



UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

MAY 2016



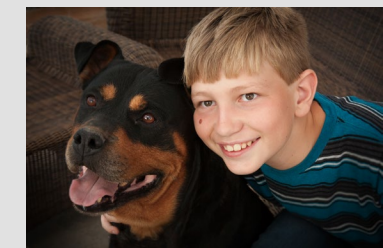
Dani, age 17
Photo by: Whitney Lewis

In This Issue

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>3 100 Summer Fun Ideas
A list of fun things for kids and parents to do together during the summer.</p> <p>4 A Day in the Life
By: Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D.
An infographic illustrating a Day in the life of a child with Executive Functioning Issues.</p> <p>6 To the White Parents of My Black Son's Friends
By: Maralee Bradley
An article written from a transracially adoptive mom.</p> <p>8 Untangled
By: Denise Kendrick
An article about decluttering her child's life.</p> | <p>10 Utah's Adoption Connection Calendar
A highlight of utahadopt.org community calendar.</p> <p>11 Discipline Cheat Sheet
Simple phrases and ideas for diffusing tough situations with your child.</p> <p>12 Keeping an Adoption Open Despite Challenges
By: Barbara Herel
An article for parents of open adoptions.</p> <p>14 The Adoption Letter
By: Donald Craig Peterson
A personal story about adopting from foster care.</p> |
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100 Summer Fun Ideas for Kids and Parents

1. Pick your own...whatever. Find a farm with blueberries, strawberries, tomatoes, flowers, etc., and get picking.
2. Play outside in the rain. Smell the rain on the pavement; splash in puddles; make mud pies.
3. Make your own rain. Douse everyone with the hose or sprinkler.
4. Take family naps. Parents nap too!
5. Have daily quiet time. Big kids need rest too.
6. Cook out...frequently. Go beyond the burgers. Try veggies or fish.
7. Make "smores." Chocolate + marshmallow + graham cracker=summer
8. Camp out. First-timers, try backyard camping.
9. Camp in. Put the sleeping bags on the floor.
10. Stargaze. Invite friends and make a party of it.
11. Catch lightening bugs.
12. Rearrange the furniture. Give the kids graph paper and have them draw out a plan first.
13. Make your own pizza. Try this recipe.
14. Invite friends over for a game night.
15. Go to the demolition derby.
16. See an air show.
17. Stop to smell the flowers. (Go to a botanical garden.)
18. Talk to the animals. (Go to the zoo.)
19. Get wet. (Go to a water park.)
20. Have a puzzle race.
21. Play a card game.
22. Play a board game.
23. Make good use of nearby parks.
24. Pack a picnic.
25. Start the back-to-school shopping early.
26. Get the summer homework done.
27. Experiment with new hairdos.
28. Dig in the sand at the beach.
29. Set a goal and complete a home project.
30. Take an early morning bird walk.
31. Grow vegetables. And then eat them.
32. Grow flowers. And then arrange them .
33. Let the kids cook dinner. In fact, make a tradition of it.
34. Host the kids' friends for a sleepover.
35. Go to a nearby museum that you've never been to before.
36. Go to your favorite local museum...again.
37. Go to a carnival or county fair.
38. Decorate your walkways with chalk.
39. Take a hike.
40. Plant a butterfly garden.
41. Make fresh lemonade. Maybe even sell it at a lemonade stand!
42. Take a road trip to a nearby city.
43. Show the kids science is fun.
44. Go to a matinee. Find a bargain movie house and pay less.
45. Go to the drive-in.
46. Read a chapter book aloud.
47. Listen to a classic as an audiobook.
48. Teach the kids a game you haven't played since you were a kid.
49. Meet friends at the playground.
50. Visit a historic house.
51. Make ice cream.
52. Use bikes as a mode of transit.
53. Take bike rides for fun.
54. Go fishing.
55. Paddle a kayak or a canoe.
56. Jump rope.
57. Press summer flowers.
58. String beads.
59. Blow bubbles. Make your own!
60. Play miniature golf.
61. Eat at the counter of a diner.
62. Find a new place to play.
63. Build a Lego castle.
64. Master a new skill together.
65. Teach the grandparents to use Skype.
66. Build a fort.
67. Make fairy houses.
68. Write/illustrate a comic book.
69. Build your brain. Try some brainteasers.
70. Find a free concert near you.
71. Fly a kite.
72. Run in the yard.
73. Visit a local farmers market.
74. Create art with beach items.
75. Have breakfast in bed.
76. Play with clay.
77. Make play dough creations.
78. Make paper airplanes. See whose goes the farthest.
79. Join a summer reading club.
80. Keep a sketch diary.
81. Write in a journal.
82. Teach the kids to skip stones.
83. Make photo gifts online. Grandma will love them.
84. Take lessons together. Cooking, yoga, tennis, music, etc.
85. Play croquet on the lawn. And try bocci too.
86. Set up a badminton net. You could use it for volleyball too.
87. Play HORSE.
88. Create a treasure hunt for kids.
89. Erect a bird feeder.
90. Join a Junior Ranger program.
91. See a dramatic performance together.
92. Put on your own dramatic performance.
93. Make music.
94. Play charades.
95. Break out the family movies. And the popcorn too!
96. Go to a flea market or garage sale.
97. Have a garage sale.
98. Climb trees together.
99. Get a book of riddles. See if you can stump each other, then write your own.
100. Keep your kitchen cool. Make no-bake cookies.



On the Cover Tyler, 13

Tyler looks up to the adults in his life! He is a personable and empathetic child who always sees the best in people. When not cheering on others, he is probably singing along to a Michael Jackson song. Tyler likes to keep busy with recreational sports such as football and snowboarding, enjoys the great outdoors, and has fun camping out as a Boy Scout. Emergency vehicles easily catch his eye, his favorite food is spaghetti tacos, and he dreams of becoming a firefighter when he grows up.

Now an eighth grader, Tyler favors science and gets along great with his peers. He benefits from an IEP (Individualized Education Plan), speech therapy and counseling. He may need some assistance as an adult, but a wonderful life is a possibility!

If you are able to provide Tyler with a loving, structured and consistent home, we urge you to inquire. The caseworker prefers an active LDS family, in which Tyler can be the youngest child in the home, preferably with other children close to his age or older. He would like to maintain contact with his siblings and a previous foster parent. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related services.

For Utah children, only homestudied families from all states are encouraged to inquire.

Photo by: Linda Boyd

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.

A Day in the Life of a Child With Executive Functioning Issues



Meet Josh, a sixth grader who has executive functioning issues. Executive functions work together to help the brain organize and act on information. They include:

- Organizing, setting priorities and starting tasks
- Focusing, shifting or sustaining attention and thinking flexibly
- Regulating alertness and staying on task
- Managing frustration and keeping emotions in check
- Using working memory and recalling information
- Self-monitoring and controlling impulses

To understand how executive functioning issues can affect kids in school and outside of it too, take a look at a typical day in Josh's life.



7am

Argh! Josh knows he's forgetting something. Ah, that's it—his cleats for today's game. He runs back inside to get them...but ends up leaving his backpack at home as he races to catch the bus. He sprints past the checklist his mom made to help him remember what he needs for school. But it's too late: The bus is about to pull away! He's going to miss it again.

Executive Functions:
Organizing, Using Working Memory

11am

Josh's teacher asks, "Who has a good answer to the first question I gave you yesterday about last night's reading assignment?" Josh squirms, hoping he won't be called on. He didn't write the questions in his daily planner and has no idea how to answer them.

Executive Functions:
Organizing, Focusing



1pm

It's the best part of the school day: lunch! But Josh hogs the conversation, talking way too loud and too much about his video games. He doesn't notice how annoyed his friends are getting.

Executive Functions:
Self-Monitoring, Controlling Impulses

3pm

In soccer Josh is so focused on getting the ball that he doesn't keep in mind which direction he's supposed to run once he gets it. He quickly heads for the nearest goal and kicks the ball—right into his own team's net.

Executive Functions:
Shifting Attention, Thinking Flexibly



6pm

Josh isn't happy when his mom tells him to turn off the TV and set the dinner table. When he thinks he's done with this task, his little sister tattles that he's forgotten to give each person a cup. Frustrated with his sister and with missing his TV show, Josh loses his cool and screams at her.

Executive Functions:
Managing Frustration, Keeping Emotions in Check

8pm

After lots of prodding from his mom, Josh sits down to do his homework. But he doesn't know where to start. Instead of doing the book report or the math problems that are due tomorrow, he decides to surf the web to find a topic for his science report that's due next week. Then he takes a break to play a video game.

Executive Functions:
Setting Priorities, Starting Tasks



10pm

When Josh finally begins the book report, his mind keeps jumping from one thought to another. He can't figure out what to write and only gets one sentence down on paper before he gives up for the night. He thinks he can do more on the way to school tomorrow—even though he's never gotten anything done while riding the bus with his friends.

Executive Functions:
Sustaining Attention, Staying on Task, Organizing

12am

It's way past his bedtime. Josh is exhausted. He tries to go to sleep, but he can't shut off his brain. He keeps worrying about disappointing the teacher with his book report and getting teased by his teammates for kicking the ball into the wrong goal.

Executive Functions:
Regulating Alertness, Keeping Emotions in Check



About Executive Functions

- Many kids with learning and attention issues have trouble with executive functioning. It's very common in kids with ADHD.
- Executive functions are the brain's self-management system. Issues with executive functioning can make it hard to complete schoolwork and everyday tasks.
- But there are ways to help at home and in school. Classroom accommodations and informal supports can help kids like Josh get organized and stay on top of their assignments. Then they'll feel less stressed and more prepared for day-to-day activities.

Ways to Help

- Ask teachers to check your child's daily planner for assignments.
- Post schedules and directions and say them out loud.
- Give step-by-step instructions and have your child repeat them.
- Use checklists and color-coded school supplies.
- Break projects into smaller pieces with their own deadlines.
- Use graphic organizers or mind-mapping software.
- Talk with your child's doctor about considering ADHD medication.
- Follow a daily schedule that builds in time for taking breaks.

*Adapted from an NCLD infographic (illustrations by Fil Vocasek) and the work of Thomas E. Brown, Ph.D.



To the White Parents of My Black Son's Friends

If you tell your kids racism happened a long time ago but now it's over and use my family as an example of how we can all get along, you are not doing me any favors.

by Maralee Bradley

I've been wrestling with talking to you about some things I think you need to know. I've wrestled with it because I feel my own sense of shame—shame that I didn't know or understand these issues before they touched my family. I've felt fear that you'll respond in subtle ways that make it clear you aren't safe for my child. I've been concerned that you won't believe me and then I'll feel more angry than if I hadn't said anything. But my son is getting older and as he transitions from an adorable black boy to a strong black man, I know the assump-

tions about him will change. And I need your help in keeping him safe. We talk to our son about safety issues. We talk to him about being respectful of police (and anyone in authority), about keeping his hands where they are visible, about not wearing his hood up over his face or sneaking through the neighbor's backyard during hide-and-seek or when taking a shortcut home from school. We are doing what we can to find this bizarre balance of helping him be proud of who he is and helping him understand

that not everybody is going to see him the way we see him. Some people are going to see him as a "thug" before they ever know his name, his story, his gifts and talents.

But here's the thing—as much as we can try to protect him and teach him to protect himself, there may come a time when your child will be involved. As the parents of the white friend of my black son, I need you to be talking to your child about racism. I need you to be talking about the assumptions other people

might make about my son. I need you to talk to your child about what he would do if he saw injustice happening.

"Colorblindness" Denies Our Reality

I know that in a white family it is easy to use words like "colorblind" and feel like we're enlightened and progressive. But if you teach your kids to be colorblind, they may not understand the uniquely dangerous situations my child can find himself in. If you tell your kids racism happened a long time ago and now it's over and use my family as an example of how whites and blacks and browns can all get along together, you are not doing me any favors. Just because you haven't seen obvious examples of racism in your own life doesn't mean it doesn't exist. It is easy to think we live in a colorblind society when you don't know that two weeks ago I was on the phone with the principal at my son's school to discuss the racial insults he was regularly receiving from the student sitting next to him. I was thankful for how seriously the school handled that incident and we consider it a huge victory that my son felt safe telling his parents and teacher how he was being teased since many kids don't. It is easy to think we live in a post racial society when you don't know that a neighbor of mine called the Child Protective Services hotline to complain about my kids behaving in the exact same ways as the 10 other white neighbor children they regularly play with (playing in the "street"—we live on a cul-de-sac—, playing in our front yard without shoes, asking for snacks from the neighbor parents—these are the actual complaints that were made). I don't want to begin to tell you the trauma it is to former foster kids when a social worker shows up at your house to

interview them and I'm afraid I haven't yet forgiven our neighbor for bringing that on our family (although it was quickly determined to be a ridiculous complaint and there was no further action taken). The thing is, I doubt that neighbor even thinks of himself as racist, but the fact that when the white kids of the neighborhood do it it's "kids being kids," but when the kids of color are involved it's got to be addressed by authorities shows the underlying bias of his assumptions. This isn't "concern," this is harassment.

So, white parents, please talk to your kids about racism. If they see my son being bullied or called racist names, they need to stand with him. They need to understand how threatening that is and not just something to be laughed off. If your child is with my child playing soccer at the park and the police drive by, tell your child to stay. Just stay right there with my son. Be a witness. In that situation, be extra polite, extra respectful. Don't run and don't leave my son by himself. If you are with my son, this is not the time to try out any new risky behaviors. Whatever trouble you get into, he will likely not be judged by the same standard you are. Be understanding that he can't make the same mistakes you can.

White parents, treat my son with respect. Don't rub his head because you want to know what his hair feels like. Don't speak "black slang" to him because you think it would be funny. If you're thinking about making a joke that you feel might be slightly questionable, just don't do it. Ever. Your kids are listening and learning from you even in the jokes you tell. Be conscious of what media messages your kids are getting about

race. Engage in tough conversations about what you're hearing in the news. Don't shy away from this just because you can. He can't. We can't. Be an advocate for this beautiful soul who has eaten at your kitchen table, sat next to your son at church, been at your child's birthday party. He is not the exception to the rule. He is not protected by my white privilege for the rest of his life. He is not inherently different from any other little black boy and ALL their lives have value and worth and were created by God. I have hope that when white parents start talking about these issues with our white kids, maybe that's where change starts.

This article originally appeared on her blog, amusingmaralee.com, and was reprinted with permission.



About the Author:
 I am a mother of six pretty incredible kids ages 9 and under. Four

of my kids were adopted (one internationally from Liberia, three through foster care) and two of our sons we made ourselves. Prior to becoming parents my husband and I were houseparents at a children's home and had the privilege of helping to raise 17 boys during our five year tenure. I'm passionate about caring for kids, foster parenting and adoption, making my family a fairly decent dinner every night, staying on top of the laundry, watching ridiculous documentaries and doing everything I do for God's glory. It's tough to leave the house these days for anything besides grocery trips and the occasional stop at Grandma's house, so this is where you'll find my attempt at reaching outside my front yard to connect with other grown-ups.
 -www.amusingmaralee.com/aboutmaralee



UNTANGLED

by Denise Kendrick

How I broke up with our therapist, allowed my kids to be quitters and ended up happier and healthier

Last year my parents offered to stay with my children while my husband and I attended a conference. I was grateful that my newly adopted children would be able to sleep in their own beds and stay on schedule while we traveled. I dove into cleaning, pre-cooking meals and decluttering to prepare. I spent hours creating a detailed daily schedule of my six elementary-aged children's activities and therapies. I searched the calendar, referred to sports schedules and dug through backpacks for project due-dates. I color coded appointments

by child including driving directions for ball fields, choir rehearsals, orthodontists, orthopedists and schools. As I gazed at the final copy of this beautiful spreadsheet I felt the urge to frame, or at least laminate, it. My pride quickly dissolved as I realized what this spreadsheet really meant.

We were over-scheduled.

And yet, I always felt like we weren't doing ENOUGH for our kids. I walked through most days feeling guilty. My

sixth grader fretted that she was the ONLY band student not taking private lessons. My 9-year-old's play therapist suggested therapeutic horsemanship for her self-confidence but the intake process seemed daunting. The paperwork for an upcoming Special Education Admission, Review and Dismissal sat unfinished on my desk. We were doing so many good things, but every night I fell into bed feeling overwhelmed and inadequate.

My parents survived that crazy week

watching our kids, but we knew it was time to make a change. My husband and I began discussing every commitment we faced in a given month. I conceded that there were a few activities my children simply did not enjoy anymore. For the past six months I'd been pushing my son to stick with percussion although he rarely practiced. We sold the drums on Craigslist, cancelled lessons and moved on with our lives, all happier for it. Next, we began to calculate the true cost of participating in certain activities. Although our daughter had a scholarship for a children's chorus, her participation cost us an hour roundtrip in the car, \$20 in gas, and, often, \$40 in last-minute fast-food dinners. We decided that choir at her middle school was sufficient for her age and interest level. When the season ended we did not re-enroll. I was delighted to realize that this process would free up our finances as well as our schedules, but I still felt burdened by our adopted children's therapies, tutoring and medical appointments. Since these commitments seemed nonnegotiable, I congratulated myself on at least reducing our daily chaos and moved on.

By culling a few activities here and there we started to find breathing room in our schedule, even occasional open evenings to spend blissfully laying around the house. One of these lazy evenings I took my 8- and 5-year-old sons fishing at a pond in our neighborhood. I helped each of them select a bobber, hook their worm and cast out into the little pond. After turning to help my older son unhook a small sunfish I turned back around to discover that

my other son had been busy while my back was turned. In the blink of an eye my younger son had reeled in his line, gotten the hook tangled in the lures and extra hooks in the tacklebox, attempted to cast the line out again, and now stood with a hairy, tangled mess of a fishing line. I quickly realized this epic birds-nest-sized tangle on his rod would take an hour to undo, so I handed him my rod and reel and sent him on his way.

I had a moment of clarity as I watched him there on the dock, sheer joy on his face as he wildly swung my rod around in an attempt to cast. There were some things in my children's lives, not easily untangled, that were holding us back from enjoying life. I had prioritized counseling over bike rides, tutoring over play dates, play therapy over Play-doh. In my earnest efforts to "un-do" years of neglect, trauma, developmental delays and learning differences I'd put my kids' childhood on the back burner. The very obstacles I was trying to help my children overcome were calling the shots!

It was time to set the tangled rod aside and enjoy the day.

So I broke up with our therapist. I told him "It's not you, it's me" to soften the blow. We backed counseling down from weekly appointments to once a month. We quit tutoring and spent more time reading together snuggled up on the couch. We felt the affects of these changes almost immediately. I realized we had underestimated the emotional toll counseling and therapy had on our kids. After expending so much effort in

appointments they came home cranky and emotionally drained. As we cut back on therapy we saw our kids use more of their emotional bandwidth to connect with siblings and build friendships.

One year later, trauma still rears its ugly head in our home. Attachment is tenuous. Homework is a nightmare. The tangles aren't gone, but we've stopped focusing on "fixing" and turned our attention to living. I don't think we're done with therapy forever. We're surrounded by incredible resources and we will continue to research and advocate for our kids. But this is working for us right now. We've given ourselves permission to allow healing to happen through daily interactions and long hours at the park. So, if you're looking for us on a sunny afternoon, you'll find us down by the pond with a line in the water.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Denise Kendrick is a graduate of the University of North Texas and co-founder of the Embrace Ministry in Dallas, Texas. Kendrick and her husband, Bruce have nine children, by birth and adoption, ages 1-22 years and two adorable grandkids.

Utah's Adoption Connection Calendar

"You Should Check it Out!"

Education is a powerful parenting tool. A better understanding of your child and some of the issues that they face can completely alter your parenting style and relationship with your child. The calendar section of Utah's Adoption Connection web site features dozens of classes and workshops every month. There are local classes as well as national webinars. Most are free and a few have a modest registration fee. You can access the calendar on the main page, but also under Support and Resources. Classes are on a variety of topics; some are adoption related but many are just related to parenting a child with special needs. Some are even about managing your own mental health while parenting, which can be a huge challenge for many of us. Help is only a click away. When you understand a behavior, it makes it a lot less challenging.

www.utahadopt.org

May 2016



Discovering Possibilities

Date: 3/22 - 5/24 • 4:00pm - 6:00pm
Location: Youth Services 177 West Price Ave Salt Lake City, UT 84115

3/22 - 5/24
4:00pm - 6:00pm

A FREE Support Group for Teen Girls Ages 13-17.

Join a 10-week female empowerment group focusing on healthy relationships, positive choices and strong self image.

For more information visit <http://www.youth.slco.org>

To register contact Lorri Lake (385-468-4524) or Anne Schmidt (385-468-4528)

August 2016



Royal Family KIDS of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Date: 8/1 - 8/5

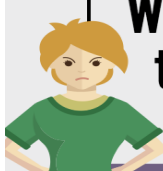

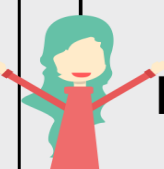



8/1 - 8/5

Royal Family KIDS of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church is gearing up for our 2016 camp and is opening up registration to children. Here are the hyperlinks for the [information letter](#) as well as our [2016 application](#). Camp will be held Monday, August 1-Friday, August 5. Camp is open to children ages 7-11 who have been involved in the child welfare system. Please fill out an application for each child, there is a \$25 registration fee for each child. After we receive your application we will review it and contact you in the next few weeks. Please feel free to call or email with any questions. We look forward to hearing from you and reconnecting with your children!

Discipline Cheat Sheet

Instead of that, Say this.

Simple phrases and ideas for diffusing tough situations with your child.

 <p>What were you thinking?!?!</p> <p>Instead say: I'm going to help you with this.</p>	<p>How many times do I have to tell you?</p> <p>Instead say: I'm going to do () so that it will be easier for you.</p>	<p>Stop it! You are embarrassing me!</p> <p>Instead say: Let's go to a quieter place to get this sorted out.</p> 
<p>If you don't stop that, no Xbox for a week!</p> <p>Instead say: I can see this is tricky for you. We are going to solve this later. Let's get a drink of water.</p>	<p>Go to your room!</p> <p>Instead say: Come here. I've got you.</p> 	<p>No stars on the star chart for you!</p> <p>Instead say: Let's figure out a better way for next time.</p> 
<p>Stop. That. Right. NOW!</p> <p>Instead say: If you need to get your mad out - then go ahead. It's okay. I've got you.</p> 	<p>*Silent eye-roll and frustrated sigh*</p> <p>Instead do: *Kindness in your eyes and a compassionate hair touse*</p>	<p>You are IMPOSSIBLE!</p> <p>Instead say: We will get this figured out. I can handle ALL of you. It's all good.</p> 

DR. VANESSA LAPOINTE



Keeping an Adoption Open Despite Challenges

By Barbara Herel

As a mom who's active in the adoption community, writing and speaking about the positive rapport I have with my daughter's birth family, I connect with many fellow adoptive parents. While most share their own heartening open adoption stories, some describe relationships that aren't so easy.

Whenever I see a question about a birth parent who has a history of substance abuse or mental illness or is otherwise unstable in an online adoption forum, far too many of the responses focus on "setting boundaries," "not condoning poor choices," and "standing your ground." And yet, when I connect in a more personal way with parents voicing these same concerns, they're looking for more nuanced answers. Many express anxiety, or even fear, about their open adoption, but very few would ever question whether their child benefits from the relationship.

That's what inspired me to reach out to five moms who are in the thick of navigating a relationship with a troubled birth parent. As I delved into their stories, it struck me that they shared a few distinct qualities that help them maintain openness in light of challenges—acceptance, commitment, empathy, and forgiveness. The moms clarify why they feel the birth parent relationship is invaluable, regardless of the circumstances, and offer their advice and encouragement. I hope you find their stories as touching, insightful, and helpful as I did.

Explaining Addiction to a Teen

"We need to keep in mind that we are dealing with the walking wounded."
—TORI, mother of a 15-year-old son

"She gave me her baby. How could I turn her away?" says Tori, who maintains an open relationship with her son's birth mother, who is addicted to drugs.

Tori accepts without question the fact that her child has two sets of parents—and that she doesn't "get to choose how his birth parents live their lives." She believes that, as the adoptive mother, it is up to her to make the relationships work.

Whether the challenge is an addiction or a scheduling conflict, Tori thinks a flexible attitude serves her best. "I take the approach of, 'I'm sure I can find one day out of the whole year to accommodate her for a visit.'" That said, Tori also understands that common sense must prevail, since, after all, "you wouldn't let Grandpa take your child when he's drunk."

Speaking to her son about his birth mother's addiction has been a gradual process. "We didn't

get into the drug talk until he was 10 or 11," she explains. "It was at that time he discovered that his birth mom, Jen, was living in what I can only describe as a hoarder house. That's when he realized Jen's life was in upheaval."

Tori took that opportunity to discuss Jen's alcohol and drug use. "I spoke very matter-of-factly about how Jen can sometimes keep the relationship going and sometimes she can't," says Tori. "I talked about how her actions are not personal—they have nothing to do with him."

If Tori knows that Jen is not sober when they have a visit coming up, she'll plan to meet in public for a briefer period. When that happens, she might explain to her son, "Jen's not doing well right now, so let's just spend a little time with her today and wait for the next opportunity." After a recent one-hour meeting at a taco stand, Tori said her son noticed that his birth mom was "a little off," but didn't seem upset. "He said something like, 'Oh, she looked a little tired.'"

Empathy—digging down deep to put ourselves in someone else's shoes—is needed in any demanding relationship. At 15, Tori's son is aware that his birth parents have lives that are separate from his. He sees their struggles and knows that their lives are not perfect. "I'm proud to say that he's grown up to have quite a bit of empathy for her, and he can't help but love her," says Tori, who shares that love for her son's birth mother.

"We need to keep in mind that we are dealing with the walking wounded," says Tori. "We must have a place in our hearts for them. That's the gift I give to him, and it helps me be more understanding. Not loving my kid's mother is not even an option."

Tori's advice: Before distancing or cutting off birth parents, Tori believes adoptive parents need to ask themselves: "What part of me wants to do this? If this 'want' is coming from me, it's not about my kid." Tori takes her own advice, which helps her remain committed to the relationship.

Connecting with Two Birth Moms with Hard Lives

"I can't fix things for my children's birth mothers, but I can be the stable one."
—RACHEL, mother of a nine-year-old son and a three-year-old daughter

Rachel, a mom of two, maintains open relationships with both of her children's birth mothers.

Her son's birth mother, Sara, has a history of moving from one abusive relationship to the next.

Once Rachel realized that she couldn't "fix things" for Sara she felt more at peace. "I just had to learn to be happy with the time we do have. If she drops in and out, that's just how it is. I can be the stable one." Rachel also connected with Sara's mother when Sara dropped out of touch; that deepening relationship with her son's birth grandmother has been a bright spot over the years.

Rachel's daughter's birth mother, Laine, has "had a hard life, and it's turned her into a rather hard person." Rachel acknowledges that Laine isn't someone she would choose to associate with if she were not her daughter's birth mother. Yet after witnessing the strong and loving bonds her son has with his birth family, Rachel is committed to working on the relationship with Laine for her daughter's sake, insisting that the benefits outweigh the angst. "Even though my three-year-old daughter doesn't particularly care about the relationship right now, I'm sure some day she will," says Rachel.

Ultimately, Rachel strives to send the message to her kids that they each have two "real" moms, and that they can always talk about or to their birth families. Her son, in fact, has already begun forging an independent relationship with his birth family, calling or texting his birth mom or grandmother on his own. While it's easier to empathize and move forward with Sara, Rachel does her best "to be friendly and to keep an open mind" with Laine. And, if Laine should ever decide to close the adoption, Rachel says, she would feel as if she had failed.

Rachel's advice: Rachel knows firsthand that open adoption can be hard, yet she is quick to say, "it is so worth it for the kids." When asked if it has ever crossed her mind that her son and daughter might be better off without the presence of their birth mothers, Rachel is resolute: "No. Even when Sara was in and out, I saw how my son's relationship with his birth family was a positive factor in his life. He has some difficulty knowing he has siblings who don't live with us, and he always wants to know how they're doing. He perks up whenever he gets a call or a card from his birth family."

Accepting the Consequences of Addiction

"It's obvious to me that she loves our son, but is so caught up in her addiction that she can't function as a mother. I hope she doesn't close the adoption due to that pain."
—CHRISTIE, mother of a five-year-old son

When Christie's five-year-old relationship with her son's birth family began, she acknowledges that she had a hard time. "My husband and I don't have

a lot in common with either parent besides this child, and we had no experience with addiction or mental illness. It took several years before I was able to let things go and accept them as they were."

The relationship has gotten easier with time, says Christie, who focuses on treating her son's birth parents with the respect that family members deserve. "Family is a big priority for me," she says, "so I make sure we visit at least four times a year and get the occasional letter out. (I'm much better about the visits than the letters.)" Christie also shares that her son has a birth sibling who lives with his birth father, and she wants the boys to know each other.

Although the families visit regularly, the visits with her son's birth mom are often short. "I can see her pain regarding the adoption," says Christie, "and I think that's why. It's obvious to me that she loves our son, but is so caught up in her addiction that she can't function as a mother. I hope she doesn't close the adoption due to that pain."

Christie realizes that her feelings for her son's birth mom may always be complex. "I see the results of her addiction—the crimes of petty thefts, assaults, and trespassing—and I realize she's in a cycle that I do not understand. And yet, she is the one who completed me. How do you compute that? This person gave us her child. I constantly remind myself that it is because of her that I am a mom. And I will continue to honor her decision by trying to stay empathetic, open to her, and to maintain that relationship for our son."

Christie's advice: Christie counsels fellow adoptive parents to keep the relationship going. "I suspect that, if we stopped calling or making contact, they'd let us drift away." And when difficulties arise, Christie says she imagines her child's future questions: "I always ask how I would explain myself: 'I'm sorry, Son, it was just too hard to keep things going?'" That's why not trying is never an option for her.

Explaining Mental Illness and Addiction After Foster Adoption

"I do it for my kids, because they deserve to know where they came from. I do it for her, because nobody grows up hoping to be an addict who continues having babies taken away from her. I do it for myself, my husband, and my biological kids, so we can all honor family and have even more people to love and care about."
—GERRI, mother of a four-year-old daughter and six- and eight-year-old sons

Gerri adopted three children from foster care. Their birth mom suffers from drug addiction and an untreated mental illness, and has difficulty staying in touch. Because of this, Gerri would describe their current relationship as, essentially, a closed adoption.

When Gerri realized that contact with their children's birth mother was not likely to be constant, she reached out to other birth family members—and received a warm welcome. "People comment that I've built these 'great' relationships with the birth family. We do know these people because I sought them out, but the relationships are great because these people have loved and accepted us. Relationships are two-way streets and I cannot do it alone."

Gerri continues to reach out to her children's birth mother, and admits she gets angry occasionally, thinking, "Don't you realize how good you have it here? I'm letting you have access to these children. Stop taking it for granted!" Once the anger subsides, however, forgiveness finds its way back into her heart. "I forgive her when she doesn't show up for visits because I realize there is so much I do not understand about what it's like to be her," says Gerri. "She made my babies, I love her." And she is reassured by knowing that, if contact ever completely drops off, "we'd still have the strong connections we have with the other family members, which fill an important need for my children."

Why is Gerri committed to making the relationship work? "I do it for my kids, because they deserve to know where they came from. I do it for her, because nobody grows up hoping to be an addict who continues having babies taken away from her. I do it for the extended family, victims themselves of lifetimes of poverty, institutionalized racism, and addictions, but so full of love, joy, and traditions, like any family. I do it for myself, my husband, and my biological kids so we can all honor family and have even more people to love and care about."

Gerri's advice: Your open relationship might not look the way you anticipated. If your child's birth parents aren't involved, consider building relationships with family members. How did Gerri make those connections? "Since the state can't hand out other people's addresses, I wrote a letter to an extended family member and asked the state to send it on our behalf," she shares. "We are now connected with my kid's birth great grandma, aunt, grandpa, biological siblings adopted by other people, and with their adoptive parents."

Giving Herself Space from a Birth Parent, When Needed

"No matter how hard it gets for me sometimes, I would never consider closing the adoption."
—LAURA, mother of a three-year-old son

Three years into her open adoption, the biggest challenge Laura faces is her son's birth mother's mental health: "She has a borderline personality disorder and has been unstable since the birth of our son." Adding another layer of complexity to their relationship is the fact that Laura and her son's birth mother have known each other their whole lives.

"His birth mother is like a sister to me," shares Laura. "We all went into this adoption knowing it would be open and that I wanted her to be a part of his life. As a general rule, I text frequently to tell her we miss her, we love her, we would love to see her. And, because she's my friend, to ask her how she's doing." These days, however, her son's birth mom fades in and out of their lives.

"We don't see her as often as I wish we could," says Laura, "but I know that's because she is struggling—dealing with a mental illness, and with giving up her son for adoption. I can't even begin to imagine what she thinks or what she goes through." When her son's birth mom threatened suicide, Laura tried to let her know she was there for her. "She told me, 'I gave you the baby you wanted. Now go away and leave me alone.' We had many words, but those were the ones that stung. I never want her to feel like she was just a vessel that carried a baby for someone else. I need

her to realize her importance in our equation. She is his birth mom; that is an important title to hold. She is a very special person to us."

When Laura became a mom, she accepted that she would always put her son's needs first. "That being said, it doesn't mean that I should let myself be mistreated by his birth mom," says Laura, who has needed a few breathers from the relationship, to mentally and emotionally regroup after a verbal attack. She has done so by cutting back on the amount of texts she sends, and has also stepped back from visits until "we've both had a chance to calm down." However, says Laura, "No matter how hard it might be for me at times, I would never think of closing the adoption."

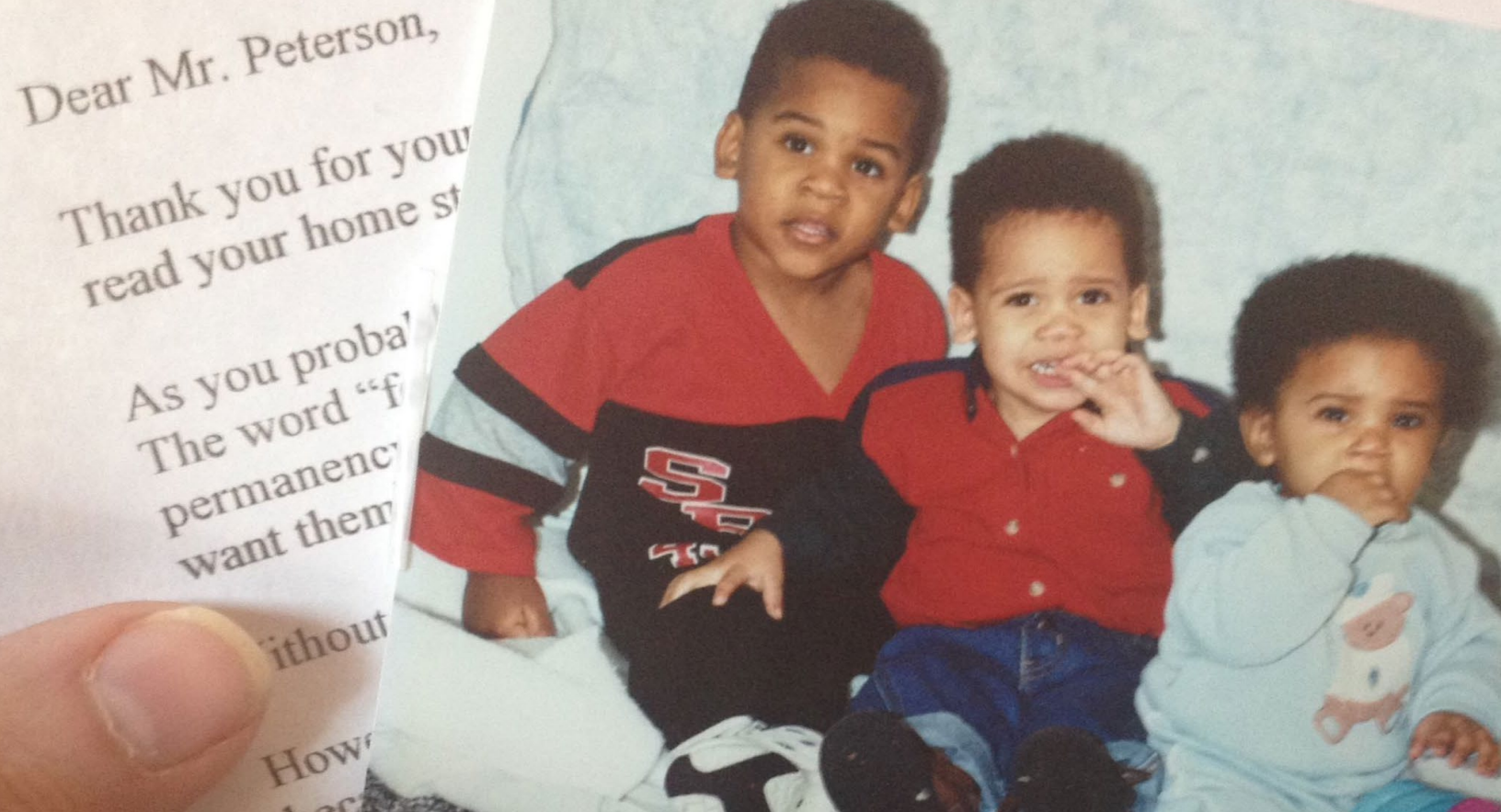
Laura understands all too well the challenges of mental illness: "I can relate because I have bipolar disorder." With a solid medication regimen, Laura lives a very normal, stable life. "Before my son was born, his birth mother told me how important she felt it was that I have personally dealt with mental illness. She felt that, if her son inherited her illness, I would be able to understand him and help." Laura says that in their rocky relationship, mistakes and mishaps are always forgiven. "I think it helps the relationship develop more deeply when I can look past mistakes and continue looking toward the future."

Laura's steadfast devotion to her son's birth mother is directly related to her own experience. When she was 10 she learned that the mother who was raising her was actually her stepmother. "The news devastated me," says Laura. She was dissuaded from finding her birth mom and didn't form a relationship with her until her thirties—something she does not want for her son. Throughout her life, Laura has also struggled with her feelings toward the stepmother who raised her, since "she wasn't the best of moms." Laura was subjected to sexual and mental abuse while in her care, and so distanced herself as an adult. But when Laura's daughter was born, she decided to let her mom back into her life. "She seems to have changed a lot," says Laura. "She also loves my children to death and is so very kind to them. I have forgiven her for all that I held against her for so many years."

Laura hopes that she's serving as a good role model to her son. "I want my son to see that I have two moms, just like he does, and that I have a healthy relationship with both of them," she says. "After all, how would it look to him if I held a grudge and didn't even speak to my mom who raised me? That's not setting a good example."

Laura's advice: "Be open-minded about everything in your open adoption," says Laura. "Remember, you probably chose open adoption for the health of your child and his or her birth mom/parents. And, most important, honor your commitment. Follow through with your part, and then some. Birth moms need you to step up and encourage visitation because, for the most part, they don't want to impinge on your lives. Keep contacting her even if you don't get a response. Just because you don't hear back doesn't mean she isn't wondering about the child y'all share."

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The Adoption Letter – The One I Never Received

by Donald Craig Peterson

I wouldn't trade my 18-year adoption journey for anything. Yet on many occasions, I walked in the dark – much more than expected – and still find myself there today. Frankly, I was emotionally unprepared for the unpleasant surprises associated with early childhood trauma.

Amid the excitement of adopting, no one used the words developmental trauma, attachment or therapeutic parenting. No one said, "Love can't conquer all."

Instead of pie-in-the-sky expectations – that prospective parents perceive as promises, I wanted the truth. Here's the letter I should have received well before the placement of my first three sons.

Dear Mr. Peterson,
Thank you for your continued interest in Andrew, Michael and Brandon. We have read your home study and see a possible fit with your family.

For children whose parental rights have

been terminated, adoption is an incredible opportunity. We want them to thrive in their new home. We want them to reach their respective potential. Because the design of each placement is permanency, we use the word forever.

The #1 goal is a healthy, functioning family.

However, perfection is not guaranteed.

When behavioral challenges erupt in the future – and they will, you need to be ready. To avoid disappointment and frustration, your expectations must remain realistic. Otherwise, the adoption could disrupt.

That means parents return the children to us before the adoption is finalized in court. No one wants that to happen.

ABANDONMENT

The downside of adoption is abandonment. Children lost the family that gave

them life. In other words, you can't erase history – nor should you try. It's a part of your son or daughter and must be respected.

Over the years you will invest time talking about a birth family – one that you probably never met. Your child will have many questions, especially during adolescence. Some won't be easy. You might even hear hateful comments.

"I never asked to be adopted."

"You're not my real parents." Although their feelings are intense, you must never take the words to heart.

EARLY TRAUMA

You must be aware of the early trauma. Nearly all adopted children bring their past trauma into the new home – whether from abuse or neglect. Although these experiences range from mild to severe, none can be overlooked. They all left an imprint in the brain.

In the case of Andrew, Michael and Brandon, we don't have all the facts about their initial years. We do know they were removed from their birth family for neglect. We do know their birth-mother drank alcohol during pregnancy. We do know they spent several years in foster care.

The whole truth will not be known.

THERAPEUTIC PARENTING

Healing from past trauma can take years, even a lifetime. This means that the process of bonding – or attaching to you – might not happen automatically. It may never fully develop and lead to a diagnosed mental health condition. Moreover, traditional parenting techniques won't be enough. To build lasting connections, you need to parent differently.

Without question, you must become a therapeutic parent.

Because of your children's past, you must always make them feel safe. You must provide high structure that enables nurturing. Being consistent is imperative. Keeping their world small is essential. This encourages your children to rely on you more than anyone else. And throughout the day, your efforts to parent must remain highly intentional to overcome the negative effects of their past.

Since progress can be painfully slow, you must be patient.

ADVOCATING

At times you might feel your child is moving in the wrong direction – in spite of your efforts. If this happens, you must rely on natural supports in the community as well as additional trauma-sensitive treatment.

But finding qualified providers won't be easy. They might come at a price. And remember, not all professionals understand trauma – even when saying they do.

No doubt, you must advocate. This includes educating others about early trauma. This will reduce the possibility of triangulation – the common, maladaptive practice where the adopted child pits other adults against the new parents.

Although some funding for post-adoptive services is available, it's not enough. Demand exceeds supply. Should expensive out-of-home treatment become necessary for your child, we will attempt to work with you but cannot make guarantees.

LEARNING CHALLENGES

If birthmothers use alcohol or various narcotics during pregnancy, trauma also occurs in the womb. The brain damage in most cases is permanent. Severe neglect after birth can also change the brain. It's called developmental trauma.

Although early milestones may be met, difficulties with learning are probable – especially when rigor increases in middle school. You might spend hours helping with homework. You might receive unwelcome calls from teachers. If special education becomes necessary, a high school diploma might be out of reach.

With reasonable expectations that build on previous successes, children can learn. They just do it differently.

COMPLEX BEHAVIORS

Lastly, we must mention behaviors – the not-so-welcome kind at home or school.

They have meaning and are rooted in control.

They cause great pain for families.

The behaviors can become severe, put others at risk of harm, create property damage and strain family relationships. Although they can trig-

ger harsh reactions, most children don't respond to logical consequences. And by shaming them, stressed-out parents can easily escalate the behaviors they want to eliminate.

Many children with past trauma believe adults can't be trusted. To survive, they took care of themselves – even as infants. In a new home, they might resist their parents' efforts to assume responsibility.

No wonder, they're afraid of the unknown. This fear is real and can turn into anger. And no one wants to raise an angry child.

You will need to learn the difference between discipline (to teach) and punishment (to take away). Not an easy task!

Due to ignorance about trauma, you will likely be blamed for your children's problems. Documenting behaviors – both good and not-so-good – in a daily journal is highly advised. This paper trail will allow you to communicate effectively with educators, mental health providers, child welfare case managers and extended family members.

We've described a lot of negatives in this letter.

Our objective is not to scare you away. We simply desire to be honest about the challenges, while providing hope. We look forward to finding the most appropriate family to adopt Andrew, Michael and Brandon.

Thank you again for your interest.

Sincerely,
The Adoption Team

Craig Peterson publishes EACH Child every Tuesday. To subscribe, open this link and "Like" the page. EACH Child is Special: Working Smarter Not Harder to Raise Every ONE

To follow his son Andrew's inspiring story, "Like" his special Facebook page. Andrew Peterson Goes for the Gold.

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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:

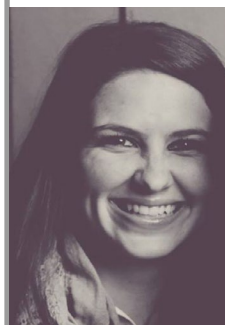
Richfield/South	Angie Morrill	435-896-1263
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Eastern Region:

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



HONORING EXCELLENCE *Kendra Healey, SSW*



Kendra Healey works in the St. George, Utah office of the Division of Child and Family Services. She currently has two cases with The Adoption Exchange, Wendy's Wonderful Kids team.

Kendra is a dream to work with! She is always so positive and has such a good attitude. She always returns phonecalls/emails/texts promptly and keeps everyone on her team up to date on case information.

Kendra truly believes that *unadoptable is unacceptable!* She wants permanency for the youth of her caseload and understands how important it is. She knows and believes there is a family out there for every youth. Kendra is teachable with regards to the adoption process, is eager to learn best practice, and wants advise and expertise from team members.

She sees the WWK Recruiter and The Adoption Exchange as a vital partner to help find permanent homes for the waiting children in Utah's foster care system.

Visit us online at www.utahadopt.org