

Rejecting the opportunity for reunion

Offering a family member from whom you have been separated by adoption the opportunity to be involved in a reunion is a very generous gesture. Unfortunately, however, some people are not ready to accept such an invitation and, if they refuse your offer, you may misinterpret their rejection of the reunion opportunity, as a personal rejection of you as a person. I believe that a common reason for people to reject the opportunity of an adoption reunion is that they have not yet performed the personal recovery work, which would assist them to work through the grief associated with their adoption loss and so feel ready to contemplate reunion. Personal recovery work can be very useful for anyone considering being involved in an adoption reunion.

The separation which results from an adoption creates a situation of loss. It is difficult for family members who have been separated by an adoption to grieve that loss, however, because their grief is disenfranchised. Grief is considered to be disenfranchised when it is not openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported. After other losses in our lives, such as those connected with most cases of bereavement, being able to grieve with the support of our community assists us to accommodate our loss and to move forward with our lives. In my first book, *Adoption and Loss – The Hidden Grief*, I explained in detail the ways in which the grief following an adoption separation is disenfranchised and the outcomes for those affected. The most common outcome is that the grief is suppressed. This can lead to emotional and physical health problems.

Because those who suppress the grief which follows an adoption separation suffer on an emotional level, I believe that they can benefit from undertaking emotional recovery work. I have provided in my second book, *Adoption and Recovery – Solving the mystery of reunion*, some detailed suggestions for how this personal recovery work can be performed. Those who have managed to undertake productive personal recovery work are much more likely to be comfortable with being part of a reunion with family members from whom they were separated by an adoption, than those who have not taken the opportunity to do so. If you decide to approach a family member from whom you were separated by an adoption with a view to being reunited with them, or, indeed, meeting them for the first time, you have no way of knowing whether or not they have undertaken any personal recovery work. If that person has not acknowledged the impact of adoption separation in his or her life, or, indeed, if that person has been unaware up to that point that they have been involved in an adoption separation experience, then they have not had the opportunity to address the issues which have arisen as a result of the separation. You may find, therefore, that they are not ready to proceed with the reunion.

If you have already spent time preparing yourself and feel that you are ready, you may find this frustrating. However, if your aim is to establish a relationship with a family member, this is more likely to occur if you are able to be patient and allow him or her time to consider the opportunity to undertake personal recovery work. It is important to remember also that everyone has the right to choose their own time in which to address their adoption issues. For many people, it is only when they are offered the opportunity of reunion that they begin to become aware of the depth of their feelings around their adoption experience. For some people, this realisation is so frightening that they panic and choose instead to try to keep their emotions buried. However, by offering them the invitation to participate in a reunion, you have also offered them the opportunity to address their hidden grief. You may be disappointed that they choose not to do that at a time which would suit you. However, you can have the satisfaction of knowing that you have helped them to move forward in terms of their personal growth and development, by drawing their attention to their grief. Hopefully, they will soon find the courage to explore, experience and accommodate that grief and so feel ready for reunion.

It takes courage to explore the emotional issues and to awaken the dormant grief which have resulted from an adoption separation. Fewer people would reject the opportunity for reunion if the community in general were more aware of the impact of adoption in people's lives. Increasing community awareness about the losses associated with adoption

separation, the value in grieving those losses, the usefulness of personal recovery work and the role of reunion in assisting the grieving process will be of great value to all those whose lives have been affected by adoption separation. When openness and honesty replace secrets and lies, fear can be replaced by confidence and opportunities for reunion will be more likely to be welcomed rather than rejected.

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Evelyn Robinson, who is a counsellor, educator and author of

Adoption and Loss – The Hidden Grief

Adoption and Recovery – Solving the mystery of reunion

Adoption Reunion – Ecstasy or Agony?

Adoption Separation – Then and now

welcomes contact from interested readers.

Postal address: Clova Publications
PO Box 328
Christies Beach
South Australia 5165

E-mail: erobinson@clovapublications.com

For further information about Evelyn and her work, please visit her web site:

Web site: www.clovapublications.com