



# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

FEBRUARY 2015

**Shaleen, age 16 is waiting...**

Photo by: Drake Busath

# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

QUARTERLY DCFS NEWSLETTER



**Elizabeth, age 16 is waiting...**

Photo by: Brekke Felt

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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 or visit [www.utdcfsadopt.org](http://www.utdcfsadopt.org).

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They say the odds and statistics are stacked against me, well they may be but

**I am not a statistic and I am not an odd.**

I am an 18 year old girl that wants to be loved by a family. I have lived in the foster care system for 13 years. I have been told many times within those 13 years that

being older makes me more unable to be adopted but

**I never lose hope.**

They never tell me these things to make me lose hope but just to make it so I know how it really is.

**I am a fighter and fighters never quit.**

It's hard knowing that because of my age I may not have a family. But I always have hope no matter how long I have to wait, I will wait.

There are 6.5 billion people in this world; I'm pretty sure that someone out of those 6.5 billion are willing to take a look at my picture and read my description and say

**I want to get to know her.**

I wake up every day wondering if anyone has looked at my picture or if they have went to the website. But I always have hope no matter what and I know that if it was meant for me to belong to a family then It will happen that way. I can't stress over it.

**I take it one day at a time,  
one prayer at a time.**

-Estella, age 18, matched with a family

## Complex Trauma: Facts For Caregivers

*This fact sheet presents information that can help you recognize the signs and symptoms of complex trauma in your child and offers recommendations for what you can do to help your child heal.*



*Complex trauma describes both children's exposure to multiple traumatic events and the wide-ranging, long-term impact of this exposure. These events are severe, pervasive and often interpersonal, such as abuse or profound neglect. They usually begin early in life, may disrupt many aspects of the child's development, and interfere with the child's ability to form secure attachment bonds. Many aspects of a child's healthy physical and mental development rely on this primary source of safety and stability.*

### WHAT IS IT LIKE TO BE A CHILD WITH COMPLEX TRAUMA?

We all have an internal alarm system to warn us of danger and prepare us to respond. The "fight, flight, or freeze" response prepares us to fight off an attack, flee if fighting does not seem possible, or freeze if we can neither fight nor flee. This response is something that has been built into the human body and brain for thousands of years. When we perceive danger, this internal alarm system turns on, and when the danger passes, the alarm system shuts down.

Children with complex trauma often have overactive alarm systems, where their alarm system "goes haywire." These children may jump at any loud noise, or feel their hearts pounding when they see one child shove another on the playground. They might wake up from sleep every time a dog barks in the neighborhood. They are always on the lookout for danger. Often they think safe situations are dangerous. They have false alarms when things remind them of the traumatic events. We call these "trauma reminders."

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## WHAT ARE REACTIONS TO REMINDERS?

Trauma reminders make a child think about or “relive” a frightening event from the past. Trauma reminders (some people may call these “triggers”) can be places, sounds, smells, tastes, colors, textures, words, feelings, and even other people. Children can have trauma reminders many times a day. They can be reminded of traumas that happened even before they could understand or talk about them.

A child may react to a trauma reminder without being aware of the reminder. Parents and caregivers may not be aware of them either. Here are some common trauma reminders for children with complex trauma:

- Ketchup—reminds a child of the blood she saw when her father hit her brother
- A book dropping off a desk—reminds a child of gunshots in his neighborhood
- Packing suitcases—reminds a child of the day he was taken from his mother’s home and placed in foster care
- Arguing—takes a child back to seeing her father beat her mother
- Feeling alone and overwhelmed—reminds a child of how she felt while being sexually abused

## HOW MIGHT COMPLEX TRAUMA AFFECT THE WAY MY CHILD SEES THE WORLD?

Complex trauma changes how a child views the world and connects with other people. Some children with a complex trauma history may do the following:

- Believe that the world is and will always be an unsafe place
- Have trouble depending on a caregiver or other adults, such as teachers or police officers, to keep them safe
- Have trouble building and maintaining healthy relationships with others; approach relationships with suspicion and distrust
- Overreact or feel completely betrayed by a minor misunderstanding or squabble with a friend
- Respond negatively to seemingly positive events, such as praise, intimacy, or feelings of peace. A child who lacks experience of and memory for happy and safe times may not understand or be comfortable with such feelings.



## HOW DOES COMPLEX TRAUMA CHANGE MY CHILD'S THINKING?

A child with a complex trauma history may:

- Have trouble developing skills and learning, due to the amount of mental energy being spent reacting to trauma reminders
- Have trouble focusing, organizing, and processing information; this might make the child seem to be ignoring a caregiver or teacher who has to repeat requests or instructions to get a response
- Seem distracted because he is trying to predict or avoid the next "bad thing" that will happen
- Seem very nervous, emotionally intense, or to have a "hair-trigger" response; frequently, she may be flooded by overwhelming and unbearable emotions
- Seem "shut down," numb, and unable to experience or express any emotions

## PART OF TAKING CARE OF YOUR CHILD IS TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF FIRST.

- ***Be aware of your own feelings and reactions.*** How you are coping affects how you are able to help your child. Children often take their cues about how to react from the important adults around them, using the adult as a model for their own feelings and behaviors. If you are sad or upset in front of your child, that's okay. Show your child, through words and actions that, even when you're upset, you are still able to manage your feelings and to take care of him/her.
- ***Take care of yourself as best you can,*** and accept help from those around you. Taking care of yourself is an important part of taking care of your child. Try to get enough rest and exercise, and take some time away from your childcare responsibilities.
- ***Keep other family members and important adults*** (such as early child care and pre-school providers, teachers, coaches, clergy, and youth leaders) ***informed of what your child is experiencing.*** Partner with them to support your child by helping them to understand the connection between traumas and your child's feelings and behaviors.
- ***Do not hesitate to seek professional support.*** Parents and caregivers sometimes feel as though they should handle everything on their own. Experiencing repeated traumas can be extraordinarily painful, even overwhelming, and doesn't necessarily get better on its own. It makes sense to seek the advice, guidance, and support of someone who knows about trauma and can help you and your child.

## WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO HELP MY CHILD HEAL FROM COMPLEX TRAUMA?

- ❑ **Keep to a daily routine**, as much as you can, so she knows what to expect. Children are reassured and comforted when things are predictable and familiar.
- ❑ **Listen to his words and watch his behaviors**. While some children can tell you what they're experiencing, others won't want to talk about it, won't know what they are feeling, or can't express it in words. "Listen" to what your child is showing and telling you in words, behaviors, or physical complaints like headache or stomachache.
- ❑ **Praise your child** for making good choices, cooperating, and handling things well.
- ❑ **Set reasonable and consistent limits and give clear expectations**. Holding children accountable, especially children who have experienced traumas, helps them feel in control and successful.
- ❑ **Use simple language and watch your child's reaction**, when explaining what has happened. Follow your child's cues as to how much to say. Don't get frustrated if she asks you to tell it again. Older children may get quiet and seem not to want to discuss things, even though they want to know.
- ❑ **Reassure your child** when you leave him, in clear cut ways, and let him know when you will be back together. After an incident where your child has reacted to a trauma reminder or other upset, he might be clingier, have trouble separating, or be more fearful. If you tell your child, for example, "I will pick you up right after school," do your best to stick to that. (And it's best to be honest, rather than tell him what he wants to hear.)
- ❑ **Watch for trauma-related reminders** or "triggers" that are hard for your child. If she gets overly upset or angry when seeing people who hurt or neglected her or when overhearing adults talk about what happened, she may need to learn how to cope with painful events or images.
- ❑ **"Respond" to your child rather than "react."** Children often act out when faced with stressful situations. What seems like a tantrum or a rude demand may be a reaction to a trauma reminder. Before you jump in and punish, Think *trauma first*. Take some time to explore and understand the roots of the behavior.
- ❑ **Advocate for your child within the school system**, discuss what the school can do to support her (e.g., understanding potential trauma reminders or triggers such as fire alarms, offering counseling or accommodations, etc.).
- ❑ **Keep an eye out**, as your child gets older, for new situations that stir up trauma reactions. Be prepared for your child to "revisit" the traumas and, if you need to, seek professional support.



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Established by Congress in 2000, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) brings a singular and comprehensive focus to childhood trauma. NCTSN's collaboration of frontline providers, researchers, and families is committed to raising the standard of care while increasing access to services. Combining knowledge of child development, expertise in the full range of child traumatic experiences, and dedicated to evidence-based practices, the NCTSN changes the course of children's lives by changing the course of their care.

# Adoption Tax Credit: 2014 Finalized Adoptions

For adoptions finalized in 2014, there is a federal adoption tax credit of up to \$13,190 per child. The 2014 adoption tax credit is NOT a refundable credit, which means taxpayers can only get the credit refunded if they have federal income tax liability (*see below*).

The credit is paid one time *for each adopted child*, and should be claimed when taxpayers file taxes for 2014 (typically in early 2015).

To be eligible for the credit, parents must:

- **Have adopted a child other than a stepchild** — A child must be either under 18 or be physically or mentally unable to take care of him or herself.
- **Be within the income limits** — How much of the credit parents claim is affected by income. In 2014, families with a modified adjusted gross income below \$197,880 can claim full credit. Those with incomes above \$237,880 cannot claim the credit; those with incomes from \$197,880 to \$237,880 can claim partial credit.

## The Amount of Credit to Be Claimed

Families who finalize the adoption of a child with special needs in 2014 (*see details below*) can claim the full credit of \$13,190 on the line that asks for expenses—whether or not they had any expenses.

*Example* — A woman adopts three of her grandchildren from foster care and the state paid all of the fees. All three children receive monthly adoption assistance benefits and thus are considered special needs. The grandmother earns less than \$197,880 so she can claim the full credit of \$13,190 per child for a total of \$39,570. How much the grandmother actually receives, however, will depend on her tax liability (*explained below*).

## When to Claim the Credit

Parents who adopt a child with special needs claim the credit the year of finalization. Parents who adopt internationally 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 the year of finalization or the year after they spent the funds.

*Example* — A family begins adopting a U.S. infant in 2012 and pays \$4,000 in expenses in 2012, \$5,000 in 2013, and \$3,000 in 2014. The adoption finalizes in 2014. The parents must file for the \$4,000 spent in 2012 on their 2013 taxes. They cannot claim the \$5,000 and \$3,000 until they file their 2014 taxes.

## Qualifying as Special Needs

Families who finalized in 2014 the adoption of a child who has been determined to have special needs can claim the full credit of \$13,190 as their expenses, regardless of their actual 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 receives adoption subsidy or adoption assistance program benefits (which can include a monthly payment, Medicaid, or reimbursement of nonrecurring expenses). The instructions for the 2013 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 effort began (US child).
- 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 special needs under the tax credit. No child adopted internationally is considered special needs for the adoption 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.

### **How Much Taxpayers Will Benefit**

How much, if any, of the adoption tax credit a parent will receive depends on their federal income tax liability in 2014 (and the next five years). In one year, taxpayers can use as much of the credit as the full amount of their federal income tax liability, which is the amount on line 46 of the Form 1040 less certain other credits (see Child Tax Credit below). Even those who normally get a refund may still have tax liability and could get a larger refund with the adoption tax credit. Taxpayers have six years (the year they first claimed the credit plus five additional years) to use the credit.

People who do not have federal income tax liability will not benefit. We encourage them to file a Form 8839 with their taxes to document the credit. They will then be able to carry the credit forward to future years in case the credit becomes refundable again in the future or their tax situation changes. (If a tax preparer wants to charge extra to file the Form 8839 and you won't benefit at all with your 2014 taxes, you might want to wait and amend your taxes if the credit is ever made refundable.)

Below are a couple of examples of how the tax credit might benefit families who finalized adoptions in 2014 (these are simplified examples, which do not take into account the Child Tax Credit explained below).

*Example 1 — A couple adopted two brothers who had been determined to have special needs. The parents had \$6,500 in federal income tax withheld from their paychecks, and their tax liability is \$7,000, which means they would normally owe \$500 to the IRS. Their adoption tax credit is \$26,380, and they can use \$7,000 (their tax liability) of that with their 2013 taxes. They get a refund of the \$6,500 they had already paid, and can carry over \$19,380 for up to five more years.*

*Example 2 — A couple adopted three siblings with special needs. They had \$1,000 in federal income tax withheld from their paychecks, and their tax liability is \$0, which means they would receive a refund of \$1,000. They have \$39,570 in the adoption tax credit, but they cannot use it with their 2014 taxes since they have no federal income tax liability. They should still file Form 8839 with their 2014 tax return so that they can establish the credit, and carry it forward for up to five additional years in case their tax liability goes up in the future or the credit becomes refundable.*

### **Interaction with the Child Tax Credit**

If parents can claim their child as a dependent, then they should also look into the Child Tax Credit. The Child Tax Credit and the Adoption Tax Credit interact and may reduce the Child Tax Credit a family can claim. To determine the amount of the Child Tax Credit they can use, a family must complete the Child Tax Credit Worksheet in IRS Publication 972.

Taxpayers who can answer Yes on the last line of the Child Tax Credit Worksheet may be eligible for the Additional Child Tax Credit, which is a refundable credit (meaning they can claim the credit regardless of their tax liability). To claim the Additional Child Tax Credit, parents must complete IRS Form 8812.

### **Claiming the Credit**

To claim the credit, taxpayers will complete a 2014 version of IRS Form 8839 and submit it with their Form 1040 when they file their 2014 taxes. Before filing, taxpayers should review the 2014 Form 8839 instructions carefully to be sure they apply for the credit correctly. The instructions will likely contain a worksheet needed to calculate tax liability and thus how much of the credit will be received. The form and instructions will be available around January 2015 at [irs.gov](http://irs.gov).

### **What If I Have Additional Questions?**

If you have additional questions on the adoption tax credit, contact the North American Council on Adoptable Children at 651-644-3036 or [taxcredit@nacac.org](mailto:taxcredit@nacac.org).

25 Ways  
To Ask Your Teen:  
"How Was School  
Today?"

WITHOUT asking  
"How Was School  
Today?"

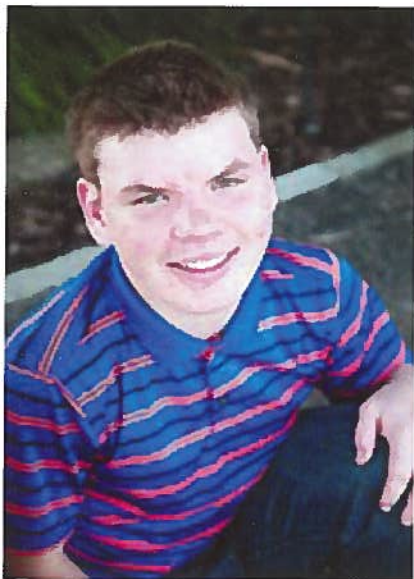
Simple Simon and Company

1. Where in the school do you hang out the most? (Like a particular hall, classroom, parking lot, etc.)
2. What would your school be better with? What would your school be better without?
3. If you were a teacher, what class would you teach? What class would be the worst to teach? Why?
4. What was the coolest (saddest, funniest, scariest) thing that you saw today?
5. Tell me one thing that you learned today.
6. If your day at school today was a movie what movie, would it be?
7. Besides walking to their next classes, what else do people do in the halls in-between classes?
8. Who do you think you could be nicer to?

9. What is your easiest class? What is your hardest class?
10. If they played music in the halls at school, what would everyone want them to play over the loudspeaker?
11. If you could read minds, what teachers' mind would you read?
12. If today had a theme song, what would it be?
13. Which class has your favorite group of students in it? Which class has the worst group of students?
14. What do you think you should do more of at school? What do you think you should do less of?
15. What are the top 3 (or 5) things that you hear people say in the halls?
16. What do you think the most important part of school is?
17. Tell me one question that you had today...even if it wasn't answered.
18. What class has the most cute boys/girls in it?
19. If an alien space ship landed at your school, who would you like them to beam aboard and take back to their home planet?
20. Who did you help today? Who helped you today?
21. If you could be invisible for the day at school what would you do?
22. What part of the day do you look forward to? What part of the day do you dread?
23. What would you change about school lunch?
24. What classmate is most likely to be arrested, made president, become a millionaire, be in movies, let loose a flock of wild chickens in the library, etc?
25. If you had to go to only one class every day, which class would it be?
26. Tell me one thing you read at school today.
27. If your day at school was an emoticon, which one would it be?
28. What do you think your teachers talked about in the faculty room today after school?

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Ok, so I know there were a few more than 25...but with teenagers...we all need all the help we can get!



## Wells, age 17 is waiting...

Wells loves living an active lifestyle! Catching a wave on a wakeboard, shooting hoops, or participating in archery are a few things he is masterful at doing. Learning about personal responsibility, Wells is thriving in caring for the family dog. Fond of playing his favorite games on the Wii, this great teen also enjoys listening to rap music. Wells hopes to travel a lot in his life. A twelfth grader this year, Wells does well in reading and typing. He benefits from an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) and counseling, which will need to continue after placement. He is not expected to live independently as an adult, but his life can be fantastic! Wells is a funny, friendly, and personal young man with a caring personality who is in need of a loving, caring and structured home. If your family can offer this, we urge you to inquire. Wells has a few food allergies such as a lamictal, chocolate, and peanuts. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related services. For Utah children, only homestudied families from all states are encouraged to inquire.

# Finding Parenting Support Online

Did you know that there are adoptive parents just like you around the world? Families are increasingly finding support through social media. Locally here in Utah, The Foster Care Foundation provides support to foster and adoptive parents through regional adoption clusters. Cluster is really just a fancy name for support group. Clusters provide local training on a variety of topics that include information for both foster and adoptive parents. Each region of the state also has a closed Facebook Cluster page that you can become a part of. Go to the Utah Foster Care Facebook page to learn more. The Adoption Exchange also shares information about upcoming trainings and events on their Facebook page, [facebook.com/adoptex](https://www.facebook.com/adoptex).

## Facebook pages that you might want to check out:

The Adoption Exchange  
Utah Foster Care  
Adopting the Older Child  
Foster2 Forever  
Foster2Forever – Foster Care Parenting Support  
Utah Transracial Adoption  
Adoptionhair\_skincare  
Adoption Learning  
Utah Adoption Council  
Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption  
National Adoption Day  
Save the Adoption Tax Credit

For other information and resources in your area visit: [http://www.utdcfsadopt.org/support\\_groups.shtml](http://www.utdcfsadopt.org/support_groups.shtml)

## Check out the latest titles that have been added to the Lending Library at Utah's Adoption Connection

### Books

Brain-Based Parenting by Daniel Hughes  
Teenagers and Attachment by Sue Arney, Camila Batmnghelidj, and Louise Michelle  
Mindful Movements by Thich Nhat Hanh  
Brothers and Sisters in Adoption:  
Helping Children Navigate Relationships When New Kids Join the Family by Arletta James

### CD's

Promoting Self-Esteem in Adopted Children/Intimacy and Relationships by Claudia Jewett Jarratt  
Attachment and Adoption/Bonding and Attachment in Adoptive Families by Vera Fahlberg  
Principles of Attachment Parenting by Arthur Becker Weidman, Ph.D  
Up Close and Personal by Bryan Post LCSW

Look for other interesting titles at [www.utdcfsadopt.org](http://www.utdcfsadopt.org) under Adoptive Family Resources

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**Adolescence and Adoption**  
*Not for the Faint of Heart*

By: Cindy Dallow, PhD, RD

Well, it's finally here. The time every adoptive parent dreads: adolescence.

Yes, all parents dread this time in their child's life and rightfully so, as they stand by helplessly watching their sweet happy-go-lucky child turn into a somber, moody mess of hormones almost overnight.

Yet for kids who were separated from their birthmother before the age of three (and especially for those who were then placed into an institution), it's a particularly painful time and its approach causes anxiety in the heart of many an adoptive parent.

Adolescence is a time of reckoning and, for some, of willful rebellion. It's a time of seeking one's own identity and finding one's place in the world. For children adopted at an older age, it's a time when painful memories come bubbling up to the surface and their deeply-guarded feelings spill out onto your lap when you least expect it.

Adoption experts claim that the loss of a birthmother is "the ultimate wound" and that adolescence is the time when most adopted kids start to question not only who they are – like all teenagers do - but why their birthmother chose to give them up. They often experience intense feelings of loss and "genealogical bewilderment" and for boys, this can sometimes turn into rebellious behavior.

But as prepared as we have been for adolescence, we still didn't see it coming. Our sweet, sensitive, and funny little boy turned into someone who was making "poor choices" at school and who was being mean to other kids. He's been getting into trouble in various places and, although he is extremely remorseful each time an incident occurs, the incidents continue.

At home, he is helpful, respectful, and full of joy. He is extremely empathic toward injured animals and kids in need. Every Christmas he wants to give away all of his toys to kids who don't have any. In essence, he has a heart of gold. Nevertheless, his past is catching up with him.

Fortunately, we know several adoptive parents who get it and who love our son dearly. They call him a "survivor" and they see past his obstinate behavior and disobedience. They see what I see: a deeply hurt child who is striking out at the world but who wants nothing more than to be loved and accepted.

That's exactly what we've been trying to do: love and accept him and guide him in the right direction. But it's not easy making up for lost time. For the first five years of his life, no one hugged or kissed him, no one tucked him in at night (he still rocks himself to sleep), no one celebrated his birthday, and no one taught him right from wrong.

So my husband and I plug away, trying our best to turn every troublesome incident into a teachable moment, praying that this will be the last one. Sometimes, we get tired and lose our cool, only to be reminded of how much we love him when we see how hard he tries to do the right thing.

We all have our crosses to bear and being adopted is certainly not an excuse for bad behavior. However, I urge you, unless you know a child's story and understand where he or she came from, be patient and supportive when they mess up. Adolescence is hard enough for kids who were loved and nurtured their entire lives but for kids who weren't, it's even harder.

We will make it through this crazy time and hopefully, my son will be that much stronger for it. A little help from outside the family doesn't hurt either.

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About the Author: Cindy Dallow, PhD, RD

Family: Married to Kurt Dallow for 21 years; mom to two 13 yr olds, Katerina and Evan, and step-mom to Kendall (35) and Kent (32).

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About: For 25+ years I've worked as a nutritionist in clinical, community, and academic settings. I love being a mom and running, biking, and hiking in the mountains.

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