

## When Parents Struggle with Postadoption Depression

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So your child is home and things are supposed to be wonderful. At least that's what you've told everyone, including yourself. Yet, you feel as if you're struggling and what you expected isn't what's happening in your life. You may be feeling sad or "empty" or that there is little pleasure in your life anymore. And guilt feels like a shadow, apparent even when the sun is shining. You might be struggling to bond with your child or he/she with you. You feel like an imposter at times, smiling when you feel so overwhelmed and lost.

I've been studying parental postadoption depression for the past seven years, and there is still so much to understand. But we do know a few things that might be helpful to you as a parent. First, researchers suspect that the rate of postadoption depression in parents is about the same as postpartum depression (10 to 15%). Second, studies have shown that when parents struggle with depression, there can be negative effects on the children. And third, depression is a clinical problem that is treatable.

There are many parents – mothers and fathers – who become depressed or melancholy after their child is home. We aren't sure why, but for you and your family's sake, it's important to share your feelings with someone you trust. It could be a partner, friend, or professional counselor, who understands the dynamics of adoption.

Adoption professionals sincerely want to know if you are struggling. They are also a good source of information and referrals to help you obtain services. Engaging in virtual adoptive parent groups might also be helpful in realizing you're not alone. Reading books about adoption and adoptive parenting can be another way to ease the emotional pain and better understand your child. Many parents have found my book, *The Post-Adoption Blues: Overcoming the Unforeseen Challenges of Adoption*, to be helpful, but there are many others great books out there.

I know it's hard to start these conversations. You don't want to somehow be disloyal to your child or family by not being happy. It's not easy to talk about. But it's so important. The bottom line is this: by taking care of yourself, you'll be better able to meet your child's and family's needs. Parents have told me, sometimes with tears in their eyes, that once their depression was recognized and treated, they embraced their healing and regained their sense of self.