

BUILDING FOREVER FAMILIES

Wisconsin Public
Adoption Workbook

DAY 3 of 3
June 2021



Agenda Day 3

- I. Welcome and Introductions
- II. Culture and Identity
- III. Parenting to Influence Resiliency
- IV. Legal Issues in Adoption
- V. Facing Fears Positively
- VI. Conclusion

Learning Objectives

1. Incorporate elements of a child's cultural heritage into family practices and describe ways to help children and youth embrace their cultural identity
2. Discuss the importance of becoming a supportive ally in parenting youth that identify as LGBTQ
3. Explain "Positive Parenting" as the framework for parenting adopted children
4. Identify landmarks in the history of child welfare/adoption law
5. Identify key roles on the child welfare and legal team
6. Identify the major steps in the legal process leading to adoption
7. Define "legal risk" and what it means for adoptive families
8. Recognize and manage common fears related to adoption

Questions that will be Answered in the Training

1. Who are the children in care? What kinds of experiences may they have had that you need to know as you prepare to adopt?
2. How does adoption impact the child, birth family, and adoptive family?
3. What should you consider and be ready to do to best parent them?

TRY THIS

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Understanding Identity

How do you see yourself? How do you see your child?

Objective: To look at the multiple factors that shape identity.

Directions: Take 60 seconds to complete each sentence, using as many descriptive words as you can. For children who are old enough, consider asking them to complete these sentences as well, substituting the word “parents” for “child” as needed.



My parents say I am...

My peers say I am...

My community says I am...

(I know this by the faces and voices of neighbors, service providers, professionals, etc.)

The media says I am...

I am missing altogether from...

I say I am...

My child is...

My child's peers say she (he) is...

Our community tells my child that she (he) is...

The media says my child is...

My child is omitted from...

My child describes herself (himself) as...

5 Lessons Learned the Hard Way



RJ Sangosti—The Denver Post/Getty Images Alexander Landau

Alex Landau's mother Patsy Hathaway believed that love was enough when it came to raising her black son—until her child was severely beaten by Denver police in a routine traffic stop (see story above). "Had I prepared Alex properly, he would have suffered less," she says today. "I regret this. But he would not have become the leader that he is destined to be either." Here, Hathaway shares what she wishes she'd known.

1. "Preschoolers experience prejudice. So you teach younger children the best you can [about racism], in simple language. Lessons can become more elaborate as kids mature."
2. "Children should deeply understand that racism is not their fault; there's nothing wrong with them. Try to explain without vilifying others."
3. "Universalize it—white slavery in Greece, the Jewish experience, the struggle that Hispanics face. It's not just blacks who have suffered; it's a problem of how people treat each other. You don't want children to feel that it's just their race, or who they are."
4. "Talk about the movement, the wonderful civil rights leaders and how they made a difference. Introduce people your children can identify with and want to emulate."
5. "When kids are older, parents need to get practical about how to handle potentially dangerous situations like police stops. Make sure they know their rights and that they understand the recommended way to handle themselves with the police. We want our kids to live to become peaceful agents of change."

ADOPTION ADVOCATE NO. 42

POSTED DEC 01, 2011

TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT ADOPTION: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PARENTS

BY: NICOLE CALLAHAN

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For many adoptive parents, it is easy to talk about their first meeting with their child, the first day they brought her home, or their early memories of her; these times are usually joyful to recall. But the questions that adopted children have do not end – and may not necessarily even begin – with the day their adoptive parents brought them home.

Some children may have endless questions about their birthparents and birth families. Some will feel dissatisfied with the information provided, and long for more. Some will struggle with accepting and dealing with certain facts, especially as they grow older and learn more about their histories. And some may feel uncomfortable when questioned by others about adoption, and will need to be taught by their parents if – and how – to respond.

Following are some suggestions for adoptive parents on how to discuss these and other issues with their children, and incorporate an open and ongoing discussion of adoption into their family life.

Talk about adoption early and often, and don't wait for the child to bring it up every time.

“Parents have to be proactive, intentional truth tellers,” says Jayne Schooler, an adoption advocate who has authored six books and numerous training curricula on adoption, including *The Whole Life Adoption Book* (coauthored with NCFA) and *Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child*. “Tell your child about his adoption early on. Give him truthful answers from you, so he doesn’t find things out about his adoption from others, in ways you would rather he didn’t.”

Chuck Johnson, president and CEO of NCFA and a former adoption agency director, agrees: “Always be ready to discuss adoption honestly. You have to start out from the beginning with a clear plan, lay the foundation by teaching children what adoption is, gradually share more age-appropriate information until the child reaches a full understanding, and continue the process throughout his life.”

It’s important to keep in mind that adoption is not abnormal, nor should discussions about it be stressful for adoptive parents, says Dr. Kathleen L. Whitten, Ph.D., a developmental psychologist, lecturer in psychology at Georgia State University, and author of *Labor of the Heart: A Parent’s Guide to the Decisions and Emotions in Adoption*. “If parents have been well-prepared before adoption, they

should have no trouble with the fact that adoption is a wonderful way to build a family. Parents who truly believe this will have no problems talking about adoption with anyone, especially their children.”

In “Growing Up Adopted: Birth parent contact and developmental outcomes” (H.D. Grotevant and R.G. McRoy, 1998), a major study examining outcomes for adopted children with varying levels of openness, researchers found that, regardless of the level of openness, all children in the study expressed curiosity about their birth families, regardless of the amount of information they already had. Adoptive parents must realize that this is natural, and that a child’s curiosity about her birthparents or desire to talk about them does not mean that she loves her adoptive family any less.

“Some parents may feel they are ‘off the hook’ if their child doesn’t bring up adoption very often,” says Schooler. “But that’s the wrong way to think about it. Parents should bring up adoption themselves, as the best way of letting their children know that they are always happy and able to talk about it.”

One question Schooler always poses to adoptive parents is: “When was the last time you talked about adoption in your family?” If they can’t remember, she says, then it’s time for the parents to bring it up intentionally. The family could watch a movie or read a book related to adoption, and talk about it afterwards. If their child’s birthday is coming up, they could take the opportunity to talk about her birthparents. Parents could bring out old photo albums and retell the story of their child’s adoption – as much of her story as they know.

According to Schooler, “Adopted children will ask the questions about adoption that they feel they have *permission* to ask. Parents have to think about how they communicate and what kind of environment they are establishing. Is their home the sort of place where their child can feel comfortable asking lots of questions about her adoption?”

If children sense that their parents are uncomfortable discussing their birth families, or suspect their parents do not care about or do not want to answer their questions, it may make them feel guilty about or alone in their curiosity. Parents must respond to their child’s curiosity without fear, embarrassment, or insecurity. Their child must know that she can always come to them with questions, and they will do their best to answer and help her understand.

“Always be open to conversation and help your child understand that being adopted is nothing to be ashamed of,” says Chuck Johnson. “It is a fact of a child’s life, one that must be discussed.”

Allow the conversation about adoption to develop, change, and grow along with your child.

Curiosity about their origins, birth families, and adoptions is universal among adopted children, though the intensity of this curiosity as well as the sorts of questions they have will vary and, for most, change over time. “Young children...are most interested in themselves, their own families, and their own story, not in an abstract idea about what adoption is,” says Dr. Whitten. “A mom might say, ‘Once upon a time, you were born in a beautiful country, Russia. Your birthmother was not able to take care of you, so she took you to an orphanage and asked them to find a forever family for you. They called us and asked us to be your family, so we flew to Moscow...’ and then add details about the trip, the first time you saw your child. I’ve heard from other adoptive families that children around age two to four want to hear this story *every night*.”

The same answers that satisfied a child when he was younger may not necessarily do so when he is a teenager or young adult. For these reasons, the ongoing adoption discussion should grow and change along with the child, evolving as he gains understanding and maturity. “One of the prevailing

questions that most adoptees ask is the 'Why?'" says Jayne Schooler. "They want to know, 'Why was I adopted? Why did this happen?' As they grow and develop, they need their parents to add more content and context to the 'why.' As a child gets older, he's going to want more details, and you should not hide things from him. But some of the harder information will need to be shared at the right time, when he is ready. Parents are the only ones who can discern whether their children are ready to hear and understand certain facts about their history."

Adoptive parents should not share all the information with their child from a young age, particularly if some of the information is troubling. "While discussion about adoption has to begin on day one, I think that some parents, in their efforts to be diligent, can overwhelm their child with too much information, too early," says Johnson. Adoptive parents should share what they know when they feel their child is ready for it. Schooler advises parents that, as a general guideline, they should tell their child his entire history – as much as they know – by the time he is 12 years old. "He probably knows more than you think he does, no matter what age he is," she says. "You want to avoid accidental disclosure about his past from other people, other family members. Another way to avoid accidental disclosure of facts is to be very aware of who you share parts of your child's history with – there are some things that are no one's business outside of your immediate family."

For parents of children adopted at an older age from foster care or via intercountry adoption, who may remember their parents, members of their family, or previous caregivers, the adoption discussion can prove even more challenging. "Parents have to remember that their children will see these people through the eyes of their adoptive parents," says Schooler. "You have to think about how you talk about your child's birthparents. Be aware of and control your own emotional response, even if it's difficult. Always demonstrate compassion for your child's former parents and family. Remember that an adopted or foster child still loves her parents, and in some way still wants their blessing – she will have her own feelings of grief and loss to cope with; she should not have to deal with your anger or your negative reaction, too. Make sure she knows she can always ask any question of you, even if it's something unpleasant or sad."

Adolescence often presents additional challenges in a parent/child relationship. For teenagers who were adopted, adolescence may also be a time when they experience greater uncertainty or emotions related to their adoptions. It is a time when harder facts about a child's adoption and birth family can be talked about in greater detail, but parents should be prepared for the impact this could have on the child.

"Adolescents become able to think adoption in broader, abstract terms. However, this is very variable, and not all 13-year-olds, for example, are ready to understand the complexities of poverty and family stress and – for some children, geopolitical realities – that lead to adoption," says Dr. Whitten.

While older children and adolescents can begin to understand some of the reasons – if known – why they were placed for adoption, Chuck Johnson warns against "blaming" relinquishment or abandonment on poverty alone. "Adoptive parents, too, can lose jobs or experience financial hardship," he points out. "It is not money or resources alone that makes someone a child's parent. What it boils down to is that the birthmother had her reasons for not believing that she could take care of her child, and she knew that someone else could. Adoption is the merging of love and law to make a family. Adoptive parents are committed to loving and caring for their children, no matter what happens."

Find ways to discuss adoption with your child even if you lack certain information.

As there are many different levels of openness in adoption, there is also great variety in the amount of information that may be known about the birthparents. In open adoptions, the adoptive family is in contact with the birthparent(s), who can assist in answering adoptees' questions about their origins. Other adoptions are more closed, with less contact or no contact at all, and the birthparents may have chosen to disclose far less personal information to the adoptive family. In adoptions out of foster care, the child's biological family is often known and remembered by him, and he might maintain contact with biological parents or other kin. In many intercountry adoptions, by contrast, far less may be known with certainty about a child's birthparents or birth family, particularly in cases of child abandonment.

Dr. Betsy Vonk, Ph.D., an adoptive mother and a professor of social work and director of the MSW program at the University of Georgia, says, "If less is known about the birthparents or how the adoption came about, parents can explain some of the reasons why birthparents place their children for adoption. They can tell their children that it is usually a very hard decision to make, but that they don't know exactly why their birthparents made that decision. This allows the child to express fantasies they might have about their early histories, and for parent and child to share their feelings about the 'not knowing.' This kind of discussion can mature with the child's understanding."

Jayne Schooler recalls a conversation she had with a group of parents that had adopted children from China: "They told me, 'We don't know anything.' I said, 'You know more than you think. You know when you first thought about adoption, how you made that decision. You know when you first visited China and saw the orphanage and met your child's caregivers. You know what you did when you first visited your child – the hotel where you brought her, the things you gave her, all the circumstances of when and where and how you ended up bringing her home.'"

"It can be very painful to be unable to provide our children with their early life stories," says Dr. Vonk, "but I don't think it is fair to make one up for them. Instead, we can provide empathy and support for their feelings about the ambiguity."

For many children, says Dr. Whitten, the central question in their minds – and the one for which their parents might not have answers – is "Why didn't my parents keep me?" She explains, "The underlying question behind this is, 'What is wrong with me?' Of course, the best answer is the true one, about the circumstances of your child's adoption... [R]eassure your child that her adoption was because of a decision that had nothing to do with her as a person, and everything to do with her birthparents' lives, concerns, abilities, etc."

If children know less about their birth families and express sadness about this, Dr. Whitten says it is important to empathize with them, and not try to talk them out of feeling the way they do. "You can share with them your own sadness, by saying something like 'I'm sad that we don't know more about your birthparents/don't know why they made an adoption plan/can't see them more often, too.' You can also emphasize that the birthparents are probably sad, too – sad that they weren't able to be parents when the child was born, and sad that they may not know what happened to the child or what the child's life is like now."

At the same time, Dr. Whitten adds, parents should not simply assume that all adopted child are equally "scarred" by feelings of sadness or loss or grief. "Sometimes this is overemphasized in adoption practice," she says.

Make a real effort to educate yourselves and understand the context in which the adoption decision was made.

It is important, says Chuck Johnson, for adoptive parents to help their child consider his adoption in the right context. "There's a tendency, sometimes, to want to evaluate a decision as if it were being made today," he notes, "but it is crucial to think about the time the decision was made and the unique people involved. There may have been stigmas of the time that do not exist to the same extent today. There were almost certainly enormous challenges facing the child's birthparents. You always have to consider the personal attributes, the time, the sacrifices, and the unique situation of the person or people involved."

Research conducted by NCFA in recent years has shown that many birthmothers choose to make an adoption plan because they believe it is in the best interests of their children. For many birthparents, adoption is a choice reflecting a birthmother's love and willingness to sacrifice on behalf of her child.

"Adoptive parents have to try to help their adopted child think about that – the birthmother's choice – and what a sensitive, difficult, and weighty decision was made, in many cases for the sake of the child," Johnson explains.

It is also necessary, Jayne Schooler adds, for adoptive parents to attempt to gain real understanding of the cultural circumstances involved in an intercountry adoption. This, too, might be information that their child will want to know.

"Many birthmothers know that they cannot care for their children; they do not have the support or the resources. So some of them make a plan and take the children where they might be found and cared for," she says. "Of course, adoptive parents can't always know for certain what their child's birthparents might have done – and if they don't, they shouldn't claim to know – but they should educate themselves, and try to imagine the difficult circumstances faced by so many birthparents when they have these discussions with their adopted children."

Talk with your child about how to respond to questions from others.

"When children are older...many questions will come from their peers," says Dr. Whitten. "Parents can prepare their children by saying, 'Not all kids are adopted, and kids at school might ask you about it. You can decide if you want to tell them anything or not.'" She adds that parents should also be prepared for questions themselves.

It is common for adopted children and their parents to receive questions from their peers, extended family members, teachers, friends' parents, even total strangers. This can prove uncomfortable at times, even for those children who generally find it easy to talk about their adoptions. For children who are more shy, or those who are currently struggling with different aspects of their adoptions, it can be far more disconcerting.

Adopted children, says Dr. Vonk, should be taught that the choice of when, where, and how to respond to questions about adoption is entirely theirs. No matter what sort of questions they receive, or who asks the questions, they should not feel that they must give a particular answer, or any answer at all. "One of the things I've found to be most helpful to children is for them to understand they are not obligated to answer every question that is asked of them, particularly if the person asking is a stranger, or is asking in a way that feels like teasing or hostility," she says.

She says that it is important for parents to model responding to questions, so their children can see how they can choose to answer – or not answer. “We can show our children that sometimes we share a bit of information about our own experience, or about adoption in general; sometimes, we might invite the person to talk with us at another time when we are not with our children; and, at other times, we must become comfortable saying to a stranger in a store who asks an intrusive question that there are private matters that we don’t talk about outside of our family,” she explains. “Always, after an encounter with someone, especially if it’s an intrusive question, it’s important for parents to talk with their children about their perspective of what happened, how they felt about it, and how they would like to handle something similar in the future.”

Parents can help their children practice using role play, rehearsing various situations and conversations with them, so they are empowered to handle different questions that may be asked. Says Dr. Vonk, “This will help them learn that there are different times and places for different sorts of responses, and they have the power to choose what their response will be based on what feels right to them.”

Conclusion

Every child is unique, as is every adoption, and therefore every adopted child will approach his or her adoption in a different way. Most of the questions and issues that are unique to adopted children can eventually be resolved over time – just like most issues faced at various times throughout childhood and adolescence. Research shows that the majority of adopted people successfully work through their questions and feelings surrounding their adoptions – though some will need extra help in order to do so – and feel happy, safe, and loved in their adoptive families.

Adoptive parents must consciously work to encourage and maintain an open and ongoing conversation about adoption with their children. It will not always be possible to answer every question a child may have about adoption, but through honesty, empathy, and self-awareness, parents can help their children to grow in their understanding of adoption, their histories, and their place in their birth and adoptive families.

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Empowering Your Children to Share Their Adoption Stories

Helping your children to share their adoption story can have far-reaching benefits for your children, your family, and the community surrounding you. By helping your children share their story, you also help them to own their story.

It's natural to want to share your children's adoption story with others, but as adoptees, their stories belong solely to them. As parents, you may feel as though the story belongs to you as much as your children, but in truth, these are two separate journeys: yours and your children's.

How it helps your children

By allowing your children to tell their adoption story in their own way, you may find that your child may not feel comfortable sharing parts of his or her story, and that's okay.

You may also find some inaccuracies in your child's story. It could be that your younger child doesn't fully understand the process of adoption, or your older child feels embarrassed by certain events that occurred as part of the adoption process.

Identifying inaccuracies will help you work with your child to overcome some of the reasons they may feel uncomfortable sharing certain parts of their story, while at the same time reassuring them that they only have to share what they feel comfortable sharing.

How it helps your community

When your children feel empowered to share their stories, they can help teachers, friends, neighbors and even strangers understand what adoption is and what it means. Being open about it helps them understand the world of adoption better and hopefully they learn some positive adoption language as well.

You may feel as though the story belongs to you as much as your children, but in truth, these are two separate journeys: yours and your children's.

Knowing when not to share

While teaching your children that it's good to share their adoption story, they should also know that it's okay not to share, too.

There may be times when they don't feel comfortable answering the question that was asked of them or they simply don't want to share at that particular time.

In those cases, you can empower them to share a fact about adoption to the person asking them their story. You may want to teach your child some interesting facts about adoption that are easy to remember, so that they can easier deflect questions.

For example, if your neighbor asks your son if he was placed for adoption because his mother was too poor to take care of him, he might tell the neighbor, "My birth country has an excellent adoption system, and it's culturally acceptable for infants to be placed with foster families who work with many international families."

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How to help your children with their stories

So *how* can you help your children share their stories? Start by having them tell you their story and allow them to ask questions. Answer their questions and talk about emotions that come up about their story. Try



to help them identify their feelings, and if the opportunity presents itself, open up the topic for discussion.

You might say, “I can’t imagine what it feels like to know your birth parents struggled a lot, but it sounds like you feel sad for them and maybe a little angry at the world for there to be such hard times in life.”

Have these initial talks in a private place and make sure they remain between you and your child, unless he or she gives you permission to share. Your child will likely be willing to ask more questions when it’s a private conversation. However, if you have other kids who were adopted, sometimes including them in adoption conversation is also helpful (while recognizing that each person’s story is different).

There are many places and situations in which the topic of adoption may arise. Talk about what places are the most appropriate to discuss adoption. Some examples could be:

- **School.** School assignments sometimes involve students revealing private information regarding their family. Talk with your child’s teachers ahead of time and introduce them to adoption friendly school assignments. If your child is uncomfortable with revealing their

adoption story at school, then you will need to talk this through with your child ahead of time in order to address how these assignments will be handled by you and your child.

- **Community.** If people have questions about being adopted, have your kids be ready with a response or something that they’re willing to share.
- **Religious organizations.** Your family’s church or other faith-based organization often has forums or “temple talks,” and maybe adoption is something you and your kids could talk about.
- **Family gatherings.** When spending time with members of their extended family, again, have your child be prepared ahead of time with something to say.
- **Employers.** When your children start working, they may wish to share their story or some facts about adoption with their employer or co-workers. Or, if appropriate, they might even share their story with *your* coworkers.
- **Personal journal.** Your children can write in a journal as therapy for themselves or to show others when they feel comfortable.

These are just a few examples of ways your children may feel comfortable sharing their story or some facts about adoption.

Most of all, teach your children how to share safely. Make sure your children know that when sharing information about their adoption with someone outside of their safety zone (family members, close friends, teachers, etc.), not to share too many personal details.

They shouldn’t share their full name, where they currently live, or any other information that can identify them to a stranger or casual acquaintance who asks them a question in passing.

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Empowering your children to share their story with others, or to write it down for others to read, can be extremely rewarding for your children. Each child will have a different level of comfort in sharing his or her story and how much of it he or she might want to share.

Your children will most likely change their story over time as they feel more or less comfortable sharing certain aspects. They also may adjust their story depending on who they are telling it to.

When your children are sharing their adoption stories, they are educating others about adoption, they are owning the fact that they were adopted and they are proud to share their experiences with others.



Resources

Call us at (800) 762-8063 to borrow the following resources from our lending library.

Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew, by Sherrie Eldridge

W.I.S.E. UP Curriculum, by the Center for Adoption Support and Education

Examples of Adoption and Foster Care Stories

- <https://www.fosterclub.com/article/real-stories-foster-youth>



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Missing Pieces: Talking to Your Child about Adoption when Information is Limited

How much do you know about your child? Parents who adopted internationally, those who experienced a closed adoption, or whose child was relinquished through the Safe Haven law in Wisconsin may find that they know very little about their child's medical, social, or birth family history. So, why is this important? Most children and youth who were adopted will someday ask to find out about their birth family members or will have questions about their pasts. This tip sheet looks at what you can do to support your children when you have little or no information about their birth family.



Adoption, Loss, and Its Implications

Adoption cannot happen without loss, and most adoptees experience some amount of grief over the loss of their relationships with birth family and culture. When information about the child's birth family is lacking, those feelings of loss may be even more intense and might surface at various points in the child's life. If the adoption was preceded by an abandonment, children may experience self-esteem issues as they try to understand how and why their birth parent would desert them.

Adoption is a lifelong journey, and your child's feelings and understanding about adoption will change as she goes through various developmental stages and life events. Preschool-aged children often view adoption

in a positive light and may ask a lot of questions about the subject. By the time children who were adopted reach school age, most realize that, in order to be adopted, their birth parents had to make a difficult decision to make an adoption plan.

The Teen Years and Beyond

Adolescence can be a trying period for any young person, and adoption adds another layer of complexity. Identity becomes a big focus during the teen years. Part of a person's identity includes where they came from and how that affects who they are. Adolescents who do not

know much information about their past may struggle with questions like "who am I?" Those who joined their family through birth or through an open adoption, have some idea of what their birth family looks like, what they have in common with them, and/or why their birth family made an adoption plan. Youth who know little about their past may struggle with the unknown. In general, most teens try to fit in with their peers and don't like to stand out. Since most teenagers have information about their family history, a teen who was adopted can feel "different."

During the teen years, feelings of loss related to adoption may appear or intensify. As teens start exploring the dating world, they are likely to enter a relationship that ends abruptly after

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several days, weeks, or months, as most young courtships do. For the teen, this can feel like abandonment and cause them to feel that they are (again) unworthy of love. Adolescents who were abandoned as infants may also find it challenging to deal with the transition to adulthood, especially if it means moving away from their adoptive family for college or other endeavors. For some, this is a reenactment of an earlier loss of their birth family and, when that loss occurred, it lasted forever. Abandonment issues can resurface when you least expect them; some adoptees may re-experience loss issues when they become parents themselves.

Lack of Medical History and Information

Not having access to medical or genetic information can affect a child and her adoptive family in many ways. Adoptive mom Karianne Osowski admits that her daughter's medical and genetic history are always in the back of her mind, because there is so much that is unknown. A doctor's appointment may lead to questions about family history that cannot be answered, which may lead to sadness or embarrassment for the adoptee. Here are some situations that may be triggers for some children who were adopted:

- *Medical exams*—often occur at times of change, such as before school starts, when adoptees are often already emotionally vulnerable
- *Illness or medical crises*—the adoptee may wonder if having family medical information could have prevented or changed the outcome of the situation

- *Medical related school assignments*—blood typing and other science-related assignments that ask children to compare a physical feature to that of their parents

Tips for Talking to Your Child

Most adoptees will have questions about their birth family at some point during their childhood or adolescence. Having open and honest talks with your child about adoption might help reduce any feelings of shame she may be experiencing, as well as help her understand that her past does not fully define who she is or who she hopes to become.

So, what happens when questions come up for which you don't have an answer? It is

never easy to have to tell your child that you don't have the answers that she is looking for, especially if that fact is likely to cause your child pain. Talk together about her questions and cross those unknown bridges with gentleness and honesty. Admitting that you don't know the answers she is looking for is certainly hard, and your child may have a hard time hearing that, as well. Keep the line of dialogue open and check

back with her so that you can help your child deal with and work through any feelings of frustration, hurt, or anger related to those unknowns in her history.

Keep in mind that **no** adoptive parent has the answer to **all** of the questions their child will ask about her birth family. As children develop, they may even go through a time of thinking that their adoptive parent, who claims to have little or no information about their birth family, is actually withholding information from them. Sometimes it's helpful for youth to



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hear from more than one “source.” If possible, reach out to the adoption agency that you worked with and ask a representative from that agency to call, come speak with, or send a note to your child explaining that the information she is looking for, was not provided at the time of her adoption. Sometimes you may simply have to deliver the same message many times and help your child deal with the disappointment of not knowing.

How you frame the information you share with your child can make a difference in the way she perceives her story. For example, telling your child from a young age that, “your birth mother chose a safe place for you,” can help her focus on the positive aspects of adoption. Telling your child that, “your birth mother abandoned you,” has a much more negative feel. As is the case with all conversations about adoption, be mindful of your child’s age and developmental level. If the child was abandoned, you might talk together about some possible situations that might have led her birth parent(s) to make that decision, such as unsafe circumstances, limited parenting knowledge, or a lack of resources or support. The box to the right illustrates how some ways of talking to your child about abandonment may look.

Creative Ideas

Talking to your child about her feelings is important, as are creative ways that might help her work through those feelings and emotions. For example, books are a great way to introduce the subject of adoption and help children understand that they are not alone. You might keep some of the numerous adoption-related books available in your home collection so that your child can read and re-read them, if needed.

Young children often respond well to being asked to draw a picture of their adoption story. Adoptive parent Tricia Burkett encourages her six-year-old daughter to write letters and draw pictures for her birth

Talking about Abandonment

Preschool Years: “Your mother couldn’t take care of you and wanted you to be safe. So she found a safe place to put you where safe adults would come and take care of you.”

Early Elementary: “We feel sad sometimes, and even mad sometimes, that we cannot give you any more information. Do you ever have any sad or mad feelings about not knowing anything? It is important that you understand that you are not responsible for the decision your parents made.”

Middle School Years: “Although we do not have information directly about your birth parents, we can explore all about your country and learn to understand why birth parents had to make such difficult decisions. When you think about your birth parents, what do you think about? Are you ever sad or angry that you don’t know anything about them? What would you like us to do to help you?”

Preteen: Continue using educational resources to fill in a child’s cultural and educational background. Continue to ask the questions mentioned above in greater depth. Consider locating a peer support group of other adopted preteens and teens that deals with open discussion regarding adoption issues.

—From the book *Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child: Making Sense of the Past* (page 99)

family, and then place them in a special folder. Tricia has told her daughter that, if she ever gets to meet her birth family, she can give them the folder so that they know that she has been thinking about them. Tricia has noticed that this activity has been therapeutic for her

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daughter, and has allowed her to develop a connection with her birth family, even though they have never met. Older children or teens may benefit from being given a private journal in order to write about and process their emotions. Resources like the art therapy book *Adopted and Wondering: Drawing Out Feelings* can help your child get started on this process.

Hold on to any significant artifacts or pieces of information about your child's birth family. This could be anything from a piece of paperwork with the birth mother's handwriting or a photo of the child's birth parent. You may have heard about life books, which document a child's life using photos, stories, and other mementos. Even if there are many gaps in your child's history, making a life book could help her develop a connection to her past.



One adoptive mom had little information regarding the birth family of the child she adopted from out of state. However, she did know which hospital the child was born at, and, when she was in town, she stopped by the hospital to take a picture to add to the child's life book. You may also be able to use the Internet and resources like Google to get images of places or maps, such as streets, hospitals, or significant places people were born or lived. Consider other creative ways by which you could add information that may be meaningful for your child, even if it is not directly related to their family history. If you know your child's birthdate, you could use a website like [My Birthday Facts](#) to find facts such as how many hours/days/seconds old they are, or who was President when they were born. Websites like [Info Please](#) can provide information about U.S. and world events, movies, music, sports, and other newsworthy events that happened the year of your child's birth. While none of this will

make up for a lack of information about her birth family, it can help your child develop a sense of individuality.

Searching for Answers

At some point, your child may wish to search for more information about her birth family, a decision that could bring up conflicting emotions. They may fear finding their birth

family and then being rejected by them a second time. Or, they may worry that searching for their birth family will upset their adoptive family. It can help to let your child know that it is okay for her to search for her birth family – she may even appreciate your help with this process. Even children who have good relationships with their adoptive parents and are happy and well-adjusted can long to

know more about their birth families. On the other hand, some adoptees may not have an interest in their birth family history. Your child's feelings about wanting to know more or not may change over time; regardless of how she wants to proceed, do your best to support her and let her know that you are on her side. For more information on search and reunion, view our [To Search or Not to Search tip sheet](#).

The Importance of Connections

Getting to know other parents who have adopted may not only give you some additional support, but those other parents may have insight to share about how they handled a particular situation. If your child joined your family as a result of Wisconsin's Safe Haven law, you may be interested in Safe Place for Newborns. This nonprofit organization hosts a [Facebook page](#) where adoptive parents can network, and also organizes social events, during which adults and children from safe haven families can get together. If you adopted through international or

Continued on page 5

domestic infant adoption, there are [various support groups](#) throughout the state that might fit your family's needs, as well.

For children and teens who were adopted, being around other adoptees can help them feel "normal." Adoptees may establish meaningful connections with other adoptees at a workshop, camp, or in a support group setting. It may also be beneficial to find an adoptee who is older than your child to act as a mentor. These relationships are particularly helpful when adoptees are able to share common experiences and ways they have coped with the challenges associated with being adopted. These days, the Internet and social media can help children make connections with other adoptees. Even connecting your child to a blog written by another adoptee many help her see that her feelings are "normal" and show her that she is not alone.

Throughout your adoption journey, you will likely experience many joys, as well as many challenges. Adoptive families with little or no

information about their child's birth family can expect that their child will have many unanswered questions. As your child's guide through this journey, you have the opportunity to encourage her to talk about her true feelings about adoption, whether they are positive, negative, or conflicting. You will be there to support her when she has questions that cannot be answered. Remember that you are not alone in this journey and that the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families is also here to support and guide you.



Books

- *Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child*, by Betsy Keefer & Jayne Schooler
- *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew*, by Sherrie Eldridge
- *The Primal Wound*, by Nancy Newton
- *Making Room in Our Hearts: Keeping Family Ties Through Open Adoption*, by Micky Duxbury
- *The Sounds of Hope: A True Story of an Adoptee's Quest for her Origin*, by Anne Bauer
- *Connecting with Kids Through Stories: Using Narratives to Facilitate Attachment in Adopted Children*, by Denise Lacher

Related Tip Sheets

- [Talking to Your Children about Their Birth Parents](#)
- [The Journey of Forgiveness: How to Teach Your Children](#)
- [Empowering Your Children to Tell Their Adoption Stories](#)

Videos

- [Compassion for Birth Families](#)
- [There's Always Something Good](#)

Other Resources

- [Lavender Luz Blog](#)
- [Wisconsin Adoption Records Search Program](#)



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Benefits of an Antiracist Foster Home Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of the benefits an antiracist foster home could be to a foster child of color?
2. What are some ways you can appropriately express this support?
3. How do you think being transracially adopted affects children and their families?
4. What do you think it is like to be a member of a transracial family—where individuals within the family do not share the same racial identity?
5. What thought had you given to how society's racial stereotypes might affect you and your adopted child if they are from a different racial background than you?

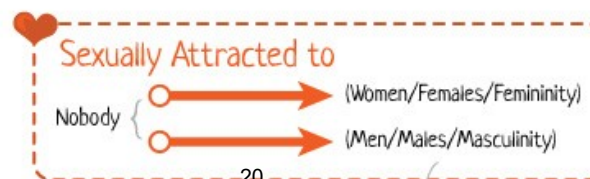
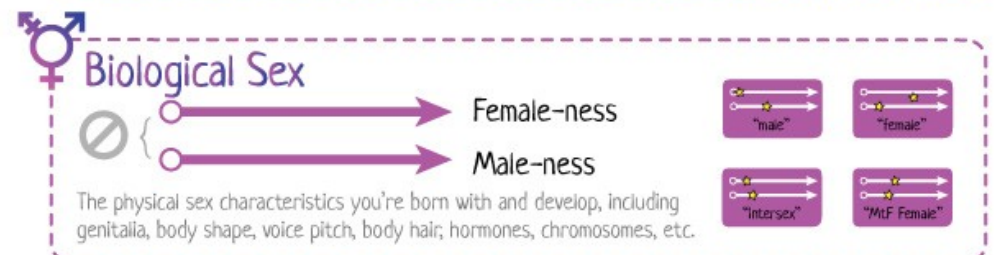
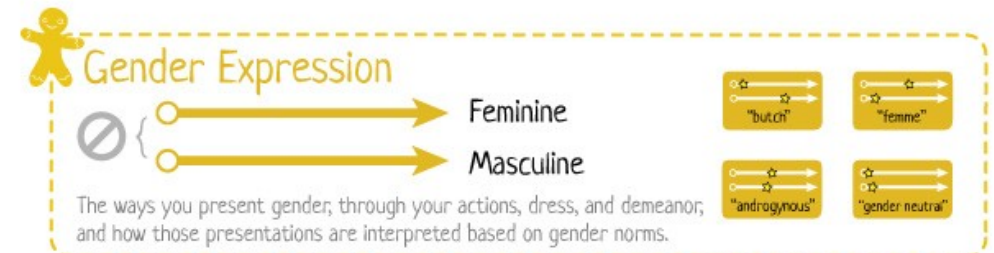
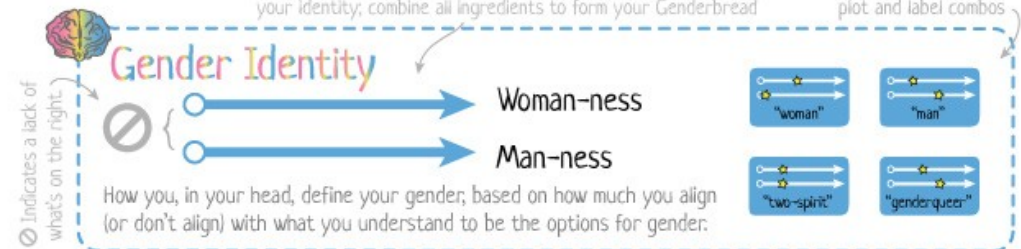
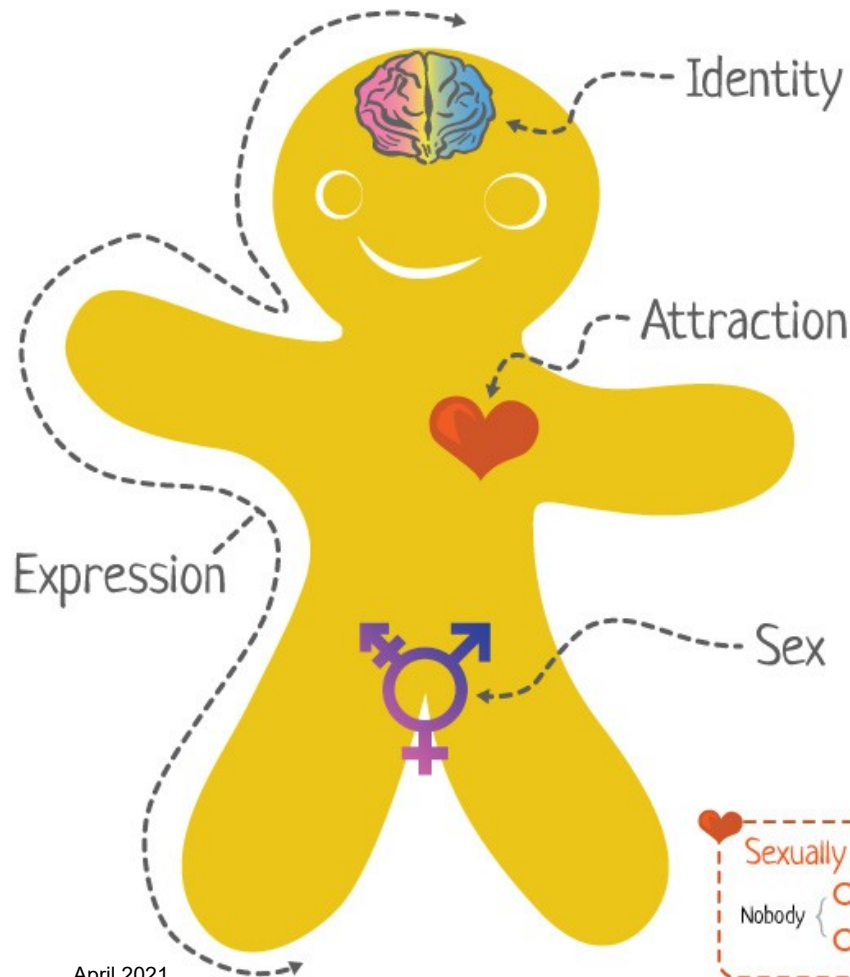
The Genderbread Person v3.3

Gender is one of those things everyone thinks they understand, but most people don't. Like *Inception*. Gender isn't binary. It's not either/or. In many cases it's both/and. A bit of this, a dash of that. This tasty little guide is meant to be an appetizer for gender understanding. It's okay if you're hungry for more. In fact, that's the idea.

by its pronounced **METROsexual**.com

Plot a point on both continua in each category to represent your identity; combine all ingredients to form your Genderbread

4 (of infinite) possible plot and label combos



In each grouping, circle all that apply to you and plot a point, depicting the aspects of gender toward which you experience attraction.

April 2021

For a bigger bite, read more at <http://bit.ly/genderbread>

Microaggression Statements

A microaggression is an indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group. Microaggressions are generally discussed from the perspective of race and racism but any marginalized group in our society may become targets: people of color, women, LGBTQ persons, those with disabilities, religious minorities, and so on.

As you read each of the following statements, identify the hidden message.

1. A young person uses the term "gay" to describe a movie that she didn't like.

2. When Asian Americans and Latino Americans are assumed to be foreign-born "Where were you born?" "You speak good English."

3. A person of color is presumed to be dangerous, criminal, or deviant on the basis of their race.

A store owner following a customer of color around the store.

4. Two gay men hold hands in public and are told not to flaunt their sexuality.

Microaggression Statements and Interpretations

Draw a line connecting the statements in the first column with all the possible interpretations from the second column. Each statement from Column A may connect with more than one interpretation. Be ready to explain each choice.

Column A: Statements

1. "Don't be such a sissy."
2. "Of course you have a bad relationship with your parents. You're gay."
3. "You speak English very well."
4. "America is a melting pot."
5. "I don't see color."
6. "I have Black friends, so what I say isn't offensive."
7. "Everyone knows Blacks are more likely to shoplift."
8. [A professor asks a Latina student in front of the class] "What do Latinas think about this situation?"
9. "That's retarded."

Column B: Possible Interpretations

- a. Feminine traits are undesirable.
- b. People with disabilities are less important, likeable or competent.
- c. You don't belong.
- d. Being gay is unacceptable.
- e. Your sexual orientation is your most important characteristic.
- f. You are not man enough.
- g. Your culture is your most defining feature.
- h. People of your background are unintelligent.
- i. You look like a criminal.
- j. I see you as your skin color only.
- k. You are not American.

<http://breakingprejudice.org/teaching/group-activities/microaggression-activity/>

Resilience

Research on resilience in children demonstrates that there are four main areas that comprise protective factors for children.

1. *Child Factors* – Children are wired to respond to stress in certain ways. Having characteristics such as being persistent, goal-oriented, adaptable, optimistic, willing to approach novel events, have high self-esteem, intelligent, and good social skills contribute to positive adaptation. Children who, before the traumatic event, were fearful, anxious, or sad may experience serious reactions, take longer to bounce back, or require extra attention from their families.
2. *Trauma Characteristics* - Children who are in close proximity and who experience intense emotions (fear or panic) during the event tend to be at risk for subsequent problems.
3. *Parent Availability* - An essential protective factor for children is the reliable presence of a positive, caring, and protective parent, who can help shield their children against adverse experiences. They can be a consistent resource for their children, encouraging them to talk about the experiences. And they can provide reassurance to their children that the adults in their life are working to keep them safe. This is your role for your child or children. Especially if your child has been in multiple placements throughout their years in foster care.
4. *Developmental Stage* –In order to become resilient to life's unpredictable and overwhelming stressors, we first must build and strengthen our stress-response systems through "practice" and those experiences allow development to proceed. The expression of resilience varies with age and a child's developmental capacity in all the domains.

Source: NCTSN 2018

Love and Logic Parenting Style Assessment

Jim Fay

Directions: Please read each statement and circle the response that fits best how you would respond.

1. Your child forgets either their homework, band instrument, or lunch you:

- a) Run to the school as fast as you can. You just hate to see them lose points, miss out in band, or go hungry.
- b) Give them a long lecture on responsibility, and let them know there will be a serious consequence because you had to drive all the way back to school.
- c) You say, "Bummer buddy, I hate when I forget things. It's sure easy to do. What do you think *you* are going to do?"

2. Your child CHRONICALLY holds up morning car pool and is never ready on time you:

- a) Rush around behind them packing their backpack for them. Nagging them incessantly to PLEASE hurry!
- b) Yell and threaten to take away their video games after school if they can't figure out how to get it together.
- c) You've already talked about what it takes to get ready before 8:00 am so you:
 - SHUT YOUR MOUTH during morning routine.
 - Make a phone call to the car pool lady and ask her to wait 30 seconds for him. If he's not ready, please go ahead.
 - Be really sad for him when car pool is gone, "Bummer man. That just stinks. What are you going to do?" Then give him some choices of what some kids try. (Of course you've planned this whole session out before hand. You have all the support and help you need to handle whatever this child may throw at you. You empathetically keep the responsibility on his shoulders, and it becomes a great learning experience for him.)

3. Your toddler's breakfast is coming to an end. She continues to throw her drink off the highchair, squealing in delight. You:

- a) Are getting annoyed but keep picking it up sweetly reminding with every throw, "Sweetie, leave your cup here." And, "Now let's stop throwing and drink it all gone."
- b) Get frustrated. With every throw your face is redder and your sweet voice turns in to a demanding, "Stop that!"
- c) Sing "Uhh-ohh, looks like you're done. Time to get down." Then, when 'princess' whines and cries that she wants more you are so sad, "I know, so sad. When we throw we get down." You are a pro at redirecting; next you're off to the play room, "Do you want to play blocks or dolls?"

4. Your kids aren't picking up their toys you:

- a) Get sick of stepping on them. You know they should be picking them up... but company will be here soon and it's just easier to get it done yourself.
- b) Pull them in from the other room, grab their hands and state, "Start picking up NOW!"
- c) Make it a game! Everyone is a dump truck time to scoop up as many toys as possible. You let them know, "I love helping people who work hard!"
- d) Your family already has a rule: Who ever picks it up, gets to keep it. Your sweet girl cries when she realizes you've picked up all her My Little Ponies you say, "Bummer, this is so sad. Would you like to try again tomorrow or wait for 2 days instead?"
- e) Both C and D are great choices!

5. It's time for Junior to take out the trash you:

- a) Ask him 3 times and the smell is driving you crazy. You take care of it for him because he is busy with his homework.
- b) Click off the T.V. he is watching and state, "Excuse me?! What did I ask you to do? Why isn't it done yet? How many times do I have to ask you to do something before you actually get it done!?"
- c) Sigh with relief. When you asked your kid to take the trash out, you asked him to do it sometime before dinner. You know that Junior NEVER misses a meal. You know that the smell of dinner will remind him of his promise and if not you will lovingly let the family know, "I am happy to serve dinner in 5 min. to everyone who has their chores done."

6. Your general parenting philosophy:

- a) You rap it like Vanilla Ice, "If there is a problem – you I'll solve it!"
- b) You feel like Burger King said it best, "Do it my way right-a-way."
- c) You believe in your kids and you tell them by holding them accountable in loving ways. Because you've set firm and loving limits, you are able to give your kids lots of freedom and choices within those limits.

(Turn to next page for scoring)

If you answered mostly A's:

You are probably a "Helicopter Parent." You have a big heart and people usually see you as a "great parent." Your style makes sense when a child is anxious about time or a task or about figuring something out on his/her own. However, when you are always there to rescue and save your child you may be doing it at your own expense, and even worse THEIR expense. You may not be helping your child learn skills and may be unknowingly communicating to your child that you do not think he/she is capable .

If you answered mostly B's:

You are probably a "Drill Sergeant Parent." You run a tight ship and expect your kids to do what you say when you say it. You are a well-meaning parent who wants to have a well-oiled machine. You want the very best for your kids and you know they are capable of it. When your kids make mistakes you tend to get upset rather than looking at it as a learning opportunity. Sadly the ironic part is when kids always have a drill sergeant breathing down their neck the covert message is, "I think you are too dumb to get it on your own, so I've got to nag, lecture and micromanage you." Your kids may tend to rebel as they get older because they haven't had enough healthy control in their lives. They also might tend to be sneaky. Drill sergeants train their children that a bad choice means mom/dad gets mad. Child's conclusion, "if mom and dad don't know, no one will get mad at me."

If you answered mostly C's:

You are probably a "Consultant Parent" You are an expert at having lots of tools on your parenting belt. You recognize there are several ways to handle a situation and you do it according to your child's needs. You view failure as a catalyst for growth and success in the future. You recognize your child's need for appropriate control and encourage him/her to exercise it. This style may be anxiety-provoking for children who have been neglected and expected to act like a parent. And it may miss communicating your expectations and values around a child's behavior.



Resilience and Child Traumatic Stress



What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability of a child to recover and show early and effective adaptation following a potentially traumatic event.

What is a traumatic event?

Traumatic events, like sexual or physical abuse, witnessing domestic or community violence, or being in a natural disaster, often cause children to have strong, upsetting feelings and can potentially disturb daily life, development,

and ability to function. The effect of a traumatic event depends in part on the severity of a child's experience. All children have some strengths to help them adjust and recover following a traumatic event.

At the same time, some children who experience a traumatic event may be significantly affected. This is not the fault of these children or a sign of weakness or failing. Instead, some traumatic events can overwhelm children's capacity to adapt to them, which affects their ability to recover. In these cases, a child may need additional family and system resources, services, and supports for resilience and recovery.

What does resilience look like in children?

Following a traumatic event a child's pathway to resilience could include these elements:

- Responding with minimal distress or effect on daily functioning.
- Exhibiting a temporary dip in ability to cope followed by an early and effective return to a child's usual level of functioning.

Some children may have problems functioning in certain areas (e.g., school performance), while at the same time showing resilience in other areas (e.g., peer relationships). Family and system resources, services, and supports can help improve functioning in areas where the child is struggling while also supporting and enhancing areas in which the child is doing well.



This project was funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The views, policies, and opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of SAMHSA or HHS.

What factors might enhance resilience in children after traumatic events?

Children's resilience may be enhanced by these factors:

- Support from parents, friends, family, school, and community.
- Resources that help to buffer negative consequences on daily life.
- Feeling safe at home, school, and in the community.
- Having high self-esteem—an overall positive sense of self-worth.
- Possessing a sense of self-efficacy—a child's belief that he or she can be successful in different areas of life.
- Having a sense of meaning in one's life, which might include spiritual or cultural beliefs, connections with others, or goals and dreams.
- Possessing talents or skills in certain areas (e.g., the arts, athletics, academics).
- Possessing a variety of adaptive and flexible coping skills that he or she can use in different situations.

Challenging life circumstances or adversities, for example, living in poverty, racism, ongoing community violence, social isolation, or illness can undermine children's resilience.



How do the systems in which children live affect resilience?

Children are dependent on others for their survival, and family, peers, schools, neighborhoods, and communities can provide resources that promote resilience. The quality of the systems and supports in a child's life can greatly assist children's resilient recovery.

Feeling close to or having a sense of belonging with other family members, peers, and community members can help children cope with trauma. When children experience a traumatic event, they often look to family and friends to help make sense of their experience and deal with difficult emotions.

Resilience may be fostered in children who have these:

- A strong, positive relationship with a primary caregiver who acts to ensure safety and protection after a traumatic event.
- A circle of family members who are committed to each other, share time together, resolve problems and conflicts effectively and efficiently, celebrate successes, hold shared values and beliefs, practice meaningful rituals, and have predictable routines.



Resilience and Child Traumatic Stress
The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
www.NCTSN.org

- A school that provides a positive social environment, works to foster and develop the child's cognitive skills, and promotes student safety and belonging through the support of school counselors, school social workers, school resource officers, teachers, and other school staff (e.g., bus drivers, cafeteria workers).
- A community that ensures access to quality essential services such as childcare, after-school programs, healthcare, and mental health services; has safe neighborhoods; provides green space, quality food sources, and healthy recreational activities; fosters a sense of community and connectedness; and has an equitable and diverse culture.

What are some initial steps to enhance recovery during treatment or services?

- Strength-based interventions that focus on helping youth and families recognize, understand, and value their own strengths in responding to a traumatic event.
- Strength-based assessments that include:
 - Assessing the resources and capacities of the child, caregiver, family, and community.
 - Determining how the provider can support and utilize these resources to improve child and family functioning in the treatment process.



Providers can work collaboratively with the child and family to develop a treatment or service plan that integrates individual, family, and communal strengths to address needs or symptoms, accomplish goals, reduce adversities, and foster growth and development.

For example, a provider could assist a child and family in creating a “strengths family tree.” Family members take an inventory of the resources and strengths of the child, family, and community and record these strengths and resources on the outline of a tree. Providers can use the “strengths family tree” as a symbol to integrate personal and communal strengths and resources and discuss ways the child and family can continue to grow in order to accomplish their treatment goals.

An overall strengths-based model includes these goals:

- Establishing an alliance
- Identifying strengths as well as problems
- Instilling hope and encouragement
- Finding practical solutions to presenting problems
- Building strengths and competence
- Fostering empowerment and change



Children can overcome the experience of trauma, but this often requires hard work. It is important for providers and families to give children credit for their courage and the hard work they can do to get better.

Resilience and Child Traumatic Stress
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HOW DOES THE LAW AFFECT ADOPTIVE PARENTS?

The DCF must attempt to notify the adoptive parents of a minor child when written information is received from a licensed physician verifying that a birth parent or biological sibling has developed a genetically transferable disease or condition.

Adoptive parents may request medical/genetic information and non-identifying social history information about their adopted child's birth parents.

OTHER PERSONS ELIGIBLE TO REQUEST MEDICAL/GENETIC INFORMATION

- The guardian or legal custodian of an adopted person or of an individual whose birth parents terminated parental rights.
- the offspring of an adopted person if he or she is at least 18.
- an agency or social worker assigned to provide services to the adopted person.
- The parent or guardian of a deceased adoptee's child.

Physicians can direct the program to pass on genetically transferable disease information about adopted persons, individuals, birth parents or siblings to adopted persons, individuals or birth parents.

ADULTS WHOSE BIRTH PARENTS TERMINATED PARENTAL RIGHTS

Adults who were not legally adopted as children but whose birth parents terminated parental rights in Wisconsin have the same services available under this program as adult adoptees.

SEARCH FEES

An hourly fee is charged for the release of medical, genetic and non-identifying social history information contained in existing closed adoption records. The maximum charge for preparing these materials is limited to \$150.

An hourly fee is also charged for a search for birth parents.

Some applicants may be eligible for a fee reduction. Additional information about Program fees can be found on the Adoption Records Search Program application form.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS PROGRAM OR TO REQUEST AN AFFIDAVIT OR APPLICATION PACKET, CONTACT:

Adoption Records Search Program
DCF/DSP
P.O. Box 8916
Madison, WI 53708-8916
(608) 422-6928

E-mail:

dcfadoptionsearch@wisconsin.gov

Website:

<https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/adoption/search>

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ADOPTION RECORDS SEARCH PROGRAM



A SPECIALIZED PROGRAM FOR:

ADULT ADOPTED PERSONS

ADULTS WHOSE BIRTH PARENTS
TERMINATED PARENTAL RIGHTS BUT WERE
NOT ADOPTED

ADOPTIVE PARENTS

BIRTH PARENTS

DIVISION OF SAFETY AND PERMANENCE

THE WISCONSIN ADOPTION RECORDS SEARCH LAW

Wisconsin's adoption record search law is set forth in sections 48.432 and 48.433, Wisconsin Statutes. It is administered by the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families (DCF).

The primary purpose of this law is to help persons who have been adopted or whose birth parents have terminated their parental rights, to obtain information about themselves and their birth relatives. This information may include:

- Non-identifying social history information.
- Medical and genetic information about birth parents and members of their families, including routine health information and any known hereditary or degenerative diseases.
- Most recent names and address of birth parents in DCF files.
- A copy of the impounded birth certificate (the birth certificate on file prior to the time of adoption).

The law specifies conditions and protections under which the search may be conducted. Birth parents have the option to file a notarized statement (affidavit) with DCF consenting to the release of their identities or to refuse to allow the release of their identities.

Adult adoptees may also file a consent allowing for their contact information to be released to a birth parent who requests it.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE LAW

The law requires DCF to assist eligible persons to obtain medical and genetic information from and, or locate their birth parents.

The law establishes procedures for adults whose birth parents have terminated parental rights and adopted persons to search for their birth parents.

The law also:

- Requires Circuit Courts to report medical and genetic information on both birth parents and relatives to DCF at the time parental rights are terminated in Wisconsin.
- Requires DCF to maintain a permanent centralized birth record file on all adoptions completed within the State.
- Allows adoptive parents to request medical and genetic and non-identifying social history information from existing records or to request updated medical or genetic information from their children's birth parents.

HOW DOES THE LAW AFFECT ADOPTED PERSONS?

A person who was adopted in Wisconsin who is now age 18 or older may request a search for his or her birth parents. A birth parent must file an affidavit of consent before any identifying information can be released.

If an affidavit is not already on file, a search for the birth parent will be conducted. The birth parent is then contacted and given the option of signing an affidavit to release identifying information – or refusing.

When paternity was legally established, both birth parents must file affidavits before the identity of either one of them may be released to the adopted person. If the adopted person was born in Wisconsin, a copy of his or her impounded birth certificate can be released once the birth parents have filed affidavits.

An adopted person can also request non-identifying information from his or her adoption file and updated medical and genetic information about his or her birth parents. If updated information is requested, a search for the birth parent will be conducted to obtain the information.

An adopted person may file a notarized affidavit with DCF consenting to the release of his/her identity to a birth parent upon request.

The DCF makes every effort to notify an adopted person or his or her adoptive parents (if not yet 18 years old), if we receive information that a birth parent or biological sibling has developed a genetically transferable disease or condition.

HOW DOES THE LAW AFFECT BIRTH PARENTS?

A birth parent may file a notarized affidavit with DCF consenting to the release of his/her identity and location and a copy of the impounded birth certificate to the adopted person.

A birth parent may revoke the affidavit (withdraw their consent) at any time by writing to the Adoption Records Search Program.

A birth parent may request the most recent name and address of the birth child they placed for adoption if the birth child has an affidavit of consent on file with DCF.

Birth parents are required to provide medical/genetic information to the court at the time parental rights are terminated. Updated medical/genetic information may be filed with DCF any time. Forms are available from Adoption Records Search Program for this purpose.

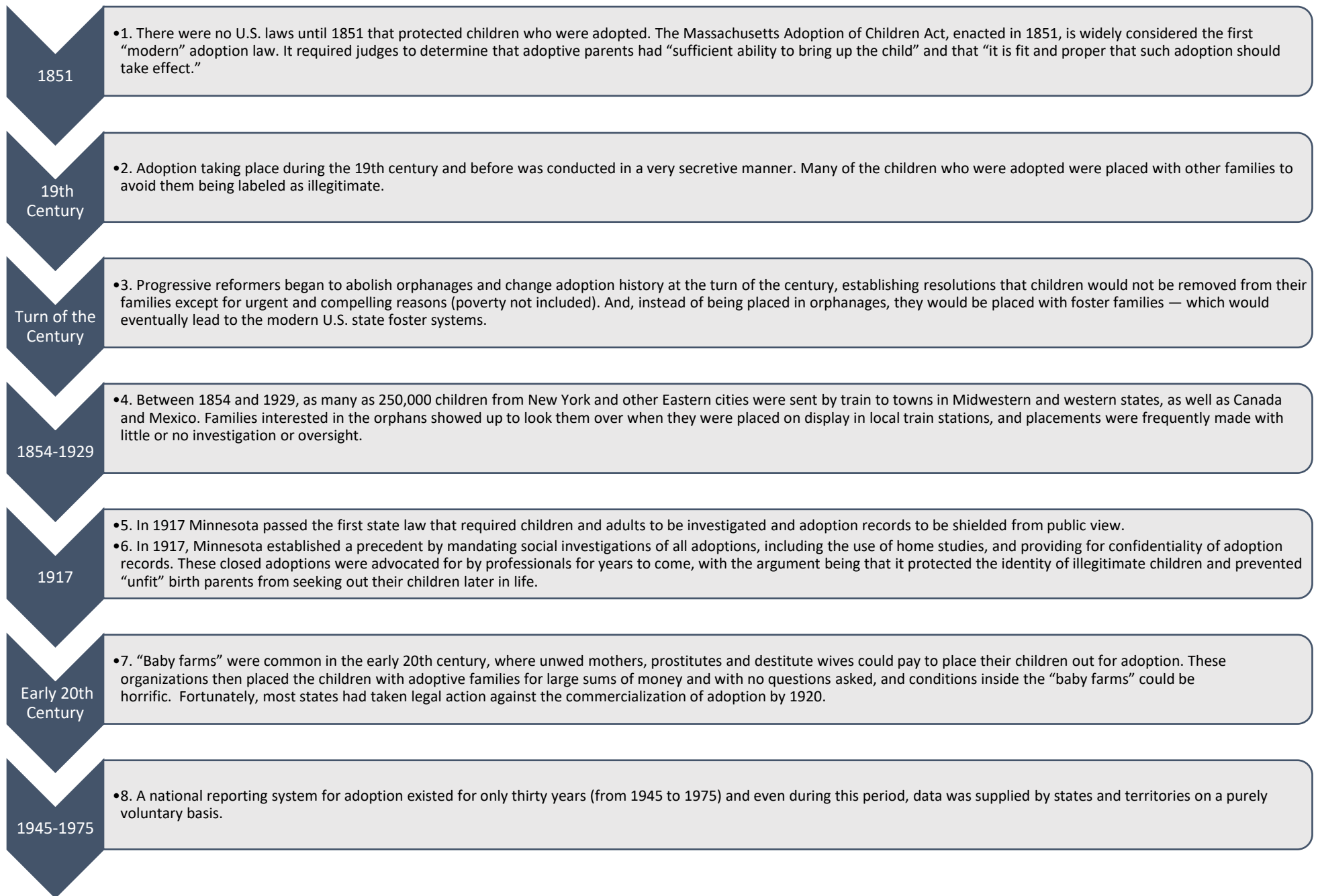
A birth parent may request the Program to notify an adoptee, if a genetically transferable disease or condition is present in the family. A statement from a licensed physician is required.

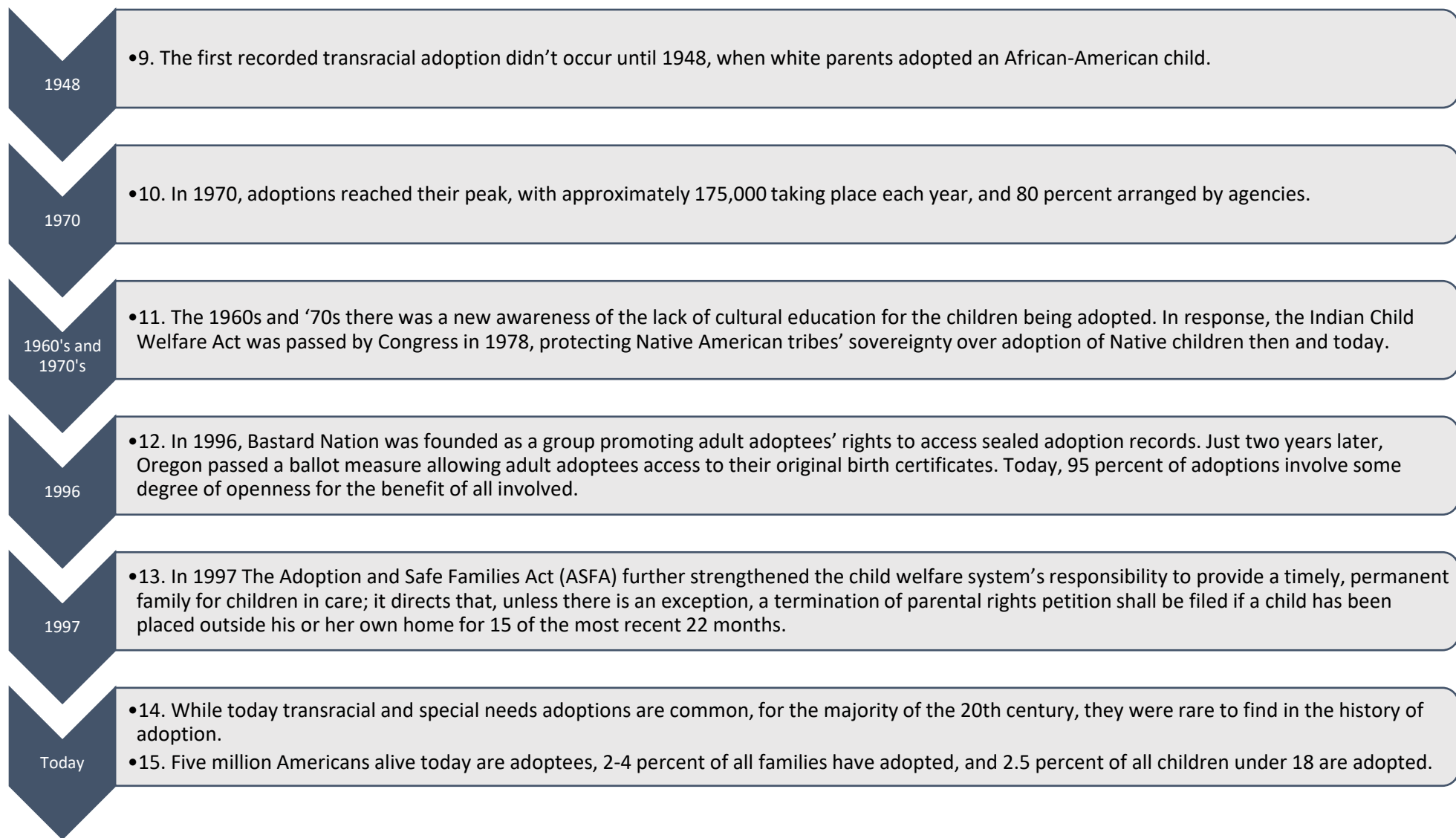
HOW DOES THE LAW AFFECT SIBLINGS?

The current adoption search law does NOT allow siblings to request searches for each other. Some medical information about siblings may be included in the non-identifying social history record.

Historical Roots of American Adoption

Legal Issues in Adoption





List of Court Personnel

1. **Assistant District Attorney** represents what is best for the common good based on Chapter 48 and makes legal recommendations based on their interpretation of Chapter 48.
2. **Corporation Counsel** is a lawyer who works for the county or child welfare agency and might represent the county/agency in child welfare cases.
3. **Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)** is a trained volunteer chosen by the judge to advocate for a child in foster care.
4. **Commissioner** is an attorney, appointed by a judge, who presides over certain types of court issues.
5. **Defense Attorney (aka Parent's attorney)** is an attorney assigned to represent the parent and their desired wishes related to their child to the court.
6. **Guardian Ad Litem** is an attorney, who represents children under the age of twelve, represents the best interests of the child to the court; not what the child may wish to happen.
7. **Judge /Presiding Judge** is an elected official who makes the final court decisions and rulings in a case.
8. **Public Defender (aka Adversary Counsel)** is an attorney who represents a child ages 12 and over. This attorney is required to represent the wishes of the child to the court.



Preparing to Go to Court

Court. It's a word that, for many foster parents, conjures up feelings of fear, nervousness, and the unsettling butterflies of the unknown. What will the attorneys, judges, and social workers—people who may seem far removed from the realities of your everyday life—decide about the child you care for every day? The court system speaks a different language and makes crucial decisions about the lives of the children in your care. While you do not need to dive deep into all the legalese, it may help to know the basics, as well as what you can do to get yourself and the older child or teen in your care ready for court.

What drives decisions made in child welfare?

Agencies focus on safety and permanency when making child welfare decisions. Permanency means a forever family. It means the child has a safe and stable home and a life-long relationship with a caregiver.

Permanency may mean returning home, guardianship, adoption, or a planned living arrangement with a relative or non-relative. Returning home is always the preferred choice. If that cannot happen, the hope is that one of the other arrangements will allow the child to have permanent legal family and lifelong support.

This emphasis may sometimes be at odds with your concerns as a foster parent. You may wonder about the quality of parenting happening in the birth home. It may help to think of the child in the context of having a birth family and a supporting family, with permanence as the ultimate goal.



Why go to court?

- **Your Input is Valuable.** The decisions the court makes about children's lives are only as good as the information provided, so your observations are important. As a foster parent, you have impressions that come from direct, day-to-day

involvement with the child as well as school personnel, medical professionals, therapists, or birth parents. For more on recording your notes, see our tip sheet on [The Importance of Documentation](#).

We recommend talking to the social worker and the Guardian ad Litem (GAL) before a hearing to share the information that you've gathered since the last hearing. This could be done in an email that includes the worker, GAL, and supervisor.

- **To Play a Role.** Foster parents have not always had a clear role in legal proceedings about the children in their homes, but that is changing. More and more statutes not only require the court to notify foster parents of relevant hearings but also give

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those parents the right to provide input at the proceedings. For example, if a child has been in the foster home for at least six months, and a change of placement is proposed, the foster parents have the right to contest the change. The foster parents must be notified of the change and have a time frame during which they can object.

- **To Gather Information.** Whether or not the social worker suggests you should go to court, if you have the opportunity, we hope that you do so. You will gain valuable information at court that you would otherwise only learn secondhand later, or not at all.

A family affair

The legal terms used in child welfare are intentionally different from those used in criminal court. Even though a child's caregivers are ultimately legally accountable, the child welfare system in Wisconsin focuses on the needs and safety of the child. Legal terms used in the criminal system are given family-friendly alternatives; "disposition" instead of "sentencing," and "fact-finding" rather than "trial." It may be helpful for you to think and talk about the court process as a way to help children and families heal, rather than to assign punishment.

Some participants view the legal process as adversarial, as having winners and losers. As protectors of children, we want to keep the best interests of the child in mind and, in most cases, that means improving a child's life in the context of his or her birth family. No one wants to have a child or family feel like they have "lost" during the court process. A trauma-informed approach will view the family as a whole, rather than the child in a vacuum. So, when we work to respect, dignify, and support the child *and* birth family throughout the legal process, the child will benefit.

The practical pieces

Here are some practical tips for preparing for going to court:

- Keep your explanations positive and developmentally appropriate when discussing court with the child in your care. For teens, explain the roles of the various people attending the hearing.
- If the child or youth will be attending the hearing, take them on a tour of the courthouse and courtroom ahead of time if possible. If you cannot take a tour in person, you might look at pictures in books or online.
- Guardians ad Litem or other attorneys involved in the hearing may want to speak with the child before the hearing. Do your best to ensure the child is available to engage in those conversations.
- If you're unable to be present for the hearing, you may be able to participate by other means. (See section titled *"Participating in Court"* later in this tip sheet.)
- Prepare for pre-hearing interactions that may occur while you're waiting for the hearing to begin. For example, you may have a conversation or meeting with the child's birth family. Your social worker can help you stay informed about any recent developments in the case.
- Bring an item for the child or teen to occupy their time during what is sometimes a long wait for the hearing.
- Dress – wear casual but slightly more formal clothing; the same for the child or youth participating in the hearing.
- Arrive well ahead of the hearing time, to

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allow for parking, getting through security (if your courthouse has it), and finding your courtroom.

- While arriving on time is important, understand that there could be long delays before your hearing.
- Be aware of how difficult this time may be for the older child or teen who attends court. He or she may feel confused about who to talk to or sit with. You might find it helpful to talk about these options ahead of time with the child or youth.
- Child welfare proceedings are confidential. Please know that the courtroom will be secured at the start of the hearing.
- Each court jurisdiction has its own culture, and protocol will probably vary from district to district and even between judges' courtrooms. Your social worker may have some additional information or tips about what you might expect at the hearing.
- Courtroom etiquette calls for addressing the judge as "Your Honor." Children and youth may not be familiar with this courtesy, so you may wish to make a point of discussing this with them before the hearing.
- Be mindful that emotions can run high. You might prepare by thinking of what

may cause an emotional reaction for you or the child, as well as techniques to help you remain calm.

- The birth family may have strong feelings about the decisions that will be made in this hearing. It may help to try to see the situation from their point of view and to remind yourself that you are all interested in the best outcome for the child.

- Remember that, pre- or post-court, the child may act out, withdraw, or exhibit other signs that they are processing the monumental decisions that are happening. Be supportive of the child in your care, and do your best to help them regulate their emotions.



What happens at hearings

It may help you, as well as the child in your care, to understand the purpose of the hearing you will be attending. Your social worker, the Guardian ad Litem, or experienced foster parents might be able to help answer your questions or address any

concerns you may be feeling. Courtroom protocols differ depending on the type of hearing, so you may wish to learn more about each type so that you can best prepare for whatever will be expected of you or the child. For more information, see the [Wisconsin Foster Family Handbook](#) for an excellent explanation of the child welfare process.

Typical hearings in the child welfare system might include temporary physical custody,

Continued on page 4

change of placement, plea hearing, and termination of parental rights. See Chapter 48 (children's code) in the [Wisconsin Statutes](#) for more details on what happens in child welfare hearings. For information on youth justice, visit Chapter 938 in the same handbook.

Participating in court

There are various ways to provide your input to the court. These might include testifying, participating by phone, or writing a letter.

Provide testimony.

As a foster parent, you may be called upon to testify. Alternatively, the judge may simply ask you questions as you sit in the courtroom.

The information you may be asked to present:

- Your credentials and experience as a foster parent
- Your observations of the child during placement
- Your interactions and shared parenting with the birth parents
- The role you have played as a foster parent, and any supportive activities you have engaged in, such as therapy, involvement with the child's education, medical services, etc.

A few things to keep in mind if you are asked to testify:

- Check with your social worker before court. Any written notes or documents you bring could be copied by the attorneys and kept for the record.
- While testifying, do your best to answer as directly and succinctly as you can.
- Focus on the facts. For example, avoid saying "he always cried after visits because he hated going." Instead, you might say, after a visit on a particular date, "his appetite was different and he wet the bed that night."



Participate by phone. This is generally not recommended, and is more typically used for the birth parents or another "party to the action." Nevertheless, in many hearings, you have a right to participate, so

if you simply cannot be present in person, ask your social worker about how to request to appear by phone. Be sure to make your request well before the court date.

Write a letter. Whether you appear in person or not, a written letter to the court will ensure that your observations and impressions are heard by all involved in the court process. Mail the letter to the court well before the proceeding; copies will be made available to all parties. As with testimony, do your best to present your information factually without including opinion or assumption.

Sometimes the wheels of justice turn slowly. At many points in the process, there

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may be a continuance (postponement) of a legal action. Some reasons may be:

- The court may need participants to gather more information, such as what can be learned from a parental capacity assessment or an alcohol and drug evaluation.
- The attorneys involved may have scheduling conflicts, or new attorneys may have been assigned to take over cases, causing delays.
- The system may have a bottleneck that prevents your case from being heard until months beyond when statutes indicate it should be heard.

Whatever the reason, you will surely need patience with what can become a long, drawn-out process. Here are a few final tips for what to do while you wait:

- To a child, a few weeks can seem like years. Use developmentally appropriate ways to communicate where you're at on the legal timeline. For example, "The judge is giving your parents some extra time to make things safe for you at home."
- It may be tempting to avoid talking about the court process with the child during in-between periods. However, emotions surrounding court may be just under the surface for the child. Keep the lines of communication open, get answers to the child's questions, and assist the child in regulating emotions.
- Move your child's healing journey forward. Talk to your social worker about how best to take advantage of the additional time, whether it's scheduling visits with brothers or sisters, adding in an extracurricular activity, or squeezing in

additional therapy.

While the court process may at times seem intimidating and endless, have confidence in the legal journey that you, the child, and the child's family are traveling. Preparing for court will help both you and the child in your home adjust, and remember, eventually there *will* be a resolution!



Resources

Tip Sheet

- [The Importance of Documentation](#)

From our Library

- *Just for Now: Kids and the People of the Court*, by Kimberly Norris
- *What's Happening in Court?*, by Judicial Council of California
- Legal Resource Manual for Foster Parents, 4-module curriculum by Regina Deihl, J.D.
- *Objection Your Honor*, by multiple authors

Other Resources

- [Advice for Foster Parents Going to Court](#)
- [Advocating for the Best Interest of the Foster Child: A Guide for Foster Parents](#)
- [Foster Parents and the Courts](#)
- [Wisconsin Foster Family Handbook](#)
- [Wisconsin Statutes](#)



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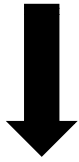
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Chapter 48 Court Proceedings: Types and Purposes

The following hearings are how a family case proceeds when CPS has become involved



Temporary Physical Custody Hearing (48.21) - a hearing to determine exclusive original jurisdiction over a child alleged to be in need of protection or services which can be ordered by the court. It must be conducted by the judge or a circuit court commissioner within 48 hours of the time the decision to hold the child was made, excluding Saturdays, Sundays, and legal holidays. The Assistant District Attorney will seek an order authorizing non-secure temporary physical custody (TPC). The TPC Order remains in effect until the dispositional order is granted, or the petition is withdrawn, and it gives the agency/county authorization to have the child remain in placement outside of the home.



Plea Hearing (48.30) - a hearing to determine whether any party wishes to contest an allegation that the child is in need of protection or services. If the petition is contested, a date is set for no more than 20 days after the plea hearing. If a petition is not contested, the court, shall set a date for the dispositional hearing.



Status Hearing – a hearing that provides an update to the court regarding the results of external evaluations such as mental health assessments, AODA assessments, or genetic testing. Also, a hearing related to the mental condition of the child, the child's parent, guardian or legal custodian, prehearing motions, waiver motions and hearings on other matters.

***Settlement Conference** – A special hearing that happens only in Milwaukee County in which the family's goals are discussed, deliberated and agreed upon.



Fact Finding Hearing (48.31) - a hearing to determine if the allegations in a petition are clear and convincing that a child is in need of protection and services.



Dispositional Hearing (48.335) - a hearing to make a final determination in which a child has been found to be in need of protection or services. The Judge signs a Dispositional Order and court conditions are confirmed, where each child is placed, it is put on record if the father who was alleged has not been adjudicated; and the permanency goal is determined.



Permanency Plan Hearing (48.38)(5m) –Permanency Plan Hearings occur on an annual basis before a judge. These are the topics of discussion at this type of hearing:

1. The continuing necessity for and the safety and appropriateness of the placement.
2. The extent of compliance with the permanency plan by the agency/county and family members.
3. The extent of any efforts to involve appropriate service providers in addition to the agency's staff in planning to meet the special needs of the child and the child's parents.
4. The progress toward eliminating the causes for the child's placement outside of his or her home and toward returning the child safely to his or her home or obtaining a permanent placement for the child.
5. The date by which it is likely that the child will be returned to his or her home or placed for adoption, with a guardian or in some other alternative permanent placement.

Permanency Plan Review (48.38)(5) –Permanency Plan Reviews happen in front of the court or child welfare panel and occur 6 months after a Permanency Plan Hearing.



Extension of Dispositional Order Hearing (48.365) - a hearing that is held when the goals set in the original Dispositional order have not been met, conditions for the return of the child(ren) have not been accomplished and the case needs to remain open.

Next set of Hearings that lead to Adoption:

1. Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) Hearing (48.427) – a series of hearings on the petition to terminate parental rights. At the initial hearing on the petition to terminate parental rights, the court shall determine whether any party wishes to contest the petition and inform the parties of their rights. There are 2 portions toward termination.

1. The first is evidence of legal grounds, Grounds for involuntary termination of parental rights (48.415). For this portion parent can request a jury or judge (court) trial.
2. The second portion is to determine that legally severing the parental rights is in the best interest of the child (48.426), emotionally and physically.

2. Adoption Hearing (48.91)- the hearing in which the court determines is in the best interests of the child and the court shall make an order granting the adoption.

Other Types of Court Hearings:

Change of Placement Hearing (48.357(2m)(b)) – a hearing occurs if one of the parties is not in agreement to a child changing placement. The judge listens to each party and makes a determination if the child can move.

Temporary Guardianship Hearing 48.023(1)/ 48.373(1) - a person appointed by the court to be the guardian of a child under this chapter has the duty and authority to make important decisions in matters having a permanent effect on the life and development of the child and the duty to be concerned about the child's general welfare, including but not limited to: medical or psychological care.

Capias Hearing 48.19(1)(d) - The child has run away from his or her parents, guardian or legal or physical custodian.



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Created by Milwaukee County Case Management Mentors 2010

Promoting Normalcy: Applying the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard

Introduction:

All children in out-of-home care deserve the right to normalcy. It is the responsibility of everyone involved in the child's life to promote and encourage normalcy by allowing the child to participate in age

Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard Considerations:

- ❖ Age, maturity, and development
- ❖ Potential risk factors
- ❖ Best interest of the child
- ❖ Growth
- ❖ Family-like living experience
- ❖ Child's behavioral history
- ❖ Court order/Legal considerations
- ❖ Cultural, religious, tribal values

and developmentally appropriate activities. Out-of-home care providers can promote normalcy for children placed in their care by using the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard to make decisions about the child's participation in extra-curricular, enrichment, cultural, social, and recreational activities; including transportation, employment, peer relationships, and personal expression.

Every reasonable and prudent parenting decision should be child specific and situation specific. Each decision should be made on a case-by-case basis and the out-of-home care provider should weigh all of the available information against the Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard considerations.

Whenever appropriate, reasonable and prudent parenting decisions should be made with active communication and consultation with birth parents, adoptive parents, or guardians of the child. While their permission is not required for reasonable and prudent parenting decisions, the parent/guardian may have valuable insight about the child that may help you make decisions, and will allow them to remain an active part of the child's life. The parent/guardian does not have to be called or consulted for every individual decision, but their values and input should be taken into consideration.

Out-of-home care providers should also include children in decision making. Not only does this improve independent living skills, it empowers children to be involved in their own planning. Children may have a different opinion on the appropriateness of an activity or whether it is in their best interest. Out-of-home care providers maintain the ability to say "no" to an activity a child would like to participate in, as long as it is a reasonable and prudent parenting decision.

If an out-of-home care provider does not have enough information about a child to make a reasonable and prudent parenting decision, they should contact the child's caseworker or to discuss the decision. Agencies cannot require an out-of-home care provider to obtain prior approval for a reasonable and prudent parenting decision. If an out-of-home care provider would like to approve an activity that promotes normalcy that crosses any existing court orders and/or rulings and decisions related to visitation, therapy, the permanency plan, or other related activities and schedules, the out-of-home care provider should discuss the activity with the child's caseworker.

Questions to Consider:

Out-of-home care providers should ask themselves the following questions when making a reasonable and prudent parenting decision for a child placed in their care. The following questions are not the only questions that out-of-home care providers should ask themselves, and no single question is necessarily the deciding factor for approving a particular activity.

Age, maturity,
and
developmental
considerations
module 5

Do I know enough about the child's developmental/medical history?

Would other children of the same age be allowed to participate in this activity?

Does the child show mature decision making?

Does the child have any developmental delays that would impact this decision?

**Potential risk
factor
considerations**
module 5

- Who will be attending/supervising this activity?
- Does the child have adequate training and safety equipment for this activity?
- Can the child protect him/herself and know how to respond in an emergency?
- Have I given the child enough information to safely participate in the activity?

**Best interest
of the child
considerations**
module 9

- Is this an activity the child is interested in participating in?
- Does approving this activity only serve my interests?
- Will this activity trigger any trauma reactions for the child?

**Cultural,
religious, and
tribal value
considerations**
module 2

- Will this violate any of the child's/family's cultural, religious, or tribal values?
- Will this activity promote cultural, religious, or tribal growth for the child?
- Will this allow the child to explore their own cultural, religious or tribal values?
- Have I consulted with the child's parents and families about their values?

**Growth
considerations**
module 5

- Will this promote the child's cognitive, social, emotional, or educational growth?
- Will this allow the child to further explore and pursue his/her interests?
- Will this activity safely allow the child to "fail" and learn from his/her experience?
- Will this activity teach the child independent living skills?

**Family-like
living situation
considerations**
module 6

- Would I allow my biological or adopted child to participate in this activity?
- Have I allowed other children in my home to participate in this type of activity?
- Will this activity help to make the child feel included?

**Child's behavioral
history
considerations**
module 8

- Does the child demonstrate responsible behavior for their age and capabilities?
- Does the child understand parental expectations and consequences?
- Does the child have a history of risky behavior?

**Court-order/
Legal
considerations**
module 1

- Will this activity violate a court order?
- Is this a decision only a legal guardian can make?
- Will this activity interfere with any visitations, appointments, or treatment plans?
- Will this activity violate any laws, policies, or administrative code restrictions?

Group Share Activity: Facing Your Fears

1. What if I fail?
2. What if the people in my community reject my transracial family?
3. What if he/she rejects me?
4. What if the child wants their birth parents more than they want me?
5. What if people judge us for our decision to adopt?
6. What will I do if my child struggles with his/her identity?

Common Adoption Fears

Here are five common fears of adoptive parents and how to handle them.

By Lee Helland



Few things in life fill your heart like the idea of bringing home a new child to love. The flip side: Few things fill you with such fear. Adoptive parents often experience distinct anxieties as they wait for their bundle of joy. If this is you, take heart. These thoughts are normal, and there's a wealth of resources that offer help.

Parents preparing for the birth of a child expect an instant, magical, world-moving connection with that baby. Will your love be the same? The short answer is yes. "Adoption looks different -- you're thinking, 'We weren't pregnant for nine months,'" says Bobbi J. Miller, Ph.D., a licensed family therapist who specializes in adoption and an assistant professor of family and community medicine at Saint Louis University. "The attachment process is about building a relationship. That takes time, and that's okay." In fact, many biological parents say they don't feel the immediate bond they thought they would. It often takes days or weeks of caring for the child -- feeding, clothing, changing diapers -- for that everlasting tie to form.

[What if I don't know how to talk to my child about his adoption?](#)

As adopted children grow, they may experience feelings of grief and loss about their family, country, or culture of origin, regardless of how old they were when they were adopted and whether or not they have a memory of where they were born. While these feelings often don't kick in until age 7 or 8, when kids start using their "thinking brain," you'll find it much easier to talk about them if you've been open about the adoption from the very beginning. Develop a family narrative, emphasizing that some people become part of a family through marriage, others through birth, and others through being adopted. As your kid gets older, or if she is older when you adopt, talk about her birth family and culture. Tell her, for instance, "You have an amazing singing voice, you must get that from your birth mom." The parent's job is to make the adoption and birth parents part of the conversation so that the child has the opportunity to voice feelings, according to Rita Taddonio, a licensed social worker and head clinician at Spence-Chapin, a private, not-for-profit adoption agency in New York. "Normalizing the topic helps them understand that when they're a little sad about their story, they can talk about it," Taddonio says.

How do you know if your adopted child needs help? "First of all, if they're not talking about it at all, be a little concerned," Taddonio says. "Change of behavior -- like an easygoing kid who now seems angry and is fighting with friends -- is also a red flag, especially from ages 7 to 12, when they could be stuck somewhere in their feelings about adoption."

What if people in my community aren't accepting of our transracial family?

American families adopted 8,668 children from other countries in 2012, and the Child Welfare Information Gateway estimates that roughly 14 percent of all adoptions are transracial or transcultural. Even if you live in what you believe to be an accepting family and community, be prepared to counteract prejudiced or racist questions or comments that your adopted child might hear, such as, "Where's the real parent?"

"Whether a remark is racially motivated or coming out of ignorance, what's important is that your answer convey the message you want your child to hear," Taddonio says. "Validate by saying, 'I'm the real parent -- you must mean his birth family.'" Seeing you take a stand and be proactive signals that you understand the gravity of what your child might be feeling, and helps him or her develop the tools needed to problem-solve.

"The best thing we did while we were waiting was to join a membership organization for families who adopt from China," says Tricia Corcoran, 49, of Kings Park, New York, who adopted her daughter from China two years ago when the little girl was 1 year old. "I wanted Charlotte to grow up around families like hers, and she's been around them her whole life."

Spending time with people of the child's ethnic group helps instill a sense of belonging. The group Corcoran is a part of, Families With Children From China, has chapters all over the U.S., and they organize events like picnics, parades, and culture camps to help families keep the kids connected to their heritage. Adoption agencies and the Child Welfare Information Gateway offer more ideas for honoring your child's birth culture.

Will the child have special needs?

A paper by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services reported that 37 percent of adopted children had special health-care needs, compared with 17 percent of biological children. And while 16 to 20 percent of adopted children have learning disabilities, compared with 8 to 10 percent of children in the general population, that still leaves a vast majority who do not, Taddonio points out.

At the beginning of the adoption process, you'll be asked whether you're open to adopting a child with special needs. You can prepare yourself to answer this by researching what's involved in caring for these children (the Child Welfare Information Gateway, the U.S. Department of Education, and your adoption agency are good resources). If you've been chosen by a birth mother to adopt an infant, think about how you'll move forward if the child turns out to have special needs, whether at birth or later in life. "Even when you give birth to a baby, you don't

know what the child's exact needs will be," Taddonio says. "Every parent should have some exposure to the learning-disabilities spectrum."

The Child Welfare Information Gateway offers links to financial assistance, including tax credits, for adopted children's health-care needs.

What if the birth parents change their mind?

If you've been chosen by a birth mother to adopt the baby she's expecting, you may worry that she'll have a change of heart. While this isn't common, it can happen. The best way to avoid heartbreak is to work with a reputable adoption agency and encourage the birth parents to take advantage of pre-adoption counseling. "You want them to have really considered the decision," Miller says. If they're exploring their feelings and given the opportunity to express them, there's a smaller chance of surprises later.

Another advantage of pre-adoption counseling is that you'll have the resources you need at the ready if the birth mother does choose a different path.

How do I find the right professional if I need help?

If you decide that anyone in your family needs help coping with fears or other emotions about the adoption, contact your adoption agency, which should have counselors on staff and, if necessary, can recommend additional professionals -- such as a psychologist, psychiatrist, or social worker -- who are experienced in adoption issues.

Check out this Child Welfare fact sheet for more info on finding the professional who is right for you.

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Definitions of Important Terms

Ally - Someone who makes the commitment and effort to recognize their privilege (based on gender, class, race, sexual identity, etc.) and work in solidarity with oppressed groups in the struggle for justice. Allies understand that it is in their own interest to end all forms of oppression, even those from which they may benefit in concrete ways. (<https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/antiracismresources/allies>)

Bias- a tendency, inclination, or prejudice toward or against something or someone (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/bias>). Biases can be positive or negative. Biases are often based on stereotypes, rather than actual knowledge of people or situations. Everyone has biases.

Implicit Bias- The attitudes or stereotypes that impact understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control. (Diversity and Resiliency Institute of El Paso)

Prejudice - An adverse judgement or opinion formed beforehand or without knowledge or examination of the facts. (American Heritage Dictionary)

Race- Although there are vast variations in human ethnicity and culture, there is no biological basis for racial categories. Race is a social construction that has largely served to justify inequitable, and often inhumane, treatment of some populations by others, such as the forced removal and genocide of indigenous populations, enslaving of Africans, and the Jewish Holocaust.

- Taken 10/2/2020 from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-race/>

Racism- Following Tatum (1992), we understand racism as “a system of advantage based on race” that is perpetuated through institutions, policies, practices, ideologies, and interpersonal interactions.

In the U.S. context, racism has and continues to benefit people perceived as “white” and to disadvantage those perceived as “people of color.” As such,...racism powerfully shapes life experiences and life chances.

- Taken 10/2/2020 from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/guides-sub-pages/teaching-race/>

Antiracism- In *How to Be An Antiracist*, Kendi writes:

"To be antiracist is to think nothing is behaviorally wrong or right -- inferior or superior -- with any of the racial groups.

Becoming antiracist requires every individual to choose every day to think, act and advocate for equality, which will require changing systems and policies that may have gone unexamined for a long time.

How Ibram X. Kendi's Definition of Antiracism Applies to Schools, taken 9/10/20 from [kqed.org/mindshift](https://www.kqed.org/mindshift), Katrina Schwartz, 12/18/19

LGBTQ+- an acronym used to describe those that do not identify as heterosexual or cisgender.

Cisgender- a gender identity, or performance in a gender role, that society deems to match the person's assigned sex at birth.

Lesbian - A woman whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same gender.

Gay - A sexual and affectional orientation toward people of the same gender.

Bi-sexual - A person whose primary sexual and affectional orientation is toward people of the same and other genders, or towards people regardless of their gender.

Transgender – Identifying as transgender means that one's internal knowledge of gender is different from conventional or cultural expectations based on the sex that person was assigned at birth. While transgender may refer to a woman who was assigned male at birth or a man who was assigned female at birth, transgender is an umbrella term that can also describe someone who identifies as a gender other than woman or man, such as non binary, genderqueer, genderfluid, no gender or multiple genders, or some other gender identity.

Questioning - The process of exploring one's own gender identity, gender expression, and/or sexual orientation.

or **Queer** – A term people often use to express a spectrum of identities and orientations that are counter to the mainstream. Queer is often used as a catch-all to include many people, including those who do not identify as exclusively straight and/or folks who have non-binary or gender-expansive identities. This term was previously used as a slur, but has been reclaimed by many parts of the LGBTQ movement. (hrc.org)

Gender expression is all about how you demonstrate your gender through the ways you act, dress, behave, and interact—whether that is intentional or unintended. Gender expression is interpreted by others perceiving your gender based on traditional gender roles (e.g., men wear pants, women wear dresses). This is in contrast to a person's "sex" which refers to the anatomy of an individual's reproductive system and secondary sex characteristics (e.g., body hair, widening hips, facial hair, muscle mass).

Gender identity is all about how you, in your head, think about yourself.

Sexual orientation is all about who you are physically, spiritually, and emotionally attracted to.

Anti-Racism/Transracial Parenting:

1. Harvard University Anti-racism Resources

Podcasts- <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/antiracismresources/allies/podcasts>

Information for Parents- <https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/antiracismresources/allies/podcasts>

2. Antiracist Baby Picture Book

By IBRAM X. KENDI Illustrated by ASHLEY LUKASHEVSKY

3. Let's Talk About Race

By Julius Lester, Illustrated by Karen Barbour

4. How to be an Anti-Racist Adoptive Parent

<https://www.adoptivefamilies.com/transracial-adoption/how-to-be-anti-racist-adoptive-parent/>

5. Seeing White podcast, www.sceneonradio.org/seeing-white/

6. Harvard Implicit Bias Test, implicit.harvard.edu/implicit

LGBTQ+ Resources:

1. The Trevor Project- <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/>

A Guide to Being an Ally to Transgender and Nonbinary Youth-

<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/trevor-support-center/a-guide-to-being-an-ally-to-transgender-and-nonbinary-youth/>

2. Child Welfare Information Gateway- Resources for Families of LGBTQ Youth-

https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/diverse-populations/lgbtq/lgbt-families/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=elertapril21

3. The Genderbread Person- <https://www.genderbread.org/>

4. GLSEN (Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network)- <https://www.glsen.org/>

5. This is a Book for Parents of Gay Kids: A Question & Answer Guide to Everyday Life

By Dannielle Owens-Reid, Kristin Russo and Linda Stone Fish

6. Unconditional: A Guide to Loving and Supporting Your LGBTQ Child (Book for Parents of a Gay or Transgender Child)

by Telaina Eriksen (Author)