

# Community Discussion Guide for Adoptees

*By Cam Lee Small, MS, LPCC*

*Conversation Prompts to Promote Safety, Community, and Encouragement*

The purpose of this guide is to help facilitate discussion in the context of safe, brave, soft, tender, nuanced atmospheres, where adoptee experiences are seen and held with care, where mutual empathy and growth-fostering relationships are nurtured as much as possible. This is not an exhaustive or comprehensive guide meant to teach about the history and complexities of adoption, nor does it suffice as a therapeutic support to replace professional treatment or counseling. Please take care to use it as an entry point for group cohesion and collective reflection.

## Opening Circle: Establishing Connection & Safety

### 1. Community Kick-off

What's something about your birth/heritage culture that has felt easy to be proud of, like you didn't even have to try, it's just like an automatic thing that you feel confident/excited about?

### 2. Defining Our Terms Together

Imagine you had to lead a class on "identity" for a group of adoptees going into 5<sup>th</sup> grade, but you couldn't use the word "identity," how else would you help them understand what the class was about?

### 3. Shared Experience

Have you ever been somewhere in public with your family and you felt different or out of place in some way? Can you share what that experience was like (e.g., where were you, who was there, what were you doing, what feelings came up for you, what were others doing that contributed, how did you get through it, were you able to share or process it with your parents/family, etc)?

## Identity Exploration

### 4. Personal Reflection

In the past year, what's something you think has had the biggest influence on your sense of identity, of who you are and who you want to become?

## 5. The “Invisible” Experience

What’s a fact about being an adoptee that people wouldn’t know just by looking at you? Or that people wouldn’t know unless you told them?

## 6. Being “The Only”

How would you finish this sentence: being one of the only \_\_\_\_\_ kids in my class sometimes feels like \_\_\_\_\_. (e.g., one of the only Asian kids, adoptees, person with my racial-ethnic background, etc.)

## 7. Learning to Celebrate

What’s something about your birth culture/heritage that you had to eventually learn to be proud of, something that maybe took some time or you had to get more exposure to it before you understood and felt proud of it on a deeper level (e.g., drums, food, music, literature, theater, poetry, fashion, language, etc.)?

# Navigating Nuance

## 8. Belonging

Some adoptees have said it’s about where you were born or your parents. Others have said it’s about who you look like. Others have even said it’s about the traditions you do or what you know about the culture. Everyone’s answer is welcomed actually, but how about you? Ex. ***What do you think makes someone “Korean” or “American”?***

## 9. The “Third Space”

There’s a term called “third space” that describes how Korean adoptees sometimes feel “too Korean” to fit in with their “white friends” but also “too white” to fit in with Asian communities. What do you think they mean by that?

## 10. The Chopsticks Story

There’s a story about a Korean adoptee who was trying to learn how to use chopsticks, but they were feeling extremely frustrated because the chopsticks kept falling out of their hand. In a moment of frustration they screamed, “Ugh! I’m not a real Korean, I can’t even figure out how to use chopsticks!” There’s no right or wrong answer here, but why would they associate using chopsticks with being a “real” Korean? And what’s so frustrating about that, why do you think would it be so important to this Korean adoptee that they wanted so deeply to learn how to use chopsticks? *[another version of the story is they’re trying to learn how to make kimbap but it doesn’t turn out the way they’ve seen it served at a Korean restaurant]*

# **Adolescent & Family Dynamics**

## **11. Teen Adoptee Questions**

Some of the most common questions that teen adoptees often navigate during middle and high school are included below, do any of these resonate with you / how would you answer any of these for yourself today?

- Why do I feel different from everyone else?
- Is it ok to ask questions about my adoption story?
- What will my life look like when I leave home / graduate high school?
- How much am I like my birth parents and how much am I like my adoptive parents?

## **12. Family Understanding**

For adoptees at any age, what do you wish your family knew about what it's like to be an international and/or transracial adoptee? What do they miss or sometimes not quite understand? Or, where does your family/parent kind of understand what it's like - but somehow there are parts of your experience or perspective that you still wish they could fully or completely know exactly how you feel or what it's like?

# **Cultural Identity & Meaning-Making**

## **13. Multi-ethnic / Multi-cultural & American Identity**

Think about your birth/heritage culture. And how does that shape the way you experience living in the U.S.? For example, what does the term "Korean American" mean to you?

## **14. Multi-cultural Living**

What does the term "multi-cultural" mean to you and can you think of examples of how you experience or practice it in your life?

## **15. Asian American Influence**

Even if you've never officially wrote it down or told someone, you probably have your own unique definition of terms like "Asian" or "Asian American," and it's common for that definition to shift or evolve as you get older. Who in your life has been significant in teaching or showing you what it means to be "Asian" or "Asian American"? If you're connected to a different birth/heritage culture, feel free to reflect on that here as well.

# **Navigating Race & Racism**

## **16. Real Talk**

What's a word or a phrase to describe what it's been like to have conversations about race or racism with your parent(s) or other family members?

## **17. Difficult Interactions**

Have you ever experienced something that felt like a racist interaction but it felt hard to explain to someone else - or maybe it was difficult to describe how it may have been racist?

## **18. Our Support Systems**

Where or with who do you feel safest with in terms of being free from racist environments and interactions?

## **19. Sources of Strength**

What's been a source of strength, resilience or comfort for you over the past couple of years as communities around the nation continue to struggle with important conversations about race and racism?

## **20. Support from Family**

Racism can be a complicated idea. Some see it as a combination of power and prejudice (e.g., this group of people is "better" and gets to make the rules - while other groups of people are seen as "inferior" and have to follow whatever rules get made). In that kind of context, sometimes people get treated unfairly or in ways that don't feel safe, helpful, or inclusive. How has your family helped you navigate those kinds of interactions? Or/and, if by chance you've ever experienced them, what else has helped you deal with those kinds of interactions?

## **21. Helpful Frameworks**

Over the past couple of years, what definition of "racism" has been most helpful to you - and what resources or people in your life have helped you understand and respond to racism in safe, empowering ways?

# **Next Steps: Vision & Hope**

## **22. Imagining Futures - Part 1**

Imagine there's a message from the future, adoptees and children of adoptees are afraid to associate with their birth/heritage cultures. What do you think happened or didn't happen to make things end up that way?

## **23. Imagining Futures - Part 2**

Now imagine a message from an alternate future, a universe where adoptees and children of adoptees celebrate and embrace their connection to their cultures of origin. They're flourishing. They celebrate. They don't pretend everything about their birth place and people are perfect, but they connect with their culture in ways that feel healthy and hopeful and life-giving. What do you think happened or didn't happen to make things end up that way?

## **24. Hopes for Our Generation**

What's a hope or a wish you have for this current generation of adoptees and family members of adoptees? What do you hope we avoid? What do you hope we accomplish or experience together?

# **Facilitator Notes**

### **Safety Principles:**

- Begin with positive, accessible topics that build connection
- Consider moving from external experiences to internal reflection
- Address complex/challenging topics only after trust is established
- End with hope and forward-looking vision

### **Community Building:**

- Early questions focus on shared experiences and common ground
- Questions progress from individual reflection to group connection
- Emphasize that all answers are welcomed and valid

### **Practical Encouragement:**

- Questions acknowledge both struggles and strengths
- Include opportunities to share resources and support
- Focus on agency and empowerment rather than just problems
- Conclude with vision-casting for positive change

**FOLLOWUP RESOURCES:** [Here's a curated list](#) that includes three categories for folks to start/continue the conversation and access further support as they see appropriate. It's just a starting point and not exhaustive, but something to help people who might be wondering "Where could I go from here?"

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## **TEEN ADOPTES ON A JOURNEY // Fall 2025 Teen Adoptee Identity & Skills Group**

Adoption is a lifelong event.

Our collaborative journey of **Adoption Literacy** must be, too.

### **TEEN ADOPTEE IDENTITY & SKILLS GROUP**

**Cam offers a fun, interactive atmosphere to introduce "6 Journey Points"** - adoptee-specific concepts that your family needs to process during adolescence.\*

**Facilitated by** author and Korean adoptee Cam Lee Small, MS, LPCC

Curriculum inspired by [The Adoptee's Journey: From Loss and Trauma to Healing and Empowerment](#)

**BONUS: PARENTS join Cam** for an exclusive **Parenting Adolescent Adoptees** seminar on the evening of Tuesday October 28th at 7:00pm-7:45pm central to a) recap what your teens have learned/practiced throughout the group and b) discuss your strategies to support them moving forward.

**Teen adoptees ages 13-17 gather for 6 sessions weekly and virtually on Zoom. Tuesdays at 7:00pm-7:45pm central time, 9/16, 9/23, 9/30, 10/7, 10/14, and 10/21.**

### **Adoptees get:**

1. Safe, refreshing, invitational environment
2. Confidential space to ask questions
3. Time to hear from others
4. Six weekly themes that guide our discussion
5. FREE access to [online course for teen adoptees](#) (\$79 value) and [adoptee workbook](#) (\$19.99 value)
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7. New peers and community, along with a place to share from their specific lived experience
8. Adoptive parents receive exclusive training and workshop interactions hosted by Cam through the **\*Parenting Adolescent Adoptees Seminar 10/28/25.**

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# teen adoptivee group

BY CAMLEESMALL, MS, LPCC

**Adoption is a  
lifelong event.**

**FALL 2025  
TUESDAYS  
7PM - 7:45PM CT**

**Our collaborative  
journey of  
Adoption Literacy  
must be, too.**







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Fun, interactive atmosphere to introduce “6 Journey Points” - adoptee-specific concepts that your family needs to process during adolescence.\*

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**Virtual Teen  
Adoptee Support  
Sep-Oct**







The Adoptee's Journey:  
**FOR TEEN ADOPTEES**

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# IDENTITY & SKILLS GROUP

**For Teen Adoptees 13-17yr**

**Weekly Virtual Sessions**

**Sep-Oct**

*FACILITATED BY CAM LEES SMALL, MS, LPCC*

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