



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

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

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Adoption: A Different Kind of Miracle

Children are a miracle! The way their tiny bodies are formed, the way their little minds develop, and the different personalities that begin to shine through leave us, as parents, speechless. There is nothing better than feeling those sticky little fingers wrapped around your neck.

Adopting a child is also a miracle. Becoming the parent of a child who you didn't give birth to and loving him or her as much as you do, is nothing short of amazing! But we must remember that this miracle is of a different kind. Unfortunately, there is another mother and father somewhere who were unable to keep their child and, for whatever reason, lost their chance at experiencing the parent-child miracle. They will miss out on the smiles, the fights, the tears, and all those precious, sticky hugs! And, all of this also means that your child's story will be forever changed.

You are not a hero for adopting your child. You are a mother. A father. A parent with the capacity to love beyond biology, the heart to put all you have into the life of a child, the stomach to deal with the blood, sweat, and tears, and the strength to keep at it day after day, despite the many ups and downs.

In the end, isn't this the true miracle? A parent and a child, having a bond that defies biology and a love that cannot be measured.

Client Testimonials

"I don't know where we or our kids would be if it hadn't been for the services and support you have offered! You have and always will have a special place in my heart! Thank you for your support!"



Post-Adoption Resource Center

AVAILABLE SERVICES

Working with your adoptive family:

- Support of a PARC specialist in your home
- 24-hour crisis availability
- Short-term emergency intervention
- Family-centered plan
- List of supportive regional resources

Connecting you with community services:

- Liaison for adoptive families to other service providers
- One-on-one assistance accessing services
- Comprehensive resource guide

Getting you the information you need:

- Daily phone access
- Timely responses with information
- Connection to resources

Supporting your family:

- Monthly group experiences
- Quarterly training

Sharing even more:

- PARC website with recommended books/articles on adoption
- List of community resources
- Calendar of adoptive parents' events and trainings
- Adoptive family newsletter

Have a *Pure Michigan* Spring Break

So you're staying home for spring break. Instead of walking on white, sandy beaches there is a good chance you will still be walking on white, frozen snow. But don't worry, there are plenty of ways to turn your spring break into an unforgettable staycation!

BECOME A MICHIGAN TOURIST. How many of us have truly explored our hometown or the next town over? Just like so many New Yorkers have never been up the steps of the Statue of Liberty, there is a good chance that you haven't seen all your town has to offer. So pick your town or any of Michigan's other small towns, call their tourism department, and request some pamphlets. Then sit down with your family and decide what area attractions are a must-see. I bet you will be surprised by what is just around the corner!

GO CAMPING. We know, we know. We're in Michigan. Even if you like "roughing it," the unpredictability of Michigan spring weather could make this a little *too* rough. But, you can bring the outdoors in by turning your living room into a

campground. Bring out the sleeping bags, turn off the television, and make some s'mores over the stovetop. And don't forget to turn off the lights and pull out the flashlights! You could even build an indoor fort or tent for everyone to snuggle under.

CREATE A CULINARY CHALLENGE NIGHT. Sit down as a family and decide on a "special ingredient" and have everyone plan a dish that uses that ingredient. If you have younger kids, you can pair them with an adult or older sibling or help them come up with a dish that is within their abilities. During the afternoon, everyone must prepare their dish. Then for dinner, feast on everyone's culinary masterpieces and vote on a winner. For an added challenge, give everyone a budget and go grocery shopping together!

GET WET! It may be too cold to hit the beach here in Michigan, but there are other ways to make a splash. Many of the indoor waterparks in Michigan offer spring break discounts and many hotels will offer day passes to access their pool. Not to mention, many communities have recreation centers with indoor swimming pools. And, finally, make sure to watch for your PARC calendar to see what wet-and-wild activities may be offered near you!

HOST A TALENT SHOW! No doubt each member of your family has a unique and entertaining talent, including you. Whether it is singing, dancing, putting on a magic show, or hosting a family game show, you'll be surprised by what each member of your family comes up with. So set the stage and have some fun!



Fun Facts

Children actually grow faster in the spring than during other times of the year.

Spring fever is not just a saying. Experts say the body's makeup changes due to different diets, hormone production (often caused by more bare skin), and temperature.



Fremont/Muskegon Completes 1,000th Adoption

November 24, 2015, was a memorable day for the Boxers when their son, Isaac, became part of their family. But this day was special for Bethany Christian Services as well—Isaac's adoption, on National Adoption Day, marked 1,000 children and families brought together in Fremont/Muskegon since the branch's first adoption in 1978. Isaac has four siblings adopted through foster care, including a biological sister. Adoption Specialist, Rachel McClenahan, was blessed with the opportunity to complete the milestone adoption.

I was adopted at the age of two by the foster family I had been placed with shortly after I was born. I have lived all my remembered life with adoption as part of my identity. While I was able to escape much of the trauma associated with being a foster child due to the circumstances surrounding my placement and subsequent adoption, having the label of "foster child" as part of my history has marked me as well. I can't claim to be an expert on adoption as a whole, but I can provide some insight into what I've learned, both in my own experience as an adoptee and in my relationships with other adoptees.

Here are my tips for talking to your child about adoption:

TALK ABOUT BIOLOGICAL PARENTS

And don't wait for your kids to bring them up. Young kids will likely only ask questions about their biological parents or other family members if they feel 100 percent safe in doing so. They may feel like they're going to hurt your feelings by asking or that they'll get a vague, uncomfortable answer to their question. They may even be self-conscious asking about them because they feel like they shouldn't care about biological relatives that they hardly (or don't at all) know or who may have hurt them in the past. Parents, if you bring them up on your own from time-to-time, you send the message that it's okay to talk about them and, even more important, that you're comfortable doing so.

LET YOUR CHILD'S STORY BE THEIR STORY.

Being adopted carries a lot of baggage. People often make assumptions about adoptees, especially those who have been adopted out of foster care. I will always remember a conversation I had with a coworker after my older brother had passed away. This particular coworker had learned of my adoption from a family member of mine she knew. So when I told her about my brother, she wanted to clarify "what kind of brother" he was. I was used to this, so I explained that he was my adoptive brother and my parent's biological child. "So he was your mom's real son? I can't even imagine how terrible that would be.

Your poor mom." I was speechless. It didn't matter that I knew that it would be just as terrible for my mom to lose me as it was for her to lose my brother, seeing it through my co-worker's eyes, I suddenly felt less valuable. Your child's story is their own, and not every acquaintance needs to know it. Offering it up freely to people who aren't familiar with adoption or foster care can have unintended and sometimes painful consequences for your child.

UNDERSTAND THAT YOUR CHILD MAY BE DIFFERENT THAN YOU

Because traits run in families, the chances of having a child with a different (even conflicting) temperament or learning style increases when you adopt a child. Things that came easily to you may not come as easily to your adopted child, and vice versa. A close friend of mine has struggled with anxiety and depression her whole life, struggled in school—especially math—and found it relaxing to express herself creatively and dabbled in poetry. Her accountant mother and engineer father were often frustrated with what they perceived as laziness and an unwillingness to pick herself up by her bootstraps. Later on in her life, she came into contact with her birthmother. Her birthmother had also struggled with mental illness, was a published poet, an accomplished artist, and was diagnosed late in life with a learning disability that made school difficult for her. My friend was later diagnosed with a variation of the same learning disability and received appropriate counseling that made coping with it easier. All kids are different than their parents in some ways, but adopted children often have more variation that their parents may want to consider.

REMEMBER THAT ADOPTEES ARE OFTEN STUCK BETWEEN TWO WORLDS.

Because I was adopted at a young age, I have no memory of ever having a different set of parents than the ones who raised me. I had built an identity around having a secure household with two parents who were present and invested in my development as a person. I wasn't in contact with my birthfamily until I was an



adult, so it wasn't until then that I had to reconcile the identity I had built in the family I grew up with and the family I shared biology with. I shared DNA with alcoholics and abusers, but I grew up in a home where there was rarely, if ever, alcohol present and where I always felt safe. On the other hand, a friend of mine was in an abusive home until she was nine and then was abruptly moved to a loving foster home where she was allowed no contact with her birthfamily. Despite the real harm her biological family had caused her, she struggled with losing contact with them and by extension, her roots. If at all possible, keeping contact with birthfamily, or at least keeping an open dialogue about them, can help bridge the gap between these two worlds.

DO NOT DEFINE YOUR CHILD'S EXPERIENCE FOR THEM.

No parent likes to see their child in pain and will likely do anything to take it away. But the pain of adoption is real, no matter the age. There cannot be adoption without brokenness. Often times, parents may try to take away the pain their adopted child is feeling by trying to paint the adoption in only a positive light. This can be harmful, however, because it sends the message that it is wrong to feel anything other than positive feelings regarding their adoption. Be clear that you love them, but let your child work out how they feel about their experience for themselves. You can't take away the pain, but you can provide a safe environment for them to process their feelings regarding adoption and the circumstances surrounding their particular situation.

upcoming events & training



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



recommended reading

Early Childhood Mental Health: An Introduction

This free e-book is about the development of mental health in early childhood and how mental health difficulties in early childhood influence children's emotions, behaviors, and social skills. The e-book aims to provide an understanding of early childhood mental health and when a significant concern may be present.

Check out the KidsMatter website www.kidsmatter.edu.au for additional information, resources, and more free e-books.

www.kidsmatter.edu.au/ebook/kmec/early-childhood-mental-health-intro/#/0



PARC Region 2: Northern Michigan
231.421.6500 • jwicksall@bethany.org
www.facebook.com/PostAdoptionResourceCenterOfNorthernMI

Join us for skating (both ice and roller), a pool party, movies at the State Theatre, gymnastic time, a mom's night out, and so much more!

SPECIAL EVENT: Hearts of Hope Adoption Conference

Join other adoptive families while learning about adoption specific topics from multiple speakers. Special keynote speaker, Nathan Boltman, LPC, LLMFT, will be presenting on the Nurtured Heart Approach, Pam Wolz will speak about developmental trauma and it's implications on the brain, followed by Dr. Jerry McLaughlin talking about transitioning.

Lunch will be provided.

Saturday, March 19
8:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

Denno Museum Center • Jannis Room
1701 E Front St • Traverse City, MI

PARC Region 3: Central Michigan
231.924.3390
www.facebook.com/PostAdoptionResourceCenterCentralMichigan

COMING TO BIG RAPIDS IN MAY:

Meet and train with adoptive families from around the state. Conference topics will be presented by multiple speakers and will include: resiliency, hands-on parenting tools, faith-based response to human trafficking, adoption subsidy, special education advocacy, and working as a team for children.

Please "like" us on Facebook or send us your email to receive the conference details and registration.

Gladwin, Ludington, and Fremont area families, watch for mailings about your monthly meetings!
Osceola County families, please contact us if you are interested in support and training in your area. We would love to meet with you!

PARC Region 4: Western Michigan
616.710.5120 • sirwin@bethany.org
www.facebook.com/PARCRegion4

Join us at Catch Air, Kangaroo Palace, Meg's Playhouse, and Frederik Meijer Gardens and Sculpture Park. Check us out on Facebook to find out more about mom's night out, dad's night out, and other support groups and family fun events.

REGION 4 CONFERENCE Parenting a Child with Sexual Behavior

Guest speaker Tina Timm, PhD, LMSW, LMFT is an associate professor, MSU School of Social Work. She has more than 22 years of clinical experience and advanced training in sexual trauma and family therapy. This event is open to adoptive families and professionals. Lunch will be provided.

Friday, April 29
8:30 a.m.–4:00 p.m.

Bethany Christian Services
Conference Center—Door G
901 Eastern Ave NE • Grand Rapids, MI



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

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

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

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



postadoptionrc.org