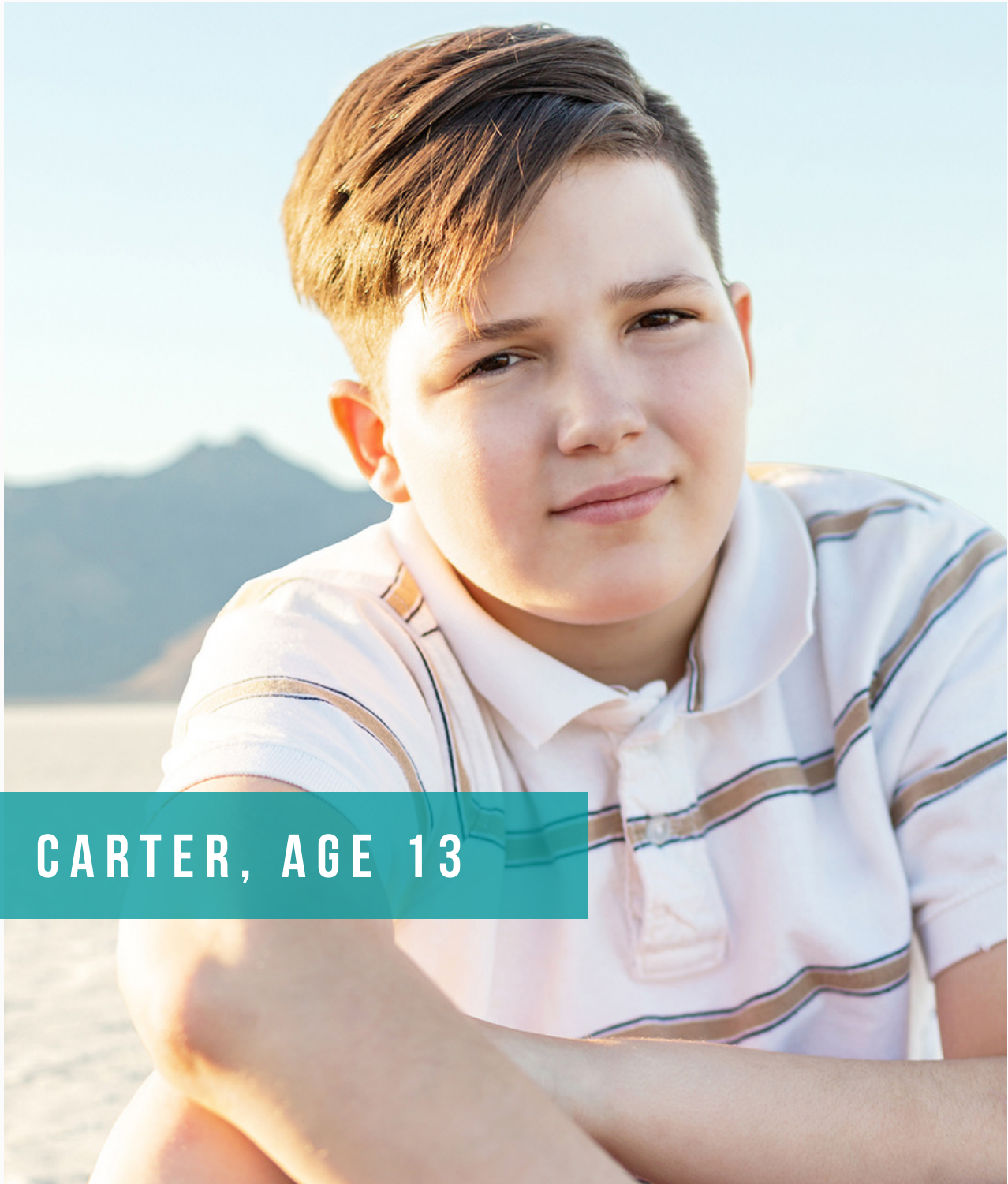


# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

MAY 2023 EDITION



CARTER, AGE 13

Photo by: Candice Bithell,  
Candice Renee Photography



**ISABEL, AGE 14**

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# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

In partnership with  RAISE the FUTURE

## Spotlighting Resources Utah's Adoption Connection Resource Database

### U Can Learn

U CAN LEARN first started in 2001 as a testing and tutoring center, with one facility at Research Park at the University of Utah. Well into our fifteenth year as a 501©(3), we have provided thousands of children in the Salt Lake City area with effective, low cost treatments for dyslexic, attention deficit disorders, visual processing disorders, academic problems, speech and language problems, and memory and learning deficits. With a staff of two specially trained teachers and therapists, we are a one-of-a-kind-learning center, providing solutions for bright children and adolescents with:

- Lower grades in the academics
- Slow processing speed
- Visual and/or Auditory processing disorders
- Dyslexia/reading failure
- Dysgraphia/writing problems
- School anxiety
- ADD/ADHD
- Memory loss due to concussion or post-chemotherapy

6375 S Highland Drive, #202  
Salt Lake City, UT 84121  
(801)308-1258

### Disability Law Center- Education

Utah students with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. For this to be a reality for the more than 60,000 students in Utah eligible for special education services, schools must fully implement both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) flexibility approved plan, the Utah State Office of Education (USOE) must identify and correct noncompliance, parents must know and exercise their rights, and the state must adequately fund special education.

205 North 400 West  
Salt Lake City, UT 84103  
800-662-9080

### Utah State Office of Education Educational Equity Section

Educational Equity is a federally mandated monitoring office for the K-12 public school that monitors civil rights compliance in accordance with the U.S. Department of Education and the Office for Civil Rights regulations which prohibits: discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex discrimination, disability, age or religion, discrimination on the specific basis of sex discrimination, discrimination on the basis of disability in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance, equal employment opportunity and fair employment practices

-They also provide help and information on Anti-bullying, MESA program, poverty,

Holly Bell, Education Specialist  
(801)538-7828

For more resources, visit <https://www.utahadopt.org/resources>



### ON THE COVER, CARTER

Carter loves books through and through. Reading is an activity he enjoys any time of day. Carter particularly loves reading about chemistry and trying out experiments. This fellow says that his favorite color is salmon, and he is an animal lover at his core. If you are familiar with the hero Martian Manhunter, Carter will likely have a lot to share with you. He also has an interest in electronics. Carter enjoys eating at McDonald's and Subway, and his best-liked drink is Arizona watermelon sweet tea. His number one goal is staying busy. Carter blossoms with one-on-one attention from adults. He appreciates being able to teach them the things he knows. Carter dreams of a career as a chemist when he is older.

This bright child is in the seventh grade and has a love for learning.

All family types will be considered for Carter. He has significant connections to maintain following placement. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related services.

This is a LEGAL RISK ADOPTIVE PLACEMENT.

MAY 2023 EDITION

Kathy Searle, Editor

Lindsay Kaeding, Design Director

To submit articles or for a subscription, call 801-265-0444 or email [kathy.searle@raisethefuture.org](mailto:kathy.searle@raisethefuture.org). This publication is funded by the State of Utah, Division of Child and Family Services. Raise the Future prepares and prints the newsletter and the Division of Child and Family Services mails the publication. The mailing list is kept confidential. One can be removed from the mailing list by emailing [amyers@utah.gov](mailto:amyers@utah.gov).



# Parenting in Transracial Adoptions— What You Need to Know

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BY: ELLEN SINGER, LCSW-C, FORMER C.A.S.E ADOPTION COMPETENT THERAPIST

Jaiya John, Ph.D., an African American adult adoptee was raised along with his younger adopted African American brother in a Caucasian family in a predominantly Caucasian community.

In his autobiography, **Black Baby White Hands: A View From the Crib**, Dr. John writes that when his father was asked by an African-American man, “*How are you all going to teach this child all of the things that a Black child needs to know to grow up in a society so strongly averse to Black people?*” His father replied honestly that he probably could not “do a good job because of my ignorance and limited perspective,” but that he would try to teach his son what his father had taught him, and “hopefully that will provide him the tools and strength of character to figure out the rest on his own.”

Upon hearing this story, Dr. John notes that while he appreciated his father’s acknowledgment of the challenges involved in raising a Black child, he thought to himself, “How exactly was I supposed to ‘figure the rest out on my own?’ I had been lost in a racial hinterland. Something in our relationship had needed to stretch and elevate itself out of their cradle and into mine—a dimension that could address my unique circumstance.”

Without question, Caucasian parents raising adopted children of a different race face significant challenges. They need to ensure that their children grow up with knowledge and pride in their racial/cultural heritage. Also, they should be comfortable with their adoptive family culture. These are the keys to a cohesive, positive identity and self-esteem.

This involves a commitment to open communication –often initiated by parents, around 1) the adoption story, 2) the reactions of others to their visibly “different” family, and of course, 3) the racism that exists in our society.

Regarding the latter, parents need to discuss the positive and negative racial stereotypes and biases that happen all around all the time. In addition to the home atmosphere, Gail Steinberg and Beth Hall emphasize in **Inside Transracial Adoption**, that parents must make it a priority to ensure that their children have a “regular and comfortable connection to the cultures with which society will identify them.” For many parents, this means making changes in their lifestyle and facing their feelings of discomfort or fear. Living in a diverse community certainly can help make this easier, but only if the effort is made to make real, close connections with families of the child’s birth heritage.

If families do not live in a diverse community, Steinberg and Hall suggest that parents need to bring their children “to experiences with their racial/cultural group as frequently and for as long duration as possible.”

A culture camp is one example. If parents seek out experiences where they are the minority, they will also understand what it feels like to be in their children's shoes.

Steinberg and Hall give the following suggestions to connect children with members of their racial culture:

- Do everything in your power to make friends with at least one family who shares your child's racial heritage, hang out in their neighborhood, giving your child a chance to make friends with kids who share her racial experiences.
- Join in recreational, religious, or educational groups or activities with members of your child's racial or ethnic group.
- Shop, go to restaurants, movies, and beauty/barber shops with people of your child's heritage.
- Seek out special events such as museum exhibits, street fairs, musical productions that are likely to be attended by people of your child's heritage as well as people of other cultures. Help your child to appreciate all different races/cultures.
- Choose professionals of color: doctors, dentists, and teachers, etc.
- Choose schools with diversity in mind.
- Join adoptive parent groups with other transracially adopted families, esp. families with children of the same racial heritage as your children.
- Certainly, by adolescence, if not before, as transracial adoptees move further out into the world, their ability to cope with "being different" and racism will continually be tested.

In *Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens* by C.A.S.E. CEO Debbie Riley, LCMFT and Dr. John Meeks, one 24-year-old man writes, "I was not aware of the apparent awkwardness my family's racial consistency thrust upon society at large! However, when I reached my teenage years and was stripped of my naiveté...Soon, looks that I once classified as just that turned into scowls or disgust and visual admonishments." How does he cope? "I deal with it. I don't ignore the fact that my family is different from many families. What I ignore is the reminder that society gives me each day telling me so."

Helping your child learn coping skills for dealing with racism is no small challenge. Parents need to look to their "village" to assist them with this important task. In sum, parents have two main tasks:

1. Provide relationships and experiences to ensure positive racial socialization– positive racial identity.
2. Ensure that children are prepared for and equipped to cope with racism.





# Self-Examination and Trauma

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BY: NATHAN MAGNESS, SHOW HOPE, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

As parents and caregivers, we want to see our children flourish in all aspects of life. However, for our children who have experienced early attachment injuries related to loss, abuse, trauma, and/or neglect, that flourishing may seem impossible. There is hope and help, though, through care models like Trust-Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI®). But before you take the steps toward healing for your child, it is critical for you to examine yourself, in particular to the trauma you may carry within yourself. As the late Dr. Karyn Purvis said, “You cannot lead a child to a place of healing if you do not know the way yourself.”

**To begin your examination of self, we encourage you to spend time alone and with your spouse or a trusted friend as you process the following questions.**

- + Consider how your needs were met as a child. In what ways did you know you were precious, unique, and special?
- + Attachment is often described as a dance between the child and the caregiver. What are some ways you have seen your own history impact your relationship with your child?
- + Think of a time when you were safe, but you didn't feel that way. How did you respond in that moment or situation?
- + Think about the ways in which your parents or caregivers corrected or “disciplined” you. Were any of the following practices involved: time-outs, sending you away to your room, consequences, lecturing, and/or a focus on your failures?
- + How did you respond to those more traditional forms of discipline?
- + In those moments, did you feel connected or disconnected from your parents or caregivers?
- + In the hard moments (because they will come!), from where does your source of joy and comfort come?
- + Do you have regular time set aside to connect with mentors for wise counsel and family, friends, and community for support and encouragement?
- + What hinders you from those critical relationships and regular times together?

In examining yourself, you may even want to dig deeper and explore your Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). According to the Centers for Disease Control, “ACEs are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0–17 years). ... ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance use problems in adolescence and adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education, job opportunities, and earning potential.” A helpful resource in understanding ACEs, we encourage you to check out ACESTooHigh.

On a more practical level, Mindfulness Strategies, particularly Self-Awareness Strategies, of TBRI’s Connecting Principles are actions you can begin incorporating today to promote healing for yourself and for your child and/or teen. The goal of TBRI Connecting Principles is to build trusting relationships that help children and youth feel valued, cared for, safe, and connected. Disarming fear and building trust greatly increase the capacity for connection, growth, and learning. The following are Self-Awareness Strategies for you to begin practicing today.

- + Identify the thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors you bring to relationships based on the care you received.
- + Realize how these thoughts, beliefs, and behaviors influence your relationships.
- + Identify personal triggers.
- + Practice regulating yourself during times of stress:
- + Pray.
- + Take 10 deep breaths.
- + Go for a walk.
- + Remind yourself, **it is my job to help my child regulate.**
- + Stay calm and emotionally present during a child’s distress:

This allows you to:

- + Think flexibly.
- + Solve problems creatively.
- + Model compassion.
- + Co-regulate with your child

To learn more about TBRI and its Connecting, Empowering, and Correcting Principles, we encourage you to explore our annual Hope for the Journey Conference. Formerly the Empowered to Connect Conference, the Hope for the Journey Conference is designed to encourage and equip parents and caregivers meeting the everyday needs of children impacted by adoption and/or foster care. The conference is also a much-needed resource for churches, agencies, and other organizations in their care and support of the families and communities they serve.

NATHAN MAGNESS IS A TBRI® PRACTITIONER WHO SERVES AS THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS AT SHOW HOPE, A NATIONALLY RECOGNIZED VOICE IN ADOPTION ADVOCACY AND ORPHAN CARE SUPPORT WORK. YOU LEARN MORE AT [SHOWHOPE.ORG](http://SHOWHOPE.ORG).



# The Teen Brain: 7 Things to Know

From the **NATIONAL INSTITUTE of MENTAL HEALTH**

Did you know that **big** and **important changes** happen in the brain during adolescence? Here are **seven things to know about the teen brain**:

## 1 Adolescence is an important time for brain development.

Although the brain stops growing in size by early adolescence, the teen years are all about fine-tuning how the brain works. The brain finishes developing and maturing in the mid-to-late 20s. The part of the brain behind the forehead, called the prefrontal cortex, is one of the last parts to mature. This area is responsible for skills like planning, prioritizing, and making good decisions.



## 2 Brain development is related to social experiences during adolescence.

Changes to the areas of the brain responsible for social processes can lead teens to focus more on peer relationships and social experiences. The emphasis on peer relationships, along with ongoing prefrontal cortex development, might lead teens to take more risks because the social benefits outweigh the possible consequences of a decision. These risks could be negative or dangerous, or they could be positive, such as talking to a new classmate or joining a new club or sport.

## 3 The teen brain is ready to learn and adapt.

The teen brain has an amazing ability to adapt and respond to new experiences and situations. Taking challenging classes, exercising, and engaging in creative activities like art or music can strengthen brain circuits and help the brain mature.



## 4 Teen brains may respond differently to stress.

Because the teen brain is still developing, teens may respond to stress differently than adults. This could increase teens' chances of developing stress-related mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression. Recognizing possible triggers and practicing effective coping techniques can help teens deal with stress. More information on managing stress is available at [www.nimh.nih.gov/stress](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/stress).



## 5 Most teens do not get enough sleep.

Research shows that the sleep hormone melatonin works differently in teens than in children and adults. In adolescence, melatonin levels stay high later at night and drop later in the morning, which may explain why teens may stay up late and struggle with waking up early. Many teens do not get enough sleep, making it harder to pay attention, control impulses, and do well at school. Getting good sleep at night can help support mental health.



## 6 Mental illnesses may begin to appear during adolescence.

Ongoing changes in the brain, along with physical, emotional, and social changes, can make teens more likely to experience mental health problems. The fact that all these changes happen at one time may explain why many mental illnesses—such as schizophrenia, anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, and eating disorders—emerge during adolescence.



## 7 The teen brain is resilient.

Despite the stresses and challenges that come with adolescence, most teens go on to become healthy adults. Some changes in the brain during this critical phase of development actually help support resilience and mental health over the long term.



## Finding help

If you or someone you know has a mental illness, is struggling emotionally, or has concerns about their mental health, there are ways to get help. Find more information at [www.nimh.nih.gov/findhelp](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/findhelp).

Talking openly with your doctor or other health care provider can improve your care and help you both make good choices about your health. Find tips to help prepare for and get the most out of your visit at [www.nimh.nih.gov/talkingtips](http://www.nimh.nih.gov/talkingtips).

If you or someone you know is struggling or having thoughts of suicide, call or text the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at **988** or chat at [988lifeline.org](http://988lifeline.org). In life-threatening situations, call **911**.





# More Love is More Love

IN MANY FAMILIES, RELATIONSHIPS COME WITHOUT EXACT NAMES. WHILE ADOPTION HIGHLIGHTED THIS TRUTH, IT WAS ALREADY A GIVEN IN MY FAMILY—AND MAYBE IN YOURS, TOO?

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BY SARAH ERTAN BUTTENWIESER

The photo arrived the way many photos do these days; I was tagged on Facebook in order to see it. The dress 18-month-old Cora wore was one my daughter, Saskia, had worn and loved. I had carefully chosen it for Cora because she's family, and because the dress had family provenance. Let me explain: Saskia's aunt Laura made the dress. Laura is married to my husband's brother (from their dad's first marriage). Cora is Saskia's cousin because her mother, Margery, is Saskia's birth mom's sister (from their dad's second marriage). Following me?

In my family, many relationships come without exact names. We adopted Saskia five years ago in an open adoption, so there are many family members who "belong" to her—Cora and Margery, for example, and her birth mom, Caroline, whom Saskia calls Auntie Cece. While adoption highlighted this truth, it was already a given in my family—and maybe in yours, too. Families tend to be rich, complicated entities. Over time, they can transform from neat and tidy to somewhat overgrown—and interesting.

My parents divorced when I was in elementary school, and they both remarried. While I don't know all of my stepparents' relatives well, I knew some of them, and I got a beloved stepsister out of the deal. Whenever people used to ask me whether I felt sad that my parents divorced, I'd say I wasn't. My answer was (and still is): "Without their divorce, I wouldn't have Emily." When Emily got married, her sister (technically, her half-sister, if you want to be technical) stayed at our house the night before the wedding. Though we made the arrangement for convenience's sake, it felt easy and natural—after all, we were both sisters of the bride. Did that make us sisters, too? If not technically (if you want to be technical), I think it's fair to say that we felt sisterly, especially in our shared love for Em.

During a visit to New York, my stepsister's dad came to our hotel to see his daughter. A tall, wiry, energetic, and somewhat hammy guy, he declared to my children that, as Emily's dad, he was "kind of another grandpa." My kids were more than game for a fun grandparent-like addition. Had we spent more time together, I'm certain this would have become more tangible.

Is my cousin's wife's sister my cousin? I adore her, so surely, in a way, she is—or can be. Is my cousin's ex-wife my cousin still? We think so. I don't mean this in a flip and offhanded way; I guess that I think family is complicated enough that you might as well hold those you want to love alongside those you've been handed without a choice. Maybe this is part of why adoption didn't seem entirely foreign to me. Some aspect of that choice felt expansive, as if we'd only embraced a different (admittedly complex) spin on that notion that you can reach toward family, that you can think outside the most simple definition about who belongs and who doesn't.

While it's hard to explain adoption to a five-year-old—and at times, I fear what the conversations will be with a 10- or 15-year-old—the notion that guides me is this: More love is more love. And knowing so much of her family, the ones brought via her mom—even without neat words to describe all of our relationships—feels very warm. I feel like we all have Saskia's back. So last week when she informed me that I am not her mom, I asked what she meant. “Auntie Cece is my mom,” she said.

I heard a little hint of challenge. I took a deep breath. “Well, I'm your mom,” I said as directly and without revealing that she'd stolen my breath as I could manage. “And Auntie Cece is your mom, too.”

“I have two moms!” she exclaimed.

“That's right,” I agreed.

More love may be more love; it's also a lot to wrap your mind around—for her and for me. I gave her a hug and she hugged me back. I could feel her relief that she could say this; that it was fine to say and that I know I'm her mom—and want her to know that, too.

“And one dad,” she added.

That's another story for later (we've never met her birth father), and so I nodded.

*First Appeared in Brain Child Magazine “Reprinted with permission from Adoptive Families.” At end of article: “Reprinted with permission from Adoptive Families magazine. Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved. For more articles like this one, visit Adoptive Families online, [www.adoptivefamilies.com](http://www.adoptivefamilies.com).”*



# Pediatric Occupational Therapy Providers in Utah

Occupational therapists use meaningful activities to help people participate in what they need and/or want to do in order to promote their physical and mental health and well-being. They are well equipped to support foster and adoptive families by supporting the development of motor, social, cognitive, self-regulation, and sensory skills which are often delayed or impaired due to trauma. This handout aims to help you become connected with occupational therapy practitioners by providing the contact information of various pediatric occupational therapy (OT) providers in the state of Utah.

In Utah, medicaid and many insurance plans require a referral from a physician for occupational therapy services. Contact your insurance provider and/or pediatrician if you have any questions on the referral process or insurance coverage. More information about scheduling an evaluation can be found on the website for each respective clinic. If your child is under the age of three contact their pediatrician to determine if they qualify for early intervention services. Raise The Future does not recommend any particular provider. Each clinic has different philosophies and approaches, therefore it is recommended to research and contact the clinics prior to receiving an evaluation in order to find the best fit for your family. The information below is based on what was made publicly available as of March 2023 and is subject to change.

\*Accepts traditional medicaid and/or SelectHealth and University of Utah Health medicaid plans

## Davis County

### Ability Innovations\*

365 W 1550 North Ste H Layton, UT  
(801) 618-7903  
info@abilityinnovations.com  
abilityinnovations.com/

### Better Learning Therapies\*

915 N 400 W Ste. 110  
Layton, UT 84041  
www.betterlearningtherapies.com

### Primary Children's Rehab-Bountiful\*

280 N Main St Bountiful, UT 84010  
(833) 577-3422  
intermountainhealthcare.org

### Primary Children's Rehab - Layton\*

201 W Layton Pkway, 3rd floor Layton,  
UT 84041  
(801) 577-3422  
intermountainhealthcare.org

## Salt Lake County

### Better Learning Therapies\*

9119 Monroe Plaza Way. Sandy, UT  
84070  
In Association with KoolMinds  
www.betterlearningtherapies.com

### Children in Motion\*

5284 Commerce Dr, Ste C-214  
Murray, UT 84107  
(801) 871-5492  
www.children-in-motion.com

### Functionabilities

12453 S 265 W Ste B, Draper, UT  
84020  
(801) 443-7775  
Makingtherapyfun.com

### Just for Kids

2224 E 3205 S Salt Lake City,  
UT 84109  
(801) 231-9207  
susan@otjustforkids.com  
www.otjustforkids.com/therapies

### Primary Children's Eccles Outpatient Services\*

81 Mario Capecechi Dr Salt Lake City, UT  
84112  
(801) 662-1000  
intermountainhealthcare.org  
**Primary Children's Outpatient Rehab TOSH\***  
5770 S Fashion Blvd Bldg 5 Ste 210  
Murray, UT 84107  
(833) 577-3422  
intermountainhealthcare.org

### Primary Children's Rehab - Riverton Hospital\*

3741 W 12600 South Riverton, UT 84065  
(801) 571-3081  
intermountainhealthcare.org

### Primary Children's Rehab - Taylorsville Clinic\*

3845 W 4700 South Taylorsville, UT 84118  
(833) 577-3422  
intermountainhealthcare.org

### University of Utah Health Life Skills Clinic\*

417 Wakara Way #1410 Salt Lake City, UT  
84108  
(801) 585-6837  
healthcare.utah.edu/life-skills-clinic

## Summit County

### Blue Sky Therapeutics

2760 W Rasmussen Rd, Ste 205/6 Summit  
Center Bldg D Park City, UT 84098  
(435) 659-1746  
falikhahn@gmail.com  
blueskytherapeutics.com

## Uintah County

### Breaking Barriers Therapy\*

24 W Sergeant Court Dr, Ste 204 Saratoga  
Springs, UT 84045  
(801) 987- 6333  
contact@breakingbarrierstherapy.com  
www.breakingbarrierstherapy.com

### Learning Solutions\*

80 N. Vernal Ave, Vernal, UT 84078  
(435) 789-5683  
Madilyn.Bernard@learningsolutionsinc.org  
www.learningsolutionsinc.org

### Orem Community Hospital Pediatric Rehabilitation\*

527 W 400 N Ste 2 Orem, UT 84057  
(801) 714-3505  
intermountainhealthcare.org

## Utah County

### Strides Pediatric Therapy\*

18406 W. White Quest Dr Eagle Mountain, UT  
84013  
(801) 335-4699  
mjuarez@stridespediatrictherapy.com  
stridespediatrictherapy.com

### Whole Child Therapy\*

1570 North Main St Spanish Fork, UT 84660  
(801) 585-6837  
contactus@twctherapy.com  
www.thewholechildtherapy.com

## Washington County

### Prickly Pear Pediatrics

168 N. 100 E Ste 224 St George, UT 84770  
(307) 258-1852  
emily@pricklypearkids.com  
pricklypearkids.com

### St. George Regional Hospital Pediatric Rehabilitation\*

652 South Medical Center Dr St. George, UT  
84790  
(833) 577-3422  
intermountainhealthcare.org

## Weber County

### Ability Innovations- Ogden\*

5484 S. Adams Ave Pkwy Washington  
Terrace, UT 84405  
(801) 608-8056  
aiogden@abilityinnovations.com  
https://abilityinnovations.com



EntertainmentCalendar.com is America's online network of local web sites that showcase the wealth of events, resources, and opportunities available in local areas. We currently have two properties in each of 36 regions across the U.S. and Canada: KidsOutAndAbout.com and BeyondTheNest.com.

# www.kidsoutandabout.com

## Adoption and Foster Care Related Podcasts

### Trust Based Relational Intervention



practice.

The TBRI® Podcast features conversations about Trust-Based Relational Intervention®, an attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children. On this podcast we talk about the elements of trauma-informed care and chat with experts in the field about implementing TBRI® across different communities of care and

### Creating a Family Talk about Adoption & Foster Care



Creating a Family is a national infertility, adoption, & foster care education and support nonprofit. We interview leading experts on infertility, adoption, and foster care each week to bring you unbiased accurate information.

### The Adoption Connection Podcast by and for Adoptive Moms



If you are an adoptive mom looking for hope, practical tools and friends who understand, this podcast is for you!

### The Adoption and Fostering Podcast



This podcast discusses contemporary Adoption & Fostering and gives interesting ways and solutions to foster your child.

### Who Am I Really? Podcast



Who Am I Really? shares the journeys of adoptees who have searched for and found members of their biological family.



# In My Skin

BY JUSTICE STEVENS

*Justice Stevens was adopted transracially with his sister. He shares his thoughts below about how the transracial placement affected him and what his parents did—and do—that help.*

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FROM NACAC

When I was eight I was transracially adopted. My parents are white and I'm Black. We lived in a small white suburban town. The number of Black kids in the town you could count on two hands. I didn't realize or pay attention to the fact that I was Black unless I was faced with racism, which came not just from kids, but adults as well. The racism I faced from adults (teachers, bus drivers) was when I went to them for help when kids called me the "N" word, and it was made clear that it wasn't an important issue to them.

It confused me to not know why the adults didn't take a stand against the racism I faced. It was painful as well. One thing always stuck with me, and that's when I was faced with racism, my parents stood against people who looked like them to protect me. It was important for me to see that as a child. I needed to know that my parents felt my pain, even though they would never be in my shoes. I needed to know that my feelings were validated, and that what I was facing was wrong.

Growing up I had prominent Black role models. One was my mom's co-worker named Celeste. I loved Celeste's energy and fashion style. She would do my and my sister's hair. My mom drove us to Boston to Celeste's house so she could braid our hair in the latest styles. To drive all the way to Boston, for us to have our hair done by Celeste was important to me! No offense to my mom, but I wasn't nervous any time Celeste did my hair. I thought, "She's Black, so she'll know exactly what to do to my hair!" I remember Celeste talking about the newest trends, movies, and music. I paid attention to how her decor was in her house, what type of shows or movies she watched, how she parented her son. Celeste was so cool in my eyes because in my mind that's who I was going to be when I was older, so I felt I had to pay attention to how she was. I felt I had to mimic her.

Another role model was my mom's friend Harriet, who was raising her granddaughter. Harriet had lived through the civil rights movement and experienced segregation. I always enjoyed listening to her stories. My mom always says that Harriet is her mom, and Harriet treated my mom like a daughter. They could talk about the struggles Harriet faced, even though my mom is White.

It's important that my parents embraced Black friends, and had Black friends who turned into family. It was important to see my White mom listen attentively, and have painful conversations with people like Harriet when they spoke about the injustice they faced. It was also important to see my mom have the conversations with Black people about their triumphs like when Harriet spoke about being involved in civil rights—being on the forefront for change and equality for African Americans.

My parents always had pictures of African Americans in the house and paintings by African Americans, even to this day even though my siblings and I haven't lived at home for many years. They brought our culture into the home.

I think it's very important to also touch on how the birth kids or siblings of a different race can be affected by transracial adoption. When I was 14, my biological sister Tanya (14); my brother Max, who was 13 and is my parents' birth son; and my younger brother Melvin, who was 7 at the time and is Black all went to a camp in Roxbury, near Boston. Most of the campers were African American. I thought this was going to be fun, but I didn't have a good experience. Tanya and I were treated different—as if we weren't cool enough. The kids judged us for not knowing our culture. Max was embraced because it was expected that he didn't know “how to be Black.” Melvin started to change how he talked, and started to use more slang. I started to resent Max because in my eyes he was more Black than me even though he was White—he listened to rap music and was into urban culture, and I couldn't handle it. I felt that it was so easy for him to be part of something I tried so hard to be part of that was a part of me.

But Max always stuck up for us. He was the cool white boy so when he stuck up for us, the kids backed down pretty quickly. It was automatic that Max stuck up for us because we were his siblings. Max lived in New Orleans for many years in a predominately Black neighborhood. He gravitates towards the African American community, that's where he feels he belongs. As an adult I embrace it, I'm proud of him. I love that he loves my culture, and I'm prouder that he also speaks out against the injustice we face. He had gone against people he's known his whole life to defend the African American community. I'm proud that he's my brother.

With the police brutality going on in the world, I am proud to say “Black lives matter” and to stand with my people. I'm prouder that my parents do also. They stand up to injustice, even if they have to take on people they've known for a long time. This is important for me to see and will always be important to me. My parents aren't afraid to stand up and stand by the side of African Americans and our struggles. They know that it's a real issue we face, I face, my Black siblings face every day. My parents say that white privilege exists. They don't water down what the people who look like them do to me or people who look like me.

My advice for transracial adoptive parents is to always stand up for what is right because your kids will be watching and they won't forget a single thing. Don't ever say you understand what it's like or what it must be like because you don't and you can't. Be by their side while they struggle with their identity and long for acceptance because it will happen. Listen to them—both what they say and what they are showing you through their actions. It will be ugly, scary even, but don't give up. Stay on the journey with them, let them know that you're there every step of the way. Some things you can guide, others you can't, and you have to be okay with that. It's critical that you allow them to express who they feel they are, or what makes them feel in touch with their roots, even if it makes you uncomfortable. It's going to be overwhelming at times, but you will all come out the other side enlightened.

You all will learn from each other. There will be a light at the end of the tunnel. It will all be worth it.



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## TBRI® TIDBIT:

**STAY CALM** (No Matter What)

**SEE THE NEED** (Behind the behavior)

**MEET THE NEED** ( Find a way)

**DON'T QUIT** (If not you then who?)

Dr. David Cross