



Support. Education. Local Events.  
*for Adoptive Families*



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The PARC newsletter is published quarterly. Please direct questions and comments to [parcnewsletter@bethany.org](mailto:parcnewsletter@bethany.org)

Bethany Christian Services is a nonprofit, private social services agency with more than 115 offices located in 36 states. In addition, Bethany offers social services to children and families in 15 countries.



**[www.bethany.org](http://www.bethany.org)**

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## Planning Forward: Navigating Birth Family Contact

Things have become increasingly more complicated for adoptive families raising children who have experienced life in the child welfare system. While many adoptive families can navigate healthy connections with their children's biological family, some families must maintain stricter privacy for safety reasons or at the recommendation of a mental health professional. We understand that every family is unique. The trouble is that we live in the age of instant information.

Want to know something? *Google it!*

Want to find your birth family? *Look them up on social media!*

While it may not always be that easy, we do understand that with a few clicks of the mouse, our children can have access to more information than we may want them to have. Especially for preteens and teens, a smart phone, school IPAD, or Chromebook may give them the ability to find birth family members without you ever knowing about it.

Preparing for healthy birth parent contact in the information age is just smart parenting. While some adoptive parents must work through their own personal worries or fears, most parents want to be equipped to handle tough situations before they happen! If our children are going to have healthy contact with anyone, it requires us to be involved.

This newsletter is designed to help. We want to help you think about planning for any contact with your child's birth parent. There is an adage that failing to plan is planning to fail. Even if you are uncomfortable with the thought of your child reconnecting with their birth family, your support and guidance is very important to your child. Connecting with people in this global world is easier than it has ever been. In this issue, we want to give you strategies, resources, and tips to be prepared for those challenges.

Adapted from the article, *Safety Planning for Birth Parent Contact* by Rosemary Jackson, LMSW, Michigan State University, School of Social Work, Mac Ballantine, Adoptive Parent, 2014 (used with permission).



## DID YOU KNOW ...

### Medical Subsidy Funds are Available for Summer Camp

Summer is a great time to take advantage of a little extra boost. If your child struggles in the traditional camp setting or just requires extra structure, consider one of many local specialized summer camp options. The medical subsidy program may cover up to \$500 per calendar year for the cost of a specialized summer camp, if your child has a related physical, mental, or emotional condition certified by the Adoption and Guardianship Assistance Office. To discuss the authorization process for summer camp, contact your local Post-Adoption Resource Center!

Looking for help to navigate technology and the latest apps your kids are using? Check out the following parent resource:

Protect Young Eyes exists to keep kids and teens safe from the dangers lurking on portable, internet-ready devices.

[protectyoungeyes.com](http://protectyoungeyes.com)



## Quotes to Inspire You

"Keep your face to the sun and you will never see the shadows." —Helen Keller

# Safety Planning for Birth Parent Contact

Studies show that there are benefits when an adoptee is free to ask questions and have information surrounding their history and biological family. Many adoptive families and birth families have proven that there can be good collaboration and healthy relationships through open adoption. (Siegel & Smith, 2012)

While many families find a way for those connections with their child's birth family, there are times when safety keeps that from happening. In those cases, a good safety plan can benefit the adoptive family. Any good safety plan begins with a conversation between the adults in the family about what they will do should their child have contact with his/her birth family. It's important that **all** adults are on the same page and know what the plan is should a crisis arise.

## GOOD SAFETY PLANS:

- Are family specific and addresses the entire family group;
- Must be implemented and remain active as long as a potential crisis exists;
- Establish the family's immediate response to a potential danger and clearly describe the specific safety actions and other responsibilities of all family members.

## Putting together a safety plan also requires the following steps:

- **Before an incident or crisis occurs, talk to your child.** The conversation surrounding your child's history should be started early and always open for discussion. Let your preteen/teen know what expectations you have regarding contact with their birth families and include:
    - What type of contact is acceptable and what is not.
    - Whether or not you expect that your child will let you know if he/she is contacted by the birth parent.
    - That you are responsible for the well-being of the child and that you have his/her best interest in mind.
  - **Specify what type of contact will be allowed.** If contact has been initiated, it is vital to be clear with your child about the boundaries that must be in place. Good questions to ask:
    - Is your child allowed contact through telephone and social media?
    - Can your child have in-person contact with birth family—what type of contact and with whom specifically?
    - Does contact need to be supervised by you or someone you have designated?
    - Can contact be spontaneous or does it need to be scheduled in advance?
  - **In the event of a crisis that arises around contact with a birth family member, specify who is to be notified and how.** Plans could include notification of any of the following:
    - Authorities—When calling police or other legal authorities, have a copy of your Final Order of Adoption on hand. The police can initially consider this nothing more than a civil matter and will not want to get involved unless you can prove the situation is parental interference.
    - The school—Notify your child's school in advance of the people allowed to pick up your child.
    - Other family members who can be called to help.
    - Birth family members who you are in contact with.
    - Others—friends and neighbors.
- Good plans include the telephone numbers of everyone listed so in the heat of the moment it is easy to follow through with the plan. Make sure to talk to everyone in advance who is listed on your safety plan so they understand they may be contacted should a crisis arise.**
- **In the event of a crisis, spell out what steps are to be taken and in what order.** If your child has been in contact with a birth family member, let them know what they should expect. Will you:
    - Use parental control setting if the contact is through social media?
    - Contact the birth family member directly to discuss the situation?
    - Notify your child that you are aware of the situation and have taken steps to bring him/her into compliance with the agreed upon plan?
    - Take other steps that have not been discussed but seem appropriate for the situation?



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  - Take other steps that have not been discussed but seem appropriate for the situation?

**Whatever steps you have agreed to need to be clearly stated in the plan. Review the safety plan with your children so everyone in the family understands and can ask questions or offer suggestions. Don't be afraid that broaching this topic with your child will plant seeds about birth family contact they had not thought of. Most children do think about making contact. Talking about the subject will not make it happen but will allow for everyone to be on the same page and navigate a healthy approach to connection. It will also allow you to anticipate and plan for contact with a birth parent in an acceptable way, helping everyone feel like they are more in control should a difficult situation arise.**

## local events & training & family activities

All three Post-Adoption Resource Centers have many family fun events planned, as well as support groups and trainings. Please check your Post Adoption Resource Center region's Facebook page, watch for monthly calendars, or give us a call to find out what is available near you.

**REGION 2:**  
**Northern Michigan**  
231-421-6492  
[parctc@bethany.org](mailto:parctc@bethany.org)

[www.facebook.com/  
PostAdoptionResource  
CenterOfNorthernMI](http://www.facebook.com/PostAdoptionResourceCenterOfNorthernMI)

**REGION 3:**  
**Central Michigan**  
231-924-3390  
[parcfr@bethany.org](mailto:parcfr@bethany.org)

[www.facebook.com/  
PostAdoptionResource  
CenterCentralMichigan](http://www.facebook.com/PostAdoptionResourceCenterCentralMichigan)

**REGION 4:**  
**Western Michigan**  
616-224-7565  
[parcgr@bethany.org](mailto:parcgr@bethany.org)

[www.facebook.com/  
PARCRegion4](http://www.facebook.com/PARCRegion4)



Moms enjoyed spending time together while making winter décor signs for their homes at The Hang Workshop in Traverse City.

### PARC Family Event Survey Responses

“Thank you so much for having this event—a great opportunity for parents to have some quality time. Much appreciated!”

“Everything that I have had the opportunity to attend has been done with love, compassion, and has been professionally-handled. Thank you all so very much.”



Taking a break from the fun to enjoy some pizza!



Families enjoyed a floating inflatable obstacle course at the Alpena Plaza Pool!

## Adoptive Youth and Social Media:

### TIPS FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

- Talk with your child about adoption and birth family connections, and answer his or her questions.
- Present options for learning more about birth relatives, when the child is interested, and emphasize the benefits of preparation and support.
- Discuss the benefits and risks of Facebook and other social networking sites, and provide guidance for safe use.
- Establish internet rules at an early age (such as not giving out identifying information, including a birth date, address, or phone number).
- Prepare your child for the possibility that a birth family member could contact him or her through social media, and discuss possible responses.
- Set privacy controls.
- Monitor your child's internet and social networking use. (Join the same social networks as your child, become your child's online "friend," and request passwords for their social media accounts.)

*Resource credit: <https://childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-openadopt/> This material may be freely reproduced and distributed. However, when doing so, please credit Child Welfare Information Gateway.*



Bethany Christian Services is committed to supporting adoptive families through the lifelong, rewarding journey of adoption.

**REGION 2**  
Bethany Christian Services  
1055 Carriage Hill Dr, Ste 2  
Traverse City, MI 49686  
231-995-0870  
[www.bethany.org/traversecity](http://www.bethany.org/traversecity)

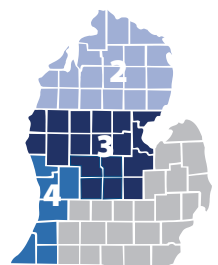
Charlevoix, Emmett, Cheboygan, Presque Isle, Antrim, Otsego, Montmorency, Alpena, Leelanau, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Crawford, Oscoda, Alcona, Manistee, Wexford, Missaukee, Roscommon, Ogemaw, and Iosco counties

**REGION 3**  
Bethany Christian Services  
6995 West 48th St  
Fremont, MI 49412  
231-924-3390  
[www.bethany.org/fremont](http://www.bethany.org/fremont)

Mason, Lake, Osceola, Clare, Gladwin, Arenac, Oceana, Newaygo, Mecosta, Isabella, Midland, Bay, Montcalm, Gratiot, Saginaw, Ionia, Clinton, and Shiawassee counties

**REGION 4**  
Bethany Christian Services  
901 Eastern Ave NE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49503  
616-224-7565  
[www.bethany.org/grandrapids](http://www.bethany.org/grandrapids)

Allegan, Berrien, Cass, Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa, and Van Buren counties



[postadoptionrc.org](http://postadoptionrc.org)