

UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

FEBRUARY 2018



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QUARTERLY DCFS NEWSLETTER



Jacob, age 15
Photo by: Cliff Winegar, MarDel Photography

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Lindsay Kaeding, Design Director

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FREE Webinars

Did you know about the training opportunities available on The Adoption Exchange website?

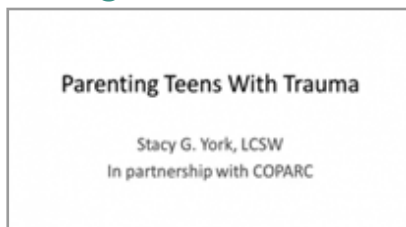
Here are a few examples:

Navigating Special Education



Making sure that your child gets the supports needed to be a successful learner can be overwhelming. If you have a child that requires exceptional services from the public school, there are three different types of support available: the Advanced Learning Plan (ALP), the 504, and the Individualized Education Program (IEP). In this webinar, Roxanne Bradley will describe each of these supports and how to access each one.

Parenting Teens From Trauma



Parenting teens who have experienced trauma is difficult. In this course we will take a look at not just how their brains have been changed, but what we, as caregivers of adolescents, can do to help our teens develop healthy identities, find healthy role models, learn skills to talk to and help open up our teens, research-based interventions to help meet their needs and teach them how to have their voice heard, and much more. Part 1 of 2.

For more like this visit:

<https://www.adoptex.org/online-learning-center>



On the Cover *Luka, age 17*

Dancing, singing and writing are just a few of Luka's impressive talents! He interacts well with peers and has many friends, and reports to get along well with adults as long as they can relate to one another. Luka's best-loved colors are blue and red, and favorite food is potatoes.

This twelfth grader has an appreciation for art and is described as a great conversationalist.

The caseworker prefers a family with a single mom, single dad, two moms or two dads. If you can provide a loving family for this awesome kid, we urge you to inquire. Luka would like to remain in contact with his grandmother following placement. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related services.

For Utah children, only home-studied families from all states are encouraged to inquire.

Photo by: Chauntelle Jaunzer, Opie Photography

To view other children that participated in Heart Gallery 2018 visit the gallery online at www.utahadopt.org.

If you are interested in any of the children featured in this publication, please contact The Adoption Exchange at 801-265-0444 or visit www.utahadopt.org.



LET'S PLAY JENGA BACKWARDS!

By Michael Serra

Reprinted with permission from *Adoptive Families*

As a father who raised a child from birth and is now parenting older children adopted from foster care, I've come to see that the game and pieces may, indeed, be the same, but you have to play in an entirely different way.

The journey from the moment you first think of adopting from foster care to sending your son or daughter off to college, walking them into their first apartment, or, in my case, seeing one of them head off to the US Air Force boot camp, is anything but a game; yet it is a game that I use to best describe it.

If you've never heard of Jenga, let me quickly explain how it's played. You begin by building a thick, solid tower out of rectangular shaped wooden blocks. The players take turns removing one piece at a time, then placing it on the top of the tower, trying not to cause the entire thing to collapse. We enjoy this game in our family, as it removes any fierce competition and replaces it with a

steady hand, some logic, and a little bit of luck. It was one of the first games we played with our children after becoming foster parents—and, I soon realized, an apt metaphor for our lives.

A Solid Foundation

As I raised my biological daughter, Beth, I meticulously laid down piece after piece from the moment I cut the umbilical cord. The years went by and we symbolically built that solid tower that would eventually help her move into her own apartment, walk on my arm down the aisle to say, "I do," and hand me my first and then second grandchild. That sturdy foundation is what every parent hopes to build for his child. Then,

as your child heads off on her own, she removes pieces as she sees fit, to reach higher and move forward, hoping against hope that she won't fall or collapse. If it does, indeed, all come crashing down, we gather the fallen pieces, rebuild, and continue playing.

While watching our 7 and 13-year-old foster children play Jenga, it dawned on me that we were playing the same game as parents, but needed to "play" in an entirely different way; we needed to play the game backward.

Imagine, if you will, starting with a tower in the center of the table, but, instead of being solid, it's already filled with holes. The game's objective now

is to carefully fill in the gaps with the missing pieces, not knowing which goes where or how much force you'll need to put it into place...but yet, you try. It is a bit harder—sometimes a lot harder—and you may have many more collapses than when you play the game the other way, but, trust me, it isn't impossible. And when that tower starts to fill in and become stronger, it's an amazing feeling for all playing.

Replacing a Missing Piece

My struggle in this “game” has always been how to assess the pieces that were missing and how to insert them into my kids' lives. In truth, I think I've gotten quite good at this game, playing it both forward and backward, without any “normal” rules, but not without a lot of sweat and tears. To start, you need to see each child as his or her own person. Sometimes, you have to go all the way back to the beginning to find a “missing piece,” regardless of the child's age or how mature he or she is trying to appear.

Here's one example: Our daughter, Rosanna, threw wild and outrageous temper tantrums that had proved quite successful for her with other foster families in getting what she wanted. After reading about this in her “telling” and seeing it firsthand, I cast my mind back to Beth's growing-up-years and simply did things backward. The next time Rosanna wanted something, like chocolate before dinner, and I said “no,” I had a plan. As soon as Rosanna began to scream and stamp her feet, I gently carried her into her room. I told her that she was safe here and that she could scream as long and as loud as she wanted to. Then I stepped out of her room and closed the door. When she screamed, I responded “louder.” She indeed screamed louder, and louder, for a good 20 minutes [the kid has stamina, that's for sure!], until she fell asleep and silence took over. Forty-five minutes later she walked into the kitchen, hungry as a bear, with not a care in the world.

We all ate, cleared the table, and moved into the living room. But, before we

turned on the TV, I told her we needed to go back. Go back to an hour ago, and talk about the tantrum. She wasn't too happy about this. It took time, but she did learn how to go back and not only recall, but verbalize, how she felt, why she felt that way, and what she really wanted.

At seven years of age, some of this was way beyond her understanding and ability, but I consistently asked the same questions. Sometimes we revisited the same tantrum two or three times over the course of a week or a month. Eventually we would talk about expected behavior and expected outcomes, and about feelings and wants vs. needs. She quickly understood that she could scream as long and as loud as she wanted while in her room, and did it a few more times, but then the novelty wore off and she realized that the results were nothing like she wanted. The tantrums started decreasing in frequency and intensity until they became almost non-existent.

The true issue that I needed to recognize and talk to her about was “disappointment.” It was her underlying demon, if you will. She's 14 now, and we continue to work on it, but she is thriving and handling disappointment so much better today. It took a long time to accomplish this. We had to go back many times, not just to the incident, but sometimes all the way back to the age when I felt she had first been grievously disappointed.

Rosanna and I had many talks about what we thought she could possibly know and ultimately miss about her birth mother, after having been removed from her at the age of only six months. As an infant, Rosanna would have known her mother's voice, heartbeat, scent, touch and perhaps even her moods, both good and bad. Then we explored the idea that Rosanna could have missed the way her mother held her, cradled her, rocked her, and possibly even shook or ignored her. These are real possibilities, as she was removed from her mother's care for definite reasons. We explored all of this as possible reason behind her actions, behind the

temper tantrums she'd been throwing since before she could remember. Then we began figuring out how she could put what she was feeling into words. “I feel disappointed that I can't have chocolate right now.” “I feel angry that my brother ate the last tortilla.” “I am scared to be alone.” “Who will teach me how to cook?”

Once we started walking together in this direction, things began to change. Sometimes you have you let children catch up to their age, but sometimes you have to go back to an earlier emotional age in order to find that missing piece. And I can honestly say that this is one piece has been successfully slipped into place in Rosanna's increasingly solid tower.

MICHAEL SERRA, an artist and writer, is a father of three (and grandfather of two) who lives with his family in San Diego, California.

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raising children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders (FASD)

tips



about

Parenting a child with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD) is a journey. It can sometimes be very challenging and very rewarding at the same time. You cannot parent a child with an FASD without having it change your life and most often, for the better. You will meet some amazing people, make some amazing friendships, and see a beautiful child work really hard to be the best person they can be with your love and support.

on fasd

- Know that you will go through periods of grief that never fully go away. The brain damage from the prenatal alcohol exposure is a lifelong disability, one that makes a child's future uncertain. It is hard to see them struggle. This will hit you at times when you are least expecting it. This is normal.
- Learn as much as you can about FASD. Read books, attend trainings, conferences, and support groups. Not just at the beginning of the journey, but all throughout.
- Get accustomed to educating many people on FASD, including professionals. It is a very misunderstood disorder.

remember

- Take your child's age and cut it in half. That is the age you can expect them to act.
- It is a spectrum disorder. Children and adults with an FASD function at different levels.
- FASD is brain damage. Permanent brain damage.
- Don't blame yourself (or the birth mom if your child is adopted). FASD is usually a result of either an addiction issue, or a lack of knowledge and understanding about what prenatal exposure can do to a developing fetus. No mom goes into their pregnancy willfully intending to hurt their child.

patience

- Be patient. Children with an FASD can tell you a rule, but that does not mean they can always follow it. This is very frustrating.
- Re-teach everything. Don't get irritable or short tempered when you have to teach your child the same things over and over again — sooner or later (likely later) they will get it.
- Know that conventional parenting techniques often don't work with children with an FASD. A sticker chart may work well with one child and not another. Time-outs rarely work with our kids. We have to be creative and find alternative strategies. And know that when we find one that works, it might not work for more than a few weeks (or less, or more).

routine

- Keep to a routine when possible and let the child know ahead of time what the plan is for each day. Post a daily calendar and run through the routine with the child each morning.
- Prepare for transitions such as getting in and out of the car or bathtub, waking up, going to sleep, settling for dinner, a change in television programs. Children with an FASD don't always have the natural ability to make transitions from one emotional state, or one activity level, to another. Be prepared to help them every time.
- Break all tasks down to one step at a time. Children with an FASD can't always see the parts of a whole nor can they always understand a sequence — help them to see the parts and the order of an activity or task.
- Know that our kids often have a hard time discerning the difference between what one minute, five minutes, or 30 minutes feel like. Visual times can help to alleviate many meltdowns that are due to this challenge. There are two different timers I recommend and they are both available on a website called www.abilitations.com Search “audible countdown timer” and “sand timers.” The sand timers are offered in various times and are pretty sturdy.
- Learn to distinguish between flexibility and chaos. You will have to allow for spontaneous change but that doesn't mean that you can't have a schedule that is mostly followed; you will know when to let go.

health

- Keep complex carbohydrates and proteins (e.g. whole wheat crackers, string cheese, etc.) around for regular snacks to keep blood sugars stable. Varying blood sugars will impact the child's mood so keep it stable.
- Our children need lots of exercise. Try individual sports like swimming or biking. This helps with large muscle development and keeps them out of team sports that can create confusion or peer alienation.

developmental age equivalent

With most kids with an FASD, we should cut their age in half, and that is often the age they are functioning in most areas. Imagine sending a 9 year old into the real world with little to no support...

<u>Skill</u>	<u>Developmental age equivalent</u>
Actual Age	18 years
Expressive language	20 years
Comprehension	6 years
Money and time concepts	8 years
Emotional maturity	6 years
Physical maturity	18 years
Reading ability	16 years
Social skills	7 years
Living skills	11 years

Streissguth, A.P. & Kanter, J. (Eds.) (1997). *The Challenge of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome: Overcoming Secondary Disabilities* (300 pp.). Seattle: University of Washington Press.

relationships

- Negotiate with the teacher for a reduced, or non-existent, homework load. This will reduce household tension in the evenings and respect the child's exhaustion level.
- Get use to feeling like you are being judged by everyone: people, other family members, medical professionals, school staff, neighbors, etc. People will give you advice that will often seem very condescending. Learn to smile and know that people mostly are just trying to help. Say something when appropriate.
- Be aware that some relationships in your life may change. You may very well be raising "that child," the one that others don't want around their children. Some families experienced not being invited to certain activities. Work on educating your family and friends on FASD, with hope that they will be patient and understanding.
- Find other families raising children with an FASD to form relationships with. This is by far the most common desire that caregivers have, to talk with another parent who "gets it."

have fun

- Create some fun in every day. FASD symptoms can create a lot of tension and stress in the family, so make sure you find something positive and fun in each day. It can be simple and short, but it needs to happen.
- Lots of cuddling and hugging! Your child needs the physical contact that re-enforces attachment.
- These kids are precious. They can be really frustrating, really often, but they are typically really fun kids who just want love and acceptance. Accept them for who they are. Consider their developmental age, instead of their chronological ages when setting expectations.
- Learn to expect chaos, issues, and challenges. Have fun and celebrate when you are wrong!

To find additional information on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder visit Utah's Adoption Connection's free Lending Library at www.utahadopt.org.

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: When Good Parenting Doesn't Work

Presenter: Eileen Bisgard, J.D

Annual Adoption Conference for Parents 2018

Participants should:

- Learn how fetal alcohol spectrum disorders are recognized and diagnosed
- Begin to understand children with FASD and other pre-natal exposures
- Focus on interventions that successfully effect the behavior of children with FASD
- Learn why traditional parenting methods may cause more difficult behavior
- Hear of new ways to create positive outcomes with children who have FASD

Lunch will be provided



MONDAY, MARCH 5TH 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Location: DCFS Ogden Office 950 E 25th Street

REGISTER ONLINE AT [HTTP://PROVOPROFESSIONALS2018.EVENTBRITE.COM](http://PROVOPROFESSIONALS2018.EVENTBRITE.COM)

TUESDAY, MARCH 6TH 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Location: doTERRA 549 South 1300 West, Pleasant Grove

REGISTER ONLINE AT [HTTP://PROVOPROFESSIONALS2018.EVENTBRITE.COM](http://PROVOPROFESSIONALS2018.EVENTBRITE.COM)

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 7th 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Location: Utah State University Eastern

451 E 400 N, Price CIB Room 101

Satellite locations: Roosevelt - Ephraim - Moab – Blanding

REGISTER ONLINE AT [HTTP://PRICEPARENTS2018.EVENTBRITE.COM](http://PRICEPARENTS2018.EVENTBRITE.COM)

THURSDAY, MARCH 8TH 9:00 AM 4:00 PM

Location: Red Lion- 161 W 600 S, Salt Lake City

REGISTER ONLINE AT [HTTP://PROVOPROFESSIONALS2018.EVENTBRITE.COM](http://PROVOPROFESSIONALS2018.EVENTBRITE.COM)

THURSDAY, MARCH 22nd 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Location: Heritage Center

105 N 100 E, Cedar City

REGISTER ONLINE AT [HTTP://CEDARPARENTS2018.EVENTBRITE.COM](http://CEDARPARENTS2018.EVENTBRITE.COM)

Registration deadlines: March 14th

Please find childcare as children cannot be accommodated.

Five foster parent licensing hour will be offered.

Eileen Bisgard, JD and Adoptive Parent

Eileen Bisgard is an adoptive parent advocate who is raising children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). She will provide adoptive parents, who adopted children from the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS), with personal understanding of how to effectively parent children affected by FASD. She will help parents understand what FASD looks like in children's behaviors and cognitive development. She will address how adoptive parents can best address their children's unique needs.



Why Do We Rely on 'Shame to Tame' Children's Behaviour?

By Jane Evans, Reprinted with Permission from Jane's Blog, thejaneevans.com

Shame to Tame

Time-out, criticism, telling-off, 'say sorry', go to your room, get out of my sight; you just lost your play-date/phone/lift.....

All of these rely upon loss of emotional connection with the main caregiver, loss of something helpful or pleasurable, and/or isolation. They connect the child with a sense of not good enough, unacceptability and shame. The hope is this will teach them to change their behaviour to fit with the caregiver's expectations and desires.

The problem with shame is it causes melt-down

In a state of shame emotionally and physically there are big dramatic automatic changes that kick in. Shame triggers the survival system to either fight - so some children (and adults) start to shout, scream, cry and even lash out, flight - there is a strong urge to run away fast with no destination in mind, freeze - rooted to the spot, immobilised which if it goes on for too long can lead to a system shutdown. NO LEARNING is possible in any of these SURVIVAL states.

Shame teaches self-loathing, avoidance, deceit and self-sabotage

Shame stifles confidence, adventure, creativity, self-acceptance, authenticity, self-belief, joy, a love of learning.....I could go on.

Many of us live with our shame and are 'successful' in areas of our lives, but invariably shame is going to undermine our fullest, greatest potential.

Children and young people will DEFINITELY make mistakes. It is in the small print of their job descriptions - the bit you may not have had time to read! Their brains are not fully formed until late 20's maybe even 30's so we need to ALWAYS remember this.

What do children need from us?

Anyone who is learning something new - so that's every child and young person - needs calm, compassionate teachers who can help them feel safe enough to be curious and to problem-solve to build to their knowledge and their skills.

If I was trying to learn to bake a cake (not managed this one yet!) I would need someone to go slowly, smile and be kind when I got in a fluster and put the wrong ingredient in at the wrong time, help me calm down, and start again with a system, so I got things in the right order next time.

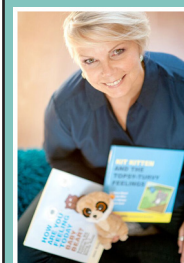
What I'd hate would be a loud sigh, a roll of the eyes, the bowl being snatched away and banged out in the sink. I'd feel like an idiot, I'd internally crash and would want to flee the situation never to return because I'd feel ashamed.

As caregivers we need to understand and recall the very body-based feelings of shame, the emotions it triggers and try VERY hard NOT to do this to children. Nature gives children, and us a shot of shame when we get something wrong. A very young child will sense pushing their sister caused a strong reaction internally, and to their sister too. How we then plow in will either create a lasting sense of shame. It may also provide information on how to connect with us in future if other ways have previously failed e.g. when they were happily playing together and making mud pies we took the time to do something else.

Getting connection will trump being shamed BUT the 'after-shame' will still be strongly felt too. Over time it will reinforce the belief that they are mean and hurt others, therefore, are shameful. No one wants a child to carry that around as their truth.

About the Author:

Jane Evans is a TEDxBristol, International Speaker & Trainer. She is the author of two books, "Little Meerkat's Big Panic" and "Kit Kitten and the Topsy Turvey Feelings."



www.thejaneevans.com

A Planet Called Shame

When you shout at me I'm already gone
 So you're shouting at emptiness
 I've jumped in my shame rocket
 I'm shooting into Space
 Can't see or hear you anymore
 I can only zoom far far away
 Your anger, frustration, disappointment a meteor shower
 spraying-pitting-burning my rocket

I land with a familiar bump on a planet called Shame
 I know it well I come here often
 I leave my battered rocket tumbling out on to the hardness of
 Shame

I lay flat out in the crater of unacceptability
 I swim slowly in the pool of toxic shame
 I trip I stumble over the rocks of badness & unlikeability
 Nothing much has changed since my last visit to planet Shame

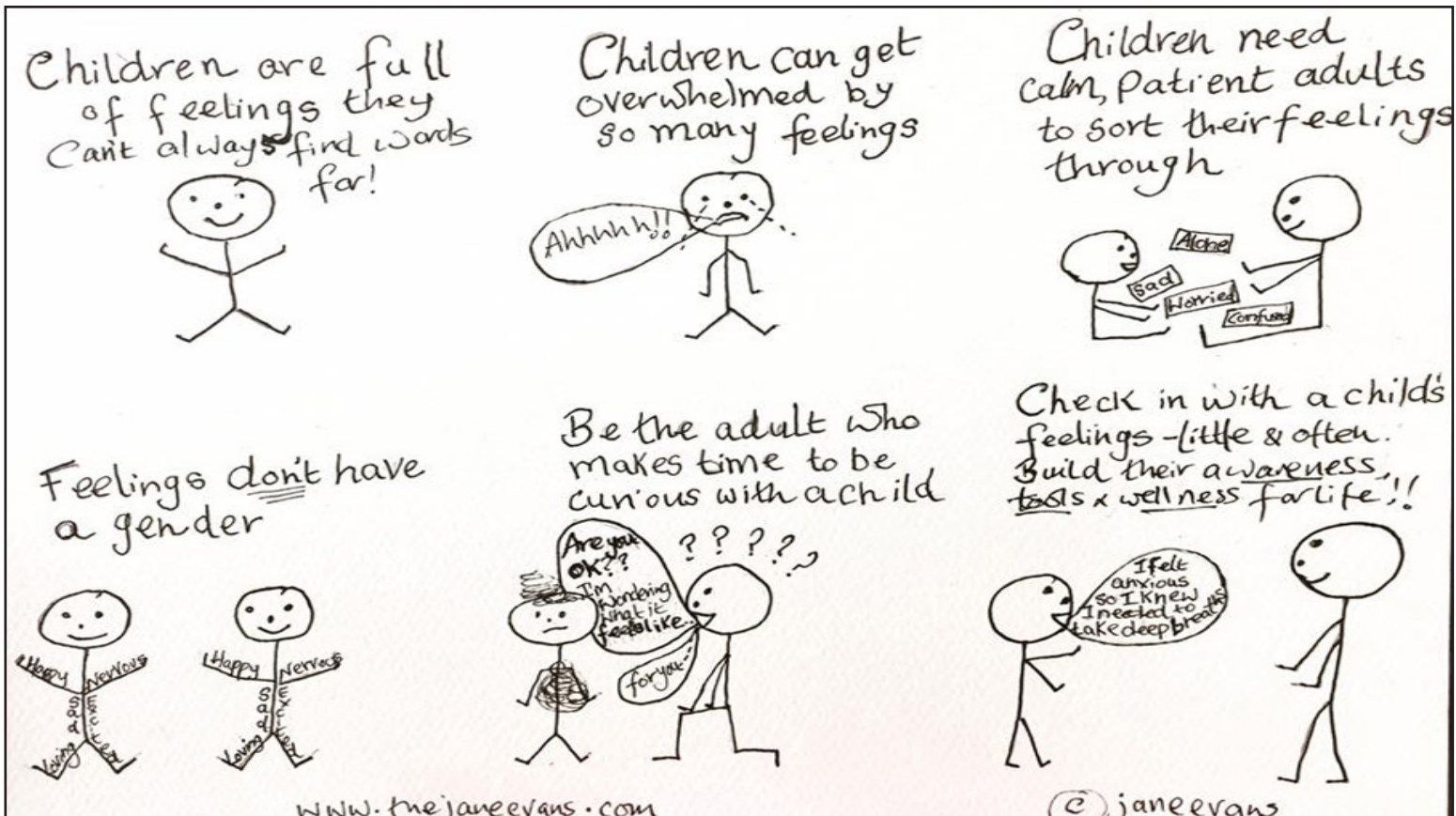
It's cold here on a planet called Shame
 It's lonely here on a planet called Shame
 It's scary here on a planet called Shame
 It's my destiny here on a planet called Shame

It's my truth here on a planet called shame
 I'm tired here on a planet called Shame
 It's a long way back from a planet called Shame

My rocket is damaged so I wait to be rescued
 A journey full of meteor showers will do that to a rocket
 I want to come back but can't call out from a planet called
 Shame

I wait, I wait, I wait to be rescued from this far away place
 I can fly rockets but I can't fix them
 I need your help
 When will you come?

The journey to a planet called Shame is always fast and furious
 The journey back is long, dark, difficult, uncomfortable
 Your disapproving tone, look, sigh, shrug is fuel for my rocket
 Your compassionate acceptance rescues and restores my rocket
 I've had enough of visiting a planet called Shame
 I prefer a planet called GOOD ENOUGH
 Help me spend more time there



"I wish all parents, grandparents, teachers, physicians, and counselors could regularly attend this conference. It's a life changer every single time!" -Eve Boger, adoptive mother

EMPOWERED TO CONNECT CONFERENCE

PRESENTED BY SHOW HOPE

SIMULCAST | APRIL 13-14, 2018

Come experience practical teaching in a safe and supportive community as we work to equip families, churches, and professionals to better serve children impacted by adoption and foster care.

Featuring Trust-Based Relational Intervention® methods developed by Dr. Karyn Purvis and Dr. David Cross from the Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development at TCU to help bring attachment and connection in families

10 am-6 pm MDT

Children's Service Society of Utah

655 E 4500 S, Suite 200

Salt Lake City, UT 84107

Registration information to come. Email us to be notified.

Email: liesl@cssutah.org

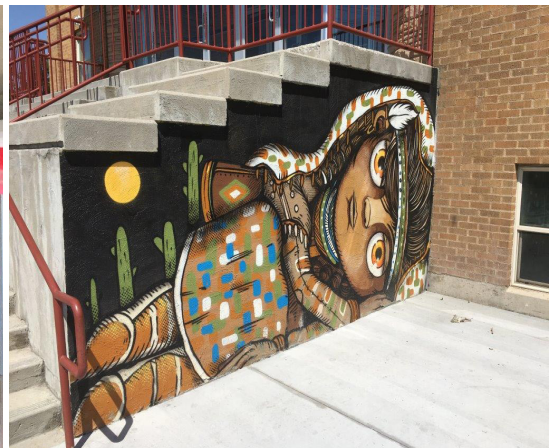
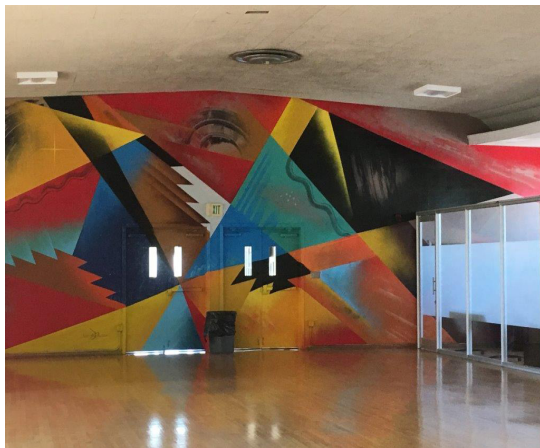
PRESENTED BY:



CEU credits may be available to professionals.

Urban Indian Center of Salt Lake

Does Your Child have American Indian or Alaska Native heritage?



Many resources are offered at the Urban Indian Center of Salt Lake. Many American Indians and Alaska Natives live along the Wasatch Front, including tribes that are native to Utah such as the Ute, Paiute, Goshute, Shoshone and Navajo (Dine'). Some are young adults coming to attend college either at University of Utah or Salt Lake Community College. Some are families who moved to Salt Lake City to better their lives by taking a new job in the city. The Urban Indian Center (UIC) serves as a gathering place where people can participate in familiar Native American community activities such as pow wows and sweat lodges, providing a comfort zone for those who are far away from home. Some of the people may need help with finding work or need basic staples of life assistance until they get on their feet. The Urban Indian Center is a place the people can turn to for assistance in health care, mental health care and other needs. The UIC provides services that identify and educate our clients concerning preventive care, well-being, enjoyment and encouraging better overall health of life within the Native American community.

In order to register for programs or services provided by the Urban Indian Center of Salt Lake please bring the following documentation when you visit the Center; all documentation is required and must be provided at the time of registration. Along with documentation an intake form must be completed; the form can be found below or filled out at time of registration.

INTAKE FORM is available at

<http://www.uicsl.org/admissions/>

- A Tribally issued Certificate of Indian Blood (CIB) or Identification card. A CIB must include the degree of Indian Blood (ex: 1/2, 1/4, etc.)
- Social Security Card (or letter from Social Security Administration indicating you have ordered a new or duplicate card)
- Photo ID, if over 18 (if registering your child, please bring parent[s] photo ID)
- Proof of residency (rental/lease agreement, mortgage, or official mail)
- Proof of Income (if applicable)
- Medical insurance card (if applicable)

*Please note: This form is required for all new clients and those who have not been to the center for a period of greater than 5 years.

120 West 1300 South, Salt Lake City, Utah 84115 • Toll Free (866) 687-4942 • Phone (801) 486-4877

For other resources and services in your area please visit the Resource Database online at www.utahadopt.org



An Adoptee's Perspective:

10 Things Your Child Needs to Know

By Christina Romo

10. You have a right to feel the way you do about your adoption journey.

Adoption is complicated and messy and wonderful and heartbreaking. Life may feel wonderful to you now or it may feel confusing and awful. Know that your feelings about being adopted are valid and will likely change throughout your life—and that is completely normal and okay. There is no right or wrong way to feel about adoption, and there is no right or wrong way to navigate your adoption journey. You have a right to explore what it means to be adopted in your own time and in your own way. Your experience is your own and you are the only one who knows what is truly in your heart.

9. Know that you may see and feel the world differently due to the traumatic losses you have experienced in your life.

Many adoptees are also mental health warriors and brave their battles valiantly every day. Know that you are not alone in this and it is okay to ask for help if you reach a point where you no longer feel as though you can brave your battles alone. You don't have to do this alone—we don't want you to go through this alone. Your life has value and your light is so very needed in this world.

8. You have a right to fight until you feel safe.

Regardless of the age at which you joined your adoptive family, you may find that forming a connection with them is extremely difficult. Whether you joined your family who adopted you as a baby or as a teenager, or even as an adult—the fact of the matter is that you were biologically connected to your birthmother for nine months before you came into this world. You heard her voice and you felt her heartbeat from inside her womb and you have her blood running through your veins. That matters. The connection you formed with your birthmother matters. And, that can make it difficult to form a connection with the family who adopted you. You may have endured traumatic experiences in your life beyond the loss of your birth family and your culture and community of origin. While you are not what happened to you, those experiences can very much affect the way you view and form relationships with others. You may need to fight against forming connections or receiving love from your family until you can truly believe in your heart and in your gut that you are safe and that nothing you can do or say will be enough to push your adoptive family away from you or make them love you any less. It won't be easy for anyone involved, but you need and deserve to know that you are worth fighting for and

that there are people in your life who will fight to stay just as hard as you fight to push them away.

7. Your sense of identity is your own.

Adoption is the result of a series of decisions that have been made for a child. As an adoptee, you may feel as though there are many things in your life that are out of your control. You may have had your name changed, you may not know your true date of birth, or you may have been raised in a racial and cultural community that differs greatly from your race and culture of origin. All of these decisions that are made for you can profoundly impact your sense of identity and the world's perception of you. As you mature and grow in your understanding of yourself and your adoption journey, you may begin to see yourself differently and reject or embrace parts of who you are. There is no right or wrong way to form your identity as you navigate your adoption journey. And, the way you currently identify and see yourself may completely change in a few years. The process of forming your identity may include exploring your past and seeking connections to your family and culture of origin. You have a right to seek out the missing pieces of the puzzle, and you have a right to search for a connection to the people and things that may fill a void in your life and help you feel whole again.

6. You should never have to choose between loving the family who brought you into this world and the family who adopted you and chose to raise you.

There is room in your heart to love both. You can feel blessed to have a family to celebrate milestones and holidays and birthdays with and to have your needs met while mourning the loss of your birth family and the connections to your heritage and your past. Loving your family of origin and yearning for a connection to your past doesn't have to mean that you love the family who adopted you any less. It is okay to miss your birth family and wonder about what might have been. They will always be a part of you. You have a right to wholly embrace the many aspects and people that contribute to who you are.

5. There is beauty and heartbreak in being perceived as different.

It is not easy being different and living and going to school in a place where nobody looks like you and nobody seems to understand what you are going through. The questions about who your "real" parents are and why you can't be with them, the endless taunting and bullying, the assignments you can't complete due to the countless unknowns in your life—all are incredibly heartbreaking reminders of the losses you have experienced and how different you truly feel. Being different can be lonely and terrifying, but it can also be inspiring and beautiful. We are all unique in our own ways and life often deals us cards that we aren't prepared to play. But, it is in those moments of adversity where we discover our strength and resiliency—where we fight to hold onto the things and people in our lives that bring us joy and foster hope. It is in those moments where we are presented with opportunities to educate others and create awareness about the issues that we face as a result of our experiences in life. It is in those moments where we get to decide how we react to difficult situations—where we must gather the strength and courage within ourselves to find light in the darkness and fight to rise above the adversity—where we can choose to combat hatred with kindness, compassion, and love.

4. Allow yourself to let go of the guilt that you feel.

As adoptees, we tend to blame ourselves for the things that have happened in our lives that were out of our control. We ask ourselves questions like:

"If I hadn't cried as much, would they have kept me?"

"If I had helped more/if I hadn't made them so angry, would they have taken me away?"

"If I had been better or if I had tried harder, would they have stayed?"

We feel guilty for not feeling happy about being adopted and for not being able to be the children we believe our adoptive parents want us to be. We hear stories from other adoptees who have experienced trauma and abuse in their adoptive families and we feel guilty for not having had those experiences as well. We feel guilty for missing and loving our birthmothers and we feel guilty for the hatred and anger we feel towards them. We feel guilty for loving our adoptive parents and we feel guilty for not being able to love and connect with them in the ways they wish we could. We feel guilty for the constant anger and sadness we feel. We feel guilty for how lost and alone we feel. It is important to remember that we are not what happened to us. We had no control over the choices that were made that led to our relinquishments and subsequent adoptions. Adoption is so incredibly complex and there is no right or wrong way to feel about being adopted. We have a right to not feel okay about what has happened in our lives. But, we also need to do what we can to not allow ourselves to get stuck there. We need to allow ourselves the time and space to heal. We need to attempt to forgive others and ourselves in order to heal and work towards finding some semblance of peace in our lives.

3. You are worthy of love, and you are worthy of being loved exactly as you are.

There have been experiences in your life that may have caused you to feel like you are not good enough and are not deserving of love, but you are. You should not have to compromise who you are to prove to others that you are worth loving. Love is something that should be given without expectation of anything in return, and you deserve to have that kind of love in your life. You should never feel like you have to buy love or friendship or a sense of belonging with things like gifts, money, your body, good grades, perfection, loss of identity, or anything else that may compromise who you are and who you believe yourself to be. You are worthy of love without condition or expectation. You are worthy of being loved for who you are—beautiful and messy and wonderful imperfections and all.

2. You matter to this world.

It can be difficult to understand why people in your life chose to make the decisions that led to your being adopted. Some of those decisions may cause you to feel as though your value in this world is less than others whose birth parents chose to raise them. I want you to know and to hear me when I

say that your life, your voice, and your story all have value in this world. Regardless of how you came to be adopted, I want you to know that you matter and you have the capacity to do amazing things in your life. Never forget that this world needs your light.

1. You are not alone.

Being an adoptee can be beautiful and lonely and wonderful and devastating. It can be difficult living in a world of people who breathe the same air as you, but will never understand what you have gone through and why you feel the way you do about it. That sense of belonging can feel so fleeting at times—it is something you may never fully be able to experience. It is never easy to feel misunderstood. It is never easy to feel lost in a world that you are encouraged to embrace but that never fully feels like your own. It is never easy to hear that you were given "a chance at a better life" when all you want is to experience the life from which you were torn away—a life you may never have had the chance to know. Please know that you are not alone. There are entire communities of adoptees who have had similar experiences and know exactly what you are going through and truly understand how you feel. Reach out to the people in your life who love and care about you. Talk to them about the things that hurt, and talk to them about the things that bring you joy. Too many adoptees have lost their lives with too many words in their hearts that they felt were unspeakable. While the words you need to say about what you are feeling may be hurtful to your loved ones—the pain will heal with time. However, the pain of losing you would create a deep and devastating wound that your loved ones would carry with them forever.

Please know that you are so very loved.

You are seen.

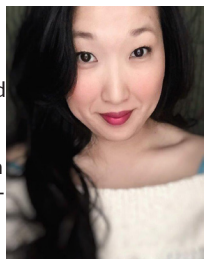
You are wanted.

You are irreplaceable.

You are never, ever alone.

It will get better, and there is always hope.

Christina Romo was adopted from South Korea at age 2. She works for an adoption organization and lives in Minnesota with her husband and their two sons. She shares her journey as an adoptee through her blog, *Diary of a Not-So-Angry Asian Adoptee* (www.diaryofanotsoangryasianadoptee.com).



Please contact Christina at ck-casale2romo@gmail.com if you wish to use or distribute this piece.

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Contact Your Post Adoption Specialist

Northern Region:

Jeanna O'Connor	801-395-5973
Anna Whisler	435-213-6641
Aubrey Meyers	801-776-7352

Salt Lake Region:

Adoption Helpline	801-300-8135
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Western Region:

Jeannie Warner (A-L)	801-787-8814
Megan Hess (M-Z)	801-921-3820

Southwest Region:

Richfield/South	Angie Morrill	435-896-1263
St. George	Gwen Fund	435-668-1852

Eastern Region:

Price/Castledale	Greg Daniels	435-636-2367
Vernal/Roosevelt	Fred Butterfield	435-630-1711
Moab/Blanding	Katie Eberling	435-678-1491

5 HONORING EXCELLENCE *Miriah Caldwell*



Miriah Caldwell works in the Salt Lake City, Utah office of the Division of Child and Family Services.

Miriah is an incredible worker. She came back from maternity leave like a champion. She jumped right back into action and took her cases on with full confidence and attention. She has a heart of gold and will go to the mat for her cases. She takes her work home and she always has a sweet smile on her face

mixed with a soft spoken voice no matter the predicament she is in.

She is an extremely smart and capable caseworker. She genuinely cares about her clients, and this makes a world of difference in their lives. She goes out of her way to fully get to know and understand her clients, so that she can better serve them. She juggles so many tasks at once, but manages to make her clients feel cared about. Miriah is an inspiration to the rest of our team and we are so lucky to have her!

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