

Discovering the Meaning of Parenthood Through the Gift of Adoption

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I. *The Crisis Triangle*

Three distinct phases. These include:

1. *Shame Phase.*

Triggering event, such as recognition of fertility difficulties such as, male infertility. There is a recognition that the pregnancy process will not go forward according to one's expectations. This often includes a psychological experience of shock as one manages what are often profound disappointments.

Internalization of the disappointing experience in the form of something being wrong with me. That I or my partner or the couple is to blame/is at fault for the failure of pregnancy to go forward as expected.

2. *Secrecy Phase*

Keeping the pregnancy issues to one's self or as a private experience held by the couple only. The sense of secrecy is motivated by the felt sense of shame, coupled with the desire to keep the issues from being discussed by others, such as family, close friends, and important authority figures such as a religious authority or a psychologist.

The secrecy stage has a strong tendency in the direction of Isolation, in which a person or the couple seeks to manage the issues on their own, often with no support from family, friends, or important authority figures, and/or community involvement.

3. *Silence Phase*

In the silence phase the internalization of shame that results in secrets and isolation is further transformed and elaborated in terms of silence about the pregnancy issues. The silence has to do with a number of factors: 1. silence about the actual disappointing events themselves, 2. silence about the emotional impact of the

experience, 3. Silence about the effects (if any) on one's partner, 4. Silence about the ways in which the experience has effected the relationship, and 5. Silence about the ways in which the experience has impacted one's world view, 6. Silence about the issues in terms of the communication between the partners.

As such, the shame-secrecy-silence triangle is potential debilitating, in that it can rob the couple of opportunities to go forward with parenting in ways that really uniquely available for the couple.

II. ***Transitional Period*** in one's life, and in the life of the couple. In the context of this discussion, the transition has to do with beginning to explore what I call The Adoption Triangle.

III. ***The Adoption Triangle***

The Adoption Triangle is the connection between the ***child, the birth parents, and adoptive parents***. In every adoption, all have a role. This is true whether the adoption is open (the adoptive family and adopted child have much information or contact with birth parents) or closed (they have virtually no information or contact).

Adoption today recognizes that each party plays a vital role in the health and well being of the child.

The adoption triangle represents a movement away from the shame triangle particularly because adoption is no longer a cultural taboo—no longer a secretive phenomena. In fact, society has become increasingly tolerant of adoption. Thus, discussing adoption with others is a much easier task. Also, in transracial and international adoptions, the physical differences between the adopted child and other family members make adoption obvious.

Thus, once one feels themselves ready to explore adoption, the real issue is not whether to answer questions about adoption but how to answer the questions sensitively, with consideration for timing for the family, the child, and one's community.