



FOG Fazes for the Birth/First Mother

Coming Out of the FOG (Fear, Obligation, Guilt/Grief) for a Birth/First Mother occurs in phases as awareness emerges and one confronts, processes, and accepts the impact of child relinquishment on their lives.

Just like actual fog, there are blurred lines around these categories. The Birth/First Mother may transition in and out of these phases over time rather than experiencing a linear process. Not every B/F Mother will move through these phases as described, in this sequence, or to the same intensity, but the majority report similar experiences. With B/F Mothers, we typically see two kinds of belief systems that maintain the FOG Fantasy: the HERO and the HARLOT.

Fazes 1-4 represent the first steps around awareness and the impact of relinquishment. These first phases act as a strategy (conscious or subconscious) to protect from facing the deep pain experienced in Fazes 5-8.

Faze 1:

Disengaging

Relinquishment of a child is a traumatic event that alters the woman's experience of herself and the world around her, permeating her core belief system and overall identity.

B/F Mothers disengage from the reality of their own motherhood and the loss that is inherent in adoption. Some women disengage to the point of not recognizing they are pregnant until close to or even at time of giving birth. The resulting shock and dissociation creates a split of false-motherhood identities (the HERO and the HARLOT) allowing them to convince themselves of the fantasy that relinquishing their parental status and their child's birthrights is actually possible.

Faze 2:

Denying

The B/F Mother actively denies their biological connection to their child, their claim to their child, and their own transition into motherhood. This denial, also known as repression, is a strong coping mechanism that can result from an inability to accept the truth that one has given birth and is now a mother. Denial also serves as a buffer to shield the woman from the pain of her tremendous loss.

Denial is often first manifested during pregnancy as the mother denies herself the experience of attaching to her child in utero, thinking of herself as only a "surrogate" who is carrying a child for someone else and not the actual parent of her own baby.

Faze 3:

Defending

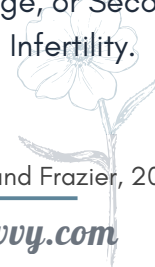
B/F Mothers defend their adoption decision to others and/or themselves while holding on to the FOG Fantasy that their child is better off without them. They defend against any idea that adoption could negatively impact their child. All losses in adoption (such as lack of genetic mirroring and family history) are seen as insignificant compared to "protecting" the child from a bastard status, the bio parents' youth, financial state, perceived ineptitude and/or their family's rejection. If religion is involved, they may defend adoption as a special, beautiful thing that is God's plan and a way of redeeming oneself for sexual activity outside of marriage.

Faze 4:

Discerning

The B/F Mother begins to question her beliefs about adoption and whether or not it was truly "in the best interests of the child." She starts opening up to considering the gravity of adoption issues which could lead to feelings of guilt. She starts to recognize the societal and familial forces at play that have influenced or pressured her to deny or defend but still may see adoption as mostly positive or necessary.

This phase is often prompted by a developmental stage or significant life event such as a birth, death, marriage, or Secondary Infertility.



Adapted from Reconstruction of Adoption Issues by Penny, Borders, and Portnoy, 2007, and Emotional Blackmail: When the People in your Life Use Fear, Obligation, and Guilt by Forward and Frazier, 2019

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By Amy Barker, LMHC & Jennifer Joy Phoenix, LSWAIC

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Fazes 5 & 6 have the potential to completely overwhelm the B/F Mother but are necessary along with Fazes 7 & 8 in setting one up to continue coming fully Out of the FOG and on to the Healing Path as they continue to integrate their authentic identity of Mother.

Faze 5: Deconstructing

Confusion and ambivalence take over as the B/F Mother faces that she can no longer accept or believe the positive adoption narrative that so heavily influenced her adoption decision. She may also begin to acknowledge how others influenced, coerced or forced her to make the permanently impactful decision to sign away her parental rights and to hand her child off to be raised by strangers. Anger, sadness, and regret may begin to overwhelm her as she becomes terrified that “the Abyss” of complicated and intense emotions repressed for much of her life (possibly since pregnancy and placement) will engulf and eventually drown her.

Faze 6: Drowning

As feared, the B/F Mother is now flooded by intense emotions while facing the compounded losses inherent in relinquishment trauma (core, vicarious, secondary, disenfranchised, and ambiguous). She may also be experiencing the dismantling of her entire belief system. During this onslaught of conflicting emotions previously shrouded by the FOG, the B/F Mother may experience a shock to the nervous system which can result in an emotional shutting down or conversely as a violent emotional explosion. B/F Mothers will need to move through all the difficult stages of grief or risk getting stuck in this phase.

Faze 7: Developing

As the B/F Mother begins to accept that the baby she lost to adoption is in fact her very own child, she will begin the process of emotionally claiming her child. This will lead to the development of her own motherhood which is critical to this phase. Though loss will still pervade the B/F Mother’s experience of burgeoning motherhood, Fear, Obligation, and Guilt/Grief will no longer define her or drive her behavior. Through self-acceptance she will shed the FOG Fantasy roles of HERO and HARLOT to embrace her truth as MOTHER of a child lost to adoption.

Faze 8: Deciding

The B/F Mother makes the self-actualized decision to embrace a more integrated sense of self which includes her motherhood. She decides to forgive herself, to release shame and guilt, and to accept her parentage as it is, knowing that adoption has forever changed her relationship with her child. The B/F Mother moves through the world with more agency and better clarity providing a new sense of peace enabling her to continue on to the next step in the lifelong journey, the Healing Path.



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