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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

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(215) 256-0669

MEMBERSHIPS

**North American Council on
 Adoptable Children
 Winner of the Angels in Adoption
 Award
 United Way**

www.taplink.org

Presidents Corner

Phyllis Stevens

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to all of you! This has been a very good year for TAP. We have received over 250 calls on our help line and more than 50 emails. This is both good news and bad news. The bad news is that most of the calls came from families that were hurting and needed help. The good news is that we were able to help or direct them to someone that could.

We have also seen a growth in our membership. Families are not only attending the meetings consistently but are also volunteering with fundraisers and other activities.



This is a perfect time to say thank you to all of TAPs members. Whenever I asked you to do anything you were right there. A very special thanks to all of you who sent Jenell a "Get Well" card. She was SO appreciative. She wants you to know that each card was a blessing to her. It seemed as if you knew when she was having a bad day because a card would arrive and lift her spirit.

Thanks to Meg for taking the lead in organizing the clothes give-away, and to Michelle, her daughter, and Debbie for working with what seemed like mountains and mountains of clothes during the conference. This was a BIG hit with the families.

The conference went very well. Pierre V. Cooper was our keynote speaker. He spoke about people who influenced his life over the years and encouraged the families that what they were doing with our children was a good thing. It still amazes me how appreciative the families are that come to the conference each year. They love it, and I love them.

We are in the process of putting together our parent group meeting schedule for next year. If you would like us to cover a certain topic please let Andrea or myself know as soon as possible. If you know of any speakers that would come and speak to the group let us know that as well.

The North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC), which is a national organization and our Pennsylvania State Conference will be collaborating together next year for one huge conference in Pittsburgh. The dates are August 3-6, 2005. I know most of you will not be able to afford to attend this conference. The cost of the hotel, childcare, and transportation alone would be too expensive, (I did not include registration because they give out scholarships for that). My hope is to find grants or sponsors that would cover all of the cost of the conference for some of you. Pray that I will be successful.

Our Christmas Party is December 11th. More information is on the inside.

God bless and have a safe holiday.

National Adoption Month, 2004

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

By deciding to share their hearts and homes with a child, adoptive parents demonstrate great compassion and receive many blessings in return. During National Adoption Month, we recognize the generosity of adoptive and foster families who are providing hope and love, and we encourage the adoption of children of all ages.

In 2002, I signed the Promoting Safe and Stable Families legislation that supports families and promotes adoption, and last December I signed the Adoption Promotion Act of 2003 to increase incentives to adopt older children. We have raised the adoption tax credit to \$10,000 per child and created the AdoptUSKids website that has joined thousands of children with adoptive parents. We are working hard to place more children from foster care to permanent homes. This year, on November 20, communities from all 50 States and the District of Columbia will celebrate National Adoption Day by finalizing the adoption of thousands of children by loving families. And each one of those families will be enriched by the addition of new members. By bringing care and hope into other lives, individuals can fill their own lives with greater purpose.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, GEORGE W. BUSH, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim November 2004 as National Adoption Month. I call on all Americans to observe this month with appropriate programs and activities to honor adoptive families and to participate in efforts to find permanent homes for waiting children.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this fourth day of November, in the year of our Lord two thousand four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-ninth.

Families Need the Whole Truth

by Diane Riggs and Joe Kroll

While policies increasingly favor heightened information sharing between child welfare agencies and foster and adoptive parents, practice often lags behind. Confidentiality directives hold such sway for some that child information does not flow freely between workers or to children's caregivers. Now, concerns about privacy mandates in HIPAA (the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) are inspiring even less sharing—a trend we find deeply troubling since full disclosure about a child's medical, educational, and social background is key to adoption success.

Why Information Matters

When it comes to successful parenting, more information is better. In *Promoting Successful Adoptions*, Susan Smith and Jeanne Howard list “knowing the child's history” as a factor tied to adoption stability. Richard Barth and Marianne Berry, in *Adoption and Disruption*, observe that “families with less accurate preplacement information about the child will have less realistic expectations about behavior, resulting in long-term frustration for both parent and child.” In fact, Barth and Berry found that “better information” was clearly associated with fewer disruptions.



Children adopted from foster care have endured pain and loss. To even begin to prepare for and address the child's needs and behaviors, parents must thoroughly understand the child's history. Parents cannot effectively care for and bond with new sons and daughters knowing only fragments of their children's past.

Disclosure is in agencies' best interest too. Workers would certainly rather not watch families suffer, see placements disrupt, or be charged with withholding crucial information from parents. Wrongful adoption lawsuits hurt agencies and workers, and cannot make up for families' pain

Disclosure Laws and Standards

The federal Social Security Act mandates that state agencies collect complete health, education, and other information about foster children. Each time a child changes placements, the agency must supply updated records to the new parent(s).

Most states also have disclosure laws and policies. Likely places include the state's children's code, family law code, social services code, or other adoption-related statute.* “As a general rule,” Madelyn Freundlich (co-author of *Wrongful Adoption: Law, Policy and Practice*) states, “adoption professionals must disclose [to pre-adoptive parents] all known, material information about a child's health, social, and other background.”

Ideally, the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) proposes in *Standards of Excellence for Adoption Services*, agencies should supply pre-adoptive parents with complete medical, mental health, developmental, psychological, educational, and social information about the child, as well as his or her immediate birth family, and other birth relatives back several generations. CWLA also calls for detail, asking for instance that agencies disclose the child's prenatal care (including drugs or medications used during pregnancy) plus genetic links to diseases or disorders or positive family traits like longevity.

Under CWLA's standards, agencies would offer adopting parents enough information to fairly assess their ability to parent specific children and gain a realistic sense of needed supports and services. Adoptees would be able to know and own their family history, and be able to provide valuable background information to medical and mental health providers.

HIPAA

HIPAA has gained increasing attention since April 2003 as compliance dates have brought the law's privacy provisions into reality for "covered entities." As one legal expert asserts, HIPAA regulations are "chock full of ambiguities" concerning child welfare agencies' responsibilities under the law. Does HIPAA prohibit agencies from releasing identifiable health information about foster children to pre-adoptive and adoptive parents? Are child welfare agencies covered entities?

In a February 17th Information Memorandum, HHS states that "[s]ome title IV-E child welfare agencies may be defined as health care providers." The memo concludes, however, that "HHS and the Children's Bureau cannot determine whether all child welfare agencies are subject to HIPAA's regulations."

In short, most state agencies have had to decide for themselves whether HIPAA regulations apply. Unfortunately, many agencies that try to follow HIPAA have begun to limit key medical information disclosure to pre-adoptive parents.



Advice for Agencies

HIPAA regulations assert that the federal law supercedes state laws, unless the state law is (among other things) "serving a compelling need related to health, safety, and welfare." To ensure that your agency's practices are legal, and children's best interests are being honored:

- Continue to seek clarification about how or if HIPAA applies to your agency. The New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children, Inc. wrote to the State Office of Children and Family Services last summer about HIPAA mandates. In return, the deputy commissioner explained how, in New York, HIPAA does not prohibit "protected health information" from being disclosed to foster and adoptive parents. If asked, your state commissioner may come to the same conclusion.
- Follow state and federal laws. HIPAA may apply, but other laws do too. As stated above, the Social Security Act outlines foster care and adoption disclosure requirements. The Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act governs child protection disclosure rules. And, as outlined in Making Good Decisions about Confidentiality in Child Welfare, confidentiality exceptions are allowed to provide child and family services, supply information to caregivers, and protect children from future abuse.
- Work to prevent wrongful adoption actions. Kathleen Hogan Morrison, an Illinois adoption attorney, offers this advice. First, workers must actively seek out birth and birth family records. Second, instead of simply summarizing information about the child, workers should copy the original documents for adopting parents. Finally, agencies should establish a system for learning about and complying with relevant laws.

Thoughts for Parents

When a child is about to join an adoptive family, parents must learn all they can. "Information gathering," observe Regina Kupecky and Gregory Keck in Adopting the Hurt Child, "is the most important step prospective parents must make." To maximize chances for a successful adoption:



Appreciate the value of the child's background information. Complete disclosure is crucial for early diagnosis, to address the child's needs, to qualify for support services, and to avert possible problems down the road.

Acquaint yourself with state and federal laws and agency rules. Protect your family by learning about services you are entitled to receive, and then advocate for what you need.

Ask questions and listen carefully. Quell the inner voice that says, “This will never happen to us.” Ask lots of questions and record details that workers, therapists, teachers, and former foster parents volunteer about your child.

Conclusion

The federal government is duty-bound to safeguard children’s and families’ well-being. As written, unfortunately, HIPAA regulations have caused some agencies to fear penalties for inappropriate health information disclosure more than the potentially dire consequences of inadequately preparing families for adoption.

To promote families’ well-being, the government must clarify ways in which HIPAA applies to child welfare practice, and amend provisions that adversely affect children’s best interests. Waiting children need families well-equipped to help them overcome troubling pasts and reach for promising futures.

Travel Assistance Program for Kids with Autism



If you have a child, or know of a child, in need of travel to medical care outside of the immediate area, the Unlocking Autism program may be able to help. It has partnered with several airlines to assist parents of children with autism in getting to medical appointments in other states. You can submit application information by using the contact form on the main page of their web site; www.unlockingautism.org. Travel grants are based on need, flight schedules and the availability of frequent flyer mile donations. If you would like to donate your frequent flyer miles, please check the box on the web site and you will be contacted.

Health Insurance Dispute Guide

A free online consumer guide about handling health plan disputes has been launched by the Kaiser Family Foundation and Consumers Union. To access the Consumer Guide, visit the Kaiser Family Foundation website at www.kff.org/consumerguide/, or the free consumer advice section of the Consumer Reports magazine website, www.consumerreports.com.

PA Parents and Caregivers Resource Network





Pierre V. Cooper, REJOICE, Inc. and Jane Johnston, SWAN



Dr. Karen Jenkins, Exec. Adm. Blair Christian Academy, and Rev. Geneva Hackett (Blair provide childcare for the conference)



Darlene Preston, Discover Toys Exhibit , TAP Member



DHS Matching Exhibit Table



Candace our 12 year-old soloist



The Joy Unlimited Youth Mass Choir

Saving Lives, Building *Hope!*, Adoption, Foster, and Kinship Family Conference



Keeping Christmas Merry

As I walked through the stores looking for Veteran's Day bargains. I couldn't help but notice the decorations were evergreens, poinsettias, silver bells, and red and green ribbons. The intercoms piped in "White Christmas" and "Frosty the Snowman." "How", I wondered, "can we survive six full weeks of holiday preparations?"

As a mother I have always believed it was my special responsibility and privilege to make our family's Christmas "merry." The sooner I started, the longer the processes lasted. Bake three more kinds of cookies. Buy two more gifts. The Christmas season expanded until I was exhausted as the big day arrived at last.

Children are affected even more by this trend to extend the "Christmas season" from mid October to late December. The "hype" is simply too much for them. Foster and adopted children have been deprived of unconditional love and giving during their early years. They have insatiable needs for attention and "things" all year round. They are quick to balk when another child gets a much-needed article of clothing or an extra slice of toast. When they are exposed to two months of advertising "propaganda" which equates getting gifts with love, things get out of control very quickly.

To complicate matters even more, feelings of grief and loss surface in all of us during the holiday season. We remember loved ones who have moved away or who have died. Feelings of melancholy are common in adults and children. For those children who have lost so much in their young lives, the holiday season may be especially painful or even devastating. Often they believe they don't deserve happiness and will try to sabotage the season by creating chaos.

How can we survive a two month holiday season without exhaustion and/or depression? First, lower your own expectations. As the parent, you are not responsible for making everyone's' Christmas merry. You best meet your children's needs when you are rested, cheerful and focused. Set reasonable goals and stick to them. Make a list of gifts for family members. Keep the number of gifts per child to a minimum. It is best to choose one or two durable creative toys which will last. "Stocking stuffers" can include a few inexpensive frivolous items and snacks. Straining the family budget by buying the latest fad toy is not going to make up for neglect your child may have experienced during holidays in the past. Your child needs your consistency, patience and time more than he or she needs presents.

Elaborate cooking and baking is expected during the holidays if you believe the covers of magazines staring back at you in the supermarket checkout line. The reality is, this kind of food preparation takes a lot of time. Most families with newly adopted and foster children already find there are not enough hours in the day to meet the needs of the children in their care. You are not a "Scrooge" if you choose to buy cookies and cakes. Meals can be fun and simple. After years of feeling frustrated trying to organize a formal holiday dinner, to choose a time to accommodate family members coming from different parts of the state, and to devise a menu to please everyone, I decided to really simplify things, Cold meats and cheeses from the store, bread, lettuce, tomatoes, condiments combined with potato salad for a build-your-own submarine sandwich meal. To my amazement it was a great success with everyone. Get creative. Break some of your own rules or establish new traditions.

Try to spend some extra time with your adopted child during this season. Try to be sensitive to his or her feelings regarding the past. Give the message by your words and actions that it is okay to think about people and holidays from the past. Take time to listen to his or her expectations of what the holidays will bring. School age children can be helped to understand that television makes the holiday season into a fairy tale, which can not possibly come true. Explain your own values around the real meaning of the holiday season.

As with vacations and birthdays, holidays are high stress times. Try to maintain your child's schedule. Staying up late at night watching holiday specials on television is certain to result in trouble for your child. Children whose lives have been disrupted and confused do best with routines and consistency no matter what time of year it is.

For adopted and foster children, making Christmas merry means having parents around them who are rested and calm. It means having parents who will understand their grief when they recycle past losses. It means having parents who are able to keep them safe by providing a routine, structure, and patience at a time when life may seem out of control.

Parents who put the emotional and spiritual needs of their children ahead of elaborately wrapped, expensive gifts and gourmet foods are the very best. Use this holiday season to teach, to listen, and to build a foundation of love on which to build in the new year.

Five Points on Parenting

Admittedly I have been a much better parent of adults than I was of small children. I am thankful for our own children and now grandchildren who are teaching me what parenting is about. These points are definitely not a primer on the subject, but rather some observations that have been made by others and one principle that has worked for me. I hope that you find them helpful.

- 1) A young father with a strong-willed five-year-old son told me that "My challenge is to transfer the control by me to my son's control of himself." This is so much better and so much more than merely controlling the child's behavior. He is parenting in the highest sense.
- 2) When a parent with a gifted child who seemed to purposefully fail consulted an experienced psychiatrist he received this counsel: "It is important to know whether the child gets attention (is connected to you) through achievement or non-achievement. Does the child want your sympathy for failure or approval for achievement?" If the bond is the negative model then praise for achievement will fail and conversely if the bond is through achievement constant criticism will fail.
- 3) One of my favorite psychiatrists told me that anyone who looks to me as a father figure must know two things: what makes papa smile and what makes papa frown. This works in parenting, in mentoring and in management. The responsibility of the father figure is to remain consistent or the other person will become very confused by receiving mixed signals.
- 4) A well-known comedian was interviewed about his views on parenting. He quickly threw out this line: "Choose when you want your kids to hate you." He expanded by saying, "Give them everything they want as a child and they will hate you as adults; give them everything they need to become great adults and they will hate you as children - your choice."
- 5) One of the better thoughts that I have had on parenting revolves around the transition between child and adult. When the child is young the parent is responsible for control and exercises power, but as the child moves into adulthood the relationship changes. Therefore, the good parent changes from power figure to wisdom figure. Furthermore, the movement reverses and is now child to parent when seeking wisdom rather than parent to child in exercising power. I think of it as moving from a line to staff function.

Which principle hit home for you this week? Pick one and focus on identifying three ways that you could become more effective as a parent.

For more writings of Fred Smith visit www.breakfastwithfred.com

Jokes from Kids

Q: What do sea monsters eat?

A: Fish and ships!

Q: What goes ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, plopp?

A: Someone laughing t heir head of f!

Q: What always ends everyt hing?

A: The letter 'G'!

Q: What can a whole orange do t hat half an orange can never do?

A: Look round!

Q: To whom do people always take of f t heir hats?

A: Hair dressers!

Q: What always f alls wit hout get t ing hurt?

A: Rain!

Q: What word is always pr onounced wrong?

A: Wrong!

Q: What is f ull of holes yet can st ill hold wat er?

A: A sponge!

Q: Which is t he f ast est , cold or heat?

A: Heat; you can cat ch a cold!

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