



UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

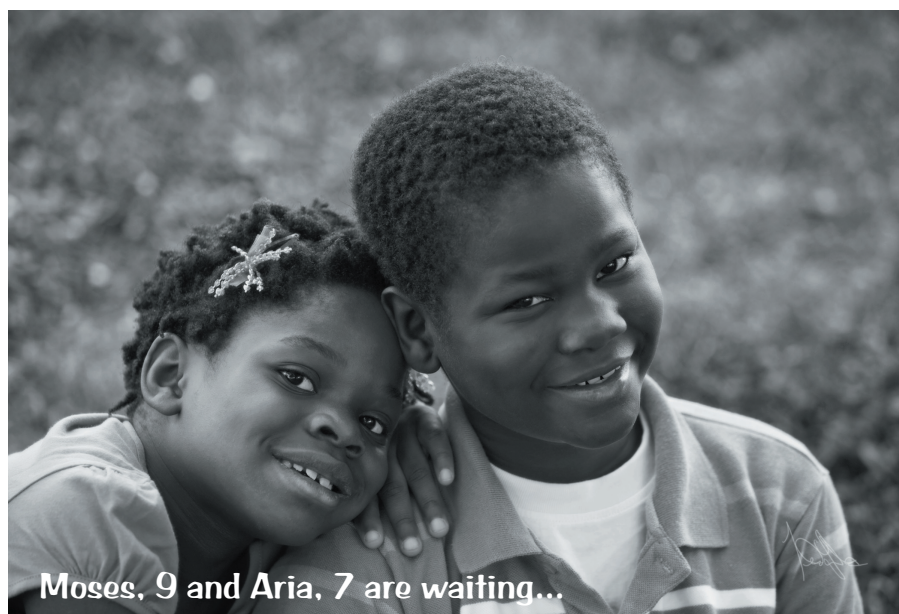
NOVEMBER 2007

Michael, age 8 is waiting...

UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

QUARTERLY DCFS NEWSLETTER



Moses, 9 and Aria, 7 are waiting...

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If you are interested in any of the waiting children you see in this publication, please contact The Adoption Exchange for more information at 801.265.0444.

November 2007
Kathy Searle, Editor
Lindsay Kaeding, Design Director

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ALONE

-By Chris, age 12



Brittani, age 14 is waiting...

**As I sit here with my thoughts
I wonder why
I will face the world alone
until I die.**

**My heart is full of sadness
Feeling sorry for myself
For I've no one to love me,
No, not even myself.**

**Everybody has someone,
Everybody has a home.**

**Nobody knows the feeling
Of what it's like to be alone.**

**Life seems to work
For everyone but me.**

I'm loving someone,

**But that someone doesn't
love me.**

I really wish I had a family

I really wish I had a home.

I really wish I had a someone,

So that I wouldn't be alone.

Say Hello to Brittani!

This happy teenager is fun to be around! She is a playful young woman who loves to joke around. Brittani loves to be social with friends and enjoys just hanging out and having a good time.

Brittani is currently in 9th grade and will move on to her Sophomore year this fall. She is at grade level, shows improvements, and gets good grades.

Brittani has some difficulty trusting adults due to some childhood trauma but is very open to new experiences. She has good relationships with the adults and peers in her life. She is working through these challenges in weekly individual therapy.

This happy teen wants very much to be adopted and to have a consistent family who will love and support her. If your family is able to provide Brittani with these necessities, we urge you to inquire. Financial assistance for medical care, therapy & adoption costs may be available.

Caring for Ourselves: Caring for Our Children

-Dr. Kathy Moroz



As the adoptive parents of a hurt and vulnerable child, you face the challenges every day of helping your kids take in the safety and support you offer them. Even on the best of days you may scratch your head and wonder what on earth is going on in their brains. On bad days, you may be wondering which screws are loose in your own head. And yet, you approach this challenge with wide, open arms and a big heart. You also meet this challenge with the wisdom of experience. Your well-functioning brain allows you to make use of information from your senses, including your intuitive sixth sense, to make choices about your responses to things going on around you and to communicate your ideas and feelings to others.

Granted, we all have our brain quirks, and many of

us have experienced trauma or, at the very least, some major hurts and losses in our own lives. But hopefully, we have also experienced unconditional love and support along the way, and these experiences have helped us become strong in the broken places and mostly whole. Caring and compassion led you to reach out to these hurt children because you know how much they need safety, protection, guidance and limits as well as basic resources and opportunities to make a good life for themselves. You want to show them a way out of the over-and-over cycle of abuse and trauma that has likely consumed their parents and their parents' parents before them. This legacy of trauma may be close to home if you are now parenting your grand child or a niece or nephew. And while outside experts sometimes offer helpful information, your own day-to-day observations combined with your wisdom from life

experiences actually provide you with an excellent tool kit for helping your child.

As infants, we start out completely helpless and vulnerable. Survival depends on our connection to at least one other person who is physically, if not emotionally, present enough to keep us alive. Without this basic care, we do not survive. Surviving, however, does not mean thriving. Many adopted infants and young children initially cling to birth parents who fail them in many ways. Regardless of the quality of their first parenting, they become attached to the best caregiver they have. After all, their survival depends on this relationship, even when their birth parents are the source of their greatest hurts and fears.

As children learn to do whatever it takes to keep their caregiver nearby, they learn how to do this thing we call "being in a relationship with another person." They actually figure out the best strategy for engaging and keeping their parent near by, and since survival is a life or death matter, their brains latch onto these strategies with incredible holding power. It turns out this is the way the brain works: if survival is involved, we remember it. Keep in mind that this process of learning how-to-do-relationships begins very early and is clearly established by the time a child is 18 months old, but not set in concrete. Equally important, we know that insecure babies can grow into a sense of security over time through stable relationships with trustworthy, loving adults. And this, of course, is where you come in.

We can now think of a child's attachment behavior along a continuum, ranging from very insecure to very secure behavior. Both insecure and secure patterns of attachment are strong and tenacious. Often, in order to survive, children do what they have to do to get along with a parent who is preoccupied, depressed, angry, hostile, neglectful, rejecting or unable to create or maintain any sense of safety or predictability. In this way, many of the insecure attachment behaviors that you as adoptive parents later struggle with reflect the child's heroic efforts to make the best of this initial bad situation. These behaviors are set in motion as the child compromises their own needs in order to keep their survival person close by. Later, when you offer to take this burden off their shoulders, they have trouble letting go of the controls and trusting you to really be there for them. Remem-

ber...anything that has to do with survival tends to get stuck in our brains. Although understanding can go a long way toward keeping you from losing your mind and heart, it still hurts to see them struggle so against the possibility of a new, safe and loving reality. Don't despair though, any shift toward greater security, however small, is a significant step toward more positive social interactions and long term relationships.

Let's look at two examples of how trauma may be transmitted from a hurt parent, male or female, to a hurting child. First, imagine a little boy whose birth father does not like to hear him crying. This dad may believe that boys have to grow into strong men and therefore, baby boys need to learn how to be tough right from the get go. Weak boys grow into weak men. Worse still, weak men get picked on and they deserve the treatment they get. This dad may even remember what happened to him when he cried as a child and his dad and his older brother teased him and called him a baby. Maybe he even got the belt for crying when he was hurt. Shamed and rejected, he feared his father's complete abandonment of him. Now, his little boy will learn to do whatever he has to do in order to keep his father from becoming enraged and rejecting him. He will learn how to suppress his feelings so as not to incur dad's wrath and disgust. In order to do this, however, he will have to disown the sensitive, vulnerable parts of himself and disconnect from any emotional or sensory expressions (crying or getting red in the face or stammering, for example) that might betray his vulnerability. These patterns may remain outside both father's and son's awareness until and unless there is enough safety and emotional support to take the lid off this Pandora's box and explore and process all the disowned emotions and behaviors. Until such integration is possible, both father and son will remain fragmented and less than whole.

Now let's turn to a birth mother who was traumatized in her own childhood and continues to experience trauma as an adult. If she feels unsafe in her own body and in the world, if she views the world as a frightening place and other people as threatening or dangerous, she conveys these views to her child through her body language, her touch, her words and her actions. To protect her-

self, she may cut off awareness of her own feelings and sensations in response to physical, sexual or emotional abuse. Now as a parent, she may find it difficult to tolerate her baby's feelings. She may become anxious and agitated or depressed and withdrawn when confronted with her child's needs and helplessness. As a result, she may misread or be unresponsive to her child's emotional cues. If mom uses alcohol or drugs to cope with her own pain and trauma, these substances will further skew or deaden her responsiveness to her child.

Babies learn to trust their own perceptions and emotional responses when these are acknowledged, validated and reflected back to them through their parents' mirroring responses. Children who do not receive accurate and empathetic reflection, as in the two examples above, may experience delayed and disorganized development of the part of the brain that processes emotions and sensory information. While we can't completely undo the hurt that happened to these children before we came on the scene, we can meet them where they are and go from there. The first step in helping a child recover from trauma is safety and security, and this is a step we may need to revisit on a moment-to-moment or hourly basis. Traumatized children have no place of safety in their own bodies. We help them gain a sense of safety and security on the inside by providing it for them on the outside, and we do this over and over again.

So how do you turn things around for these kids? Here are a few easier-said-than-done steps for adoptive parents. Don't be surprised if these steps have as much to do with you as they do with your children.

1) Increase your awareness of the potential for drama that surrounds all of us in any family, friendship, work or community situation. This phenomenon is not personal or unique to adoptive parents. Drama can knock you off balance and drain you of energy. Resist the temptation to get involved. From a practical standpoint, you need all your energy and conscious control over where your energy goes. You can't really afford to have it leaking out in sneaky ways or cascading away when big upsets fog your brain and throw your body into red alert.

In addition, be aware of any unresolved trauma in your own life. We may feel hurt, angry, anxious or paralyzed in situations that tap into an old emotional injury, and we tend to take these situations very personally when often they really aren't. If any of this sounds familiar, you may want to get some additional support from a therapist or counselor who can help you shift your perspective on these old hurts and help you clear trauma that may be stuck in your body-mind-spirit.

2) Take very good care of yourselves – physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually and make sure you have lots of support from people who are empathetic and attuned to you. This support may come from family members or friends who really “get” you, the ones who love you unconditionally and help bring you back from the brink when you are overwhelmed with life. Staying balanced means making small adjustments from moment to moment and avoiding the lurching off the road and back on again kind of balancing we sometimes do. Many parents have a hard time with this one. We really believe we're supposed to put everyone else's needs first, and we do...until we get sick, have a meltdown, feel drained and exhausted or more than a little crazy and frantic. Enough emotional and physical support will keep you out of rigidity and allow you to be both consistent and flexible in your responses. Brittle things tend to break, and you don't want to reach the breaking point. If you can stay limber in your thinking, reactions and expectations you'll be able to laugh at yourself or at least at your situation. [Laughter releases neurochemicals in the brain that make us feel good and may actually renew and heal cells all over the body.] Flexibility will give you a lot more ease and comfort in the long run than a steady diet of ultimatums, disappointment and frustration.

3) If you are co-parenting with a partner, the two of you need to be on the same wavelength with each other. There's a very good reason for a vertical hierarchy of authority in the family, and you and your partner are the alpha dogs. Many traumatized children feel most comfortable when they are in charge or when anarchy and chaos prevail. They expect boundary violations and double crosses and unconsciously wander into them or make them happen. This means you have to be extra vigilant about

your own boundaries and ways that you may merge with others or allow them to merge with you. Your children are great teachers in this regard. They may catch you off guard, when you're tired or emotionally drained, and provoke a fight between you and your partner or between you and another child in the family. This requires you to be awake and alert and to know what you're looking at. It also helps if you agree about what you're seeing and how you respond to it. Stick together; you really need each other.

4) Ensure your child's safety by creating structure, predictable routines and clear boundaries. You provide containment for your child's out-of-touch-with reality ideas and over-the top feelings and behaviors. You provide this containment for your child at home, and you often have to get other people, even members of your own extended families, on board with the program. This is no small feat! It requires you to be very clear with yourself about the limits and consequences your child needs and to be proactive in getting and maintaining consistency in your child's various environments. And even though you set limits from a place of love, not anger or desperation, others may challenge your perceptions and seek to "rescue" the child from the limits and consequences you set. Remember: They don't live with this child and they don't really understand how "outside the norm" your child's behaviors can be. Avoid second guessing what you know about your child, and don't allow others to undermine your position.

5) Show your child through your actions that you are aware of your own emotions and sensations and that you know how to stop and think before you react impulsively. You can also teach them about making choices by letting them know how you choose one idea over another. In doing this, you are helping the child strengthen interconnections between the feeling and thinking halves of the brain, and this in turns promotes self-awareness, self-regulation, creativity, and flexibility.

Fear and pain trigger a defensive, self-protective response within the self. This initial response is designed to cut off awareness of painful thoughts, feelings and sensations. Yet, the brain gets carried away with this job and soon screens out all or most sensory and emotional information. To help children get

reacquainted with the sensory world, we first soothe and comfort them. When they're feeling safe, we encourage them to explore what's going on in their bodies and how body sensations let them know how they are feeling. Helping children find the words to express their feelings and thoughts also promotes the development of new connections between brain cells and parts of the brain.

While early experiences affect brain development, our brains continue to develop and change as long as we are alive. Many times when there is an injury to part of the brain, for example a head injury or a stroke, another part of the brain may take over the job of the injured part. There is also evidence that early damage to the brain due to trauma in childhood may in fact be healed by safe, stable, loving and supportive parenting. On those hardest of days when it seems like your child is taking three steps backward for every step forward and not taking in a word you say, hold onto your optimism with the knowledge that change is always possible.

When you can't get them to change, look inside – is there something you can change about your reaction to them? The very best we can offer our children (and ourselves) is to be balanced, stable, healthy and creative – and to stick around for a very long time, loving them wholeheartedly, no matter what.

Kathy Moroz is on the "hindsight" side of parenting with four young adult children, one of whom joined the family at age 13. She is on the faculty at the University of Utah, College of Social Work in the Social Research Institute and has had a private, clinical practice for many years. Dr. Moroz's research, writing, teaching and clinical practice focus on promoting secure attachment relationships and helping children and adults recover from trauma. Through a partnership between the University of Utah and the Utah Division of Child and Family Services, Dr. Moroz offers training for preadoptive and adoptive parents on attachment, trauma and the relational brain. These free trainings are offered regularly in the Salt Lake, Ogden and Provo areas. For specific information about training dates and locations, please contact Dr. Moroz by email at kathleenjmoroz@socwk.utah.edu or telephone 801-587-9278.

Announcements &

COLLEGE COST REDUCTION and ACCESS ACT 2007

On Thursday, September 27, President Bush signed into law the College Cost Reduction and Access Act (Public Law 110-84), the bill that includes the Fostering Adoption to Further Student Achievement Act amendment, making it possible for teens in foster care to be adopted without losing access to college financial aid. Under this new law, youth who are adopted after their 13th birthday will not have to include their parents' income in the calculations for determining their need for financial aid. More information to come when available.

2007 NOVEMBER ADOPTION CELEBRATION

Join the Utah Adoption Council and The Adoption Exchange on NOVEMBER 3rd, 2007 from 11:00-1:00 at BOONDOCKS FUN CENTER for a day to celebrate November Adoption Month. Free miniature golfing, tokens and food. All day passes will be available to purchase the day of. Please contact The Adoption Exchange at 801-265-0444 with any questions.

FREE 8-WEEK PARENTING COURSE

Project Reality presents Communities Empowering Parents. A parenting program for the entire family. Spend one evening a week with other parents looking for advice on communication, discipline, talking to kids about sex, alcohol, drugs, violence and gangs, how to talk about and manage emotions. Sessions will be taught by people in the community with specialized training. Classes will be held on Thursday evenings beginning in January 2008 at Longview Elementary, in Murray. For more information contact Julie Carter or Anne Smith at 801-264-7428.

SUB FOR SANTA

Help provide Christmas for the many foster children that are waiting in care. If you are interested in donating items, sponsoring a child or wrapping presents please contact The Adoption Exchange at 801-265-0444. Sub for Santa will begin in early November.

& Events...

PERSPECTIVES ON ADOPTION-Annual Adoption Conference

Save the date for the 2008 UAC Conference. Sponsored by the Utah Adoption Council. To be held April 9th and 10th at the Southtowne Expo Center. More information to come when available.

PEACEFUL PARENTING CLASS: By Ned and Kathy Searle

November 9th

7-9 pm

Utah Foster Care Foundation Offices

5296 Commerce #400

This class discusses the losses involved with foster care and adoption and how they affect parents and the children they provide care for. A peaceful heart leads to a peaceful parent; a peaceful parent leads to a peaceful home, a peaceful home leads to a peaceful child. To register contact UFCF Trainer Liz Rivera at 801-994-5205 or by e-mail; liz@utahfostercare.org.

The Art & Science of Love: A Workshop for Couples

November:

Saturdays: 3rd and 10th -- 9:00 a.m.—3:00 p.m.

December:

Saturdays: 1st and 8th -- 9:00 a.m.—3:00 p.m.

The University of Utah, DCFS, and the Utah Foster Care Foundation are partnering to present a FREE workshop intended to strengthen marriages. The goal of the workshop begins by focusing on the couple's relationship and then translating that to all relationships within the family and aimed at helping parents meet the challenge of raising adopted children. The FREE workshop is designed to promote healthy attachments between all family members. Workshop presented by Bruce Parsons, P.h.D. PLEASE REGISTER FOR THE SEMINAR by Calling : Rebecca Smith 585-3524

Four Building Blocks

LeRoy Franke, LCSW and Lorna Franke, MEd

For a number of years now, we have had the opportunity to meet with numerous foster and adoptive parents to discuss the challenges they face in their family relationships related to the foster care and adoption experience. It has become clearly evident that fostering or adopting children creates unique issues in marriages and families that need addressing.

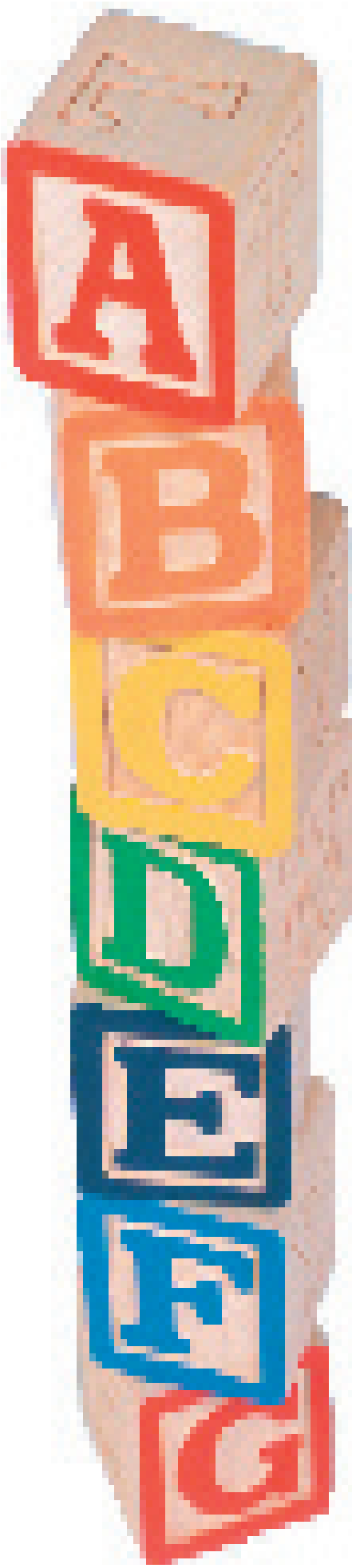
In an effort to provide support to foster and adoptive families, we have explored stress management and relationship building approaches that might help deal with some of the challenges foster and adoptive families face. We have learned over the years that there are some very specific skills that can be used to help them strengthen their marriage and family. We would like to briefly explore four of those skills that have proven helpful to parents in building and maintaining effective marriage and family relationships. (Note: These relationship skills are more fully explored in a curriculum developed for The Rural Adoption Cooperative, a federal grant project hosted by The Adoption Exchange in Aurora, Colorado.)

These skills, which we have chosen to label as “The Four Basic Building Blocks of an Effective Relationship” include: 1) commitment; 2) communication skills; 3) creative conflict resolution; and, 4) shared goals and values.

A Successful foster and adoptive parents all seem to possess a high level of COMMITMENT to their families. This commitment involves a personal decision to pursue a course of action and incredible internal fortitude to maintain that course. It includes a decision to love an individual unconditionally, regardless of the outcome of that decision, and whether that love is returned in kind or not. At times, it may also require a high tolerance level for discomfort while working through a number of issues. Yet these parents, like Don Quixote, continue to remain optimistic while “fighting the windmills.” They stay focused on an objective, with all of its ups and downs and twists and turns until the ultimate goal is achieved.

Commitment to a relationship includes eight key elements: 1) It makes the daily decision to love. 2) It looks for and builds on the good. 3) It loves unconditionally. 4) It builds trust. 5) It makes the relationship a priority and includes quality time to be together. 6) It shares openly and honestly. 7) It is firm, and includes “tough love” which provides the needed structure and consequences to learn to live in intimate relationships. 8) It is kind, charitable and easily forgives. This incredible level of commitment extends to all of the family relationships, not just to the foster or adopted child, but to the marriage partner, other children and family members as well.

Great miracles happen in the families who are able to continually affirm each another by looking for and building on the good in one another. The affirmations allow the families to focus the majority of their time and energy on reinforcing what is going right



of an Effective Relationship

within the family. The tone of the family is fun and full of joy. The children in these families begin to understand that they have inherent value in just being who they are, and can begin behaving more closely to the new vision they and their families have for them. We invite families to monitor their communications for a day or two to determine the percentage of their communications that are positive and nurturing vs. negative. We highly recommend a daily dose of 80% affirming, positive messages. How is your family doing?

B EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION is the second building block. The communication skills in successful foster and adoptive families involve far more than just the sharing of information; they also include the sharing of thoughts and feelings. They help children begin to understand consequences of their behavior, particularly its impact on other family members. (When you... I feel... because...).

Critical, blaming and judgmental communications children had received prior to their foster and adoption experience are replaced by clear communications which are direct and either nurture or establish clear consequences for negative behavior. This communication is not loud, harsh or angry, but is calm, focused and consistent.

The non-verbal communication powerfully compliments the verbal communication where family members are comfortable with “good” touch, face-to-face discussions and good eye contact. This includes frequent expressions of appreciation not only verbally, but accompanied with a hand on the shoulder, a hug or a warm smile.

C CREATIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION evolves from effective communication, wherein the needs of each family member are clearly expressed, and when conflicts arise win/win solutions are sought. Creative conflict resolution is neither permissive nor authoritarian. When conflicts of needs are identified within the family, it allows for creative brainstorming to find alternatives that are acceptable to all family members. It promotes the open sharing of feelings, builds trust and confidence in one another and helps family members feel valued and keeps the “I count/you count” levels high in the family.

Arguments and loud voices are replaced by some clear “rules for fair fighting” which include effective listening, expressing needs, wants and hopes in “I feel” messages, with no critical, blaming language, and a continual demonstration of mutual respect for each other’s feelings.

D Finally, effective families learn to develop SHARED GOALS AND VALUES. The vision a family has of its mission and purpose is critical to unifying a family in a positive direction. This gives life meaning and direction, and has a spiritual component that may or may not be worship based. These values are clearly defined and taught and modeled by the adults in the home.

Some of the unifying values held by most families include love, honesty, trust, charity, kindness, work, personal responsibility, forgiveness, service and caring for others.

The best gift families can give a child is self-esteem, self-confidence, resilience to face a challenging world and a sense of connectedness and belonging. The above skills can help develop those attributes in the children we will be sending forth from our families.

INDIVIDUAL RESPITE

Are you an adoptive parent who just needs a break once in a while? Would you like to go out on a date with your spouse or just clean your house? Our mission is to strengthen and support adoptive families in our community. To be the best parent you can be, it is important to put a priority on getting your own needs met.

The Adoption Respite program was designed to alleviate adoption disruption by providing quality child-care so you can take a break from the demands of being a parent. As long as one of your children has been adopted from foster care, all of your children in your home qualify for services. We serve ages 0-17 and can offer child-care in your own home or at the Family Support Center, or in some instances in your own home.



(Ogden Respite worker Melanie plays with Luke.)

We provide care for children with special needs pending a family assessment. This assessment is to identify the needs of the family and then match the children with the most appropriate caregiver.

There is a small fee of just \$5.00 an hour per family, regardless of how many children we care for from your family. A limited number of scholarships are available if you qualify and need assistance to help pay for this service.

Here are some ways you can use this time of respite for yourself:

Go on a date Clean your house
Go shopping Take a break

Here is where you can use us:

We can come to your home
You can bring your children to the Family Support Center

We also offer **Date Nights** at the Family Support Center of Ogden. Children can come to the Center and enjoy quality care, nurturing activities, and a nutritious meal. You get to go out for a night of fun, knowing that your children are safe and having fun as well.

Our date nights are from 5:00 – 9:00 pm on the following nights:

November 2, November 10, November 16, November 30, December 14.

CARE

December 8th and 12th our nursery will be open from 1-5 p.m. To give you time for shopping for Christmas.

We encourage parents to give us a call to find out more information or to set up an appointment for this wonderful service. We look forward to seeing you and your family!

We have several locations that will support you in your adoption,

Northern Utah Region: Family Support Center of Ogden
1181 S. Christmas Box Lane
Ogden, UT 84404
(801) 393-3113

Orem/Provo Region: Family Support and Treatment Center of Utah Valley
1255 North 1200 West
Orem, UT 84057
(801) 229-1181

Eastern: Family Support Center of Carbon County
108 North 300 East
Price, UT 84501
(435) 637-0268

Salt Lake: Family Support Center
777 West Center Street
Midvale, UT 84047
(801) 255-6881

Western: Family Support and Treatment Center
1255 North 1200 West
Orem UT 84057
(801) 229-1181

Southwest: Family Support Center of Southwestern Utah
102 North 200 East
Cedar City, UT 84720
(435) 586-0791





Nichole, who is a junior in high school, was adopted at age nine. Now 16, she dreams of becoming a teacher, but is still haunted by memories of her past.

Taunting Nightmare

By Nichole Johnson

I was only three when I was taken from my birth mother. The day it happened was an incredible journey that now, at 16, I can remember as clear as glass.

My little brother and I lived in a small beaten-up trailer with a front “lawn” consisting of rocks, dirt, and a few scattered toys. On this day, inside the darkening trailer, my brother and I had wrapped ourselves in tobacco-stained blankets to try and stay warm. He was curled up next to me on the bed.

Mom had left around noon while it was still bright out, and had turned off the heat—maybe for safety or to save money. The rustling and rattling of poorly taped windows accompanied a draft of cold air that raised the hair on my back and arms.

Thoughts rushed through my head. I wondered where Mom was and why she was always gone. My stomach knotted and my eyes grew blurry as I thought about how, when she was home, my mom was always mad, always yelling, “I hate you! You’re worthless! No one would ever love you, especially when you do things wrong!” The smell of alcohol on her breath made my empty stomach feel sick.

I never knew why my mom was always so mad. I tried to do the right thing; I took care of my brother, tried to make meals for us, and kept us as clean as possible. Nothing was ever good enough for her.

I thought about she fought with her boyfriends and how, trembling with fear, I would hide my brother in the corner while bottles smashed against the wall sending red, brown, and yellow glass cascading to the floor. I recalled the screaming voices, often directed at me, the punching, the crying, and more yelling.

One time an ex-boyfriend stabbed my mom in the arm. That night, for trying to help her, he locked me—in only a nightgown and socks—outside all night. That boyfriend often locked me outside for “time outs,” but not usually for that long.

On this night, as my brother slept, tears fell from my eyes like a heavy rain. Gazing through the speckled glass at the rain outside, I wished someone who loved me was there to hold me and keep me warm. Then the water reminded me of the time a drunk babysitter forced me into a bathtub and held my head underwater until I passed out.

Two headlights interrupted my thoughts. A burst of joy warmed me. I was not alone with my brother anymore. Soon a second set of headlights cut through the night and then blue flashing lights. Maybe it was one of my mom's boyfriends, I thought. Maybe it was my mom. I gave my brother a few gentle pushes to wake him, even though Mom never came home this early. It was usually morning when she stumbled in and passed out.

My brother and I crawled out of bed and followed the short route to the kitchen and living room. The cold plastic floor under my feet sent goose bumps up my legs. As we shuffled forward, I noticed strange shadows in the kitchen, and lights darting here and there like someone was looking for something. The hair on my back stood up. Something was not right.

The happy feeling became a boulder in my stomach when I heard strange voices outside. A man came to the door and shined his light through the taped glass—glass broken when one of Mom's boyfriends shoved her into it. When he called out, "Hello?" I grabbed my brother and hid under the kitchen table. My heart was racing like it would jump out of my body.

The man knocked again. "Hello? Is anyone there?" he asked more loudly. A beam of light hit the spot where we were crouching, and I started to cry. I was terrified and felt completely helpless. I wanted my mom; I wanted someone to comfort and protect us.

"I see something," said the man to his partner. Both men, one stout and the other slender, started to come in. My body froze. Once inside, the men walked over to us, talked briefly to each other, and then told my brother and me that everything was going to be okay. They said we were safe now.

"Safe now?" I asked myself. What did they mean? Was my mom home? Why were these strangers in our trailer?

As the stout man moved to pick me up, I began to sob. He repeated that everything was okay and that he wasn't going to hurt me. I let him lift me. He wrapped me in a cozy new blanket that smelled nothing like our blankets. The other man picked up my brother. Then they carried us to the car. What were they

going to do to us? Had Mom sent them?

The outside air was cold. I remember seeing the men's breath clouding the air as they talked to each other, shaking their heads. As they opened the car doors and put us inside, I was still crying, but soon I felt how warm it was and noticed how clean the seats were. The stout man told us again that we were safe.

The thin man put a note on our front door, and then got into his car. The stout man climbed into the car with my brother and me. As the car engines roared to life, I felt a rush of panic rising in me. What did the note say? Where was my mom? I wanted to yell, "Help!" but the word was stuck in my throat. I was too afraid to say anything.

The heat in the car fogged up the windows as we drove away so I cleared a spot on my window to look back at my home. The cold moisture made my hand feel numb, like my heart. I looked over at my brother. He had instantly fallen asleep. My tears dried, and in the warmth of the blanket, my eyes grew heavy. Still anxious, I tried to stay awake, but soon I drifted to sleep in the darkness.

More than a dozen years later, I am still haunted by these memories and problems caused by the neglect and abuse I suffered. My mom hurt me badly, as did babysitters and boyfriends. They also taught me how easily phrases like "I hate you" can wound people emotionally, and that injuries from physical abuse hurt on the inside long after the marks fade.

The night I was taken from the person I loved so much is like a vivid nightmare I can't forget. But I know now that the abuse was my mom's fault, not mine. Therapists and my adoptive parents have helped me to understand these truths.

Still, that night in the trailer has left a permanent scar on my heart. More than anything, I wanted my mom to be there, to fight to keep me, to save me. But that never happened. The thought of it haunts my dreams day and night.

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