

UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

AUGUST 2014

Dylan, age 18 is waiting...

Photo by: Alan Gibby



Alisia, age 16 is waiting...

Photo by: Summer Derrick

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

YOU KNOW YOU ARE IN A PERMANENT HOME IF...

- You are introduced as "son" or "daughter."
- You have your own Christmas stocking.
- You have your picture on the wall. An 8 x 10.
- Your picture is on Grandma's wall.
- Your clothes are not labeled.
- You get braces on your teeth.
- You think of calling your social worker, and you don't have one!
- Your mom and dad sign your school permission slips.
- You do not worry about moving to another family.
- You go on family vacations.
- You stay with your grandma, friends or relatives if your parents go on a trip.
- Your name is printed on family Christmas cards.
- You move with your family to another state.
- You stay with one of your parents if they get a divorce.
- You stay with the family even if mom or dad is seriously ill.
- You know what school you will attend next year.
- You have a savings account, or a college fund.
- You can tell school friends about your next summer vacation plans.
- You are insured to drive the family car.
- You wear your mother's wedding dress at your own wedding.
- Your parents help you with a down payment on car, apartment, furniture, etc.
- Your mother becomes your children's grandmoher.
- You can come home, even with your kids, if you need help.
- Your name is in the family will.
- You can inherit the family ranch.
- You feel that you "belong" in this family.
- Having the key to the house.
- Having someone to call in case of emergency.
(or when you have a flat tire on your way to work on your first day.)



Back-to-School Transitions: Tips for Parents

By Ted Feinberg, EdD, NCSP, & Katherine C. Cowan
National Association of School Psychologists

Getting a new school year off to a good start can influence children's attitude, confidence, and performance both socially and academically. The transition from August to September can be difficult for both children and parents. Even children who are eager to return to class must adjust to the greater levels of activity, structure, and, for some, pressures associated with school life.

The degree of adjustment depends on the child, but parents can help their children (and the rest of the family) manage the increased pace of life by planning ahead, being realistic, and maintaining a positive attitude. Here are a few suggestions to help ease the transition and promote a successful school experience.

Before School Starts

Good physical and mental health. Be sure your child is in good physical and mental health. Schedule doctor and dental checkups early. Discuss any concerns you have over your child's emotional or psychological development with your pediatrician. Your doctor can help determine if your concerns are normal, age-appropriate issues or require further assessment. Your child will benefit if you can identify and begin addressing a potential issue before school starts. Schools appreciate the efforts of parents to remedy problems as soon as they are recognized.

Review all of the information. Review the material sent by the school as soon as it arrives. These packets include important information about your child's teacher, room number, school supply requirements, sign ups for after-school sports and activities, school calendar dates, bus transportation, health and emergency forms, and volunteer opportunities.

Mark your calendar. Make a note of important dates, especially back-to-school nights. This is especially important if you have children in more than one school and need to juggle obligations. Arrange for a babysitter now, if necessary.

Make copies. Make copies of all your child's health and emergency information for reference. Health forms are typically good for more than a year and can be used again for camps, extracurricular activities, and the following school year.

Buy school supplies early. Try to get the supplies as early as possible and fill the backpacks a week or two before school starts. Older children can help do this, but make sure they use a checklist that you can review. Some teachers require specific supplies, so save receipts for items that you may need to return later.

Re-establish the bedtime and mealtime routines. Plan to re-establish the bedtime and mealtime routines (especially breakfast) at least 1 week before school starts. Prepare your child for this change by talking with your child about the benefits of school routines in terms of not becoming over tired or overwhelmed by school work and activities. Include pre-bedtime reading and household chores if these were suspended during the summer.

Turn off the TV. Encourage your child to play quiet games, do puzzles, flash cards, color, or read as early morning activities instead of watching television. This will help ease your child into the learning process and school routine. If possible, maintain this practice throughout the school year. Television is distracting for many children, and your child will arrive at school better prepared to learn each morning if he or she has engaged in less passive activities.

Visit school with your child. If your child is young or in a new school, visit the school with your child. Meeting the teacher, locating their classroom, locker, lunchroom, etc., will help ease pre-school anxieties and also allow your child to ask questions about the new environment. Call ahead to make sure the teachers will be available to introduce themselves to your child.

Minimize clothes shopping woes. Buy only the essentials. Summer clothes are usually fine during the early fall, but be sure to have at least one pair of sturdy shoes. Check with your school to confirm dress code guidelines. Common concerns include extremely short skirts and shorts, low rise pants, bare midriffs, spaghetti strap or halter tops, exposed undergarments, and clothing that have antisocial messages.

Designate and clear a place to do homework. Older children should have the option of studying in their room or a quiet area of the house. Younger children usually need an area set aside in the family room or kitchen to facilitate adult monitoring, supervision, and encouragement.

Select a spot to keep backpacks and lunch boxes. Designate a spot for your children to place their school belongings as well as a place to put important notices and information sent home for you to see. Explain that emptying their backpack each evening is part of their responsibility, even for young children.

Freeze a few easy dinners. It will be much easier on you if you have dinner prepared so that meal preparation will not add to household tensions during the first week of school.

The First Week

Clear your own schedule. To the extent possible, postpone business trips, volunteer meetings, and extra projects. You want to be free to help your child acclimate to the school routine and overcome the confusion or anxiety that many children experience at the start of a new school year.

Make lunches the night before school. Older children should help or make their own. Give them the option to buy lunch in school if they prefer and finances permit.

Set alarm clocks. Have school-age children set their own alarm clocks to get up in the morning. Praise them for prompt response to morning schedules and bus pickups.

Leave plenty of extra time. Make sure your child has plenty of time to get up, eat breakfast, and get to school. For very young children taking the bus, pin to their shirt or backpack an index card with pertinent information, including their teacher's name and bus number, as well as your daytime contact information.

After school. Review with your child what to do if he or she gets home after school and you are not there. Be very specific, particularly with young children. Put a note card in their backpack with the name(s) and number(s) of a neighbor who is home during the day as well as a number where you can be reached. If you have not already done so, have your child meet neighbor contacts to reaffirm the backup support personally.

Review your child's schoolbooks. Talk about what your child will be learning during the year. Share your enthusiasm for the subjects and your confidence in your child's ability to master the content. Reinforce the natural progression of the learning process that occurs over the school year. Learning skills take time and repetition. Encourage your child to be patient, attentive, and positive.

Send a brief note to your child's teacher. Let the teachers know that you are interested in getting regular feedback on how and what your child is doing in school. Be sure to attend back-to-school night and introduce yourself to the teachers. Find out how they like to communicate with parents (e.g., through notes, e-mail, or phone calls). Convey a sincere desire to be a partner with your children's teachers to enhance their learning experience.

Familiarize yourself with the other school professionals. Make an effort to find out who it is in the school or district who can be a resource for you and your child. Learn their roles and how best to access their help if you need them. This can include the principal and front office personnel; school psychologist, counselor, and social worker; the reading specialist, speech therapist, and school nurse; and the after-school activities coordinator.

Overcoming Anxiety

Let your children know you care. If your child is anxious about school, send personal notes in the lunch box or book bag. Reinforce the ability to cope. Children absorb their parent's anxiety, so model optimism and confidence for your child. Let your child know that it is natural to be a little nervous anytime you start something new but that your child will be just fine once he or she becomes familiar with classmates, the teacher, and school routine.

Do not overreact. If the first few days are a little rough, try not to over react. Young children in particular may experience separation anxiety or shyness initially but teachers are trained to help them adjust. If you drop them off, try not to linger. Reassure them that you love them, will think of them during the day, and will be back.

Remain calm and positive. Acknowledge anxiety over a bad experience the previous year. Children who had a difficult time academically or socially or were teased or bullied may be more fearful or reluctant to return to school. If you have not yet done so, share your child's concern with the school and confirm that the problem has been addressed. Reassure your child that the problem will not occur again in the new school year, and that you and the school are working together to prevent further issues.

Reinforce your child's ability to cope. Give your child a few strategies to manage a difficult situation on his or her own. But encourage your child to tell you or the teacher if the problem persists. Maintain open lines of communication with the school.

Arrange play dates. Try to arrange get-togethers with some of your child's classmates before school starts and during the first weeks of school to help your child re-establish positive social relationships with peers.

Plan to volunteer in the classroom. If possible, plan to volunteer in the classroom at least periodically throughout the year. Doing so helps your child understand that school and family life are linked and that you care about the learning experience. Being in the classroom is also a good way to develop a relationship with your child's teachers and classmates, and to get firsthand exposure to the classroom environment and routine. Most teachers welcome occasional parent help, even if you cannot volunteer regularly.

Extracurricular Activities

Go for quality, not quantity. Your child will benefit most from one or two activities that are fun, reinforce social development, and teach new skills. Too much scheduled time can be stressful, especially for young children, and may make it harder to concentrate on schoolwork. When evaluating extracurricular activities, consider your family schedule and personal energy level. Multiple activities per child may be too much to manage, particularly if the activities have overlapping times, disparate locations, require your attendance, or disrupt the dinner hour.

Select activities where you have someone with whom you can carpool. Even if you are available to drive most days, you will need backup sometimes. Choosing activities that occur on-site after school will also minimize driving.

Find out from the school or teacher which days will be heavy homework or test study days and schedule extracurricular activities accordingly.

If your child does not want to participate in regular, organized extracurricular activities, you may want to consider other options to help build interests and social skills. For example, check out the local library for monthly reading programs, find out if your local recreation or community center offers drop-in activities, or talk to other parents and schedule regular play dates with their children.

When Problems Arise

These recommendations can contribute to a positive and productive school experience for most children. Some children may exhibit more extreme opposition to or fear of school or may be coping with more specific learning or psychological difficulties.

If your child demonstrates problems that seem extreme in nature or go on for an extended period, you may want to contact the school to set up an appointment to meet with your child's teachers and school psychologist. They may be able to offer direct or indirect support that will help identify and reduce the presenting problem. They may also suggest other resources within the school and the community to help you address the situation.

While children can display a variety of behaviors, it is generally wise not to over-interpret those behaviors. More often than not, time and a few intervention strategies will remedy the problem. Most children are wonderfully resilient and, with your support and encouragement, will thrive throughout their school experience.

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Exercise and Stress: Get Moving to Manage Stress

By Mayo Clinic Staff

You know that exercise does your body good, but you're too busy and stressed to fit it into your routine. Hold on a second — there's good news when it comes to exercise and stress.

Virtually any form of exercise, from aerobics to yoga, can act as a stress reliever. If you're not an athlete or even if you're downright out of shape, you can still make a little exercise go a long way toward stress management. Discover the connection between exercise and stress relief — and why exercise should be part of your stress management plan.

Exercise and stress relief

Exercise increases your overall health and your sense of well-being, which puts more pep in your step every day. But exercise also has some direct stress-busting benefits.

- It pumps up your endorphins. Physical activity helps to bump up the production of your brain's feel-good neurotransmitters, called endorphins. Although this function is often referred to as a runner's high, a rousing game of tennis or a nature hike also can contribute to this same feeling.
- It's meditation in motion. After a fast-paced game of

racquetball or several laps in the pool, you'll often find that you've forgotten the day's irritations and concentrated only on your body's movements. As you begin to regularly shed your daily tensions through movement and physical activity, you may find that this focus on a single task, and the resulting energy and optimism, can help you remain calm and clear in everything that you do.

- It improves your mood. Regular exercise can increase self-confidence and lower the symptoms associated with mild depression and anxiety. Exercise also can improve your sleep, which is often disrupted by stress, depression and anxiety. All this can ease your stress levels and give you a sense of command over your body and your life.

Put exercise and stress relief to work for you

A successful exercise program begins with a few simple steps.

- Consult with your doctor. If you haven't exercised for some time and you have health concerns, you may want to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise routine.
- Walk before you run. Build up your fitness level gradually. Excitement about a new program can lead to overdoing it and possibly even injury. For most healthy adults, the Department of Health and Human Services recommends getting at least 150 minutes a week of moderate aerobic activity (think

brisk walking or swimming) or 75 minutes a week of vigorous aerobic activity (such as running). If you're new to exercise, start at the moderate level and then add vigorous activity as your fitness improves.

- Do what you love. Virtually any form of exercise or movement can increase your fitness level while decreasing your stress. The most important thing is to pick an activity that you enjoy. Examples include walking, stair climbing, jogging, bicycling, yoga, tai chi, gardening, weightlifting and swimming.
- Pencil it in. Although your schedule may necessitate a morning workout one day and an evening activity the next, carving out some time to move every day helps you make your exercise program an ongoing priority.

Stick with it

Starting an exercise program is just the first step. Here are some tips for sticking with a new routine or reinvigorating a tired workout:

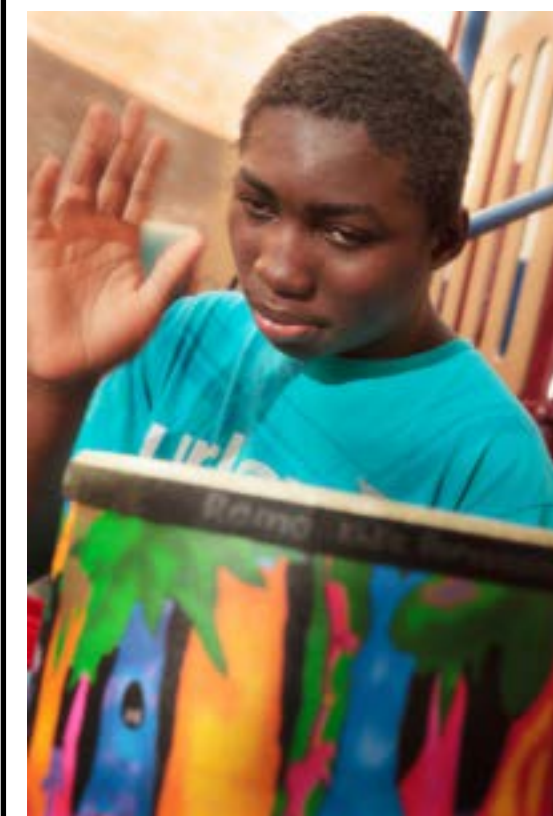
- Set SMART goals. Write down specific, measureable, attainable, relevant and time-limited goals. If your primary goal is to reduce stress in your life and recharge your batteries, your specific goals might include committing to walking during your lunch hour three times a week or, if needed, finding a baby sitter to watch your children so that you can slip away to attend a cycling class.
- Find a friend. Knowing that someone is waiting for you to

show up at the gym or the park can be a powerful incentive. Working out with a friend, co-worker or family member often brings a new level of motivation and commitment to your workouts.

- Change up your routine. If you've always been a competitive runner, take a look at other less competitive options that may help with stress reduction, such as Pilates or yoga classes. As an added bonus, these kinder, gentler workouts may enhance your running while also decreasing your stress.
- Exercise in increments. Even brief bouts of activity offer benefits. For instance, if you can't fit in one 30-minute walk, try three 10-minute walks instead. What's most important is making regular physical activity part of your lifestyle.

Whatever you do, don't think of exercise as just one more thing on your to-do list. Find an activity you enjoy — whether it's an active tennis match or a meditative meander down to a local park and back — and make it part of your regular routine. Any form of physical activity can help you unwind and become an important part of your approach to easing stress.

- Source: Reprinted from the MayoClinic.com article "Exercise and stress: Get moving to manage stress" (<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/stress-management/in-depth/exercise-and-stress/art-20044469?pg=1>)
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Moses, age 15 is waiting...

Moses has a passion for music! He loves to sing and often has people clap for him as he dances. This loveable young man relishes being the center of attention. Funny and affable, Moses can entertain himself with simple toys and can often be found playing with Tupperware.

This teen is currently in the seventh grade. It is not expected that Moses will live independently as an adult, but he can have a fantastic life! He is in counseling, which will need to continue after placement. This great kid is in need of a family who can provide him with the love and support he deserves.

If your family is interested, we urge you to inquire. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related services. This is a LEGAL RISK ADOPTIVE PLACEMENT. In a legal risk adoptive placement, it is expected that the family will eventually adopt the child, even though the birth parents' rights have not been fully terminated at the time of placement.

For Utah children, only homestudied families from all states are encouraged to inquire.



RETRACE DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES TO HELP OLDER CHILDREN HEAL

By Claudia Fletcher

outside the context of a relationship. Without that relationship, however, a child has no incentive to behave better. To help children attach, learn to gently correct behaviors without over-reacting. Picture yourself as a new husband or wife trying to please the other and be genuinely attractive and worth attaching to. Long lists of rules and consequences that require consistent behavior management should not be the focus of this first stage.

As much as possible, create good feelings for the child whenever you are around. Use lots of laughter, pop a Hershey's kiss in her mouth when she sustains eye contact, and give as much affection as she will allow. When the child misbehaves, stay calm and point out that the behavior is not appropriate while redirecting her to a new activity with you by her side. Actions and reactions like these promote bonding between parents and children.

One of the most significant pieces of this stage in understanding hurt children is Erikson's definition of hope: "enduring belief in the attainability of fervent wishes."² Recognizing that many children who enter care do not believe they can get what they want provides insight into their little hearts. With no hope and no belief in their own abilities, they are victims in a dim dark world. And, according to Erikson's theory, the only way they can develop the ego quality of hope is to attach to another person.

STAGE TWO: 18 MONTHS TO 3 YEARS AFTER PLACEMENT
EGO DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: AUTONOMY VS. SHAME.
BASIC STRENGTHS: SELF-CONTROL, COURAGE, AND WILL

Once an adopted child learns to attach, he is ready for stage two—the "terrible twos" in typical development. For a child placed at 11, this stage can coincide with puberty. Complicating matters further, we parents find it exceedingly hard to muster the emotional response we would offer a tantruming toddler when confronted with an older child having a meltdown.

During Erikson's second stage, as Arlene Harder explains, we can "build self-esteem and autonomy as we gain more control over our bodies and acquire new skills, learning right from wrong. And one of our skills during the 'Terrible Twos' is our ability to use the powerful word 'NO!' It may be pain for parents, but it develops important skills of the will."³

Parents are often so relieved when it appears the child is attaching that they begin to panic when defiance kicks up a notch. They wonder if the attachment isn't real, but according to Erikson, only when children complete the attachment stage can they enter the willful stage during which the need to question, tantrum, and act out dramatically multiplies.

Responding to an older child's tantrum as if she were a two-

year-old is tricky. We can pick up a two-year-old and take her to a safe place to calm down. When a youth is 15, however, that's not an option. Remembering that her actions are as impersonal and unplanned as a toddler's can help us overlook much of it. In the midst of a tantrum, children cannot reason. Do not try to discuss their behavior or redirect them by speaking more loudly. That only escalates the situation. If the child is safe and doesn't pose a danger to himself or others, the best choice is often to leave the room and give him time to finish the tantrum. If safety is a concern, sit down and remain silent or talk very softly. Active listening is much better than attempting to reason.

Consider a raging child who goes into the "nobody likes me" mode. Our natural instinct is to assure her of our love, but that just gives her a reason to argue. A better response is, "It sounds like you are feeling sad or feeling like you aren't loved." To de-escalate tantrums, listen actively and rephrase the child's thoughts.

Many of our children have raged over the years, all at different stages and in different ways. They have used foul language, threatened us, and damaged property. At the outset of our parenting journey we wanted to rapidly stop the meltdowns, but that just made things worse. Now, with our younger children, we respond as calmly as possible and wait it out.

STAGE THREE: 3 TO 5 YEARS POST-PLACEMENT
EGO DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: INITIATIVE VS. GUILT.
BASIC STRENGTH: PURPOSE

Erikson links the third psychosocial crisis to the "play age," or later preschool years. During this time, the healthy developing child learns to: (1) imagine and broaden skills through active play of all sorts, including fantasy, (2) cooperate with others, and (3) lead as well as follow.⁴

Healthy preschoolers can explore and develop social skills fairly easily, but the same lessons are much harder for an older child. Using the example of a boy who is 10 at placement, let's go through his adolescence according to Erikson.

For 18 months after your family welcomes the child home, until he is 12, the boy is working on attachment. Then it is time for his defiance phase. Until the child is almost 14, he is oppositional, argues with everything, and has fits of aggression. Now he's entering high school, and it is time to learn the social skills his peers learned in preschool.

At this stage you must allow for failure, let him be imaginative, and set up ways he can test skills without being embarrassed. Scouting or martial arts classes where multi-age groups participate can offer children a place to connect

Years ago, I was the social worker on two separate cases that disrupted the same year. With each set of parents I tried to explain a fundamental truth: relationship reciprocity and bonding expectations for a child during the first year of an adoptive placement must be the same as those for a newborn. To heal and thrive, older adoptees must be able to retrace, with their new family, developmental steps they missed early on.

During college I studied Erik Erikson, a Pulitzer prize-winning psychologist known for his work on identity and psychosocial development in the mid-1900s. Decades later, I noticed remarkable connections between his theories and parenting older children. The key part of Erikson's theory is that until a person completes one developmental stage, they cannot go on to the next stage.

Erikson's first four stages—applied to youth from the time of placement to the time they get ready for independence—can teach parents how to help older children heal while they still live at home.

STAGE ONE: THE FIRST 18 MONTHS
EGO DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: TRUST VS. MISTRUST.
BASIC STRENGTHS: DRIVE AND HOPE

"[E]mphasis is on the mother's positive and loving care...[using] visual contact and touch. If we pass successfully through this period of life, we...[can] trust that life is basically okay and have basic confidence in the future. ...[I]f our needs are not met, we may end up with a deep-seated feeling of worthlessness and a [general] mistrust of the world."¹

Research has shown us how important it is for children to attach. Even so, in the first year after placement, we new parents still make the mistake of dwelling on behaviors instead of attachment. Things can change if we view newly placed children of any age as a newborn:

- Expectations. Can a newborn give back emotionally? Do chores like everyone else? Know how to have a reciprocal relationship? Of course not. Neither do older kids in a new family.

- Response. If expectation changes, so does the response. Instead of thinking a child is refusing to comply, assume she is unable to complete the task. This nurturing, teaching approach often nets better results whether a child is being oppositional or is truly incapable.

- Realizations. Until a child is attached, behavior will not change. If the child cannot bond with anyone, why would he want to please anyone? Too often adoptive parents expect compliance

with whomever they feel comfortable. Preschoolers love hanging out with “cool” older kids. Allowing older children to master interactions with much younger children can be beneficial for both.

Some of our oldest kids really enjoy spending time with the youngest ones. We supervise the interaction, and try to keep other siblings’ comments to a minimum. Finding situations in which the youth can be both a leader and follower may also help during this stage.

Failure to resolve this stage, Erikson explains, causes immobilizing guilt. Children may be fearful, hang back from groups, rely too heavily on adults, and have a limited ability to play and imagine.

Thus it is key to guide children through stage three so they can face stage four without fear or guilt. Trying to rush them through stages because they are so much behind their peers is counter-productive.

STAGE FOUR: 6 TO 12 YEARS AFTER PLACEMENT
EGO DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: INDUSTRY VS. INFERIORITY:
BASIC STRENGTHS: METHOD AND COMPETENCE

“During this stage...we are capable of learning, creating and accomplishing numerous new skills and knowledge, thus developing a sense of industry. This is also a very social stage of development and if we experience unresolved feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among our peers, we can have serious problems [with]...competence and self-esteem.”⁵

Years after their peers, many adopted children reach a stage where they can make future plans. Up to this point they have had a sense of inadequacy and inferiority that has eroded feelings of competence and hurt their self-esteem. Fortunately, with support of dedicated parents, youth can still work through stage four and learn to feel good about themselves.

Children who hit this stage at age five have years to test a variety of life choices. Older children who still need to discover talents and interests must try many different things in an abbreviated timeframe. It’s important to give youth plenty of chances to succeed and offer a lot of encouragement. Tasks that your children do with you can increase their confidence and receptivity to new activities.

Schools and communities offer other options. Music, sports, drama, and other community ed classes enable children to explore many avenues. We allow our stage four children to try a lot of activities and ask only that they participate for one season before electing to opt out.

Final Thoughts
 Parenting older adopted children requires patience, time, and

realistic expectations. Keeping in mind Erikson’s stages has helped me to parent my own children more effectively, and better prepare parents as they plan to adopt and work through the first few years of placement.

Each stage takes longer than we might prefer. But just as we cannot expect a healthy two-year-old to act like a 10-year-old, we cannot expect a 10-year-old child who is emotionally two to act his age. When we take a step back, slow ourselves down, celebrate small victories, and walk through this journey with our children, there can be healing for us all.

Footnotes

1. Harder, Arlene F. , M.A., MFT. “The Developmental Stages of Eric Erikson.” www.learningplaceonline.com/stages/organize/Erikson.htm. Support4Change. n.d. Web. 5 Nov. 2009.
2. Erikson, Erik. Insight and Responsibility. New York: W.W. Norton. 1964. p.118.
3. Harder, 2009.
4. "Stages of Social-Emotional Development in Children and Teenagers." www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/development/erikson.shtml. Child Development Institute. n.d. Web. 5 Nov. 2009.
5. Harder, 2009.

An adoptive parent and child welfare expert, Claudia is a sought after speaker. She and her husband Bart also founded Third Degree Parenting, LLC, and this year published *Out of Many, One Family: How Two Adults Claimed Twelve Children through Adoption*.

Published in the Fall 2009 Issue of Adoptalk.

UPCOMING EVENTS:

ADOPTION WALK
 October 18th • Liberty Park

NOVEMBER CELEBRATION
 November 8th • Boondock’s locations (Draper and Kaysville) • 10:00 – 2:00

UAC SPRING ADOPTION CONFERENCE
 March 25th & 26th 2015 • South Towne Expo Center



HEART GALLERY NEEDS LOCAL VOLUNTEERS

As we look towards opening our 10th annual Heart Gallery this coming November we are looking for local volunteers to help with finding locations for Heart Gallery as well as help with locations for mini- towers. The mini towers are small display towers that can go in places that the large Heart Gallery cannot. We are looking for local volunteers that can assist The Adoption Exchange in finding locations for both of these exhibits. A small stipend will be offered as well as mileage. We know that you know your communities better than we do. We would like volunteers across the state of Utah especially in the more rural areas. So if you have thought about helping out this might be a good fit for you. We will provide you with all the information you need to approach local businesses and community centers to help find families for Utah’s waiting children.

Please fill out the form below and send it to:
 The Adoption Exchange
 975 E Woodoak Lane Ste. 220
 SLC, Utah 84117
 Or email the following information to Kathy Searle at ks@adoptex.org

HEART GALLERY VOLUNTEER APPLICATION

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip code: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

THE ADOPTION EXCHANGE • 975 E WOODOAK LANE, SUITE 220 • SLC, UT 84117 OR EMAIL INFORMATION TO KS@ADOPTEX.ORG



BEARING WITNESS:

One Gift Parents Can Offer to Help Their Children Heal

By: Jennifer Winkelmann MA, LPC, NCC

Change... Transition... Those are really just nicer and softer words for “loss” and “upheaval”, right?

In my personal life, I experienced a good handful of changes in 2011. These changes are the likely prompt for turning this thought over in my brain: How is it possible for humans to successfully adjust when Upheaval (and her less nice cousin, Loss) come calling again? For all my mental gymnastics, I kept coming back to one significant factor – relationship. When we experience challenges, the healing power of authentic relationship is highlighted once again. It is often the “make or break” factor as to whether humans are resilient in the face of the most significant challenges.

Many times, when change comes – even if it is a positive change, in our best interest in the long-run, or something we “want” – we also experience high levels of stress. Our systems become deregulated, and we begin a subconscious search for something to bring us back to a state of regulation. Or, in less scientific terms, stress usually propels most of us into behavior we think will offer some relief. Most of the time, we engage in some form of imbalance, trying to re-regulate, incoherently pressing toward stabilization. We do nothing but sleep... or become insomniacs. We turn to food for soothing... or lose our appetites altogether. We exercise obsessively... or make too friendly an acquaintance with the couch. We become cranky and irritable... or shift into a people-pleasing mode in an effort to ignore what is happening with Self. And countless other things... in search of something less painful than the change and the stress that comes with it.

When I reflect on my own experience, and I name that which helped me come to healing in the wake of upheaval or loss, the name usually belongs to another person. Our authentic relationship with another is where we find the most effective salve was applied to the wounds we carry.

So, in that vein, I’ve been sifting through how relationship plays a part as the great healer when we face transitions. What I have concluded is this: There is significant healing power in having a Witness to change. Somehow, when we have a Witness to our losses, upheavals, and transitions, we are better equipped to endure. When someone is bearing witness to our pain, watching faithfully, waiting for opportunities to offer his/her presence in the midst of that chaos, it can make all the difference as we navigate our way toward wellness.

A Witness reminds us we are not alone.

A Witness offers perspective, comfort, and a safe place to talk about what is happening.

A Witness marks the importance of the change, giving us permission to say, “It matters. The way this change is affecting me is significant, and I deserve to have feelings about it.”

When we weigh these thoughts with regard for “our” children, children who come into our lives with significant histories of trauma, we must consider the significant, life-altering, incomprehensible changes they have had to endure; it is easy to see how a child’s grief, rooted in past hurts, can interfere with relationship today – in this family. When we, as caregivers, experience those blocks to relationship with our children, we search for ways to build bridges and encourage the authentic connections we yearn for.

One way to make in-roads to a child’s hurting heart is to be a Witness. This is not a charge that we have to find ways to travel through time, to the past where the hurt began. Instead, we bear witness to the pain that is the natural outcome of the child’s losses. Being intentional as a Witness to a child’s pain communicates, “What happened to you matters. It is safe for you to share this with me. I will not leave you alone with your pain.” What better foundation for relationship can we provide for the broken-hearted?

Some caregivers are eager to be a witness, but find their youngsters keep those vulnerabilities locked up tight. These parents long for their children to peek out from the places where they hide. Witnessing works anyway. It’s about holding a sacred space for the people we love... a space they can enter into, knowing they are safe, accepted, and wanted – just as they are.

The intention we set to create emotional safety is the greatest gift we can give to another human being. So, set your sights on holding a space, and find ways to be a Witness. Then let your witness be a bridge between you, knowing you will have to build the bridge slowly, while you walk. And, in time, Love will do its gentle, healing work.



FACEBOOK-ADOPTION FRIEND OR FOE?

Thoughts of an Adoptive Parent

By Kathy Searle, MSW, Utah Director of Programs, The Adoption Exchange

It seems that nearly every day a new story circulates online, in the newspaper, or on TV about people making connections with long lost relatives or friends through Facebook. There were recently efforts made to open adoption records in the state of Utah. The bill requesting this change failed to pass in the legislature and yet birth families and adoptees are making their own connections every day through social media.

There are two sides to this issue. It goes back to the early 90's when adoption was struggling to come out of the shadows of secrecy. Contact between birth parents and the children they placed for adoption was becoming more accepted.

I recently explained to my 19 year old daughter, whose adoption was originally closed at the request of the birth parents and then opened when she was 12, that many families have open adoptions today. I explained that having both of your mothers in the same room should not be a weird thing, but instead, a natural thing that can, and does happen in adoption. I told her that having more people to love you is a gift.

There are generations of adult adoptees still struggling with the question, "Should I try to find my birth parents?" In the past, making this decision to begin the search did not always present quick results. Adoptee after adoptee talks about searching and not finding, years passing in the mean time, continuing to search without finding. With today's technology, if you have the right information you could very well type a few words into a search engine or on Facebook and be staring at a photo of your birth child or your birth parent. The practices and policies of today are rushing to catch up to what is already taking place.

So the question is, is social media friend or foe? For many of the people I have spoken to in the adoption arena, it is a friend. They don't have to hire a detective, sign up with a registry or hire an attorney to petition the courts for information about who they are and the story of their beginning. On the other side of things, in foster care adoption, social media is often seen as a foe. When your teenager decides to find their birth family on Facebook and it is discovered that the birth family has not made changes since parental rights were terminated, it can be a devastating thing. Adoptive parents fear the worst for their child whom they love so much. Some even have to fear for the safety of their entire family.

Parents everywhere are struggling with determining whether social media is a friend or foe in their lives. I don't have all, if any, of the answers, but one thing that can be said is that we need to be talking with our children about the effects of finding their birth families through social media. It is important however to keep in mind that our own fears should be kept in check during this process. Many times, because of our fear, we make the wrong choice. Like trying to limit contact with the birth family or ignore that it is happening, even when we suspect it. As adoptive parents, we need to recognize the amazing pull of knowing who you are and where you came from. One of the difficult things about having a teenager is losing the control you once had in keeping them safe and regulating their environment. As we look at the emotional history that we bring to the situation and acknowledge our own fears, we are much better equipped to help our children explore relationships and build skills to keep them safe. Whether we like it or not, social media is here to stay and we need to develop strategies to keep ourselves and our families safe. We can do this by being honest with ourselves about what we are bringing to the table and help our kids be honest about what they and their birth families are bringing as well. It is still as complex as ever to tell the stories of why a child was placed for adoption or why a birth parent was not able to make necessary changes in order to get their child back. Those stories carry pain for everyone involved and they must be carefully held by everyone. We must also remember that the person's life that is impacted the most is the child, who sadly is usually the one that had no say about the decisions being made by the adults. There is fear and pain on all sides of the adoption triad, but in order to overcome the fear and pain it will take everyone involved to be honest with themselves about what they bring to the adoption. We must recognize the loss that brings us all together in order for us to attain the relationships that we strive for when we put a name into a Facebook search and wait for the results.



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