

How to find or start an adoptee support group

Compiled by Leah Cooper with suggestions from Haley Radke and Penelope Needham

While support groups are not a substitute for work with a licensed, adoption-aware therapist, being in community, sharing and comparing our feelings about our unique experience can be a deeply empowering, comforting, clarifying, and validating experience. Below are some tips for finding and/or starting a support group where you are.

How to find a group

Check adopteesconnect.com, concernedunitedbirthparents.com, meetup.com, [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com), and social service or adoption related agencies in your area. Be aware that existing groups have different criteria for membership in the group. Some are just for adoptees, while some are for anyone in the triad (adoptive parent, birth parent, adoptee) or in the constellation (anyone involved in and impacted by adoption). Some are just for people who are members of a particular organization or geared toward a particular aspect of adoption experience (seeking reunion, therapy, storytelling, etc.) It's good to consider what you are going to feel most comfortable with in terms of both sharing and listening.

Start your own

There are a few resources already out there that dive deeply into how to do this:

- **The very best resource we've encountered** with the nitty gritty on all you might want to think about when starting a group is an episode on Adoptees On, a fabulous podcast hosted by Haley Radke, where adoptees discuss the adoption experience. The episode features Jeanette Yoffe, MFT, who shares what inspired her to begin a support group for adoptees and covers how to start your own group and best practices for peer-facilitated groups. [Listen to the episode here.](#)
- Adoptees Connect helps adoptees start "affiliate" groups in their area, [with guidance here.](#)
- American Adoption Congress has a list of support groups and a "Starting a Support Group" guide too, [all on this page here.](#)

Some additional tips to consider:

- If you're not sure you're ready to start a group, Jeanette Yoffe suggests finding one adoptee friend to be a listening partner on a regular basis - just taking turns sharing, listening and offering support. Maybe over time this partner can help you plan a group.
- Consider carefully who you'd like to reach out to and include - adoptees only or other members of the triad or constellation. If you're new to this work, consider sticking with a group that is limited to others in the same role in the constellation as yourself (i.e. just other adult adoptees).
- Prepare a list of ground rules everyone should follow to create an emotionally safe and inclusive environment for everyone. Jeanette Yoffe recommends several in the podcast episode above (a few are even listed on the web page below the recording).
- Be clear and honest about what kind of group it is when you promote it. Make it clear that it isn't therapy (unless you are a therapist of course).

- Consider some structure to the conversation to make sure everyone who wants to share gets a chance, but those who have less to share can also just listen.
- Be prepared for diversity in attendees' experience, opinions, hopes, and ability to participate.
- Consider finding someone to share the load of planning, hosting, and facilitating. As Penelope Needham says, "It will happen whenever two or more are gathered and committed to organizing and committing to be there."
- Think about where, when, and how to host and invite to reduce as many barriers to participation as possible.
- Once your group gets going, occasionally do a check-in on how it's working for everyone in terms of communications, structure, and timing.
- Try not to take it personally when people come and go. We adoptees are sometimes very sensitive to departures (eek, abandonment!) but everyone is on a different journey and your group just might not be a fit for where they are in their journey now.
- Make sure you (or whoever is going to facilitate) has resources for self-care so you or they are able to stay grounded while facilitating.
- Promote your group through any of the resources mentioned above for seeing if a group already exists. Consider grassroots techniques for promotion too like hanging a flier at your community center, library, place of worship, grocery store, arts center. Adoptees are everywhere!