



# A Workshop for Parents & Children

## PARENT WORKBOOK



CENTER FOR CHILD  
& FAMILY HEALTH



MODULE I  
**INTRODUCTIONS**



PARENT  
WORKBOOK





# MODULE 1: INTRODUCTIONS



## GOALS OF LEAF

**Goal 1:** Build connections. By meeting other families with adoption in common, we hope to normalize some unique aspects of forming a family through adoption. We hope you can sustain these connections after the group ends. We also hope to strengthen the connection between parent and child throughout this group.

**Goal 2:** Increase communication about adoption. We hope that, each week, you and your child will learn more about adoption and will engage in more conversations about adoption. Through family together time and home practice, we hope to encourage ongoing discussion of your child's adoption journey as well as help you handle adoption-related questions in the community.

**Goal 3:** Develop skills for coping with strong emotions. Parents and children will learn to label and express feelings related to adoption and learn how to regulate strong feelings (both related to adoption and in general). In addition, you will learn steps to help regulate your children as well as regulate your own strong feelings.



## GROUP STRUCTURE OVERVIEW

### Important Dates & Times

Start date: \_\_\_\_\_ through end date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time each week: \_\_\_\_\_ through \_\_\_\_\_

### Home Practice

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

Purpose of these calls is to give you an opportunity to explore your reflections from class and home practice with the facilitator.

My Midweek Calls –

with \_\_\_\_\_ on \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_  
(Facilitator name) (Day of week) (Time)

### Ground Rules

- Confidentiality – Please respect each other’s stories by not repeating what is shared in our group.
- Try to refrain from giving advice – Instead of saying “You should,” try saying “What worked for me...”
- Step up, step back. We want to hear from everyone! Say something if you haven’t in a while or let others speak if you have.
- Real talk! We hope to keep it real and honest; there are **NO PERFECT PARENTS!**
- Practice compassion for self and others and take time when you need.



## LEAF MODULES OVERVIEW

Module 1	
<p><b>Parents: Introductions</b></p> <p>Parents will get to know each other, learn more about the purpose of the group, and explore concepts to be discussed throughout the group.</p>	<p><b>Kids: Introductions</b></p> <p>Kids will get to know each other, learn more about the purpose of the group, and learn foundational concepts that will be used throughout the group.</p>
Module 2	
<p><b>Parents: Parent Regulation – 3 C's</b></p> <p>Parents will learn about the first “C” of the 3 C’s framework: calm. They will explore their own coping zones and how to widen their green zones.</p>	<p><b>Kids: Dealing with Strong Feelings</b></p> <p>Kids will go further into how they can understand their distress, manage their strong feelings, and cope.</p>
Module 3	
<p><b>Parents: Connect to your Child – 3C's</b></p> <p>Parents will learn steps to connect and attune to their child’s emotions around adoption-specific scenarios.</p>	<p><b>Kids: Emotions</b></p> <p>Kids will learn to identify their feelings, start to explore and normalize feelings that might be common to their adoption story, and link their emotions with their adoption story.</p>
Module 4	
<p><b>Parents: Correct &amp; Practice – 3C's</b></p> <p>Parents will learn how to problem-solve when their child displays strong emotions and practice using the 3 C’s with adoption-related scenarios. Parents will also learn strategies for self-regulation.</p>	<p><b>Kids: Learning about Adoption</b></p> <p>Kids will receive an introduction to adoption and begin to process their own adoption story.</p>



<b>Module 5</b>	
<p><b>Parents: A Deeper Understanding of Behaviors</b></p> <p>Parents will explore what’s below the surface of their child’s behaviors and discuss ways to help their children feel safe, capable, and lovable.</p>	<p><b>Kids: Thoughts &amp; Worries about Adoption</b></p> <p>Kids will explore thoughts and worries that are common among adoptees and how they can manage them.</p>
<b>Module 6</b>	
<p><b>Parents: Questions about Adoption</b></p> <p>Parents will explore the many questions common to adoption and reflect on where those questions come from, how they can be challenging for parents and children, and why they are important to answer/validate.</p>	<p><b>Kids: Questions about Adoption</b></p> <p>Kids will learn that adopted children almost always have questions about their adoption story and why it’s important to communicate those questions. They will explore some of the feelings they have because of those questions.</p>
<b>Module 7</b>	
<p><b>Parents: Losses &amp; Gains</b></p> <p>Parents will explore the losses and gains inherent in adoption, as well as how unmet expectations can lead to grief.</p>	<p><b>Kids: Losses &amp; Gains</b></p> <p>Kids will explore their losses and gains related to adoption and how that impacts them.</p>
<b>Module 8</b>	
<p><b>Parents: Identity</b></p> <p>Parents will examine how their expectations may impact their experiences and shape their own identity as well as their child’s identity.</p>	<p><b>Kids: Identity</b></p> <p>Kids will learn about the concept of identity and discuss how adoption, culture, race and family make up part of your identity.</p>

**Module 9**

**Parents: Communication & Advocacy**  
Parents will explore ways to respond to different questions and comments adoptive families encounter and learn a tool to feel empowered when addressing questions and/or comments.

**Kids: Communication & Advocacy**  
Kids will explore ways to respond to different questions and comments that they encounter about adoption and learn a tool to feel empowered when addressing questions and/or comments.

**Module 10**

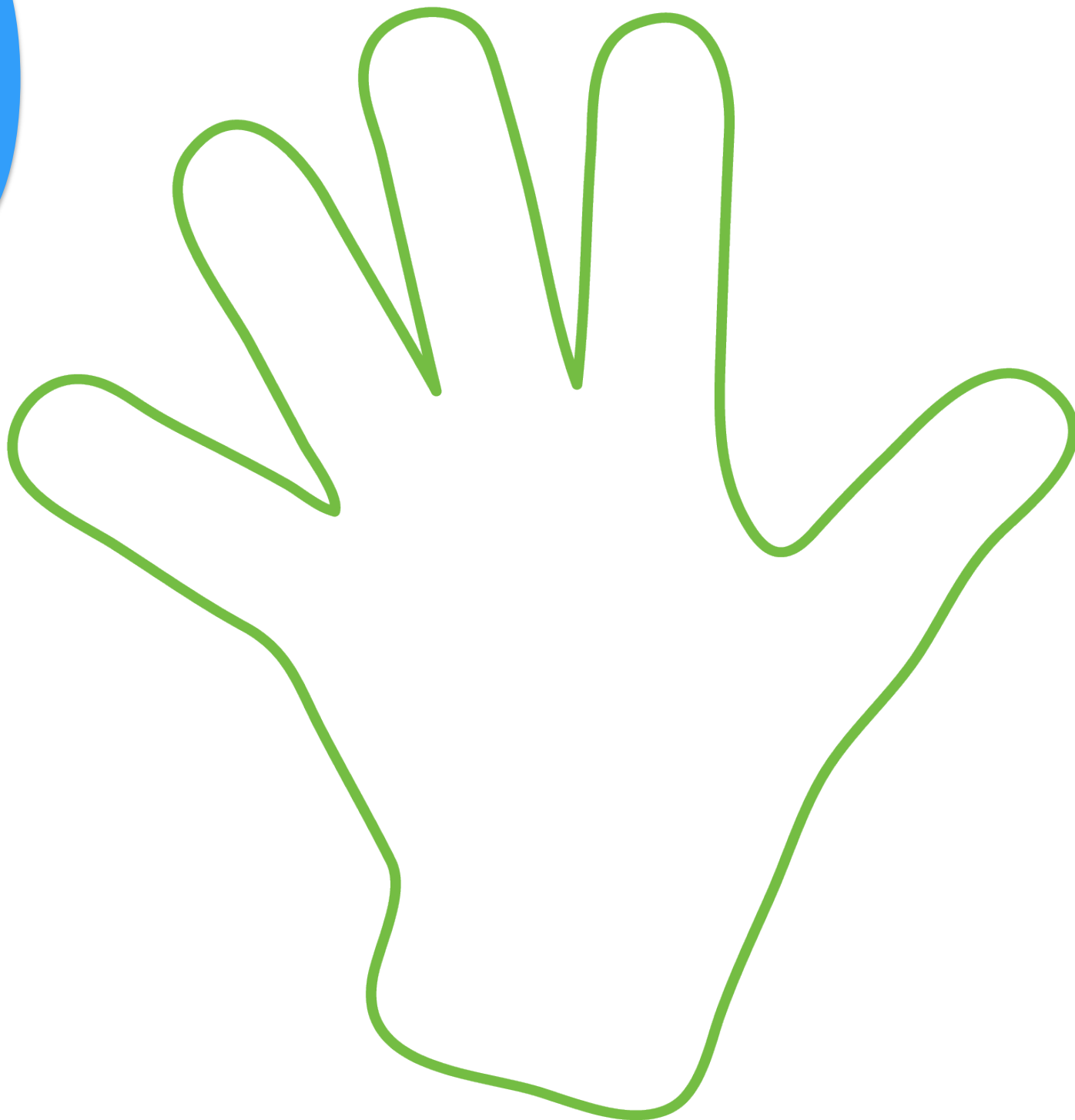
**Parents & Kids: Review & Celebration**  
Parents and kids will reflect and celebrate the areas of growth and challenge related to communication, connection, and understanding and managing strong feelings.





## HIGH FIVE: FACTS ABOUT ME

Write one fact about yourself on each finger of the hand below.







## COPING ZONES FOR PARENTS

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. This concept will be taught to both parents and kids and will be used each week as a tool for kids to check in with where they are and prompt the use of coping skills as needed. This is a tool that will be useful as kids talk about adoption in this group, as well as on a daily basis.

### RED ZONE

You are out of control. You want to fight or run away. You may feel rage or panic. You may feel stuck engaging in power struggles, focused on winning or dominance rather than connecting. You may find yourself yelling or acting in frightening ways.

### Getting Warmer

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!

### GREEN ZONE

You can deal with challenges, including your child’s behavior. Your brain is relaxed enough to use intentional parenting strategies and have empathy for others. You can cope with your feelings, even unpleasant ones.

Sometimes your green zone is big and it is easier to handle stress.



Other times your green zone is smaller and little things may bother you a lot.

### Getting Cooler

You are starting to feel checked out. Now is a great time to do a coping skill!

### BLUE ZONE

You feel shut down, checked out, numb, or frozen. You may be overwhelmed by the demands of parenting, and you may give up or be passive, which can lead to resentment. You may ignore your child, or act cold and detached.



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## HOME PRACTICE: MY COPING ZONES

1. When do you get out of your green zone the most frequently? Check common triggers for you and add any others you've noticed at the bottom:
 

<input type="checkbox"/> In the morning	<input type="checkbox"/> When you are hungry
<input type="checkbox"/> Lunchtime	<input type="checkbox"/> When you are extra stressed because of work, family, running late, etc.
<input type="checkbox"/> Right after school/work	<input type="checkbox"/> Experiencing physical pain/shifting hormones
<input type="checkbox"/> Dinner	
<input type="checkbox"/> Bedtime	
<input type="checkbox"/> When you are tired	
  
2. What do you feel when you're in the red or blue zone (examples: heartbeat racing, stomach tightening, tunnel vision, red face, etc.)?
  
3. When bumped out of your green zone, which zone do you go to most frequently? (red, blue, or both)?
  
4. Which emotions/behaviors from your children are the most triggering for you (e.g., crying, whining, clinging/neediness, shyness, baby talk, anger, aggression towards siblings, being disrespectful, ignoring you)?
  
5. Optional - Take notes this week about a time each day when you got out of your green zone while parenting. Were you in the blue or red zone, or both? What was the trigger? What else was going on in your body, mind, or the environment that was overwhelming for you?



## FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

Today in the child workshop, the children got to know each other, learned more about the purpose of the group, and explored concepts to be discussed throughout the group, including Coping Zones. For Family Together Time, you and your child will share your High Five Facts About Me.

### CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

- Keep your tone positive.
  - For this first group, remember that connecting to your child is much more important than getting these “facts” correct. Try not to correct anything they wrote.
- Notice something about their hand.
  - “I see you wrote...”
  - “That’s cool! Tell me about...”
- Share something about your hand.
  - “Hey, we both put down that we had a dog!”
  - “I had something that no one else in my group had too...”
- Ask about other children in the group.
  - “Did you have anything in common with the other kids in the group?”
  - “What were some differences you noticed between yourself and the other kids?”
- Ask about how the group felt for them.
  - I wonder if you were worried about sharing your feelings with the group.
  - Was there anything that was fun for you?





MODULE 2

# LEARNING ABOUT ADOPTION



PARENT  
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# MODULE 2: PARENT REGULATION

## PARENT'S SELF-REGULATION

### The 3 C's of Responding to Your Child's Adoption-Related Emotions:

1. CALM
2. CONNECT
3. CORRECT

### Step One: Calm Yourself

*Why is your regulation so important?*

- Your kids will be exploring their thoughts and feelings related to their adoption story, which can range from mild to intense.
- To support your child, we will teach you strategies for connecting and validating their difficult emotions, which is incredibly hard. **Connection lives in the green zone.**
- Your kids will often communicate their emotions through difficult behaviors and attitudes, which are likely to stress you out!



- You need to be in the green zone to have access to your thinking brain, which is not possible when you are in the red or blue zone (also referred to as “flooding” by John Gottman or “flipping your lid” by Dan Siegel).
- You need your thinking brain so that you can **respond** intentionally to what your child needs, rather than **reacting** to the emotions they are giving off.
- Simply telling them to calm down is not effective, they need you to co-regulate.

### 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 –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 the brain and body’s stress response, which means that children can have a harder time staying in their green zones. Children may also be on high alert for cues of danger that can come from other people’s emotional responses, such as when a parent is out of their green zone. 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, and are at increased risk for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, mental health diagnoses, 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. 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.

## Getting Back in the Green Zone

This is what to do when you are at the edge or out of your **Green Zone**.

- Recognize your patterns and come up with a plan for coping when you are starting to feel flooded.
- Minimize negative interactions when you are in your blue or red zone.
- If you are really upset from a conflict with your child, you may need 20 minutes or more to truly get back in the green zone.<sup>17-19</sup> It is not always realistic that you can walk away from parenting at that time, but you can give yourself permission to delay decision-making, arguing, or anything that will escalate emotions. **This doesn't mean giving up or permissive parenting – just hitting pause until your thinking brain is back online.**
- Use positive self-talk to disengage from conflict and know it is time to use a coping skill, such as, “He just ignored me again, and I’m starting to feel rage and I want to scream. I’m going to take a few breaths before I get back to the conflict.”

## Stressors That Make It Hard to Stay in the Green Zone

Check any that apply to you:

- Early morning
- Before bed
- Right after school/work
- Being tired
- Being hungry
- Extra stress because of work
- Sense of urgency/not enough time
- Not feeling good
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Feeling overstimulated
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Coping Skills I'd Like to Try for the Red Zone (high energy, feeling out of control, grumpy, or angry)

- 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
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Coping Skills I'd Like to Try for the Blue Zone (checked out, low energy)

- 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
- Other ideas: \_\_\_\_\_

### Things That Others Could Try to Help Me

- 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:  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Other ideas:



## CALM YOURSELF AND THEN YOUR CHILD: CO-REGULATION

- Co-regulation is helping your child to get back in his/her green zone by calming yourself first and then intentionally acting in a way that helps them to calm.
- Offer a hug, model a deep breath, relax your shoulders, create some physical space, a touch on the shoulder, just sit beside them, or offer a sensory experience.
- Communicate you are there for them, even if they need space.
- Avoid insisting they use a coping skill (leads to a power struggle), but instead try modeling your own use of a coping skill and invite them to join.

### HOME PRACTICE

- Try out some strategies for the CALM step:
  - Calm yourself when you are getting out of your green zone
  - Widen your green zone with wellness strategies
  - Help your child to calm using co-regulation
  - Communication strategies from the family regulation plan

What did you notice that was effective? What did you notice that was ineffective?

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## FAMILY PLAN FOR DEALING WITH STRONG FEELINGS

	Child	Parent(s)
Stressors that bump me out of my green zone or make my green zone smaller		
Coping skills for when I am in my <b>red zone</b> / getting warmer zone		
Coping skills for when I am in my <b>blue zone</b> / getting cooler zone		
What I might want to hear/someone else to do if I seem upset		

PARENT WORKBOOK  
MODULE 2

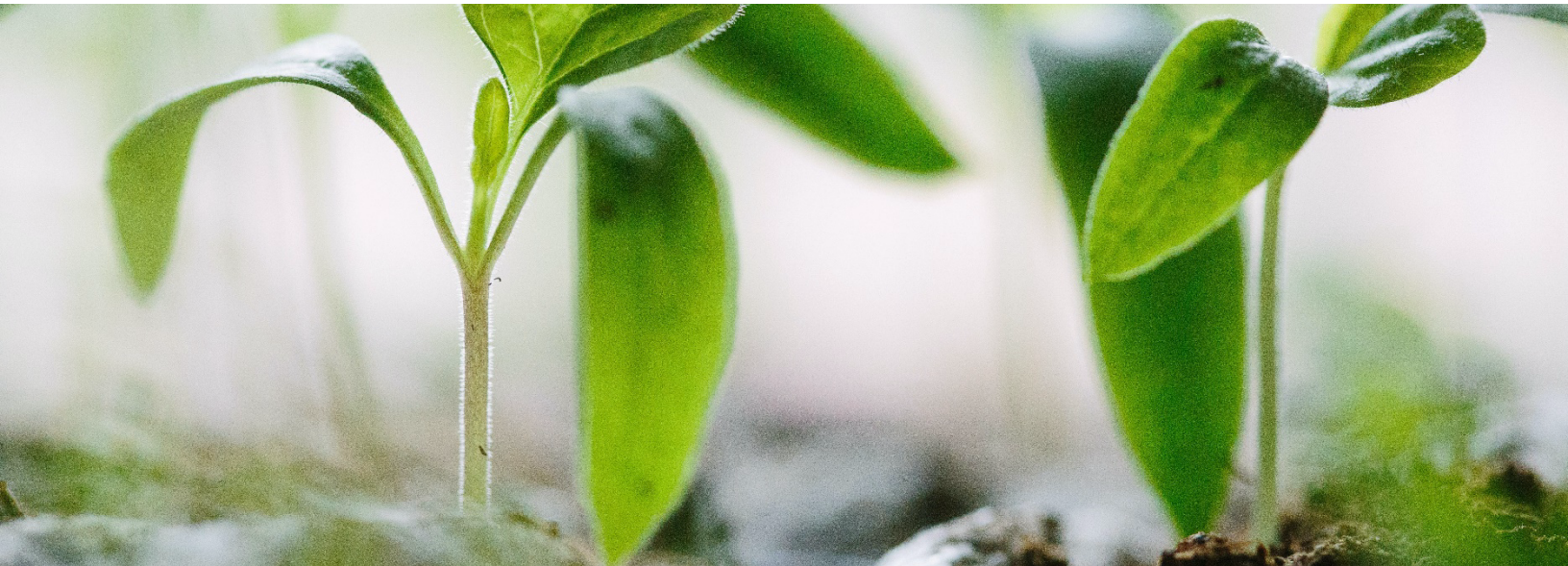


MODULE 3  
**EMOTIONS**





# MODULE 3: CONNECT TO YOUR CHILD



## OVERVIEW OF 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.



## CONNECTING WITH YOUR CHILD

### Validate the feeling

- Communicate acceptance of the emotion, even if you don't agree with all of their actions or if you would feel differently. It is OK to feel how they are feeling.
- Put yourself in your child's shoes and think about how you might be feeling in a similar situation. Try to relate to your child like you would a friend.
- Validating is NOT trying to teach a lesson or fix the problem- save that for step 3!
  - It makes sense to want to erase negative emotions or to convince them they don't feel this way. Try to do something very counterintuitive and just sit with them in negative emotions.
- Communicate that you are on your child's team versus the problem.

### Name It to Tame It

- Attempt to label what they might be feeling using emotion words and be curious!
  - In younger kids, one or two words may explain their emotions.
  - In middle childhood and adolescents, they can understand more "both/and" emotions and complex feelings.
- It is okay to guess and let them correct you. Comment on what you observe ("It seems like you are really frustrated right now.").

### Example Phrases to Try

- It makes sense to me that you feel mad about that.
- I would feel guilty too if I felt like I left my siblings behind.
- I have been in fights with my best friend like that, and I felt totally devastated.
- I hate when I get called out in front of other people, I totally get why you're mad about that.
- I'm so sorry you're sad about that. I'm here for you.
- (If they are shutting down or snapping at you) I can see that you're really upset, and I'm here whenever you're ready to talk.

### Pitfalls of Validation: Common Invalidating Responses

Although these are responses you want to avoid, they are very common. Note which pitfalls you tend to fall into and/or familiar pitfalls from how you were raised.

- **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

## MY FEELINGS CHART



**HAPPY**



**SAD**



**REJECTED**



**PROUD**



**LONELY**



**CONFUSED**



**SCARED**



**WORRIED**



**GUILTY**



**ANGRY**



**FRUSTRATED**



**SURPRISED**



**EMBARRASSED**



**ANNOYED**



**LOVED**



**DISAPPOINTED**



**HOPEFUL**



**BORED**



**OVERWHELMED**



**IGNORED**

## CONVERSATION STARTERS FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

### Be Curious

- “I see you filled in sad pretty high. Tell me about that.”
- “What kinds of things make you feel guilty?”
- Keep your tone positive.
- Only ask a few questions at a time (too many questions can feel like interrogation!).
- Remember they are the experts on their story- you don’t need to correct or fix, just show interest!

### Connect with Validation

- Put yourself in their shoes and convey that how they are feeling makes sense.
- Communicate acceptance of the emotion, even if you don’t agree.
- Example phrases to try:
  - *I can understand why you would feel that way.*
  - *That makes sense given what you’ve been through- I would be sad too.*
  - *Yeah, I get that. I am sad about what happened to your sister too.*
  - *I appreciate you sharing that with me.*
  - *I’m proud of you for your work tonight, it takes bravery to share some of these painful feelings.*
- Use your body language and tone of voice to convey you are open to hearing what they have to say and accept their responses.

### Avoid the Pitfalls

- Avoid minimizing or dismissing the emotion (e.g., *Oh, but don’t you remember, you are going to see them next week? Or, Don’t worry about that!*).
- Avoid correcting misinformation about details, although you may want to provide corrections to make sure they know that they are loved.
- Avoid going straight to problem-solving before you’ve spent time sitting with their emotions.



## HOME PRACTICE

Try the first 2 C's during a time when your child is upset (**CALM** and **CONNECT**)

What Happened?

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What zone was I in? Blue / Green / Red

What did I do to **CALM** myself (if needed)?

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What zone was **my child** in? Blue / Green / Red

What did I do to **CALM** my child (if needed)?

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Name It to Tame It – What emotion did I think my child was experiencing?

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Try validation to **CONNECT** to my child – It's okay to feel how you're feeling. I understand.

How did it go? Did I experience any invalidating pitfalls?

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MODULE 4

# DEALING WITH STRONG FEELINGS



PARENT  
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# MODULE 4: CORRECT & PRACTICE



## OVERVIEW OF 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.



## THE 3<sup>RD</sup> C: CORRECT

This can look different ways depending on what your child needs in any given situation. You may not need it at all after step 2.

Do this step last for 2 reasons:

- When kids are calm, they have access to the part of their brain responsible for learning and logical thinking.
- When kids feel understood and cared for, they are more likely to be open to adult influence in their problem-solving.

Behaviors might need correction with a **consequence**.

Convey that all emotions are acceptable, but all behaviors are not.

Consider letting go of behaviors that are unpleasant emotional expressions, but not dangerous (e.g., eye rolling, tone of voice, yelling).

Ask yourself “What is the most important thing I want my child to learn?” when choosing consequences.

Sometimes this step may look like **collaborative problem-solving**.

Collaborative problem solving is great when you need something to change but have some flexibility on how that could look.

- Giving your child input, choice and control increases cooperation and builds self-esteem.

Ask your child if he/she has ideas about how to handle the situation.

You can offer suggestions if they get stuck.

Sometimes this step looks like gentle **correction of misinformation**.

- “I know how hard it is to feel like no one has stuck with you, but you will always be a part of our family.”

“I know you were confused about where you were born, would you like me to tell you what I remember about that?”

**CORRECT** could also look like a **relationship repair** if you lose your cool or if you think they are still feeling upset with you. Note how you want to make it right or do it differently next time.

Relationship repairs can involve a show of love or affirmation.

Apologies are an opportunity to model taking accountability.

**DO:**

- Clearly state your behavior you are apologizing for.

- Take accountability for how your actions might have impacted the other person.
- State how you want to make it right and **follow through!**
- 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.”*

**DON'T:**

- Blame your child for making you upset or make excuses for your behavior.
- Use the word “if” or apologize for them getting upset.
- Demand an apology from your child.
- 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.”*

**BECKY BAILEY VIDEO DEMONSTRATION OF 3 C’S VERSUS OTHER COMMON RESPONSES TO CHILD EMOTIONS**

- What did you notice?
- How do you relate?
- How might the child / parent feel?

Ignore the feeling = Only respond to behaviors, try to engage them in an activity

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Punish = Respond to emotional expression with anger or disgust, punish behaviors associated with emotional expression

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Dismiss = Try to smooth things over, by saying “you’re fine” or “it’s not a big deal”.  
Soothe with distraction instead of responding to emotion.

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Save = Take up the child’s fight for them, fix problems for them (disempowering them from solving for themselves)

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Coach = Using the 3 C’s- calm, connect, then correct

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### PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER - THE 3 C’S IN ACTION

Using the example, how can the parent respond to their child’s emotion using the 3 C’s?

**CALM** (Get in the **Green Zone**, take a break if needed, coregulate):

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**CONNECT** (Validate child’s feelings by name it to tame it, normalizing):

I think you might be feeling...

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This is understandable because...

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**CORRECT**

Response to misbehavior when calm

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Collaborative problem-solving around friend's issue

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## CHILDREN'S GROUP INFO: PSYCHOEDUCATION ABOUT ADOPTION

- Birth parents
  - Birth parents are a child's biological parents. Some children use terms 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
  - 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.
- Infant adoption / older child adoption
  - 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!
- Closed adoption
  - 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.
- Open adoption
  - 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
  - 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 birth children).
- International Adoption
  - Parent(s) from one country 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
  - There are all sorts of similarities and differences among kids and the families who adopt them, but one of the differences that can be the easiest to see is that some kids are a different race from their parents.

### Family configurations

Families can look different in terms of parents (two moms, two dads, mom and dad, stepparents, single mom or dad, etc.), siblings through birth and adoption, ages of parents and kids, looking alike versus different, etc. In LEAF, we celebrate all kinds of families!

### What does adoption mean to you?

Adoption can mean different things to different people. There’s no right or wrong definition. The meaning of adoption to you is shaped by your own experiences and this meaning may change over time.

## ROADMAP FOR FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

### Be Curious

- “I see you wrote...”
- “That’s cool! Tell me about...”
- “I wonder if you were feeling...”
- Keep your tone positive.
- Only ask a few questions at a time (too many questions can feel like interrogation!).
- If they left something blank or put misinformation, think about why. Example phrases to try:
  - *I wonder if you were worried about sharing your feelings with the group.*
  - *I wonder if you were feeling worn out from a big day today and it was hard to think about your story tonight.*
  - *I’m wondering if it was hard to remember all the things we’ve talked about in the past in this group setting.*
  - *I noticed you are the only kid in this group who has spent time in foster care. I wonder if that’s hard for you.*
  - *I noticed you didn’t put anything on where you were born. I wonder if you didn’t feel like sharing in this group yet. I feel that way sometimes too when I’m new to a group of people.*
  - *I know that I was only able to give you a few of the details. I wonder if it still feels like there is a lot of your story that you feel confused about?*



### Connect First

- Put yourself in their shoes and convey that how they are feeling makes sense.
  - *I can understand why you would feel that way.*
  - *That makes sense given what you’ve been through- I would be sad too.*
- Use your body language and tone of voice to convey you are open to hearing what they have to say and accept their responses.

### Wait to Correct

- Avoid minimizing or dismissing the emotion (e.g., “Oh, but don’t you remember, you are going to see them next week?” Or, “Don’t worry about that!”).

- Avoid correcting misinformation about details, although you may want to provide corrections to make sure they know that they are loved.
- Avoid going straight to problem-solving before you've spent time sitting with their emotions.

If you are not sure what to say, **TRY ONE OF THESE** phrases (for when you're flooded or need to buy some time):

- *"Thank you for sharing that."*
- *"That's so brave of you to share."*
- *"You did a great job coming up with this list" (praise the process).*

### HOME PRACTICE REFLECTION

Continue to practice the 3 C's at times when my child has 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 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.

Which step has been 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 responses from the video (save, dismiss, ignore, punish)?



CENTER FOR CHILD  
& FAMILY HEALTH



MODULE 5

# THOUGHTS & WORRIES ABOUT ADOPTION



PARENT  
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# MODULE 5: THOUGHTS & WORRIES ABOUT ADOPTION



## THOUGHTS, WORRIES, AND BELIEFS ABOUT ADOPTION

### What are Core Beliefs?

Core beliefs are basic beliefs about ourselves, other people, and the world we live in. They are things we hold to be true deep down, underneath all our “surface” thoughts. Essentially, core beliefs determine how you perceive and interpret yourself, others, and the world.<sup>1</sup>

Core beliefs about adoption can be connected to thoughts and worries that children may have. Although every child’s experience is different, there are some common thoughts adoptees have listed here.<sup>2-4</sup>



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

1. 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.”**
2. 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?”**
3. 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.”**
4. 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.”**
5. 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.”**
6. 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.”**
7. 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.”**
8. 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.”**
9. 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?”**

- 10.** 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.”**

Have you heard any thoughts like these from your child? Knowing your child’s story, do any of these make sense to think? Where do you think these thoughts may be coming from?

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## Connection Between Behaviors and Core Beliefs

### 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.

### What's Below the Surface?

Think of a time you've seen a big response to a situation. What may be under the surface?

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### What Do We Do About These Thoughts and Worries?

#### First, **CALM** yourself

- These thoughts can be hard to hear, but remember that this is your child's story- you didn't create it, and you can't "fix" it or change it right away, but you can use the opportunity to connect and over time, gently influence these beliefs with your actions.

#### Then **CONNECT**

- Use "name it to tame it".<sup>7</sup> If they haven't told you how they are feeling, you can take a guess. Convey that their feelings are okay and make sense.

#### Finally, gently **CORRECT** if needed

- Provide any needed reassurances about your unconditional love, your child's worthiness, etc.
- You can provide any additional information that might provide some clarity and alleviate frustration caused by speculation. If they are committed to their version of the truth, respond to what the emotions that might be.
- You may ask a question or two to see if they are open to other ideas (such as, "Is that the whole story?"). If not, that is okay- it is not your job to change these beliefs!
- Thinking of your child's possible negative core beliefs, how can you **show** the opposite is true with your actions over time?



**Remember, if your child is having thoughts that seem to be stuck, or are causing distress or harm, consult an adoption-competent therapist for help.**

Other Examples:

- Child checked, *“I don’t know if my birth family members are safe or even alive.”*

*Parent: I know you havent heard from your birth mom in years and you are worried about her. Do you want us to add some extra prayers for her safety before bed? Giving your worries to someone who can handle them can sometimes help lighten the load.*

- Child checked, *“My birth family didnt keep me because they didn't wan't me. Something must be wrong with me.”*

*Parent: I can see you checked sad, and it makes sense to me that you would be sad. I remember learning that your birth parents were teenagers when you were born and they were living in a shelter. Do you think maybe any of those things could be why they couldn't keep you? I think they would be so proud to find out how smart, talented, and funny you are.”*

### Family Together Time Prep

Thinking of possible thoughts/worries your child may have, generate a 3 C's response.

How can you....

**CALM:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CONNECT:** \_\_\_\_\_

**CORRECT:** \_\_\_\_\_



## HOME PRACTICE REFLECTION

Reflect back on a time your child was displaying large emotions. What do you think was below the surface?

Do you think it was related to a core belief / common thought or worry?

How were you able to apply the 3 C's (or do a do-over if you didn't apply them- awareness is the first step!)





MODULE 6

# QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION



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# MODULE 6: QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION

## WHY QUESTIONS?

Children who are adopted typically have questions about their adoption, their family history, or their identity.

### Why is answering important?

- It is **THEIR** story and while you may be the holder of the information, it is their information to have. While the contents of the information may be painful, the answers to their questions can help them understand more about their lives.
- Finding out the answers another way rather than directly from you can erode trust and damage your relationship.
- Some parents feel like they need to wait until a certain time (maybe 18, or another age/stage). We have found that waiting until adulthood can make kids feel resentful and in general, the earlier the better.



### Common Questions

- 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?

### MY CHILD'S QUESTIONS

What questions do you think your child is likely to have or to ask?

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



## HOW TO ANSWER YOUR CHILD'S QUESTIONS

Remember, use the 3 C's when responding to difficult questions.

**CALM:** What feelings come up in you? What coping zone? How can you manage?

**CONNECT:** How can you respond with empathy and understanding before addressing? What might be child be feeling to have that question? How can you relate?

**CORRECT, if Needed:** Do you want to answer? Do you want to let them know you'll answer later? Do you need to provide a gentle correction to a negative core belief?

Write out some responses you can give to each question you wrote above.

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Some Suggestions When Answering Your Child's Questions

**If you know the answer and are comfortable answering:**

**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."

### **If you know the answer, but you're not comfortable answering yet:**

If you are not comfortable answering yet (any big question you haven't answered yet will probably fall in this category), focus on the 3 Cs.

**Say:** "That's a great question! I wonder if that makes you feel..."

**Say:** "I wish I knew more about your birth parents, too."

**Say:** "I know it's important to you to get this information, let's talk more at home\*."

\*If you say this, you will need to follow through and we can support you.

If you do decide that you want to share some info in response to one of their questions, we encourage you to not blurt answer out in Family Together Time, but rather prepare for this discussion:

- Talk with partner and/or other resources (such as an adoption-competent counselor).
- Use midweek calls.
- Practice sharing the answer.

### **If you don't know the answer:**

If you don't know the answer to your child's question, focus on the **CONNECT** step and 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."

## **SHARING INFORMATION WITH YOUR CHILD**

Overall guiding principles of talking about adoption.

1. Initiate conversation about adoption.
2. Use positive adoption language.
3. Never lie about the past or a birth family member.
4. Allow a child to express anger towards a birth family member without joining in.
5. Share information in a developmentally appropriate way.
6. By adolescence, all information should be shared.
7. Consider asking instead of telling.
8. Repeat, repeat, repeat!
9. Be realistic, not overly positive or negative.
10. Partner with professionals for the most difficult information.

11. Don't try to "fix" the pain of adoption.
12. If the child resists communication, try again another time.
13. Don't impose value judgments on the information.
14. Give children control of sharing information outside of their immediate family.
15. Remember, children often know more than adults think.

For guidance on how to share information about specific topics, see additional resources.

### HOME PRACTICE: REFLECTION

**Think back to the questions your child put on their My Adoption Story.**

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?



MODULE 7  
**LOSSES & GAINS**



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# MODULE 7: LOSSES & GAINS



## LOSSES & GAIN & NAVIGATING GRIEF

### Grief is a Normal Part of Adoption

Loss is inherent in adoption for both parents and children. As a society, the positive aspects of adoption with “gotcha day” celebrations, etc., are often embraced and rightfully celebrated. However, the loss is not as commonly recognized.

Grief is the reaction and all 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.

### Ambiguous Loss

A child who is adopted may feel grief or distress combined with confusion about the lost person(s) and/or relationship(s). They may feel sadness for not knowing their own history and confused with their loyalty to a family they don’t know.

Parents may feel ambiguous loss in sadness for the idea of who this child might have been if not for prenatal exposure to substances or a trauma history.



Ambiguous loss happens when a person is physically present but psychologically unavailable OR when a person is physically absent but psychologically present (most common in foster care and adoption)

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.

Parent Examples:

- 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

A grief not acknowledged by society. Anyone in the adoption constellation may have grief over their losses, but it's not commonly recognized and/or validated by others, including your support network (often minimized or trivialized).

Examples:

- Loss of birth family
- Failed adoptions / infertility

YOUR LOSSES	YOUR GAINS

### Examples of Unmet Expectations:

#### 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 negative 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.

## COPING WITH MY GRIEF

### How do you cope with grief?

- Acknowledge and allow the grief - feel your feelings.
- Find people who "get it".
- Talk about it.
- Manage expectations.
- Recognize the evolution of grief--it ebbs and flows and there are no rules to it.
- Reach out to a mental health provider.

## HELPING MY CHILD COPE WITH GRIEF

- Looking at the list of common losses and gains that follows, which ones has my child experienced?
- Are there other, less tangible losses, that my child has experienced, like loss of control or privacy?
- How do I think these losses may have impacted my child?

## Common Losses and Gains for Children Who've Been Adopted

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	

### How to help your child cope with grief and loss with the 3 C's

- **CALM** Yourself: Acknowledge your feelings and do something to help regulate yourself, if needed.
- **CONNECT** with your child and validate their grief and loss.
  - Hold space for their pain – we must go through grief instead of avoiding it.
  - Don't minimize or make light of their perception of loss.
- **CORRECT** (use sparingly): There is rarely a fix to grief and one of the hardest things about supporting those who are grieving is sitting with difficult feelings. However, there may be opportunities for problem solving, for example, if your child is grieving missing information that you can offer, or if your child is longing for contact you could facilitate.



## HOME PRACTICE: MY ADOPTION STORY

What led me to adoption? Check all that apply or write in your own:

- I/my partner struggled with fertility.
- I wanted to provide a good life for a child who had a rough start.
- I wanted to build on or start a family.
- I met a particular child who needed a home (through foster care or in orphanage) and fell in love.
- I was asked to adopt child of friend or relative.
- Religious/spiritual calling
- I was adopted or had difficult childhood experiences, and I wanted to give back.
- I wanted to continue parenting after my grown children left.
- If you chose to adopt with a partner or spouse, was that person:
  - More motivated to adopt
  - About the same as me
  - Less motivated to adopt
  - N/A

Of my support system (extended family, friends, members of faith community, etc.) which people have been the most supportive after adopting?

Are there any that have been less supportive than I expected?

Looking at the list of unmet expectations, which resonates most with you? You may choose not to write any reflections that you wouldn't want others to read. Where do you think this expectation came from?

How do you think this impacts your parenting? This is a hard question, and one that can be discussed on your midweek call.



## REFLECTION ON MY CHILD

*Think of a time your child brought their grief or to you.*

What feelings did it stir up in you?

How did you respond?

How do you hope to respond next time?



MODULE 8

IDENTITY & BIRTH FAMILY CONNECTIONS



PARENT  
WORKBOOK

AND





# MODULE 8: IDENTITY



## ADJUSTING UNMET EXPECTATIONS AND MAKING ROOM FOR THE NEW NORMAL / HOME PRACTICE REFLECTION

The following questions will be discussed in tonight's group, but we recommend you take some additional time to think through your responses at home.

Shifting expectations of **my child**:

- Attachment bonds grow over time. It is normal for these feelings to ebb and flow throughout your relationship with your child (and their feelings of attachment to you).
- You may have expectations of what your relationship looks like based on comparisons to others.
- Shifting expectations may mean accepting the child who is in front of you and grieving any unmet expectations.

How do you celebrate, embrace, enjoy, or delight in your child? What are some of the things you like best about your child?



Shifting expectations of **other people**:

- Sometimes we don't have support from others in the way we expected.
- Our support system before adopting may not look the same as it does now, but there may be ways to adjust our expectations based on the new reality.
- There may be new relationships you have formed, such as those in this group!

What are my supports and how do I use them?

Examples might include: Relationships with friends and family, support groups, mental health providers, faith community, etc.

What I Need	Who Fills This Need?
Someone who gets it	
Someone to take my mind off parenting	
Someone to help me make sense of my child's past	
Someone to have fun with	
Practical support for childcare	
Advice when I am stuck	
Support with my child's needs	
<i>(List any other needs here)</i>	

Shifting expectations of your **family**:

- Give yourself permission to say “no” to the routines that no longer serve you or your family.
- What does work for your child and family now?
- What helps your day, week, activities run smoother?
- What are things you enjoy doing together?

What does family mean to me?

Shifting expectations of **myself as a parent**:

What am I good at as a parent? What personal strengths do I bring to the table?

*Examples: patience, creativity, empathy, strong boundaries, good listening, advocacy, wisdom*

How do I show love to my child?

*Examples: Physical touch, playing sports, play time, food, gifts, being a good listener, teaching life skills, making sure they look good, provide fun experiences, celebrating birthdays/holidays*

What strengths do I bring to handling really tough scenarios with my child? What have I learned along my adoption journey?

What are some values that I have because of my upbringing that I want to pass along to my children?



## SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

- 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 others.
- 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.
- Open communication with you about adoption is perhaps the most important tool in helping your child form a positive adoptive identity. 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.
- Recognizing and confronting negative beliefs and stereotypes about adoption will be important in building their confidence. We will talk more about specific strategies next week.
- Explore any beliefs that you may hold, even those under the surface, about your child’s birth family, or others.

## TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION: HOW CHILDREN MIGHT FEEL

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 to be validated.

- Some kids may feel like they don’t fit in with kids who look like them (For example, if they are Black and 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,”).
- For kids who don’t know part of their racial identity, it can feel even harder to fit in.

- Being part of a multi-racial 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.
- Sometimes kids find things about their multicultural identity that makes them feel special or unique.

## SUPPORTING IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

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. Below are some strategies to support identity development in multi-racial families.

- 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.

If this applies to your family, what other strategies have you tried or would you like to try in the future?



MODULE 9

# COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY

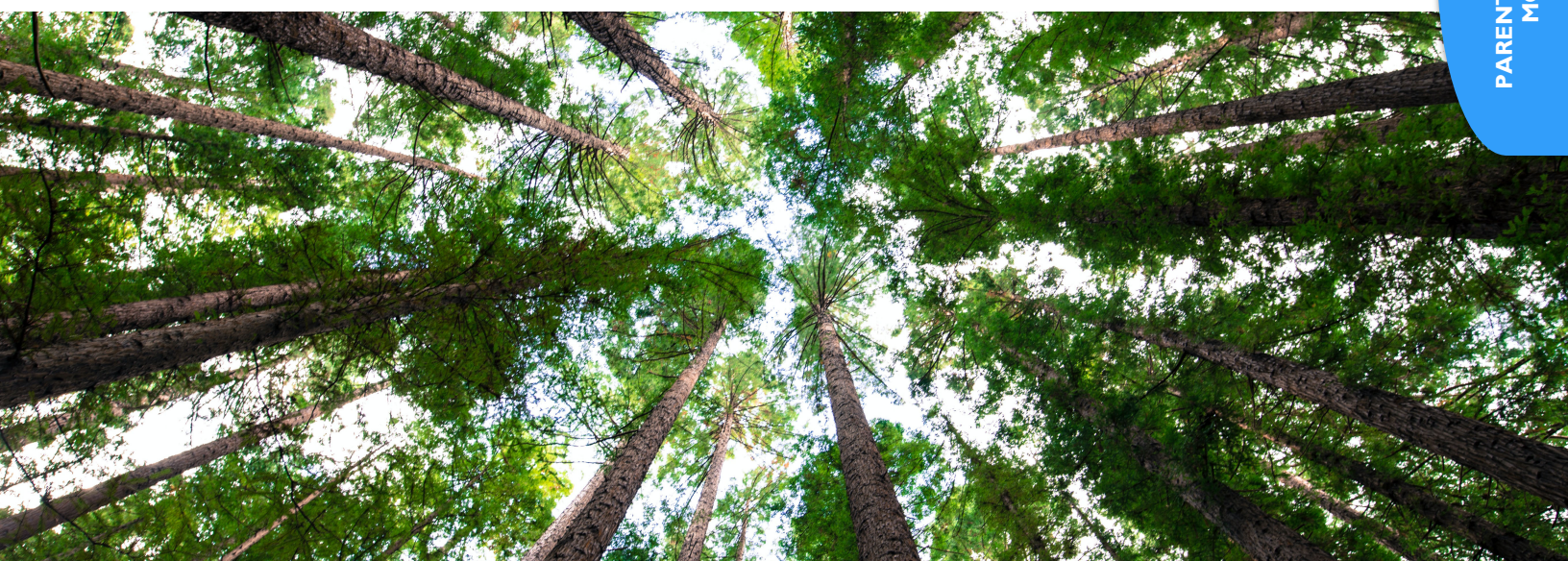


PARENT  
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# MODULE 9: COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY



## W.I.S.E. UP: A Tool for Self-advocacy (C.A.S.E.)

You have the power to choose what you want to do when people ask you about your child's adoption.

- W** *Walk Away* You can walk away or choose not to pay attention.
- I** *It's Private* You can choose to say that you do not want to share information about your adoption story.
- S** *Share Something* You can choose to share some information about adoption or your adoption story.
- E** *Educate Them* You can choose to educate others about adoption, by telling them correct information and helping them to understand it. You can make them WISER.

W.I.S.E. Up (2000) was created by the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E., [www.adoptionsupport.org](http://www.adoptionsupport.org)).



## IMPACT OF COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION

Comments and questions from people outside of your family are common for adoptive families. 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 extended family or community. The terms below can be helpful in understanding how these comments may be harmful.

Adoption microaggressions: conscious or unconscious “slights, insults, and indignities” that communicate adoption stigma or judgement.

### 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

## FAMILY TOGETHER TIME PRACTICE QUESTIONS / COMMENTS

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?”

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

If someone said this, how would you respond with WISE Up?

If someone directed this comment at me, how would you want me to respond?

How can we communicate with each other when we encounter comments about your adoption story from others?





## HOME PRACTICE REFLECTION

1. Prepare for the final group by reflecting on what you have learned and how you have grown.
2. Take some extra time before next week to think about what you can share with your child about their participation in LEAF. Remember to keep this feedback PURELY POSITIVE. The celebration session is not the time to teach a lesson.

Some examples:

- Thank you for showing up to LEAF group each week. I have enjoyed learning more about your adoption story in Family Together Time.
- I am so proud of you for being brave during LEAF group. I know it can be hard for you to talk about adoption, and I have seen you challenge yourself and grow!
- I have loved seeing you take a risk to connect with other kids and make friends!
- I am so proud of you for practicing your coping skills to calm down. You have been so determined in practicing them over and over again.
- Thank you for teaching me about WISE Up. I loved learning from you!

What positive feedback would you like to share with your child?

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3. Please complete the evaluation for the group, which you will receive by email.







MODULE 10

# REVIEW & CELEBRATION



PARENT  
WORKBOOK





# MODULE 10: REVIEW & CELEBRATION



## LEAF REVIEW: LOOKING BACK AND MOVING FORWARD

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

**CALM:** The first C was all about regulating yourself first to then help your child regulate. We talked about ways to stay in the green zone, in part by widening it through wellness activities and in part by getting 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:** Next, 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 last 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 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 COMMUNICATING ABOUT ADOPTION

- 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?
- What are some ways your perspective has shifted about talking about adoption outside the family?

## STAYING CONNECTED

- How can I stay connected to other families I've met in the group? Write down any phone numbers, future meet-up plans, etc. that you discussed in group.





## LEAF REFLECTIONS TO SHARE DURING FAMILY TOGETHER TIME

My favorite thing about the LEAF group was:

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An important thing I learned about adoption is:

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Something I'm proud of myself for:

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Something I'm proud of my child for:

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