



# TAProot

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Together as Adoptive Parents Inc. is a non-profit adoption support group composed of adoptive families, foster-adopt, adoptees, adoption professionals and other interested in adoption.

TAPROOT is a quarterly publication of Together as Adoptive Parents Inc.  
 478 Moyer Road  
 Harleysville, PA 19438-2302  
 (215) 256-0669

We urge you to send us any information that you feel may be of interest to our readers.

## OUR MISSION

To provide a support network among parents in the greater Philadelphia area, to disseminate available services and information to members and to implement programs and activities which promote the well being of children, foster and adoptive families.

Have any comments, suggestions or gripes?  
 E-mail us at  
**taplink@COMCAST.NET**  
 or call us at  
**(215) 256-0669**

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## Presidents Corner

I would like to dedicate this issue of TAPROOT to a long time friend Mary Jane Shaw. Mary Jane is not an adoptive parent, and has never been a foster parent. I guess you are wondering what connection she has with TAP. Mary Jane has been the key person who is responsible for putting together this newsletter. She not only types all the articles, she sorts, folds, put into envelopes, labels, stamps and take them all to the post office to be mailed. Sometime she makes more than one trip with hundreds of newsletters because I did not give her enough money for postage ☺. Mary Jane has helped TAP financially. She has donated gifts for door prizes, attended adoption meetings, worked on the web site and much more. She has also been a great support to me. In February of this year Mary Jane married the man of her heart and moved to another state. I really miss her. I also really hate keying in the articles for this newsletter. So if anyone out there would like a job let me know ☺ Thanks Mary Jane!

Just in case you have not heard. TAP's parent group potluck is held on the last Saturday of each month, at Montgomery County Community College in Blue Bell, from 11:00 – 2:00. Childcare is provided. **The next meetings are April 26th and May 31<sup>st</sup>.**

Mark your calendars! July 19<sup>th</sup> is our annual picnic. Don't miss it!

As most of you already know my husband and I adopted four children, one of whom is mentally challenged. When he was placed in our home at the age of 4 his IQ was 70, border line intelligent. We are very happy to tell you that he has been accepted at a Christian College in Florida. His plans are to become a youth pastor or work at a Christian Camp. I must admit "letting go" is very hard for me. He has needed me for so many years of his life. I have spent the last 15 years fighting for him. He must now fight for himself. I will spend this summer teaching him how to wash his clothes, iron, and cook. I'm pretty sure he now knows not to wear a white shirt with white pants and look like the Pillsbury doughboy, or black pants with a black shirt and tie and look like he is in mourning ☺ What I'm not sure about is how well he will handle how cruel some people can be or meeting "the girl" and falling in love or just being away from his family (which he has never been for any length of time). I guess in September of this year I will find out. I will miss him but I won't be lonely because my two oldest have just moved *back* home and we still have Alex who is nearly 16.

Phyllis

## **Womb Mates: When Sibling Rights & Child-Parents Attachment Clash**

By Regina Kupecky LSW

**Regina was an adoption placement worker for more than 25 years. Now she helps children and families address attachment issues at the Attachment and Bonding Center of Ohio, and trains nationally and internationally on various adoption topics**  
*Regina has co-authored two books, *Adopting the Hurt Child* and *Parenting the Hurt Child*, with Gregory Keck.*

Those we know me from foster care and adoption conferences, trainings on sibling rights, or my writings about siblings, know that I am a long time sibling rights advocate. Not only have I placed many sibling groups together who have thrived, I have seen how connections help siblings loss, abandonment, and identity issues. If we place more children together, we need to recruit fewer families.

Recently, however, I have become alarmed by a spate of requests to support sibling rights over attachments between very young children and their foster-to-adopt parents. The children in question typically have little or no attachment to their siblings. Many have never even met their brothers and sisters.

Workers are horrified to learn that I think their young charges should be adopted by the parents with whom they have a secure attachment, instead of moving to another family with their sibling. Poor planning that brought siblings into separate foster homes in the first place cannot be fixed by uprooting the children from their only known parents.

Below is an example of the type of case I'm talking about a case in which the siblings are firmly attached to separate parents and not connected to one another at all. In such cases, it is often not in siblings' best interest to be placed together.

At three months, Jimmy was placed with a foster parent who has lovingly raised him for three years. Jimmy is very attached to his foster mom, and she wants to adopt him. Meanwhile, when Jimmy was one, his birth mom had Cindy, who was placed in another foster home when she was a baby. (Why? No one ever knows.) Those parents want to adopt her.

Jimmy and Cindy are now ages three and two. They have seen each other a few times at birth parent visits, but don't know one another and feel most secure with their respective foster families. Then the birth parents rights are finally terminated, and some worker decides it is best to remove them both from the only families they have ever known and place them together with a third family.

"Why?" I ask. The answers trouble me. "Well," said one earnest worker, "they aren't the kids *real* parents, they are just foster-to-adopt."

I thought we did away with this "real" stuff 20 years ago. The parents are real to the child. They give real food, real love, real cuddles, real discipline. They are the *real* parents, the adults who have parented the kids almost all of their lives.

"You see," she said, and dropped her voice, "they haven't legalized, so we are still able to make the decisions."

"But," I countered, "they haven't legalized because the children weren't in permanent custody. If you believe these are the child's real parents, you must think adoptive parents aren't real either. Don't disturb them if they are doing well. Let each family adopt their child and hope that they want to be in contact. Put the sibling information in the life book so someday they can find each other. If you want them together, put them together to begin with."

"We want them together," explained another worker, "because we can find a home for them together. It is too hard with the older kids but these kids are young. Lots of people want them so the foster-to-adopt people will have to let them go."

"Wait!" I replied. "Does anyone remember the best interests of the child? Of course you can find a home, and of course some young children can withstand the blow of losing their parents. But why do we want to force these children to again suffer one of the most severe losses a child can have, the loss of his or her mother, just because we can?"

Why would we move a child just because we can? Do we have so little power in our lives that we have to gain it by rearranging the lives of toddlers and pre-schoolers?

Another worker lamented about a three-year-old placed with a single mom. "We can do better. She could

have a two-parent family with her little brother.”

But if the single mom isn't good enough, what was the child doing there for three years? Would we remove children from single parents to give them to two-parent families if they were birth children? Of course not. There's no good reason to remove a foster child from a stable, caring mom who, single or not, is emotionally bonded with the child and wants to adopt.

Workers and agencies who are belated champions of sibling rights need to change their practice. They need to train intake workers to call a sibling's foster family first when searching for a foster-to-adopt home. They need to arrange visits so siblings can form bonds, talk to families about sibling rights in training, and change the system that make the problem. It is not the children's job to sacrifice their new families to fix bad social work practice.

For these cases, we should use a different standard. In a best practice world, sibling-friendly agencies will place siblings together from the start and there will be no problem. If, however, the siblings are attached to separate foster parents, have no relationship and their respective foster families want to adopt, we should support permanency that gives the children ongoing stability and continuity.

Do not separate a child from foster parents who wish to adopt unless the parents are abusing or neglecting him. If the family is loving and safe, leave the child where he is planted and blooming. Child-to-mother attachment occurs before sibling-to-sibling attachment. Do not ask a child to give up her primary bond to her parent to *establish*, *not preserve* a relationship with a stranger who happens to have shared the same womb at a different time.

We should place more siblings together when it is in the children's best interest and there is good social work done. We do not need to hurt children by unnecessary moves and shattered attachments to foster-to-adopt parents in the name of the latest social work buzz word of "sibling ties."

Adoptalk, Summer 2002

## Why You Should Adopt!

Alex age 15

I think you should adopt because a lot of kids in this world need a permanent home. These are older kids like teenagers who have been in foster care most of their lives.

They now feel rejected and angry.

Some kids "age out" of foster care and never have a place to call home. It is so sad to think of kids that are homeless.

It is so sad to think that kids feel unwanted.

Put yourself in their place. How would you feel if you were in the foster care system? I bet you would not like it at all.

They do not like it either!

# Opt to Adopt

**Name:** Michael  
**PAE Number:** 7116  
**Age:** 10  
**Ethnicity:** Black



Michael is a handsome, out-going young man who is friendly and is easily engaged in conversation. Michael enjoys playing with his toy trucks and cars. He loves to listen to music, dance, and go swimming.

Michael's high activity level makes a structured environment essential. He functions best in situations where he knows what is expected of him.

Michael attends supported classes and does well academically.

All families will be considered for Michael.

Michael is legally free for adoption.

**Name:** Alicia  
**PAE Number:** 7115  
**Age:** 17  
**Ethnicity:** White



Alicia is a friendly, likable teen. She enjoys cooking, sewing and listening to all types of music, especially country. Alicia taught herself how to juggle and is talented at it. She is interested in sports and has a natural athletic ability. Her favorite sport is basketball.

Alicia does well academically and has formed positive relationships with her peers. Alicia continues to make progress in expressing herself and building trust in others.

All families will be considered for Alicia.

Alicia is legally free for adoption.

## Federal Tax Benefits for Foster and Adoptive Parents And Kinship Caregivers: 2002 Tax Year Guide Tax Exempt Payments

As resource families, most payments you receive are excluded from taxable income and are not reported on your tax return. These include

- cost of care reimbursements;
- specialized or difficulty of care payments;
- most other reimbursements from government or private child welfare agencies;
- child-only cash assistance (referred to in many states as “TANF” or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families); and
- Food Stamp Program.

Some payments are treated as taxable income, when a foster parent:

- cares for more than ten children;
- is paid to keep a bed available even if it is not used;
- operates a group home and is paid for his or her time;
- cares for more than five persons over the age of 19.

**NEW in 2002:** in previous years, payments from for-profit child welfare agencies were considered taxable. Effective in 2002, payments from for-profit child welfare agencies operating under contract with a state or local government agency are tax exempt to the same extent that payments from non-profit and government agencies are tax-exempt.

If a foster parent receives taxable payments, the agency issues a Form 1099 to both the foster parent and the IRS. The gross income must be reported on the tax return. All expenses incurred in caring for the child are deducted to arrive at net income. For more information, see IRS Publication 587, *Business Use of Your Home*.

Adoption assistance payments and related subsidies for childcare or other special needs, that are paid by government child welfare agencies for adopted children, are also excluded from taxable income. These payments should not be reported on your tax return.

**TIP** If a resource family receives a 1099 in error, contact the issuing agency and ask for a corrected 1099. Also, be sure to advise your tax advisor.

### Deductions or Credits

There are two basic kinds of tax benefits, deductions and credits.

1. A **deduction** is subtracted from **taxable income**, and is generally less valuable to a taxpayer. The value of a deduction is based on the marginal tax rate of the taxpayer.

*Example: A tax **deduction** of \$1,000*

*Taxpayer A, in the 15% tax bracket, will save \$150  
(15% of \$1,000)*

*Taxpayer B, in the 27% tax bracket, will save \$270  
(27% of \$1,000)*

2. A **tax credit** is a dollar for dollar reduction in **tax liability**.

*Example: A tax credit of \$1,000*

*Every taxpayer will have his or her tax bill reduced by \$1,000*

However, because tax laws and procedures are very complicated, other factors can influence the ultimate value to the taxpayer. Most tax credits are **non-refundable**. This means that the credit only reduces tax liability, and when tax liability reaches zero, any balance left from the credit is lost.

Some tax credits are **refundable**, which means the taxpayer receives a refund for the full credit, even if no tax is due. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and the child tax credit are examples of refundable credits.

The full guide is available on the web site of the Casey Family Program National Center for Resource Family Support at: [www.casey.org/cnc](http://www.casey.org/cnc)

### **Adoption Subsidy Program Analysis Published**

The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC) is pleased to announce the publication of *Forever Families—Support for Families of Children with Special Needs: A Policy Analysis of Adoption Subsidy Programs in the United States*.



This publication examines a variety of state adoption assistance and related policies and highlights those policies designed to best support families who adopt children with special needs.

The report details each state's policies on fourteen different variables, including definition of special needs, monthly adoption assistance payments, special adoption assistance rates, respite care, residential treatment, and subsidized guardianship. Under each variable, Forever Families Highlights model policies that other states could and should emulate if they would like to support children with special needs and increase the odds that these children will be adopted.

Copies of the report are available for \$10 from NACAC or can be downloaded free from [www.nacac.org](http://www.nacac.org) (in the adoption subsidy section).

### **Learn About Learning Disabilities**

One in seven Americans, (15%) of the US population, has some type of learning disability (LD), according to the National Institutes of Health. These disabilities, with reading or language skills, for example, often go undetected and untreated. To help parents and teachers better understand children with learning disabilities and recognize their signs, a Web site called LD Online offers an overview. The site give the latest information from LD experts and allows users to submit questions. Also featured are a compendium of LD news items, audio clips from experts, and weekly submissions to the site by a guest artist and guest writer (typically young children). You can also sign up for a free LD newsletter. LD OnLine is a collaboration between public broadcasting and the learning disabilities community. The site is: <http://ldonline.org>

## Wall

I have a wall you cannot see  
cause it's deep within me  
It isn't easy or a cinch,  
you can reach in  
I can't reach out.  
People wonder what it's really about.  
The wall I built that no one can see  
is a result from insecurity.  
Every time I let my heart hurt  
the scars within me grow worse and worse  
So brick by brick  
I built this special wall,  
that's now so thick it won't even fall.  
I want to show my real self  
and love from you will really help  
So bit by bit  
please chip at my wall  
til brick by brick the wall starts to fall.  
I know it will be slow,  
but it's hard to let go  
from hurt and failures long ingrained  
upon my heart from years and years of pain

KaLynn Reynolds, age 16, January, 2001

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"The Permanent Press", a newsletter from Every Child, Inc.*

# Openness About Open Adoption When is Too Much Too Much?

By Becky Judd

*Openness in adoption today is commonplace. Openness implies at least some amount of sharing of personal information between adoptive and biological families. This sharing can involve contact by email, phone, or letters; sharing holidays; or stopping by after work. When children have contact with their biological families, these relationships can overflow into the school environment.*

In a fall activity, students in my daughter's class were asked to tell what they were thankful for. My seven-year-old daughter said she was thankful for her new birth brother. When asked what she meant, she explained that her birth mother had just had a baby. I wasn't there to see the expression on the adult's face, but she did take me aside later and whisper that my daughter had mentioned a "birth mother" and she just didn't know "what to do." Rather than worry about how the teacher had reacted, I chose to view this as an opportunity to educate.

When parents know a great deal about their child's birth parents and the circumstances surrounding their child's birth, they have to make decisions about how much information to share with significant people in their child's life. One general guideline for parents is not to tell anyone information they haven't told their children. One day after school, I was chatting with the mother of my son's classmate. I mentioned going to an adoption group activity. This mother's first comment was, "Oh, I didn't know your son was adopted." (Sometimes I forget that not everyone in our small school knows that we are an adoptive family). But the next comment is what amazed me. She asked, "Does your son know he's adopted?" My son is nine. Apparently, they had decided not to tell their daughter that she was adopted until she was "old enough." This was obviously another opportunity to try to educate. As disappointing as it was to me to know that this mother had been keeping such a major secret from her child, what followed was more disappointing. At least three other adults (parents and teachers) approached me in the next six months to tell me that this girl was adopted.

A second guideline is to recognize that parents don't owe anyone else personal information about their children or their children's background. Neither should they be asked questions that sound more appropriate coming from an afternoon talk show host. For example, parents may have a need to discuss their child's adoption at teacher conference time because of issues around adoption. But they shouldn't be put in the position of having to defend or condemn the choices of their child's birth mother. "Do your child's birth sister and brother have the same father?" is a question that should not have been asked at a teacher conference, or anywhere.

Many adopted children wish they knew more about their birth parents or their early years. But for children in open adoptions, the issues are different. Sometimes school assignments raise questions about how much information to share. Next year my son will be writing his autobiography. He will have to decide whether to include his birth parents, their spouses, their children, his birth aunts and uncles who are close to his age, or either set of birth grandparents.

The bottom line is to talk to other adoptive families, listen to others, to your teachers, and especially to your children. Then, when it comes to deciding what and how much to say, follow your gut instinct and go from there.

Becky Judd is the mother of three school-aged children. She and her husband Bill adopted two of their children at birth through private adoption. They maintain contact with their children's birth families.



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