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S.T.A.R. News

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National Adoption Month



November is National Adoption Month. It is a time when adoption is in the news. It began as State Adoption Week in the state of Massachusetts in 1976. In 1988, President Ronald Reagan made it into National Adoption Week.

The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) is a group that helps to find families for children in foster care. They thought that a week was too short, and that we needed a longer time for people to be paying more attention to adoption. So, in 1990 they suggested National Adoption Awareness Month. Later, President George H.W. Bush made it official.

National Adoption Month is about celebration, gratitude and hope, not about anger and disillusionment. It has become a popular time to hold adoption fundraisers, fairs and conferences, plan political action events, and more. It is a time when every adoption-touched family or professional or adoption-related support group should celebrate adoption.

Here is a list of creative ways in which you can celebrate Adoption Month.

Select one or more than one!

- * Contact your house of worship and arrange to donate altar flowers one Sabbath in November "In Honor of Children Waiting for Forever Families" or "In Celebration of this Congregation's Adoption-Expanded Families" or "In Gratitude to Birthparents who have Chosen Adoption."
- * Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about a positive adoption issue.
- * Buy an adoption-related book and donate it to Adoption STAR, or a classroom teacher's library, a day care center bookshelf, or a school library.
- * With a friend, volunteer to do a short presentation on adoption in a school or Sunday school classroom or for a scout troop.
- * Send a donation to your favorite adoption organization.
- * Have an adoption party...invite friends and family over for a casual get together to celebrate and recognize Adoption Month.
- * Call or write to someone and say, "Happy National Adoption Month!"
- * Drop by and visit your adoption agency just to say hello!

Remember it is up to you to help increase awareness and accurate information about adoption and those whose lives it touches. ☆

"...NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE W. BUSH, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim November 2007 as National Adoption Month. I call upon all Americans to observe this month with appropriate programs and activities to honor adoptive families and to participate in efforts to find permanent homes for waiting children."

Talking To Your Child About Adoption: 10 Steps

by Adoption STAR

Adoption STAR facilitates a class called, "Talking About Adoption." In this class prospective adoptive parents are challenged to look into the future and identify how they may handle adoption related situations based on the developmental stage of their child.

Talking about adoption is an overwhelming thought for many prospective adopters, many who have not yet even shared their desire to adopt with some family members, friends or co-workers. So adding the extra piece of how one would answer young children's questions about adoption can be intimidating.

The following list provides 10 suggestions on how we should talk to children about adoption.

1. Start Early. Yes, start talking to your child about adoption during infancy! Even though your child may not understand, it's practice for you. Your child, even as an infant, gets to hear the word "adopted" in a positive context. The word adoption becomes as commonplace as everyday terms.

2. Use Positive Adoption Language. Using appropriate adoption language such as "placed for adoption", "made an adoption plan", makes the process of adoption less intimidating than having your child hear words like, "given away" or "given up." It is your job to become familiar with positive adoption language so that you can naturally share your knowledge with your child and those around you.

3. Answer the Questions Your Child Asks. Be sure you know what your child is asking. If you are not sure what the question really is, ask your child what s/he means by returning the question to your child. Often a child does not have the same terminology as we do and you may not be answering your child's question at all. Listen to

your children and give them what they need, not what you need. A tall order, perhaps, but it is the real meaning of parenthood.

4. Be Honest. By being honest you must also consider your child's developmental stages. The adoption story belongs to your child, and the child has a right to know that story. It is natural for parents to want to make everything sound perfect and to take away any possible loss or pain for our children, but it doesn't give us the right to replace missing facts or soften harsh ones. "Developmentally appropriate" conversations require you to think carefully about how to discuss difficult issues without lying. "For example, if you know your child was conceived by rape, you don't want to start out by saying your mommy and daddy loved each other very much," says Lois Melina, author of *Making Sense of Adoption and Raising Adopted Children*. "You can say something that would imply that their parents didn't know each other very well." If you don't know the answer, say so. Show that you share your child's curiosity and that you would like to know too.

5. Include Information About Your Child's Actual Birth. Many adoptees report they grew up thinking they weren't born like other people are. In Adoption STAR's Talking About Adoption Class, participants often laugh when they hear about pre-schoolers explaining they weren't born, they were adopted. Sharing your child's birth story is as important as their adoption story. It is often missed because nobody talks about their birth, because it occurred before you. Share as much information as you have about your child's birth and if you aren't blessed with that information be sure to let your child know that s/he was born just like everyone else.

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6. Keep Talking. Don't wait for your child to raise the subject about adoption. Keep the communication lines open. Raise the subject every once in a while by saying, for example, "I was remembering when we adopted you and when we went to the agency..." or "I was just thinking of your birth mother and wondering..." Your child's understanding is developing and growing all the time. Don't assume that s/he got all the details the last time you spoke about it. Repetition helps a child absorb the concepts surrounding adoption. So it's important for the parent to revisit the information frequently. Another technique is to use indirect conversation, that's talking to another person while your child is in the room. This type of conversation allows parents to keep the subject open without forcing the child to participate. "It's directly meant for the child to hear, but it's not talking to the child," says Joyce Maguire Pavao, Ed.D., founder of the Center for Family Connections in Cambridge, MA, and author of *The Family of Adoption*. For example, she says, a dad—knowing his child is nearby—might ask his wife, "I always think of Lisa on Mother's Day because she's Sally's birthmother. Should we buy flowers for Lisa and put them on the mantel in honor of her, or should we send her a card?"

Another idea is as adoption expert, Holly van Gulden calls, "leaving pebbles." You make a small comment about a topic and then see if the child responds. For example, a stranger's nosy questions could prompt you to say later, "Wow, that woman was really nosy about our family, I wonder what she was thinking?" Wait to see what, if anything, your child says and use that response to set the course of conversation. Also don't forget that the direct approach may work just as well by simply asking, "Do you have any questions about adoption?"

7. Talk About Birth Parents. No matter the type of adoption, refer to your child's birth parents by their name, if known. Your positive attitude and comfort to talk about your child's birth parents is very important in building your child's self-esteem. It also sends a message to your child that you are there for them to talk to and if they ask about their birth parents, it will not upset you. Adult adoptees often share that they were concerned they were hurting their adoptive parents if they asked questions about their birth parents.

8. Acknowledge and Accept Your Child's Feelings. Listen for the feelings behind your child's comments and questions. Curiosity and sadness are natural responses to being adopted. Don't take expressions about wanting to meet birth parents as a

reflection on you or your parenting. We don't like to see our children experiencing sadness or pain, but adoption is a mixture of joy and pain, loss and gain for all of us. Acknowledge this and help to make your child feel comfortable about talking about it. It is also beneficial with young children to help them develop a feeling-word vocabulary. Also look for nonverbal ways to help your child work through adoption issues. Some children might benefit from drawing pictures about their adoption story. Older children can write in a journal.

9. Prepare a Lifebook. Lifebooks are storybooks for children and are excellent ways to share your child's adoption story with them. Be sure to include birth family information, foster family, orphanage, etc., as applicable. Include photos of birth family if available.

10. You Are the Parent. As a parent, you know your child best, don't forget that. You are your child's parent and talking about adoption will be comfortable in time if you allow yourself to acknowledge you are the expert, you are the parent. As adopted children develop adoption understanding, increasingly complex questions and issues arise. The more comfortable you are as parents, the more your child will entrust their questions, thoughts and feelings to you. This is the cornerstone of communication within a healthy family. Parents need support too, so don't forget to also lean on adoption professionals. Remember Adoption STAR is here for you. Join SOFIA, the adoptive parent support group, if you haven't already. Talk to other adoptive parents, share and learn from them. ☆



WE NEED YOUR E-MAIL ADDRESS!

Whether you are a client of Adoption STAR or not, we would love to have your E-Mail address! If you have not provided the agency with your E-Mail address please do so today by calling the agency at 716-639-3900 or by E-Mailing the agency at info@adoptionstar.com.

Many of you provided your E-Mail addresses to us when you first contacted the agency, but often E-Mail addresses change. Please update the agency with your most recent E-Mail address. *If you do not have an E-Mail address, but do have access to a computer, we would highly recommend that you obtain a free E-Mail address. And you can do so through many search engines, like Yahoo or MSN.*



Journaling Corner

Whether you have made an adoption plan for your child or you are waiting to adopt or you are currently parenting, journaling is a great way to organize your thoughts and feelings and to learn more about yourself.

You don't have to limit yourself to writing in your journal. You can draw and paste pictures in it that have meaning to you. Be creative and use the journal to express ALL of who you are!

Journaling has been scientifically proven as an effective tool in stress reduction and personal growth and development. As one of the easiest and most powerful ways to accelerate your personal development, journaling

allows you to get your thoughts out of your head and put them down in writing. Through this process we are often able to gain insights we'd otherwise never see. There are many benefits to journaling including: solving difficult problems, gaining clarity and verifying your progress.

Adoption STAR believes that journaling is a valuable tool in personal development. In helping you in your journey toward the best self you can be, we will provide you with a journaling topic in each issue. Please feel free to use these as a guide to

Journaling Topic:

MY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

What did you accomplish today?

~ An accomplishment can be as simple as picking up the house or as complex as finishing a big project!

This book covers the choices a birth mother has to make. Julia liked this one too, but it is more serious than the Tell Me Again... book.

Did My First Mother Love Me? By Kathryn Ann Miller

We did not read this to Julia, the details and concept of birth mother are completely clear to her and we felt this may just confuse things. We liked the book but think it will be better for her down the road when more clarification is needed.

If anyone would like to share a book review on any children's or adult book related to adoption and parenting, please email your thoughts to michele@adoptionstar.com.

BOOK REVIEWS

By Scott Farrell, Adoption STAR Dad

I borrowed five children's books about adoption. Adoption STAR's advice is to read the books and feel comfortable with them prior to introducing them to a child. My wife and I enjoyed reading and re-reading the following books:

Max and the Adoption Day Party by

Adria F. Klein and Mernie Gallagher-Cole
A great story that is simple and lighthearted. It brings up the concept of adoption without going into too much detail. We usually start with this book. Of course Julia wants a party also but, we explained to her that there is only one day between her birthday and her adoption day and two parties might be too much!

Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born, by Jamie Lee Curtis

A fun story that opens up all kinds of conversations about Julia being born, usually leads to getting out all of her newborn pictures and us talking about her story which is great.

How I Was Adopted, by Joanna Cole

It goes over how babies are born in a great introductory way, talks about how some babies stay with their birth mothers and some are adopted. It was well received by Julia who brought up good questions about her sister being in Mommy's belly and her being in someone else's belly. She didn't seem too perplexed by that.

This is How We Became a Family,

by Wayne Willis



Julia and Dad



Jacob



Jayden



Zacheus



Oliver



SOFIA

*Supporting Our Families Interested In Adoption:
an Adoptive Family Support & Social Group of Adoption S.T.A.R.*

Adoption S.T.A.R. believes that support is critical to achieving the goal of finding permanent, stable, loving families for children, as well as maintaining those families who have already adopted. Parents need information that will strengthen their families, and enable them to handle the challenges of adoptive parenthood. Sofia is a group that embraces family through membership meetings, educational workshops and social gatherings for adoptees, their families and extended family. Sofia's mission is to welcome families involved in all types of adoptions, including agency, private, international, foster care or kinship. Sofia supports adoptive families in all stages of adoption and offers information and education to adoptive families and the community at large.

The involvement in a support group reduces the likelihood of adoption disruption or dissolution.

Please consider joining Sofia even if you are not a client of Adoption S.T.A.R. You and your family will not only find support, but new friendships as well. You will meet many adoptive families whose experiences with adoption are priceless.

For more information on SOFIA contact Kathy Crissey at kathy@adoptionstar.com



SOFIA PRE AND POST ADOPTION CLASSES 2008

All classes are held Wednesdays from 6:30 pm - 8:30 pm at 47 Plaza Drive in Williamsville. They are FREE for SOFIA members and \$5 per family for Non-SOFIA members.

February 6 – Baby Care Class -- a class facilitated by a registered nurse is specifically geared for prospective adoptive parents on how to care for their new baby.

March 5 – Financial Planning for the Adoptive Family -- a class back by popular demand featuring a local accountant and financial planner who are adoptive parents themselves.

May 7 – Transracial Adoption Panel -- this new class will feature members of the adoption triad discussing and answering questions regarding transracial and transcultural adoption.

June 4 – Growing in your Adoption of a Child with Special Needs -- this new class will feature special needs professionals and parents of children with special needs and will help you learn to navigate the special needs system, including but not limited to medical care, special education, and other support services. The class will also deal with the emotions involved in raising and identifying a child has special needs and growing up with that child.

September 10 – Hair Care Class -- this hands-on, how-to class is a big hit with parents of African American and Biracial children.

SOFIA MEETINGS/EVENTS FOR 2008

- **Disney On Ice** – Saturday, January 19 at 11:00 am (Rochester) and Saturday, February 2 at 3:00 pm (Buffalo)
- **Steering Committee Meeting** – March Batavia Restaurant
- **Birth Mother's Day Celebration** – Saturday, May 10 at 11:00 am Randall Baptist Church , Williamsville
- **Adoption Day at Fantasy Island** – Saturday, June 28
- **Steering Committee Meeting** – August Batavia Restaurant
- **Halloween Bash** – Saturday, October 11 at 11:00 am (Rochester and Buffalo)
- **Steering Committee Meeting** – November – Batavia Restaurant

Birth Mother's Holiday Party

It is not too early to begin planning for the birth mother's holiday party which is December 15. Many of our birth mothers struggle to give the children they are parenting presents at the holidays. We are seeking donations of brand new toys so that we can give these to our birth mothers at the birth mother holiday party. Toys can be dropped off at the office or call Kathy at Adoption STAR or e-mail Kathy@adoptionstar.com, if you can help with this.

If you have a gift for your child's birth mother or the child(ren) she is raising, you MUST plan early by getting them to the agency for delivery. If your child's birth mother will not be present at the birth mother's holiday party, you will be required to cover the expenses incurred by shipping/delivering the gift(s).

Holiday cards are encouraged to be sent to your child's birth families, however only plan to send gifts specifically if you already have an ongoing reciprocal relationship with your child's birth family.

Gifts that are received after December 13 will not be promised delivery by Christmas.

All gifts and cards delivered to the agency on behalf of your child's birth family should be sent attention: Anna Steinberg. Anna is responsible for Post Adoption Correspondence.



New Statute Mandates More Scrutiny of Adoptive and Foster Parents

On July 27, U.S. President George Bush signed into law legislation requiring states to investigate adoptive and foster parents in national crime and state child abuse registries prior to being approved to take custody of a child. The "Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006" (P.L. 109-248), introduced by Rep. F. James Sensenbrenner, Jr., is a comprehensive statute intended to protect children from sexual and other violent crimes by expanding the national sex offender registry and establishing a national child abuse and neglect registry, increasing federal penalties for crimes against children, and protecting children from exploitation on the Internet. The new statute includes "Masha's Law" - named for Masha Allen, a Russian adoptee who was sexually abused and exploited by her adoptive father - which dramatically increases civil penalties for anyone who downloads child pornography off the Internet from \$50,000 to \$150,000. To read the new statute, go to: <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c109:h4472> to read the White House press release and fact sheet, go to:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/07/20060727-6.html>

Due to the above new federal legislation there have been some very recent and important changes concerning the home study process/investigation into the background of prospective adoptive parents in compliance with NYS and Federal Requirements.

A.C.E. is a support group for adult adoptees, ages 18 and up. Adoption is a very natural way a family is formed. Though adoption is often referred to as a triangle, or triad -- adoptive parents, birth parents and the adoptee at each corner -- Adoption STAR prefers to see it as a circle. The circle is a complete series forming a connected whole; a cycle. It encompasses a number of persons bound by a common tie; a family circle. An adoptee's life is full of varying experiences. For some these experiences include security and stability, for others even if their adoption journey has been happy, it may include feelings of loss and separation. A.C.E. is a comfortable group to share these experiences with. A.C.E. hopes to enable all members to learn and grow from their experiences.

Although A.C.E. is not a search group, there will be resources available to help begin a search as well as support available from members of the group that have undergone a search themselves. Most importantly A.C.E., along with Adoption STAR, is able to provide the availability of others who understand the emotions and choices in seeking a birth family. A search may or may not be for everyone and A.C.E. will respect one's decision. A.C.E. hosts meetings, social events and provides information and referral. For more information contact Christian Eshelman at



A.C.E. MEETINGS 2008

Meetings are 6:30 pm – 8:00 pm and are held at 47 Plaza Drive in Williamsville.

Wednesday, February 13

Thursday, April 17

Wednesday, June 18

Thursday, August 14

Wednesday, October 15

Thursday, December 11

they have resided to check against the child abuse and neglect registry in each state. Unfortunately, there is no national child abuse database (yet) so each state will need to be contacted and each state's forms and regulations for clearance checks will need to be followed. New York State's SCR clearances take anywhere from 2 weeks to 6 weeks to receive clearances, it is unknown how long such clearances will take in other states.

If you have any questions regarding this new law and how it affects you, please do not hesitate to contact Adoption STAR. Adoption STAR is committed to the best interests of the



The Power of Words

By Michele Fried

Those of you who know me well, know I love quotes. I guess I am a quote collector if there is such a thing. I love quotes from famous people and from those known by just a few. I love words and the meanings they possess. I love how sometimes just a few words can affect so many people and give them insight and inspiration.

I was reading something my cousin wrote to his daughter. He posted it on her blog. His daughter is 26 and lives overseas as she is in what some consider the holy land studying to become a clergy. He writes to her telling her how proud he is of her and how much he looks forward to traveling a great distance to see her. He writes about his itinerary and the length of time – the many miles and many, many tiring hours that will pass – before he will see her, and then he writes, “But a journey to a child is never long.”

Those words just stopped me from reading and I read them over and over again. You know, it was one of those moments when I just fell in love with words, when I needed to cut and paste them and email them to myself, when I wish I said them myself. How profound. How meaningful. How true.

I love the word “journey” and use it daily when I speak to clients about what they are embarking on. There is not a day that goes by when those of us at the agency listen, support, and give encouragement to those who wait to become parents.

Waiting is so difficult. For some it can illicit intense emotions and for others physical pain. I frequently share that when your baby is placed in your arms, the wait becomes meaningless and somehow all that time disappears. The wait, I have been told and can tell you from my own experience just simply becomes “worth it.” For some their journeys are simple and sweet and for others it is bumpy, perhaps a bit roller-coaster like. However your journey has gone or will go, if you stick with it, perhaps change your route here or there, you will arrive at your dreamed of destination. I believe whole heartedly that you will feel that

your journey had a purpose and your child was meant to be yours.

Another neat quote came to me when speaking to a waiting client about birth mothers selecting the right profile for them. I loved what she told me and she said that she read it on our online group. It was written by a fellow adoptive parent, AmyJo Lauber. So I contacted AmyJo and she emailed me the words she used to help others understand the “selection” process: “A birth parent doesn't choose her child's adoptive parents like choosing from a Chinese menu but, rather, recognizes them.” Another profound sentence that made me read it over and over again. I just love it. I love it because it's true. AmyJo describes her thoughts when writing these words, “Of course, I'm making a huge assumption but that's truly how I feel it works. Just like when you meet someone and you feel you've known them forever, it's more like you remember them.”

How we struggle to describe what is un-describable – the act of a woman deciding who will parent her child. We are always asked, “Why were we chosen?” and of course, “Why weren't we chosen?” While at times reasons for both are available, many times, even the woman herself can not find the words to describe the why's but rather the fact that she “just knows.” AmyJo's understanding of the process and her special words, and my cousin's words to his daughter, hopefully will help those who sometimes feel adoption is just a competition to begin to realize that it is also a part of the journey. We must remember that a birth parent has a journey to travel too. Eventually they will intersect because it is with these two paths that the child begins his own ☆

Submissions Requested

Would you like to submit something to our newsletter?

Submissions may include:

- Your adoption story
 - Poetry
 - Pictures
- Articles relating to pre or post adoption or parenthood

If you're interested in submitting, please do so by emailing us at

info@adoptionstar.com

***We can not promise submission will be printed.*

***All submissions are subject to editing.*



★ Happy National Adoption Month!!

November is a perfect time of year to celebrate Adoption
(please see inside for some great ideas on celebrating national adoption month...)



Please consider supporting Adoption STAR by making a
tax-deductible donation
in honor of this special month
and the wonderful work that Adoption STAR does!

