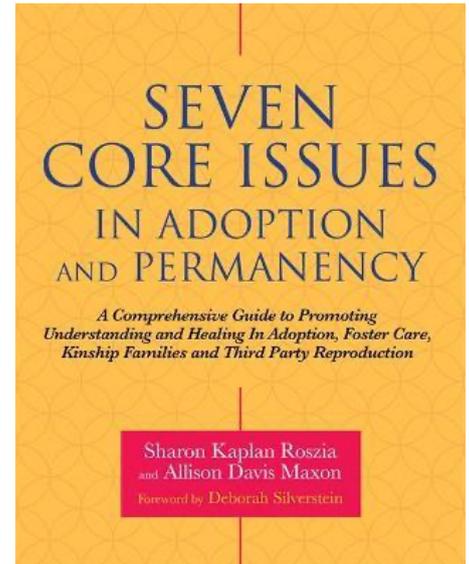


Techniques and Tools to Manage the Seven Core issues of Adoption by Roszia and Maxon (2019)

[Seven Core issues in Adoption in Adoption and Permanency](#) a book by Sharon Kaplan Roszia and Allison Davis Maxon (2019) is a framework for all members of the adoption constellation / triad to better understand how the experience of adoption has impacted their lives and relationships. The seven core issues can support an individual to communicate their own core issues more effectively as well as help them better understand the core issues of other constellation / triad members.

However, each person's experience of adoption is unique and may include all, some, or none of the core issues. Keep in mind that there is no one-size-fits-all for managing the seven core issues of adoption. Not all these tools and techniques will resonate or work for you. You are the ultimate expert in your own adoption experience. Remember to be smart and safe in choosing with whom and where to do this work because your feelings may become overwhelming. The tools and techniques below are from those suggested by Roszia and Maxon (2018).



LOSS

Adoption involves the disassembling and creating of a new family system and all adoption constellation / triad members can experience emotional loss. The following practical steps and tips are designed to help you feel empowered - which is essential for your healing and growth. By allowing a core issue into your consciousness and giving expression to your emotions, you can better understand your loss. When you speak about a core issue, you are also normalising your feelings of loss. It also helps if you are supported to speak about your feelings with a trusted friend, in a support group or with a therapist/counsellor.

- List all the losses in your life since you were born. Be specific, not general -the pain is in the detail.
- Take time to consider what you feel has been the greatest loss in your life?
- Think about any raw emotions and physical symptoms that arise for you in connection to these losses.
- Are there some unacknowledged losses that you hold onto? (Remember that anger is often the result of unresolved or unacknowledged hurt, loss, or pain).
- You might consider reflecting on who or what you are afraid of losing?
- By giving some space to allow any unrecognised or unacknowledged feelings of loss to emerge, such as despair and sadness, you can begin to release this loss from your bodily, neurological, and sensory systems.
- You might find non-verbal ways to express the pain of loss such as physical exercise / activities or creative outlets such as music, dance, and writing.
- Consider writing a journal to express your thoughts and feelings around the losses.
- Try practicing true compassion for yourself and others; this means thinking about yourself as a person who deserves loving care. For more ideas and resources visit Kristin Neff's website www.self-compassion.org

GRIEF

Grief is our reaction to loss -whatever that reaction happens to be. The term “work” is used around grief because often it is just that - messy, hard, labour intensive and can feel never ending. Grieving includes remembering, recollecting, feeling, questioning, and reorganising. By acknowledging your overwhelming loss and the accompanying pain and suffering, this can help you to release the hurt and attend to your emotional wounds. Remember that the work of grief can leave you feeling crazy, unhinged and alone; it can also be a roller coaster ride with many ups and downs. So how can we support our own grieving process?



- Think about the ways you might avoid the work of grief and describe them. For example, by downplaying your feelings or seeking ways to constantly distract yourself.
- People confronted with pain and loss need comfort: someone to talk to, lean on and share their deep feelings. Who do you trust with your intimate feelings? If there is someone, can they support you while you grieve?
- If two of you are grieving, do not judge each other. You are each dealing with your pain alone and may need others to support you as individuals. Remember, if others judge your grief, it may be because they are uncomfortable with your pain.
- If you blame yourself for the loss, consider writing a letter to yourself and forgiving yourself. Be compassionate. What would you say if you were writing this letter to a close friend?
- Consider choosing a space to honour what you have lost. It can include a place that you visit regularly, a prayer that you repeat daily, a tree that you plant and visit or a poem or story you wrote about the person that you have lost or miss.
- Think about a ritual of “letting go” to release anger and pain and to support your healing. Rituals can be simple such as lighting a candle on a significant day to acknowledge your loss or writing a letter to the person that you feel a hurt towards. Burning the letter and scattering the ashes can be a way to connect to your feelings of loss. By choosing a symbol that has a personal meaning, you can embrace the feelings that are hard to express in words and this can be healing.
- Find role models with similar losses who are further along in their grief work.
- Think about situations (e.g., birthdays, Mothers / Fathers Day) that could trigger your grief and some strategies that you could use to manage your reactions. By preparing beforehand and creating some of your own strategies this may help you less overwhelmed.
- Use your support system. Be clear about what brings you comfort and what makes things harder for you. People cannot read your mind. Try using “I” statements, for e.g. “When (situation / behaviour) happens, I feel (emotion)” to effectively express how you feel.
- Alert your friends or support people that your feelings could change daily. You may be okay one minute but the next minute you may hit rock bottom.
- Grief is exhausting. Find ways to nurture yourself in whatever ways best support you.

REJECTION

Rejection is the first spoke in the adoption wheel emanating from loss. Some form of social rejection is usually the way most constellation/triad members experience their core loss.

Tools and strategies that constellation members can use to address and manage feelings of rejection include:

- List people who you feel have rejected you.
- How do you deal with those feelings of rejection? Do you think you might be avoiding or repressing these feelings because it is just too painful?
- Are you using substances, distraction, over working / over achievement or excessive people pleasing to avoid or cover up these feelings of rejection?
- List people whom you have rejected. How might rejecting someone be a way to protect yourself from future emotional losses?
- Do you have someone who you trust who can listen and validate your feelings of rejection? (Remember to let them know you realise that they cannot fix your feelings).
- Consider joining an adoption support group to vocalise your rejection and hear other experiences of rejection.
- The snow-ball effect of rejection may lead to anger. Anger needs expression in some physical form and / or vocalisation if you can find a safe space.
- Try thinking up a personal mantra that you can repeat when angry or when sad feelings become overwhelming. Write down a list of your strengths and values. You could try reading them out aloud to yourself every morning. This doesn't mean just "talking yourself up" but taking the time to think about what makes you, you. Your mantra can help you feel stronger just by reminding yourself of your strengths and who you really are in the face of rejection and self-doubt.
- Remember to spend time with people who accept and love you. Even if you can't spend time with a loved one now, try taking your time just to think of someone who is important in your life. If you have a picture of them (even better if it is a picture of both of you doing something you enjoy) set aside some time to look at it each day while reminding yourself that this person truly loves and supports you.





SHAME AND GUILT

Shame and guilt are the second spoke in the wheel of the seven core issues of adoption and rejection often fuels our shame and guilt. It is important to remember that our shame does not survive being spoken about either within a support group or with a trusted friend. When we recognise, name, and understand our shame and its triggers, we can become more resilient to it. Some techniques and ways that can help increase our resilience towards shame and guilt include:



- Think about your feelings of guilt or shame around a situation or decision made in the past from a present-day perspective. Do those feelings relate in any way to being a member of the adoption constellation? Could you be looking at it from an “all-or-nothing perspective”? Ask yourself, are there any alternative or more nuanced perspectives that might be acknowledged about this situation or decision? Given the time and the circumstances you were in, are you able to view that situation or decision you made as “good enough”?
- Reflect on the messages and expectations that we hear (sometimes unconsciously) in our head that tell us that being imperfect means being inadequate. Where do you think those feelings and beliefs came from? Do they fuel your feelings of inadequacy?
- Think about creating achievable expectations for yourself and for others. What would that look like for you and for other people?
- Try reflecting on what can trigger your feelings of guilt and send you into a shame spiral? Consider using journaling, therapy, reading blogs or listening to podcasts to help you to connect with your internal experiences of shame and guilt. Visit www.Brenebrown.com for more information and resources/

IDENTITY

Identity is the fourth spoke in the wheel of Seven Core issues in adoption. Roszia and Maxon (2019) state that when constellation members can recognise and work on the first four core issues of adoption (loss, rejection, shame / guilt, and grief), a more solid emotional foundation is created for managing the last three core issues of identity, intimacy, and mastery/control.

According to Roszia and Maxon (2019) when people who are adopted are allowed and supported in their journey to reclaim the missing parts of their identity, they are empowered to tell their unique story, *their* way. Some techniques to create a more cohesive identity and support your lifelong “search for self” include:



- List all the words that you would use to describe yourself. Which words from the list would you choose to openly share with others? Which words would you choose to keep private? Go back over the list and identify where those attributes come from and which of them are unique to you.
- If you could change a part of your identity such as your looks, your name, your personality, your skills, your strengths, what would it be and why?
- When do you feel as if you are masquerading in a role? Do you fear that others will see the truth behind the mask? Reflect on when, where and with whom you feel your most authentic, true self?
- Create a life book that includes the narrative of your story. Start at the beginning when you were a baby. Think about including photos, timelines, memories, and mementos that have meaning for you.
- For mothers and fathers who have lost a child to adoption: list 5-10 words that describe yourself as a parent. Be curious about how this list is influenced by your experience as a birth parent. You can feel empowered by actively choosing your strengths and attributes that you might have developed from your unique experience?

INTIMACY

Intimacy is the fifth spoke in the Seven Core issues wheel. Intimacy also involves risk and vulnerability because bringing our authentic self into an intimate relationship requires us to risk being who we truly are rather than who we think others expect or wish us to be. Open communication can reduce potential barriers to intimacy between constellation members. Truly honest communication is also challenging for all of us because of society's projected expectations that constellation members should be loyal, live in the present, ignore the past and / or be grateful to their parents or society for their situation. Some tools and strategies to strengthen intimacy and reduce barriers to closeness with others include:

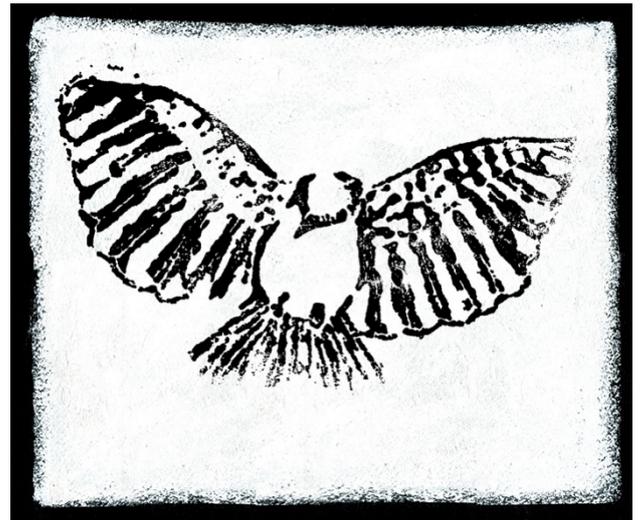


- Ask yourself, do I have any fears about getting close to others? Think about how you might use obstacles (real or imagined) to avoid intimacy and revealing your authentic self to others?
- Gently reflect on how adoption has affected your intimate relationships. What do you expect from relationships? What do you expect of yourself in relation to others? Consider ways that you might embrace your own and the other peoples' differences, flaws, and limitations.
- Reflect on your healthiest relationships. What qualities did the other person demonstrate that allowed you to feel safe enough to be vulnerable and open in that relationship? What did you bring to that relationship that allowed the other person to be vulnerable and open with you?
- Build trust: mean what you say, say what you mean and do what you say.
- Create your own daily connection rituals. Confiding with a trusted other, about the big and little things in your life is the lifeblood of intimacy. Communicating daily also builds the skill of non-defensive listening while strengthening our bonds of attachment to others.
- When a relationship is ruptured, after you have had time to reflect (and if you wish) think about how you might reconnect with that person. Remember that all relationships go through cycles of *rupture* and *reparation*.
- Being able to reconnect after a "rupture" not only strengthens our intimacy with others but also the inner relationship we have with ourselves. Reflect on whether any of these ruptures could be connected to "old tapes and messages" being playing out in the present relationship?
- Identify or seek out relationships with role models who demonstrate healthy intimate relationships. Think about what is healthy in these relationships and how you might develop these qualities in your own relationships.
- Consider the hopes and dreams you have that are currently unfulfilled regarding other members of the constellation. Imagine what you might do or say that would allow for those hopes and dreams to be realised.



MASTERY AND CONTROL

The sixth and last spoke in the wheel of the seven core issues in adoption is mastery and control. The goal for all coalition members is mastery -regaining power and control over their life. Mastery is hard-earned and a lifelong process. Words associated with mastery include active, growing, proficient, resilient and empowered. Mastery calls for us to be open to the risks of building intimate emotional connections and learning to bounce back from adversity and setbacks. When we feel hopeful and have a sense of meaning in our life, we are creating strong foundations for our resilience.



The mastery journey according to Roszia and Maxon (2019) includes giving space to think about the impact of traumatic attachment losses on our own lives. When we can honour these complex and often painful feelings that may arise within us, we can acknowledge that these feelings and who we are *matters*. It is important for us to learn how to let trusted others know what we are feeling and what we need even when this lets them see our vulnerabilities and imperfections. Mastery does not mean that we have finished grieving or processing the complex losses that come with adoption, however it does allow us to recognise that those experiences are only a part of our story. Consider the following tips and strategies to help gain more control and mastery within your life:

- List the ways you have lost power or control in your life from your experience of adoption. Have you lost power or control over other areas of your life? In what ways does it feel the same or different?
- Constellation members have described their experience of loss of control using words such as fearful, constricted, vulnerable, unsafe, helpless, and powerless. What feelings do you have when you are not in control of yourself or others? When you process these experiences, you can take yourself from passive observation to greater personal understanding and healing.
- Our wounds keep us cautious; try being more open and curious about new experiences. If you can, embrace change, take calculated risks, and afterwards reflect on how you might learn from these experiences.
- Consider what brings meaning and purpose to your life. Think about directing your energy, thoughts, and activities in that direction. It can feel empowering to focus on what you *can* control in your life.
- List the times in your life when you have felt the most empowered. Can you see any common factors (people, situations, actions) in those times?
- List your five top beliefs about life. How do your beliefs make you feel? Who would you be without any of those beliefs? Reflect on who, where or what experiences moulded those beliefs. Does your experience of adoption have an impact on those beliefs? Have you ever challenged any of those beliefs and if so, why?
- Write down the ways you may have disempowered yourself. Be compassionate to yourself. Consider how these actions may have served you at the time?
- Make a list of the people who you blame or who may blame you. From the list, consider who you might choose to forgive at some point down the track. Peace of mind can result in forgiving yourself and others
- Practice projecting your voice, speak up, let yourself be heard because you “matter”.(cont. over)

- Do you struggle to say “no”? Practice feeling comfortable saying “no” as this will help you learn how to speak your truth and to set boundaries.
- List the friends and family who you value and who are also significantly different from you. Embracing people different from yourself helps diminish prejudices and creates connection with others.
- What do you hope to accomplish in the future? Consider a range of things, such as developing a new skill or interest. If you wish, think about working towards feeling less anxious or reducing a need to control.
- Be mindful of what you allow into your world. Consider what you watch, what you listen to, what you read and the people you choose to include in your life. Select with great care the things you take into your body emotionally, physically, and spiritually because you are more than worth it.