felt loved*



# BUBBLE BREATHING

- Ask participants to hold up the wand and blow quickly. What do they notice? (Answer: There are a lot of small bubbles)
- Next, ask participants to blow slowly. What happens? (Answer: The bubbles are fewer but bigger)
- Now ask participants to blow the biggest bubble they can. This helps to gain control over your breath and learn how to breathe slowly.

## ALTERNATIVE IDEA

- Explain to participants that this is a way to lessen their worries and begin to feel more relaxed.
- Give each participant a bottle of bubbles and ask them to think about something, which causes them some worry or anxiety (nothing too traumatic).
- Have them imagine blowing their anxiety or anger into the bubble, as they blow into the bubble wand. Tell them to picture the event in the bubble as it floats/drifts away into the air.
- When their bubble pops, explain to them that their worry has popped outside of them and can't trouble them anymore.
- Have them continue blowing bubbles until they are relaxed and calm.





# PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION FOR TEENS

- Ask participants to sit in a comfortable position and close their eyes (if comfortable).
- Begin by taking a deep breath and noticing the feeling of air filling your lungs. Hold your breath for a few seconds. (brief pause)
- Release the breath slowly and let the tension leave your body. Take in another deep breath and hold it. (brief pause)
- Again, slowly release the air. Even slower now, take another breath. Fill your lungs and hold the air. (brief pause)
- Slowly release the breath and imagine the feeling of tension leaving your body.
- Now, move your attention to your feet. Begin to tense your feet by curling your toes and the arch of your foot. Hold onto the tension and notice what it feels like. (5 second pause). Release the tension in your foot. Notice the new feeling of relaxation.
- Next, begin to focus on your lower leg. Tense the muscles in your calves. Hold them tightly and pay attention to the feeling of tension. (5 second pause). Release the tension from your lower legs. Again, notice the feeling of relaxation. Remember to continue taking deep breaths.
- Next, tense the muscles of your upper leg and pelvis. You can do this by tightly squeezing your thighs together. Make sure you feel tenseness without going to the point of strain. (5 second pause). And release. Feel the tension leave your muscles.
- Begin to tense your stomach and chest. You can do this by sucking your stomach in. Squeeze harder and hold the tension. A little bit longer. (5 second pause). Release the tension. Allow your body to go limp. Let yourself notice the feeling of relaxation. Continue taking deep breaths. Breathe in slowly, noticing the air fill your lungs, and hold it. (brief pause). Release the air slowly. Feel it leaving your lungs.
- Next, tense the muscles in your back by bringing your shoulders together behind you. Hold them tightly. Tense them as hard as you can without straining and keep holding. (5 second pause). Release the tension from your back. Feel the tension slowly leaving your body, and the new feeling of relaxation. Notice how different your body feels when you allow it to relax.

- Tense your arms all the way from your hands to your shoulders. Make a fist and squeeze all the way up your arm. Hold it. (5 second pause). Release the tension from your arms and shoulders. Notice the feeling of relaxation in your fingers, hands, arms, and shoulders. Notice how your arms feel limp and at ease.
- Move up to your neck and your head. Tense your face and your neck by distorting the muscles around your eyes and mouth. (5 second pause). Release the tension. Again, notice the new feeling of relaxation.
- Finally, tense your entire body. Tense your feet, legs, stomach, chest, arms, head, and neck. Tense harder, without straining. Hold the tension. (5 second pause). Now release. Allow your whole body to go limp. Pay attention to the feeling of relaxation, and how different it is from the feeling of tension.
- Begin to wake your body up by slowly moving your muscles. Adjust your arms and legs. Stretch your muscles and open your eyes when you're ready.



# Optional Activities



FACILITATOR  
MANUAL





# OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES

*These are great activities to use during times when the participants seem to need a movement break or when there is extra time at the end of the session. Bring supplies to each session to have available.*

## 01 UNO

- Deal each person 7 cards (facing down) with the rest of the cards placed in a Draw Pile face down.
- You have to match the top card on the Discard pile either by the number, color, or the symbol/action. You can also play a Wild Card.
- If the player has no matches or they choose not to play any of their cards even though they might have a match, they must draw a card from the Draw pile. If that card can be played, play it. Otherwise, players continue to draw cards until they have a match, even if it is 10 times.
- The game continues until a player has one card left. The moment a player has just one card they must yell “UNO!” If they are caught not saying “Uno” by another player before the next player has taken their turn, that player must draw two new cards as a penalty. Announcing “Uno” needs to be repeated every time you are left with one card.
- Once a player has no cards remaining, the game is over.



## 02 SPOONS

- Have everyone sit in a circle, facing each other. Shuffle the deck of cards.
- Place spoons in the middle. There should be one less spoon than the number of players; in other words, if there are seven players, then six spoons should be in the middle of the circle.
- Deal each player four cards. With the remaining cards, form a stack.
- To begin a game, the first player takes a card from the deck and places it into his hand. He or she decides whether to keep this card or not. He or she quickly discards one card from his hand and passes it, face down, to the next person in the circle (in clockwise order).
- The goal is to try to get 4 of a kind. Once a person gets 4 of the same rank of card, he or she is now eligible to grab a spoon from the middle. Once anyone takes a spoon from the middle, the rest of the players can now grab a spoon, even if they don't yet have four of a kind. In order not to lose, you must grab a spoon in time.
- Options for continued play:
  - *The last player (the one who was not successful in getting a spoon) loses and must leave the circle. Decrease the number of spoons by one and repeat this process until there is only one winner left.*
  - *The whole game starts again with everyone playing. In other words, no one is “out” of the game.*



## 03 AIRBALL

- Inflate a balloon or beach ball.
- The goal is to hit the balloon/ball as many times as possible before it hits the ground.
- Participants hit the ball once at a time (i.e. they cannot hit the ball twice in a row)
- Variations:
  - Every participant has to hit the balloon/ball once each round
  - Have participants play on their knees



#### 04 DETECTIVE

- Students stand in a circle. One student (the detective) steps outside.
- While out of the room, another student is chosen as the leader to start the motion.
- The leader begins a motion. For example, the leader taps the top of his/her head while the rest of the students in the circle follow along.
- The student in the hallway returns to the room and goes to the center of the circle.
- After a couple of minutes, the leader changes the motion. For example, the leader claps his/her hands while the rest of the students follow along.
- The detective has to figure out which student is the leader. The detective gets three guesses. Then a new leader and detective are chosen for the next round.



#### 05 ACTIVITY THUMBALL

- Ask participants to stand in a circle
- Throw the thumbball to someone in the group.
- The participant will look to see the space there thumb landed on and engage in the activity



#### 06 NAME & MOVEMENT GAME

- Ask participants to stand in a circle.
- Have participants Have participants to state their name and then come up with a silly movement to do.
- The second person will repeat the first person name and movement and then share their name and movement. This process will continue until everyone has had a chance to give their name and movement.
- Challenge the group to see if anyone can do all of the names and movements.



## 07 PARACHUTE ACTIVITIES

- Purchase a play parachute with handles and set of light weight balls or bean bags.
- Have each participant hold onto a handle of the parachute and play any variety of the games below.
- Mushroom: hold the parachute up above your heads and try to all get under the parachute and sit.
- Make Waves: All the participants hold the parachute and move it up and down to create waves.
- Switch: On a count of three, raise the parachute above everyone's head. Call the names of two participants on opposite sides, who must let go of the parachute and trade places.
- Popcorn: As participants hold the parachute, add balls a few at a time and challenge them to pop the balls up like popcorn, without losing any outside of the parachute.
- Merry go round: Play music and have participants walk or dance in a circle until the music stops, then switch directions.







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