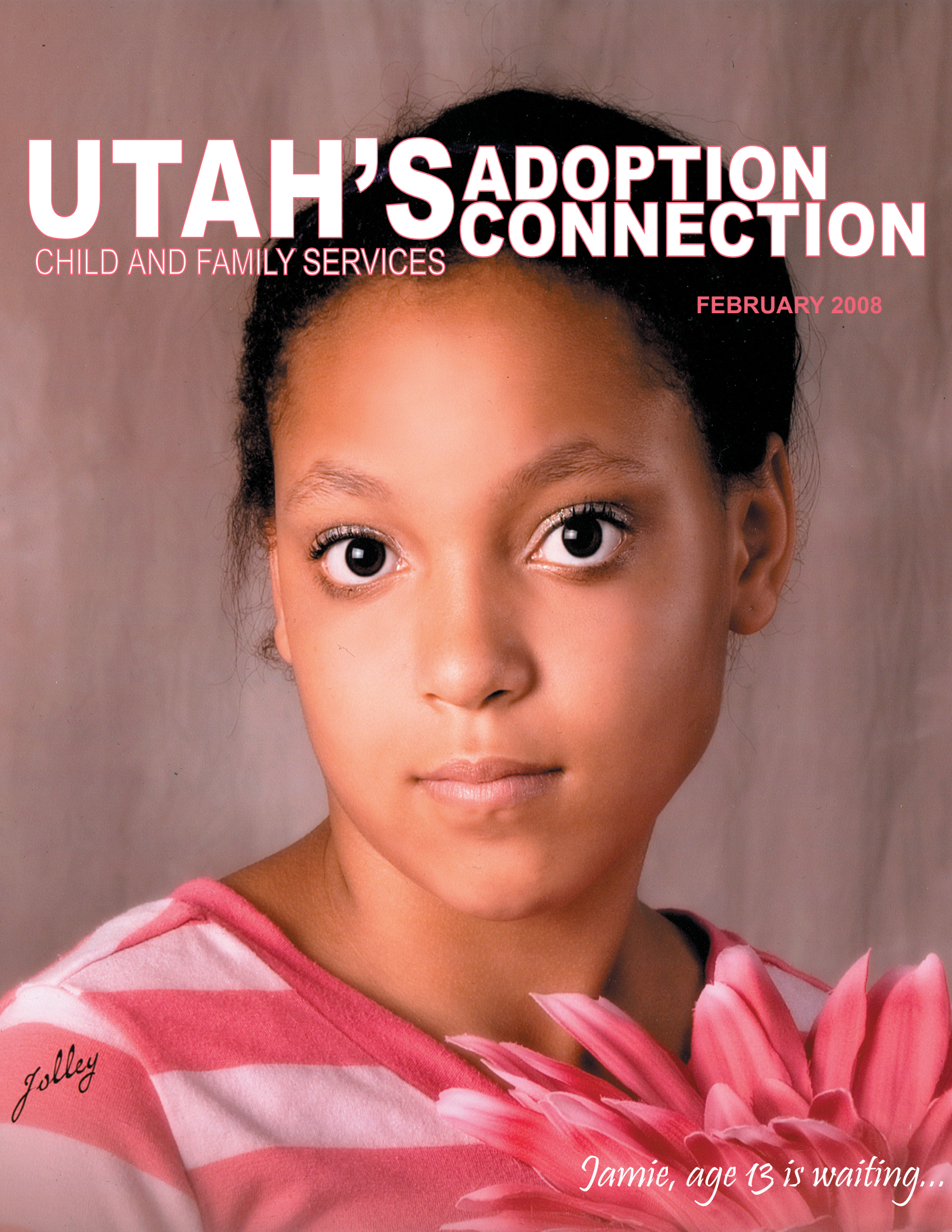


UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

FEBRUARY 2008



Jolley

Jamie, age 13 is waiting...

UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

QUARTERLY DCFS NEWSLETTER



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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.

February 2008
Kathy Searle, Editor
Lindsay Kaeding, Design Director

To submit articles or for a subscription, call (801) 265-0444 or toll free outside Salt Lake County call (866) 872-7212. This publication is funded by the State of Utah, Division of Child and Family Services. The Adoption Exchange prepares and prints the newsletter and the Division of Child and Family Services mails the publication. The mailing list is kept confidential. One can be removed from the mailing list by calling: (866) 872-7212 or 265-0444 within Salt Lake County.

TRUST

-BY SHAQUAN, AGE 17



Angel and Phillip are waiting...

TRUST IS HARD TO FIND
YET HARD TO KEEP.
HARD TO SHOW
HARD NOT TO TAKE
ADVANTAGE OF.
TRUST IS HARD TO FIND
HARD TO SEE
HARD TO NOTICE
HARD TO NOT GIVE
TOO MUCH.
TRUST IS HARD TO FIND
HARD NOT TO TELL WHEN
YOU WANT TO MOST.
HARD TO FIND WHO TO
GIVE IT TO.
HARD TO KNOW WHEN
AND HOW.
TRUST IS HARD TO FIND.

Angel wants to be with a family he can depend on to love him and give support. This friendly 9 year old gets along well with others and likes making friends. You can often find Angel trying to be a part of groups whether at school or home. He enjoys computer games, movies, and spending time with others. He is resilient and forgives others easily. He has good social skills.

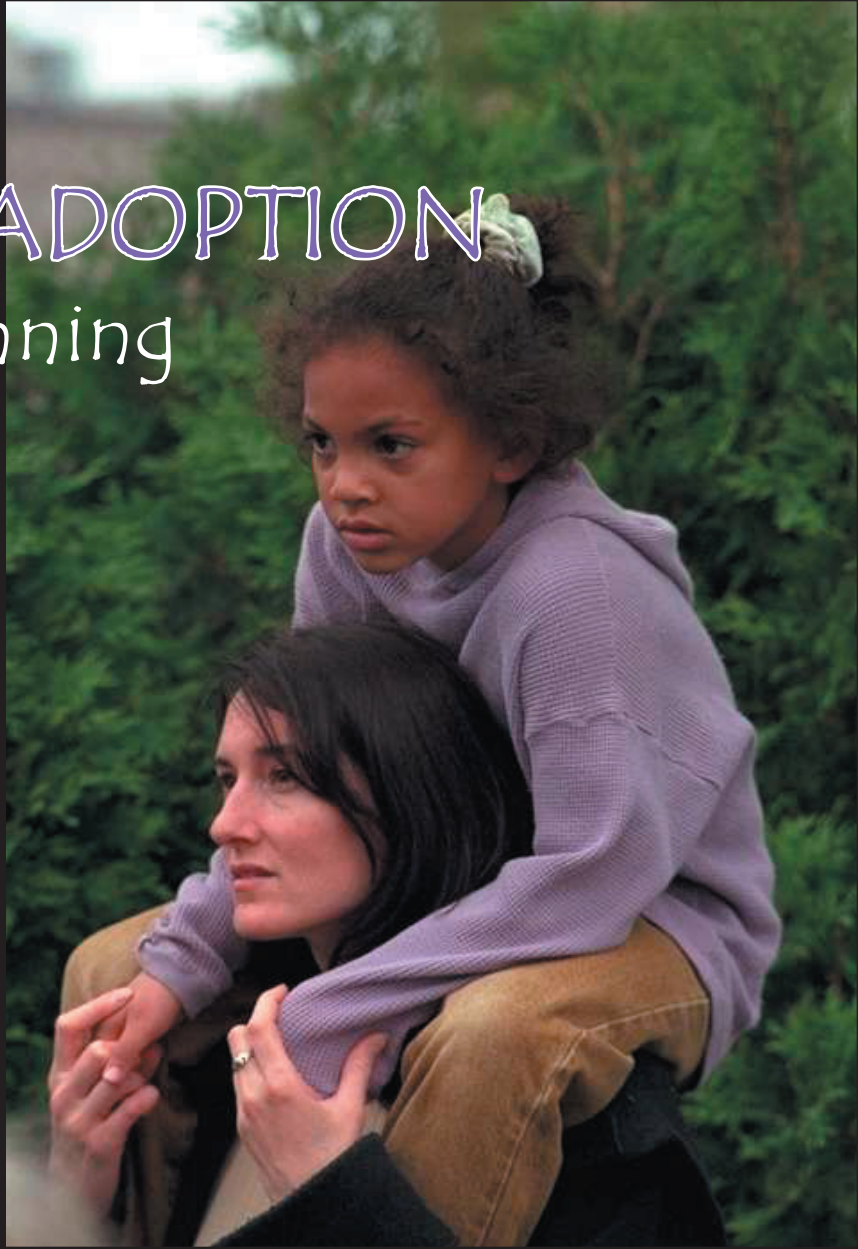
Phillip's strengths include being helpful, comical, and having a good heart. This 14 year old is empathetic and has good insight. He enjoys sports, video games, riding bikes, and music. He wants to be accepted, love and be loved by others. Like most kids his age he wants to fit in. Phillip is friendly and does his best to have a positive interactions with others. He is close with his brothers and has spent most of his life caring for them.

Both brothers are looking forward to becoming a part of a loving, supportive, family that will allow them to remain together. They have a younger brother they would like to maintain contact with, along with their foster family. All families with a current home study are urged to inquire. Financial assistance may be available for medical care, therapy, and adoption related services.

TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

Love is just the beginning

-Deb Reisner



When my husband and I adopted our first child 18 years ago, agency staff told us, “Take him home and love him. Everything will be fine.” Now we have five children and our family is a beautiful blend of African American, Native American, Latino, and European American races and cultures. Loving our children has been easy. As transracial adoptive parents, however, it has been much more difficult to develop strategies for dealing with individual and institutional racism. In our experience, the best lessons we can offer are those that teach our children to externalize racism and assure them we will always be there for them.

Externalizing Racism

Because my husband and I do not share our children’s racial or cultural backgrounds, we must work extra hard to help them develop skills and strategies to deal with the everyday reality of racism. To live authentically in our racist society, each of our children must learn to externalize racism: to understand that racism is NOT about him or her, but a reflection of other

people’s ignorance. Externalizing racism is not about dismissing racism or pretending it does not exist.

The alternative—internalizing racism—will lead children to believe the destructive messages of racism are true and directed specifically at them. When children externalize racism they can develop a strong racial identity, self-esteem, and attachments. When children internalize racism, their racial identity suffers, their self-esteem ends up in shambles, and their attachments are in peril.

Through the years, with help from many experts (especially adult transracial adoptees), we have identified a number of strategies for teaching our children to externalize racism. Four of those strategies are explained below.

Cultural Membership

One of the most important ways our children learn to externalize racism is through cultural membership. From adult transracial

adoptees I've learned that a central theme in their lives is the need to establish meaningful relationships with adults and youth who look like them and share their culture. Through these relationships, our children learn the subtle and not so subtle norms of their cultural community—how to dress, to talk, to be.

We parents must help our children engage with their cultural community in meaningful ways. By choosing where we live, where we worship, what schools our children attend, and the YMCA to which we belong, we can facilitate cultural membership. For us, these institutions have provided cultural membership, mentoring, friends, and community. Just as I need to find a tutor to teach my children physics, I need to find a tutor to teach my children how to be African American, Latino, or Native American in our society.

When our children become members of their cultural community they learn to refute stereotypes, develop survival skills, and make positive connections with a broader range of people. Cultural membership offers a solid foundation for externalizing racism.

Family Language

Within the family, we help teach our children to externalize racism through a shared language about racism. For instance, when we are out in public and someone says to my husband, “You are a saint to adopt these kids,” he replies, “No, you don't understand. I am the lucky one to be their dad.”

“You don't understand” is our family language to redirect the ignorance behind the comment back to the stranger. The stranger's ignorance is the issue, not the fact that the members of our family don't all look alike, or the myth that only a saint would adopt our children.

Inevitably, strangers will ask intrusive or inappropriate questions such as “Where did she come from?” or “How much did they cost?” or “Do you provide day care?” My typical response is, “Why would you ask?” Again, my response turns the question around, and puts responsibility back where it belongs: on the stranger.

As my children have gotten older, I hear them use this same strategy to address questions such as, “Why are your mom and dad white?” and “Why did your real mom give you away?” Their response is “Why would you ask?” Indeed, why would you ask?

Honoring Feelings

Recently I was in a grocery store with my 3-year old when I felt my neck tighten—my body's usual response to the discomfort of racism. As I quickly put the items we needed in our basket, it became obvious a woman was following us. She got closer and

closer to us with each turn down the aisles until she finally approached us at the check out. She abruptly asked, “Is that your son?”

“Why would you ask?” I replied. Then I scooped up my son and left the store. As we walked to the car, I held him close. He clung to my neck and said, “Mommy, I not like that lady.”

“Honey, where does your body not like that lady?” I asked him. He answered, “In my tummy.” We went on to talk, in developmentally appropriate language, about his body's response to racism.

It is extremely important to honor our children's feelings about racism so we can help them to externalize it. For example, if my child says a person does not like him because he is Native American, that is his reality. I don't question or try to talk him out of his feelings.

Instead we talk about externalizing the experience, discuss options for handling the situation, and decide whether he needs my help in other ways. Teaching our children to honor their feelings about racism is teaching our children to be safe. They will often “feel” racism before they are cognitively aware they are vulnerable. By tuning in to their intuitive signals, our children can avoid or better prepare themselves for racially charged situations.

Modeling Safe Responses

Parents are role models for their children. When we encounter racist behavior or institutional racism, our children are watching, listening to, and internalizing our responses for future reference. Our response is not about the other person or institution; it is about our relationship with our child. Every time we respond, act, react, or ignore behavior, we are building or tearing apart the relationship (and attachment) with our child.

A few months ago, I took my sons to the zoo. While we were waiting for the dolphin show to begin, the woman behind us began harassing my two multi-racial teenage sons. At first I sat quietly, allowing my sons to handle the situation. When the woman in front of us turned around and said to the woman behind us, “Shut your racist mouth!” it became obvious it was time for me to get involved.

I told the woman behind us, “That's enough. Leave my sons alone.” She then began to berate me. The woman's tone, the look on her face, and the two young children with her convinced me we needed to disengage.

I turned my back to her and began talking to my sons loudly enough for her to hear. “Just ignore her,” I instructed them. “She is ignorant. She doesn't understand. This isn't about us; it's about her ignorance.”

After the show ended, my sons and I still refused to engage with the woman. She finally gave up and left. We then left, and spent several days processing what had happened and what could have happened if we had responded differently.

As a woman with white privilege, my range of responses to racism is different than the range of safe responses available to my children of color. In all situations, I must remember my children are watching and learning from me. While I was sorely tempted to respond to the woman at the zoo in a way that would ensure she would not soon forget us, that response would not work if my sons used it in the future. I must respond in ways my children can use, not in ways my white privilege allows me to get away with.

Keeping Life Real

Confronting racism is painful, and while it may be tempting to try to make things easier, it is essential we strive to make things real. An adult transracial adoptee told me her mother tried to make things “easy” by downplaying racism. When the adoptee’s white mother took her to an all-white church, she would express her discomfort at the stares and whispers. Her mother would then say, “Those people are staring and whispering to each other because you are so beautiful.”

Because it did not acknowledge her reality, this seemingly nice but dismissive response left my friend feeling very alone. Even as a young child she knew the attention she received from the church-goers was about race and culture.

Though they may not mean to, extended family members may ignore the reality of racism for their nieces, nephews, or grandchildren. These relatives often love and accept the transracially adopted child into their family, yet harbor prejudices about the child’s race and culture. As illustrated by the church story, transracially adopted children will long remember the pain of having relatives deny what the child knows is real.

When it comes to racism in our extended family, we must have a “zero tolerance policy.” If our child tells us someone we love and have known all our life has done or said something hurtful, we must not minimize it. If we say, “Auntie Marie didn’t really mean that,” or “Honey, you are just too sensitive,” we are aligning ourselves with the person who hurt our child. Instead, our child needs us to make it clear we are on his or her side.

Being There for Our Children

For our children to feel secure in our families, we must be clear and consistent in the way we support and back up our children. Our children need to know whose side we are on—even when it is downright agonizing. If we are teaching our children to externalize racism by working to make things real, helping our children to become members of their cultural communities, and teaching our children to honor their feelings about racism, our children will know we stand with them.

My husband and I have also worked hard to make our family a safe place to talk. When our children are dealing with peer relationships, making decisions about priorities, or are feeling burdened, we want them to come to us. Talking allows us to infuse our values and perspectives into our children’s decision making.

When our daughter was in preschool she came home one day and announced, “Mommy, I have a new friend!” I replied, “Wonderful! How do you know she’s your friend?” My daughter innocently said, “She told me I am her favorite vigger!”

I had to process this for a few hours before I was ready to discuss it with my daughter. Our daughter did end up being good friends with this young classmate, and over time we had many more talks about things our daughter heard from her friend—things learned in a family with a very different world view than ours.

For our children to feel safe and “at home,” they must feel sure we are trying to understand their experience in the world as a persons of color. Open conversations about difficult subjects like racism, sexism, current events, and family dynamics are great ways to lay the foundation for ongoing attachment and relationship.

To build our children’s trust in us, we must also keep working to understand our own white privilege, stereotypes, and racism. We must explore our country’s history from the perspective of our child’s cultural community and commit to fighting racism even when we pay a personal price. We need to be there with our children when they are mistreated, denied access, or struggling to comprehend the cruel injustice of racism.

Love is just the beginning of the transracial adoption journey. There is no end. My husband, our children, and I continue to learn and grow together. We are a family.

“From Adoptalk, published by the North American Council on Adoptable Children, 970 Raymond Avenue, Suite 106, St. Paul, MN 55114; 651-644-3036; www.nacac.org.”



"Adoption Options"

February 27th & April 30th
7:00-8:30 p.m.
Trainer: Kathy Searle

- Class Goals
- The Process: Things to Consider
- Types of Adoption
- Choosing an Agency
- Application Process
- Home Study or Family Assessment
- Completing the Process
- Waiting
- Placement
- Post Placement
- Finalization
- Paying for Your Adoption
- Questions

Presented by

The Adoption Exchange &

The Utah Foster Care Foundation

Location: 5296 S. Commerce Dr., Ste. 400, Murray

Register online @ www.adoptex.org or call 265-0444



Announcements &

HEART GALLERY OPENING GALA- ST. GEORGE

February 12th: Benefit Dinner, Auction and Unveiling of Portraits. \$50.00 for an individual, \$100.00 per couple or \$600.00 for a Corporate Table. All donations go to benefit The Adoption Exchange in finding homes for Utah's Waiting Children. If you would like to attend please register online at www.adoptex.org.

Visit the Heart Gallery at the Rosenbruch Museum in St. George from February 13th until March 31st.

A DAY FOR WEDNESDAY'S CHILD-TELEVISED SPECIAL

Help The Adoption Exchange raise money and awareness for many of the waiting children in Utah. This all-day televised special will air on KUTV in Spring from 5:00 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. If you are interested in being a volunteer, a corporate sponsor or giving a donation please contact The Adoption Exchange at 801-265-0444.

COLOR MATTERS:

Understanding & Supporting the Emotional & Social Development of the Transracially Adopted Children.

Trainers Kathy Searle and Susan Egbert

This training will explore significance of race and the impact of "white privilege" in our society. The social and emotional implications of being transracially adopted will be explored and participants will gain practical ideas for supporting children through the developmental tasks inherent in all adoptions, and through the additional developmental tasks involved in transracial adoption

March 13th • 7:00 • Utah Foster Care Foundation

Register at www.adoptex.org

UTAH FOSTER CARE FOUNDATION PARENT TRAININGS

Family Boundaries	Kearns	8-Feb	6:30-8:30	UFCF Murray Office
Secondary Trauma/Burnout Protection	West Jordan	13-Feb	6-9pm	UFCF Murray Office
Secondary Trauma/Burnout Protection	Tooele	27-Feb	6-9pm	1784 N Aaron Drive, Tooele
Foster Parents and Caseworkers Teaming	West Jordan	15-Mar	10am-12pm	UFCF Murray Office
Finally! You Understand Me.	Tooele	20-Mar	7-9pm	1784 N Aaron Drive, Tooele
Depression Toolbox	Sandy	27-Mar	6-8pm	Sandy Fire Station 8186 S 1300 E
Oppositional Defiant Disorder	Sandy	2-Apr	6-8pm	Sandy Fire Station 8186 S 1300 E
Positive Discipline	Kearns	9-Apr	6-9pm	UFCF Murray Office
Suicide Prevention	West Jordan	16-Apr	7-9pm	UFCF Murray Office

Registration is required. Contact Liz Rivera @ 994-5205.

Check www.utahfostercarefoundation.org for most current schedule.

& Events...

PERSPECTIVES ON ADOPTION

Annual Adoption Conference

Sponsored by the



APRIL 9TH AND 10TH
SOUTHTOWNE EXPO CENTER

Workshops Include:

Judge Thorn, ICWA

Kathy Moroz, Attachment

Lynn Tanner, FASD

Video: Struggle for Identity: 10 Years Later

*Registration brochure online at www.utahadoptioncouncil.org or
by calling 801-265-0444.*

Buy
NOW



only
\$24.95

This book is also available at www.adoptex.org or call 1-800-451-5246.

Adoption: STORIES OF LIVES TRANSFORMED



Dixie van de Flier Davis, President and Executive Director of The Adoption Exchange, Inc. recounts stories of how, since the agency's inception she has seen love impact the future in extraordinarily powerful ways.

"In Adoption: Stories of Lives Transformed, The Adoption Exchange provides snapshots from individual lives and reminds of the elemental powers – love, forgiveness, hope – that these new families possess."

Neely Tucker

A reporter for the Washington Post and author of Love in the Driest Season which chronicles his and his wife's journey to adopt a Zimbabwe orphan.



14232 E. Evans Avenue, Aurora, CO 80014

THE STORY OF THE ADOPTION EXCHANGE IS A TIMELESS MESSAGE OF HOPE AND CELEBRATION.

Someone to Stand By Them

By Gary and Nancy Kehl

When an older child is brought into a home for a possible adoption, the child is generally suspicious as to whether or not the parents are going to really like him and make a long-term commitment. This is because they have generally been moved a lot throughout their experience in foster care.

When Edwin came to us he had only been in two foster care homes, but had lived with his Dad until he was eight-years-old. He had never met his mother until she showed up when he was eight. His dad's family was all black. Then this white woman shows up

one night and says she's Edwin's mom and she's there to get him. He was surprised of course.

His Mom had married and had two little girls. He was moved to an all white family with a white step-father, who obviously did not like him. He called Edwin the "N" word and would say Edwin smelled like the "N" word. The mother took him to school and told the teachers he was retarded and would need special help. This of course damaged what little self-esteem he had and led to a lack of trust in adults. Then a church social worker got involved and convinced his mother that his situation was not a good one, suggested foster care, and maybe adoption.

After several years of foster care and occasionally taking Edwin back, his mother agreed to put him up for adoption. Nancy Kehl saw his name in a book listing older children who needed a home while she taught adoption classes for LDS Social Services on how to handle older children. She felt strongly that he should come to their home and convinced her husband, Gary, to take Edwin.

When Edwin showed up a little earlier than planned on June 15, Nancy and Gary knew this was meant to be. Edwin did everything he could possibly do to be accepted into the family. He got up early to shovel the walks if it had snowed the night before. He'd even go shovel the neighbors' walks, so they'd like him and say good things about him to his parents.

After being with the Kehl's for several months, Edwin had a problem he thought would most certainly get him sent back to foster care. At the church where his dad was the leader of the congregation, a boy had been pestering him and poking him in the back. Edwin had enough and punched the instigator in the nose. The nose bleed shot all over everywhere. Edwin's bothers and sisters said, "Oh boy now you've done it you'll be on your way back."

After arriving home from church Nancy wanted to know where Edwin was. She found him hiding in the basement. She took him into his bedroom and said, "Son I understand you had a problem at church."

He just shook his head and said, "I guess."

Nancy put her arm around him and said, "Son did your Mom ever tell you she loved you?" He shook his head no. She asked, "Did your foster Moms ever tell you they loved you?" He shook his head no.

Then with her arms tightly around Edwin she said, "Son I want you to know that I love you and know no one is going take you away or send you away, this is your home." Edwin put his head on her shoulder and at age thirteen cried like a baby.

Edwin later told us that was the day he knew he was home, and that someone really did love and care for him.

Everyone in this life deserves to know that someone loves them and cares for them. If the adopted child makes a mistake, as we all do, they need to know they will have someone to stand by them and help them through.

Although he had never played organized sports before he was thirteen, Edwin went on to play football and became a star in high school. Then he started for four years at Brigham Young University as defensive end, graduated from BYU with a degree in psychology, and played football in the NFL and NFL Europe for four years before he retired. He now owns his own car dealership, America's Auto Group. He is married and has three children, one a full African-American little boy named Jaden, whom they adopted.



* Excerpt from Adoption: Stories of Lives Transformed

To order your copy of Adoption: Stories of Lives Transformed
visit www.adoptex.org or call **1-800-451-5246**

Statewide Cluster Facilitator/Support Groups

SALT LAKE VALLEY REGION

Sandy and Draper- "Parents Pulling Together in Sandy" (PPTS)

Facilitator- Naomi- 604-6069

Kearns- "KFC- Kearns Family Cluster"

Facilitator- Elise- 849-8124

Tooele- "Tooele Lighthouse Cluster"

Facilitator- Debbie- 435-843-8610

South Valley West- (Riverton, Herriman, Bluffdale, South Jordan) "South Heart"

Facilitators- Glenna- 280-6205 and Cindy - 254-5012

Magna

Facilitator- Linda C.- 508-1982

West Jordan

Facilitator- Linda P.- 233-0894

East Granite-(zip codes 84117, 84121, 84124)

Facilitator- Linda P.- 233-0894

West Valley City

Facilitator- Linda C.- 508-1982

Murray/Midvale

Facilitator- Linda P.- 233-0894

Structured Family Cluster

Facilitator-

Salt Lake City

Facilitator-

Spanish Speaking-

Facilitator- Jessica- 577-7161

Adoption

Facilitator- Debbie- 435-843-8610

NORTHERN REGION

Box Elder- (Brigham City, Perry, Willard, Collinston, Bear River City, Garland, Tremonton, Fielding)

Facilitator- Brittani- 435-279-8576

Cache Valley- (Logan, Nibley, Mendon, Wellsville, Hyrum, Hyde Park, Lewiston, North Logan, Smithfield, Richmond)

Facilitator- Susan- (435) 752-9638

Ogden North- (North Ogden, Pleasant View, Harrisville, Plain City, Farr West)

Facilitator- Marilyn- (801) 782-9080

Ogden

Facilitator-

South/Central Davis- (Bountiful, West Bountiful, Farmington, Centerville, WoodsCross, North Salt Lake)

Facilitator- Becky- 597-1544

Weber West- (Roy, Riverdale, Hooper, Sunset, Syracuse, West Point, Clinton)

Facilitator- Natalie- 801-731-1271

North Davis- (Layton, HAFB, South Weber, Clearfield, Kaysville, Emory, Huntsville, Eden, Liberty,

Morgan, Milton, Mt. Green)

Facilitator- Patty- 801-544-7925

Structured Families

Facilitator- Maryanne- 298-5865

Foster to Adopt-

Facilitator- Janette- 546-9465

WESTERN REGION

Central- (Orem, Provo)
Facilitator- Stephanie- 224-3239

North- (Alpine, American Fork, Cedar Hills, Eagle Mtn, Highland, Lehi, Lindon, Pleasant Grove, Saratoga Springs)
Facilitator- Josie- 796-6121

South- (Delta, Elberta, Elk Ridge, Fillmore, Goshen, Kanosh, Mammoth, Mapleton, Nephi, Payson, Salem, Santaquin, Spanish Fork, Springville)
Facilitator-

Wasatch/Heber- (Francis, Heber City, Kamas, Oakley, Park City, Woodland)
Facilitator- Carol- (435) 783-2116

Millard/Juab- Millard and Juab Counties
Facilitator- Jilean- 435-623-4049

Adoption-
Facilitator- Pamela- momi2mykids@comcast.net

Strutctured- Western Region
Facilitator- Cheryl- 489-0271

SOUTH WEST REGION

Cedar/ Iron- Cedar and Iron Counties
Facilitator- Cedar- Amy- 435-586-7403
Beaver- Lisa- 435-438-2651

Manti/San Pete
Facilitator- Nancy- 435-283-5020

Richfield/Sevier
Facilitator- Coylene- 435-896-2023

St. George
Facilitator- Chantal- 435-986-8010

EASTERN REGION

Price- Adoptive Family Cluster
Facilitator- Karen- (435) 748-5053

Moab- Peanut Cluster
Facilitator- Caroline- 435-259-6497

Carbon/Emery- Carbon and Emery Counties
Glenna- (435) 748-2626

Roosevelt
Facilitator- Raquel- (435) 722-3841

Vernal
Facilitator- McKay- 435-789-0833

Clusters are groups of foster/adoptive/kinship families that meet together on a monthly basis. Clusters can help you meet other foster/adoptive/kinship families, arrange respite care, and provide fun family activities.

For further information about the cluster program, please contact the facilitator for your area or call Nikki MacKay at (801) 994-5205.

Talking with Your Adopted Tee

by Ellen Singer, LCSW

Teens typically have an endless appetite for talking with friends, but when it comes to talking with adults or (even worse) parents, conversation often consists of one-syllable words, grunts, and eye rolls. When it comes to talking about adoption with some teens, parents might as easily climb Mount Everest. During adolescence, however, adopted teens need parental guidance, comfort, and support as much as ever, and parents must work to keep lines of communication open.

Extra Challenges for Adopted Teens

Identity formation and separation are adolescents' two main developmental tasks. Teens explore and answer questions like "Who am I?" and "What are my beliefs and values?" when establishing their identity. Separation involves moving toward independence and personal responsibility—a prospect both exciting and scary that can evoke a "leave me alone, but don't leave me" response in teens. Adoption adds extra complexity to these teen rites of passage. Questions of identity raise unresolved thoughts and feelings about birth parents from whom teens must still psychologically separate. For some adopted teens, separation can also seem like rejection and independence like abandonment—emotions associated with the loss of birth parents. Adopted teens who cannot express these troubling thoughts and emotions to someone (a parent or therapist, for example) are at risk for potentially serious emotional and behavioral problems including depression, substance abuse, school failure, etc.

Why Communication Is Difficult

Parents who have trouble getting young children to stop talking may be stunned with the wall of silence and withdrawal that accompanies adolescence. Teens, though, have good reasons for keeping to themselves.

Teens may stop talking to create distance from their parents. Distance helps teens feel separate and independent, and even children who used to share every thought with their parents may desire complete privacy. Parental attempts to communicate may fail because teens often perceive personal questions as intrusive.

Adopted teens may not be able to articulate what they are feeling—even to themselves. Adoption-related issues can be some of the most emotionally loaded issues teens will ever face. They may experience sadness or anger without really knowing why.

Thoughts about birth parents may make teens feel disloyal to their adoptive family. This added guilt can make adoption conversations with parents extremely uncomfortable.

So, what's a parent to do?

First, parents must think about their teen. What is he like? (Quiet? Analytical? Dramatic?) What times of the day does she seem more receptive? Next, parents must be honest about their own communication style. Many teens complain that parents don't pay full attention when they are trying to talk. When teens actually want to talk, parents should take the time to really listen.

Five Principles for Effective Parent Communication with Teens

One: Send a clear message that you are open and willing to talk about adoption. Find ways to reach out that diminish the chances of emotional confusion or overload. Many attempts will be rejected, but you may well get credit for the effort.

Kevin was a thoughtful, bright, and athletic 17-year-old who had never talked much about feelings and even less about adoption. One night, while he and his parents were watching television, a news story came on about an adoptee/birth family reunion. When Kevin abruptly got up and went to his room, his parents were certain it was because of the news story.

Kevin's parents knew that if they directly asked him for his thoughts on the news story, he would politely deny that he had any. Instead, they decided to send an e-mail to Kevin the next day. It read: "Kevin, We know we are being typical worried parents, but we love you very much and were wondering if you stopped watching TV because of the story about the young man meeting his birth mother and birth sister. If you had feelings about this, we just want you to know that we're here for you if there's anything you want to talk about. Love, Mom and Dad."

That night, Kevin wrote back: "I would never want to search. You're my mom and dad and that's it." Kevin's parents then shared their thoughts about searching, and their willingness to support him if he chose to search. Several weeks later at dinner, Kevin casually told his parents that he might like to meet his birth parents some day. They discussed that a bit and then Kevin changed the subject.

Some parents take a more indirect approach. In news stories, movies, and books, themes of loss, uncertainty, and complexity abound. Teens may be willing to share their feelings about such stories without having to directly address adoption or their own story.

Two: Communicate respect for your teen's feelings and show how much you value her opinion. This rule applies to all situations with teens, but be especially careful of your emotions when discussing adoption. Your teen will be watching for signs that you are uncomfortable or disapproving.

Sixteen-year-old Maurya knew that she was conceived during a short-term sexual relationship when her birth mother was 17, and when she entered her junior year of high school, Maurya suddenly began dating several different guys and staying out past curfew. When her parents confronted her about her behavior, Maurya yelled, "I know you think I am a whore just like my birth mother!"

Maurya's behavior and words communicated the pain and anger she felt about her birth mother and her adoption. It was as if she were waiting for her parents to confront her and was relieved by her outburst, but her parents wisely sensed that they could not set limits without first exploring Maurya's feelings. After consulting with their daughter's therapist, Maurya's parents shared their concerns for her safety and well-being, and gently asked to hear Maurya's thoughts about her birth mother and her adoption story.

Because Maurya was willing to express her anger, her parents could talk with her about making different choices than her birth mother, and finding better ways to handle her anger. These discussions eventually relieved some of Maurya's pain and helped her to better understand and forgive her birth mother.

Three: Look for red flags in your teen's behavior. Certain behaviors signal what is going on inside. (See "Six Spots Where Adopted Teens Get Stuck" below.)

Lisa, 15, entered therapy after symptoms of school phobia, peer problems, and self-destructive behavior led to intense family conflicts. While exploring adoption issues, Lisa expressed an interest in her birth history. Without knowing who her birth parents were, she said, she couldn't figure out who she was. Lisa was also frustrated that her mom couldn't understand why she started wearing one green and one blue contact lens (her birth mom had blue eyes; her birth dad had green eyes).

Lisa's dramatic behavior reflected a desire to communicate, but it

n: It's Possible and Important

conflicted with a desire to keep thoughts private since she felt disloyal to her adoptive parents when she spent so much time thinking about her birth parents. Even though Lisa's mother knew about her daughter's conflicted sense of identity and interest in her birth parents, she missed Lisa's signal. As Lisa's mother admitted, she had been minimizing Lisa's feelings and had a very hard time "walking in Lisa's shoes."

Four: Share all available adoption information. Many parents want to protect their children from potentially painful aspects of their adoption story—birth histories, for instance, that involve drug abuse, mental illness, incarceration, or sexual assault. Teens, however, need birth family information as they work to figure out who they are while being supported within their families.

As Joyce Maguire Pavao writes in *The Family of Adoption*, "It is our job to protect our children... from harm. The greatest gift we can give children is to tell them their truths and to help them make sense of these truths, especially when they are complicated and harsh."

Five: Help your teen make connections to his heritage and past. Many adoptees find comfort in learning about and visiting places associated with their birth family or birth culture. A trip to the place a child was born (or a homeland tour for internationally adopted children) may enable her to connect to the past, answer questions, or better understand the choices that led to her adoption. Some teens prefer to seek direct contact with and answers from their birth family.

Jemal, 13, joined his adoptive family at age three after living with a foster family for a year and a half. While participating in a teen adoptee group, Jemal learned he was the only one there who had lived with a foster family before adoption. When Jemal began to ask questions about his former foster parents, his parents asked their child welfare agency if he could meet the family. The foster father had died, but the foster mother was delighted to see Jemal, tell him what he was like as a toddler, and show him pictures she had kept of him. The meeting was very positive for Jemal.

Getting Support

Normal adolescence, when overlaid with adoption issues, may increase a teen's need for guidance when emotions become overwhelming. Friends who are not adopted won't understand, nor will most school counselors. Teens may not let parents help either. The best resource is a therapist trained in adoption issues who can normalize adolescence for adopted teens while watching for signs of adoption-related stress.

Debbie Riley, executive director of the Center for Adoption Support and Education, Inc., has been providing teen therapy for more than 25 years, and working with adoptees for the past 10 years. "Many wonderful adoptive parents," she notes, "find it hard to understand the power and depth of their children's feelings of ambivalence, uncertainty, and loss. Their responses often are not helpful, not because they don't try, but because they simply don't comprehend how powerful and necessary these extra tasks are." Adopted teens must deal with feelings about their birth and adoptive families.

Ms. Riley has found that parents often respond to their children's pain in ways that will make the parents feel more comfortable. Others may think they have made their teen feel better when they have only scratched the surface. Her advice: "Keep trying to walk in their shoes." Ms. Riley encourages parents to read more about teen issues and adoption, attend parent support programs related to the topic, and

check the Internet for information and suggestions.

Finally, says Ms. Riley, "Teens need to know that parents are human too. We make mistakes, we miss things." The most important thing, she says, "is to let the kids know we are trying, that we care. Say to your teen, 'I feel really bad, but I don't understand what you're trying to tell me.' Or, 'I feel bad that I didn't get it.' Then, make an effort to learn more. Part of being an adoptive parent is trying to make sure your teens aren't walking alone."

Six Spots Where Adopted Teens Get Stuck

As adoptees mature into adulthood, issues related to the topics listed below may make life especially challenging for them and their families. Parents should be aware that concerns about any of these issues may play out in their teens' behavior.

Difference:

"I'm not like most kids my family is different."
"I don't look like my family."
"I don't share my family's cultural or racial heritage."

Reason for Adoption:

"Why was I given away? Was something wrong with me?"
"My birth parents used drugs, abused or neglected me, etc. What does this mean about me?"
"Why couldn't my birth parents solve their problems and keep me?"

Missing Information:

"What do my birth parents look like?"
"I was left outside an orphanage. What's my real birthday, and why was I abandoned?"
"My birth mother wasn't sure who my birth father was."

Identity:

"Who am I? Am I more like my adoptive parents or birth parents?"
"How can I figure out who I am when I don't know much about my birth parents?"
"I'm not white like my family. Why won't adults of my race accept me?"

Loyalty:

"I'll upset my adoptive parents if I ask too many questions about my birth parents."
"Things were bad in my birth family, but I love my mom and grandmother and might live with them again some day. How can I still love my adoptive parents?"
"I worry about my siblings who are in different placements."

Permanence:

"If my birth parents gave me away, it could happen again."
"I've lived in so many foster homes, I'm sure I'll be moved again."
"I'll be 18 soon. Will my parents still be there for me after I leave home?"



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UPDATE:

The Fostering Adoption to Further Student Achievement Act

(FAFSAA) is part of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, PL 110-84, signed by the President on September 27, 2007, provides that foster care youth who are adopted after their 13th birthday do not have to include their parents' income in the calculations for determining their need for grants/loans.

The major problem was that the FAFSAA provision wouldn't be effective until July 2009. We just received information from Voice for Adoption that the revised definition will apply to all children who were in foster care on or after their 13th birthday, even if they were adopted before the law takes effect. Therefore, because these kids will be grandfathered in, families don't need to delay their adoptions until 2009 in order for the youth to be eligible for the benefit. Please share the good news with families and agencies!

[PL 110-84 amends the definition of "independent student." section 604(a)(2), the section on Definitions, within Title VI - Need Analysis, as follows:

"(B) is an orphan, in foster care, or a ward of the court, or was in foster care when the individual was 13 years of age or older or a ward of the court until the individual reached the age of 18;"