



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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Identity

By Suzanne Parks, LMSW, PARC Region 4, Post-Adoption Specialist

I·den·ti·ty: Who you are. The way you think about yourself. The way you are viewed by the world. The characteristics that define you. The qualities, beliefs, personality, looks, and/or expressions that make a person. One's self image, self-esteem, and individuality. (*yourdictionary.com*)

The work of forming one's identity never really ends; we are all shaping and forming our identities throughout our lifetime. However, for most individuals, these issues tend to become more heightened during the teenage years. Adolescence is typically when we are: seeking independence; finding our place within a peer group; defining our values and beliefs; balancing the demands of school/work; managing changes in our body; figuring out our sexual identity; discovering our uniqueness, talents, hopes, dreams; and understanding racial and ethnic heritage.

For children who were adopted, these issues of identity may be more complicated, difficult, and intense during this time, primarily because they have two sets of parents with which to identify—their biological parents and their adoptive parents. There are elements of both nature/nurture and inheritance/environment to wrestle with for the adoptee. While some adoptees sail through this stage of life similarly to youth who weren't adopted, it can be an especially challenging time for others.

In this issue, we'll be talking about identity formation and how adoptive parents can help guide their adopted teenager through this important stage of development. As always, the Post-Adoption Resource Center is here to support you on the life-long journey of adoption.

“I can’t move ahead with my future, when I don’t know anything about my past. It’s like starting to read a book in the middle. My big family with cousins and aunts and uncles only makes me aware that I am alone in my situation. It never bothered me when I was younger. But now, for reasons I can’t explain, I feel like a puppet without a string, and it’s making me miserable.”¹

It’s incredibly important for adoptive parents to provide a safe, loving, and stable environment in which the adoptee can explore these issues of identity. As an adoptive parent, you may be asking yourself, *What can I do to help my child during this difficult and challenging time?*

The first step is having an open dialogue with your child about adoption-related topics from a young age. Research shows that the sooner adoptive parents can start talking openly about adoption-related issues, the better it is for the child! Talking to your children about their birth family and adoption can be scary for some adoptive parents. Sometimes, younger children can be more comfortable with generalized ideas regarding their “adoption stories” and information regarding their birth family. However, adolescents may want to know facts and definite answers to questions in order to seek a deeper meaning about their adoption. As their parent, you are the expert on your child! While adoptive parents should remain truthful regarding their child’s birth family and the story behind how

your child joined your family, adoptive parents should take into consideration their child’s emotional and intellectual maturity to determine when your child is ready to hear potentially difficult information.

When done from an early age, adoption conversations are more likely to feel natural and occur frequently in adoptive homes. Adoptive parents should not assume that if their child is not asking about their birth family or adoption that they aren’t thinking about it. Adoptive parents need to be able to initiate these conversations while showing unconditional support and openness—even when the birth family history is difficult. It’s not uncommon for adoptees to feel guilty about wanting to know about their birth family and to worry about upsetting their adoptive parents. It’s important for adoptive parents to encourage their child to talk freely and openly about their feelings of adoption and birth family, while providing unconditional love and affirming the importance of birth family.

For many teenagers, being perceived as “different” by self or others can be a curse of adolescence. It’s a time when teens want to fit in with their peers and be part of a group or community. Teens may struggle to figure out where they fit within their own family—how they are like or unlike their parents and siblings. For adoptees, the added layer of having two families plays a part in shaping their identity. Teens who were adopted may feel conflicted regarding their feelings for both their adoptive families and birth families. They may also feel a loyalty to both families. As adoptees start to think deeper about their adoption during this time of identity seeking, they may struggle with emotional or behavioral issues that the adoptive family will have to address. It’s important for adoptive parents to provide support, understanding, and time for their teen to work through these struggles. It’s also important for adoptive parents to understand that if your child is

Quotes to Inspire You

“Today you are you that is truer than true.
There is no one alive that is youer than you.” —Dr. Seuss

thinking about or wanting to know about their birth family, it does not mean your child loves you any less or that you have failed in your parenting of them.

Here are some common questions that adoptees will often think about:

- **WHY** am I no longer living with my birth family?
- **WHO** are my birth parents?
- **WHO** do I look like? Act like?
- **WHERE** are my birth parents/ birth siblings now?

They may wonder what their life might have been like if they were raised by their birth family. Some teens also express that they feel as though they are an outsider in their adoptive homes and have feelings of not truly fitting in anywhere. They may try to act as they believe their birth parents act to identify with them, especially if the adoptee believes they are very different from their adoptive family. These differences can appear to be even more outstanding to teens if they have been adopted cross-racially, cross-culturally, or internationally.

In order to answer the questions of “Who am I?” and “Who do I want to be?” it’s important for teens who were adopted to know where they came from in order to fully become who they were meant to be. This task of integrating both birth and adoptive families is a vital part for adoptees in truly forming their own unique identity. And this process for teens, while difficult at times, is best achieved when children are allowed to talk about their birth family and their feelings are honored by their adoptive parents. Adoptive parents play a vital role in identity development for teens, and your acceptance will



Encourage Your Child To Be Themselves!

1. Open the lines of communication—listen and talk to your child often about their dreams.
2. Get into their world — join them on activities that they love to do!
3. Embrace their culture and heritage—celebrate differences in your family.
4. Speak positive things about their biological parents.

Citations:

¹ Taken from an article called “Parenting the Adopted Adolescent” in NAIC (National Adoption Information Clearing House (<http://www.naic.com>))

<https://www.bcadoption.com/resources/articles/issues-around-adolescence-and-adoption>

https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/parent_teenager.pdf

Quotes to Inspire You

“Be yourself; everyone else is already taken.” —Oscar Wilde

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 or website, watch for monthly calendars, or give us a call to find out what is available near you.

REGION 2:
Northern Michigan
231-995-0870
parctc@bethany.org
www.facebook.com/PostAdoptionResourceCenterOfNorthernMI

REGION 3:
Central Michigan
231-924-3390
parcfr@bethany.org
www.facebook.com/PostAdoptionResourceCenterCentralMichigan

REGION 4:
Western Michigan
616-224-7565
parcgr@bethany.org
www.facebook.com/PARCRegion4

MONTHLY ADOPTIVE PARENT SUPPORT GROUPS:

Region 2:

Charlevoix County:

Connect & Reflect, Charlevoix,
3rd Tuesday of the month

Emmet County:

Training/Support Group, Petoskey,
4th Tuesday of the month

Grand Traverse County:

Mugs & Muffins, Traverse City,
1st Wednesday of the month

Ogemaw County:

Foster & Adoptive Parent
Connection, West Branch,
3rd Tuesday of the month

Region 3:

Clinton County:

Adoptive Parent Lunch, St. John's,
1st Wednesday of the month

Gladwin County:

Training/Support Group, Beaverton,
3rd Monday of the month

Ionia County:

Adoptive Parent Dinner, Ionia,
1st Tuesday of the month

Isabella County:

Adoptive Parent Lunch, Mt. Pleasant,
3rd Monday of the month

Foster/Adopt/Kinship Support Group,
Mt. Pleasant, 4th Monday of the month

Osceola County:

Training/Support Group, Reed City,
4th Monday of the month

Region 4:

Allegan County:

Adoptive Parents Breakfast, Wayland,
1st Monday of the month

Berrien County:

CONNECT Support Group, Berrien
Springs, 2nd Thursday of the month

Kent County:

Adoptive Family Play Group, Grand
Rapids, 2nd Tuesday of the month

Adoptive Moms' Night Out, Grand
Rapids, 4th Monday of the month

Muskegon County:

Adoptive Parents' Luncheon, Muskegon,
2nd Thursday of the month

Ottawa County:

Adoptive Parents' Breakfast, Holland,
2nd Wednesday of the month

Van Buren County:

Adoptive Moms' Night Out, South
Haven, 3rd Thursday of the month



Region 4 was excited to have Kim Seidel in Zeeland for their fall adoptive parent conference!



Region 3 adoptive parents enjoyed a day of learning with Kirk and Casey Martin of Celebrate Calm!



Bethany 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

other suggested websites: www.adoptivefamilies.com www.adoptioninstitute.org