

# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

AUGUST 2021 EDITION



SCOTT, AGE 17

Photo by: Drake Busath  
Busath Photography



**NEVEAH, AGE 15**

Photography by Cliff Winegar, MarDel Portrait & Design

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## ON THE COVER SCOTT, AGE 17

Scott eats, sleeps, and breathes WWE, and hopes to have a career in wrestling when he is older. He also has a knack for cars and can see himself one day being a diesel mechanic. For now, playing baseball and basketball are great substitutes for the wrestling ring. An energetic kid, Scott also likes to spend his time skateboarding. The colors red, black, and gold are well-liked by this guy, perhaps because his favorite football team is the 49ers. He never turns down an opportunity to eat wings or to go to McDonald's. Those who know Scott best boast that he is a happy and charming kid who has a fun imagination for play and is always ready for adventure. The little ones in his home look up to him and relish in the times they get to play with him. Scott makes friends easily and thrives on one-on-one attention from adults. He has a special relationship with dogs.

Scott is doing well in the tenth grade.

He would like to maintain contact with his mentor following placement. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related services.

For families outside of Utah, only those families who have a completed home study are encouraged to inquire.

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AUGUST 2021 EDITION

Kathy Searle, Editor

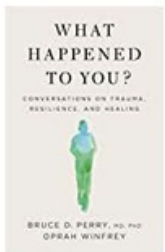
Lindsay Kaeding, Design Director

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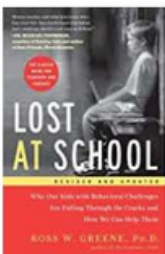
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BY OPRAH WINFREY AND DR. BRUCE D. PERRY



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BY DR KARYN PURVIS & LISA QUALLS



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BEHAVIORAL CHALLENGES ARE FALLING  
THROUGH THE CRACKS AND HOW WE CAN  
HELP THEM.**  
BY ROSS W. GREENE



**MAKING SENSE OF THE MADNESS:  
AN FASD SURVIVAL GUIDE**  
BY JEFF NOBLE





# Stuck in Racial Limbo

I grew up confused about my identity since my biological race doesn't match the one I was raised around. Now I'm starting to figure out there's no one way to be Asian American.

BY HAZEL LUO  
YA FANG LIVINGINSTON

A few months ago, my friends and I were having a conversation about our experiences as people of color. From across the classroom, a friend of mine said, "It's the ignorant people on the streets who annoy me the most. Like, just because I look Asian, I need to be stopped and said 'ni hao' to? I'm not even Chinese!"

Groaning, I added, "I know! Don't you love it when strangers come up to you and start widening their eyes, talking really slowly, and making crazy gestures with their hands? It's both funny and offensive."

"Hazel," she said with a slight laugh and then sighing, "I love you, but you can't relate. You were raised White."

In a room full of Asians, those words were like a slap in my face. As an adopted Chinese child of White parents, I have wrestled with my identity for most of my life. I don't look like my parents, which has always made me feel out of place. My mother once told me that my Filipina babysitter, Bernadette, was often mistaken for my mother, and people thought my mother was my babysitter. Hearing this story made me feel guilty—like I was abnormal for not fitting the expectations of what a daughter should look like. It made me feel like a bad daughter.

This insinuation from my peers that I was too White to understand the plight of other POC (People of Color) was frustrating. I laughed along with my friend but it felt wrong. Plenty of strangers on the street have walked past me making racial slurs. But it felt like my friend took away my Asian identity. I felt a complete lack of control in choosing who I was. Others seemed to decide for me. I felt stuck in a no man's land with other adoptees whose race doesn't match the one they are raised around.

## No One to Relate To

I was adopted from China in 2003. My middle name, Luo Yafang, is the name the orphanage gave me. The last name "Luo" and first character "Ya" I share with every other girl who was adopted from that orphanage that year. "Fang" is the distinct character that was given to me, and it means fragrant or aromatic. This part of my name is one of the few things I have always had in common with other Chinese people.



Growing up, I experienced racial taunting either out in public or in school only a few times, but it was enough to make me feel like an outcast. I'd be greeted with weird bows and saluted with foreign words I'd never heard before. People, mainly White, would place their index fingers on the outer corners of their eyes and pull them until they could barely see. I'd hear jokes from my mostly-White classmates about not being Asian if I didn't test well or kept messing up on the piano.

But at the time, I didn't know anyone who I thought would understand. I didn't even tell my parents about these incidents until long after they happened, when I was in middle school. "I can't believe she would say that to you," my mom said, and my dad added, "I'm so sorry something terrible like that happened." I appreciated their concern, but they were unable to give me advice about how to respond to these racist comments, having never been on the receiving end of a "ching chong" slur or "slanted-eye" motion.

I continued to wonder how to respond. All I knew was that they made me uncomfortable.

### **Wanting to Be White**

Because of these instances, I was constantly trying to figure out how to feel comfortable with how I looked.

In middle school, I was the only Asian girl and one of three East Asians. Even though I knew being from China made me Asian, I felt fake in a way. I'd mark the AAPI box (Asian American Pacific Islander) on all my standardized tests but wondered if the machines looking over my test might malfunction if a girl with the name "Hazel Livingston" checked that she was Asian.

I wanted to be seen as White, rather than Asian. These were the people I grew up around, and maybe if I "pretended" to be White, the racist incidents would stop. I had never heard a stranger stop and accost my parents for being White. I associated being White with being safe from demeaning racist slurs.

Of course, I didn't know then my wish to act White was bound to fail! Racist incidents and remarks are usually based on appearance, not by who you think you are.

Still, I began wanting to erase my middle name and every other East Asian characteristic I carried with me. I refused to watch anything Chinese, whether it be a wuxia action movie or even something about China on the international news. I exaggerated my dislike of math and science and I started feeling insecure about my love for music and singing, activities often associated with studious Asian kids. I wanted to be nothing like the stereotypical Asian, because that would set me apart. I thought this would finally make me comfortable in my own skin.

The most egregious example of this transformation effort was befriending Sarah, a white, Starbucks-obsessed, "I'm not like other girls" kind of girl, who believed she didn't "see color" because she "grew up in the hood." That was exactly the kind of friend I wanted, someone who said she didn't see race at all. Her professed "color-blindness" was relieving to me because I thought being with her would make race disappear.

On our way to Starbucks one day, Sarah and another girl told me that I was their "Honorary White Girl." Although I cringe at the label now, at the time the nickname felt like a compliment. I thought I had become the "basic White girl."

### **Honorary Asian Girl?**

But I was still taunted with Asian stereotypes and reality set in that my face would never be read as White.

The move to high school helped. There are a lot of Asian American students and now most of my friends are Asian American and raised in New York City. Having people who looked like me in my social circles slowly helped make me stop feeling so different. I started watching Chinese classics like *Kung Fu Hustle* and *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. For my friends, Chinese subtitles were the norm, not something seen as weird or different.

I thought I had made a huge leap in figuring out my identity. Of course, that didn't feel like the case when my friend dismissed me as "raised White." I was still being excluded because of my background, but this time it was the reverse: Was I now "Honorary Asian Girl"? I had been tentative about discussing these subjects. But then I got up the nerve to ask my best friend—who just happened to be my crib-mate from the orphanage I was adopted from—if she had had similar experiences. I began by framing it as a joke, to blunt the blow if she thought I was being weird.

"Wanna talk about adoption and some crazy fun racial experiences we may have had some time this week? Just for funsies," I asked. She responded with a casual "sure" and then we spent three hours talking about how our adoptions have shaped our interactions with others. I told her about Sarah and the people on the street and suddenly felt like I wasn't alone.

I began engaging my friends—whether they were from school, camp, or other girls from the orphanage (we're all in the tri-state area)—in long conversations about race, culture, and identity. This included "heavy stuff" I never brought up before, like if having White parents held me back from a true "Asian American experience."

At times it was frustrating, like when I was told I might be subconsciously "promoting Orientalism" if I wore a qipao, because I don't have the authentic, lived experiences that actual Chinese people do. Aren't I an actual Chinese person myself? I thought. In these discussions, though, I've discovered the breadth of our backgrounds and am beginning to think that there isn't one way to be Asian American. We have differences in not just culture, but class. I've learned that there are thousands of immigrant families in neighborhoods like Flushing and Chinatown that experience racism, economic inequality, and other hardships I don't. Asian Americans aren't a monolith or solely defined by a checkbox.

Having these conversations allows me to learn from others about things my parents could not have taught me because they are White. I'm treated like a minority because I'm seen as one, and my friends have shared their wisdom with me about the way these perceptions work.

### **Accepting Racial Limbo**

I think I'll continue to sometimes feel like I'm in racial limbo where I'm not White enough for one group but not Asian enough for others. It's hard looking like something you don't necessarily identify with.

Over time, it's become easier for me to talk about my discomfort. Yes, I've been raised with White privilege, and now I can say, yes, I'm East-Asian-representing. I have bona fides not even my friends do. My middle name. I am also the only one of my friends who was born in Asia, and I have the scars to prove it—from the BCG vaccine for tuberculosis given to babies born in China, Japan, and Korea.

There are days when I still feel strange claiming Chinese identity. And then there are times I find myself looking for the next chapter of a manhua (comic story) that's still only available in Chinese. I'm still figuring things out.

*"This story originally appeared in YCteen, a magazine written by New York City teens. Copyright by Youth Communication. More info at youthcomm.org"*



# Playful Parenting Builds Better Brains: 10 Tools For Success

BY JESSICA SINARSKI, LPCMH, FROM ADOPTALK 2018 ISSUE: REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION.

You know how it goes: one minute, the kids are calm and playful. The next minute, you're thrown into a world of whining, complaining, and flat-out defiance. One particular night, it seemed everyone in my family was primed for full meltdowns, especially when I told my preschooler that he could not eat a granola bar for dinner.

Some nights, this tension would have continued until they were all asleep, with frustrations, consequences, and teeth-gritting for all of us. That night, however, I was able to “keep my lid on.” I scooped the preschooler up, flailing legs and all, and marched him out of the room. “You’re running even though your feet aren’t touching the ground!” I said, with humor in my voice. He looked at his legs and stopped screaming long enough for me to pretend to fly him into his room. At the edge of the bed, I started to make his stuffed animals jump around and talk to him. Before long, stuffed animals were flying everywhere, and we were both laughing and having a great time. The rest of the night felt like magic: He got ready for bed without complaint and fell asleep feeling happy and loved. It changed my night as well—instead of carrying frustration into the evening, I felt a cheery affection for my sweet, strong-willed son.

That night, and in many other high stress situations, I have come to learn that laughter really is the best medicine.

## Pausing to Play

Think of the last time you were really frustrated with your child. As you envision that moment, are your thoughts racing to the negative? Do you feel any tension in your jaw or shoulders? Even now, distanced from that incident, your brain and body are producing a stress reaction. Over time, it can be easy to get stuck in this feeling of stress, making power struggles and conflict more likely. Pressing pause on that cycle is what made that evening with the stuffed animals possible.

*Try it yourself: Take a deep breath in. Hold it while you let your forehead and jaw relax. Release your breath with a long exhale. Let your cheeks turn up in a little smile.*

What do you notice? In that 10-second exercise, you sent powerful signals to your brain and body that it doesn't have to be in fight-or-flight mode! Pressing pause during a moment of frustration, or before things get heated—like before transitions or difficult conversations—can help you reverse the cycle of stress and approach the situation from a more playful perspective.

## The Science of Playful Parenting

Once you've established some sense of calm, you can find new ways to engage the child with play and laughter—which can, in turn, help them escape the fight-or-flight thinking that results in challenging behaviors. In their book *The Neurobiology of Attachment-Focused Therapy*, psychologists Jon Baylin and Dan Hughes write, “Play appears to engage a cocktail of brain chemistry that helps make it a powerful social process.”

In short, the act of playing can help develop the prefrontal cortex, or the part of the brain associated with social skills, impulse control, creativity, and joy. Playing can also evoke laughter, which stimulates opioids and dopamine, chemicals in your brain that relax the body, reduce pain, and increase positive feelings. By playing and laughing, children and caregivers alike can lower stress, diffuse anger, and enhance cognitive function.

## Putting it to the Test

Understanding why playful parenting is effective can make actually implementing such strategies in your day-to-day life a bit easier, but being playful and silly with your child might feel awkward or intimidating at first. In high-stress moments, it can be challenging to overcome your own intense emotions in favor of making a joke or playing a game. You might even feel like you're letting your child get away with something or rewarding bad behavior. Maybe your own life experiences have made it hard to feel comfortable or confident looking “silly.”



That's okay! While it may take more energy at first, playful parenting is often more effective and rewarding in the long run. Start small and work your way up. Some ideas to begin incorporating play in your day-to-day are:

- Using rhythm and rhyme to bring the child back to the present in high-stress moments or to remind the child of certain instructions. This can be done by singing or with counting games. If your child is in school, ask them to share some of the songs they might sing with their teachers during various activities.
- Challenging the child to a playful race to accomplish a specific task.
- Establishing a team mentality. As a family, have a team name and use that name when you are trying to get things done. For example, the Smith family might call themselves the "Super-Smiths." When it's time for a boring task like cleaning up or getting in the car, the parent can help motivate kids with an enthusiastic, "Go, Team Super-Smiths!"
- Creating a silly code word (think: "Purple Pumpkins") for challenging behavior. If the child starts engaging in that behavior (like whining, for example), use the silly code word to remind them to stop rather than getting stern or using punishments.
- Talking in a goofy voice or creating a silly character.
- Engaging in sensory play, like bear crawling, crab walking, or hopping to bed.

A sweet way to enter the world of playful parenting is the "love mark." If your child faces a scary transition, extended time away from you, or fear of separation, offer a marker or two and let your child draw on your hand, wrist, shoulder—wherever you feel comfortable. You can then draw on them with the same marker and remind them that you both have a little piece of each other day, even when you're separate.

### Older Youth

Play and laughter help to de-stress brains of all ages. For teens, in addition to some of the ideas above, consider:

- Inserting humor into high-stress situations (when appropriate).
- Looking for opportunities to make and share inside jokes.
- Taking the time to play physical games, like sports or other organized activities.
- Remembering to listen to or engage with the music, television, or social life of the child, and seeking opportunities where the child feels comfortable enough to share.

Most of all, develop a sense of humor about yourself and the mistakes you might make. Being playful with ourselves builds better connections in our adult brains, something we all need as we face the challenging task of parenting!

*For more ideas on how to incorporate play into parenting, follow @rileythebrave on Facebook and Instagram and check out our #playfulTuesday posts.*

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*"From Adoptalk, published by the North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC); 651-644-3036; www.nacac.org."*







# Six Questions Every Adopted Teen Wants Answered

Every adopted teen will have some questions. Here are some of the most common and what you can do to help.

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BY DEBBIE B RILEY, LCMFT, CEO CENTER FOR ADOPTION SUPPORT AND EDUCATION  
PUBLISHED BY ADOPTIVE FAMILIES MAGAZINE

Prior to adolescence, children are extremely curious about their adoption stories. Although they question the circumstances that led to their adoption, most of them seem to accept the answers calmly. But adolescents often demand fuller and more factual answers. They understand that most mothers love, nurture, protect, and keep their babies. Why not in their case? Was there something terribly wrong or unlovable about them?

Now that they are more sophisticated critical thinkers, adolescents revisit their earlier vague questions and refine them into a very personal (and sometimes painful) exploration of the question, "Why did my birth mother and birth father leave me?" This process begins early in adolescence, a period of heightened upheaval and confusion for most youngsters. The already-stressed adolescent reconnects with the powerful awareness that, to have been adopted, someone had to give him away. Here are six common adoption-related questions teens have, and ways you can help:

## 1. Why was I adopted?

The minds of adopted teens are filled with questions like, "Why was I given away? Was there something wrong with me? Did they give me away because they did drugs or abused me? What does this mean about me? Why couldn't they have worked things out and taken care of me?"

One of the hardest challenges for adoptive parents is to explain their child's adoption story. While parents begin with the best intentions in mind, they often stray off course just at the point when the information might reveal aspects of the story that may be difficult for their child to hear. Sam's mother said, "I am leery about telling Sam the whole story. I do not want to upset him." It is an understandable dilemma. By adolescence, however, it is no longer adequate to recapitulate the simplified adoption story that was given when the child was younger: "Your birth mom could not take care of you, and Daddy and I wanted so much to be parents, and we adopted you."

A parent might say: "I can imagine how frustrating it is not to have your questions answered. I wish I had more that I could tell you. However, from the little we do know, what do you think things were like for your birth parents at that time?"

## 2. What's the truth about my birth parents?

Younger children are comfortable living with broad, general ideas of their birth parents. Adolescents seek the facts — the detailed facts. They want definite information about why and how they came to be relinquished. They may ask questions like, "Why was I abandoned? Do I have any brothers or sisters? Did my birth father care about my birth mother, or was it a one-night stand?"

Parents may be hesitant to share information that they regard as potentially upsetting or damaging. But when there is a void, teens will often begin to fantasize about their birth parents and, quite often, the fantasies may be more damaging to a teen's identity formation than any fact — including difficult facts. In almost all cases, the truth is freeing for adolescents.

Barbara knew that her son Jason's birth father had a dependency on alcohol and had been physically abusive to his birth mother before he abandoned her and Jason. Barbara had told her son that she did not know anything about his birth father. "I worried that he would somehow think he could grow up to be like him." When Jason was 17, he began pushing for more information, and Barbara told him the truth. Jason was relieved that he finally had some knowledge about his birth father, even though he felt sad to hear about his poor choices. Jason had secretly believed that his birth father was dead, since no one spoke of him. The new information opened the possibility that maybe one day he could meet his birth father.

Therapists are often asked for advice on the correct timing for sharing difficult information with children. There is no cookbook answer. Each child's temperament and emotional and intellectual maturity will determine his readiness for processing distressing information. Certainly by adolescence, parents should reveal all the details they know about the adoption story. Adolescents have a new cognitive capacity to process information and to consider facts and feelings. A parent might say: "I think it is time to tell you some more information about your adoption story. You may be mad that I have waited to share this, but it was important to me not to overwhelm you with information you might not be ready for."

### 3. Why do I feel different from everyone else?

Feeling different from peers is the worst curse of adolescence. Nowhere else along the developmental stages of life do people so desperately want to fit in, to be a part of the group, as they do in adolescence. Being adopted creates a sense of being different in many ways. Adoptees may be of a different race or cultural background than their family, and may feel different from peers who are being raised in biologically related families. For transracially adopted teens, this sense of belonging and loyalty may be hard to achieve.

Katherine, 14, wanted very much to connect with her cultural origins. She sat at the cafeteria table where the Korean girls would congregate. She was flatly rejected as soon as they realized she "wasn't really Korean," meaning that she couldn't speak the language. "I knew very little about their culture — the only thing we had in common was that I looked like them." Katherine went to the Korean food market with her mom and learned how to make some Korean dishes. "I shared the food I made, and they began to talk to me! Of course the adoption question came up, but I was prepared." Katherine was slowly accepted into the group. Eventually, the girls invited her into their homes and taught her more about her birth culture, customs, and language. Katherine's sense of self-worth soared.

Adoptive parents are often surprised to learn from their transracially adopted teen that the world is not the wonderful, embracing place they believed it to be. Pedro was adopted at 18 months from Guatemala, and grew up in a fairly diverse neighborhood, but was uncomfortable being in a transracial family. "The fact that my skin color is different from my family's draws attention no matter where we are," said Pedro. "It used to be OK, but now that I am older, it seems more complicated. Sometimes, to avoid questions from people at school,

Sometimes, to avoid questions from people at school, I say that the woman who came to pick me up is our neighbor, not my mother."

What was missing for Pedro was a repertoire of survival skills necessary to combat discrimination. Long before adolescence, parents should be preparing their child to cope with racism. The Center for Adoption Support and Education's WISE Up! tool teaches children that they have the power to respond to unwanted questions through the four W.I.S.E. choices: Walk away; say, "It's private"; Share something about the adoption story; or Educate with general information about adoption. Go to [www.adoptionsupport.org](http://www.adoptionsupport.org) to learn more. Parents will need to bring up the subject, because teens will usually talk about racism only if they are directly asked.

A parent might say: "Are kids saying anything unkind to you, especially about being Hispanic? Do you notice anything about how you are treated by anyone at school because you are not white? I really want you to tell me, because I don't want you to go through this alone."

### 4. What will happen when I leave home?

Often in late adolescence, as many teens prepare to leave home for college, work, or other opportunities, they begin to ponder the longevity of the parent-child relationship. They may think that, since the adults have almost completed the job of raising them to young adulthood, the relationship will soon come to an end.

Adopted teens may be especially vulnerable to separations of any kind. They may think, "If my birth parents gave me away, it could happen again," or "When I go to college, will my parents be there for me?"

Lynn's parents were talking about how much fun it would be to have a place in the mountains. Lynn, age 15, had been listening to the conversation. She had tears streaming down her face and said, "I knew you could leave me one day." Lynn's mom was incredulous. "We were just daydreaming about our retirement home! Where in the world would you come up with the idea that we would leave you?" she reassured her.

Like all children, adopted children need to know that they are loved and that the love is forever. However, adoptive parents may need to reinforce the issue of permanency more often. Whenever a conversation about college or leaving home comes up, assure your child that you will always be his parents — no matter what.

A parent might say: "I may not be 'in charge' of you anymore, but I hope that I will always be your best consultant. I'm only a phone call or e-mail away."

### 5. Who am I?

Two questions pose particular challenges for adopted children: Who am I and where did I come from? Not only must adopted adolescents think about how they are similar and different from their adoptive parents, they must also think about how they are similar and different from their birth parents.

Many adopted adolescents ask themselves: "Am I like my adoptive parents or my birth parents or both? I know little about my birth parents, so how can I possibly figure out who I am? What does it mean that I am Hispanic/Korean/African-American? Who would I have been if I had stayed with my birth family?"

Our identity is molded from our values, beliefs, capabilities, talents, intellectual capabilities, sexual self-image, racial and ethnic heritage, personal goals and expectations, and, of course, our physical characteristics. All teens develop an awareness of these elements of self by determining how they are similar to their families and how they are different from them. In biological families, similarities and differences are typically discussed more readily. Tell your teen what similarities you see between yourself and him. Teens are often amazed by parents' perceptions, and hearing about these perceived similarities helps them feel a stronger bond.

A parent might say: "We are so alike — we are very perceptive (or messy, laugh at the same jokes, love shopping)." And don't forget to celebrate the differences, too: "I wish I could be more like you, you are so much calmer (or musically gifted, outgoing)."

### 6. Is it OK if I think about my birth parents?

Many teens experience guilt related to their frequent and intense thoughts and feelings about their birth parents. Teens think, "I have so many questions about my birth parents, but if I ask my parents, will they get upset?" Fearing the disapproval of their parents, teens may hide their feelings and struggle alone with their emotional connection to their birth parents and the questions they have about them.

The frequency and intensity of these thoughts may vary, depending on the adolescent's personal adoption story, but all adopted children ponder the existence and character of their birth parents at some point in their lives. Parents need to understand the depth of these thoughts, the emotional significance of these thoughts, and the difficulty that teens may have in sharing them.

Thinking about birth parents does not mean adolescents love their parents any less. "I am so afraid to tell my mom that I think about my birth mom," said Amy, 16. "I love her and don't want to hurt her."

A child's need to consider the significance of the other set of parents is by no means a reflection of diminishing feelings for her adoptive parents. Parents need to present clear messages to their teen, supporting the quest for information. Initiate conversations about the birth parents, and affirm their importance.

By demonstrating to your teen that you are not afraid to talk about her birth parents, you can help diminish her feelings of conflicted loyalty.

A parent might say: "I always think about your birth mother on this day (Mother's Day, child's birthday), and say a special prayer for her, to thank her with all my heart." Or, if there is contact: "I am so glad that Amanda (birth mom) is part of our lives."

*Excerpted with permission from Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens, by Debbie Riley, M.S., with John Meeks, M.D.*

*Reprinted with permission from Center for Adoption Support and Education [www.adoptionsupport.org](http://www.adoptionsupport.org)*

*Written by Debbie B. Riley, LCMFT, CEO, Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.)*

**NOV 4TH**  
7:00 - 8:30 PM

**VIRTUAL CONFERENCE**  
*Topics include transracial adoption  
disenfranchised grief and loss*

**SAVE THE DATES**

**NOV 5TH**  
NOON - 1:00 PM

**UNITED FOR ADOPTION**  
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**CELEBRATE NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH**





**RAISE** *the*  
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**NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH**

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**BOONDOCKS FUN CENTER**

**525 SOUTH DESERET DRIVE - KAYSVILLE**

**75 SOUTH FORK DRIVE - DRAPER**

**PRE-REGISTRATION IS MANDATORY**

**\$5.00 PER PERSON**

EACH PERSON WILL RECEIVE 2 ATTRACTION PASSES AND  
\$5 WORTH OF TOKENS.

FOOD WILL BE AVAILABLE FROM 11:00 - 1:00

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**[HTTPS://ADOPTION2021.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://adoption2021.eventbrite.com)**

**REGISTER BY OCTOBER 31ST**



# Teen Suicides: What are the Risk Factors?

BY NADINE KASLOW, PHD. CHILD MIND INSTITUTE

One of the myths about suicidal talk, and actual suicide attempts, in young people is that they are just a bid for attention or “a cry for help.” Kids who talk or write about killing themselves are dismissed as overly dramatic—obviously they don’t mean it! But a threat of suicide should never be dismissed, even from a kid who cries “Wolf!” so many times it’s tempting to stop taking her seriously. It’s important to respond to threats and other warning signs in a serious and thoughtful manner. They don’t automatically mean that a child is going to attempt suicide. But it’s a chance you can’t take.

When thinking about this, it helps to understand what factors make a young person more or less likely to consider or attempt suicide. What do we know about young people who try to kill themselves, or who actually die by suicide? Let’s take a look at both the risk factors—things that increase the likelihood that a child will engage in suicidal behavior—and the protective factors, or things that reduce the risk.

If a child has a lot of risk factors and hardly any protective factors you need to be extremely concerned about him. On the other hand, if he has a fair number of risk factors but a lot of protective factors you may be somewhat less concerned, although you still, of course, need to be concerned.

## Here are some key suicide risk factors:

- A recent or serious loss. This might include the death of a family member, a friend or a pet. The separation or a divorce of parents, or a breakup with a boyfriend or a girlfriend, can also be felt as a profound loss, along with a parent losing a job, or the family losing their home.
- A psychiatric disorder, particularly a mood disorder like depression, or a trauma- and stress-related disorder.
- Prior suicide attempts increase risk for another suicide attempt.
- Alcohol and other substance use disorders, as well as getting into a lot of trouble, having disciplinary problems, engaging in a lot of high-risk behaviors.
- Struggling with sexual orientation in an environment that is not respectful or accepting of that orientation. The issue is not whether a child is gay or lesbian, but whether he or she is struggling to come out in an unsupportive environment.
- A family history of suicide is something that can be really significant and concerning, as is a history of domestic violence, child abuse or neglect.

- Lack of social support. A child who doesn't feel support from significant adults in her life, as well as her friends, can become so isolated that suicide seems to present the only way out of her problems.
- Bullying. We know that being a victim of bullying is a risk factor, but there's also some evidence that kids who are bullies may be at increased risk for suicidal behavior.
- Access to lethal means, like firearms and pills.
- Stigma associated with asking for help. One of the things we know is that the more hopeless and helpless people feel, the more likely they are to choose to hurt themselves or end their life. Similarly, if they feel a lot of guilt or shame, or if they feel worthless or have low self-esteem.
- Barriers to accessing services: Difficulties in getting much-needed services include lack of bilingual service providers, unreliable transportation, and the financial cost of services.
- Cultural and religious beliefs that suicide is a noble way to resolve a personal dilemma.

But what about protective factors, things that can mitigate the risk of engaging in suicidal behavior?

### Here are some key protective factors:

- Good problem-solving abilities. Kids who are able to see a problem and figure out effective ways to manage it, to resolve conflicts in non-violent ways, are at lower risk.
- Strong connections. The stronger the connections kids have to their families, to their friends, and to people in the community, the less likely they are to harm themselves. Partly, that's because they feel loved and supported, and partly because they have people to turn to when they're struggling and feel really challenged.
- Restricted access to highly lethal means of suicide.
- Cultural and religious beliefs that discourage suicide and that support self-preservation.
- Relatively easy access to appropriate clinical intervention, whether that be psychotherapy, individual, group, family therapy, or medication if indicated.
- Effective care for mental, physical, and substance use disorders. Good medical and mental health care involves ongoing relationships, making kids feel connected to professionals who take care of them and are available to them.

So what do you do if your child fits the profile of someone at risk for youth suicide? Warning signs of suicide to be alert to include changes in personality or behavior that might not be obviously related to suicide. When a teenager becomes sad, more withdrawn, more irritable, anxious, tired, or apathetic—things that used to be fun aren't fun anymore—you should be concerned. Changes in sleep patterns or eating habits can also be red flags.

Acting erratically, or recklessly is also a warning sign. If a teen starts making really poor judgments, or he starts doing things that are harmful to himself or other people, like bullying or fighting, it can be a sign that he is spinning out of control.

And, finally, if a child is talking about dying, you should always pay attention. "I wish I was dead." "I just want to disappear." "Maybe I should jump off that building." "Maybe I should shoot myself." "You'd all be better off if I wasn't around." When you hear this kind of talk, it's important to take it seriously—even if you can't imagine your child meaning it seriously.

### ***What to do? The first thing to do is talk.***

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# LYING AS A TRAUMA- DRIVEN BEHAVIOR

BY ROBYN GOBBEL

X-ray vision and understand the neurobiology of being relationally, socially, and behaviorally human means we get to free ourselves from scary beliefs that behaviors are character flaws, a representation of who our children are at their core, solely designed to manipulate us, or a reflection of our worth as a parent.

**Lying is actually a completely normal human behavior.**

Think about it- when was the last time you lied?

Be honest with yourself (ha, I chuckled at the irony).

It probably wasn't that long again.

Ask yourself...why?

Be honest!

There are all sorts of reasons floating into your mind I'm sure- but they all land somewhere near the truth that we only lie because we are afraid of what will happen if we don't.

**We only lie because it doesn't feel safe to tell the truth.**

And when I say safe, I'm don't necessarily mean physically safe.

It could be relationally safe.

It could be if I don't lie, I won't get what I want. And the relational repercussion of lying is deemed less bad than the possibility of not getting what I want.

*Sometimes lying happens* when we feel safe enough in a relationship to know that the relationship will withstand the eroded threat of the lie.

*Sometimes lying happens* because we are actually prioritizing the relationship in the moment.

*Sometimes lying happens* because we cannot tolerate the idea of what could happen to the relationship, even if it's just for a moment, if we told the truth.

*Sometimes lying happens* because we cannot tolerate the idea of what could happen inside us (shame, dysregulation, etc.) if we told the truth.

There really are quite a lot of explanations for lying but ultimately it almost always comes down to it's not safe to tell the truth.



### **What happens if you allow that to really sink in?**

Does it change anything for you about how you see the behavior of lying? It's OK if it doesn't, I'm just prompting you to notice!

One of the biggest challenges with the behavior of lying isn't actually the lie- it's how being lied to makes us feel.

### **YOU HATE BEING LIED TO!!!**

Your brain shouts all sorts of things! Things like:

Do you think I'm stupid?

You are a pathological liar and that scares me!

You are causing me to question my own experience in reality and that scares me!

I must be a terrible parent to raise a liar.

Liars can't even have positive relationships and ultimately go to jail.

Truly. Those are scary thoughts.

And when all of us have scary thoughts, we often act in scary ways.

And then the fear increases for everything and the lying doesn't ever stop.

### **What if you could replace your own scared thoughts?**

My child doesn't think I'm stupid- they are scared.

Continual lying is a behavior that will have negative long-term consequences but worrying about that in this moment doesn't help me deal with the real life now problem.

I am a good parent who struggles sometimes- like all parents.

If you could replace those scared thoughts with true thoughts, you have one more moment of regulation.

Then you can ask yourself "why is this happening?" and maybe you can address that problem.

Or maybe your kid is too dysregulated in the moment for you to do much of anything beyond disengaging and not insisting on the truth. Remembering to think about what is driving the lie will help you remind yourself that you aren't just ignoring the behavior or allowing your kid to behave bad. You are using your thinking brain to realize your child is too dysregulated for you to deal with the behavior in the moment. Then you can shift your focus to offering connection, regulation, and felt-safety.

Lying is such a common and sticky behavior challenge that I created a thorough 90-minute webinar that gets into the nitty gritty. The webinar looks at the *why* even more closely than this article could and then moves into concrete, actionable steps to take in the moment of the lying. You can snag the webinar over in my webinar store and have instant and unlimited access. You'll download it so it's yours forever! <https://robbygobbel.com/>



### **Hey there! I'M ROBYN!**

I love coffee, PINK, and everything about the brain. Once (recently!) my teenager went ballistic on me for getting ANOTHER (glitter!!!) coffee mug in the mail. I mean...can you ever have enough? I love cultivating deep, resonant connections with anyone who is up for it, and I especially love teaching anyone who will listen to harness the power of neuroscience so they can cultivate deep, resonant connections, too. I mean, what would change in the world if we could all do that? To see, be with, feel, and deeply know each other...and ourselves.

I think everything could change.



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## **MICHAEL JACOBS, LCSW**

Michael Jacobs is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, who works on the post adoption team in the Salt Lake Valley Region, for the Division of Child and Family services. Michael received his Bachelor's degree from Utah Valley University in Behavioral Science with an emphasis in Psychology and his Master's degree from the University of Utah in Social Work. Michael has always enjoyed helping others be their best selves. Michael is fairly new to the Division of Child and Family Services and loves working with families. When not working, Michael enjoys spending time with his family, riding bikes, time at the beach, and watching movies.

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