

# UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

NOVEMBER 2020







CHEVY, AGE 16  
Photo by: Scott Gianchetta, The Photo Box Photography



**On the Cover**  
*Alexis, age 17*

Get to know more about the hilarious Alexis! She loves to be involved in activities and lists soccer and volleyball as her top interests. Taki's and a cookies n creme Hershey bar are her favorite treats to indulge in. Mint green is Alexis's best-loved hue. She thrives with adult females and is a strong advocate for herself.

She is now in the eleventh grade.

Alexis would do best in a family with a mom and a dad, two moms, or a single mom, in which she can be the only child in the home. She will need to remain in contact with her aunt and grandmother 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: Amber Schiavone Photography

To view other children that participated in Heart Gallery 2020 visit the gallery online at [www.utahdopt.org](http://www.utahdopt.org).

If you are interested in any of the children featured in this publication, please contact Raise the Future at 801-265-0444 or visit [www.utahadopt.org](http://www.utahadopt.org).

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# CELEBRATE NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH

## NOVEMBER IS NATIONAL ADOPTION MONTH

A special time to celebrate families that have grown through adoption and raise awareness of the more than 125,000 children waiting in foster care in the United States



### SPREAD THE WORD

Thousands of children and youth across the country need permanent families. You can make a difference by raising awareness in your community.

Visit [www.raisethefuture.org](http://www.raisethefuture.org) to download your tool kit.



### LISTEN AND LEARN

Young people can offer experience and valuable information about their own needs and the needs of their peers, which can help shape practices and programs.

Visit [www.raisethefuture.org](http://www.raisethefuture.org) to hear first hand from youth in foster care.



### DONATE

Every young person deserves to go through life knowing they have a caring adult by their side. Your gift directly impacts our ability to connect children and families.

Visit [www.raisethefuture.org](http://www.raisethefuture.org) to make your life changing gift.

[www.raisethefuture.org/special-events](http://www.raisethefuture.org/special-events)

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# When Play Feels Like A Chore

BY GENERATION MINDFUL

The language of childhood is play.

Through play, children learn about who they are and the world around them. Play is how children learn social-emotional skills like problem-solving, impulse control, empathy, and relationship management. On top of all of these attributes, play is just plain fun.

And while playtime certainly helps to meet children's physical and emotional needs, making time for play on a regular basis can feel hard for parents.

## BARRIERS TO PLAY

Your child asks you to pretend to be a unicorn, to act like superheroes, or to be a choo-choo train that runs around the dining room table, and you find yourself thinking Nope. Not for me. Can't do it. Bored to tears.

According to research, while parents agree that play is essential, it is not always a top priority, and some adults find it downright difficult.

The State of Play, Back to Basics report interviewed 2,000 parents and 2,000 children aged 5 to 15 about their play habits and concluded that play is in danger of becoming a "lost art," with 21% of parents struggling to engage their children in creative and imaginative activities that will help their development.

We wanted to know more about which facets of play parents find most challenging, so we asked hundreds of parents in our online community. Following are the top five barriers to play that the parents shared:

## 1. PARENTS FEEL BUSY.

Making dinner, cleaning the house, running errands, work responsibilities, family obligations, not to mention friends and "me-time"... the list goes on. Parents told us that it is hard to silence the to-do lists long enough to be present and play with their kids.

One mom shared, "I'm always left with more to plan, more to clean, just more in general. It's a balance between wanting to have a relationship with my kids in a way that feels good to them, and wanting to get everything done, which feels good to me. When my list of to-dos is long, it's hard for me to have fun."

## 2. PARENTS FEEL BORED.

The way children want to play is often not the way that parents want to play. For one thing, children love to do the same thing over and over again. This is how their brains are wired to learn. Pretend-play gives children a chance to try on adult roles like preparing food, driving, doing yard work, or taking care of babies. As adults, we already have these skills, so pretend-play can seem boring.

One father of a two-year-old shared, "I want to. I try. I just can't. I like structure, and pretend play doesn't have that. Not going to lie, it's boring. When my daughter asks me to play Barbies, I cringe a little."

## 3. PARENTS STRUGGLE TO VALUE PLAY.

The parents in our community told us that many of them were not encouraged to see play as valuable in their own childhood years --- that they were either not provided with play opportunities, or that their parents simply viewed playing as a low priority. And be-

cause the adults in their lives did not see play as "time well spent" when they were children, they find it challenging to value play as an adult. In fact, some shared that they view play as frivolous and unproductive.

"Honestly, I hate to play. I'm so task-oriented. I think it comes from my childhood where play was not valued. Performance was how I achieved validation - things like keeping my room clean, staying out of trouble and getting good grades. When I do stop to play, it feels like a waste of time," shares one mama.

## 4. PARENTS FIND PLAY LEADS TO SIBLING RIVALRY.

Can play lead to competition for attention? That was a complaint we heard from nearly a third of the parents we interviewed who said that playing with their kids was stressful because it led to family squabbles.

In one parent's words, "When I play with my kids, it never fails --- my two and four-year-old start battling for my attention until it spirals downward into fighting. I'm thinking why do I bother because everyone, including myself, just ends up feeling frustrated."

## 5. PARENTS STRUGGLE TO PLAY WITH CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES.

When parents have children of different developmental or chronicle ages, it can mystify parents on how to play in ways that bridge the gap.

One mom of two shared, "My daughter is five and has been diagnosed with autism and my two-year-old son is "neurotypical." My daughter doesn't interact with my son at all yet, and I can't seem to figure out how to connect with both of them at the same time. Playing just seems hard."

## SETTING GOALS

While there are many roadblocks when it comes to making time to play with their children, nearly every parent we spoke to shared their interest in doing this very thing. These parents were motivated to find solutions. Here are just a few of their comments:

"I would like to be present with my kids, even if it is just five minutes with a clear mind."

"I want to enjoy playing with my children for what it is. Maybe I can even learn a little from my children on how to slow down."

"I want to find ways to play that are engaging for my kids and interesting for me. And bonus if it teaches them skills like patience and taking turns."

## GETTING BACK TO BASICS

Parents, we hear both your struggles and your desire to slow life down and to connect with your children. Here are a few tips to make playtime easier and more enjoyable:

Understand why kids want to play. When children ask us to play, it's a request for connection. They want to involve us in their worlds and fill their need for "mama" or "papa" time. According to Judy Ellis, Chair, FIT Toy Design Department, "play is not only the way kids connect with us, but it's also the way they learn ... and it's a great way for parents to learn about their children, too." Speak the same play language. Play is, by definition, something you want to do, and the key to having fun while playing with your children is to find a mutually enjoyable activity.

Here are a few ideas:

- Read books
- Go swimming
- Paint or create art
- Build something together
- Go on a nature walk or bike ride
- Play board games, card games or outside games
- Snuggle
- Turn on some music and dance
- Run around the living room or have a pillow fight

Invite children into your world. When your "to-do" list feels never-ending, invite your children to join you in getting things crossed off your list in playful ways. Think sock sorting races, or recruiting your child as your sous chef in the kitchen as you prep for dinner. Involving your child can check two boxes at once, turning a mundane task into a moment of connection.

Get comfortable with boundaries. If your child wants to play and you either can't or do not want to in that moment, place your focus on what you can or will do. You might reply with, "I'm all done playing superheroes right now, but I would love to play LEGOs. Do you want to build something together?", or "Would you like to color together once I get these groceries put away?"

Say no with a yes. You are in the middle of cooking breakfast or working, or maybe, you just simply aren't in the mood. It is okay if now isn't a good time for you to play. Instead of completely declining your child's request, find ways to say no with a yes. For example, you might say: "Yes, I would love to play with you. Go ahead and play what you are playing right now, and then at 2 PM (or "when this timer goes off", or "when the baby takes a nap", or even "tomorrow", etc...), I will join you."

Schedule it. If you like structure, order, and routine, designating playtime with your children can be helpful. You can schedule it quietly, putting 10-15 minutes of "playtime" on your daily calendar as a reminder for yourself alone, or share it with your child, making it a daily or weekly playful ritual they can look forward to. Get out of the house. If your to-do list seems hard to escape, it can be helpful to get out of the house. Parents told us that they had an easier time focusing on their children when they were away from other things that pull for their attention.

There are many reasons parents can feel like playtime is no fun at all, so if you are a parent who feels this way, take comfort in knowing that you are not alone. Let go of any guilt, and honor your feelings.

Name it to tame it, staying curious about your feelings instead of judging them. Your feelings are not "right" or "wrong", but they are helpful, especially when we are able to put thoughts and words to them.

Playing with our children can come in many forms, so if pretending to be a cat does not sound like fun to you --- it's okay. Celebrate this awareness and go rock the things you do enjoy doing with your child, because even more than playing makebelieve, your children love you for being you.

*Generation Mindful creates educational tools, toys, and programs that nurture emotional intelligence through play and positive discipline. Join us and receive joy in your inbox each week. [www.genmindful.com](http://www.genmindful.com)*





# Trauma, Memory, & Behaviors

BY ROBYN GOBBEL, LCSW, LMSW, RPT-S

“Why is my child still triggered...after all these years?”

“Why does my child STILL feel unsafe?”

“I’ve never hurt my child. They’ve never missed a meal here. Why does their history still matter?”

The parents I work with try so hard to be attuned. To be connected. To understand the impact of trauma.

So. Hard.

Three, or five, or ten years down the road of working hard to create safety, be attuned, provide the intense level of needed co-regulation needed to parent a child with a history of trauma, and it can start to feel pretty demoralizing when some triggers or behaviors haven’t seemed to change.

“WHY is my child still struggling?”

“Am I doing it wrong?”

“Is something wrong with my child?”

“Will they ever be OK?”

Parents give me the side-eye when I try to help them understand that their nine-year-old’s meltdown over being told ‘no’ to a snack five minutes before dinner is related to their experiences when they were three (or even two, or one).

I say “They get overwhelmed with the belief that they’ll never eat again and it feels completely true in the moment!”

More side-eye. Uh...what? This child has now never missed a snack or a meal in seven or more years. AND dinner is literally being cooked and is almost ready to put on the table. And now they are kicking and screaming and you are saying it’s because of feeling hungry? Seven years ago?

Believe it or not- yes!! And it’s not about bad parenting, or manipulation, or anything like that.

It’s simply about memory science!

## I LOVE MEMORY SCIENCE.

Let’s look at how our memory processing system is designed to work!

### Implicit Memory

Simply because things cannot be recalled does not mean they are

not remembered...by your body and your mind. There are two kinds of memories- implicit and explicit. Implicit memory is the kind of memory that describes ALL of your memories before about age 18 months old, and MOST of your memories before about age three. Implicit memory including body sensations, feelings, perceptions, and behavioral impulses- which are behaviors that don’t have any conscious awareness.

Your child might not have recall memories of being left alone for eight-hours at a time when they were 12-months-old, but their body remembers the terror and helplessness. Terror and helplessness might have been experienced at the same time as other every-day things, like the sound of the television or the phone ringing. Or the way the light peaked in through the blinds. Or the smell of feces. In the brain “What fires together wires together” (Hebb’s Axiom), so terror and the telephone ring may have been wired together. Or terror and the certain way the light looks in the room. In the future, when your child hears a phone ring or sees the light stream in a certain way, the part of their brain that holds terror may also be activated- EVEN THOUGH THEY DON’T HAVE CONSCIOUS MEMORY!!! This can be pretty confusing- for us and them!

### Explicit Memory

After about age three, implicit AND explicit memory both start contributing to the way we have experiences, stores those experiences in our memory, and recall them later.

Explicit memory is what we are usually talking about when we are talking about memory. Explicit memory has a felt-sense of “I am remembering something right now.” You bring a situation to mind (or recall some facts) and there is a sense in your body that you are remembering this situation- not having it right now.

Explicit memories are recalled. It’s the image we bring to mind when we remember the day we got married or when we graduated. Or that moment from our favorite family vacation. When our memory processing system is working correctly (and when we are older than age three and encoding explicit memories), implicit and explicit memory work together. The positive sensations and feelings emerge in our body while we have fact-based memories of the experience. An image often comes to mind. There is a clear sense of “I am remembering something!” and we even have a different felt-sense that arises when we remember something from a year ago versus ten years ago.

### These memories have a time stamp!

Explicit memory helps us orient to time. If explicit and implicit information is appropriately connected, then when you recall your favorite family Christmas at Grandma’s home because you smell homemade cinnamon rolls, your brain instantly knows that Christmas is a memory- it isn’t happening RIGHT NOW. If Christmas at Grandma’s house was traumatic and the experience was not fully integrated and appropriately stored in your memory processing system, you may be triggered by the sweet smell of cinnamon rolls and your body may feel as though Christmas is happening NOW. The feelings of the trauma will arise in your body now (feelings like terror, helplessness, hopeless) but they feel related to what is happening NOW- not a memory.

During traumatic experiences, implicit and explicit information may not be linked appropriately. The implicit does not connect to the explicit. And (here’s the REALLY important part) this implicit data that isn’t connected is often not altered by later life experiences! (Though it can be under the right circumstances...it isn’t hopeless!).

When an implicit memory is triggered and there is no explicit memory to help it understand time and place, your child’s body literally feels like the experience is happening RIGHT NOW. Which means fight/flight/freeze/collapse happens in less than an instant. Their experience in the now is flooded in the experience from the past, and their body reacts.

### Trauma doesn’t tell time.

When an unintegrated implicit memory gets triggered, it doesn’t have access to information that tells your child “Hey! That happened a long time ago! You are safe now!” Trauma seizes your child’s body in the moment and thrusts them back into those terrifying times when the trauma was happening. This happens in milliseconds.

This isn’t happening because you are failing as a parent or because your child is being manipulative. It’s happening because of the way our memory processing system works and the way we construct our own experience of reality based on the NOW and the PAST- and then our body responds to THAT. It is always in response to how we are experiencing reality and it is always in response in trying to stay safe and alive.

### Why do I think this is important?!

Believe it or not, understanding what’s happening and why it’s happening is a parenting strategy. It doesn’t really feel like a strategy, but it is! When we understand what’s happening, we can stay more regulated. We don’t take it personally. We don’t try to logic away the trauma response. We respond to the behavior with safety, co-regulation, and connection because we understand that the only necessary thing to do is soothe our child and help them come back into connection with the ‘here and now.’ We don’t punish, lecture, or berate ourselves for being a terrible parent.

And these actions actually are strategies. When we respond to a trauma response with connection, co-regulation, and safety, we actually are doing EXACTLY the thing that helps those disconnected implicit and explicit memories find each other and integrate. Experiencing safety and connection in a moment when the brain is expecting to experience danger (a trauma response means the brain is expecting to experience danger) is precisely what memory reconsolidation theory tells us needs to happen! This will encourage the disconnected implicit memories to get connected to the explicit so that the memory feels like a MEMORY. When our bodies know a memory is a memory and not what’s happening right now, it will decrease and maybe even eventually stop a fight/flight/freeze/collapse response.

Robyn Gobbel is a psychotherapist who is currently focused on teaching, training, and writing. Her clinical focus has always been children with a history of complex trauma and their families. Last summer, she closed her private practice in Austin, TX, and she and her family relocated to Grand Rapids MI for a simpler, cheaper life. For more information go to [roblyngobbel.com](http://roblyngobbel.com)





# Defining Blackness

BY CHRISTINA OXLEY

This story originally appeared in YCteen in May/June 2019, a magazine written by New York City teens. Copyright by Youth Communication. More info at [youthcomm.org](http://youthcomm.org)

One day in my 10th grade American Literature class, we read *Fences* by August Wilson. My teacher said to everyone, “We will be reading this play aloud in class. The main character, Troy, says the ‘n’ word many times, so I’ll just say that you guys have the choice to decide whether or not you want to say it.”

That’s not what you say to a bunch of white kids, I thought. I attend a predominately white private school, and I was the only black student in the class.

One particular kid’s hand shot up to read as Troy, and I knew something horrible was about to happen. The hard R’s of the word pierced my ears as he spat out the slur over and over again, without a single hesitation. My heart pounded and my body went numb. I felt sick, but I just sat there, frozen. I wanted to disappear. I felt some eyes glance over at me, but for the most part, the rest of the class seemed unfazed.

This white boy took advantage of the opportunity to say a hate-filled word without repercussions. I always feel outnumbered in my school, but in that moment I was truly on my own. I knew that no one else in the room felt the way that I did. When class was over, I ran to the bathroom and cried.

## Just One of the Black Girls

Before I began attending a predominantly white middle school, I didn’t think much about my identity or how it was being shaped by my race, ethnicity, and the society around me. I didn’t realize at the time that I was internalizing society’s idea of what it means to be black, which is to feel apart from and less than white people. Then I started attending my middle school’s black affinity group, which taught me to recognize the ways that race influences so much about my life.

I started to pay attention to the number of times I saw on the news that an unarmed black child, like 12-year-old Tamir Rice, had been killed by police. The teachers leading the affinity group taught me that microaggressions—like teachers and peers repeatedly calling me by the wrong name because they don’t see the handful of black girls in the school as individuals, or classmates touching my hair without asking—as well as bigger racist incidents, like what would happen the day we read *Fences*, didn’t just happen to me. These dehumanizing experiences were a daily reality for black people in spaces like my school. My friend was even accused of plagiarism once because his white teachers didn’t believe he could excel academically.

My mother sent me to private schools in Manhattan because the quality of education was significantly lower at the predominantly

black public schools in our Brooklyn neighborhood. But my history classes mainly focus on Europe and white American war heroes. Black history is taught for a single week in February, with the same incomplete overview of slavery and the Civil Rights movement repeated every year. There is nothing in between the two, as if black people had ceased to exist for an entire century.

In high school, I stopped being Christina and became “one of the black girls.” The same teachers who mixed us up in class posed with us in photos for the diversity page of the school website, and put us on the front lines in basketball because they assumed the black kids were the best at it.

## Coddling White Feelings

Racial stereotypes dictated how I was expected to react to any situation at school. For example, in my sophomore year, my friend and I confronted some white boys in the cafeteria for using slurs and other racist language.

“Using the ‘n’ word is inherently racist,” I tried to explain. “It automatically makes school an unsafe environment for me. You’re white, so you cannot say that word. It has a lot of history behind it and it is blatantly disrespectful to use it when you know how harmful it is.”

Everyone just stared at me. Then some started to laugh and make side comments: “Why is she so angry?” “Why is she attacking us?”

“I’m serious,” I said, my voice rising with frustration. But as I grew visibly upset, I just drew more blank stares. These boys were in the wrong for making me feel unsafe, but I felt like the odd one out—like I had committed a crime by making them uncomfortable. It frustrated me that they didn’t understand why I had a right to be angry, and that they felt attacked when their behavior had had the effect of attacking me.

Afterwards, I went to the only black dean out of the four deans in the school. She is also one of the three black faculty members there. She told me that as a black woman, I would always have to remain calm in the face of this kind of adversity, just as she had learned to do from working in predominantly white independent schools for over 20 years.

“This school wasn’t built for people who look like us,” she said. “And when you react in anger, it makes it easier for them to justify wanting you out of it.” At first I wanted to challenge her advice, but then I just sighed and nodded because I knew it was true. Still, hearing this didn’t make me feel any better: My white peers are allowed to dehumanize me with no consequences, but I’m not allowed to be angry?

After the debacle in the cafeteria, one student even told me that I should have been “nicer” and “more calm” because my actions only perpetuated their stereotypes of me as an “angry” black woman. But why do I have to coddle white people and care about their feelings more than anyone in this school cares about mine? Why do I have to sublimate my emotions to make others feel better about their racism?

## A Truly Safe Space

Experiences like these made me realize that every day I have to prove that I am worthy of being in that space alongside people who don’t see me as equal to them, whether they realize it or not. But over the last two years, with the support of black peers who have gone through the same thing—like the dean I spoke with, black classmates, and others I’ve met through social media and diversity conferences and organizations—I’m learning how to combat the institutional and interpersonal oppression I face every day.

I’ve also found pride in being black despite the societal message that

I shouldn’t. I’ve started to embrace my natural hair and dark skin, and to express this pride through my writing and art. I’ve gained a sense of unity and community with other black people, and I see black art and culture in a way that I hadn’t been able to fully appreciate before.

For example, two years ago I went to Afropunk, a music and arts festival featuring the work of black artists. People of all genders wore afros and afro puffs of all colors and sizes, twists, beaded braids, bantu knots, and locs. As a black woman, it was reassuring and validating to be around thousands of other beautiful and confident black people. In that safe space, I felt seen, and being there brought me an overwhelming sense of pride. After a life of being disrespected, ignored, and neglected because of my blackness, I was finally able to see it in a positive and beautiful light.

Since a young age, I have been put in majority-white environments that remind me I am black — and that define blackness narrowly. In the era of American slavery and the long period of racial segregation that followed, the “one drop” rule determined what it meant to be black. No matter how you identified, if you had one drop of “black blood,” you were considered black and therefore deserved to be enslaved and treated as less than human.

Though we live in a different time, this “one drop” idea still lingers in the way we think of black identity. Many people today think that everyone who is black experiences poverty, that we all speak and act in the same way, or listen to the same music. For example, some, like the teachers at my school, assume that because I am black, I can’t express myself well, or are surprised at how “articulate” I am when I speak in public. One repeatedly asked who helped me with a writing assignment. When I said that I had done it by myself, this teacher said, “Well, I just didn’t know you could write so well!”

## Black Individuality

Many people believe that all black people share the same opinions and experiences regarding race. This plays out constantly in my life, like when a teacher has asked me to explain to my class how black people feel about being called “black,” as if I am a representative of my entire race. Or when the whole class stares at me and waits for me to respond to a question the teacher poses about race.

It is easier to isolate and discriminate against people when you don’t recognize them as individuals with their own unique thoughts, opinions, and emotions. The idea that black people are less than human, which is a legacy of slavery, can also be internalized within the black community, and be detrimental to our own self-image. When the concept of blackness is flattened into a set of stereotypes, we aren’t allowed to live up to our full potential as people. We need to be able to celebrate our black identity and decide for ourselves how to live in it, rather than letting it decide how we live. Race is a social construct used to give and limit power to different groups of people, so I can reclaim power by defining my identity for myself.

I’ve decided that I don’t have to conform to this one-dimensional caricature of what it means to be black. I don’t have to settle for less in life because others think that’s all I deserve. I can be ambitious, driven, and hardworking, unlike the stereotypes of black people as “lazy” or “uncivilized.” I can be vulnerable and feminine just as much as I can be “strong” and independent. I love to write and I appreciate art. I love indie rock music as much as rap. I have a genuine love for learning. I allow myself to be all of these things, because it is who I am. I don’t have to stay in the box that others have put me in based on my race. My identity doesn’t limit me. I get to decide who I am, whether that conforms to what anyone expects or not, and I find that liberating.





# How Secondary Trauma Affects Your Other Children

BY FOSTER 2 FOREVER

If you bring traumatized children into your home, the traumatic events that they suffered through can take its toll on you, the caregiver, even to the point that you can begin to suffer from secondary traumatic stress (STS).

Secondary traumatic stress occurs when someone is repeatedly exposed, directly or even indirectly, to trauma or suffering. Secondary trauma develops due to the stress the parent or caregiver experiences from helping or wanting to help a traumatized child. Sometimes a foster parent or caregiver can even be at risk of developing the same symptoms as the child directly affected by the trauma. A person is especially vulnerable to secondary trauma stress if they've experienced previous trauma.

But as a foster/adoptive parents, we understand how living with trauma affects us, but we are just beginning to realize how raising a traumatized child is traumatizing our other children. Children are especially susceptible to secondary trauma because of their limited ability to understand the traumatic experiences surrounding them. Young children struggle to make sense of trauma and are completely dependent on adults for their emotional and physical needs.

To me, it doesn't seem that adoptive families have truly been informed about this ripple effect of trauma. I know I wasn't. Sure, trauma-informed care is just now beginning to be discussed in foster parent training, but many of us became foster parents before this latest buzzword began making the rounds.

**Trauma affects everyone in the home.**

## **Trauma-in-Brothers**

When my son, JD, was a toddler, we added another baby boy to our family. We were excited for JD to have a brother to bond with and have as a companion growing up and into adulthood. They are brothers and love each other. When one gets in trouble, the other stands up for him. However, we didn't know the extent of JD's trauma, and how that trauma would affect our family.

JD's trauma is intense, although he doesn't remember his infant neglect, but when he feels hunger or has a drop in blood sugar, his primal fear of hunger takes over and my cheerful, sweet child becomes a totally different person. (He has had his blood sugar tested numerous times, and no physiological problems exists with his blood sugar.)

As the parents, we have struggled through secondary trauma. But what about our youngest? How has growing up under the effects of trauma affected him? Did our baby inadvertently grow up in fear? How did he not?

## **Signs of Secondary Trauma**

- Emotional Indicators: anger, sadness, anxiety
- Physical Indicators: headaches, tummy aches, constipation
- Personal Indicators: cynicism, irritability with family members

As I look through this list, I'm saddened see how each member of our family shows indicators of secondary trauma. What are we doing to help our other child?

**Counseling:** An important part of healing. We will continue counseling for both our children, of course.

**Evaluation:** Evaluate your family situation. We are currently taking a break from foster parenting to focus on healing the current members of our family. But before that, our personal standard had become to only add foster children to our family that are younger than our youngest. We've learned that trauma shouldn't be modeled to our younger children.

**Individual Attention:** Also, because our son has grown up under all this trauma and stress, we've made the decision to homeschool him this next school year. Through homeschooling, he will finally receive the one-on-one attention he usually doesn't get when his brother's needs overshadow everyone else's. We are excited about the possibilities of how our homeschool adventure can help heal each member of our family.

Through sharing my struggles of parenting trauma publicly with you, my hope is that you will be truly informed about trauma and its effects on your entire family. I also hope that you seriously evaluate your family when introducing trauma to your young children.

I still advocate foster parenting, but I also desire that both your eyes and heart are open to all that journey entails.

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# Helping Kids Who Are Immature

BY: RAE JACOBSON, CHILD MIND INSTITUTE

As children grow up, the world's expectations of them seem to change at the speed of light. Schoolwork is suddenly more challenging. Sports that were fun become more competitive and physically demanding. Activities, games, and TV shows your child and her friends loved one day are considered “babyish” the next.

All kids struggle to navigate shifting social norms and expectations of parents or teachers, but when a child matures more slowly than her peers, the changes can leave her feeling left out, embarrassed or bewildered by the things her friends are doing. Luckily, as every formerly awkward adult knows, immaturity is usually temporary, but that doesn't mean it's easy for kids who are in the thick of it.

“In most cases, as kids grow up, things even out,” says Rachel Busman, PsyD, a clinical psychologist at the Child Mind Institute. “They're going to catch up. But the process can be hard.” Our role as parents, she explains, is to reassure kids and give them the support and scaffolding they need to make it through.

## Signs of immaturity in younger kids

Children whose birthdays place them at the younger end of the class are more likely to be less mature than their classmates, but age isn't the only factor, as kids mature at different paces.

In younger kids some signs of immaturity might be:

- Needing a little extra attention or help to do things her peers will do independently
- Being less physically coordinated than other children her age
- Becoming easily upset or overwhelmed or having trouble calming herself down when things don't go her way
- Struggling to adapt to new concepts in school

- Being physically smaller or less developed than other kids her age
- Hanging back or avoiding activities that are new or challenging

## Signs of immaturity in older kids

As kids get older, immaturity might look like:

- Age-inappropriate interests, for example a preteen who's still watching Paw Patrol
- Social awkwardness, discomfort with new social relationships like dating, or unsupervised group hang outs
- Rigidity or unwillingness to try new things
- Being “grossed out” by conversations about sex and sexuality
- Being less physically developed than his peers
- Difficulty adapting to new academic challenges
- It's also important to note that kids may be less mature in one area, and advanced in another. For example, a child might be at the top of her reading group but feel lost when it comes to the social complexity of middle school, even when it seems like all her friends have it figured out.

## Emotional regulation

At its core, being mature isn't about the toys kids are into, or whether they're afraid of scary movies when their friends aren't. The key work of growing up is acquiring a set of invisible skills called self-regulation — the ability to understand and manage emotions and impulses when they come up. Kids who struggle to self-regulate have a harder time dealing with even small setbacks and aren't good at calming themselves down or controlling impulsive behaviors. For example:

A child who stalks off in a huff if her friends won't play the game she wants, bursts into tears if she doesn't get the pink cupcake, or throws a tantrum when asked to clean her room or set the table.

A pre-teen who smashes his video game controller when he loses, impulsively interrupts when friends or teachers are talking, or is late for everything.

Parents can help by encouraging children to practice skills and behaviors that bolster and teach self-regulation skills.

Talk about how he could advocate for himself if he's in a difficult situation. For example: if a child is uncomfortable with an activity his friends are doing you could develop a script he can use to defuse the situation: “You know, that's not my thing but you guys have fun, I'll catch up with you afterwards.”

Work on negotiating and being patient. For example, if a girl gets upset when her friends don't want to play her favorite game, you might say: “I know it's upsetting when you and Jen want to do different things. Next time, maybe you could try agreeing that you'll play a game she chooses first, then play one you choose afterwards.”

Practice mindfulness with your child, and model what good self-regulation looks like. For example, “I get upset sometimes, too, and it can be hard to calm down. What if we both agree to take ten deep breaths next time we start feeling angry or upset?” As kids learn better self-regulation skills, they'll feel more confident and capable when it comes to navigating new or difficult challenges, and be better able to make smarter (and more mature) choices for themselves.

## Be realistic about risks

We want our children to grow at their own speed and feel comfortable and happy and excited about the things they love. But pressure to conform to what other kids are doing can be intense. The most hazardous part of immaturity is the potential for kids to be embarrassed, teased or bullied.

So how can parents walk the line between supporting a child where she is and making sure she's not at risk? Let your child know that liking or doing things that are different than their peers isn't something to be ashamed of, but that they may have to be ready for other kids to not want to play. For example, if a child likes to play with dinosaurs but his friends have moved on to Fortnite, you could make a plan for how he'll talk to them about it. For example, he could say, “I'm going to play dinosaurs now, but can we play tag together later?”

“If a child is still sucking her thumb or bringing a stuffed animal to school at an age where that's not really appropriate anymore it isn't the end of the world,” says Dr. Busman. “We don't want to shame kids or shut them down by saying, “Don't be a baby. Get your thumb out of your mouth.”

Still, it's helpful to warn your child that her favorite activity may not be accepted by her peers. “It's a chance to help kids understand that some activities are really only acceptable in certain places,” Dr. Busman explains. “You might say, I know that sucking your thumb is super relaxing, but you know I haven't seen any of the other kids doing it at school. I wonder if that means that's something that's just better to do at home? What do you think?”

## Keep communication open

Unfortunately, no amount of planning or practice can totally ward off the potential for bullying so parents should keep their antennae up.

The best way to know what your child is dealing with is to keep

an open line of communication. That may require persistence. Ask open-ended questions and give kids as many opportunities as you can to tell you what's going on in their lives. For example, if your child reports that a girl she was friends with no longer wants to play, take it as an opportunity to do some detective work. Instead of saying, “Oh, I'm sorry,” which kind of shuts the conversation down, try, “That sounds upsetting. Has anything happened or changed between you guys lately?” If she doesn't want to answer, or simply says “I don't know,” give her some space, but make a point of checking in again later.

## Do some research

If you're concerned your child's immaturity might be causing problems for her, start by doing some research into what her universe looks like. What are other kids your child's age listening to, reading, wearing, watching, etc.? How do they compare to your child's interests? If you find something she might be interested in but hasn't picked up, like a band or a tv show, try making a plan to check it out together.

And if your child has an interest her friends think is silly, find somewhere — a club or group or class — where she's able to do it in an accepting, judgment-free space.

## Enlist the school as ally

Finally, if you're worried your child might be uncomfortable or being bullied at school, enlist her teachers or the school's guidance counselor as an ally. “If you sense that your kid might benefit from a little extra scaffolding at school, you could ask them to keep an eye out for bullies, and to maybe help her along socially until she's feeling more comfortable.” Even if you don't suspect your child is being bullied it might be a good idea to schedule a check-in with your child's teacher. He may be able to give you a better idea of the social and academic pressures she's facing at school.

## When to be concerned

In some cases, what looks like immaturity may have a different cause. Early signs of ADHD, some learning disabilities, anxiety and autism can all be mistaken for run-of-the-mill immaturity. Behaviors that seem extreme, or don't fade as children grow, warrant a visit to your child's pediatrician or a clinician.

Some things to watch for include:

- Speech delays
- Significant lack of coordination that is age-inappropriate — for example, a child who has difficulty using a fork or trouble writing legibly long into grade school
- Total lack of interest in social activities
- Serious anxiety around social situations like sleepovers or parties, or trouble making or keeping friends
- Significant sleep issues that are age-inappropriate, for example a 9-year-old who struggles to sleep through the night without parental intervention
- Academic difficulties that have a significant impact on grades
- Problems with impulse control or concentration
- Tantrums or meltdowns in elementary or middle school
- In most cases though, being immature is just a part of growing up, like having knobby knees or braces. Giving your child the help and support she needs to navigate it in a safe, less stressful way will help her land on her feet when she catches up and give her powerful tools to care for herself both now and when she's “mature.”





# Love Sees in Color

Affirm the differences your child sees by making race a part of the family conversation

BY DEBORAH H. JOHNSON, Reprinted with Permission from Adoptive Families

About a decade ago it was popular to say, “Love sees no color. I really don’t see that my kids are different.” I’m hoping we’ve moved away from that, because it’s just not true. We all notice differences, and, if we say we can’t, we’re denying something. That’s a really big part of white privilege—not recognizing that you have white privilege. Not only does this diminish the power and energy of diversity, this denial sends a message that being different is bad or shameful or something that needs to be ignored. Kids might think that even the act of noticing their unique hair or distinctive skin color means there’s something wrong with them.

## Differences at Home

It’s not enough to stop sending that message of color blindness, we must let kids know that it’s OK to describe what they’re seeing and to talk about it. It’s best to begin this at a very young age, when kids haven’t learned social inhibitions and literally say just about anything.

My family is multiracial and, when our son was three, we all sat on the floor together and asked him to describe how we looked. He said, “OK, Mommy has black hair and brown skin. Ally has brown hair and brown skin. Luke has black hair and brown skin. Daddy has yellow hair and white skin.” There was a pause, and then he said, “Poor Daddy.” We affirmed the differences he noticed, then explained how physical features are related to ethnic origins. We explained, “Mommy has black hair and brown skin because she’s Korean. Daddy’s Swedish, and that’s why he has blond hair and white skin.” You can do this with a map and tell your kids what people from their birth country and different parts of the world look like, how they dress, what language they speak, and so on.

## Differences Within Society

Openness in talking about racial differences is a crucial first step. Parents must also shake off discomfort in talking about racism, and society’s perception of their children. Begin by examining your extended families, because most of a young child’s first connections will be with cousins, grandparents, aunts and uncles. Put a critical eye on those relatives and ask yourself, “What are the jokes and stories they tell? Are they racially or culturally uncomfortable?” If kids hear something that could be offensive, parents either need to intervene in the moment, or follow up with their child afterwards to talk about what happened.

Then observe your community, noticing race at the grocery store, riding the bus, at the park, and asking, “What does our world look like? What does our family look like? Will my child see people who look similar to him? How does the world see my child?”

As parents, it’s our job to understand the world in which we live and prepare our kids for the attitudes they’ll encounter; it’s part of our parental responsibility to “get it.” Moving on from a “love sees no color” attitude may even come down to safety and survival. One of my good friends who has biological, Caucasian children and also adopted two African-American children was telling me, “You’d better believe we raised our black sons differently, teaching them some very different things than we taught our white sons, because the worlds they live in are very different. Case in point—how they should interact with a police officer.”

I’ve had many families say to me, “You know, after adopting, our group of friends really changed. We’ve gravitated toward those who supported our transracial adoption decision and who really enrich our lives, and spend less time with those who seem to narrow our world view.” I believe this is a healthy progression, that transracial adoption shouldn’t be about making your child “like” the rest of the family. Let her know that she’s part of your family, that she belongs, that families are about attachment, choices, and history together, not about blood, and that you recognize and value the diversity she brings to yours.

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## RAISE THE FUTURE

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utah department of  
**human services**  
Child and Family Services



# CONTACT YOUR POST ADOPTION SPECIALIST

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Davis/Weber	Erma Hawker	801-668-0339
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### 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/Cedar City	Paul Arnold	435-236-9337
St. George/Cedar City	Krystal Jones	435-767-8774

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Vernal/Roosevelt	Fred Butterfield	435-630-1711
Moab/Blanding	Jennifer Redd	435-260-8250

### GETTING TO KNOW YOUR POST ADOPTION WORKERS:

## AUBREE STOCK

Post Adoption Team- Western Region



Aubree Stock is delighted to be a new addition to the post adopt team in Western Region. Aubree has a MSW degree from USU. Aubree also has BS degrees in Psychology and Sociology from the University of Utah. It is her mother's greatest regret that Aubree did not attend BYU as a certain favorite child of hers did.

Aubree loves working with families so DCFS is a great fit. Aubree enjoys learning/reading, playing with her dog, walking in beautiful places, music, and exploring. Please refer post adopt families in North Orem, Vineyard, Lindon, and Pleasant Grove to her as she is happy to help!

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