

A young boy with short brown hair and black-rimmed glasses is smiling slightly while playing a wooden ukulele. He is wearing a blue and white plaid button-down shirt over a grey t-shirt. He is sitting outdoors, with a dark grey hoodie on his lap. The background is a soft-focus green landscape with trees and foliage. The text 'UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION' is overlaid at the top, with 'UTAH'S' in red and 'ADOPTION CONNECTION' in white. Below it, 'CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES' is in white. The date 'MAY 2019' is in red. The website 'utahadopt.org' is in the bottom right corner.

# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

MAY 2019



# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

QUARTERLY DCFS NEWSLETTER



TRINTIY, age 16  
Photo by: Adlifa Ford, Don Polo Photography

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# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION RESOURCE DATABASE

Families with adopted children sometimes need specialized resources, but also need resources in their own community whenever possible. Utah's Adoption Connection has collected a database of resources that is searchable, when you find a helpful resource you can print it out or send it via text message to your smart phone.

Topics include:

Respite Care  
Orthodontia  
Support Groups  
Search and Reunion  
Transition to Adult Living  
Mental Health Services  
Disability (DSPD) Providers  
Educational Supports

## Additional Resources

### Utah's Adoption Connection Newsletter

View our most recent newsletter and previous newsletters online for more information about adoption and resources available to you.

### Lending Library

Parenting is a challenging task under the best of circumstances. Parenting children who have experienced trauma requires additional skills. The lending library was created to deliver information and knowledge to parents and professionals who work with children who have challenges. Browse our Lending Library.

### Calendar of Events

View upcoming parent education opportunities and events. Ongoing foster and adoptive parent trainings are also listed through links to Utah Foster Care and National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Utah.

[www.utahadopt.org](http://www.utahadopt.org)



## On the Cover *Quinn, age 16*

Quinn is a great guy to know! Described by those who know him best as mature and a great conversationalist, he gets along well with both adults and peers. Quinn can often be found helping around the house with chores and adores taking care of animals. Playing video games is a top activity, and he aspires to design video games when he's older. When Quinn needs outdoor time, camping is his top pick. Pizza is his food of choice.

Quinn is now in the tenth grade.

He would do best in a family with a mom and a dad, two dads, or two moms, and prefers to have other children in the home. Quinn would like to maintain contact with his grandparents following placement. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related services.

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

Photo by: Lori Jenkins, Lori Jenkins Photography

To view other children that participated in Heart Gallery 2019 visit the gallery online at [www.utahadopt.org](http://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](http://www.utahadopt.org).





# 15 THINGS KIDS OR TEENS SAY THAT COULD MEAN 'I'M ANXIOUS' - WHERE THEY COME FROM AND HOW TO RESPOND

BY KAREN YOUNG, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

## How Can I Tell if My Child is Anxious?

Anxiety can be a shady character and can often appear in ways that doesn't look like anxiety. Because of this, it can be difficult to know when your child is anxious. Anxiety has been doing its thing since the beginning of humans, and it's brilliant at it. What it's not so great at is announcing its presence in gentle, clear ways that preserve the capacity for any of us to meet it with a strong, steady, 'Oh, there you are,' and an even more powerful, 'It's okay, I'm safe - you don't need to be here right now'.

## Anxiety in Children - Why Does Anxiety Happen?

Anxiety is the work of a strong, healthy brain that's a little over-protective. It comes from a part of the brain called the amygdala, which keeps us safe by getting us ready to fight for our lives or run for it. The amygdala is instinctive, so if it thinks there might be danger, it will act first and think later - and the unfamiliar, the unknown, humiliation, embarrassment, separation from important people, can all count as danger. When the amygdala is triggered, it initiates a surge of neurochemicals to make us stronger, faster, more powerful, and more physically able to deal with a threat. Sometimes, the amygdala can work a little too hard and hit the alarm button too often when it doesn't need to. It is NOT a broken brain, but a strong, healthy, capable brain that's working a little too hard and being a little too overprotective.

Back when the threats we humans faced were mostly physical, the most anxious of us probably would have been the most likely to survive. An anxious brain would have made us more alive to any threats, which would have given us the survival edge. Now, the dangers we face are less physical threats and more psychological ones. We no longer face the possibility of being dinner for a furry predator, but we do face very real psychological threats such as failure, rejection, exclusion, humiliation, disconnection from the people we care about - and the list goes on. The brain still fires up in response to threat, exactly as it's meant to, but when the threats are psychological stressors, the fight or flight response doesn't serve us so well. When there is nothing to fight or flee, there's nothing to burn the fight or flight neurochemicals that surge through us, so they build up and cause the symptoms of anxiety.

## Anxiety can sound like ...

When children are anxious, it can be difficult for them to articulate exactly what's happening for them. It will be clear that something isn't quite right, but it might not be as obvious that anxiety is behind it. Here are some of the things kids might say when they're feeling anxious. Of course, just because they say any of these doesn't mean anxiety is making the push, but it might. The key is to be open to the possibility, so if it is anxiety that's breaking their stride, you can come in and provide the support they need to feel safe, secure and ready to take on the world again.

If you hear any of these, notice when they happen. If they happen regularly in the same environment, before the same thing, after the same thing, and with other symptoms of anxiety (such as racey heart, sick tummy, avoidance, clammy skin, tension, headache), anxiety might be behind it. The clues will be in the regularity, timing or intensity.

## 1. I feel sick, like I'm going to vomit.

During anxiety, anything that isn't absolutely essential for survival slows down to conserve energy for fight or flight. Blood flow is directed from the abdominal organs to the brain, and digestion slows. This can feel like butterflies or nausea. This is a very normal part of anxiety and completely safe, but it can feel awful. Sometimes it can lead to its own anxiety about vomiting. If this is something you tend to hear before or during similar experiences (such as separation from you or before school), and there doesn't seem to be any other signs of illness, be open to the possibility that anxiety is behind it. Help your child make sense of what they are feeling by explaining where their nausea is coming from. Here are some words that can help:

That sick feeling is something that happens when your strong, healthy brain thinks there is something it needs to protect you from. It doesn't mean there is anything unsafe there, but sometimes brains can get a little overprotective. This is called anxiety and it happens to lots of people. Anxiety comes from a part of the brain called the amygdala. It's kind of like your own fierce warrior, there to protect you. If your amygdala thinks there might be trouble, it gets you ready to fight or flee the danger. Sometimes, your amygdala can be a little overprotective and get you ready for fight or flight even though there's no need. It does this by surging your body with a special body fuel to make you stronger, faster and more powerful – kind of like a superhero. This is a great thing if there is something you need to get away from, but if there's nothing to fight or flee, there's nothing to burn the special body fuel surging through you and it can build up and make you feel sick.

Something else that happens when your amygdala thinks there's danger is that it sends a message to your body to save energy, in case you need to fight or flee. One of the ways it does this is by slowing down digestion – the process that gets the nutrients out of the food you eat. Don't worry – this is completely safe, even though it might feel awful.

When you know that sick feeling is from your brain trying to protect you, there's something very powerful you can do to feel better. It's strong steady breathing. This sends a message to your amygdala that you're safe, so it knows to stop surging you with the special body fuel. When this happens, the sick feeling will start to go away.

Strong, steady breathing will neutralize the fight or flight neurochemicals that can cause nausea.

The trick is to make sure they practice strong steady breathing when they are calm, because an anxious brain is a busy brain and it will be less able to do anything unfamiliar. One way to practice is with hot cocoa breathing. Ask them to pretend they are holding a delicious cup of hot cocoa. Smell the warm, chocolatey smell for three, hold it for one, then blow it cool for three.

## 2. I'm not hungry.

When digestion shuts down to conserve energy for fight or flight, the need to eat gets shut down along with it. This is only temporary and will switch on again when the anxiety eases. (Unless of course you're offering something that makes their taste buds slam the door in disgust, you know, like anything served on the yellow plate instead of the blue one.)

## 3. My tummy hurts.

Anxiety can hit tummies hard. With any pain, it's always important to make sure there's nothing else driving the symptoms but when abdominal pain doesn't have any other physical explanation, it's possible that anxiety is the culprit. Other clues that anxiety might be driving the pain include the timing (does it happen before or during something that is likely to trigger anxiety), and the presence of other symptoms of anxiety (racey heart, nausea, tense muscles, clammy skin, flushed cheeks, avoidance etc). The brain and gut are intimately connected. What happens in the brain can affect the gut, and vice versa. Anxiety can send signals directly from the brain to the gut, causing tummy trouble. Anxiety can also influence the gastrointestinal tract to move and contract in ways that cause pain. Tummy pain without any identifiable physical cause is so common that it has a name – functional abdominal pain. The pain is very real and can be quite severe. It's usually around the belly button, but not always. Tummy pain that is driven by anxiety is best dealt with by continuing as usual, and not avoiding whatever might be triggering the anxiety. The brain learns from experience, so avoidance will make avoidance more likely. Similarly, brave behavior will make a brave response more likely. Avoidance teaches the brain that the only way to stay safe is to avoid. This can shrink their world and lead to bigger problems, particularly when the anxiety is around school or separation from you.

## 4. I don't want to go to school.

Anxiety doesn't always seem rational, but that's because it comes from a part of the brain that runs on instinct. During fight or flight, the thinking, rational part of the brain shuts down enough so as not to interrupt the fight or flight response. If the brain thinks survival is on the line, it doesn't want you to take too much time thinking about what the options are – it just wants to get you safe. This is why school refusal can happen even when there seem to be no other issues with school, friends or teachers. When anxiety switches on, nothing else will matter and all your child will be aware of is that school feels like a big dose of trouble, even if they can't explain why.

Giving them the information about how anxiety works will help them feel safe enough to be brave enough. Again, it's really important not to let anxiety drive avoidance. It makes so much sense to avoid the places that feel unsafe, but as the adults in their lives we need to believe that they can cope, even when everything in us is wanting to scoop them up and away from whatever is triggering their anxiety. The more they are exposed to brave behavior – and doing things that feed anxiety is always brave – the more they will learn they can be brave when they need to.

## 5. Anything angry.

The 'flight' part of anxiety shows itself as avoidance, but there is also the 'fight' part which can show itself as anger or tantrums. During anxiety, the surging of fight or flight neurochemicals ener-

gize the body for fight or flight. Sometimes that energy comes out as anger. As well as this, the amygdala (the part of the brain responsible for anxiety), is also involved in dealing with big emotions. When the amygdala is highly active, as it is during anxiety, it means other emotions (such as anger) will also be switched to high volume. When kids are under the influence of an anxious brain, their behavior has nothing to do with wanting to push against the limits. They are often great kids who don't want to do the wrong thing. It's not bad behavior, it's anxiety. When anxiety is driving behavior, it's important to treat the behavior as anxiety rather than bad behavior. Any shame kids might feel for their behavior will only drive their anxiety harder – they want to do the right thing and they don't want to disappoint you. This isn't intended to give them a free pass. They still need to know where the limits are, and they still need to feel the edges of those limits but it's important to do it gently and by giving them the information they need to make better choices. They want to do the right thing, but as with all of us, sometimes that can take a little wisdom and a lot of practice.

## 6. I feel really sad and I don't know why.'

(Or just tears. Lots of tears.)

Again, the same part of the brain that is in charge of anxiety – the amygdala – also controls big emotions. When anxiety is high, sadness can be too. It isn't necessarily a sign that something sad has happened. During anxiety, tears are a sign of a brain on high alert. Just be a strong, steady, loving presence, and know that the sadness will pass when the anxiety does. Let the tears come if they need to, and when things settle, explain how sadness and anxiety can happen together. Research has found that crying can be healing when people have emotional support, and if their tears led to a new wisdom about whatever it was that caused them to cry in the first place.

## 7. But what if .... What if ... What if.

Anxiety is the sign of a brain that is being hauled into the future.

The what-ifs are an attempt by an anxious brain to stay safe by turning as many unknowns into knowns as they can. Help them to find their own scaffold between their anxious thoughts and a brave response by asking them what they think will happen. This will activate the pre-frontal cortex, which is the part of the brain that is more rational, considered, and able to calm big emotions. During anxiety, the activity in the pre-frontal cortex decreases, making it more difficult for it to influence the instinctive, emotional amygdala. You might need to prompt them by asking them to reflect on what has happened in similar situations in the past – either it's never happened before, or if it has, they got through it. Recent research has found that the ability to inhibit worrying thoughts depends on an important chemical in the brain called GABA. One of the best ways to increase GABA is with regular exercise.

## 8. I need to pee ... again.

The fight or flight neurochemicals can cause the need to pee. We know it happens, but it's not clear why. One theory is that during anxiety, the central nervous system is geared to be

more sensitive, so it takes less to activate the emptying of the bladder. Another theory is that during anxiety, muscles tighten and one of these may be the bladder, causing the feeling of a full bladder and the need to empty it. If this is a common symptom for your child, it can create an anxiety in itself by feeding into the worry that there won't be the opportunity to go to the toilet if they need to. Again, explain to them how anxiety can cause this. Also let them know that when they manage the anxiety, the urge to pee will stop showing up with a grand 'ta-da' at the worst times.

## 9. I can't sleep.

An anxious brain can get busy at any time, but its favourite time to play is when there isn't much else going on. At bedtime, there's nothing else to distract from anxious thoughts. Try a mindful meditation to give your child something to focus on other than their anxious thoughts. (Try Smiling Mind which is a free app, backed by loads of ongoing research.) Another way to help anxious kiddos find calm at bedtime is to give them a job to do. Ask them to put a soft toy animal next to them so they're snuggled against it. The idea is for them to concentrate on being still and gentle enough so as not to wake their furry friend. Ask them to concentrate on their breathing and their body while they do this. This is a form of mindfulness that will help to relax their mind and body.

## 10. My legs hurt. My arms hurt.

During anxiety, fuel is sent to the muscles so they can fight or flee. This can make arms and legs feel tight, wobbly or achey. Explain how anxiety can cause this so they can understand that the pain is not a sign of a bigger problem.

Often with anxiety, kids might not realise they're tensing until they feel what 'relaxed' feels like. To help them manage their ache or tension, guide them through a progressive muscle relaxation. Starting from their feet ask them to tighten them for a few seconds, then relax. Slowly work up through the rest of the body, muscle by muscle, tensing then relaxing. This will give them a sense of what it's like to feel relaxed ... which will feel lovely.

## 11. But I don't want to sit still.

Anxiety feels flighty. The fight or flight neurochemicals that surge the body during anxiety are there to get the body ready for action. When there is no need to fight or flight, there is nothing to burn off the neurochemicals that are driving your child to wriggle or squirm. When this happens, encourage your child to move – walk, run on the spot, go up and down the stairs. Let them know this will help them be the boss of their (very excellent) brain, which will help them be the boss of their restless body. When the neurochemicals start to disappear, so will the wriggles.

## 12. But I can't do it!

Anxiety can drive perfectionism. Anxiety comes from a brain that thinks there might be trouble – and humiliation, failure – or anything that might come from making a mistake counts as



trouble. The key is to provide opportunities for your child to learn they can fail, fall or stumble – and still be okay. When they don't do as well as they expected, make it about what they've learned from the experience (and there will be great learnings they can be applauded for), rather than focusing on the loss. It's about nurturing their mindset towards recognising the opportunities, lessons or growth, rather than the losses. Also, be mindful of how you deal with your own failures. Are you able to laugh off your mistakes or failures? Can you extract the wisdom without dwelling on the loss? Kids will always learn what they see more deeply than what they are told.

### 13. I want to stay with you.

There is nothing wrong with your kiddos wanting to stay close, but it becomes a problem when it starts causing problems. Separation anxiety is driven by a fear that something might happen to you while you are away from them. The fear of leaving you will be real, but it will also be temporary. Their anxiety will ease as soon as they have the opportunity to realise you aren't there and that they are still okay so the sooner this can happen, the sooner they can find calm. Their distress on separation from you might keep happening for a while, and although this is distressing for both of you (I've been there), that distress comes from the emotional memory of the actual point separation. Our emotional memories are powerful, and they are triggered automatically and instantly. If drop-offs are distressing, these memories will be powerful and easily activated whenever they are in the same situation. The good news is that the brain learns from experience, so the more experience they have with finding calm after saying goodbye, the quicker they'll learn that they'll soon feel okay.

This is why it's so important not to drag out a tough goodbye, and I know how tough they can be (and I've also dragged them out – we're only human and it's going to happen). When they become upset, let them know that you understand how difficult it can be. It's important that they feel validated. Then, give them a cuddle and then let the goodbye be quick and confident. If you hesitate, they'll hesitate too. Similarly, if you believe they'll be okay, they'll be more likely to believe it too. Their brain is telling them they aren't safe – they need 'borrow' your calm and your belief that they can cope and do brave, hard things.

### 14. I'm tired.

Anxiety can keep kids awake at night with intrusive thoughts, and the physiology of anxiety can be exhausting. Putting themselves out there when everything in them is telling them to retreat is tiring – and brave. Mindfulness will help strengthen them against anxiety and the physical consequences that come with it. Mindfulness lowers activity in the amygdala (the initiator of anxiety) and increases activity in the pre-frontal cortex (the 'calm down, we've got this' part of the brain).

### 15. Nobody wants to play with me.

This might be a sign of an issue in the playground, but it can also be a sign of an anxious child who is holding back. Kids with

anxiety will often hold back from including themselves in the playground, at least until they feel safe with a group. When it isn't clear whether or not they'll be accepted (however kind the other kids are), anxious kids will more likely wait until they're asked, because any threat of being misunderstood or rejected will feel too big. Importantly though, kids who are anxious are often very well-liked by their peers. Their sensitivity, empathy and emotional intelligence makes them pretty great friends to have – and once they've connected with them, other kids know it too. All those other kids need is the opportunity to know them.

#### And finally ...

Children and teens will always know when something isn't right inside them, but sometimes it can be hard to find the words. As the adults in their lives who love them, the feelings of helplessness when we see them struggling can be seismic. When we can understand what's happening, we can start to give them the safety and comfort of helping them to make sense of what they are experiencing. By doing this, we can steady the ground beneath them so they can feel safe enough and brave enough to keep exploring their world, influencing it, and establishing their very important place in it.

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#### About the Author – Karen Young.

Karen has worked as a psychologist in private practice and in educational and organisational settings. She has lectured and has extensive experience in the facilitation of personal growth groups. Her Honours degree in Psychology and Masters in Gestalt Therapy have come in handy at times.

Karen founded the popular website, Hey Sigmund, after realising the power of solid information. The website attracts millions of readers each year worldwide. Her articles have been translated into a number of languages and her work has been published on various international sites including The Good Men Project, The Huffington Post, The Mighty, and Yahoo Health.

Karen is a regular contributor to Parenting Magazine in New Zealand. She can often be heard on Australian radio, and is a sought-after speaker. Recently, she published 'Hey Warrior', a book for kids to help them understand anxiety and find their 'brave'. The book has now been translated into a number of languages.

Karen has two children and two stepchildren and lives in Australia. Experience has taught her that people can do amazing things with the right information, psychology has something for everyone, jargon doesn't, everyone has a story to tell, short bios are the longest to write, nobody has it all figured out and the best people to be around are the ones who already know this.



## Fact Sheet/Tips:

# FACT SHEET/TIPS: TRANSITION TO AND FROM MIDDLE SCHOOL

Change is difficult for everyone. Gathering information and preparing for change can help alleviate anxiety. For adolescents one of the most difficult changes is transitioning to a new school. This transition happens from elementary to middle school and then again quickly from middle to high school. Here are some facts and tips to help prepare students, parents, and teachers for this transition.

### Facts about the Transition to and from Middle School:

- The students and parents have mixed feelings of excitement, worry, anticipation, and resistance.
- The students are going through puberty and changing physically and emotionally.
- The school environment is larger and more confusing.
- The students change classes for different subjects exposing them to a larger variety of teachers, classes, and students.
- The students are allowed and expected to appropriately handle increased independence and display more self-motivation.
- The grading standards change to letter grades and students/families are expected to access grades, homework, and information through the school computer system.
- The teachers are responsible to teach, grade, and keep track of more students.
- The students feel increased social opportunities and social anxieties. Being part of a group and fitting in is very important in middle and high school.
- Students who are in special education can be subject to social isolation and bullying.
- Academic course curriculum moves faster and academic performance expectations are higher.
- Students have more homework requirements
- The students receive personal interaction from the teachers.
- Classroom curriculum relies largely on printed text and is not easily accessible to some students with sensory, physical, emotional, or cognitive disabilities who need alternative ways of accessing and processing information.

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## Tips For Parents/Students:

- Follow your child's lead...give them as much information prior to the transition that they are comfortable with and can handle.
- Give your student information and exposure to the next step gradually. Consider casual opportunities such as attending a concert or game at the school.
- Request to meet the teacher/principal and arrange a tour for you and your student to walk through the new school the spring before the transition.
- If not offered, request a transition meeting early in the spring to discuss the transition with the school team to help prepare your student.
- Ask to visit the school in the summer prior to school starting to show your child's specific locker and classrooms.
- Take advantage of summer programs — academic or recreational — offered at the new school. Your child will get the feel for the campus in a much more relaxed atmosphere.
- Get a copy of your child's class schedule and mark the location of their locker and each classroom and bathroom on the school map. Tape both of these inside their binder. If your child has trouble reading maps, walk the route between classes with them — more than once, if necessary — and note landmarks that the student can use to navigate.
- Prepare a short 1-2 page fact sheet about your student's areas of strengths, struggles, learning style, and motivators and give it to the teacher(s).
- Once school is in session, email each teacher to introduce yourself and student. Let them know your student has an IEP/504 and include it if you have it. Also include the fact sheet. Request a reply so you know they received it.
- Ask how your student will access the general curriculum and what adaptations/modifications can be present if needed.
- Encourage teachers to continue using strategies that have worked for your child in the past, such as writing homework assignments on the board, or assigning your child a "homework buddy" they can contact if they forget their assignments. If the school has a homework hotline, make sure your child knows how to use it.
- Practice with your student any new skills that will be needed such as opening a padlock, carrying a backpack, etc.
- Find out the length of the passing period between classes. Time it out for your child. Demonstrate how far they can walk in that amount of time.
- Obtain a copy of the student handbook. Review rules and requirements — especially the school's code of conduct, which describes consequences for violations of the most important rules. Ask the school staff questions about anything that's unclear.
- Create a relationship with school counselor if appropriate.
- Reach each disclosure document carefully. Make sure you understand grading process in each class. Look for the best way to communicate with the teacher.
- Help your student be his or her own advocate. Encourage the student to discuss problems and solutions with teachers on their own, but be ready to step in and help as needed.
- Encourage your student to ask questions and clarify things they don't understand. Find out about extra help like after school tutoring.
- Explore the school website with your student including the school's homework website or homework hotline. Use it to double-check their class assignments.

- Seek parental involvement at the school. Attend orientation, parent conferences, and join parent groups in the school such as the School Community Council and the PTA.
- Stay involved with your student. Work to maintain an open, communicative relationship during these formative years.
- Maintain a calm and positive outlook about the transition.
- Talk about social skills. Discuss how words and actions can affect other people.
- Find out what student groups, clubs, athletics, extracurricular activities are available and explore them with your student. Get student involved in activities to help encourage relationship building.
- Encourage your student to try new things, become involved with the student body, and foster their independence.
- Encourage your child to join group conversations. Discuss how to join in without interrupting and to add something relevant to a conversation in progress. Practice this important social skill.
- Talk about and practice traits that make a good friend (such as being a good listener).
- Practice skills needed for difficult social situations.
- Remind your child to make eye contact when speaking or listening.
- Help your student with time management skills. Work together on a schedule for study time, break time, chores, etc.
- Begin to learn about and prepare for the next transitions to high school and out of high school. Investigate what the school offers and seek out parent education from the Utah Parent Center.

### Tips for Teachers:

- Personally email or send an orientation letter home before school starts. Provide information such as the schedule, time and day to report to school, transportation information, where the student will meet the teacher upon arrival, classroom rules, and contact info for teacher, principal, and counselor.
- Communicate as much as possible with your students' families. Use a variety of methods: email, phone, notes, etc.
- Provide a basic communication sheet that goes home and back to school daily or weekly.
- Meet with the student/family before school dismisses for the summer and again in the fall after school begins (group orientation for new students).
- Tour the new student and family around school showing them classrooms, lockers, bathrooms, and common areas they will be using.
- Explain the logistics of the classroom and school with new students and their families. Provide details on the daily structure like transportation, class schedule, and lunch procedures.
- Appoint a teacher or peer buddy to help with transition.
- Foster good relationships and friendships. Do not isolate the students from the student body.

### Resources:

- Middle School Transition Tips for Parents: [www.greatschools.org/pdfs/trans\\_midschool\\_adults.pdf](http://www.greatschools.org/pdfs/trans_midschool_adults.pdf)
- Smoothing your child's transition to Middle School [www.greatschools.org/special-education/health/980-smoothing-your-childs-transition-to-middle-school.gs?page=all](http://www.greatschools.org/special-education/health/980-smoothing-your-childs-transition-to-middle-school.gs?page=all)
- Middle School Transition Tips for Kids: [www.greatschools.org/pdfs/trans\\_midschool\\_kids.pdf](http://www.greatschools.org/pdfs/trans_midschool_kids.pdf)
- Universal Design for Learning and the Transition to a more Challenging Academic Curriculum: Making it in Middle School and Beyond: [www.pacer.org/publications/parentbriefs/ParentBrief\\_Apr05.pdf](http://www.pacer.org/publications/parentbriefs/ParentBrief_Apr05.pdf)
- Successful Strategies for Middle and High School Inclusion [www.pealcenter.org/middleschoolseries.html](http://www.pealcenter.org/middleschoolseries.html)





Parents nurture children’s innate curiosity and wonder while guiding their hopes for the future. Higher education can translate curiosity into a career.

A college fund helps connect dreams to reality.

A University of Kansas study<sup>1</sup> found that children who have dedicated funds of \$1 to \$499 for college are three times more likely to enroll and four times more likely to graduate.

my529, Utah’s official 529 educational savings plan, is a tax-advantaged investment vehicle specifically designed to help people save for higher education.

Opening an account at my529.org is easy and takes less than 10 minutes. my529 offers several diverse investment options. In addition, my529 does not require initial, minimum or ongoing contributions. Families can invest as much and as often as their budgets allow.

Earnings on investments in a my529 account grow tax-deferred, and withdrawals are free from federal and Utah state income taxes when used for qualified higher education expenses. Eligible expenses include tuition, fees, books, supplies, computers, and certain room and board costs at any post-secondary institution—college, university, or trade and technical school—in the United States or abroad that participates in federal financial aid programs, not just schools in Utah. Funds can also be used for K-12 tuition expenses at public, private, or religious schools.

Utah residents can claim an annual 5 percent tax credit *per qualified beneficiary* for contributions up to certain limits.

You can also invite family and friends to contribute to your account through the my529 Gift Program.

It’s never too early or too late to get started—every dollar saved is one dollar you won’t have to borrow and pay back with interest. Investing even small amounts regularly can make a difference toward your child’s future.

For more information, visit my529.org, call 800.418.2551, or email [info@my529.org](mailto:info@my529.org).

### **Important Legal Notice**

*Investing is an important decision. Read the Program Description in its entirety for more information and consider all investment objectives, risks, charges, and expenses before investing. For a copy of the Program Description, call 800.418.2551 or visit my529.org.*

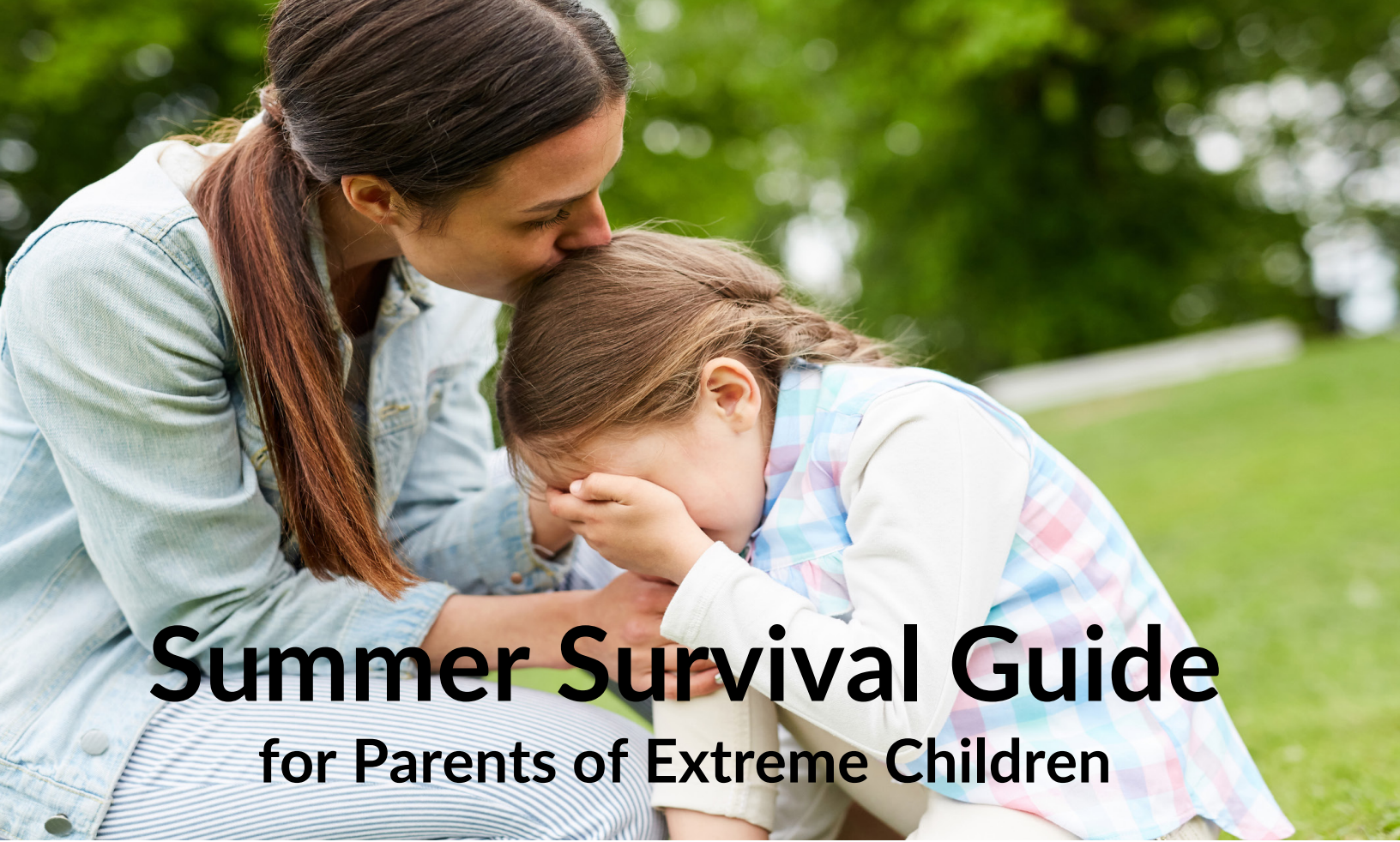
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<sup>1</sup> Assets and Education Initiative. (2013). Building Expectations, Delivering Results: Asset-Based Financial Aid and the Future of Higher Education. In W. Elliott (Ed.), Biannual report on the assets and education field. Lawrence, KS: Assets and Education Initiative (AEDI).



# Summer Survival Guide for Parents of Extreme Children

BY: BRYNN BURGER, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION

## Five strategies for really, truly enjoying your summer break with your child who has ADHD.

I write a lot about raising a child with extreme behavior disorders. For other special needs parents like myself, the idea of spending two hot months trapped at home with our children and their behaviors incites household-wide panic.

The heat, the lack of schedule, the food, the break from school — it is the stuff of nightmares, my friends. Our supremely awesome kiddos — you know, those with attention deficit disorder (ADHD or ADD), ASD, GAD, ODD, SPD, and other diagnoses that affect mood, behavior, and sensory needs — thrive on schedules, predictability, and monitored diet and screen time.

By day three, many of us have succumbed to the normalcy of giving ourselves 15 minutes of peace and quiet, courtesy of kids' YouTube and the iPad. I mean, for the love of meltdowns, there is no amount of coffee and boxed wine that could get me through this time of year without a few major meltdowns from my son (and myself).

Special needs parents know that there is no foolproof, magic solution for chilling out our kiddo, but here are five strategies that have been tested and approved in our own home to preserve what little is left of your sanity bustle (see: completely insane freak-out zone) of the summer season.

### Set a Schedule, Even if It's Vague

We know our kids need the predictability that comes with a schedule. So even if all you do is tell them in the morning three things they will be doing (some kids need times, others need references like, "after lunch we will..."), this will be helpful to prep them for returning to the more strict schedules provided by the public school system and, hopefully, weed out some of their anxiety that comes with their return in August. For our son, schedule is *key*. So, I used to be super prepared and had a Melissa and Doug Calendar that had special pockets for our activities and clocks with the time.

Then I had another kid. So, yes, there's that. Now, we do a simple Dollar Store dry erase board with the day's activities. Sometimes he can pick; other times the board makes for an easy way for him to lose a privilege should the need arise.



## Decrease the Screen Time (Like, Yesterday)

Several of the beautiful mamas in my “tribe” (see: the women responsible for my sanity who also have children like mine, so they *get me*) have kiddos who thrive on screen time so they are rewarded with this privilege much more often than our son. For our boy, screen time almost always equals a meltdown. This may come in the form of him losing a game and ending up punching or throwing the iPad, or his losing it when his screen time is up. Regardless, there are few times when it ends well for us.

However, if you believe that screen time is a normal part of your kid’s day, summer break may mean more time on the computer/video game/tablet. It may prove best for you to begin to decrease the extra time online about a week before returning to school. This will allow them to adjust more slowly and (fingers crossed) without much of an aggressive transition back to the real world when that first school bell rings.

## Focus on Meals and Snacks

Think regularly scheduled eating times and meals that have a representative from each section of the food pyramid, not the food groups recommended by Will Farrell in *Elf*. I am as guilty as the next mom of counting a couple of popsicles by the pool as breakfast and a handful of M&M’s lunch because he ate a cheese stick too, and, well, it is summer vacation. So there!

However, as much as science confuses me, I am a huge nerd and the research doesn’t lie. Many ingredients found in these types of foods are either full-out triggers or additional irritants to our children’s already destructive behavior, such as aggression, outbursts, hyperactivity, and inattention. The quicker we can wean them off the summer-flavored Oreos and back onto something that, at least at one time, could be found growing from the ground, the better for our kiddos.

## Rely on Your Sensory Strategies

Whether your kiddo is sensitive to specific clothing, needs a weighted blanket, or relies on a sensory body sock for calming, use it! Our son has Sensory Processing Disorder, so these have become part of our day-to-day as we research and learn more about his needs.

Vacations are a nightmare of sensory overloaded proportions. Consider an average day: sugar-filled cookies, singing in the car, dancing boardwalk lights, the feeling of sand in their toes, the barrage of forced hugs from distant relatives come to visit, and the pictures with strangers dressed up in costumes. It is terrifying, especially for our kids who are easily overwhelmed by just one thing from this list.

## When All Else Fails, Remember the 3 P’s: Pacing, Privacy, Peace

Sometimes, it doesn’t matter how many things we try, how many strategies we put into place, or how much we pray or cry, it is just a bad day. So, at our house, we rely on pacing and breathing to calm ourselves (that includes this mama, too). If that doesn’t work, we go somewhere alone. This may just be to another room in the house, outside, on a walk, or (in the case of myself or my husband) a drive. Sometimes we just need some distance to have our emotions and move forward. The last thing we need to do is *intentionally* choose peace.

On more days than not, our house is a war zone. Vacations and summer break are no exceptions; in fact, they are usually worse. So, sometimes we deal with whatever it is and choose to move forward as a family, regardless of the name calling, the things that were thrown, or the public meltdown that made my stomach hurt. At the end of the day, we will still be a family. No one at Target comes home with me after shopping (even though I am pretty sure, Karen, at the customer service desk, is my secret BFF). So let’s just take a tip from that snow witch, Elsa, and let it go.

Parenting is a messy gig. Parenting our kiddos is next-level CIA-operative-style adulting. Know that your brand of crazy might look different from ours, but we are in this together!

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# NAVIGATING SOCIAL MEDIA WITH FOSTER AND ADOPTED TEENS

BY: PAT RHOADS, REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION FROM FOSTERING FAMILIES TODAY

**Whether we like it or not, social media is here to stay.**

Social media has gone from the cool new fad to an ever-present reality in the lives of most Americans. This is especially true for teens. Roughly 94 percent of them are online every day, where they are spending an average of nine hours on an ever-increasing array of social media sites – from Snapchat and Instagram to YouTube and Facebook.

Further complicating your life if you are a parent who wants to keep tabs on your children's online activity are mobile phones. Sixty-nine percent of social media access happens via our smartphones. Where you might once have been able to keep an eye on activity happening on a family computer in the living room, teens can now access the internet at any place, at any time, and while actively avoiding your prying eyes.

If those teens are in foster care, or recently adopted from foster care, there may be even more risks to be aware of when it comes to their online activities.

## *How teens use social media*

For the most part, teen development hasn't changed. This phase of life is one of self-exploration. Teens want to find out who they are, and they do so through experimenting with their clothes, social circles and personas.

It is also a time for making mistakes. Adolescents' brains are still developing, and they are often not able to predict consequences for their actions. In the era before social media, those consequences could be severe, but they were typically contained within a person's community. That's not necessarily true anymore.

Some of that bad judgement can be dangerous when teens exercise it online:

- 55 percent have provided information to someone they didn't know.
- 29 percent have been contacted by a stranger.
- 43 percent change behavior if a parent is watching.
- 67 percent know how to hide their online activity from parents.



## ***Social media and our foster and adoptive teens – the bad***

When it comes to foster and adoptive teens, you may have even more to worry about than the standard (and already stressful) array of teen activity that can get them into trouble. In particular, there are two primary concerns I see:

- Unauthorized contact with birth family. For many teens from foster care, contact with birth parents and other members of their birth family is approved and healthy. However, there are times where this is not the case, and contact with a birth parent or other birth family member may prevent them from healing from past trauma.
- Unhealthy (or downright dangerous) connections from their time in care. Children who spent time living on the streets or in the company of people who took advantage of them can be contacted by people who preyed on their vulnerabilities in the past and may plan to in the future.

## ***It's not all bad news***

While it's easy to focus on the risks social media use can bring, there are a number of benefits, especially for foster and adopted children:

- Maintaining sibling connections. Safe and healthy relationships with siblings (and other similar family connections) should be preserved if at all possible. Those relationships might be disrupted when children enter foster care, and continuing contact through social media can offer needed support and stability to a child in foster care.
- Sustaining relationships with other people who have provided encouragement and support when their lives were in turmoil – such as previous caseworkers, CASA volunteers and foster parents – can provide a sense of security.
- Monitoring their activity. Keeping an eye on children's social media profiles can give you a lot of insight about their lives, especially who they hang out with and what they like to do – at least what they're willing to post online, which is usually a lot.
- Establishing a connection when things go awry. I recall a story of a young man in foster care who was prone to running away from his foster homes. He also had a habit of frequently posting on Facebook. So when he would run away, his caseworker would simply keep an eye on his Facebook page, and sure enough, he'd post something about where he was and who he was with within a few hours.

## ***What can you do?***

With all the risks out there, it might be tempting to consider banning your teens from social media completely. That's not only impractical but in the end it could do more harm than good.

Instead, approach social media and other online activity like you do other sensitive topics: communication. Talks with your teen should include:

- Teaching them how to manage their privacy settings.
- Cautioning them about what information they include in social media posts, including what's in their photos.
- Insisting that they don't connect with anyone online unless they know them "in real life" already.

There are other things you can do to try and ensure your teen's safety online. A few tips:

- If you pay for their phone or their monthly plan, consider making them sign a contract that stipulates that you are allowed access to their device (better for younger teens).
- Conduct regular searches online for your child's name – you may find information about your child published online that you were previously unaware of.
- Keep your child's phone someplace where they can't access it at night, such as in your bedroom.
- Consider installing a parent-control app on your child's phone; Digital Trends and Tom's Guide publish lists of apps and how they can help you monitor your child's activity.
- Educate yourself about apps used by some teens that hide or disguise what they have on their phones; TeenSafe maintains an annual "Smartphone App Blacklist" that parents can use to learn more.

It's said that parenting in the days of mobile phones and the internet is a lot harder than parenting when we were young. That may very well be true. But the changes are here to stay, and we owe it to our children to do everything we can to prepare them for the world they live in now, and to keep them safe while they learn.

*Pat Rhoads is the social media manager for AdoptUSKids, a national, federally-funded project working to ensure that children and teens in foster care get safe, loving, permanent families. During his nearly eight years at AdoptUSKids, Rhoads has spoken and written numerous times on the topic of social media in child welfare. In his day-to-day job, Rhoads spends his time using social media to raise awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families, and providing information and resources to the public.*

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## Contact Your Post Adoption Specialist

### Northern Region:

|                 |              |
|-----------------|--------------|
| Jeanna O'Connor | 801-395-5973 |
| Victoria Fritz  | 801-388-6651 |
| Aubrey Meyers   | 801-776-7352 |

### Salt Lake Region:

|                   |              |
|-------------------|--------------|
| Adoption Helpline | 801-300-8135 |
|-------------------|--------------|

### Western Region:

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

### Southwest Region:

|                       |               |              |
|-----------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Richfield/Cedar City  | Paul Arnold   | 435-236-9337 |
| St. George/Cedar City | Krystal Jones | 435-767-8774 |

### Eastern Region:

|                  |                  |              |
|------------------|------------------|--------------|
| Price/Castledale | Greg Daniels     | 435-636-2367 |
| Vernal/Roosevelt | Fred Butterfield | 435-630-1711 |
| Moab/Blanding    | Tracy Carpenter  | 435-459-9077 |

### GETTING TO KNOW:

## BRANDIE NAYLOR

FAMILY SUPPORT MANAGER, THE ADOPTION EXCHANGE



Brandie Naylor graduated from Weber State University in Social Work and Family Studies in 2001. She has been working in child welfare for 20 years and has been employed at residential treatment facilities and facilitated respite care for Davis Behavioral Health. She also assisted in the classroom and school counselor offices for the Ogden School District.

She was employed with the State of Utah Division of Child & Family Services at The Christmas Box House children's shelters and Child Protective Services. Brandie has also worked with at-risk children in Oregon, the Tlingit and Haida Tribes in Alaska, and with an elementary school in the Maui Hawaii School District. She worked as a Wendy's Wonderful Kid's Recruiter for almost 4 years, and is now the Family Support Manager for the Utah office of The Adoption Exchange.

#### Family Support Resources Available at The Adoption Exchange

- Trust Based Relational Intervention Practitioners
- TBRI Caregiver Series Trainings
- Parent Support Groups- Training Provided
- Lending Library
- Resource Navigation- online & in-person
- Transition Coordination
- Annual Adoption Celebrations

Access to free family activities throughout the year

**CONTACT BRANDIE AT [BNAYLOR@ADOPTEx.ORG](mailto:BNAYLOR@ADOPTEx.ORG)**

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