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

TAPROOT is a publication of
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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 children, adoptive, foster, and kinship families.

HAVE ANY COMMENTS,
SUGGESTIONS
OR GRIPES?

E-MAIL US AT

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MEMBERSHIPS

North American Council on Adoptable
Children

Statewide Adoption & Permanency
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PA State Resource Parent Association
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www.taplink.org

MY Say

Phyllis J. Stevens

First please accept my apology for not producing a newsletter last year. It has taken me an entire year to get it through my head that I cannot keep the same schedule as I did before Hunter. Inside you will see some of the highlights of 2013. It was a very busy year. What you will not see is the hundreds of families that we helped. The trips to courts and schools to advocate for families. The tears and the laughter.

As most of you know Derek and I have adopted again. This only proves that God has a sense of humor. Neither I nor Derek were looking to adopt anything. Our youngest was 26. We were planning what we would do for the rest of our lives. I was asked by a friend if I would foster their grandson for 6 months. I said yes. Hunter was placed in our home as a foster child when he was 4 months old. Six months turned into two years. When we realized that reunification to the birth mom was not going to happen we had to make some decisions. How could we let someone else adopt Hunter after he had been with us for two years!



We had a family meeting that did not go well. Our adult children were concerned that we were being "forced" into giving up our dreams. They were concerned about our age and taking care of a 2 year old. After much discussion we convinced them that we were very happy. We are having so much fun with Hunter. We are doing things that we had not done in years, like going to the zoo, camping out in the backyard, going on picnics, etc. We used our swimming pool more last summer year than we had done in the past 3 years. We are enjoying every minute with this little one and my grandson. We call them Thing One and Thing Two. It helps a lot that my twenty six year old daughter Alex lives with us. Her son Julius and Hunter are like brothers.

The only regret I have is that I did not take the time to enjoy all my children as much as I am enjoying Hunter. Even though we are very close and spend a lot of time together I wish I would have laughed more with them when they were younger. One thing for sure is that I am definitely having my adoption tubes tied.

The Importance of the TRUTH

I have been working with foster and adoptive families for more than 20 years. Talking to children about their family history, why they are currently in foster care, why they were originally placed in foster care or why they are now adopted presents challenges for many families. Each situation is different and nothing in the work we do is ever prescriptive for all...however below are some helpful hints from 20 years of direct work and training and working with more than 10,000 parents and workers in 14 states and Canada.

First, and most important-tell the truth. Second and equally important-tell the truth. The third thing you need to know is –tell the truth.

Step: **1** Tell the Truth

When families choose not to share the truth they usually have good intentions in trying to “protect the child from hurt feelings.” The truth eventually comes out and then the trust in the relationship is broken. “You lied to me all these years”...is not a great way to start adolescence.

Step: **2** Get Training and Guidance and Become Comfortable with the Subject Matter

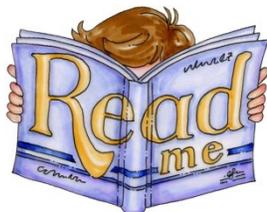
It is often our own discomfort as adults with the subject- incarceration, prostitution, incest, violence, drugs, mental illness- that prevents us from sharing the information that children need to understand their own story. It is important to seek out training opportunities and/or guidance from professionals such as therapists, caseworkers, and other to support you through this process.

Step: **3** Tell Children in an Age Appropriate Way

Once you know the truth is “way to go” and you feel comfortable, the next step is to tell them in an “age appropriate” way. You still tell the truth, but the language you use and the level of detail may be different. For younger children it is the start of the truth so you can expand on it as they get older. Children in elementary school think concretely and need the information delivered in that way. Teens can think more abstractly and understand things in a deeper way, so you can give more detail and expect they may ask more challenging questions.

Step: **4** Work as a Team

If birth parents are still around and can work well with you they are the best people to help as they can honestly share what happened. If they are either not available or still may have a different version of the events than you think is “real” then you may need to proceed without them. Workers, therapists, mentors, foster parents or adoptive parents may all be part of the team.





Step: Be Creative-Use Videos, Books, Music, Art and Any Other Creative Method Available to You
Some children process information better when it is not just sitting in a room and talking. If there are videos that tell a story it is sometimes easier to project their feelings onto the character in the movie. An example of this is the movie Elf. The main character was “adopted” by the elf family, but goes to find his birth dad. He ends up seeing it is possible to love two dads. Some teens who say they do not want to be adopted have this “divided loyalty” issue. We showed this movie to teens in foster care who were probably not going to go home but were not sure about adoption either. This helped them explore their thoughts as “Elf.” Some children love to tell stories through pictures or art. Whatever works for them is fine-usually you as the parent know your child the best.



Step : Have them Repeat in their own Words What You Talked About
Sometimes we think children understand us and we have not been clear enough for them. Having them tell you in their own words allows you to double check what they got from the conversation.



Step : Make Sure They Know you are Always Open and Available to Talk more whenever they are Ready.
Sometimes children are thinking about their birth parents but are not sure if you as foster or adoptive parent are OK with talking about it. It is important to keep reminding them from time to time that you are always available for this.

Children who are not told about their life story often imagine things to be even worse than what they are. Their lack of understanding what has occurred to bring them to this point in their life can be frustrating and may contribute to some challenging behaviors. It is their life and they deserve to know the truth. It is important when reading articles like this-these are suggestions and are guiding thoughts-however you should always seek guidance for your individual circumstances from professionals who know your family. There are many books available to you on foster care and adoption. Tapestry Books (tapestrybooks.com) has a wide selection of books on adoption and you may find it helpful to check that website. One young adult who had been adopted as a younger child said, “It’s my life. Why should case workers know what happened to my mom and dad, but not me. That makes no sense.” He went on to say, “If each worker decides what is a topic that is too hard for a child to hear, then every child would get a different version of their life depending on who their workers are. I think all children are entitled to know the truth about their lives.”

We usually do our best work when we learn from those who have been in the system themselves. When we keep things from children there is often tension on the home around “keeping the secret.” The easiest way to ease that tension is not to have secrets to begin with. So instead of waiting, “I’ll tell them when they are older because. . .” it is better to tell the truth in an age appropriate way.

There is no future date that telling a child you have been lying to them is a good date. Happy 12th birthday . . . and by the way. . . The longer you keep secrets, the more challenging things become.

All people who choose to be foster or adoptive parents will encounter the triumphs and challenges of the child welfare system. When there are challenges like how to talk to children about difficult information, remember to tell the truth, reach out to get training and support, tell them in an age appropriate way, use your team, be creative, make sure they repeat back what they understand, and tell them you are always available if they have more questions or want to talk more at another time.

I’ll tell them when they are older is not the way to go . . . tell them now.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Barry Chaffkin, LCSW, has worked with thousands of children. He has directly supervised the reunification of more 900 children and the finalization of more 900 adoptions in the New York City foster care system. He is currently an adjunct lecturer at Columbia University School of Social Work and the CEO of Fostering Change for Children (go to fosteringchangeformchildren.org to find out more).

Opt To Adopt



Calvin & Jack

Calvin (age 11) is a young boy who enjoys playing outside when the weather is nice and playing with his helicopters and video games. Calvin likes watching “Bey Blades” and his favorite movie is “Ice Cream Land.” His favorite foods include spaghetti, chicken, cookies and cake.

Jack (age 10) is a young boy who loves watching the Cartoon Network and enjoys playing with his helicopters, yo-yos and electronic games. Jack also enjoys playing outside when the weather is nice. His favorite food is pizza.

Calvin and Jack each have an individualized educational plan for school. They share a strong bond with each other; however they can antagonize and argue with one another at times and will require extra attention.

Calvin and Jack would benefit from a great deal of structure and firm, but loving, parenting. They would benefit from a committed family who has the extra time to help them in the areas where they struggle. Calvin and Jack require a family who can be patient with them, guide them, and can be supportive and understanding of their needs and love them unconditionally. Both children state they would love to have animals in their forever home.

A two parent home would be ideal for this sibling group, however all families will be considered for Calvin and Jack. They are not yet legally free for adoption.

For more information about Calvin, Jack and others visit www.adoptpakids.org



Social Security

Dear Colleague:

We are proud to announce the launch of Social Security's disability education and awareness initiative, "The Faces and Facts of Disability." Through this campaign, we hope to educate the public about the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program and dispel common misconceptions. To learn more about the campaign, visit our Faces and Facts of Disability website at www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityfacts.

Please help us spread the word.

As part of this campaign, we developed a series of outreach materials for groups and organizations, at <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityfacts/materials.html>, which includes fact sheets, newsletter articles, posters, social media content, PowerPoint slides, and web widgets. We ask that you use these materials, to help promote the initiative.

We hope you will join us in these efforts by sharing the "Faces and Facts of Disability" with your members and providing feedback for further enhancement for the campaign.

It is often said that knowledge is power. By arming the public with facts about our disability program and telling some of our beneficiaries' stories, together we can empower people to draw their own informed conclusions about SSDI and the vital social support it offers.

Sincerely,

Maria Artista-Cuchna

Acting Associate Commissioner for External Affairs

Still scary but progress is being made

According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCAR) at the end of September 2012 there were 399,546 children in foster care in the United States. You may think WOW, that is a lot of children and youth in care, and you are correct. But a few years back there were 500,000 children and youth in foster care. Think about that, that's a half million children. Three hundred thousand, ninety nine, five hundred forty six does not sound so bad now. Although for those children and youth it is very bad.

According to AFCAR over 20,000 youth aged out of care. That's 20,000 youth that lost all of their services, health and dental insurance, a case worker to check on them to see that their needs are met, a place to be for Thanksgiving and Christmas. As I have said many times, many will end up homeless or in prison.

In Pennsylvania we have approximately 14,000 children in foster care down from 20,000 just a few years ago. This is good news! These numbers tell me that Together as Adoptive Parents, Inc, and organizations like us have their work cut out for them.

The majority of these children have experienced damaging levels of traumatic separation, loss, neglect, and abuse. Research is telling us that post adoption support is vital! It can make the difference between a family staying together or breaking apart.

As we go into the summer, please think on what you can do to help the 14,000 that are still in care. Among the ways that you can help is to adopt, become a foster family or mentor a youth. You can also make a tax-deductible donation to TAP by visiting our website www.taplink.org and clicking on the donation button.

Thank You!

FOR YOUR GENEROSITY

TAP would like to thank each of you, our donors, friends, volunteers, and supporters for your continued generosity. It is because of people like you adoptive, foster, and kinship families across Pennsylvania are strengthened, and children and teenagers in foster care find forever families. We are especially thankful that you continued to help us through these economically rough times.

The Haircut

A teenage boy had just passed his driving test and inquired of his father as to when they could discuss his use of the car.

His father said he'd make a deal with his son: 'You bring your grades up from a C to a B average, study your Bible, and get your hair cut. Then we'll talk about the car.'

The boy thought about that for a moment, decided he'd settle for the offer, and they agreed on it.

After about six weeks his father said, 'Son, you've brought your grades up and I've observed that you have been studying your Bible, but I'm disappointed you haven't had your hair cut.

The boy said, 'You know, Dad, I've been thinking about that, and I've noticed in my studies of the Bible that Samson had long hair, John the Baptist had long hair, Moses had long hair ~ and there's even strong evidence that Jesus had long hair.

'Did you also notice that they all walked everywhere they went?'

Take Another



Good news! Have you seen our website Taplink lately. It has a fresh new look and updated resources. We are adding new resources everyday so if you don't see what you need one day check back the next day. There is a great article on the website under publications called "coping with trauma". I think every adoptive, foster, and kinship parent should read it. I would encourage you to read it, print it, and share it.

We can also use your help. Many of you take your child/children to a therapist. We need you to send us those names. Do you know of a good after school program, or educational program? We are looking for any resource that will help other adoptive, foster and kinship families. PLEASE help us to help others. Call us at 215.256.0669 or email us at taplink@comcast.net with the names and we will do the rest.

