



FOG Fazes for the Adult Adoptee

Coming Out of the FOG (Fear, Obligation, Guilt) for an Adoptee occurs in phases as awareness emerges and one confronts, processes, and accepts the impact of adoption on their lives.

Just like actual fog, there are blurred lines around these categories. Not every Adoptee will experience these phases as described, in this sequence, or to the same intensity, but the overwhelming majority of Adoptees report similar trajectories. For those raised in abusive adoptive homes, these phases are increasingly more complex and fractured, making them even more challenging to identify and move through. Adoptees in Reunion, Late Discovery Adoptees (LDAs), and those with a DNA surprise may be catapulted into any FOG Faze at any time.

Fazes 1-4 represent the first steps around awareness and the impact of adoption. For some, these first phases act as a subconscious strategy to protect from facing the deep pain experienced in Fazes 5-8.

Faze 1: Disengaging

Adoptee does not consider adoption to have a positive or negative influence on one's life. Adoptee does not notice or acknowledge ways adoption may have impacted them. Adoptee has little to no interest or curiosity around their race, ethnicity, culture, biology, etc. as it may differ from their adoptive family. Lack of engagement around adoption issues keeps the Adoptee from making the connection between their struggles with anxiety, depression, intimacy, etc. and their adoption.

Faze 2: Denying

Adoptee knowingly or unknowingly denies any issues surrounding their adoption. Adoptee may feel a fierce sense of loyalty, obligation, and/or gratitude toward either adoptive or biological family. Adoptee dismisses any internal or external cues or reminders that adoption may have played a significant role in their story. Adoption may be seen by the Adoptee as having only a positive influence on one's life or no impact at all.

Faze 3: Defending

Adoptee is resistant to any suggestion that adoption may have an impact on one's life. Adoptee wants to be considered no different than people who were born biologically to their parents and does not want to be pathologized or pitied. Adoptees may defend their adoptive or biological family, not wanting to hurt them in any way. Adoptees also may defend being adopted as something that makes them special, chosen, and/or is "God's plan."

Faze 4: Discerning

Adoptee begins to have an awareness of adoption issues and starts to recognize the societal and familial forces at play that have influenced or pressured them to deny or defend but still may see adoption as mostly positive. Adoptee starts to discern the impact of adoption on their life which is often prompted by a developmental stage or significant life event such as a birth, death, marriage, etc.

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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Some Adoptees report beginning emergence during these latter phases, having always had an awareness of how adoption and/or relinquishment has negatively impacted them and their families.

Fazes 5 & 6 have the potential to overwhelm the Adoptee 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.

Faze 5: Deconstructing

Adoptee fears the fallout from questioning their long-held beliefs about adoption.

Confusion and ambivalence take over as the Adoptee faces the knowledge that they can no longer live in the fantasy of their carefully constructed adoption narrative. They fear being abandoned again by those whose view of adoption may differ from their own felt experience, and are terrified that "the Abyss" of emotions that they have repressed for a lifetime will engulf and eventually drown them.

Faze 6: Drowning

As feared, the Adoptee is now flooded by intense emotions while facing the compounded losses in their story. Anger, resentment, and sorrow may be directed at their biological parents, adoptive parents, self, society, church, and/or the adoption system.

Adoptee may also experience a shock to their nervous system during the onslaught of conflicting emotions which may result in an emotional shutting down. They will need to move through all the stages of grief or risk getting stuck in this phase.

Faze 7: Developing

Adoptee recognizes and begins to accept that there are both gains and losses in adoption, and that the overwhelming grief from ambiguous loss and the desire to protect others will no longer rule their lives or determine their future. They begin developing a more integrated sense of self based on all aspects of their adoption story.

Faze 8: Deciding

A new identity emerges for the Adoptee as pain subsides and pride replaces shame in the understanding of one's unique story. Adoptee decides how they will move forward in life and in their relationships with increasing clarity and autonomy. Adoptee embarks on or continues on the next leg of the lifelong journey: the Healing Path.

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