

Adoption



Foster Care

The mission of Children's Aid Society is to identify and provide services to improve the lives of children and their families.

Post-Permanency Newsletter
Summer 2019

Everyone needs a role model

Everyone needs a role model. They teach us about ourselves. In children, they help to define what they feel is important and meaningful. Sometimes children compare themselves, and when they believe that they share characteristics, it can help them to believe in themselves. If they find similarities in the person they admire — In any way — It is easier to believe that they are ok themselves and provide an important kinship.

Role models can help teach:

Character – helping define what we admire and value, and

maybe over time, what we feel is less important.

Possibilities – we may not have thought we could obtain and which inspire us to keep trying and keep hoping.

Strategies – in handling life's challenges. This helps us think we, too, can overcome obstacles.

Goals – we may not have even dare set for ourselves if we didn't have a role model to inspire us!

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Same family ... different stories



Families with more than one adopted child obviously have children with different stories about how they joined the family. There are families who have both biological children in the family and children who became part of

the family through adoption. And of course, all families have children adopted through different adoption processes – domestic, international, perhaps all international but from different countries, public or private domestic adoption, and the list goes on and on. Even children who are adopted through the same process, e.g. private domestic (agency or independent adoptions) will certainly have their own unique story.

The various differences create

both enriching experiences as well as some interesting challenges.

One of the most important challenges for parents usually relates to concerns about sibling relationships and the perception each child has of his place in the family: "Was it better to be born or adopted into my family?" "Are we real sisters?" or "Do Mom (or Dad) like you the most because you are the same color as they are?" In addition, they may worry about how outsiders'

comment about the family. Most parents hope for wonderful, peaceful, and close relationships between their children, but as parents, we know that realistically this is not always be the case. No matter how we all grew up, parents can't predict how sibling relationships turn out....so it becomes important for adoptive parents to understand that when there is sibling friction or rivalry, it is not likely that it is due to how the child(ren) joined the family. In

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Low cost ideas for summer fun



Here are a number of wonderful low cost summer activities for kids and families that help families keep their hard-earned money in their pockets.

With each of these ideas, you might fashion "what to do" boxes. Create two boxes - one for "outside" and one for "indoors" - containing index cards with activities written on them. Rotate who in the family gets to pick the card for that day. This is a great way

to avoid activities that cost a lot of cash and a fun way to create a family plan.

Low or no cost outings and activities are something to consider for your own kids or a group of friends getting together that will create fun and memories without heating

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Are most days a battle from breakfast to bedtime?

Triple P — Positive Parenting Program can help! Free, private, in-home sessions will teach you how to adapt your own behavior to get the results you want from your child.

Available in Clearfield and Jefferson counties!

**To sign up or for more information,
call 814-765-2686 x206
or email ppp@childaid.org**

Paid for with Pennsylvania taxpayer dollars.

— Everyone —
(from Page 1)

Role models who are also adoptees are especially important for children. Adoption is a different experience that is not shared with everyone. It can affect a child's self-esteem and we know that during certain times of their lives, children may feel adoption somehow makes them less valuable. Role models help them to realize that there are millions of adoptees — and the majority grow up to be happy and successful. Sometimes adoption provides an opportunity to make children more resilient, or help them develop skills/interests they may not have otherwise.

It is important to provide them with opportunities to make connections with adoptees, regardless of whether their adoption stories are similar or not. Consider the fact that Washington D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams

can inspire every child, though few will share a common adoption story. Children can be empowered by learning how he incorporated his identity as an adoptee with the successful person he is today.

Did you know that these successful people were adopted?

Sarah McLachlan — a musician, songwriter, performer and winner of two Grammy Awards. She and her two older brothers were adopted.

Edward Albee — Playwright

John J. Audubon — Naturalist

Surya Bonaly — Olympic Figure Skater

Peter and Kitty Carruthers — Olympic Skaters

Christina Crawford — Author

Daunte Culpepper — football player, Minnesota Vikings

Faith Daniels — TV News Personality

Eric Dickerson — Pro Football Player

Melissa Gilbert — Actor

Scott Hamilton — Olympic Skater

Faith Hill — Singer

Steve Jobs — Founder, Apple Computer

Art Linkletter — TV Personality

Charlotte Anne Lopez — Miss Teen USA

Greg Louganis — Olympic Diver

James Michener — Author

Tom Monaghan — Founder, Domino's Pizza

Dan O'Brien — Olympic Gold Medalist

Jim Palmer — Pro Baseball Player

Dave Thomas — Founder, Wendy's

Because of the way adoption is portrayed in literature, the media, and Hollywood; children are likely to be unaware of how common it is for adoptees to grow up as successful, "normal" adults. Strive to surround them with that message. We can educate the world about the overwhelming success of adoptees. We can let EVERYONE know that there are many adoptees — some famous, others who are not — who can be role models for all!

— Low cost —
(from Page 1)

up your wallet or credit card bills:

- Visit a farm, pet store or the animal shelter
- Visit a fire station
- Have cooking lessons at home (bake bread, make homemade ice cream, grandma's cookies)
- Visit a pizza store (they'll sometimes let the kids make one for little or nothing)
- Visit a television station, radio station, or newspaper facility
- Visit the Department of Conservation's nature centers and enjoy educational exhibits
- Learn to knit or do needlework
- Get a giant piece of paper and colored pencils and draw your dream house interior view with all the details

- Participate in free summer reading programs and story times offered by many local libraries
- Visit zoos and museums that have free or reduced rates for kids on special days
- Have paper airplane or paper boat races or try making and flying your own kites (books at the library have the instructions)
- Put on a theatrical performance, a puppet show or a talent contest
- Write and illustrate a story
- Plant a small garden or container garden and watch it grow
- Have sack, peanut or egg races
- Plan a picnic as an activity
- Hold a bring-a-dish block party
- Rent a movie and have special "movie night"

snacks

- Take your kids on a tour of family history and photos
- Search garage sales as family fun and walk away with a few really good deals
- Play board games on rainy days
- Go swimming at the local lake, pond or pool (you can ask for a one day guest pass at a local YMCA to check out the facilities)
- Visit Vacation Bible Schools, Summer Bible Clubs, Kids Camps, Day Camps
- Walk, hike, and enjoy nature
- Go camping in the backyard
- And last but certainly not least ... make your own bubble solutions and spend hours dipping bubbles!

Adoption & Foster Care Support Group

Our support group meets the third Monday of each month from 6-8 p.m. Meet families like yours who share similar joys and concerns. Includes light dinner, child care, training hours, guest speakers and more! Call 765-2686 for information!

SWAN Post-Permanency Services



statewide
adoption and
permanency
network

These services are available to any family who has adopted and lives in Pennsylvania, whether or not they adopted their child from foster care, and to those families who have provided permanency to children from the foster care system through permanent legal guardianship or formal kinship care.

Families self-refer by calling the SWAN Helpline (800-585-SWAN) to request these services. The services are part of a continuum of services that strengthen and support families and assist in strengthening the special needs adoption community at the local level.



Join Real Relationships to learn how to improve communication, resolve conflict, and parent as a team! Skills benefit every relationship!

Upcoming workshops for unmarried couples:

June 8 | June 19 & 20 | July 20

Retreat for married couples:

July 12 & 13

Includes free catered meals and Sheetz cards!

To sign up
or for more info:

765-2686 x241 | realrelationships@childaid.org



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fact, it's probably just very normal! We must remember that sibling relationships are so complex – so much is dependent on each child's unique personality and temperament ... so sibling relationships are not always easy to influence– or control.

That being said, there are many ways for parents to help to influence sibling relationships in a positive way.

Comparisons (ick!)

For adoptive parents with more than one child, an important task is to diminish comparisons that might imply there's a difference in children's role or "status" in the family because of the route they joined the family. For example: parents need to be free to express their positive feelings about giving birth to a child as well as the joy they have experienced through the adoption of another child. We can't deny our feelings in an attempt to protect children from the realities of these wonderful differences. A family who was there for one child's birth can be glad for that experience as well as the excitement of flying to Texas to pick up their daughter. Through both indirect and direct ways, parents must continually send the message to their children that how each child joined the family is different – and wonderful – not better or worse.

Unfortunately, despite our repeated attempts at sending this message, children may reach their own conclusions about the differences and decide that their story was the "best" way or the "worst" way compared to a sibling's. Sometimes a biological child may think it's better to have been born to parents than adopted, but he just might also think that his sibling's adoption story is so interesting and exciting that maybe adoption is better. (I'm pretty sure my biological children think adoption is the "best". We gotta work on that!) When adopted children compare their stories, they may decide that one is "better" than the other – "He came as a baby so Mom and Dad love him more." or "She's the luckiest. She gets presents from her birthmother and gets to visit her, and I don't know my birthmother at all.") Sometimes one child may have more information about his birth family than his sibling(s); one child has a picture, another doesn't; one knows about both birth parents, another only about his birthmother, etc., all of which can potentially create feelings of confusion and jealousy.

Some parents try to minimize their children's pain by denying one child something to try to protect another. For example, they may want to limit contact with one child's birthmother because there is no possibility of contact for another child. This would be a big mistake because the child without contact could benefit enormously from contact with his siblings' birth parent despite the possible jealousy or pain it may cause. We have no contact with our 10 year old's birthmother (the birthmother wanted a closed adoption once she was placed). We have an open adoption

with our 3-year-old's birthmother. When her birthmother came to town several months ago, having her visit with our family, even though our 3-year-old didn't understand that this was her birthmother, I feel our 10 year old really enjoyed visiting with this birthmother and asking her questions.

In another example, I heard a story recently of an adoptive mother of two children who are now adults. The adoptive mother never gave her first child a blanket that had been knitted for him by his birthmother because she didn't have anything to give the other adopted child. It seems it would be better to not deprive one child of something meaningful and special, and instead, try to help the other child develop coping skills for sadness, disappointment, and even anger.

Comparisons are rarely a good thing, especially in adoption. Parents may want to consider making a family policy that differences are not to be used to hurt each other... but again, as parents, we know we can't control what goes on all the time. If parents try pick up on hurt feelings from their child, they can be more ready to provide reassurance and comfort to the child. They will be able to offer reassurance that what the child has heard (or maybe feels) from a sibling does not match the parents' feelings and attitude. It is crucial, however, to never discount the feelings of the child. Perhaps the parent could say, "I know you wish you had been with us when you were a baby, like your sister was. It seems that you're worried we might favor her because of that, but that's not at all how Dad and I feel. We love you. But I certainly understand how you might feel this way." Providing reassurance and validating feelings leaves the door of communication wide open for a child to express more feelings...ahh...every parent's goal!

Regardless of the route in which children entered the family, it is crucial for them to have a clear understanding of the reasons the family decided to adopt each child. As Holly van Gulden points out in *Real Parents, Real Children*, "it is important for children to believe the parents' motivation was based on love for a child, not a cause or some need the child would fulfill. Adopted children do not want to grow up believing that they were, in effect, a project for the parents. In bio/adopt families, if a child was adopted first into the family, they may also think they are no longer needed when the parents become pregnant. Birth children may think their parents adopted because they were not the right gender (or race). These thoughts may seem absurd or irrational to adoptive parents, but they may make perfect sense to their children. With this realization, parents can proactively make statements to help defuse the power of these musings." Read that again. It's beautiful.

Promote Your Children's Individual Strengths

A great way to ensure that children feel equally valued is to be very clear about the each unique and special characteristics each

child brings to the family. As parents, we often connect to our children for different reasons, and sometimes it's easier to connect with one child than to another. (And siblings, too, may connect for reasons having nothing to do with how they came into the family.) When families embrace a shared family culture that is based on differences as well as similarities that are valued by everyone, they are able to weather doubts about their connections to their parents. For example, a family who has been more geared toward academics can celebrate the uniqueness of a child who is athletic and recognize in a positive way that this talent is definitely a gift from the child's birthparents!



Providing Children With Individual Attention

Can we ever do this enough? It seems so obvious, but it's not always easy for parents to give each child in the family individual quality time. Different amounts of attention may be based on the child's particular needs (a child who has learning disabilities certainly needs more help with homework) or stage of development – (a toddler definitely requires more help.) But children can perceive these differences incorrectly, and despite our reasonable and lengthy explanations, they still worry that attention differences are favoritism. Given this reality, as parents, let's be aware of our children's feelings and acknowledge them. And of course, children can also try to manipulate parents into paying attention- or even get certain privileges– by charging that they are being treated unfairly: "You let him go with his friends, why can't I?" Try to not overreact when children try to use adoption as a hook – like, "You aren't my real mother!" or "You love him more because he's white like you!" and the list goes on and on...again 'normal' childhood behavior.

If we are consistent with our love and reassurance, and open and honest when questions come up, we are creating a family that is able to celebrate differences – and similarities – appropriately, and hopefully create love and harmony in our homes. And isn't that ultimately the goal of all parents... adoptive or otherwise?



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