



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



## In this Issue:

Introduction

Talking Trauma

Resources and Books

Conversation Starters:  
Kids Movies with  
Adoption Themes

Events, Training,  
and Family Activities

Bethany Locations  
& Counties Served

Websites

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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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**A**s a parent, I remember the day my oldest child spoke his first word. It was a day of celebration, and I couldn't wait until he said it again. Fast-forward twenty-three years and four children later, I confess that the best time of my day is when those same children are sleeping, and no one is talking!

Maybe you have kids who talk a lot too. But when it comes to their trauma, this can be something that frightens us to hear. While some kids share openly right from the start, others can be reluctant to talk about the past or about traumatic events.

Parents are the key players in helping their adopted children heal and make sense of their past. They help them find the freedom and words to tell their story. In this issue of our newsletter, we want to help you help your children. Often parents don't know where to start, how to respond to shocking realities of past abuse, or how to encourage their children to see that the world is now a safer place to be.

One thing I've learned being an adoptive parent is that it's often less about what I say to my kids in those moments and more about being present and empathetic when my children need to have their say. This provides the groundwork where healing can happen. Fighting my urge to "fix it" and being emotionally and physically present to care for them while they put their own words together seems to be the healing trend.

And isn't that the beauty of adoption?

Every child, finding their place to be heard.

Every child, receiving love and compassion to bind up those wounds.

And every parent, finding the courage to lead their children through the process of making peace with the past so they can move forward into a hope-filled future.

*Kim Waldie, Post-Adoption Resource Center, Region 2 Supervisor*

"Not all of us can do great things, but we can  
do small things with great love."

—Mother Teresa

**T**rauma is a complex topic that can be hard to talk about with your child. While working with a therapist is important during this process, many children seek comfort and guidance from their caregivers.

Unfortunately, it's hard to predict when or where the conversation will start. Once it begins, however, caregivers should be present and open to listen. Dr. Bruce Perry, in his article "Helping Traumatized Children: A Brief Overview for Caregivers," says, "If a child senses that her caregivers are upset about the event, she will not bring it up." If you feel lost when talking to your child about their trauma or with how to answer their questions, be reassured that it can be challenging for the most experienced adult! Don't be afraid to find your own support system (counselor, PARC, friends, etc.) during this process.

When talking trauma, the first step is helping children understand what trauma is. The official definition of trauma is "a psychologically distressing event that is outside the range of usual human experience, often involving a sense of intense fear, terror and helplessness" (Perry, 2014). Obviously, your child may not have the age-appropriate language to understand this definition. Using age-appropriate language to explain trauma can be extra helpful for your child. Stephanie Grant, director of infant mental health and trauma informed communities at Developmental Enhancement Behavioral Health (Holland, MI), in her presentation on talking to kids about trauma, suggests having a conversation with your child, expressing that trauma is "something that happens that really hurts you, really upsets you, and really scares you. Trauma can hurt your body, your feelings, or both." This can open the door for them to share the scary things that have happened to them.

Second, it can also be helpful to share with your child how trauma impacts the developing brain when a child doesn't feel safe. Those "scary things that happen" impact how our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors form as a survival response to that traumatic event. Whether it was abuse, neglect, prenatal exposure, or exposure to domestic violence, they eventually

begin to understand that their own history had an impact on them because of trauma. Through your encouragement, they can also understand that there is hope for change! If your child doesn't remember her history of abuse, her actions and feelings



Talking trauma is something you can do. Your child desperately needs to make sense of their story.

can cause frustration, and she can easily buy into the lie that "I'm just a bad kid." Dr. Grant recommends talking to our kids about how our brains grow, develop, and work, and teaching them this truth: "they're not bad kids, they're good kids that have had bad things happen to them."

Eventually the conversation will turn to your child's personal story. The timing of the conversation is important. Dr. Perry says that it is sometimes difficult for a child to process trauma too soon after the event. As time goes on,

their ability to understand and make sense of it should increase. He recommends allowing children the freedom to bring up the topic of their own trauma first without forcing them.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network provides a few tips to parents regarding things to avoid in keeping those conversations positive and healthy:

- 1. Words that invalidate how your child feels about what happened.** (E.g., "That's not how it happened," or "You shouldn't feel that way.") Invalidating your child's feelings will make him uncomfortable or even shut down future conversations.
- 2. Lecturing your child.** Focus on your child's feelings, and give them freedom to talk about their struggle. Your curiosity shouldn't shift into an interrogation.
- 3. Telling your child what to feel.** (E.g., "You shouldn't feel that way.") Sometimes your child's feelings will surprise you. They may even communicate positive feelings for their abuser. "Should" statements imply that your child has no right to feel the way he or she feels.
- 4. Not acknowledging their feelings.** Children from trauma need reassurance from their caregivers that their feelings matter and are valued.

## Quotes to Inspire You

"Advice is like the snow. The softer it falls, the longer it dwells upon and the deeper it sinks into the mind."—Samuel Taylor Coleridge

# Talking Trauma (continued)

Like most things in the adoption process, talking trauma will take time and will be an ongoing conversation that will be revisited throughout your child's developmental growth. Don't be surprised if your child asks the same questions over and over. Don't forget to share information with your child's therapist. Dr. Perry reminds caregivers of this important truth: *"In the long run, the opportunity to process and re-process many times will facilitate healthy coping."* That's a goal we can all get on board with!

Talking trauma is something you can do. Your child desperately needs to make sense of their story. Having these discussions allows them to feel heard, to feel valued, and to develop those skills. Even when you don't have the words, your listening ear, support, and willingness to go with your child back into their past hurt can bring a comfort and healing that can last a lifetime.

Grant, Stephanie. *How To Talk About Trauma to Kids*. Presented at Adoptive & Foster Parent Fall Conference, Traverse City, MI, October 2017.

Tuning in to Your Child's Emotions: Tips for Parents. *Trauma-Informed Parenting: Supplemental Resources*. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: [www.NCTSN.org](http://www.NCTSN.org), 2016.

Perry, B. D. *Helping Traumatized Children: A Brief Overview for Caregivers*. CTA Parent and Caregiver Education Series, Volume 1: Issue 5. ChildTrauma Academy Press, 1999.



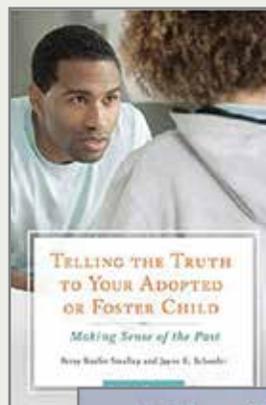
## Resources and Books



### Conversation Starters Kids Movies with Adoption Themes

- The Blind Side
- The Tigger Movie
- Annie
- Elf
- Lilo & Stitch
- Tarzan
- Meet the Robinsons
- Despicable Me
- Martian Child
- Anne of Green Gables

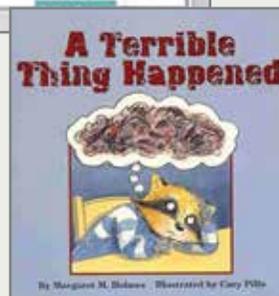
### Suggested Reading



#### Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child:

Making Sense of the Past

Betsy Keefer Smalley  
& Jayne E. Schooler



#### A Terrible Thing Happened

Margaret M. Holmes

### Quotes to Inspire You

"To appreciate the beauty of a snowflake it is necessary to stand out in the cold."—Aristotle

# Local Events, Training & Family Activities

All three Post-Adoption Resource Centers have many family fun events planned for winter, as well as support groups and trainings. 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  
231-421-6500  
parctc@bethany.org

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

**REGION 3:**  
Central Michigan  
231-924-3390  
parcfr@bethany.org

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

**REGION 4:**  
Western Michigan  
616-224-7565  
parcgr@bethany.org

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



It was a great night of training for adoptive parents in Traverse City on all things tech and social media related, with Chris McKenna of Protect Young Eyes.



Winter is a great time to look back and remember the warm, sunny days of summer! Adoptive families celebrated their new splash pad with a picnic on the shores of Lake Huron in Alpena and the Slip N Slide party in Grand Rapids.

## Quotes to Inspire You

"In the depth of winter, I finally learned that there was in me an invincible summer."—*Albert Camus*



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)