



# 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.  
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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 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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- PA State Foster Parent Association
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From Phyllis Stevens, Executive Director

How could we have missed the signs? We knew she had a learning disability, which was diagnosed early in elementary school. We also knew there were developmental lags. We knew to interact with her according to her emotional and physical needs and not her age. We were doing everything "right". She attended a learning support class from 3<sup>rd</sup> grade until she graduated to help her through school. We would break tasks down into smaller, doable steps, so that she could not feel like a failure.

After beating our heads against the wall for 17 years we decided to take her to be tested by a Neurologist. She was diagnosed with Attention Deficient with Hyperactive Disorder, and put on the medication Concerta. There was also a sentence buried in the report that read "possible signs of Fetal Alcohol Effect".

Things were going well until she graduated from high school. She was not able to complete job applications without our help. She could not handle money. We would give her money that should have lasted two weeks, she would spend all of it in two days, not thinking about the next 12 days. She could not do simple math.

Finally one day while my husband and I were away for a few days she quit her jobs packed her clothes and went to live with a friend and her mom. She spent all of her savings and then some. It never occurred to her that you she had to subtract the checks she wrote from the bank balance. As long as the ATM showed positive she felt that could keep writing checks. She did not realize that one day all these checks would hit the bank. It also never dawned on her that you cannot not just live with people without contributing something and that she needed to work.

She moved from one "friend" to the next creating her world as she went. Some of the lies were so outrageous that you almost wanted to laugh.

After running out of places to live she was forced to come home. When we asked her why did she leave her answer was "I don't know". When we asked her why did she tell so many lies on the

family her answer was “I don’t know”. When we asked her about the bad checks, her response was “I thought I had money in the bank”. When asked about some of the choices she made that could have led to jail time for her, she had no response.

We could not understand why she could not see that there are consequences for every choice a person makes in life. All she wanted to do was to be with her “friends”. We knew it was a matter of time before she disappeared on us again. Now she is once again out on her own.

My husband and I devoted an entire day searching the web for answers. We found it in the most unusual place, a 1999 *TAPROOT*, the title of the article was Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/ Fetal Alcohol Effect *By Becky Richardson*. It was as if Ms. Richardson was living with my child.

We searched the web for everything we could find on FAS/FAE. The more we read the more we were convinced that we had found the answer. I could not stop praising the Lord. I can’t explain the feeling that Derek and I both had, happy and sad at the same time. Happy because we now know the cause of her behavior, sad because her brain has been permanently damaged. Here are the symptoms:

- Attention deficits
- Memory deficits
- Hyperactivity
- Difficulty with abstract concepts
- Inability to manage money
- Poor problem solving skills
- Difficulty learning from consequences
- Immature social behavior
- Inappropriately friendly to strangers
- Lack of control over emotions
- Poor impulse control
- Poor judgement

My daughter has ***all*** of the symptoms above.

We also found out from searching the web that if we can get a medical diagnosis she will be eligible for Social Security. This will give her health insurance, at the moment she has none. She works part-time at McDonalds. She is not mentally capable of working the type of job that would supply health insurance.

My husband and I decided to write this article in order to help other parents that may be experiencing the same type of behavior with their child and are looking for answers.

If you would like more information on FAS/FAE please contact TAP and we will put you in contact with one of our members who is very involved in research surrounding Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and Fetal Alcohol Effect.

Here are a couple of books: *Damaged Angels* by Bonnie Buxton, *The Broken Cord* by Michael Dorris. We have reprinted the old Taproot article in this issue in case it helps someone else

Have a safe and blessed Christmas season. .

# Of Oreos and Cameos

by Sue Badeau

My six oldest children are African American. They were all already teens when we adopted them and each had their own wicked sense of humor. If my husband or I was ever sitting between two of them, when a third walked into the room, they delighted in seeing who could be first to exclaim, "Oreo cookie!" as they pointed at the three of us on the couch.

This, of course, was all in good fun, but it also exemplified our basic approach to the various issues of transracial adoption that arose on a regular basis. We had three basic rules: Be direct. Be honest about your feelings. Maintain your sense of humor. These rules have helped us deal with issues as diverse as insensitive remarks; prejudice and discrimination at school, at work, at the mall, or by police officers; hair and skin care; culture, personal history and identity; dating and marriage and more.

The racial differences between these children and my husband and I were (and still are) quite obvious. They are out there, on the table, every day. Sometimes we notice, sometimes we do not, but others always do. And when they do, they present us -with a plethora of issues to discuss, problem-solve, muddle through and eventually resolve in ways that feel right to us. The visibility and clarity of our differences is often helpful. It creates definition and helps us maintain focus when needed.

-I have other children whose racial, or ethnic, differences between us are not so obvious. When we sit together, no one exclaims, "Oreo cookie!". We look rather more like a "Cameo cookie" The vanilla cookies aren't all that different in color from the cream filling. Yet, they have identity issues and they face obstacles created by discrimination, insensitivity and confusion that are equally as challenging and significant as those of my African American children. Trouble is, they are less obvious, and therefore, can easily go unnoticed.

Parents of Hispanic children, Asian children, Bi- or multi-racial children and even internationally-adopted Caucasian children may feel that they sidestepped the transracial adoption issues by adopting children who physically look more like them. It can be tempting to be so concerned with all the "regular" parenting issues such as schools, health and safety, onset of adolescence, etc. that issues of race, ethnicity and identity can take a back seat. And when your child looks almost like they could have been born to you - (only with a little bit-of a tan), who's to be the wiser?

I have found that children whose racial differences are less obvious often have the harder time coping with the confusing questions about identity that they face. Do they deny part of themselves and work at "passing" in the majority, mainstream culture? Or do they emphasize their differences, finding ways to dress, do their hair, or even affecting voice-accent in order to be clear about their loyalty to their culture of origin?

If they choose to explore their ethnic and cultural heritage, where do they turn for support<sup>0</sup> Does a Mexican-American child "find" herself in the local Puerto Rican community just because others see them both as generically "Hispanic"<sup>1</sup>? Will a Chinese youngster feel embraced by a Korean church just because the larger culture calls them both "Asian"?

What does it mean to be neither white nor black in an American society that often wants to see the world only in two tones? A Caucasian person - at school, - in the mall, on the street - typically looks at an African American and thinks of that person as fundamentally "American". He does not necessarily expect this person to speak a different language, or be culturally fluent in anything but "American". Yet, this same person will, upon being introduced to a person named, "Jose" expect him to speak Spanish, know how to cook Spanish foods and be able to discuss the politics of South American countries with first-hand knowledge. He is not viewed as truly "American", but rather as a visitor from another land, or possibly an "illegal immigrant" usurping an American's place in social programs,

schools or jobs. This common, day-to-day reality faced by our non-white, non-black children creates a wide range of feelings including identity confusion, frustration, and anger.

The non-white, non-black adopted child has additional challenges. The adoptive parents, in a well-meaning attempt to help the child bond, attach and feel a sense of belonging within the adoptive family, may strongly emphasize the ways in which the parent and child are the same, downplaying any sense of difference. When the differences are not "on the table" this is easy to do. Thus, the child now senses that any exploration of or identification with his racial or cultural background will create tension or distance in his relationship with his parents. Soon, the child's external and internal worlds become separate, creating a great deal of turmoil and stress.

Another issue these children face is a sense of isolation and invisibility. My Hispanic son, adopted as a toddler from El Salvador, often bemoans the fact that special presentations at church, school, in the community or on television that purport to be about "Multicultural issues" or "Race relations" or "Race and Culture in America", etc. totally focus on black-white relations and issues to the exclusion of all others. "I'm not black," he says, "And I'm not white. Does this make me invisible?"

Adoptive parents must not choose to adopt children of color lightly. A child with tan skin, a child who "almost" looks like you, a child who "passes" for white or even is "part white" has just as many, or perhaps more, issues around race, culture, and identity as an African American child. Adoptive parents involved in any adoption in which the child has a background that is different from the mainstream, Caucasian, culture is involved in a transracial adoption and needs the education, resources and supports that go with transracial adoption.

The three rules still apply: Be direct. Be honest with your feelings. And, maintain your sense of humor.

Care for a cookie?

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the  
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**Dunkin Donuts**

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# Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/ Fetal Alcohol Effect

By Becky Richardson

When pregnant women drink alcohol, the alcohol crosses through the placenta and is mixed into the fetal circulatory system. If it takes three drinks to intoxicate a 150- pound woman, think what three drinks can do to a tiny, one pound baby. Babies who are exposed to alcohol while in the uterus are often damaged, resulting in fetal alcohol syndrome (EAS) or fetal alcohol effect (FAE). Another medical term for this is alcohol related neurodevelopmental disorder (ARND).

Children who are born affected by alcohol vary considerably in the amount of damage they have sustained. Some may be barely affected, have normal intelligence, and are never diagnosed. Others may have the characteristic look of FAS (thin upper lip, little or no ridge at center of upper lip, wide set eyes, short nose, folds at insides of eyes, low nasal bridge), growth retardation, and severe retardation. Alcohol destroys brain cells so that brains of people with FAS/FAE look like swiss cheese with holes throughout the brain. This means that the normal circuitry of the brain does not work. Children with FAS/FAE may be able to do things one day but not the next. They may be able to understand things in one setting but not another.

Take the following example:

A 10 year old child with FAS had to cross the street to go to school. The mother spent the summer teaching her child to cross the street safely, look first left, then right, then left again. If no cars are coming, cross the street quickly, but still walking. Once you are halfway across the street, look again to the right to be sure that no cars are coming. The child learned how to do this and the mother was satisfied that the child could safely cross the street to go to school. However, one day the mother saw the child run into the street without looking to chase a ball. When the mother asked the child why hadn't he looked both ways before crossing the street, the child's response was that he was not crossing the street, just getting a ball.

This child had been unable to make the connection between running into the street after a ball and crossing the street on the way to school. These seemed like two very different activities.

## Characteristics of Children with FAS/FAE at Different Ages

**Preschool:** have sensory integration dysfunction (meaning that they are irritated by too much sensory overload and have trouble calming themselves); tend to exhibit anger or rage; experience attention disorder; behave manipulatively; don't understand cause and effect; are dangerous to selves and family if interested in knives and fire; need 24 hour supervision.

**Elementary:** exhibit poor social skills; are overreactive, impulsive, and unpredictable; lack internalized knowledge of right and wrong; blame others for problems; lack empathy; fail at abstract learning (tends to show up in third grade); commit unsafe pranks (cant predict the results of what they do, so do unsafe things without intending to hurt themselves or others/can't transfer information from one setting to another).

**High School:** are probably in special education classes; participate in high risk behaviors (especially gang activities); may be victim or predator; have difficulty separating fantasy from reality; have strong sense of self protection, but can't always recognize danger; recover quickly from crisis; are overly influenced by the media and peers; need but resist structure; lack understanding of own limitations; often have family and personal problems.

**Adults:** have poor problem solving skills and limited life skills; set unrealistic goals; exhibit little self control; experience employment and financial problems; are highly volatile and very manipulative; can't internalize society's values, morals, and laws; are often homeless or unemployed; have unsafe sexual

behavior; have mental health issues.

Because of their organic brain damage, many people with FAS/FAE have:

Poor judgment skills. They seem irresponsible, make poor choices, and seem willful. They are often unable to see beyond the moment and can't think about the future.

No sense of boundaries. They have little sense of personal or property boundaries, are not respectful of other people and their things, and are inappropriate in their touching.

An inability to manage their own behavior. They are immature, have little self control, and say words that have no meaning for the situation.

Difficulty with abstract reasoning skills. They have trouble with concepts of time, money, and math. Budgeting is a tough skill to learn. It demands planning, thinking about the future, and delaying gratification, all skills that require abstract thinking.

Poor memory. Things done one day may be forgotten the next. Their knowledge is inconsistent because only some things are remembered.

Difficulty predicting. Much of behavior is based on being able to predict the outcome. For example, "If I eat this third helping of ice cream, I will feel sick." If people can't think about the consequences of behavior, they are likely to get caught in many tough spots.

Poor impulse control. People affected by FAS/FAE often lack internal controls, lack intent and foresight, and lack the skills to cover up uncontrolled activities, so they often get in trouble.

How Can You Help?

This all sounds pretty discouraging. What can you do to help these children? The first thing is to get the child diagnosed. If you have a child with some of the behaviors listed above, ask a knowledgeable pediatrician if this child might be affected by alcohol. Remember, too, that many drug using moms are poly--drug users. So a child who was cocaine positive at birth may also be alcohol affected. Early diagnosis will allow you to access treatments that will help your child develop as much and as quickly as possible.

**Why Would Anyone Choose to Parent a Child with FAS/FAE?**

Good parenting does make a difference for these children. Many children will learn skills on their own, but children affected by alcohol need help to achieve their potential. "In the field of child development, there is a general view that early intervention and a facilitating environment can help to maximize every child's potential, no matter what the problem. However, children without learning disabilities or behavioral problems can thrive without such interventions, whereas children such as those with FAS need interventions to approach normalcy" (Weiner and Morse, in *Alcohol Health and Research World*, Vol. 18, #1, 1994). If you want to know that you are having a lasting impact on a child, try parenting a FAS child. By getting an accurate diagnosis, coordinating good services and being an active, effective parent you can make a difference in the entire life of an FAS child.

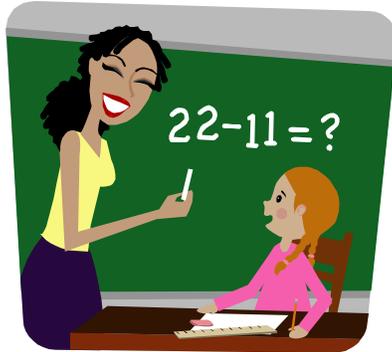
If you are parenting an FAS child, you already know that this is a challenge. It is important that you take care of yourself. Take time outs, use respite, be sure the professionals you use understand FAS/FAE, and talk to others who are parenting FAS/FAE children.

*Becky Richardson is foster parent training coordinator with the Hennepin County Children and Family Services Department, Foster Care Unit, Health Services Building 9 MC960, 525 Portland Ave. S., Minneapolis, MN 55415-2007. This article is reprinted with permission from Essentials: The Newsletter for Hennepin County Foster Parents, Vol. 21, No. 6, November 1998.*



## A Special Ed Christmas

'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the schools  
 No students were present to break any rules  
 The budget was written and every dime spent  
 with no one quite sure where it all went  
 The school board was snuggled all safe in their beds  
 While visions of budget increases danced in their heads  
 When all of a sudden there arose such a clatter  
 They leaped from their beds to see what was the matter



Away to the board room they went in a dash  
 to see who it was that threatened the cash  
 And there before them - who did appear?  
 With issues they thought finished this year

Once more before them plainly to see  
 Were parents of children they called "Special Needs"  
 We've done this before and we were quite clear  
 So once again tell us why you are here

One of them stepped forward and it soon was apparent  
 That this person before them was one informed parent.  
 The presentation was prepared with great thought and care  
 With federal law quotes that brought them great glares



With a voice loud and clear they were all called by name  
 These are not new laws and the meaning is plain  
 IDEA, ADA, LRE and 504  
 It is time to remind you just like before

We wish you good tidings great hope and good cheer  
 The time for inclusion is finally here  
 Why won't you listen to this our plight  
 To be included is not privilege but right



We want them included right from the start  
 To become part of the whole and not kept apart  
 We want them included and yes all means all  
 Don't make them feel different, don't make them feel small

For such a long time the seed has been planted  
 why do we still struggle for what to others is granted  
 "No not right now but we'll tell you when"  
 We've heard that same story again and again

So on this the holiest of nights  
 we say inclusion is not a privilege but a right  
 and on this issue we firmly do stand  
 the rights of our children we do now demand

As the meeting concluded ending the night  
 It was heard.....



**MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL  
 AND TO ALL EQUAL RIGHTS**



Don't forget  
TAP's Christmas Party



**Saturday December 13th**

From **12 till 3 (new times)**

**Santa's Shop will Open at 2:00 and close at 3:00**

**Langhorne United Methodist Church**

**301 E. Maple Ave.**

**Langhorne, PA**

**Directions on the Events page at [www.taplink.org](http://www.taplink.org)**



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