

UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

NOVEMBER 2021 EDITION



MIRACLE, AGE 14

Photo by: Chauntelle Janzer,
Opie Photography



JEREMIAH & TALIYAH

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Candice Renee Photography

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A LETTER FROM UTAH'S FIRST LADY ABBY COX

November is National Adoption Month. It is a month when we recognize the need for forever homes for children in foster care, a month when we take time to thank and celebrate all of our adoptive families who have opened their hearts and their homes to children in need of love, safety, and permanency. November is a month when we recognize and appreciate the immense amount of critical work, time, and patience that goes into completing an adoption.

These past years have brought a variety of challenges, many of which adoptive families could not have anticipated. Together, we had to adapt to various adversities to maintain some sense of normalcy. This is especially true with our adoptive families, children in care, and adoption workers.

As First Lady, I want you to know that focusing on foster care and the children and families who are impacted is one of my core initiatives moving forward. What you're doing and what you have done is beautiful, life-saving work. I have seen how Utah's foster, adoptive and relative families have remained patient and unwavering, in the face of much uncertainty. Our families have continued to display resiliency, passion, and strength during these unprecedented times.

I want to say THANK YOU.

Thank you for the courage to **welcome a child into your home** with little to no knowledge of what impact they will make in your world.

Thank you for **being driven by the hope and faith** that you can make a positive difference.

Thank you for **understanding the damaging impact of childhood trauma**, and making every effort to help children and youth heal.

Thank you for **dealing with disappointments and getting right back up when you fall**.

Thank you for **advocating** with schools, doctors, social workers, probation officers and even neighbors, for your kids.

Thank you for many nights of little to no sleep as you have served as **comforter, consoler or mentor**.

Thank you for being a tutor, coach, friend and a **role model**.

Thank you for **loving** the unlovely, healing the hurt, and guiding those who feel lost.

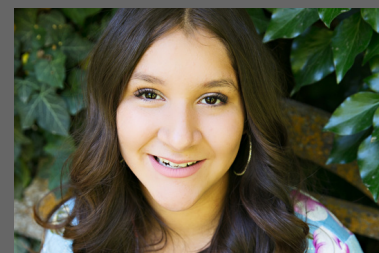
Thank you for being **one of the most significant, lifelong influences in the life of a child**.

I see you, and I honor the work you are doing.

My team and I are ever grateful for your open hearts and helping hands. We're dedicated to raising awareness of you, and doing whatever we can to lighten your load. Happy National Adoption Month!

Sincerely,

Abby Cox, First Lady of Utah



ON THE COVER

MIRACLE, AGE 14

Miracle is a polite and inquisitive child who makes friends quickly! A social girl, she is easy to like and she appreciates the company of others. Miracle eats, sleeps, and breathes all things sports. When she isn't participating in sports, she enjoys going to the mall and doing her make-up. Blue often appears in her coloring and she loves koalas. If able to pick superpowers, flying would top her list. Miracle loves Mexican food. She hopes to become a doctor when she is older.

As an eighth-grader, Miracle is proud of the A's she earns; math is her favorite class.

Miracle's LDS faith is important to her and she would like a family that can support her in this. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related services.

This is a LEGAL RISK ADOPTIVE PLACEMENT.

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

NOVEMBER 2021 EDITION

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How Anxiety Affects Teenagers

Signs of anxiety in adolescents, and how they're different from anxious children.

BY CAROLINE MILLER,
CHILD MIND INSTITUTE

There is substantial evidence that the pandemic has increased the number of adolescents (and even some pre-adolescents) who are anxious. It's no wonder, given that COVID lockdowns and distancing robbed teenagers of many of the activities they care about most, disrupted their education, and isolated them from their friends.

We are all hoping that as life returns to something like normal, adolescents will rebound. But anxiety in adolescents was already on the rise before the pandemic. Why? Experts cite increased pressure to succeed in school, a world that feels scarier and the toll social media can take on self-esteem. But nobody really understands it. It's important to recognize the signs of anxiety and get kids who are struggling help.

How is anxiety different in teenagers?

Anxious teenagers are different from anxious children. At each stage of development, kids have different worries and vulnerabilities.

Younger children are prone to be anxious about external things — like animals or insects, the dark, monsters under the bed, or something bad happening to mom and dad. But teenagers are more likely to be worried about themselves — their performance in school or sports, how they are perceived by others, the changes in their bodies.

Some anxious teenagers have been anxious for many years by the time they reach adolescence. Maybe parents have been aware of it, but the child functioned well despite their distress, so nothing was done about it. Or the child was treated and things got better. But as more is expected of them, in middle and high school, and as they develop more focus on their peers, the anxiety can resurface and become more severe. And some teens who weren't anxious children develop adolescent-onset kinds of anxiety, including social anxiety and panic attacks.

What are teenagers anxious about?

Their performance. “We see a lot of fear of not doing well,” explains Jerry Bubrick, PhD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute who specializes in anxiety and OCD. “A lot of anxiety is geared towards perfectionism, or needing to do their absolute best in school, beyond an intense work ethic.” Even when parents report that they urge kids not to stress over college admissions, teenagers say they feel intense pressure to get those straight A’s.

How they’re perceived. “Every teenager is going to have an awareness of and a certain vigilance about how they’re being perceived,” Dr. Bubrick notes. “That’s just part of the adolescent process, but some kids have that on steroids.” The result can be debilitating social anxiety. “They’re going to be really excessively worrying about whether they might be seen as incompetent or stupid, or they’re really worried about doing something embarrassing.”

Their bodies. Physical changes of adolescence are a cause of discomfort for many teenagers. Developing either before most of your peers, or after them, can make kids feel different and out of step. “For girls if you’re on the early side in development, it’s going to affect you more negatively than if you were on time with development or even late,” notes Dr. Bubrick. Boys, he adds, are especially sensitive to height. “So if a 15-year-old hasn’t gone through puberty yet, and they’re looking like they’re 12 and their peers are looking like they’re 19, that can have a pretty profound impact on self-esteem and confidence.” Some kids develop a form of extreme anxiety called body dysmorphic disorder, becoming so obsessed with a perceived physical flaw (real or imagined) that it causes great distress and interferes with their functioning.

Symptoms of anxiety in teenagers

Symptoms of anxiety vary widely, from withdrawal and avoidance to irritability and lashing out. Anxiety is often overlooked because teenagers are good at hiding their thoughts and feelings. But these are some of the behaviors that might be a sign that a teenager is anxious.

- Recurring fears & worries about routine parts of everyday life
- Irritability
- Trouble concentrating
- Extreme self-consciousness or sensitivity to criticism
- Withdrawal from social activity
- Avoidance of difficult or new situations
- Chronic complaints about stomachaches or headaches
- Drop in grades or school refusal
- Repeated reassurance-seeking
- Sleep problems
- Substance use

Anxiety and school refusal

Since so much of what adolescents are focused on is connected with school — think academics, sports, other activities and social life — school can be the setting of a lot of things a teenager might be anxious about. Hence when kids resist going to school, it’s not necessarily about school itself.

Dr. Bubrick notes that what we call school refusal used to be called schoolphobia, but that implied that school is the source of their anxiety. Instead, in dealing with kids who find frequent excuses to stay home, or flat-out refuse to go, the focus isn’t on that decision to not go to school. “We’re more focused on why they’re making that decision to not go to school.”

The problem could be worry about being called on randomly by a teacher and making a mistake. Or having a panic attack in class. Or worry that they look wrong, and people will make fun of them. “You could interview a hundred kids refusing to go to school,” adds Dr. Bubrick, “and get a hundred different reasons why.”

Anxiety and Substance Abuse

Teenagers who are anxious (not unlike adults who are anxious) may use recreational drugs, especially marijuana, as a way of coping with their discomfort. It’s self-medication, notes Dr. Bubrick, and the reality is, in the short term, it works. “It does alleviate anxiety and stress. It numbs it. It does shut off the worry part of your brain.” But it’s a poor coping mechanism in the longer term, because the anxiety persists and the teenager becomes dependent on the substance.

Dr. Bubrick says what he hears about most from teenagers is that marijuana is healthier than alcohol. And now that marijuana is legal in many places (for those over 21) and vaping is an option, it’s easier than ever to smoke — on the street, at home or at school — without adults being aware of it.

But he notes that neither is a healthy way to manage anxiety, and he urges kids not to use recreational drugs as medicine. “If you have a joint in your pocket all the time and you’re smoking during the day, to get through your day at school, that’s no different from having a bottle of vodka in your desk drawer at work.” You’re still relying on a substance to get through the day — and the more you use it, the more dependent on it you’ll be.

Anxiety and depression

It’s common in teenagers to find that they are depressed as well as anxious. That is in part because an anxious lifestyle can be so distressing, or so limiting, that it leads to depression.

Dr. Bubrick recalls treating a young woman whose move to a new high school triggered intense social anxiety. She was so worried about failing in a more competitive atmosphere that she began to withdraw from activities. Then she had a panic attack, and began to withdraw from friends because she was afraid of having another panic attack in front of them. Eventually she was so isolated she became severely depressed.

This kind of layering of anxiety and depression is both common and commonly missed, Dr. Bubrick notes. If a clinician just treats the presenting symptoms of depression, and misses the anxiety, the result won't be effective.

But it's also possible that anxiety and depression are two separate co-occurring disorders.

Dr. Bubrick explains: "The question I ask kids is 'If I was able to go into your brain and just remove your anxiety, would you still be depressed?' If they say 'Yes, I would still be depressed,' that would suggest it might be a co-occurring depression. If the answer is, 'No, I would feel amazing if you took the anxiety away,' then I would think the anxiety is causing the depression."

Dr. Bubrick notes that among the various kinds of anxiety, generalized anxiety disorder, commonly called GAD, is particularly linked to depression later in life — so much so that it's also thought of as a precursor for depression. GAD is anxiety that's not triggered by a particular thing (that's called specific phobia) but by persistent and excessive worry about a variety of everyday things.

What's the link between anxiety and depression? Dr. Bubrick thinks anxiety undermines well-being. If you can't trust yourself and you can't trust that you're going to make good decisions and you live defensively, then you're especially at risk for depression.

"If you're walking around always worrying and always doubting, and everything in life is 'what if?' that's going to start to have a pretty profound effect on how you see yourself and your confidence and your self-esteem," he explains. It's not surprising, he adds, that if you've been living defensively, with a steady diet of fear, it could lead to depression.

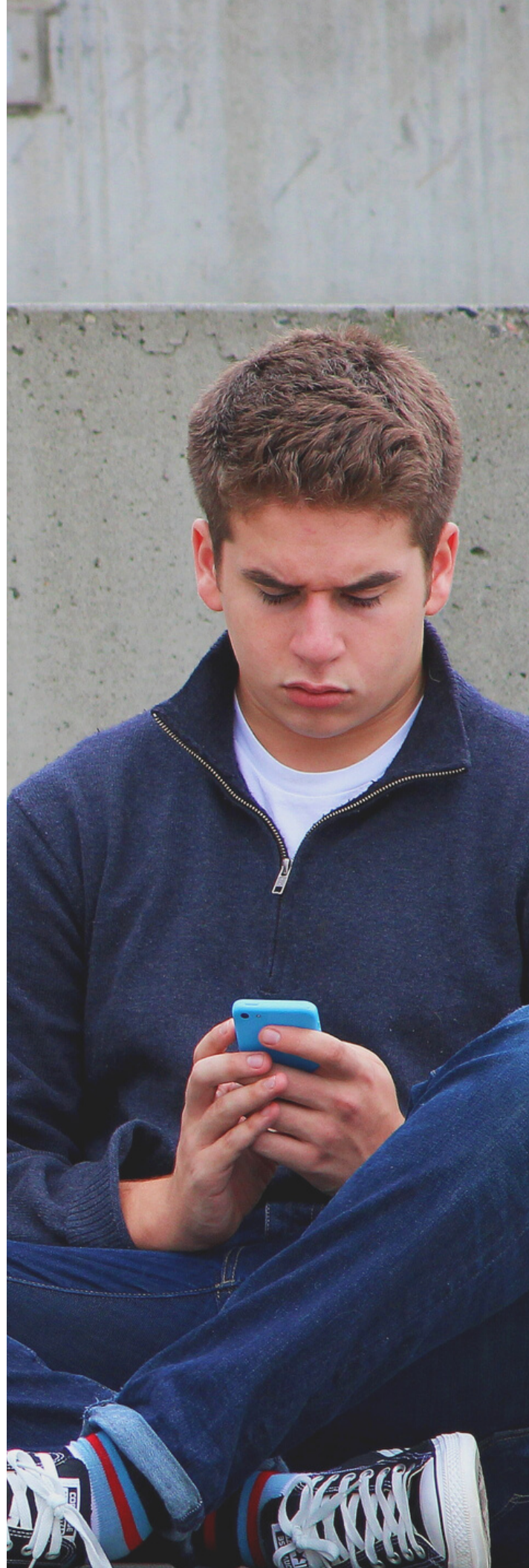
Treatment for anxiety

The most effective treatment for anxiety in teenagers is cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), combined, if needed, with antidepressant medication. And the good news is that it's very effective.

CBT teaches anxious kids strategies for thinking differently about anxiety and responding to it differently when it occurs. By tolerating anxiety rather than avoiding things that trigger it, they learn that it diminishes over time. And by gradually increasing exposure to feared objects or activities (a type of CBT called exposure therapy), the anxious response itself is reduced or eliminated.

Antidepressants called SSRIs (Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors) — are the medications recommended for treating anxiety disorders in children. They are combined with CBT in kids whose anxiety is too great to enable them to participate in CBT alone

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Child Mind Institute



UNITED FOR ^{ethical} ADOPTION

Invites You to a Virtual Conference

November 4th

7:00 - 8:30pm



Janet Nordine, MS,
LMFT, RPT-S

FREE CONFERENCE

November 5th

12:00 - 1:30pm



Cameron Small,
MS, LPCC

Understanding Grief and Loss

Disenfranchised grief, also known as hidden grief or sorrow, refers to any grief that goes unacknowledged or unvalidated by social norms. This kind of grief is often minimized or not understood by others, which makes it particularly hard to process and work through.

[REGISTRATION LINK FOR
GRIEF & LOSS](#)

Returning Home: A Guide for Supporting Adult Adoptees in Their Birth Search

If I could go back in time, there are a few things I'd do differently in my personal search for my birth parents. I've organized them into this workshop, along with lessons from my experience as a licensed mental health clinician.

[REGISTRATION LINK FOR
RETURNING HOME](#)

**REGISTRATION IS
REQUIRED FOR EACH
SESSION**

*Foster parent training
hours are available
CEU's are pending*



Seven Ways to Cultivate an Attitude of Gratitude

BY ERIN SORKIN, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

Between all of the daily posts on social media and the multitude of videos, articles, and books on the subject, it's easy to feel like gratitude is just another trend, unworthy of your time and attention. This can be especially true if you're feeling like some of your "friends" on Facebook are using the posts to humbly brag on their own lives and accomplishment (#blessed). However, there are many scientifically proven benefits to practicing gratitude that range from improving sleep to helping build relationships. Even though I've read all of the research and know how helpful it is, I've always had a really tough time keeping up with a gratitude journal. It just feels too much like work to me. That's why I decided to search for other ways to practice gratitude.

Take a look at seven ways to help you feel more grateful and balanced during this stressful, holiday season, without writing a single journal entry.

1. Meditate- Most of us don't take time in our day to self-reflect. We're so busy rushing from one task to the next, that we never stop to just be still. I recommend adding at least five minutes of meditation to each day. I love the Insight Timer app, which has dozens of guided meditations on the theme of gratitude. Taking just a few minutes to quiet our overworked brains can be so powerful!

2. Take a Pic- This idea came to me this morning, as I was rushing to take my big kids to school. I was not in a great mood as it was 7 am and I was awake, but when I pulled out of our driveway I saw the an almost full moon in the middle of a beautiful pink and orange sky. The beauty of that moment hit me with a wave of gratitude. If you have trouble coming up with gratitude lists after a long day, take pictures instead. If you can capture some of those grateful moments, it makes reflecting on them much easier.

3. Start a Gratitude Jar- Skip the pressure of the daily journal entry by keeping a gratitude jar this November. Add something to it whenever the mood strikes. Everyone in your family who is old enough to talk can contribute something to the jar. It could also be a way for family members to say thank you for the kind things you do for one another.

4. Play the Grateful Game- This idea, from Teach Beside Me, is another great way for the whole family to practice gratitude. If you played the game Pick Up Sticks as a kid, this is the same concept, except, when you pick up a stick, you have to say something you're thankful for that matches that colored stick's category. For example, if you pick up a red stick you have to name a person you're thankful for, green sticks mean you need to share a food that you're thankful for, and so on. If you can't find the game, make your own with colored straws.

5. Have a Gratitude Storytime– These books are a great way to teach kids and adults alike about thankfulness:

- The Thankful Book– by Todd Parr– This fun book shows you that you can be thankful for things both big and small. Kids will love the silly illustrations.
- PAWS and THINK Series: Be Thankful for What You Have– by Miranda Mittleman– See the world through a dog’s eyes in this heartwarming story that teaches kids to appreciate the simple things.
- Thanks for Thanksgiving by Julie Markes– This beautifully illustrated book follows a family discussing all of the things they are thankful for. It includes a space at the back to record your own thankful thoughts.
- The Gratitude Diaries by Janice Kaplan– In this memoir, Kaplan spends a year living gratefully and documents the changes this made in her marriage, career and life in general.
- Almost Everything: Notes on Hope by Anne Lamott– In her newest book, Lamott helps readers discover the hope and wisdom within themselves, even at the darkest of times. It came out last week and I just bought it to listen to on Audible. Book club, anyone?

6. Put Gratitude Out Into the World– Instead of just writing about the people you’re thankful for, say thank you to them in a genuine and specific way, give compliments freely when someone does, says or wears something that brings you joy. Don’t keep those thoughts to yourself.

7. Give Back– It’s easy for all of us to be so focused on our own problems that we forget how much we have compared to so many: a place to live, food, water, free public education, etc. It’s especially important for us to teach our children who have luckily never known another way of life outside of their comfy beds, Friday night pizza dinners and screen time.

There is no better way to bring home this lesson than to help others in need:

- Host a holiday party or playdate to benefit Feed More. Here’s a list of their most needed items.
- Volunteer in Feed More’s Community Kitchen and put together healthy meals for hungry children and homebound adults in your own community.
- Organize a fundraiser for refugees.
- Create Giving Bags by filling gallon bags with gloves, socks, hand and foot warmers, water, snacks and dollar bills. Hand them out to homeless men and women in your community.
- Organize a drive for your local hospital: VCU Health is currently looking for chemo care kits, fleece blankets and waiting room kits for both kids and adults. All items should be new, except for books and magazines.

Bonus: My holiday survival advice, take it or leave it:

- If you’re spending too much time stressing this holiday season, it is truly worth it to take five minutes to just be alone with your thoughts. If no one in your family will give you five minutes of peace, like my crazy crew, go take the dog for a walk, hide in your car or lock yourself in the bathroom. They can survive without you!
- If you’re feeling less than and comparing yourself to everyone’s highlight reels on Facebook and Instagram, it’s also worth it to take a social media hiatus over the next few months.
- When it comes to holiday dinners, decor, and gift-giving, do whatever works best for you and your family, and leave the rest to the Pinterest overachievers. Remember that they are a small 1% of the population with too much time on their hands. We’re too busy being adults with many important things to do!
- Expressing gratitude shouldn’t feel like another chore on your already massive holiday to-do list. It should be something that builds closeness within your family and brings contentment within yourself. If it feels artificial to you, don’t do it.
- When all else fails, there really isn’t much that an entire bottle of wine, a hot bath and a few hours of Bravo reality TV can’t fix. You’ll either A) forget your troubles, B) fall asleep C) feel more content with the drama in your own life, and possibly D) all the above. It’s basically fool-proof.

In the spirit of this post, thank you for taking the time to read my writing. Most of the time, like 99.9%, I have no idea what I’m doing, but writing things that may potentially help or entertain others brings me tons of joy.

Erin Sorokin is a writer, teacher and blogger at A Good Enough Mom. She graduated from Ohio University in 2003 with a BA in journalism and Notre Dame College in 2005 with her B. Ed. in K-12 Special Education. She currently lives in Richmond, Virginia with her husband, three kids and two crazy dogs.



One Foster Boy's Untold Story and the Family That Showed Him Immense Love & Acceptance

BY CAROLINE BAILEY, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

Tonight, after 2.5 years of living here, my oldest son sat down at the table with this. He was about to chow down when I stopped him and asked what in the world he was doing.

He said, "I made myself dinner."

"But it isn't cooked. I can cook that you know."

"Well, I wanted to eat something I used to eat a lot with my old family."

So we sat down and I asked him to tell me about it. He said that they wouldn't feed him due to being passed out (you can guess why) and he would have to make dinner for himself and his brothers (two and four months when they came to us). He said that all the money they had would be spent on cigarettes and other fun things () and so he would find change in their van and would buy Ramen packets at the store down the street (at age six!).

He said he didn't know how to boil water, so he would eat it like this. And, he actually grew to like it. So, he would break it up for his sibling and would try to make bottles for the baby (at age six!).

Guys. I asked him to make me some. And, I sat there beside him and crunched it down with lots of water because it's not great...and he just started talking about how the first time I made them Ramen, he wouldn't eat it and I told him I remembered. He said it's because it reminded him of his Ramen packets and he didn't trust me (big thoughts for being nine!).

He said he isn't sad he's not with his "old family" (his words) anymore, but that sometimes HE LIKES TO REMEMBER HOW STRONG HE HAD TO BE.

I write this so everyone knows, trauma isn't healed quickly (sometimes never), an adoption doesn't erase the past or the memories, kids can change, they will change with love, and to never give up on a kid because "they are hard."

And then, I walked away in shock, in sadness, and so so proud of how strong my baby is. He's so wonderful. And, we love him so much.

Friends, THIS is the life experience of kids who come from hard places. THIS is living a trauma-informed life. We can't imagine what kids from hard places have lived through. It is not just about one act of abuse or neglect, it is about living in survival mode and doing it day in and day out. It is about making sure younger siblings are also surviving, even at the expense of childhood.

Trauma infuses itself into every pore. Kids just don't forget it. Their brains and bodies won't let them. Those of us privileged enough (yes, I said privileged) to enter into the lives of children with hard life experiences must be willing to sit down, eat uncooked Ramen noodles, and listen. We must not give up.

Our kids didn't.



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**ADOPTION
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REGISTER BY NOVEMBER 3RD

Holidays with Extended Family- An Opportunity for Connection

BY ELLEN SINGER, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM THE CENTER FOR
ADOPTION SUPPORT & EDUCATION

As the holidays approach and families anticipate the time they may be spending with relatives and close friends, parents often think about the relationships between their children and these important people in their lives. For some families who live far apart and only see each other at holiday time, the chance to build connections makes this time especially important. For adoptive parents, the desire for their children (and their family) to be loved and accepted may be tinged with anxiety. Will their relatives and friends accept their children? What are the attitudes of their relatives and friends about adoption? Will the subject come up in some way? If so, do these people know how to even talk about adoption? Do they know positive adoption language? Will they unknowingly say something hurtful? Will they be sensitive to their children's feelings?

Educating family members

Just as adoptive parents broadened their understanding of adoption (beyond the personal experiences they had prior to considering adoption), so too must extended family members learn a great deal. For example, many people still think of the adoption process of the past as being true today. They may be shocked at the idea that many adoptive families and birth families enjoy some kind of contact/relationship with each other. They may be uncomfortable with the fact that perhaps birth relatives have been invited to share in the family's celebrations. They may have no understanding why a family's house is decorated with Chinese paintings just because the adopted child is from China. After all, isn't she being raised to be an American?

Just as adoptive parents may have in the past, used the terms "real parents" or "put up for adoption" or "surrendered" or "hard to place", now hearing those same words from others, let alone from their relatives/friends, may be shocking. Having been hurt by intrusive questions from strangers, adoptive parents may still be surprised to know that their own close circle may feel entitled to information about their child's birth family and not understand the need to be respectful regarding the privacy of a child's adoption story.

Adoptive parents have learned so much as they have strived to understand and meet their children's needs. They have also learned (hopefully) so much about how a child might think and feel about his/her adoption at different ages. Now, to foster the relationships between their children and their relatives/friends, adoptive parents can and must help to educate and normalize adoption to their extended network. This is not an easy task, as people often "don't know what they don't know." After all, if your child's grandmother's best friend growing up was adopted, then she "understands", no? Maybe, but a sample of one does not an expert make!

Adoptive parents can bring their relatives "up to speed" in many ways. The best way is to prevent difficulties from arising is by sharing the important things to know (as they pertain to your family situation.)

- 1) Explain kindly that your child's story is his and only he can share the details he wishes to share as he grows.
- 2) Help extended family members understand how aspects of your child's behavior may be related to experiences he had prior to adoption –e.g. in the orphanage, in foster care.

3) Education can also involve helping the extended family learn about a child's heritage or ethnic/racial background (if different from the family), or possibly the country where he was born. Explain to your loved ones why keeping an

adopted child's heritage is so important and why you may have incorporated certain traditions into your celebration of the holidays as a result.

4) Help your relatives understand why you are thrilled (not threatened) to receive the lovely holiday cards/gifts from your child's birth family. If birth family members are to be included in family celebrations, obviously it is a good idea to prepare relatives/close friends for this as well! Educate them about the benefits of open adoption to your child, your family and your child's birth family. With regard to the latter, isn't the holiday season about being open-hearted?

If a relative or friend is open to reading, give them books, articles, websites and other resources to increase their knowledge. Sometimes parents invite their relatives to join them in attending adoption-related holiday celebrations. Many adoptive parent support groups hold holiday get-togethers. The important thing is to keep the lines of communication open, be patient and respectful. Anticipate and even role play the difficult questions that may come up or the troubling comments. If you get defensive or angry, the relative/friend learns nothing about adoption except that you seem "overly sensitive and overly reactive."

One more tip for creating bonds: look for the similarities between your child and his relative and comment on those similarities. Maybe your son laughs the same way as Uncle Harry. Maybe your daughter loves to cook like Grandma Mary. Children may not physically look like their adoptive family members, so pointing out these similarities can help to create an important sense of connection between your child and their relatives.

A child's sense of belonging to an extended family network provides important support as he grows up. For the child who joins her family through adoption, it is especially critical to feel that family members claim her as "one of theirs." Those strong bonds also provide peace of mind that the next generation—children and grandchildren of the adopted family member—will continue to be "just part of the family"!

Suggested reading:

[In On It by Elisabeth O'Toole](#)

[Adoption is a Family Affair by Patricia Irwin Johnston](#)

[Making Room in Our Hearts by Mickey Duxbury](#)



nurture.
inspire.
empower.



Happier Holidays

BY JESSICA SINARSKI, ADOPTUSKIDS: REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION.

The holiday season is upon us, full of fun and festivities. For children who are in foster care or were adopted, Christmas and other holidays can be a reminder of the family they've lost. Here are some suggestions for navigating the season with your family.

1. Shift your expectations

If your child or teen has a history of loss and trauma, holidays can trigger all kinds of mixed-up feelings and challenging behaviors. What sounds fun to you might be a trigger for your child. Make it safe to discuss what this time of year means to them, and recognize that they may not be happy or enjoy the holidays in the way you wish they would.

2. Keep your family routine

Consistency is always important for kids in foster care. Simply having school end for a break may be upsetting. Be cognizant of children's need for sleep and nutritious meals. Talk about the big feelings your kids might be having, and plan activities that will let them get their energy out in healthy ways.

3. Make time for relaxation

Review your social calendar for the month of December. If you have plans every weekend, decide which things you can eliminate. Stay home when you can and set aside time for yourself!

4. Buy less

Children with attachment trauma sometimes rely more on things than on people to measure love. Perhaps make some gifts together or give experiences like bowling or movie tickets.

5. Incorporate birth family members when safe and possible

Whether it's inviting family members to a meal, arranging a phone call or Zoom session, or sending a card in the mail, acknowledging and welcoming birth family members can help ease the sense of loss and competing loyalties that children may feel.

6. Create a new tradition together

Drive around in your PJs looking at Christmas lights. Make cookies—have fun and don't worry about a Pinterest-perfect result! Snuggle up with popcorn and watch a fun movie. Ask your child to share some of their traditions with you, and incorporate those into your family's holiday plans.

7. Have an escape plan

If you're co-parenting, perhaps drive separately to gatherings just in case a parent needs to leave with a dysregulated or tired child. Talk with your child or teen before events that might be stressful and create a signal they can give if they need help or are getting overwhelmed.

8. Notice brave moments

The holidays are filled with things that can be very challenging for a child whose brain defaults to defense mode. It is incredibly brave to trust an adult if adults have not always been safe. Remember to celebrate the little things, like handling a change in plans, sharing with a sibling, or even getting in the car without complaining.

9. Laugh a lot!

Realize that at least one thing (and most likely many things) will go wrong. When they do, take a few deep breaths and smile! It is amazing how laughter helps us cope!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jessica Sinarski is a certified adoption therapist and the founder of BraveBrains, a resource and training platform for home, school, and community. She is also the author of *Riley the Brave*, a book to help children heal from trauma.



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**GET TO
KNOW YOUR
POST
ADOPTION
WORKERS:**



ERMA HAWKER, MSW

Erma is a one of the Northern Region clinical post-adopt workers. Erma has worked for the Division of Child and Family Services for 13 years and has been working with post-adoptive families for the last eight. Erma started as an ongoing caseworker, post adoption caseworker, adoption finalization worker and now the clinical post-adoption worker. Erma has completed the TBRI full caregiver series and would like to attend TBRI Practitioner training in the future. Erma is married to her husband, Tadd and has four children. In Erma's spare time she enjoys spending time with her family and binge-watching movies.

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