Post-Adoption Depression

Post-Adoption Depression Syndrome (PADS) is the feeling some families are left with after their child is placed in their home. Families feel like they should be excited and elated that they completed their adoption journey and are now a family, yet they are left feeling hollow, and sad. As a result, parents may try and push down these feelings because they're not "supposed" to feel this way. But the reality is, parents can feel depressed even after the adopt. Adoption is a long and sometimes stressful journey, and when it culminates some of those feelings parents may have suppressed earlier on come flooding in.

If you are a parent who is dealing with post-adoption depression, just know you are not alone. There are thousands of other mothers and fathers out there who are trying to cope with their feelings after they adopt, and who are also feeling alone in the world. I hope this newsletter gives you some comfort and great resources to help yourself overcome your depression. And most of all, I hope it shows you that you are NOT alone, and these feelings are natural.

The Causes of Post-Adoption Depression

Post-adoption depression usually shows up a few weeks after the adoption is finalized. Between the lack of sleep, the bonding efforts,

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How to Practice Self-Care

Taking care of your needs is just as important as taking care of your child's needs. If you meet your needs, you will be able to meet the needs of others. The following are some ways you can practice self-care:

Work self-care into your daily routine. Recognize that you have needs that must be met!

handling a child's severe emotions and behaviors, and possibly learning more about your child's history before he/she was placed in the home, parents can become completely overwhelmed.

Parents may also be questioning their parenting abilities, especially when it seems like their child doesn't respond to their love and affection. In fact, it may seem like their child doesn't even want to be there and doesn't like them. This type of rejection can be hard to swallow, as parents feel like they're supposed to love their kids, and vice versa.

Parents may have also waited for adoption day for years, and as a result are reluctant to admit that there may be some post-adoption issues that need to be taken care of. It may be difficult to seek out help from your agency or a therapist, as there is a lingering fear of failure.

Please understand that feeling this way post-adoption is completely normal, and if you need help ask for it. Your adoption worker is there to provide post-placement support for your entire family, so utilize that service. Therapists specializing in adoption are trained on adoption issues, and they are familiar with your experiences. They will be able to help you work through your emotions and situation.

Signs of Post-Adoption Depression

The following are some of the common signs of post-adoption depression. Please keep in mind that this is not to be used as an official diagnoses, but to make you aware if you need to seek professional treatment:

- Loss of interest in being around others, or participating in activities previously enjoyed
- Constantly on the verge of tears
- General fatigue, loss of energy
- Irritability
- Difficulty sleeping; increased need for

Ask for help. It is literally impossible to do it all. Seek out help from others when you need it.

Keep life simple and routines consistent. Don't overcommit your family to a million different activities. Focus on just a few and devote your energy towards them.

Don't compare yourself to others. You are raising a different family than your neighbor, sibling or friend. Your situations are going to be completely different, and so will the needs of your children. Focus on your child and what they need, and don't worry about what so-and-so is doing.

Create a plan for the challenging part of the day. Is the morning routine a struggle, or maybe there are fights around dinnertime? Figure out what part of the day is hardest for your family, and create a plan to help make things run a little smoother. Recognize any

sleep
- Significant weight gain or loss
- Excessive feelings of guilt
- Feelings of hopelessness

What Adoptive Parents Need To Do

It is so important that you seek out professional help the minute you feel depressed and overwhelmed. Members of the professional adoption community are trained to work with families during all aspects of the adoption journey, and will not judge you or take your child away if you admit you need some help. Remember - your adoption worker would not have approved the placement if he/she didn't think you could handle it! There is always an adjustment period after an adoption is completed, and post-adoption depression may be a sign that you are still adjusting to the changes. In addition to seeking out professional help as needed, families should also do the following:

Reach out to your support network - Establishing this support network pre-adoption is so important. If you haven't created a support network yet, do so now. People in your support network can include family members, friends, support groups, respite care providers, and other community organizations. Have their names and contact information handy in a binder so you can reach out when you need help.

Work with adoption professionals - Enlist the help of your child's caseworker, therapist, doctor, specialist, former foster parent, community organizations, etc. to get your child the services he/she needs. When your child's needs are being met, it will be easier for you to help meet your own.

Contact other adoptive parents - Form or join a support group of other adoptive parents who have been through similar situations. This support group can be one in your community

emotions or behaviors that occur during those times, and brainstorm ways to meet those needs.

Join a support group. Knowing you are not the only parent on the planet that has experienced these challenges and having people to give you advice and suggestions will help eliminate some stress.

Create time for yourself. Even if it's just 10 minutes a day - enjoy a coffee, read a magazine, take a walk, or do some yoga - that time is just for YOU. Don't do anything else during that time.

Have something to look forward to every week. Positive reinforcement works just as well on parents as it does on kids. Having a reward for yourself during the week, whether it's a beer, a glass of wine, or a cookie, reward yourself with some you-time. You deserve it!

Look for the

or online.

Create a child care plan - Decide who will be caring for your child when you are at work, need a night off, are attending a support group meeting, etc. Come up with a list of a few people who will be effective at handling the child's needs.

Prepare for time off work - Be realistic about how much time you will need to take off from work. Talk to your boss about your time-off needs, and make preparations to have your work covered while you are gone.

Plan time with your significant other - A strong partnership is vital to a happy family. Make sure that you and your partner get some time alone together frequently. This is one reason why respite care providers exist!

Plan some "you" time - Self-care is critical. If you can't take care of your needs, how will you take care of someone else's? Remember, your child needs you fully functioning and happy, so don't neglect your needs.

positives. This may be easier said than done, but even on the days when your life is falling apart and nothing is going as planned, take a step back and evaluate your day. Chances are, you will find at least one thing that makes you laugh or smile.

Additional Information

C.A.S.E. - Dear Ellen: Post-Adoption Depression

Child Welfare Information Gateway - Impact of Adoption on Adoptive Parents

EMK Press - Post Adoption Depression Disorder: What it is, what adoption professionals can do to help, and how adoptive parents can deal with it by SM Macrae

Articles & Resources

Adoptive Families - After the Bliss by Shelley Page

Adoptive Families - "Do I Love Him Yet?" by Melissa Fay Greene

Adoptive Families - Is This Really Parenthood? by Fran Eisenman

Adoptive Families - More Than Just the Blues by Doris A. Landry

Adoptive Families - Your Baby, Yourself

Creating a Family - The Elusive "Happily Ever After": Post-Adoption Depression

NACAC - Self-Care: Barriers and Basics for Foster/Adoptive Parents

Slate - My Post-Adoption Depression by Amy Rogers Nazarov

The Post-Adoption Blues: Overcoming the Unforeseen Challenges of Adoption by Karen J. Foli, Ph.D. and John R. Thompson, M.D.

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