



# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

NOVEMBER 2005

# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

QUARTERLY DCFS NEWSLETTER



## In This Issue

### 3 **These Are Your Children**

*By: Joyce Maguire Pavao*

A poem reflecting adopted children.

### 4 **The Happiest Times or the Hardest Times**

*By: Kathy Searle*

An article about how holidays affect adopted children.

### 6 **Understanding Bullying**

*By: Marlene Snyder, P.h.D.*

An article on how bullying affects children with learning disabilities or ADHD.

### 8 **Fall Groups and Workshops**

Social skills group, women's process therapy group and sibshops for the fall season.

### 10 **Talking to Children about Adoption**

*By: Jayne Eblering Schooler*

An article including five principles of telling your child he or she is adopted.

### 12 **Heart Gallery Locations**

Locations of Utah's First Heart Gallery Exhibit

### 14 **Parenting Traumatized Adoptive Children**

*By: Dee Paddock*

An article to help parents help their adoptive children overcome trauma they have experienced.

November 2005

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You cannot change the truth.  
These are your children,  
but they came from somewhere else.  
And they are the children of those places  
and of those people as well.  
Help them to know about their past  
and about their present.  
Help them to know that they are from extended families,  
that they don't have only one parent or set of parents,  
but that they have more mothers and fathers.  
They have grandmothers, godmothers, birth mothers, mother countries, mother earth.  
They have grandfathers, godfathers, birth fathers, and fatherlands.  
They have family by birth and by adoption.  
They have family by choice and by chance.  
Childhood is short;  
They are our children to raise;  
they are our children to love;  
and then they are citizens of the world.  
What we do to them creates the world that we live in.  
Give them life.  
Give them their truth.  
Give them love.  
Give them all that they came with,  
Give them all that they grow with.  
Your children do not belong to you,  
but they belong with you.  
You cannot keep them from what is theirs, but you can  
keep loving them. You do not own your children,  
but they are your own.

-Joyce Maguire Pavao





# the Happie

Stress levels rise dramatically for parents during the holiday season. For first time parents and even those who have experienced many holidays together as a family, holidays can be stressful. Parents want to create the magic dreamed about or even experienced as children. For many children who are adopted from the foster care system, the holidays are not always a time for happiness. Many children while in their birth families viewed the holidays as a time to realize how dysfunctional their families really were. They may have spent Christmas Eve with parents who were strung out on drugs or alcohol. They learned that Santa Claus came to other houses but not theirs. Some children experienced additional abuse during the holidays because stressed out parents tried to deal with additional demands. Some children face disruption from foster homes or treatment facilities. Many experienced

# Best times or the Hardest times

adoptive parents realize that for children the holidays can be trying. So what can we do? First, it's important to realize and remember our children's past, talking with them about what they have experienced in the past can give us information that may help us understand their behavior, thoughts and feelings that the holidays can bring for them. Talking about your memories both good and bad can allow your child the freedom to express their memories as well. All of us carry a great deal of anxiety about having a great holiday. We frequently hear messages about how everyone should be happy at this time of year, and when our families don't seem to measure up, this adds to our frustration. Don't set yourself up by thinking that your holiday has to look like the latest television show or magazine. Be patient with yourself and with your children. Make sure that everyone gets enough sleep. If your child has had problems with certain activities in the past, avoid those activities or talk with the child in advance and have a plan in place if something goes wrong.

Overcrowding your schedule can make everyone miserable. Many of our children get over stimulated easily, cutting back to a few great activities may be better than trying to fit everything in and not having any fun at all. Our kids may do better with picking out the cookies at the store instead of baking. Long drawn out activities put a lot of pressure on everyone. Remember your family can define your own fun, talking with your children in advance about the holidays and what they

want to do and not do can really help. Our family has had some traditions change over time as new children have entered the family. Many times we as adults are hung up on some tradition that worked well in our family years ago, but might not be working well anymore. Creating new traditions when new children come into your home helps them to feel more a part of the family. Often with traditions we just expect everyone knows what we do because that is what we've always done. Take the time to talk with them about what to expect so they, like the other children, can anticipate the fun event. Holiday traditions can be the glue that can cement a child to a new family, but they usually take planning, time and effort on the part of the parents and possibly older children already in the family to make them a success.



**Bullies!** Every classroom has at least one. Whose name comes to mind when you hear the word “bully”? Who was the kid who could upset your day with his verbal, physical, or emotional insults? Most adults who were bullied remember such childhood events vividly.

Bullying among elementary school children and teenagers is a growing problem in many schools in the United States. It’s happening in urban, suburban, and rural schools. Kids who have learning disabilities (LD) or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are especially vulnerable to bullying problems.

While bullying isn’t new, professionals today have a new level of understanding of the problem. Bullying is a learned behavior that can be prevented! Effective bullying prevention programs are being used in progressive school systems throughout the country. It’s important for parents, students, teachers, and school administrators to understand and learn to manage bullying that occurs at school and elsewhere.

### What is Bullying?

“A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative acts on the part of one or more other students. It is a negative action when someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another,” says Dan Olweus, a prominent researcher on bullying behaviors. Bullying may involve physical aggression such as fighting, shoving, or kicking; verbal aggression such as name calling; or more subtle acts such as socially isolating another child. With the increase in numbers of personal computers at home, youth have also learned to use e-mail and web sites to bully or harass others.

### Why Focus on Bullying?

Given the rising concern about violent crime among youth, parents, schools, and communities are concerned about reducing “bullying” behaviors because:

- Persistent bullying can leave long-term scars (e.g., low self-esteem, depression) on victims.** Some victims of bullying may turn to violent means of retaliation. Some severely bullied victims have tried suicide as a means to escape their tormentors.

- Students who bully others are especially likely to engage in other antisocial and delinquent behaviors** such as vandalism, shoplifting, truancy, and illicit drug use. This antisocial behavior pattern often will continue into young adulthood.

- Bullying may contribute to a negative school social climate that is not conducive to good social relationships or learning.** Everyone is affected by bullying, even those not directly involved in the conflict. Youth who are “bystanders” often watch bullying but don’t intervene, because they don’t know what to do and may fear retaliation from the bully.

- Bullying is a widespread problem among school children.** Surveys of 4th-6th graders in several states indicate that 25 percent of all children had been bullied at least “several times” within a two-month period; about 10 percent had been bullied at least once per week. One in five (20 percent) children reported having taken part in bullying other students at least “several times” within the last two months.

### Profile of a Bully

Boys and girls who bully do not have low self-esteem as was once thought. Bullies, in fact, may be average students or even classroom or athletic leaders. At school, bullies typically tease and taunt their victims repeatedly in a nasty way. They intimidate, make fun of, and ridicule other students. They shove, hit, kick, and push their victims around, often damaging the victim’s belongings. It is common for some bullies to manipulate other kids to do their “dirty work” for them while they stay in the background and watch. Youth who do the bullying for others are referred to as “henchmen.” In such cases, it can be difficult to see who the bully really is.

Bullies usually select weaker and relatively defenseless students as their targets. They have a strong need to dominate and subdue other students, to assert

themselves with power and threat, and to get their own way. They may brag about their actual or imagined superiority over other students. They may be hot-tempered, easily angered, impulsive, and have low frustration tolerance. Bullies are seen as being tough, hardened, and having little empathy with students who are victimized. When confronted about their behavior, they are likely to try to talk themselves out of the situation by denying they did anything wrong. Bullies often try to place blame on their victims, saying something like, “They deserved it.”

### Profile of a Victim

Typical victims are children who can be overpowered (physically, mentally, or emotionally) by the bully. They are usually more anxious and unsure of themselves than other students. These children often have a negative attitude toward violence and the use of violence in dealing with others. Victims usually suffer from low self-esteem and view themselves negatively. They often consider themselves failures and feel stupid, ashamed, and unattractive. They may come to believe

# Understanding Bullying

## and its Impact on Kids with Learning Disabilities or ADHD

By: Marlene Snyder, Ph.D

that they “deserve” to be bullied. They are often lonely, friendless, and abandoned at school.

In his pioneering research on bullying behaviors, Dr. Dan Olweus has described two types of victims:

### The Passive or Submissive Victim

- Is non assertive and through his actions may signal to others that he is insecure and won't retaliate if attacked or insulted
- Is cautious, quiet, or anxious
- Cries easily and collapses quickly when bullied
- Has few friends and isn't connected to a social network
- Lacks humor and pro-social skills
- May be physically weak

### The Provocative Victim

- Is both anxious and aggressive
- May cause irritation and disruption around him
- Is easily emotionally aroused
- Prolongs the conflict even when losing

### How Bullying Affects Kids with Learning Disabilities and ADHD

If your child has a learning or attention problem, he may easily become involved in bullying situations. Let's take a look at some of the reasons for this:

- People often assume that kids with AD/HD are bullies because of their hyperactive, impulsive, aggressive, or demanding nature. According to a national survey on school discipline conducted by Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD), about 32 percent of kids with AD/HD are “egged on” by their peers to act out and get into trouble. The study found that many youth with AD/HD were victims of bullies, but when they reacted to the bully, they were punished for poor behavior and the bully was not. Without understanding the dynamics of a bullying situation, adults can further “victimize” the victims of bullying.

- Victims of bullies (especially boys) are often physically weak, oversensitive, and have poor social skills and low self-esteem. This describes many kids with LD or AD/HD.

- Many kids with hyperactive/impulsive AD/HD are provocative victims because they annoy and over-react to bullies.

- Kids who are victimized often learn to get what they need by becoming bullies themselves. In fact, about 16 percent of kids will act as both a bully and a victim at one time or another.

## Gender Differences in Bullying

Most scientific research on bullying has focused on boys. Books that address bullying in girls are starting to appear, but most are written from the personal experience of the authors rather than from scientific research projects. New studies are underway that will help us better understand the dynamics of gender differences in bullying. This is what is currently understood about gender differences in bullying:

- Boys tend to bully with direct physical or verbal aggression.

- Bullying by girls is more difficult to observe. Girls tend to bully with indirect or “sneaky” means of harassment such as social isolation or covert aggression such as spreading rumors or manipulating the friendship relations within the class (e.g., depriving a girl of her “best friend”).

Normal Conflict	Bullying
Happens Occasionally	Happens Repeatedly
Accidental	Done on purpose
Not Serious	Serious-threat of physical harm or emotional or psychological hurt
Equal emotional reaction	Strong emotional reaction on part of the victim
Not seeking power or attention	Seeking power or control
Not trying to get something	Trying to gain material things or power
Remorseful-takes responsibility	No remorse-blames the victim
Effort to solve the problem	No effort to solve the problem

- Boys who bully tend to be older than their victims (whether the victims are boys or girls).

- Girl bullies tend to target other girls who are the same age.

- Girls are more likely to be bullied by a group, which is emotionally devastating.

- Girls are more likely to involve both boys and girls in their bullying pursuits against a victim.

- Boys identify their aggressive behaviors against victims as “bullying” more often than girls.

### Adult Intervention is Key

For most children, bullying experiences will be nothing more than an unpleasant childhood memory. But for those who are more severely bullied, the pain runs deep. Because their days

and weeks are filled with fear, humiliation, and pain inflicted by bullies, they find it difficult to concentrate and participate in class. Kids who are bullied are often absent from school. They are lonely and may become depressed or lash out at their bullies in violent ways.

Bullies who are not stopped are more likely to have criminal records in young adulthood than youth who don't bully. Bullying, therefore, is a serious problem for both the bully and the victim. Both bullies and victims need positive adult intervention to make the bullying stop. Remember that bullying is a learned behavior that can — with adult intervention — be prevented or stopped!

Whether your child is a bully, victim, or bystander, there are steps you can take to coach him toward more positive behavior.

*For more information about bullying or for steps on coaching your child toward more positive behavior visit, [www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=697](http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=697).*



# **SOCIAL SKILLS GROUP**

For Kids grades 1-3

Tuesdays  
4:00-5:30

777 W Center Street in Midvale

Starting October 25th

\$25.00 per session  
sliding fee scale available

Contact Emily at the Family Support Center  
255-6881 ex. 1245

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# **WOMEN'S PROCESS THERAPY GROUP**

An on-going therapy group for women struggling with concerns such as :  
depression, self-esteem, stress, relationships, grief and loss

Thursdays  
1:00-2:00

777 W Center Street in Midvale

Starting October 13th

\$25.00 per session  
sliding fee scale available

Contact Tonja at the Family Support Center  
255-6881



# DON'T MISS THESE GREAT WORKSHOPS

Allies with Families is excited to present a one-of-kind workshop specially designed for siblings (age 8-13) of children with mental health and behavioral challenges and other special needs.

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Sibshops are a celebration of the many contributions made by brothers and sisters. Mental illness and other special needs impact the entire family; including siblings.

Sibshops are fun workshops with a mix of new games (designed to be unique, off-beat, and appealing to a wide ability range), new friends, and discussion activities.

Sibshops are not therapy but rather a recreational program for brothers and sisters of children with special needs. Sibshops are free of charge!

September 29-November 17 (Thursdays)

8 weeks series of Sibshops

6 pm to 8 pm

Ogden Weber Human Services

237 26<sup>th</sup> Street, Ogden

October 5-November 23 (Wednesdays)

8 week series of Sibshops

6:30 pm to 8:30 pm

Davis Behavioral Health

2250 North 1700 West, Layton

Register for Sibshops today! Call Karen at 547-5027 or Allies with Families at 801-292-2515 for information





# Talking to Children about Adoption

By: Jayne Eblering Schooler

What would it be like if you were Kelly? Kelly, now 17, was adopted as an infant. Of course, everyone knew it but Kelly. One afternoon at a family reunion she sat dumbfounded when her cousin asked her what it felt like to be adopted. Kelly, shell-shocked, quietly whispered, “Fine,” and quickly got up to find her parents. Why hadn’t they told her? What would it be like if you were Jordan? Jordan, age 8, knew he was adopted, but he didn’t know why. The truth was, his birth mother loved him very much, but as a young teen she was unequipped to raise Jordan to adulthood. Jordan’s adoptive parents knew the whole story, but they assumed that the less said, the better for everyone. The only problem was that Jordan was left believing there was something “wrong” with him, that he had been unlovable from birth. Why didn’t his adoptive parents realize the complex feelings their son was battling? From a historical perspective, adoption has loomed under the cloak of secrecy for decades. Adoption practitioners believed it would be best to create a new world for all those involved in the adoption circumstance. This world would be a place in which adopted persons were told to forget the past, as though it did not exist; adoptive parents were told to create a new reality and were given freedom to exist in total anonymity; and birth parents were shoved aside and told to erase the present events from their memories. Many individuals who grew up as foster or adopted children during those decades felt that they were reared under the shadow of secrecy, silence, and shame. It proved difficult for them to build their identities and feel secure when key

aspects of their pasts were unknown, unimaginable, and even frightening. The task of communicating to a foster or adopted child about his or her past still challenges parents today. A recent research study of 288 adoptive families reported that fewer than 40 percent of the adoptive parents had given their adopted children all the information they had. More than 25 percent falsified or omitted information. The remaining families gave little or no information about the adoption and, in some cases, never told their child that he or she was adopted. The foster/adoptive family, through their child, becomes connected to the social problems that might have resulted in the adoption plan: alcoholism, drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, child abuse and neglect, mental illness, etc. Although some adoptions occur as the result of birth parents who were simply not emotionally or financially able to care for their child, a majority happen because of traumatic or difficult life circumstances. Because of that potential connection to troublesome experiences, foster and adoptive parents have a crucial responsibility to communicate the circumstances of their child’s past in a manner that will lead to understanding, resolution, and healing. What do parents need to know about communicating to their child about adoption?

## Five Principles of Telling

**1. Initiate conversation about adoption.** Begin early. One benefit of communicating about adoption in the early years

is for the parents to become comfortable about adoption as the way they are building a family. Some believe they should wait until the child asks questions and answer only the questions asked by the child. Some children may never ask. Why? Children often believe that they are being disloyal to the adoptive family when they have feelings and questions about the birth family. As a result, they may avoid conversation about the adoption and the birth family even when they have burdensome questions or troubling feelings. Adoptive parents must look for opportunities to raise the issue of adoption and ask the child for questions. In this way, the adoptive parents assure the child that his or her feelings are normal and expected, and they, as parents, do not feel threatened or believe that the child is disloyal.

**2. Use positive adoption language.** When parents talk with their children, friends, and extended family members, they must model positive adoption terminology. If parents are not aware of their language, they may inadvertently connote negative ideas when they talk about the birth parents, history, or about adoption itself.

**3. Never lie to a child about the past or a birth family member.** Lying about a child's birth parents or history generates serious trust issues. When the truth is revealed in the future due to a search, a slip by either the adoptive parent or extended family, or an accidental discovery of adoption-related documents, a serious rift in the parent/child relationship occurs — a rift which is difficult to repair with an apology or explanation. What began as “protection” of the relationship with the adopted child can become a “termination” of trust and intimacy in that relationship.

**4. Omissions are OK until around the age of 12.** After that, all information should be shared. The complete history may be too complicated or too “adult” to share with a toddler or even a school-aged child. However, as a child nears the teen years, it is important that they move into those years with an understanding of why the adoption happened. Almost all teenagers, unless developmentally delayed, have the cognitive skills and sophistication to know all of their histories. In response to the question “What do you say to an adopted teenager?” The answer is “Everything.” Adopted people deserve to hear all the facts, all the information that concerns their own lives, all of their own histories. In other words, an adopted person deserves to know his or her story. So if, for whatever reason, the full story has not yet been told during childhood, it should be told very early in adolescence (Taken from Randolph Severson's article “Talking to Your Adopted Adolescent About Adoption;” published in *A Collection of the Best Articles on Talking with Kids About Adoption* by Best

of PACT Press).

**5. Don't impose value judgments on the information.** Information about a child's history may seem very negative, even horrific, to adoptive parents or social workers, but may be interpreted quite differently by the child. As stated earlier, information about a child's history should never be changed or given to an older child with significant omissions. Facts must be presented, however, without the overlay of values, and without judgment. The child's feelings for or memories of the birth family may alter his or her perceptions of events. His or her need to have positive feelings for the birth family will definitely color his or her perceptions. If facts are presented in a negative, judgmental fashion, the child interprets this judgment as the adoptive family rejecting his or her birth family, origins, and, ultimately, him or herself. We do not have the right to judge birth parents; understanding comes from “witnessing” without judgment or censure. Children must develop the maturity to do the same, and this “understanding without judgment” must be modeled for them by the people most important to them: their parents.

These are just five principles for talking with children about adoption. Additional principles and insights can be found in *Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child*, which I coauthored.

#### **About the Author:**

*Jayne Eberling Schooler passionately supports foster and adoptive families through education and training. She conducts workshops on adoption, foster care, and family life issues across the country. She is the author of five books in the field, including “Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child: Making Sense of the Past,” from which this article was adapted. Her most recent book, to be released in October, is titled, “Mom and Dad, I'm Pregnant: When Your Daughter or Son Faces an Unplanned Pregnancy.” This book is written from the Schoolers' personal journey. She can be reached at jayeschool@aol.com. Her Web site is www.jayneschooler.com.*



# HEART C LOCAT

NOVEMBER 4TH - DECEMBER 16TH  
**TROLLEY SQUARE**  
SALT LAKE CITY

DECEMBER 19TH - JANUARY 31ST  
**SALT LAKE COUNTY BUILDING**  
SALT LAKE CITY

**PLEASE VISIT THE ABOVE LOCATIONS AND  
FEATURING PROFESSIONAL PICTUR**



# GALLERY TIONS

FEBRUARY 1ST-28TH  
**UNION STATION**  
OGDEN

LATER DATES AND LOCATIONS  
**TBA**

**TO SUPPORT UTAH'S FIRST HEART GALLERY,  
RES OF UTAH'S WAITING CHILDREN.**

# Going and Growing Through Grief and Loss Parenting Traumatized Adoptive Children

By: Dee Paddock

Ten years ago when I was 30, life was good. I'd met the right man, I'd made the right plans, I was pregnant after a painful struggle with infertility. I had been a good girl and, like all good girls, I was going to achieve what I pursued.

Then our baby Sara died at birth. The trauma of losing Sara with no warning brought me to my knees and changed my life forever. During the past decade, I thought I'd taken care of recovering from this loss with therapy and support groups and my work. But when the TWA jet blew up in the sky last July and people died in a shocking tragedy, I was retraumatized. I couldn't stop watching the news, craving more gory details than necessary and unable to concentrate on much else. I realized it was my old trauma activated by something beyond my control "out there."

This reaction happens to your traumatized child every day.

## "Fight, Flight, Freeze"

Dr. Bruce Perry, a researcher at Baylor College of Medicine, studies the impact childhood trauma has on the emotional, behavioral, cognitive, social, and physical functioning of children. He has studied child survivors of the Waco disaster and found that traumatized children can be sitting calmly in a group, talking about something benign like the weather, yet still be in a hyper-aroused physiological state. Although they appear outwardly calm, their resting heart rate may be as high as 140 - 160 beats per minute. They may experience the rush of adrenaline and a hyper-vigilant, heart-racing, breath-racing reaction of "fight, flight, freeze" in response to non-threatening situations at almost any time.

Perry's work shows that, over time, traumatized children may lose the neurological ability to regulate their body's stress response. So even when traumatized children "look" normal, they may be reacting to normal life events as though they are in imminent danger. This hyper-aroused, hyper-vigilant state interferes with a child's ability to pay attention, to learn, and to develop normal relationships.

## What Causes Trauma in Adoption?

Many adopted children have been traumatized by the people who gave them birth, or by others entrusted to care for them and love them. And many are traumatized in foster care systems because our culture values the genetic connection between parent and child over all other ties. In our society, parents may abuse or neglect their children repeatedly, but because they are "blood," we trap them in foster care to try to maintain these relationships. This causes even more trauma for children.

Other adopted children may experience trauma when they have the ability to understand what adoption means. Around age seven or eight, children begin to see that belonging to their adoptive family means they lost something very significant — their birth family. They may process adoption as: "My parents didn't keep me. They didn't want me. They hurt me." Children often focus on their birth moms, asking, "Why didn't she want me? I cried too much. I ate too much. I was worse than my brothers and sisters. Is that why I was given away?"

## They Can't Tell Us!

Everyone wants to have smart kids who are verbal and can tell us what they feel, want, and need. But traumatized children hold so much inside because it's not safe to tell it, or because they don't know it themselves, or because of what Dr. Perry is discovering. His research shows that children who have been traumatized show abnormal brain development and that some parts of their brains simply aren't available for use. So it's no coincidence these children have learning disabilities, and no surprise they act out. They're in pain; acting out is the only way they can show how much the world hurts them. Their behaviors can tell us a great deal

about their internal experience of being traumatized and terrorized.

When my husband John and I started to see that our son Cody, adopted from Korea at age four, had problems, we went to professionals who said, "You just need to love him more." Love him more? I just wanted him to go far away! We had learned quickly that a traumatized child's acting out can make parenting hellish and totally dispel the adoption myth that love heals everything. Cody acts out because his experiences taught him that the grown-ups who were supposed to love him hurt him. John and I are the stand-ins for a birth father who was abusive, drank too much, and hurt little children. Cody is not intentionally trying to hurt us — but he acts out in his young life to create distance between himself and the grown-up world.

## What Triggers Acting Out?

Even when family life is relatively calm and safe, traumatized adopted children can be triggered into the alarm state of "fight, flight, freeze." Cody steals when he is triggered, and he can be triggered by fear, exhaustion, pain, nightmares, medications, or by thinking about traumatic or emotional events. The first time Cody stole money at school, it was from a teacher who loves him and got close to him. Because he fears getting too dependent on people emotionally, he took five dollars out of her wallet as a way to create distance by betraying her trust.

It's also easy for parents to get triggered by a traumatized child. Every time the phone rings during the school week, I get that "fight, flight, freeze" feeling too. I feel physically sick when Cody's school teachers call because they seldom call to say what a great guy he is. But Cody steals because he gets triggered, and he gets triggered because he was traumatized as a very young child. Parents of traumatized children have to become detectives — you don't know what the triggers are until you put on your Sherlock Holmes hat and watch your children carefully. They'll leave lots of clues about what triggers their trauma response.

## Trauma Triggers Grief

Now that I understand what Cody has been through and am more realistic about who he is, I grieve about not being able to fix this. Like many other parents, I'm grieving the loss of the "perfect" child. And I grieve for the innocent child that someone hurt, irreparably.

Our traumatized children need to grieve too.

As parents, we must teach our children to say therapeutic "good-byes." In this culture, we don't always teach our kids to learn how to deal with losses that are final — like adoption. Traumatized children have a lot of mourning to do so they can do some living. And the more mourning they do, the more room they have in those broken hearts for love. As an example, in our family we have a ritualized "good-bye" to the teachers at the end of every school year.

Because many of our children will never have contact with their birth families, we must teach them to live with the loss and ambivalence that are normal in adoption. These are tough feelings to tolerate; they make traumatized children feel helpless and powerless. To stop such feelings, traumatized adopted children split the world into good and bad — they can't deal with the idea that the woman who gave birth to them has hurt them or abandoned them, or placed them for adoption. They split off their rage at being abandoned, hurt, or neglected, and put it somewhere else, usually on an adoptive parent!

Cody was a master at showing me his rage and making me the "bad parent," as if he were saying, "Every time you get close, I'm going to sabotage that." On the other hand, he would show his dad a lot of sweetness — proving to the "good parent" that he was really easy-going and happy to be in our family. We were experiencing our son's traumatized feelings and behaviors in two very different

and conflicting ways. In the face of this splitting behavior, John and I thought we were going insane and knew the stress Cody was creating could easily turn into a couple's brawl.

But when parents fight, traumatized children are quietly satisfied because they have put their rage and misery out there where other people can handle it for them. It's a coping tool they use to survive. If our family is on the verge of splitting down the middle, then Cody gets to say, "That's what always happens. It happened in my birth family; it's happening here; it always happens." Then he feels powerful — he's able to get the grown-ups to act out his pain — and he doesn't feel so unbearably helpless.

### Put the Adults in Charge

Our initial goal as parents should not be to have traumatized children fall in love with us; we first need to help them feel safe. When children don't believe that even their basic physical needs will be met, there's no room for love and trust. "To be rooted is probably the most important and least recognized need of the human soul," writes author Simone Weil. Our kids have had their roots torn; they haven't been watered or fed. Children like Cody have no idea what normal life means—what love means, what trust means—because of their early experiences.

So we must start immediately to contain the acting-out behaviors and stop worrying so much about how our traumatized child "feels." Bad behavior is not okay because it makes people pull away from our children. Parents should create a more rigidly structured environment that is predictable and consistent. My generation was raised to have a lot of choices, but traumatized children often can't deal with choices. They're desperate to know that adults are strong and brave enough to take charge, but they're going to test your determination every step of the way.

We have to teach traumatized children how to be more verbal and how to negotiate with adults for what they want and need. For instance, they may steal things because they believe that's the only way they'll get them, or become aggressive because they don't know how else to express their anger. So push your children to tell you what they want and need. Reward the words, rather than the behaviors. Tell your children that they will not get what they want by acting it out. Be sure to reward the verbal expression of wants, needs, or feelings, even if you can't grant the requests.

Parents must become skilled at decreasing the trauma response in traumatized children. Give your children small, manageable elements of daily control that will increase their sense of mastery and competence. Give them therapeutic information; teach them a normal response to life's stresses each time they act out a trauma response. And most important, don't lie to your traumatized children. Don't lie about their past, don't lie about the trauma, and don't lie about the challenges of healing from trauma.

### Intimacy Scares Them

In our family, we use the "sit-out" to contain bad behaviors and don't ask, "Why are you acting out?" The goal we emphasize is stopping the behavior. Sometimes John and I will speak about our son in the third person because it makes the conversation less personal for him. "Is Cody going to have a good

day?" or "Cody seems angry." Actually, traumatized children often feel soothed when we step back and behave as caretakers rather than parents for awhile. Why? Because the intimacy of family life terrifies them. You see, they fear that if they fall in love with you, you'll leave them or hurt them. They will do everything they can to prevent that from happening.

"The elevator to success is out of order. You'll have to take the stairs, one step at a time," says author Joe Girard. As parents of traumatized children, we want successes to be quick and impressive so they reinforce our belief that we're doing the right thing. But in reality, we have to hang in there as long as necessary. We also need occasional respite from our traumatized children so that we can nurture ourselves and our other relationships. Remember, change takes time.

Expect to experience *deja vu* during this change process, just like I had *deja vu* when Cody stole from a second teacher's wallet. And expect that the more you work to contain the behavior, the more your child will act out initially. By anticipating that you will take two steps backward for every step forward, you won't set yourself up for disappointment and failure. And be sure to celebrate progress — Cody may have taken a five dollar bill from his teacher but he left the twenty! That showed some empathy on his part and we want to celebrate progress.

### Growth Comes out of Grief

When Sara died, I thought my life was over. I couldn't get out of bed because I didn't see the point. I decided I would only be okay if I could know where Sara was, and that she was okay. In their own ways, our traumatized adopted kids try to make sense out of their losses too.

I eventually realized Sara was ahead of me on life's journey; that she knows more than I do. Nietzsche wrote, "That which does not kill me makes me stronger," and we must teach this to our traumatized children every day.

As a result of Sara's death, I have been given many gifts: my adopted children, my work, and the considerable honor of helping parents and traumatized children live a better life together. Traumatized children need our patience, support, understanding, and yes, our love, so they can begin to find the gifts in their lives. You cannot undo what happened to them in the past — you can't even make it smaller. Someone once said, "Sooner or later you have to give up the hope of having a better past." So focus on what you can do — you can help your traumatized children learn to count on you and make the rest of their lives bigger.

*Dee Paddock is a psychotherapist, consultant, and adoptive mother of three who specializes in "Families With a Difference" issues — including those related to adoption, foster care, infertility, infant loss, and parenting children with special needs. She runs a private psychotherapy and consulting practice in Denver, and speaks to many groups and organizations both inside and outside the U.S.*

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## Darion is waiting...



Darion, age 14, is the type of person who hates to see others hurt or disappointed. He is a very loving and kind-hearted child. As a very accepting teen, Darion gets along well with others and has a very mellow personality. Darion would like to have a mom and dad he can call his own.

Like most young men his age, Darion loves sports, swimming, camping, TV, video games and being with his foster family and friends. His caseworker notes he does well in picking high quality friends as well.

Prior to coming into care, Darion was only taken to school once in a while, so he is working hard to catch up. He is not used to being motivated by school or work, but he has taken great strides toward improvement and expectations are that he will continue.

Darion's caseworker feels he would do well in a two-parent home, regardless of age differential between siblings.

Financial assistance for medical care, therapy and adoption costs may be available

*For more information about Darion please contact The Adoption Exchange at 1-866-872-7212*



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