

**This Edition
Focuses on Teens
and Adoption**



Adopting Teens: A Delayed Blessing

by Mary Martin Mason

A year ago, when Larnell was 16, he sat in a support group for foster youth awaiting adoption. Stone faced, he was listening to a guest speaker describe an opportunity for youth like himself to make public appearances and tell their stories. "You've got 30 seconds to make your case," he told the startled guest speaker. Larnell never took his eyes off the clock, and true to his word, timed the presentation.

Although he still reserves some teenaged skepticism of adults, since gaining a family his trust level has increased as much as his smile. On January 25, 2003, seventeen-year-old Larnell was adopted by Bereatha Jasper, one of many former foster care providers; "too many to count" in his estimation. Reminded of some challenging past behaviors, he laughs. "I was more reckless back then. I don't know if that is a good thing or a bad thing. I didn't show much emotion. I thought like an adult. Most of the time I was very serious."

Recruiters who find homes for older youth find that they are likely to be adopted by people who already know them, a fact that wasn't lost to Larnell who asked his social worker to return him to the foster home he had once shared with one of his younger siblings;

only this time, he wanted Bereatha to adopt him. He explains, "When I was in this house, I was going through a lot of emotions and I couldn't wait to get out of here. But once I got out and went to other places I realized how good I had it here. This is a family where all my brothers were happy, and if anything happens they can still call here. Me and Mom kept contact when I was out of here."

Larnell's fears that Bereatha might not want to adopt him were heightened when she needed some time to consider the prospect. She explains her initial hesitancy as, "It's more that you're bringing in a teenager, not necessarily that it was him. He was going through that 'I want what I want when I want it. Forget the world' thinking. And you have to think about the clash of personalities. As teenagers, we thought we knew everything. Everyone who adopts teens goes through that even though I wouldn't trade this experience for anything. God brought this person back into my life for a reason. I'm glad He did."

Bereatha's resolve to adopt was heightened by her childhood experiences. "One of the things I learned growing up was that we always seemed to have someone staying with us. I thank my mother for that. She taught us to help the next person out because down the road it might be our child that needed that same help."

Create Opportunities for Bonding

When he first came to live with Bereatha, she took him camping. In hindsight, Larnell refers to the adventure as "forced bonding. I didn't know that was her strategy. I just thought she was taking us to God knows where. It did work because I was scared up there. You see those movies in the woods like *Blair Witch Project* or where people are ambushed by bats. Out there you have to go to your parent and you have to ask questions because they're the ones who have been up there before."

Larnell recognizes that the camping trip was his mom's way to remove television, video games and other distractions so that he was forced to interact with her family. "My mom says that overnight you can't get to know one person completely. You need to spend time with that person to see if that's who you want to adopt you."

Expect Adjustments between Birth and Adopted Siblings

Today, Larnell feels especially close to his mom and to his new brother Jarvis. "We're a real family here. Mom knows how to be like a teenager because she knows what she did. You can't pull anything on her because she already did that when she was a teenager and that makes it funnier. When we're in trouble, we know it! She can be like a teenager at times and she can be like an adult. She knows certain times to play."

Adjusting to getting a brother overnight presented some challenges for Larnell who says, "Jarvis was a brat. He was upset because he thought I was going to take his mom, and I was upset because he was her kid. I don't think she treated me differently than him, but we'd always clash about that. We got into it a couple of times, but that was a long time ago."

Stay the Course with Discipline

Larnell appreciated the discipline that had been missing in some of his former placements. "Here it's a good kind of intimidation," he explains, "like when you mess up in school you get a consequence. The others weren't very persistent like Mom is. It was like, 'Oh you messed up at school, well whatever. He's not my kid. Just let him do whatever he wants.' Now if I get in trouble, I sit in school and I don't want to go home. When you get home and she's sitting at the table, you know you're in trouble."

"School is not an area I play around with," says Bereatha. "That's your job, so you have to treat it like it's your 9 to 5. It's very important for African American males to get an education, so I don't accept blame or excuses."

Enjoy Differing Points of View

Summing up the fears of adopting teens, Larnell says, "Parents are thinking just one thing... that rebellious stage. We're going to challenge you some because we tend to think we're new school. We know the technology and we find the easy way out instead of using your parent's way. Take cleaning the bathroom. I try to find Windex and she's using vinegar. Then I'm

using paper towels and she's getting newspapers."

Larnell says that an advantage in adopting older kids is "you have more fun. Most parents get joy from a young child because they bring them up the way they want them to be, but when you have a teenager who has already been brought up, there is still leeway to change that child. Every day will be interesting because there will always be something new."

Maintain Contact with Siblings

As the oldest of four brothers, Larnell feels a responsibility that occasional contact helps him fulfill. "Your brothers are your life," he says. "That's keeping your life, the bond with your brothers. If I lose touch with my brothers I feel like I didn't do my job as a big brother. Being with your brothers is one of the most important things in adoption. I need to be there for my younger brothers. I kind of keep order between them."

Expect Long Term Results

Bereatha says, "You can truly say, I've got x number of years that I'm going to have to be responsible. Just because they turn 18, your job's not through. It's no different from having your own child. Seeing this child succeed has to be one of the best gifts that life can give. When you know that you took that extra step to help someone out, there's a blessing that money can't buy. I absolutely wouldn't trade this experience for anything."

For other parents adopting teens, she suggests, "A whole lot of prayer. You have to have faith. I don't care what it's in, but you have to have faith that those waters will calm themselves..."

Larnell interrupts, "But a teenager will drive you up the wall."

"Yeah," agrees Bereatha, "they will but it's not going to always be hectic. It will calm down."

Expect Positive Changes as Trust Increases

Despite some growing pains, Larnell is well on his way to becoming a responsible young man. Bereatha says, "Because these children have been bounced around for a chunk of their lives, they have insecurities about trusting an adult. It's a hard shell to break through. That has got to be the biggest hurdle. When they get to the point that they are able to trust you, I know that there is a change. It does take some time to get to that point, and it doesn't happen over night."

"The key advantage is a teenager can actually communicate with the adult," says Larnell. "The only time a child talks to an adult is when he or she is in trouble. But by the time you're a teenager, you basically know all the stuff so you can sit down and play in a way."

Bereatha adds, "As a teenager you think that the world is against you, but the older you get, the more you realize there were some people along the way that were truly trying to help you out. They don't understand that at 15 or 16."

At seventeen, Larnell understands. After all, he picked Bereatha as his mom, a fact he instills into his advice for other waiting teens. "Be specific as to who you choose to adopt you. You have to play the field. Walk through most of them and see which family you like."

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TEENS NEED UNCONDITIONAL *Commitment*

by Pat O'Brien, Founder & Executive Director, You Gotta Believe! The Older Child Adoption & Permanency Movement, Inc.

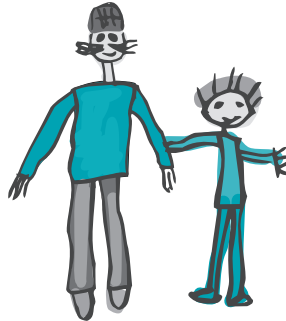
Having founded You Gotta Believe!, a New York based agency that places teens with adoptive and other permanent families, I often get asked, "What kind of people will offer their home permanently to a teenager?" My answer is always the same: "Any and all kinds of people who, after a good preparation experience, are willing to unconditionally commit themselves to a child, no matter what behavior that child might ultimately exhibit."

Teenagers, first and foremost, need at least one parent. We define a parent as "at least one adult who makes a unilateral decision to unconditionally commit to a child for a lifetime." Anything less for a teen in need of a permanent home is an artificial relationship. Teenagers in foster care need unconditional commitment before anything constructive can follow.

My working definition of unconditional commitment is that there is nothing a teenager can do to stop being someone's child. It means we treat this child's behavior the same as we would a biological child. If a biological child commits a crime, he might go to jail, but he does not lose his parents because he made a mistake. If a biological child becomes mentally ill, she might have to be hospitalized on a long term basis, but she does not lose her parents. If a biological child becomes heavily involved in drugs, he might have to be placed in a residential treatment/therapeutic community, but he does not forfeit his parents because he has the disease of addiction. And most of all, if a biological child has a nasty attitude, the hallmark of adolescence, he or she doesn't stop being that parent's child.

Since typical negative teenage behaviors get teens in foster care thrown out of traditionally prepared foster homes and even some

adoptive homes, You Gotta Believe! has developed some special coping techniques for families. Our sure fire antidote (assuming unconditional commitment on the parent's part) is P.U.K.E. or Patience, Understanding, Kindness and Empathy.



Teens typically come from multiple placements because no one expects their caretakers to commit to them. Already anxious when they move into their new adoptive home, their behaviors invariably test the commitment of their new parents. Can you imagine what it would have felt like during your adolescence if your parents gave you back every time you messed up? We know teens that have been kicked out of homes for having a nasty attitude when they thought they were expressing an opinion. We know kids who were kicked out for talking back when they thought they were sharing their perspective. We know teens thrown out for not being appreciative when they didn't know how to show appreciation to the satisfaction of their new parents. And we know kids ousted for being disrespectful when they thought they were being themselves.

You Gotta Believe makes it a practice to teach each and every one of our families the importance of unconditional commitment by only approving prospective families who agree to practice unconditional love.

Our part of this contract is to support our families through their post-placement hard times by listening and immediately responding to their phone calls. We

check in on a weekly basis after the placement of a child. We organize support groups, buddy families, and respite so that experienced families can help newer families. We do all of this with little or no budget for post-placement services because it is a commitment that we believe all agencies must make when placing older children.

If a child's adolescence is handled properly, the child will have a family for life and, in turn, the family will have the young person in their family forever. This means we teach parents to treat every child as if that will be the child who will bring them their last glass of water. I know of at least three placements where the child that our agency placed, as a young adult, was the person who brought their parent their last glass of water. This final symbolic act was not done by biological children of the dying parent, but rather by the adopted child.

Adopting a teen offers a lifetime of mutual benefits for a relatively short stint in the child's growing years. If you want a rewarding parenting experience, there is nothing better than taking in a 15 or 16 year old because in a relatively little period of time (perhaps as short as 5 or 6 years) if you stay committed and your commitment is real, you could actually have a child who likes you and will say nice things about you. By 21, unlike many biological children, the teens that we placed as teens intellectually understand that you were not the cause of any of their problems but rather an integral part of their solution and healing.

You Gotta Believe is a homeless prevention program that seeks to prevent homelessness by finding permanent moral and legal adoptive homes for teens and pre-teens in foster care. For more information contact Pat O'Brien at 1220 Neptune Avenue, Suite #166, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11224; ygbpat@msn.com; 1-800-601-1779; www.yougottabelieve.org.

Avoiding Power Struggles with Difficult Teens: *Using the Fair Exchange Method*

by Paul Buckley, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

Parent: "Honey, you don't seem to have a grasp on reality when it comes to money or human relationships. I recommend that you do what I say when I say it. This will help you grow to be a responsible person and a good citizen."

Teen: "I want to be a responsible person and a good citizen, Mother. Yes, yes, I will do what you say when you say it. Please excuse me while I go clean the bathroom."

You probably recognize this conversation as the type that is going on between parents and teens everywhere... parents and teen space aliens on a planet far, far away from Planet Earth. Here on Earth, beleaguered parents face irascible, avoidant youngsters. To the constant, "Gimme gimme gimme," parents reply, "You want it all and don't want to put any effort into earning it." To the barrage of disrespect, moms and dads say, "I never would have gotten away with talking to adults the way you do." Parents whose tireless efforts result in ingratitude remark, "If I got back one tenth of the effort I put into running you around, fixing meals and doing laundry, I'd be happy."

continuous approval to do but that could be revoked. Favors are the extra special treatment that parents provide, while gifts are presents or extraordinary favors. Welcome entails special times when teens are invited to interact with a parent.

The completed list that may have as many as 25 items under each category reflects the potential influence that parents have with their children. It reminds them that they have a lot more influence than they might think.

In our affluent and permissive youth-orientated culture, youth are taught that they can have whatever they want without the benefit of contributing. The result is kids who lack boundaries, act obnoxious and feel overly entitled. Even so, there are behaviors that parents can expect from their child in exchange for all that they do or allow. These might include respectful interactions, completion of chores, attending and passing school, and following household rules.

Using this method, parents learn to exchange permission/allowance/favors/ gifts/welcome for respect and cooperation at home. This can be stated in a simple formula: "I'd be happy to... (fill in the teen's request) just as soon as... (fill in your request

point in order to regain power, but parents should resist joining them.

Don't expect teens to become immediately compliant to Fair Exchange Parenting. Anticipate them to nag or pout or tantrum or play their usual trump card in order to get what they want. As parents stick to their guns, teens will discover that their old strategies don't work and will adopt new ways of cooperation and respect in exchange for what they want. The aim is not to control the child, but to be in control of granting permission, allowance, gifts, favors and welcome. Remember, parents can't control their children, but over time, this strategy will significantly increase the parental influence over the child.

A more difficult situation is reflected in the following conversation:

Parent: "I'd be happy to give you permission for that, honey, just as soon as you've completed your chores."

Teen: "I don't care about your permission. I'm going out anyway!"

Parent: "I know I can't control you, but you don't have my permission. That's all."

If the teen goes out without permission, he will eventually face some future consequences. He will

Permission	Allowance	Favors	Gifts	Welcome
Sleepovers	Phone use	Rides to places	Money	Take them shopping
Use of car	TV	Special meals	Special foods	Join you for dinner
Visit a friend	Play video games	Do their laundry	Special clothing	Watch TV with you
Have friend over	Computer use	Take them out to eat	Rent DVD or movie	Go on a weekend trip
To go to a sports event	Cell phone	Cell phone	Cell phone minutes	Take to a special event

Fair Exchange is a simple communication style that can significantly increase cooperation between teens and their parents. While this method is easy to understand and do, it requires some initial mapping out on the parent's part. To start, they will need to create a box (see above) in which they categorize the various influences that they hold over their teen. These include Permission, Allowance, Favors, Gifts and Welcome. Permission includes any activity that requires parental approval. Allowance comprises whatever a teen has

for cooperative and respectful behavior.) For example, if the young person wants a friend to sleep over and needs the parent's permission but has not been timely with chores, the parent might say, "I'd be happy to give permission for a sleepover, honey, just as soon as you complete your chores on time. Let's give it about a week and see how your chores work out." The parent should then disengage and say no more since the more they talk, the more they communicate their insecurity. The teen will often try to engage in a power struggle at this

have a harder time justifying this misbehavior if the parent avoids the power struggle of yelling and arguing. Most important, the parent will have clarity about whether he or she is willing to grant permission, favors, gifts, welcome or allowance the next time the teen wants something.

Paul Buckley is a licensed marriage and family therapist who specializes in family therapy and educational assessment with On-Sight Therapy & Consultation Services (612-867-2565).

Who AM I? Where AM I GOING? THE ADOPTED ADOLESCENT

by Beth Hall and Gail Steinberg

A teen's job is to figure out who he or she is in the world. The teen years, which can start as young as ten or eleven (and continue through age forty-seven), have often been compared with the preschool years because of the myriad of changes that occur. On the physical level, your child's body and general look may be so transformed that people perceive her as an adult. Teens develop a new ability to be introspective and analytical which plays out in new views of the world, some of which may be challenging to parents. Emotionally, their job is to separate from the family and begin to find ways to function independently as responsible adults. For adopted kids, this process includes embracing adoption and genetic/racial/heritage issues perhaps on a deeper level than has ever been possible before. Thunder is common. Adolescents need to take their independence rather than be given it. A parent's most difficult task is to create a delicate balance between loving and letting go.

The concept of development is essentially optimistic, suggesting that children (and adults) will grow and change, usually in healthy ways, if they are not actively prevented from doing so. But how do parents get out of the way and let teens experiment in safe ways? The science of child development is based on the ability to observe an individual child clearly, setting aside as much as possible our personal needs and preconceptions. The careful practice of observation can be extremely valuable in parenting teens because it allows parents to look at the world through our children's eyes.

Teens are still children in adult bodies trying to figure out a world that is ever more complex and challenging. If we reject their world we are relegating them to negotiate it on their own. We can either be there for our kids or leave them to fend for themselves. For adopted kids in particular it is critical that we make the choice to hang in with them even when it's really hard. This means letting go of our own first judgments and finding ways to be empathetic with our child's predicaments. If we listen and watch instead of lecture and judge, we will learn and be given many more opportunities to weigh in with guidance and help when needed.

If normal adolescence involves a crisis in identity, it stands to reason that

adopted teenagers will face additional complications. Adopted teens have two sets of parents and two cultures against which to measure sameness and differences. If teens have no way of knowing their past or the characteristics they may pass on to the next generation, they may experience "genealogical bewilderment," the sense that they have lost not only their history and birth parents but also a part of themselves. In the absence of biological relatives who can provide insight to future physical and personal development, the growth spurts, mood swings, and hormonal changes of the teen years can increase self-consciousness and worry. As the clearest points of distinction between adoptive and birth parents may be based on race, culture, or class differences, it seems natural for teens to focus their movement toward independence in these areas. Adoptive parents also have to guard against resisting their adolescent's separation process, because of their own sensitivity to issues of attachment and loss.

Adopted teens may approach their own sexuality with the belief that they are the result of their birth parents having "irresponsible" sex. Most young people who are sexually active want to believe that they matter to someone else, that someone else cares. Sex can feel like caring even when it is only an event. Let your child hear you say, "Your birth parents were human and so are you; to be human is to be at times vulnerable, needy, impulsive; but to be human is always to be worthy of love and respect." Let them also hear that sexuality and sex itself are wonderful and exciting experiences, not something bad or scary. Choices around when, how and with whom are what matters. It's all about conversations and choices - not lines in the sand, which too often result in power struggles of the worst degree.

Who's in charge? Who should be? To have been moved from one family to another without any say in the matter tends to facilitate a particular sensitivity to issues of control and difficulties with transitions. Added to that legacy is the adopted child's experience of feeling different from family and community, an experience that tends to create a heightened need to find ways to fit in. It's logical to imagine that adopted teens will face extra challenges in the adolescent quest for adult autonomy and identity.

Keep the boundaries in place, but understand that your adolescent needs to keep more things to himself in his effort to learn how to meet his challenges on his own. Instead of trying to control his life, take control of your need to know and to fix everything. Parents who are able to understand their kid's need to fit in, to make choices and to become himself or herself may avoid getting into power struggles over incidentals like hair styles, clothes, loud music or slang. They are often more able to create a more peaceful family life than parents who are intent on making their children conform to their limited sense of the acceptable.

In the end, it is all about connection. Stay close to your child, letting him know that you can talk any time about anything, but allow him to solve his own problems and learn from his own mistakes. Help her build feelings of competence by trying on adult roles, such as taking on an after-school job, survival training, joining a team or taking a trip by herself. Asking questions like, "What is it like to deal with that?" or "What choices do you feel you have?" instead of lecturing your child about what you want them to do, keeps your relationship supportive. Remember no one grows up without making some mistakes; your teenager will too. Help them know that no mistake is irrevocable so long as they remain alive. Knowing that you will be there for the long haul, no matter what they do or who they become, is the most important way to support teens in their journey of becoming themselves.

Beth Hall and Gail Steinberg are the co-founding directors of Pact, An Adoption Alliance, as well as adoptive parents to children of different races and ethnicities. The authors of Inside Transracial Adoption as well as numerous articles, they lecture across the country and are committed to serving children.

Reprinted with permission from the authors and Pact, a multicultural adoption organization dedicated to addressing essential issues affecting adopted children of color. Pact offers lifelong support and placement services for birth and adoptive families with adopted kids of color.

Find out more by contacting Pact, An Adoption Alliance, 3220 Blume Drive, Suite 289, Richmond, CA 94806; 510.243.9486; www.pactadopt.org

MINNESOTA ADOPTIVE AND FOSTER PARENT

Support Groups

ONLINE SUPPORT GROUPS OPEN TO FAMILIES THROUGHOUT MINNESOTA

Southwestern Minnesota
Claudia Fletcher
maeflye@aol.com

Southeastern Minnesota
Kathy Holtan
rochmnmom@yahoo.com

METRO AREA SUPPORT GROUPS

Adoptive Family Network
Kate Brady
612-721-5209

African American Adoption Agency
Carmita McGlory
651-659-0460

Amigos de Colombia
Luann Zimmer
612-879-5251

Anoka County
Nancy Le
763-422-7104

Carver County
Becky Varone
952-361-1649

Dakota County
Ann Dempsey
952-891-7415

Downey Side
Janese Crowley
651-228-0117

Families with Children from China
Diane Nathrop
651-488-6872

Hennepin County
Ginny Blade
651-644-3036

Honduran Adoptive Families
Jane Delage
651-698-5887

Hopkins Area Family Resource Center/ Grandparent Support Group
952-988-4333

Korean Adult Adoptee Group
Deborah Johnson
612-861-7115

Minneapolis Early Childhood and Family Education (ECFE)
612-668-4630

Minnesota Foster Care Association
763-333-2943

Multiracial Single Parent Group
Jennifer Schnarr
651-603-0245

Native American Community
Mary Lyons
877-392-0270 - toll free
952-892-7846

Niños de Paraguay
Jane Nichols
952-829-0938

North Metro
Deb Reisner
763-545-0293

North Suburban Ours for a United Response
Marge Newmaster
763-429-0357

Open Adoption Resources Network (OAR) Support Group
Heidi Manguson - 507-356-4209

Parents of Asian Indian American Children
Marilyn Christianson
952-944-7114

Parents of Latin American Children
Brenda Machacek
952-494-9290

Peruvian Adoptive Families
Diane Anderson
651-439-6749

Rainbow Families
612-827-7731

Ramsey County
Judy Howell
651-779-8220

Transracial Adoption Support Group
Deb Reisner
763-545-0293

Washington County
Judy Howell
651-779-8220

GREATER MINNESOTA SUPPORT GROUPS

NORTHERN

Adoptive Parents Support Group - Duluth
Michelle Fitzgerald
218-726-4888
218-525-7114

Birth Parent Support Group - Duluth
218-733-2356

St. Louis County
Kari Otruba-Visina
218-525-0664
866-302-2211 - toll free

Families with Children from China (FCC) - Duluth
Jill Dalbacka
218-525-4906

Native American Community
Mary Lyons
877-392-0270 - toll free
952-892-7846

North Homes - Grand Rapids
218-327-3000
888-430-3055 - toll free

Thief River Falls
Connie Hesse
218-681-1761
877-373-0433 - toll free

Polk County Foster Parents
Jackie Jeffrey
218-281-3127

CENTRAL

Chisago, Isanti and Pine Counties
Julie Pribyl
320-963-6055
877-699-5937 - toll free
Bonita Carlson
651-462-7100

Crow Wing/Aitkin/Morrison Counties
Julie Pribyl
320-963-6055
877-699-5937 - toll free

Douglas County
Barb Fischer
320-763-3144
800-728-1736 - toll free

Downey Side - St Cloud
Pat or Mike Schaefer
320-240-1433

Kanabec-Mille Lacs Counties
Theresa Julkowski
320-679-2467

Ottertail County Foster/ Adoptive Parents
Barb Fischer
320-763-3144
800-728-1736 - toll free

Stearns County
Ellen Kampa-Evans
320-656-6118

Wadena County
Barb Fischer
320-763-3144
800-728-1736 - toll free

Wright-Sherburne Counties
Carol Askew
763-241-2656
800-433-5239 - toll free

SOUTHERN

Downey Side - Owatonna
Vicki Bush
507-446-8503

Families of Multiracial Adoptions - Mankato
Roxanne Johnson
507-345-1850

Love Has No Boundaries - Fairmont
Teresa Engeman
507-235-8748

Lutheran Social Service - Mankato
Rebecca Moore
507-625-7660

Partners in Adoption - Marshall
Cindy Nelson
507-532-1260

Olmsted County Children's Mental Health Collaborative
Debra Dalin 507-529-4539
Kathryn Sackett 507-287-1565
Kathy Holtan 507-292-8886

Rochester Grandparent Group
Jill Welsh
507-287-2020

Rock-Nobles-Pipestone Counties
Claudia Fletcher
507-283-9693
877-349-6353 - toll free

Sibley, Renville, McLeod, Watonwan Counties
Claudia Fletcher
507-283-9693
877-349-6353 - toll free

TEEN Resources

Books For and About Teens: Fiction

Dear Nobody, by Berlie Doherty, portrays 18-year-old Chris who struggles to deal with two shocks that have changed his life, meeting the mother who left him when he was ten and his discovery that he has gotten his girlfriend pregnant. Separately, he and his girlfriend come to terms with their child's and their own future.

Find a Stranger: Say Goodbye, by Lois Lowry, describes Natalie Armstrong, an attractive, happy teenager about to enter college who sets out to discover her birth parents. Teen readers report that it surpasses superficial teenage novels in being painstakingly real about the process of searching.

The Snake-Stone, by Berlie Doherty, describes fifteen-year-old James's search for his birthmother. A champion diver, James's rigorous diving schedule makes him an outsider among his classmates. Increasing feelings of loneliness help him decide to pursue the missing life connection from his past. The award-winning British author interweaves James' narration with passages from his birthmother's voice, leaving the reader an opportunity to sort out the conflicting feelings inherent in searching.

Non-Fiction

For When I'm Famous: A Teen Foster/Adoption Lifebook, by Helen F. Daringer, helps teens express their goals and dreams while learning more about their own life. Exercises are provided that help teens fill in the blanks about their past, present and future.

The Face in the Mirror: Teenagers and Adoption, by Marian Crook, aids teens in discovering their identity with a renewed sense of belonging and place in the world. Based on interviews with adopted teens, adoptive parents, and birth parents, the book explores why teenagers want to know their roots.

Getting Ready for Adoption by Theresa L. McCoy, is a teen-friendly workbook that prepares the older child for adoption. The book guides both the social worker and the youth through each step of the adoption process. Explanations and hands-on activities help to answer questions, explore hidden fears or fantasies, work through abuse trust and love issues, build self-esteem and prepare the child to handle new experiences and adjustments.

How it Feels to Be Adopted, by Jill Kremetz. Although some young readers may groan at the outdated hairstyles and clothes in photographs of the youth who are interviewed, the content of this classic still holds as nineteen adolescents give their views about being adopted.

Inside Transracial Adoption, by Beth Hall and Gail Steinberg, is filled with personal stories, practical suggestions and theory combined in an encouraging and supportive style that reinforces the message that race matters, racism is alive, and families built transracially can develop strong and binding ties.

The Real Me: A Teen Lifebook for Young Adults in Foster Care or Adoption, by Theresa L. McCoy and Donna Barnes, offers adopted teens and foster kids a chance to explore and document the many sides of their personality as well as past connections, present status, feelings, strengths and weaknesses, hopes and plans.

Who Am I and Other Questions of Adopted Kids, by Charlene C. Giannetti, provides straight talk from youth and young adults to assist others in untangling confusion around being adopted.

Why Didn't She Keep Me? Answers to the Question Every Adopted Child Asks, by Barbara Burlingham-Brown, provides personal and honest accounts by fifteen birthmothers about why they chose adoption for their children.

Guidebooks for Higher Learning

Learning How to Learn: Getting into and Surviving College When You Have a Learning Disability, by Joyanne Cobb, steers students through the process of preparing for post secondary education, choosing the right school and succeeding academically. Aids in taking standardized tests and utilizing the Americans with Disabilities Act to access services in college.

The Best 331 Colleges: 2002 Edition (Princeton Review) by Robert Franek (editor) uses student input to rank colleges in numerous categories from financial aid to academics to social life. Even if the reader doesn't pursue one of the 331 highlighted colleges, the guide demystifies the application and entrance process with information applicable to anyone considering college.

K & W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder by Marybeth Kravets and Imy Wax, offers:

- Advice from specialists in the field of learning disabilities
- Admission requirements and graduation policies for programs designed for youth with learning disabilities.
- Services available and information on the level of support services provided
- Policies and procedures regarding course waivers or substitutions
- Names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses of program administrators
- Strategies for finding the right program for each student's needs

PARENT LIAISONS CONNECT FAMILIES WITH RESOURCES

MN ASAP's parent support and respite network includes eleven regional parent liaisons to help adoptive parents locate support and resources. Contact your regional parent liaison if you need local resources (such as a respite care provider or therapist), would like to start or join a support groups, or just need someone to listen. The liaisons are here to help!

MN ASAP PARENT LIAISONS

Metro Area African American Community

Mary Collins
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Adopting Teenage Siblings: *The Ride that Makes You Scream*

by Mary Martin Mason

Fifteen-year-old Fanniece and her brother, 14-year-old Marvell sit side by side in a Perkins restaurant booth. Between bites of pancakes, Fanniece recalls a time two years ago when she and her brother joined their new parents, Mike Hoskin and Jeanne Keller. "We were in different foster homes for four years..."

Marvell: "...and we came to this family two years ago..."

Fanniece: "...and we didn't live in the same foster home..."

Marvell: "...and we didn't live in the same city either..."

Fanniece: "...yeah, but we had contact with each other..."

Although today Fanniece and Marvell finish each other's sentences, they weren't always close. Their mother Jeanne recalls, "Fanniece was at camp when we met Marvell. He called her up and said, 'There's people interested.' Then on July the fourth we had them together, and it was the first time they had seen each other in a long time. Here was a brother and sister who hadn't lived together. You can imagine the dynamics of that. I can't tell you the number of times that first month she'd say, 'Call the social worker. I'm not staying with this boy one more minute.'"

Rivalries have since eased, and the two claim that they don't fight any more. "When we first moved in together I used to beat her up a lot," jokes Marvell to which Fanniece adds, "We went at it like Tom and Jerry." Marvell thinks that tensions arose from having to get used to each other again and that his parents had a harder adjustment than he and Fanniece. "They made up the rules as they went. What we would do wrong would probably become a rule."

As first time parents, Jeanne and Mike reflect on the challenges of becoming an instant family with teenagers, Jeanne admitting that much has surprised her even though she grew up with younger siblings. Mike was more prepared for the inevitable conflicts.

"Jeanne thought they'd be like her, but I figured they'd be more like me. I figured God was going to get even with me," he laughs.

Jeanne recalls an early incident in which Fanniece threw a folding chair at her brother in church. "I found myself saying, 'Honey, first of all, we don't do this kind of thing in church,' and secondly, 'What the hell are you doing? This is not appropriate behavior.'"

Expect Differences in Adjustment for Siblings

Behaviors differed for the sister and brother during the first months in their new home. Mike says, "Fanniece was easier to get along with until the finalization. She was polite and good, and he was just a terror. After the finalization, he was 'Whew!'

I'm here to stay,' and she was, 'Great! Now I'm here to stay, and now I can be who I really am.'"

Jeanne analyzes these behaviors as: "It's like I'm going to push you so far and you're finally going to throw me back and make me feel worthless just like everyone else has. Mike kept telling Marvell, 'I am too stupid to give up.'"

During that first challenging year, Fanniece admits that she had a tougher time than her brother, saying, "It took me a while to adjust. I thought I won't ever be calling anybody besides my birth parents Mom and Dad. It was hard in the beginning, but now we're really close."

Work on Attachment

At the recommendation of their social worker, Jeanne and Mike took their new son and daughter to the *Family Attachment and Counseling Center. Their hope was to help their children accept and trust them as new parents. Jeanne says, "During the two weeks of intense therapy, Marvell soaked it in more, and Fanniece was very resistant. Now she talks about how important it was. I'm always surprised to hear her speak positively of it."

"I had a hard time trusting after being in foster care for a long time," says Fanniece. "You can't trust anybody. That's why I never told my parents anything at first. I would talk to them, but I wouldn't tell them my personal stuff. But now my parents hear a lot."

Marvell credits attachment therapy with "teaching you how to react to what your parents

do and to do what they say." He has grown close to his dad, saying, "I know both of them good, but my dad and I have a better relationship. He was my assistant coach in baseball, and we're taking gun safety together so we can go hunting."

When Marvell recently returned Jeanne's bedtime hug, she was thrilled. "He put his arms around me and hugged me back before saying, 'Okay, Mom, that's enough.' And I said, 'I know it is, honey,' and gave him a kiss on the neck and he didn't say, 'Oh, gross' or anything like that."

Moments of closeness between Fanniece and her mom occur during shopping trips. Especially fond of shoes, Fanniece has managed to convince her mom who disdains shopping to accompany her to the mall. "My mom hates shopping," says Marvell, to which Fanniece adds, "Yeah, but she'll go three hours with me."

Jeanne takes heart in such moments that are increasing. "In Target Fanniece will put her arm through mine as we walk through the store. I grab onto every good thing I get from her like when she says, 'Me and Mom really like Chinese' or 'This is me and mom's favorite restaurant.'"



Acknowledge Tensions that Result

Siblings
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REQUEST FOR ADOPTION *Information*

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Organization _____

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City/State/Zip _____

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___ To save postage, send an email reminder of the next MN ASAP Family Voices that I can download from www.mnasap.org My email address is _____

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Complete this form and fax it to 612-861-7112 or mail it to:

MN ASAP, c/o MARN, Loring Park Building, 430 Oak Grove Street, Suite 404, Minneapolis MN 55403 www.mnasap.org

Parenting the Hormonally Challenged: *Adopted Teens and Sexuality*

by Denise Goodman, Ph.D.

Many parents feel overwhelmed or tentative about the prospect of dealing with their teenager's emerging sexuality. For many foster, relative and adoptive parents, this task is complicated by the fact that the youth may have been sexually abused as a younger child. The following points provide a good foundation for parenting teens around sexuality issues:

1. BE COMFORTABLE WITH YOUR OWN SEXUALITY AND THEIRS, TOO. Too often, adults are paralyzed when it comes to discussing sexuality with teens. Teens are sexual beings and since birth have been growing sexually as well as cognitively, physically, socially, morally and emotionally. However, the influx of hormones and the onset of puberty put sexual growth in the forefront of the youth's developmental processes. While there are many "normal" behaviors during this stage, promiscuity, sexual aggression and gender identity issues may be signals that the youth is dealing with past abuse issues.

2. BUILD TRUST: Teens who have been sexually abused often lack basic trust in adults. They may be scared of the dark, the bathroom, the basement or a medical examination. It is critical that parents be supportive by accompanying the teen to the doctor's office or by installing nightlights (without drawing attention to the teen's fear). Teenagers need to know that they can count on consistency, honesty and support from their parents to make them feel safe and secure.

3. SET CLEAR BOUNDARIES: Sexually abused youth have had their basic physical boundaries violated. Foster, relative and adoptive parents must work to restore them. Clear boundaries that apply to all family members must be set for dress, privacy and physical touch:

- **DRESS:** Examples for dress are that every family member must be covered when coming out of the bathroom or

bedroom, no coming to breakfast in your underwear, and the youth can't see company without proper clothing. Support and encouragement during shopping trips can assist in more appropriate clothing selections.

- **PRIVACY:** Examples for re-establishing a sense of privacy are knocking or warning before entering bedrooms and bathrooms and making rules about when it's okay to close doors. Another rule of privacy is that no one listens to other phone conversations or opens another's mail.

- **PHYSICAL TOUCH:** Parents must approach physical touch with caution, and caregivers should avoid any contact that could be misconstrued as abuse. The parent should gain the teen's permission to hug or touch him/her. Rules for touch should generally be that "ok" touches are above the shoulder and below the knee, and the youth should have the power to decline any physical affection or touch.

4. LEARN TO TALK WITH TEENS ABOUT SEX: To assist youth in dealing with their victimization or to support their normal sexual growth and development, parents must use the correct language and not slang names or euphemisms. Parents who avoid conversations about sexuality force teens to learn from unreliable and inaccurate sources like their peers, siblings or media. Parents can think about the five toughest questions they could be asked and prepare answers so that if the opportunity presents itself, they will be prepared.

5. EDUCATE THE YOUTH: It is important to give teenagers accurate information about sex, sexuality and human reproduction. This may be difficult for parents who may feel education will lead to sexual intercourse and experimentation. Teens need information, not taboos. Sexually abused children need to learn about the emotional side of sex as they have been prematurely exposed to the

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from Moves

The move from the Twin Cities to a farm brought the reality that in their new community, Marvell and Fanniece are members of a racial minority. For Marvell who excels in sports, racial incidents occurred both on and off the field. Jeanne says, "The first year here he was called the N word a lot, and I remember going to pick him up from a football game early and he came to the car and was crying. He had gotten into a fight with a kid who had called him that. He said, 'I just want to move back to Minneapolis. At least there I know where I stand.' I said, 'I am so sorry,' and I held him, and I said, 'I wish there was something I could do, but I can't because we're not moving to Minneapolis.'"

To keep their children connected to their racial heritage, Jeanne and Mike changed school districts and churches. They take Fanniece and Marvell to birth family reunions, birthday parties, and holiday gatherings and travel out of state to see birth relatives. There are frequent family trips to the Twin Cities for drum lessons, cultural and sports events as well as church services. Jeanne and Mike's Liberian friend visits so often that he is known as Uncle Dewey to Fanniece and Marvell.

Today, Marvell points out that both he and his sister who is a cheerleader "may be minorities in this town but we're popular. Everybody knows us. It's a good thing, but there are a lot of racist people. You don't know who they are, but sometimes they'll just stare at you and that makes you feel weird."

Country life suits Fanniece who likes going four-wheeling, and Marvell says that they spend so much time in town with friends that it's not like living on a farm.

His dad points out another benefit of country living for Marvell. "He's better off being here because when he gets grounded, he's grounded. He can't run... not unless he's going to walk 16 miles to town. In his last placement he would take off. Here he's isolated enough that when he gets grounded it means something."

Maintain Birth Connections

Jeanne acknowledges that she and Mike are providing their children "an opportunity to finish growing up together. That is the biggest gift that we have given them. Not only have they been able to live together for this period of time, but last summer we brought them to see one of their older sisters who they hadn't seen in six years, and Fanniece and Brandy have developed a close relationship. They have another older sister who we brought them to visit several times. We felt like we had to keep those connections. We didn't get these kids from underneath a cabbage leaf. They had relationships and knew these people, so we go down at Thanksgiving and Christmas and for a birthday of a younger brother who is being adopted by a birth family member."

Fanniece sums up the importance of such visits as filling in the hole of not being able to grow up with your siblings. Marvell says, "It's important to see your siblings to see how they're doing and to tell them that you're not dead."

Expect Challenges Tempered with Joy

Despite some tough times, Mike and Jeanne are committed to their children and are anticipating adopting more teens. Jeanne says, "We have learned so much raising these children and it would be a crying shame to waste all that knowledge. I would absolutely recommend adopting teenagers."

Mike says, "People mistakenly think that you can't affect their lives at all at this age. I think you can. Our social worker pointed out that there are two types of people who adopt older kids, those who get through it and never do it again and those who get back on the ride again. We'll probably get back on the ride again because it's the only ride that makes us scream."

For potential parents considering adopting a teen, Fanniece says, "Give it a shot. We are teenagers and we bring a lot of drama, but this is the best stage for anyone who wants to adopt. We also bring a lot of happiness. This is the time when parents can see us mature and they don't have to change diapers."

Marvell says, "Since we're older there's a quick turn-around. It's worth it." For Minnesota teens still awaiting adoption, he advises, "Always stay cool and get adopted if you can."

**For more information about the Family Attachment Center, see the Spring 2003 issue of MN ASAP Family Voices. Download from www.mnasap.org or call 612-861-7115 to request a copy.*

◆ WAITING CHILDREN: LaQueena ◆



For more information about LaQueena, please contact MARN at 612-861-7115.

LaQueena, age 16

Social and active, LaQueena's goal is to attend college. Towards that end, she has a job and is building her savings account. Known for her terrific sense of humor, she has many friends and serves on the varsity cheerleading team at her school. She has played on the volleyball team, has strong public speaking skills and interacts well with younger children.

The best placement for LaQueena would be with supportive and accepting parent(s) who will recognize her many talents and help her reach her full potential. LaQueena has a brother who she would like to stay in contact with following adoption.

Transitioning FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

For Youth Diagnosed with a Learning Disability

(Reprinted with permission from CHADD Attention! Magazine)

Students with disabilities can and do succeed in post high school education. Success begins as high school counselors and therapists help parents determine a teen's readiness to leave home and enter college. Since colleges vary in their ability to accommodate students who have a learning disability such as AD/HD, guidebooks can be helpful. (See page 7.) Betsy Stout-Morrill, director of admissions for Beacon College, and Stephanie Knight, admissions counselor for Beacon College, offer the following guide for teens who anticipate attending college. As early as the junior year, youth can start practicing some of the suggested skills.

Academic Transition

- Know your diagnosis and learning disability.
- Know your skill levels in reading, writing and math.
- Know what accommodations you need.
- Provide written documentation of your disability with your application.

Social Transition

- Choosing fun over academics causes some freshmen to lose focus and fail college courses.
- Use the skills and foundation learned from family members, teachers and others to make wise choices.
- Balance your social life and academic responsibilities.

Achieving Independence

- Notice what adults do for you at home and school and learn to do it for yourself.
- Take an inventory of your life skills. Start practicing these important skills before you leave home.
- Know the names of the over-the-counter medications you take.
- Know how to clean a bathroom and the supplies you'll need.
- Know how to do laundry.
- Know how to make your own doctors' appointments.

For more information contact CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) at 8181 Professional Place, Suite 150, Landover MN 20875 or visit the CHADD website at www.chadd.org

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physical side of sex. Both boys and girls need to learn about birth control and sexually transmitted diseases. Parents can seek help from community agencies such as Planned Parenthood and Family Planning.

6. USE THE "3 C'S" IN AN EMERGENCY: It is not uncommon for a parent to encounter a "sexual situation" that involves their teen. Consequently, all parents must be prepared to handle these incidents as therapeutically as possible. Here are some tips called the "3 C's":

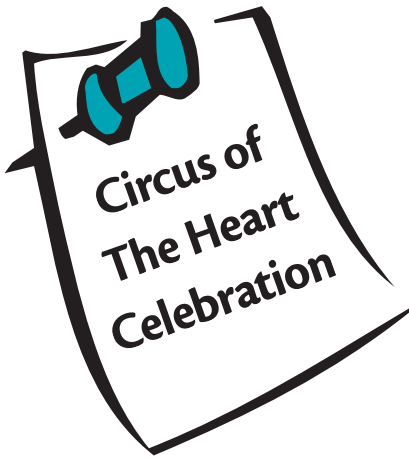
- **CALM** - The parent must remain calm while confronting the situation, even if it requires getting calm or faking calm. When parents are in control of themselves, they are able to use more effective strategies to handle the situation.
- **CONFRONT** - The parent must confront any behaviors that are unacceptable. This information should be given specifically and gently without threatening or shaming. Too many times parents say, "Don't do that" or "Stop it" without being specific. Teens can become confused or ashamed if they are not confronted directly and supportively.
- **CORRECT** - Since a teen's behavior is purposeful, the parent must offer the youth a substitute behavior to utilize when the need arises. The parent should suggest alternatives that are more acceptable and appropriate given the situation. When the youth uses the alternative behavior, the parent should give positive reinforcement.

7. ADVOCATE: Parents must advocate for the needs of their children. Teens who have been sexually victimized may need a variety of services; therefore, the foster/adoptive/kin parent should advocate with the social worker, agency or the mental health center until the services are in place. This may mean that the parent calls every week or even everyday and leaves messages. The parent may need to contact managers or administrators to obtain services for their teen. In other words, keep asking until you get what you need for your child.

Sexuality is a normal part of human growth and development. Every teen, including you and me, struggled to figure out who we were as sexual beings. Today's teens are bombarded with sexual stimuli in music, on TV, in the movies and on the radio. Coupled with a past history of sexual abuse, it can be a daunting task for a teen to come to terms with who they are sexually. Be supportive and understanding...and remember, a sense of humor goes a long way.

Denise Goodman, Ph.D., is an adoption consultant and trainer with 25 years experience in child welfare, protective services and foster parenting. She has worked in residential treatment and has been a foster parent for teens. Serving as a technical assistant to the Annie E. Casey Foundation in the area of recruitment, training, licensing and support of resource families, she also conducts workshops and consultations throughout the United States on topics related to foster care and adoption.

dagpbd@aol.com 1824 Snouffer Road, Worthington, Ohio 43085.



◆ Circus of the Heart Annual Adoption Celebration ◆

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FREE statewide celebration of adoption to honor families who have grown through adoption and those waiting to adopt children. Prizes, games, refreshments and lots more.

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