

# Adoption Tasks Across Development

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NOTE: Do not focus on the stage of development—focus on the adoption tasks at this stage. Because the child may be emotionally younger than their chronological age, it is helpful to look at these tasks as a series and not necessarily defined by age. For example: a child who is seven may actually be a three year old level and will need you to adjust to his **stage** not **age**.

## Infant to 18 Months: Basic Trust vs. Mistrust

Adopted Child's Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adjustment to a new family, focusing on safety, trust and attachment</li></ul>
Adoptive Parent's Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Providing bonding and attachment experiences, providing loving touch, talking comfortably and positively with infant, family, and friends about adoption.</li><li>• <u>Tasks in action</u>: reading children's books with adoption themes to learn/teach positive adoption language.</li></ul>

## 18 months to 3 years: Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt

Adopted Child's Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recovering from trauma and trauma of separation, learning positive adoption language, and beginning to learn adoption/guardianship story.</li></ul>
Adoptive Parent's Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Helping child with emotional self-regulation, reading adoption story books to child, encouraging questions and answering honestly, telling adoption story as a favorite bedtime story.</li><li>• <u>Tasks in action</u>: using positive adoption language, reading adoption story books, showing child pictures/mementos of birth family, bringing culturally appropriate dolls, toys, books, art, and music into home to provide positive image of child's heritage.</li></ul>

## Preschooler 3 to 6 years: Initiative vs. Guilt

Adopted Child's Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wants more information about adoption and birth parents (where do I come from), recognizes differences in appearance (who's eyes/nose do I have), and the beginning of cultural pride.</li> </ul>
Adoptive Parent's Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging questions and answering honestly, providing information about birth family, reassuring child that s/he will not lose adoptive/guardianship family, teaching modeling cultural pride through stories, ethnic foods, family holidays and rituals.</li> <li>• <u>Tasks in action:</u> creating/developing a "Life Book" with child, reading adoption story books together, bringing culturally appropriate dolls, toys, books, art, and music into home to provide positive image of child's heritage.</li> </ul>

## 6 to 11 years: Industry vs. Inferiority

Adopted Child's Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing the what and why of adoption, coping with differences, loss and grief, fear of being taken away again, understand the legality of adoption.</li> </ul>
Adoptive Parent's Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Validating child's connection to both adoptive/guardianship and birth families, helping child accept birth parents' limitations without blaming, continuing openness about race, culture and ethnicity; preparing child to negotiate two cultures at once (e.g. birth and adoptive/guardianship family).</li> <li>• <u>Tasks in action:</u> inviting child to discuss questions or feelings, validating child's wish for or fear of birth parent contact, letting child know s/he can love both sets of parents, allowing child to control telling his/her story outside the family.</li> </ul>

## 12 to 18 years: Identity vs. Role Confusion

Adopted Child's Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identity—as adoptee and possibly racial or cultural, curiosity about birth family identity, adoption loss. How does adoption fit in with their identity? May seek out contact and information from birth family. Exploring questions: Who am I? How do I fit in? Where am I going?</li><li>• Understanding one's adoption story on a deeper level, coping with loss/lack of control, coping with adoption stigma, trying on traits of birth family</li></ul>
Adoptive Parent's Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Validating child's need to know his/her history, helping child cope with loss, allowing child to exercise control whenever possible, understand that much of child's anger is directed at birth parent, letting your child know your love is unconditional.</li><li>• <u>Tasks in action</u>: letting your child know you are not threatened or angry about questions regarding birth family or past history, sharing all information with child about his/her pre-adoptive/guardianship life, teaching and modeling self-protection and responses to racism and prejudice (e.g. being stopped by police, scrutinized in stores).</li></ul>

## Promoting Mastery and Control Across All Stages of Development

Adopted Child's Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop mastery and control</li></ul>
Adoptive Parent's Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Allowing child to exercise control whenever possible using choices and compromises.</li><li>• Provide opportunities to foster competence and mastery with your support. Help them learn new skills, participate in activities, and participate in different interests.</li><li>• Avoid responding to resistance or defiance with anger.</li><li>• Restore their voice: ask about preferences and engage them in making appropriate decisions and put into words what a child might be feeling.</li><li>• Share power and control: find ways to engage a child in decision making and problem-solving. While we don't put them in charge of all the decisions that impact him/her, there are many that they can have a voice in or make a decision.</li><li>• Model and mentor new experiences: mentor them or coach them through experiences and be their cheerleader.</li><li>• Make it safe to try and fail.</li></ul>