

# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

FEBRUARY 2012



**Andrew, age 15 is waiting...**

Photo by: Steve Mackley

# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

QUARTERLY DCFS NEWSLETTER



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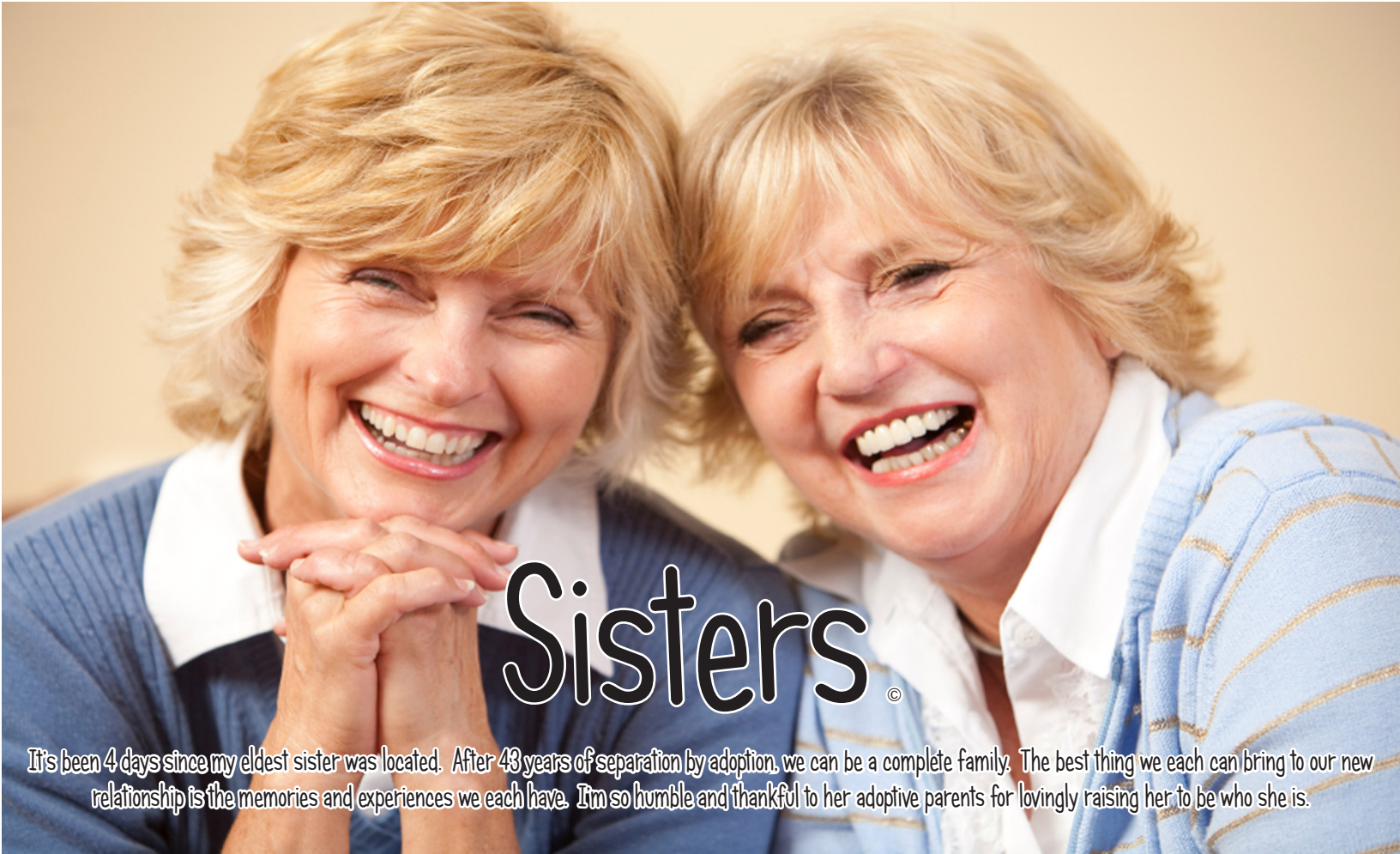
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If you are interested in more information on any of the children featured in this publication, please contact The Adoption Exchange at 801-265-0444.

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# Sisters. ©

*It's been 4 days since my eldest sister was located. After 43 years of separation by adoption, we can be a complete family. The best thing we each can bring to our new relationship is the memories and experiences we each have. I'm so humble and thankful to her adoptive parents for lovingly raising her to be who she is.*

My Dearest Sister,  
This journey has been long. This experience like a favorite song.  
Dreams realized and not abandoned.  
Wish finally granted.  
My imaginary friend now has a name,  
a face,  
embodiment I now can claim.  
I am yours and you are mine.  
My sister forever  
no longer undefined.  
This journey has indeed been long,  
And now we know that what was wrong:  
Was just the timing in our past,  
and now the clock can be still at last.  
Long enough for us to embrace  
the promises of tomorrow and what we'll face.  
I envision a reunion,  
happy not sad,  
in which we're altogether,  
now that would be Rad!  
Love from your 'Little sister!'  
-Jeni Dawn ©



## **“I Don’t Care If He Goes To Harvard, But . . .**

*By Ellen Singer, LCSW-C and Marilyn Schoettle, M.A.*

*The Center for Adoption Support and Education, Inc.*

Everyone who decides to embark on the journey of parenthood goes down the road with fantasies of what parenthood will be like, and more importantly, dreams about what their child will become as he grows up. Will she love soccer like I do? Will he excel at science? Will we have wonderful summer vacations at the beach, like we did when I was a kid?

As adoptive parents, we have the same dreams that all parents have, although we usually embark on our trip to parenthood with less information about the biological road maps of our children. Although many of our friends find that their children by birth are surprisingly different than they expected them to be, it is true that we take a fork in the road when it comes to perceived certainty about the future. Whether we adopt because of infertility or not, we are told we must set aside our “fantasy child” in order to be emotionally prepared to love and attach to one who brings her own set of genes, family history, and talents. Logic tells us that she may look and be very different from what we hoped or expected our biological child would be like.

Many adoptive parents find this inability to predict actually frees them from the pressure of producing a Gerber baby who will be the star of the spelling bee. They look forward to learning about who their child is and what special traits he will contribute to the family. For example, a child who is discovered to be artistically talented in a family where no such gift exists is a pleasing, wonderful surprise.

But what happens when the surprises are considered negative or undesirable, or the child’s personality seems mismatched for the adoptive family? What if the child’s accomplishments are disappointing? Does adoption complicate how parents handle their expectations, dreams, or plans...especially when they are not going to be realized?

### **Expectations and the Idealized Child**

***I wonder if this whole adoption thing was a massive mistake. I think I’ve ruined my life. I wonder if I’m trying to make good out of bad genes. I think about returning him. I wonder if my birth child would have thrown the spaghetti at me. (Jana Wolff, *Secret Thoughts of an Adoptive Mother*, 1997.)***

The truth is, no children—adopted, foster, birth, or step—ever really meet any parent’s ideal, and all parents experience some disappointment in their children. Adoptive parents may have an especially hard time with the loss of the fantasy child because it is easy to assume the fantasy would have been realized in the biological child. By observing families created by birth, it is possible to see this probably would not have happened.

The loss of the idealized child becomes a problem for ALL parents, notes Elinor Rosenberg, author of *The Adoption Life Cycle* (1992), if that child is not recognized and is “unconsciously imposed on the existing child—adopted or biological—who can never be seen and appreciated for who he or she is. Under these circumstances, parents live in a state of constant disappointment, and children, sensing their disappointment, feel they are not the person they are supposed to be, thus fostering feelings of inferiority.”

While adoptive parents may face disappointment, as all parents do, many of us worry that admitting it will mean we are rejecting our children. Just about the last thing adoptive parents want to do is to appear to be pushing their children away.

Plans and dreams for our children can also become a problem if they are just making up for what we missed. That scenario can be so problematical that Carl Jung once said, “The worst thing that can happen to children is the un-lived lives of the parents.”

### **Expectations and the Idealized Family**

*Three-year-old Sam is jumping about in the pool’s locker room, finding dozens*

of reasons why his mother should not be permitted to put on his clothes after swimming. Exhausted after trying three separate and innovate forms of bribery and meeting only failure, his mother looks at the ceiling and exclaims loudly, “Good Heavens! Why did I decide to have this child?!!”

Now imagine the implications of hearing an adoptive parent, in the same situation, cry out, “Good Heavens! Why did I decide to ADOPT this child?” Most of us would never say anything like that out loud.

Yet, it is normal for parents to feel ambivalent about children. All parents struggle with the notion that they should love their children unconditionally and that mothers in particular should love their children all of the time. In *The Mother Dance: How Children Change Your Life* (1999), Harriet Lerner notes that parents “must accept the obvious: that when it comes to love, the other person’s behavior always matters, even when that person is an infant or small child.” It’s very typical for children to do things we wish they wouldn’t, and that influences our feelings, just as they are influenced by things they wish we wouldn’t do.

For some adoptive parents, it is especially hard to acknowledge normal ambivalence about their children. Most of us do not feel we have the luxury to be uncertain about them. We worked hard to adopt them, sometimes needing to convince family and friends that it was the right thing to do. We do not want to hear, “I told you so. Adoptive families ARE different.”

There are times when it seems the rest of the world is looking to confirm the suspicion that adoptive bonds are weaker, our children “second best.” It’s a nuisance that needs to be dealt with, particularly because we must model for our children how to handle this extra challenge, as they will also face it from time to time. Ironically, the pressures felt by some adoptive parents because of society’s *expectations of what a family should be* are not unlike the pressures we place on our children by holding onto preconceived notions of what they should be like.

Because ambivalence is normal and it is helpful to express such feelings, adoptive parents often enjoy sharing these thoughts with a group of friends who also adopted their children. The chances are higher that they will be able to understand our concerns without questioning our commitment and love for our children. Friends who are not adoptive parents, but who know us well, are also more likely to understand.

Although most of these feelings are quite normal, they can become dangerous if parents blame their disappointments and frustrations on the fact that the children are adopted. This scapegoating can create breaks in family bonds by separating or disowning the child (and his problems). Professional guidance can help to prevent this situation.

### **Children’s Expectations**

*I think I was adopted because I was an ugly baby.*

*I must not be as good as the kids whose parents kept them.*

It is not unusual for children who were adopted to use their own age-appropriate, but limited, logic to understand their adoption story. They may expect or fear that their adoptive parents will “give them away” as well. Sometimes their expectations impact ours. It is well known that school-age children may exhibit testing behavior in order to see if they can elicit rejection from their adoptive parents or others because they imagine their negative behavior may have been the reason their birth parents placed them for adoption. Rosenberg describes it this way: “The child is asking, ‘Will you still keep me, even when you can’t stand me?’ This prompts the parents to ask themselves the same question.” Sometimes it causes parents to revisit the fantasy child again.

Parents aren’t the only ones with fantasies. All school-age children, by birth or adopted, may experience what is known as the “romance fantasy.” For biological children it is the belief that they must have been “adopted” - that out there exists another set of their real parents who would be much more like them, would better understand them, and surely not make them do horrid things like clean their room or eat their broccoli. But adopted children really do have another set of parents, so handling this common childhood notion can be much more

complicated. Adopted children's perceptions of the ways they are different from their adoptive parents can pose difficult challenges all on their own, aside from what the parents communicate about those differences. Holly van Gulden, in *Real Parents, Real Children* (1999) points out that "a child may lack a sense of belonging even if the parents have a strong sense of claiming (helping the child to see how he is similar to his adoptive family - traits, talents, appearance, etc.), if he feels his uniqueness sets him too far apart from the rest of the family."

If we recognize our expectations and how they affect our children, we can work to put them in perspective. We can choose to handle our ambivalence in ways that affirm our love for our kids. One of the unique challenges of adoptive parenting is to understand that our expectations exist side-by-side with those of our children, whose dreams and worries about the future are affected by adoption and their need to come to terms with what might have been. Success lies in shaping our family's future together, drawing the map of our journey as we go.

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### Proceeds benefit:



January 2, 2012 through February 29, 2012, while supplies last, Wendy's customers who purchase a Frosty-shaped key tag for \$1 at participating restaurants in Utah, Colorado and select Wyoming Wendy's will receive a Free Jr. Frosty with any future purchase at Wendy's through 12/31/2012. Proceeds benefit The Adoption Exchange. Not valid with any other offer.

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# Utah Foster Care Foundation 3rd Annual Symposium

APRIL SYMPOSIUM FOCUSES ON BRAIN MAPPING



By Mick Woolsey

UFCF DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

FOSTER PARENTS, CLINICIANS, AND CHILD WELFARE professionals will have a unique privilege at this year's Utah Foster Care Symposium on April 18-19th at Zermatt Resort in Midway. We will be hearing first-hand from Bruce Perry, M.D. Ph.D., a world-renowned researcher and advocate for children. Dr. Perry is best known for his longitudinal studies of trauma and attachment issues and the effects on the brain.

This will be our "3rd Annual Utah Foster Care Foundation Symposium on Attachment and Trauma: Healing Families." We are so excited to have Dr. Perry spend the entire day (Wednesday April 18, 2012) with us to go over his newest research on brain-mapping and how we as caregivers can use that information to help the young children in our care.

I encourage you to register early at [traumaandattachment.eventbrite.com](http://traumaandattachment.eventbrite.com) for this once-in-a-lifetime event. We look forward to sharing this wonderful 2-day symposium with each of you!

CEUs PENDING!



## UTAH ADOPTION COUNCIL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

*Perspectives on Adoption*

APRIL 25TH AND 26TH 2012  
SOUTH TOWNE EXPO CENTER

REGISTER ONLINE AT:  
[UTAHADOPTIONCOUNCIL.COM](http://UTAHADOPTIONCOUNCIL.COM)



## **If you finalized an adoption in 2011, you are likely eligible for thousands of dollars in federal adoption tax credit!**

For adoptions finalized in 2011, there is a federal adoption tax credit of up to \$13,360 per child. The 2011 adoption tax credit is refundable, which means taxpayers can typically get the credit refunded regardless of what they owe or paid in taxes for the year. Even people who have no income can qualify for a refundable credit.

The credit is paid one time *for each adopted child*, and should be claimed when taxpayers file taxes for 2011.

To be eligible for the credit, parents must:

- **Have adopted a child other than a stepchild**
- **And be within the income limits** — How much of the credit parents can claim is affected by income. In 2011, families with a federal modified adjusted gross income below \$185,210 can claim the full credit. Those with incomes above \$225,210 cannot claim the credit; families with incomes between \$185,210 and \$225,210 can claim partial credit.

### **The Amount of Credit to Be Claimed**

Families who finalize the adoption of a child with special needs in 2011 (*see details on page 2*) can claim the full credit of \$13,360 whether or not they had any adoption expenses.

*Example — A grandparent adopts three of her grandchildren from foster care and the state agency paid for all of the fees. However, all three children receive monthly adoption assistance benefits and thus are considered special needs. The grandmother earns less than \$185,210 so can claim the full credit of \$13,360 per child for a total of \$40,080.*

Other adopters can claim a credit based on their qualified adoption expenses, which are the reasonable and necessary expenses paid to complete the adoption as long as those expenses are not reimbursed by anyone else. If the expenses are less than \$13,360, the adopters claim only the amount of the expenses. If expenses exceed \$13,360, the maximum credit to be claimed is \$13,360 per child.

*Example — A couple adopted two children from China and had \$40,000 in legal fees, travel expenses, and*

*agency fees. They received a grant of \$20,000, leaving them with \$20,000 in qualified adoption expenses. They can claim only the \$20,000 (not the full \$26,720 they might have been eligible for).*

### **When to Claim the Credit**

Parents who adopt a child with special needs and are not basing their refund request on expenses claim the credit the year of finalization. Parents who adopt internationally also cannot claim the credit until the year of finalization. Parents who are adopting from the U.S. and claiming qualified adoption expenses can claim the credit either the year of finalization or the year after they spent the funds.

*Example — A family begins the process of adopting a U.S. infant in 2010 and incurs \$7,000 in expenses that year plus \$4,000 in 2011, but will not finalize the adoption until 2012. In 2011, the parents can claim the \$7,000 for the 2010 expenses but not the \$4,000 spent in 2011. In 2012 when the adoption is final, the parent can claim the 2011 and 2012 expenses up to the maximum credit.*

### **Adoptions from Previous Years**

**Families who adopted from 2005 to 2010 who have not already claimed the adoption credit for those adoptions may still be able to benefit from the credit.**

Taxpayers who adopted from 2005 to 2009 can carry credits forward to 2010 (when the credit first became refundable). In cases of adoptions before 2008, however, some or all of the credit may be lost.

Some families who adopted in 2003 and 2004 may be able to take limited advantage of the credit but will not benefit from refundability. Families who adopted earlier than 2003 cannot benefit from the credit if they did not take it already.

To learn more about whether the credit for previous years' adoptions, visit <http://www.nacac.org/taxcredit/taxcredit.html> or call NACAC at 651-644-3036.



## Qualifying as Special Needs

Families who adopted a child who has been determined to have special needs can claim the full credit of \$13,360 without having any adoption expenses. The credit for all other adopted children is based on the family's qualified adoption expenses.

Basically, a child with special needs is a U.S. foster child who is adopted and receives adoption subsidy or adoption assistance program benefits. The instructions for the 2010 tax credit explain that to be considered a child with special needs, the child must meet all three of the following characteristics:

- “The child was a citizen or resident of the United States or its possessions at the time the adoption process began.
- A state (including the District of Columbia) has determined that the child cannot or should not be returned to his or her parents' home.
- The state has determined that the child will not be adopted unless assistance is provided to the adoptive parents. Factors used by states to make this determination include:
  - The child's ethnic background and age,
  - Whether the child is a member of a minority or sibling group, and
  - Whether the child has a medical condition or a physical, mental, or emotional handicap.”

Just because a child has a disability does not mean the child is considered special needs under the tax credit. Not even every child adopted from foster care is considered special needs (about 10 percent of children adopted from care do not receive adoption assistance support). Those who do not receive any support from the adoption assistance program are likely not to have been determined to have special needs.

Bottom line, if your child does not receive adoption subsidy/adoption assistance benefits, you will likely have to have qualified expenses to claim the credit.

## Claiming the Credit

Taxpayers should review 2011 Form 8839 instructions (which will be issued by early 2012) very carefully to be sure that they apply for the credit correctly. In 2010, taxpayers were required to file taxes by mail rather than electronically and had to submit certain documentation with the return.

Unless the process changes significantly, taxpayers will complete a 2011 version IRS Form 8839 (which should be available by early 2012) and submit it with their Form 1040 when they file 2011 taxes. On Form 8839, those who adopted children determined to have special needs can write \$13,360 on the line that asks for qualified adoption expenses. Other adopters should enter their qualified adoption expenses.

## IRS Review

In 2010, the IRS reviewed the vast majority of adoption tax credit applications. The review process was often lengthy, with many parents waiting months to hear from the IRS and even longer before they received their refund. In many cases, parents had to resubmit documentation of the adoption and either proof of expenses or special needs determination.

Unless the process changes from 2010, parents will need to prove the adoption by providing the IRS with a copy of the adoption decree with the official seal visible. Families who adopted a child with special needs must also provide a copy of one of the following: (1) the adoption assistance agreement, (2) a letter certifying that the child has been approved for adoption assistance, and (3) a letter from the state or county child welfare agency stating that the child has been determined to have special needs.

Families who incurred expenses are likely to be asked by the IRS to verify those expenses during the review process. Proof of expenses included copies of receipts, canceled checks, and credit card statements.

For more information, visit [www.nacac.org/taxcredit/taxcredit.html](http://www.nacac.org/taxcredit/taxcredit.html), e-mail [taxcredit@nacac.org](mailto:taxcredit@nacac.org), or call 800-470-6665. NACAC is not a tax professional organization and this should information not be considered to be legal or tax advice.

NACAC was instrumental in passage of the law that made the full tax credit available to families who adopt from foster care without documenting expenses. We need your support to continue similar advocacy efforts and to enable us to share information about the credit with other families.

Please become a member of NACAC or make a donation at [www.nacac.org](http://www.nacac.org).

North American Council on Adoptable Children  
970 Raymond Avenue, Suite 106, St. Paul, MN 55114

A close-up photograph of a young girl with light brown hair and blue eyes. She is holding a black magnifying glass over her right eye, which is significantly enlarged and in focus. Her left eye is also visible, looking slightly to the side. The background is softly blurred, showing more of her hair and a white garment.

# Supporting Adoptees through Search and Information Seeking

**Susan Cutler Egbert, BSW, MSW, PhD**

I once co-lead a series of post-adoption trainings that began by asking participants, “What is adoption?” A Navajo woman who lived in a remote corner of my State gave the most meaningful response I have ever heard. She said simply, “It means you have more clans.” As an adoptee and an adoptive mother, no definition of adoption has ever made more sense to me.

This definition’s open model of belonging to multiple families takes the edge off the inherent sting of the complicated loyalty issues adoptees experience as they seek to make peace between the guilt-provoking “Why would you need to search for them when your adoptive family is so wonderful?” response, and their feeling absolutely compelled to know about and understand their birth families in an effort to know about and understand themselves.

Acknowledging and validating the reality of this quandary is critical to empowering and supporting the emotional safety of all adoptees, despite their level of interest in search. Permission to wonder is a right all adoptees deserve. Being joined in their journeys to seek, process, and understand the realities of their histories is a meaningful gift we can all choose to share.

Adoptees seek information and connection with their birth families for many varied and personal reasons. Despite common perceptions, it is important to know that not every adoptee is hoping for a dramatic “Oprah reunion”. Many just want information and a chance to build a bridg-

ing sense of psychological and biological identity over an abyss of vague self-concept and self-awareness. When adoptees express an interest in knowing and understanding more about themselves and their histories, they should be empowered to choose the timing, direction, and depth of their searches. They should be informed that the continuum of search, information sharing, and contact available to them includes:

- Requesting and receiving background information gathered by the placing agency at the time of placement in a non-identifying format
- Using a volunteer or professional confidential intermediary to contact birth family and facilitate information sharing
- Contacting birth family and exchanging information, letters, and pictures directly via US Mail, electronic mail, or social media such as Facebook
- Participating in direct telephone contact with birth family
- Meeting members of the birth family in-person with time-limited contact
- Meeting in-person and establishing on-going contact and relationship with the birth family

Productive search outcomes are often achieved through informal means and self-searching based on information the adoptee, adoptive family, or agency already has. In some states adoption records are open or may be opened upon successful petitioning of the court in the jurisdiction where the adoption occurred. In more difficult cases, adoptees may find it helpful to employ professional confidential intermediaries, independent search consultants, private investigators, detectives, or search organizations to assist in finding and making initial contact with their birth families.

Unfortunately, the existence of unethical people who are willing to exploit vulnerable adoptees' need for information about their lives and history necessitates supporting adoptees through this process by empowering them with information about obtaining references and a written contract or agreement outlining all of the steps involved in a professional search. These agreements should include a disclosure of costs and timelines, and a clearly stated plan for delivering the information obtained to the adoptee. Caution is critical when hiring search services that require money up front. Up front fees should only include deposits, and the written agreement should indicate a process for refunds and additional payments that reflect reasonable and fair business practice.

Regardless of how the search is undertaken, supportive wondering—without judging or questioning—about the adoptee's perception of the following can provide an important emotional foundation for whatever might be ahead:

- What she already knows about her birth family and the context of her adoption
- How she experienced and feels now about her adoptive family and childhood
- Her current life situation and stage of development
- Timelines and "triggers" that are motivating her to search now
- Her expectations about what her birth family is like now
- Her expectations about her birth family's response to the search
- Where on the continuum of search and information seeking she perceives herself to be--what level of contact is she envisioning
- How prepared she is for potential search outcomes that might not meet her expectations

Search and information seeking outcomes are never predictable and controllable, and while it is not possible to prepare adoptees for the unknown, it is possible to provide support by sharing and processing the potential realities. The adoptee needs to understand that her birth parents may no longer be alive, may be impossible to find, or may exercise their right to refuse to acknowledge her or share information with her.

The adoptee should also understand ahead of time that contact can be disappointing, difficult, and even traumatic as she faces her own feelings about her birth family, as well as her birth parents' feelings about her adoption and about being contacted. The adoptee may also need support to understand her adoptive parents' complicated feelings and responses related to the search and its outcome. Ideally, these conversations can be undertaken with emotional safety in the adoptive family.

## Practical Ideas for Providing Social and Emotional Support

### **Before search, help adoptees to:**

- Recognize the grieving that will come with the search—like most things in life, there will undoubtedly be some gaps between expectations and reality.
- Accept an unknown outcome—be prepared to be surprised.
- Expect to learn painful information—not many adoption placement stories are the end of a well-timed fairy tale romance.
- Decide who to tell about the search and when to tell—choose to share with those who are supportive and choose not to attend to stigma and loyalty guilt-ridden responses borne of adoption ignorance.

### **During search, encourage adoptees to:**

- Talk through and/or journal experiences—identify and process the realities.
- Accept the best and worst-case scenario as it unfolds.
- Recognize that contact will bring up new and unexpected emotional responses from everyone in the adoption circle.
- Normalize reactions—behavioral, cognitive and mood responses may seem strange and confusing both to adoptees and to those around them.

### **After the search, no matter the outcome, empower adoptees to:**

- Determine a level of contact and prepare for that to change.
- Grieve what might have been—the gap between expectations and reality.
- Build and rebuild relationships—both old and new—based on the social and emotional dynamics of the search.
- Build and rebuild a more centered and whole sense of self—based on knowledge, understanding, and truth about themselves and their lives.

There are aspects of being adopted that are inherently isolating and lonely. Search and information seeking is a logical human response on the part of adoptees to addressing their very literal separation from their birth family "clans". The journeys they take to bridge this separation—irrespective of the outcomes—are most meaningfully undertaken with support, help, encouragement and empowerment.

### **Sidebar**

Acknowledge and validate the loyalty quandary

Support adoptees right to wonder, know, and understand

Do not judge or question motivation

Explore expectations

Join the journey

Recognize the realities of potential search outcomes

Normalize unexpected social, emotional and behavioral responses

Grieve the gap between expectation and reality

Celebrate the peace and wholeness that comes with truth, even difficult truth

# ADOPTION RESPITE PROVIDERS

**Child & Family Support Center  
(Cache County)**

380 West 1400 North  
Logan, UT 84341  
(435) 752-8880

**Box Elder Family Support Center  
(Box Elder County)**

276 North 200 East  
Brigham City, UT 84302  
(435) 723-6010

**Family Support Center of Ogden  
(Weber County)**

3340 So. Harrison Blvd., Ste. 110  
Ogden, UT 84403  
(801) 393-3113

**Family Support Center  
(Davis and Morgan Counties)**

(801) 773-0712

**Family Support Center of Taylorsville  
(Salt Lake County)**

1760 West 4805 South  
Taylorsville, UT 84118  
Contact: Elisa at (801) 703-3675  
Or Janessa at (801) 637-6425 or  
Family Support Center at (801) 955-9110

**Family Support Center and Treatment Center  
(Utah County)**

1255 North 1200 West  
Orem, UT  
Adoption Respite Specialist, Chelsi Rasmussen  
At (801) 691-3784

**Family Support Center of the  
Uintah Basin**

259 North 700 East  
Roosevelt, UT 84066  
(435) 722-2401

**Carbon County Family Support  
& Children's Justice Center**

80 So. Fairgrounds Road  
Price, UT 84501  
(435) 636-3739

**The Family Support Center of  
Southwestern Utah**

102 North 200 East  
Cedar City, UT 84720  
(435) 586-0791



**Child & Family Support Center**

Strengthening Families and Protecting Children

# Free Home-Based Child Care Program

For parents who have adopted children  
through the Division of Child & Family Services.



Adopting a child can be a heartwarming, rewarding experience that benefits the lives of both parents and children immeasurably.

Adopting a child can also be challenging! The **Child & Family Support Center** has a new program designed to reach out to parents who have adopted through the Division of Child & Family Services. The **Home-Based Adoption Respite Care Program** is available now to give adoptive parents a little extra time to accomplish what they need! Call Teresa at 435.752.8880 for more information.

\* Child care **in your home**

\* **Trained** and **experienced** child care providers

\* Care provided for children **birth through 17 years**

\* Available **nights** and **weekends**

\* Use up to **12 hours** at a time with a maximum of **20 hours** per year

\* **No cost**

\* Great to use during **cluster meetings**

*“Adoption means that you grew in your mom’s heart instead of her tummy!”*

*~Author Unknown*



380 W 1400 N Logan, UT 84341

[www.CacheCFSC.org](http://www.CacheCFSC.org)

435.752.8880



My first mother transported me from Martin Place West Hospital where I was born a few days before to my first and only foster home. For reasons unknown it was her job to make sure I was taken to the foster home. My foster mother met my first mother outside her home and there I was turned over and relinquished. A few weeks later, my first mother would return with some diapers and t-shirts for me. She was accompanied by her best friend who waited in the car while my first mother went inside my foster home with the gifts. After a few moments, my mother returned to the car and what transpired in the home between me and my first mother was never mentioned. As they pulled from the curb in front of my temporary home, I often wonder if my first mother knew it would be the last time we saw each other. The amount of time we spent together was minimal. There is no record as to how much time we spent together in the hospital and this last visit appears as if it could be measured with an egg timer not a calendar. Although our interaction was limited, the split from my first mother would affect me the rest of my life.

Last week, I sat in a room in Denver Colorado at the African/Caribbean Heritage Camp and just 3-5 feet from me sat several teenage adoptees. Surprisingly, this was

the first time I have ever had the opportunity to sit down with teenage adoptees and talk. I was part of a panel that included African nationals, fellow adoptees, and an African American camp counselor. The panel was about identity and connecting with their transracial origins. About 30 minutes into our discussion reality descended upon me like an unexpected early morning fog. As other panel members spoke to the teenagers, my mind took flight. I was still part of the conversation but preoccupied with other thoughts.

About 10-12 beautiful adoptees sat in front of me ranging from ages 13-17, and mostly female. The thought that keep bouncing around in my head made me sad and very reflective. I wondered if the kids knew just how beautiful and special they all were. Churning over and over in my head was the thought of myself at their age. That split from my first mother played itself out over and over and over in friendships and relationships in ways that I was blinded to at their age but in ways that are so clear to me today. The fracture of the very first relationship I ever had tilted every other relationship since then.

The subtle whispering that crept through my thoughts convinced me of a picture of myself far different than was actually there. It was as if I stood in front of a fun house mirror

everyday and the image that reflected back to me was distorted. It was this image that I took with me everyday that told me I wasn't good enough; I wasn't worthy. This image and subliminal understanding affected how I interacted with people. It created an invisible line that I rarely would cross. My relationships and friendships were superficial and kept at a safe distance. This protected me from the rejection that I feared and came accustomed to expect. If I only waded in to relationships, I couldn't be drowned by the rejection that was sure to follow. So I stood back, and watched as others formed deeper relationships and wondered why I couldn't do the same. I wondered why my emotional roots only went down so far and others had deep strong giant oak-like roots that drew people in and hugged them.

The saddle bags full of issues that accompany adoption are compounded in Transracial adoption. The whispers that bounce around in your head like the digital tennis ball in the video game Pong are verified when the subtle messages from society and not so subtle messages from peers tell you you're different. Not only do they tell you you're different but that tell you in a way that cosigns the whispers that say you are not as good. The thoughts are sinister on their own but when something on the exterior supports them it makes it difficult to overcome them.

This all came back to me as I sat in front of these kids and I couldn't help but wonder how they were affected by this invisible poisonous fog that clings to thoughts and images.

In a predominately white environment, as a child of color at the age of dating I wondered what messages were being sent to these children. Were the messages that they weren't as beautiful or attractive as the white kids getting through to them? As these teenagers begin the process of pairing up with other teens are some being left out because of the cultural differences in beauty?

It was the girls I worried about the most. The boys of color have, for lack of a better term, better cross over appeal. White girls being attracted to black boys is more common than white boys being attracted to black girls. My fear was that the pursuit of them in the white community is different than if they were in a black community. The girls who would get a great deal of attention in the black community may find the line of friendship stops at dating when you are a female of color in a predominately white community. The message that that sends to a young girl could be devastating. The fun house mirror that I constantly struggle with is making house calls to generations behind me and I wanted to stand up and tell one adoptee at a time that the reduced image of themselves was altered. The image that I see of them stands

taller, is more capable, is funnier, kinder, more powerful, and their REAL potential is so bright it was burning my corneas.

I wanted to shout down the whispers that began at that initial separation from their first mother that says they are not good enough. I wanted to summon all the strength I've gained from my own powerful introspection and use it to strangle the exterior coy messages that support those whispers.

This was a new realization to me and the information was traveling through my brain at a pace that was hard to digest. It was a series of powerful messages that when organized would be inspiring but at this time the unorganized messages pounding against my skull would only come out as babble, inaudible and incoherent streams of thought. The ability to string the thoughts together without looking like a 42 year old creeper who was telling teenagers they were beautiful was not solidified in this instant.

I left the panel frustrated and saddened because what the kids needed to hear they didn't get to hear from and the echoes of the thought, "They are better than the image they see," followed me to lunch.

Still I am frustrated and saddened but inspired because from this encounter will come an amazing message that I will share with the next group, most likely through my tears, as I picture mirror after fun house mirror being shattered and the real images of these beautiful kids emerging. For those who attended the camp please pass this along to your children and let them know, they are better than the image they see.

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THE ADOPTION PROJECT: I am working on a special project that will combine the shared experiences of adult adoptees, First mothers, and Adoptive parents, in a powerful way to send an empowering and inspirational message to today's adoptees. If you are interested in sharing from your own experience please contact me for the particulars @ Kevin8967@sbcglobal.net. Feel free to share this with other who also may be interested.



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