



FOG Fazes for DCPs or Those with an NPE

Similarly to Adoptees, coming out of the FOG (Fear, Obligation, Guilt) for Donor Conceived Persons (DCPs) or those with a Non-Paternal Event (NPE) occurs in phases as awareness emerges and one confronts, processes, and resolves the impact of genetic bewilderment on their lives.

Just like actual fog, there are blurred lines around these phase categories. Not everyone will experience these phases as described, in this sequence, or to the same intensity, but the overwhelming majority report similar trajectories. For those raised in abusive environments, these phases are increasingly complex and fractured, making them even more challenging to identify and move through. Persons in this community can be catapulted into any FOG Faze at any time especially when withheld information or long held secrets are uncovered or revealed.

Fazes 1-4 represent the first steps around awareness and the impact of genetic bewilderment. These first phases act as a subconscious strategy to protect from the deep pain experienced in Fazes 5-8.

Faze 1: Disengaging

The person is disengaged from the concept of genetic identity. There is no interest or curiosity around familial differences, especially as it pertains to race, ethnicity, culture, biology, etc., because children inherently trust their parents. This lack of engagement keeps them from making the connection between their struggles with monochopsis (the subtle but persistent feeling of being out of place) and the lack of genetic continuity.

Faze 2: Denying

There is a tendency to deny any issues surrounding one's full genetic identity and to believe that the maternal (or raising family) connection is enough. They may feel a fierce sense of loyalty, obligation, and/or gratitude toward their raising parent(s). They actively dismiss any internal or external cues of genetic differences between them and their raising family.

Faze 3: Defending

There is resistance to any suggestion that the lack of genetic continuity has an impact on one's identity or development. They want to be considered no different than people who are raised by both of their biological parents. They may defend the narrative imposed by their raising family, such as "love is enough." For those whose true genetic identity has been concealed, they may defend against their own intuitive feelings regarding difference because they have been gaslit their entire lives.

Faze 4: Discerning

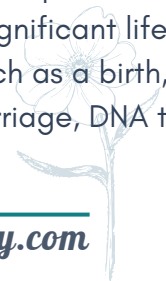
An awareness begins to emerge that one's internal reality is incongruent with their external experience. Seeing oneself as "illegitimate" for the first time can upend one's entire sense of self. They may begin to recognize the family system forces at play that have influenced or pressured them to deny or defend but still hesitate to challenge the story they've always been told. This could be prompted by a developmental stage or significant life event such as a birth, death, marriage, DNA test, etc.

Adapted from *Reconstruction of Adoption Issues* by Penny, Borders, and Portnoy, 2007

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By Amy Barker D'Alessandro, LMHC & Jennifer Joy Phoenix, LSWAIC

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All phases are contingent upon the level of concealment regarding genetic identity.

As truth is revealed, one may find themselves in any phase at any time.

Fazes 5 & 6 have the potential to overwhelm 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

Confusion and ambivalence take over as one faces the knowledge that they can no longer live in the fantasy of the narrative that was carefully constructed for them. If there has been no concealment, one may begin moving out of ambivalence and give themselves permission to make a claim on an unknown parent. For those whose secret history has been uncovered or revealed, they may become overwhelmed by the possibility that "the Abyss" of emotions they will encounter when facing the betrayal by their loved ones could engulf and eventually drown them.

Faze 6: Drowning

As feared, one is now flooded by intense emotions while facing the compounded losses in their story. Anger, resentment, and sorrow may be directed at their raising family, self, society, etc. They 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

The person recognizes and begins to accept that there are both gains and losses in their story, and that the overwhelming grief from ambiguous loss and the desire to protect or please 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 genetic identity and not on being the solution to an unmet need of a parent.

Faze 8: Deciding

As pain subsides and one decides to face and embrace their complete genetic history, a new identity emerges. They can now choose how they will move forward in life and in their relationships with increasing clarity and autonomy. They embark on or continue on to the next leg of the lifelong journey: the Healing Path.

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