

RESOURCES, NEWS & INFORMATION FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES IN TEHAMA COUNTY

TOGETHER on purpose

TALKING TO YOUR ADOPTED TEEN

It's possible.
And important.

by Ellen Singer

Teens typically have an endless appetite for talking with friends, but when it comes to talking with adults or (even worse) parents, conversation often consists of one-syllable words, grunts, and eye rolls. When it comes to talking about adoption with some teens, parents might as easily climb Mount Everest. During adolescence, however, adopted teens need parental guidance, comfort, and support as much as ever, and parents must work to keep lines of communication open.

Extra Challenges for Adopted Teens

Identity formation and separation are adolescents' two main developmental tasks. Teens explore and answer questions like "Who am I?" and "What are my beliefs and values?" when establishing their identity. Separation involves moving toward independence and personal responsibility—a prospect both exciting and scary that can evoke a "leave me alone, but don't leave me" response in teens. Adoption adds extra complexity to these teen rites of passage. Questions of identity raise unresolved thoughts and feelings about birth parents from whom teens must still psychologically separate. For some adopted teens, separation can also

seem like rejection and independence like abandonment—emotions associated with the loss of birth parents. Adopted teens who cannot express these troubling thoughts and emotions to someone (a parent or therapist, for example) are at risk for potentially serious emotional and behavioral problems including depression, substance abuse, school failure, etc.

Why Communication Is Difficult

Parents who have trouble getting young children to stop talking may be stunned with the wall of silence and withdrawal that accompanies adolescence. Teens, though, have good reasons for keeping to themselves.

- Teens may stop talking to create distance from their parents. Distance helps teens feel separate and independent, and even children who used to share every thought with their parents may desire complete privacy. Parental attempts to communicate may fail because teens often perceive personal questions as intrusive.
- Adopted teens may not be able to articulate what they are feeling—even to themselves. Adoption-related issues can be some of the most emotionally loaded issues teens will ever face. They may experience sadness or anger without really knowing why.

It's STILL not too late to get your Starbucks



We only ask one small favor ...

Visit www.togetheronpurpose.org and fill out the survey to let us know what services YOUR FAMILY would find valuable. Then, fill out the contact form, and we'll send your gift card out!

Eligibility: Must be over 18. Must be a foster or adoptive parent in the Tehama County area (we're interpreting that pretty loosely, but keep in mind, supplies are limited). One submission (and Starbucks card) per adult. While supplies last. Rules are subject to change at any time.

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WHAT'S GOIN' ON? Coming Events & Activities

JANUARY 2017

17 Together on Purpose Network & Resource Group

Tuesday, January 17, 3:30 - 4:30PM

NEW LOCATION: Alternatives to Violence Counseling Center, 20 Antelope Blvd., Red Bluff (on the corner of Antelope Blvd. & Rio St., in the same complex as the Copy Center). Come meet with professional therapist Scott Howell, MFTI and other Tehama County adoptive families for support, networking and resource sharing. **Free childcare provided on-site.** All adoptive families welcome. For more information, call 530-727-9423 or email acurry@atvrb.org. **We look forward to seeing you there!**

25 Shasta County Parent Café: A New Year! A New You!

Wednesday, January 25, 5:30-8:30PM, Manzanita Elementary, 1240 Manzanita Hills Ave, Redding. Parents and primary caregivers are helping each other strengthen their families at Parent Cafés with intimate, energetic conversations where moms, dads, and primary caregivers build off each other's experiences to solve problems that could affect their own families. Make new friends, share ideas and learn about community resources. Parent Cafés are setup in a small group setting with multiple tables covered with large sheets of paper and colorful markers. Local parents - some of them trained facilitators - gather around to talk, listen and discover new insights on personal issues from managing stress to communication to discipline utilizing the five Protective factors. Free childcare provided for first 25 kids to RSVP. Free dinner. Please RSVP, due to limited space: Crystal at 530-242-2020 or cjohnson@shastacapc.org

FEBRUARY 2017

14 Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Group (FASD) (Chico)

Tuesday, February 14, 9:30-11:30AM, Lilliput Children's Services, 289 Rio Lindo Ave. Chico. Marji Thomas, MA, CCC is

facilitating this new support group, focusing on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. The FASD Support Group will provide general information, resources, referral information and provide a supportive circle for you and your family. Please join us every month for this new and informative support group. For more information, contact Alice McKee, MSW- 530.828.8731 AMcKee@Lilliput.org

21 Together on Purpose Network & Resource Group

Tuesday, February 21, 3:30 - 4:30PM

NEW LOCATION: Alternatives to Violence Counseling Center, 20 Antelope Blvd., Red Bluff (on the corner of Antelope Blvd. & Rio St., in the same complex as the Copy Center). Come meet with professional therapist Scott Howell, MFTI and other Tehama County adoptive families for support, networking and resource sharing. **Free childcare provided on-site.** All adoptive families welcome. For more information, call 530-727-9423 or email acurry@atvrb.org. **We look forward to seeing you there!**

23 Attachment and Understanding Trauma-Informed Care: How Attachment Styles Impact Attachment

Thursday, February 23, 9AM-4PM, Government Center Board Chambers, 915 Eighth St, Marysville. Presented by Ce Eshelman, LMFT. What is Trauma Informed Care? Learn what makes an experience a "trauma" and how such experiences create styles of relationship interactions, core beliefs about the self and others, and impairment in typical child development. Identify your parenting and attachment styles, identify your child's attachment style, develop a coherent narrative, understand trauma's impact on the brain and how corrective parenting heals Complex Developmental Trauma Who should attend? YOU if you are a relative

caregiver, guardian, foster/adoptive parent, of children from difficult beginnings, maltreatment, neglect, trauma, attachment breach, drug exposure, difficult pregnancy or brain trauma. About the facilitator: Ce Eshelman, LMFT, is a champion of adoptive parents, the founder of The Attach Place for Strengthening Relationships in Sacramento and author of a support book for adoptive parents – Drowning with My Hair on Fire: Insanity Relief for Adoptive Parents. She is an attachment therapist specializing in treating families with children diagnosed with Reactive Attachment Disorder, Complex Developmental Trauma, and attachment/abuse recovery challenges. **FREE EVENT.** Registration required. For registration link, email Leslie Damschroder at ldamschroder@sierraff.org or call 530-879-3861

More Resources for Adoptive Families:

Support Groups:

Yuba, Sutter, Colusa, Glenn Counties

For Support Groups held in Yreka, Mt. Shasta, Orland or Sacramento contact Leslie Damschoder at 530.879.3861

Butte County Post Adoptive Services

Support Group, Drop in Assistance, WRAP Family Support Group ... For info, call Miko: 530-209-0817, Heather: 916-475-7198 or Deborah: 530-896-1920

Education:

Sierra Forever Families

Seminars on topics like Attachment, Understanding Poverty, Understanding Trauma, and more. Leslie Damschoder 530.879.3861

The Attach Place Center for Strengthening Relationships

3406 American River Drive, Suite D
Sacramento, CA 95864
ce@attachplace.com (916) 403-0588



Talking with your Adopted Teen ...

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- Thoughts about birth parents may make teens feel disloyal to their adoptive family. This added guilt can make adoption conversations with parents extremely uncomfortable.

So, what's a parent to do?

First, parents must think about their teen. What is he like? (Quiet? Analytical? Dramatic?) What times of the day does she seem more receptive? Next, parents must be honest about their own communication style. Many teens complain that parents don't pay full attention when they are trying to talk. When teens actually want to talk, parents should take the time to really listen.

Five Principles for Effective Parent Communication with Teens:

One: Send a clear message that you are open and willing to talk about adoption. Find ways to reach out that diminish the chances of emotional confusion or overload. Many attempts will be rejected, but you may well get credit for the effort.

Kevin was a thoughtful, bright, and athletic 17-year-old who had never talked much about feelings and even less about adoption. One night, while he and his parents were watching television, a news story came on about an adoptee/birth family reunion. When Kevin abruptly got up and went to his room, his parents were certain it was because of the news story.

Kevin's parents knew that if they directly asked him for his thoughts on the news story, he would politely deny that he had any. Instead, they decided to send an e-mail to Kevin the next day. It read: "Kevin, We know we are being typical worried parents, but we love you very much and were wondering if you stopped watching TV because of the story about the young man meeting his birth mother and birth sister. If you had feelings about this, we just want you to know that we're here for you if there's anything you want to talk about. Love, Mom and Dad."

That night, Kevin wrote back: "I would never want to search. You're my mom and

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SPOTS WHERE ADOPTED TEENS GET STUCK

As adoptees mature into adulthood, issues related to the topics listed below may make life especially challenging for them and their families. Parents should be aware that concerns about any of these issues may play out in their teens' behavior.

DIFFERENCE:

- "I'm not like most kids; my family is different."
- "I don't look like my family."
- "I don't share my family's cultural or racial heritage."

REASON FOR ADOPTION:

- "Why was I given away? Was something wrong with me?"
- "My birth parents used drugs, abused or neglected me, etc. What does this mean about me?"
- "Why couldn't my birth parents solve their problems and keep me?"

MISSING INFORMATION:

- "What do my birth parents look like?"
- "My birth mother wasn't sure who my birth father was."

IDENTITY:

- "Who am I? Am I more like my adoptive parents or birth parents?"
- "How can I figure out who I am when I don't know much about my birth parents?"

LOYALTY:

- "I'll upset my adoptive parents if I ask too many questions about my birth parents."
- "Things were bad in my birth family, but I love my mom and grandmother and might live with them again some day. How can I still love my adoptive parents?"
- "I worry about my siblings who are in different placements."

PERMANENCE:

- "If my birth parents gave me away, it could happen again."
- "I'll be 18 soon. Will my parents still be there for me after I leave home?"

dad and that's it." Kevin's parents then shared their thoughts about searching, and their willingness to support him if he chose to search. Several weeks later at dinner, Kevin casually told his parents that he might like to meet his birth parents some day. They discussed that a bit and then Kevin changed the subject.

Some parents take a more indirect approach. In news stories, movies, and books, themes of loss, uncertainty, and complexity abound. Teens may be willing to share their feelings about such stories without having to directly address adoption or their own story.

Two: Communicate respect for your teen's feelings and show how much you value her opinion. This rule applies to all

situations with teens, but be especially careful of your emotions when discussing adoption. Your teen will be watching for signs that you are uncomfortable or disapproving.

Sixteen-year-old Maurya knew that she was conceived during a short-term sexual relationship when her birth mother was 17, and when she entered her junior year of high school, Maurya suddenly began dating several different guys and staying out past curfew. When her parents confronted her about her behavior, Maurya yelled, "I know you think I am a whore just like my birth mother!"

Maurya's behavior and words communicated the pain and anger she

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Talking with your Adopted Teen ...

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felt about her birth mother and her adoption. It was as if she were waiting for her parents to confront her and was relieved by her outburst, but her parents wisely sensed that they could not set limits without first exploring Maurya's feelings. After consulting with their daughter's therapist, Maurya's parents shared their concerns for her safety and well-being, and gently asked to hear Maurya's thoughts about her birth mother and her adoption story.

Because Maurya was willing to express her anger, her parents could talk with her about making different choices than her birth mother, and finding better ways to handle her anger. These discussions eventually relieved some of Maurya's pain and helped her to better understand and forgive her birth mother.

Three: Look for red flags in your teen's behavior. Certain behaviors signal what is going on inside. (See "Six Spots Where Adopted Teens Get Stuck" below.)

Lisa, 15, entered therapy after symptoms of school phobia, peer problems, and self-destructive behavior led to intense family conflicts. While exploring adoption issues, Lisa expressed an interest in her birth history. Without knowing who her birth parents were, she said, she couldn't figure out who she was. Lisa was also frustrated that her mom couldn't understand why she started wearing one green and one blue contact lens (her birth mom had blue eyes; her birth dad had green eyes).

Lisa's dramatic behavior reflected a desire to communicate, but it conflicted with a desire to keep thoughts private since she felt disloyal to her adoptive parents when she spent so much time thinking about her birth parents. Even though Lisa's mother knew about her daughter's conflicted sense of identity and interest in her birth parents, she missed Lisa's signal. As Lisa's mother admitted, she had been minimizing Lisa's feelings and had a very hard time "walking in Lisa's shoes."

Four: Share all available adoption information. Many parents want to protect their children from potentially painful aspects of their adoption story—birth histories, for instance, that involve drug abuse, mental illness, incarceration, or sexual assault. Teens, however, need birth family information as they work to figure out who they are while being supported within their families.

As Joyce Maguire Pavao writes in *The Family of Adoption*, "It is our job to protect our children...from harm. The greatest gift we can give children is to tell them their truths and to help them make sense of these truths, especially when they are complicated and harsh."

Five: Help your teen make connections to his heritage and past. Many adoptees find comfort in learning about and visiting places associated with their birth family or birth culture. A trip to the place a child was born (or a homeland tour for internationally adopted children) may enable her to connect to the past, answer questions, or better understand the choices that led to her adoption. Some teens prefer to seek direct contact with and answers from their birth family.

Jemal, 13, joined his adoptive family at age three after living with a foster family for a year and a half. While participating in a teen adoptee group, Jemal learned he was the only one there who had lived with a foster family before adoption. When Jemal began to ask questions about his former foster parents, his parents asked their child welfare agency if he could meet the family. The foster father had died, but the foster mother was delighted to see Jemal, tell him what he was like as a toddler, and show him pictures she had kept of him. The meeting was very positive for Jemal.

Getting Support

Normal adolescence, when overlaid with adoption issues, may increase a teen's need for guidance when emotions become overwhelming. Friends who are not adopted won't understand, nor will most school counselors. Teens may not let parents help either. The best resource

is a therapist trained in adoption issues who can normalize adolescence for adopted teens while watching for signs of adoption-related stress.

Debbie Riley, executive director of the Center for Adoption Support and Education, Inc., has been providing teen therapy for more than 25 years, and working with adoptees for the past 10 years. "Many wonderful adoptive parents," she notes, "find it hard to understand the power and depth of their children's feelings of ambivalence, uncertainty, and loss. Their responses often are not helpful, not because they don't try, but because they simply don't comprehend how powerful and necessary these extra tasks are." Adopted teens must deal with feelings about their birth and adoptive families.

Ms. Riley has found that parents often respond to their children's pain in ways that will make the parents feel more comfortable. Others may think they have made their teen feel better when they have only scratched the surface. Her advice: "Keep trying to walk in their shoes." Ms. Riley encourages parents to read more about teen issues and adoption, attend parent support programs related to the topic, and check the Internet for information and suggestions.

Finally, says Ms. Riley, "Teens need to know that parents are human too. We make mistakes, we miss things." The most important thing, she says, "is to let the kids know we are trying, that we care. Say to your teen, 'I feel really bad, but I don't understand what you're trying to tell me.' Or, 'I feel bad that I didn't get it.' Then, make an effort to learn more. Part of being an adoptive parent is trying to make sure your teens aren't walking alone."

Ellen Singer, an experienced clinical social worker, is an adoption specialist at the Center for Adoption Support and Education, Inc. (C.A.S.E.) in Maryland. At C.A.S.E. she leads support groups for adoptive parents,



offers trainings about adoption issues, and writes articles for parents and professionals. Ms. Singer is also an adoptive parent.

BOREDOM BUSTERS

R a N d o M WORD SEARCH

How many can you find?

- SPAGHETTI
- TRAMPOLINE
- SOCCER
- POTATO
- SHOVEL
- SKATEBOARD

(Solution on Page 2)

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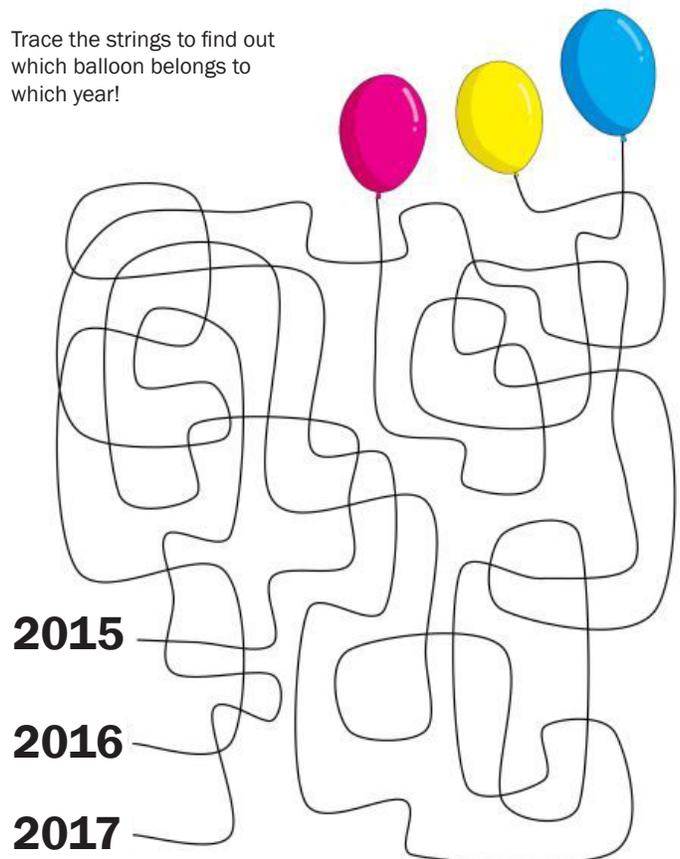
Finish the Alien...



... then give him a name!

NEW YEAR'S BALLOONS

Trace the strings to find out which balloon belongs to which year!



JAN
2017

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It's **STILL** not too late to get your ...
FREE STARBUCKS GIFT CARD
See inside for details!

Alternatives to Violence
1805 Walnut Street • Red Bluff, California 96080

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