

# Stages of Birthfather Grief

There is no “correct” way to grieve or one sudden, shining moment when you are finished grieving. But the following thoughts and feelings are experienced by many birthfathers at some point in the adoption process.

Stage	Description	Questions to consider	Comments from birthfathers
<b>Impact</b>	<p>This is commonly referred to as the shock or denial phase. You may question the paternity of the child and your role in the process, especially if you are no longer in a relationship with the birthmother. If there is some doubt about paternity, you may feel tremendous guilt about your doubts and unsure how to respond to your fears. You may also question your potential as a parent. Thoughts of your future (education, job stability and finances) may weigh heavily on your mind.</p>	<p>How do I feel about this pregnancy? What are my thoughts about the role of fathers and the needs of children? Am I equipped to provide a child with security, love and stability? How can I be supportive of the birthmother?</p>	<p>“The first thing to realize is that even if the birthfather wants to play a part in his kid’s life, he’s probably going to go into denial for a period of time. The easiest way to ‘deal’ with a painful situation like this is just to stop looking at it. I would imagine that a lot of birthfathers enter the denial phase early in the pregnancy, and I would bet that a good deal of them never stop denying it.”</p>
<b>Chaos</b>	<p>This phase refers to the first emotional reaction following a placement. You may feel shocked at how much love and attachment you felt at the birth. You also may feel a lot of responsibility to comfort the birthmother and tend to her needs, rather than to your own. If you are not involved at the birth, you may feel anger about that or it may deeply pain you — or even relieve you. Every person reacts differently.</p>	<p>Do I want to be present at the birth? How would the birthmother feel about me being there? What specific things can I do at the hospital and during the placement? If I cannot be at the hospital, what can I do later to welcome my child into the world?</p>	<p>“It is very rewarding and healing to play a role. Witnessing the birth of my son and seeing the joy of his adoptive parents was the most powerful, exciting, sad, joyful day of my life.”</p>

## Adaptation

This phase includes the first few weeks following the placement of your child. Guilt and shame often accompany this phase, alternating with feelings of pride and contentment. You may feel confused by the rush of feelings you are having. Intellectually, you may believe the placement was the right decision. But in your heart, you may question it — especially if the birthmother is still deeply grieving. Women are usually comfortable expressing more emotion than men. Some men, though they may want to cry, feel stifled during the adoption process and are unable to express their feelings.

How do I feel now? Why did I (or we) make this decision in the first place? What should my role be now? When should I contact the adoptive family or the birthmother? How should I now refer to my child? Who can I talk to about this decision and my feelings?

“Placing your child for adoption is a major blow to your self confidence. Especially for us guys — though you’ll meet very few who will admit it. You’ve got to build that up. Being needed by the adoptive parents is the best foundation around. In a way, it still allows the birthdad to provide for the kid. We need that because we’re guys, and we’re supposed to provide for our kids.”

## Balance

As you feel more comfortable with the adoptive parents, and as you develop your relationship with them, your role will become more clear to you. You will regain some balance in your life. Adoptive families and birthfathers who have stayed in touch have found their relationships to be extremely fulfilling. Your child will benefit from the love, concern and involvement of both his/her birthparents.

What does it mean to be a birthfather? Is my life going in the direction I want it to? What does this adoption decision mean to me personally? Am I following through on things I said I would do? What do I want my child to know about me?

“The adoptive parents were beyond awesome throughout this entire process. I was very hesitant about meeting them, and I somewhat figured I’d be like a third wheel from the beginning. But they do great at showing me how important I am to them in general.”

## Transformation

This phase is the point where everyone who grieves hopes to end up, eventually. Important aspects include developing your self potential; finding some kind of spirituality or meaning in the adoption experience; developing awareness of how your feelings impact your relationships with your child and the adoptive family; coming to peace with yourself and your decision to place your child for adoption; and lastly, but most importantly, being mindful and appreciative of your child’s presence in your life.

What have I learned from this experience? What do I value about this experience? How can I continue to be a loving force in the my child’s life? How can I share this experience with others, so they can learn from my story? Is it possible for me to help others in a similar situation?

“I still keep in contact with the adoptive parents, as they do with me. It’s amazing that I will still be able to know my son, and no one can take that away from me ... I can watch him grow and develop with the confidence that he is well loved and provided for. One of the best characteristics of this adoption is that I didn’t lose a family member. I gained many more.”

Based on the Phoenix Model of Grief from the book [The Phoenix Phenomenon: Rising From the Ashes of Grief](#), by Joanne Jozefowski, R.N., Ph.D.