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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 children, foster and adoptive families.

Have any comments,
suggestions
or gripes?

E-mail us at

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Presidents Corner

This has been a very busy past few months. As most of you already know I love talking and being with people. In April of this year The Collaboration to AdoptUsKids asked if I would like to do some training for them across the states. Of course I said yes. I met so many neat people during my travels. I also had the opportunity to meet and co-train with two great ladies, Mary Brooks and Mary Lou Edgar. Thanks Mary Lou for making it fun!

Keep your eyes and ears open for the launch of the AdoptUsKids media campaign. You will soon see commercials about adoption and foster care. They will be on the radio, in the newspapers and on the Internet.

May was Foster Care Month, to help bring attention to the waiting children in Pennsylvania, TAP hosted a garage/bake sale. It was a huge success! We not only made over \$500, we passed out information and talked with many, many families about adoption. I would like to say thank you to all the families that worked so hard to make this happen. The night before the sale some families drove all the way from Philadelphia to help tag and sort clothes (what a job). I think we decided to call it quits around 10:30 that night. Most of those same families were at my home at 6:30 the next morning setting up for the sale. It was great fun; we had face painters and a belly bounce for the kids, Jeff made great hamburgers and hot dogs for the adults, and the Lord held off the rain. I would also like to thank all of you who donated things to be sold. We had SO much "stuff". Anything that was left over we took to the Salvation Army, a homeless shelter and to a Pregnancy Crisis Center. See you next year for our second one.

We will NOT have a parent group meeting in June. I will be out of town, Andrea has a family commitment, but worst of all, the lady in charge of our children ages 8 and above (the largest group) had surgery last week. I will see you all July 17th for our annual picnic. It will be held at my home from 12:00 until 4:00.

Our next regular meeting will be September 25th. The topic will be **Attachment in Adoption** and the speaker will be Kathy Boyd, Chester County C&Y. We will be holding our annual Adoption, Foster

care and Kinship conference in Philadelphia on November 13th.

Don't forget that we are collecting new and used (in GOOD condition) children's books over the summer. In September we will take them to a school in Philadelphia that does not have a library. Midge Price is heading up this project. If you would like more information about it call TAP and I will give you Meg's telephone number. This is a good summer project to get your children involved in.

In closing I would like to say congratulations to my son Joshua and to Andrea's son Matthew. They both graduated from college in May. Joshua was placed with us when he was 13 months old. Some of you met Josh when he told his story at one of our parent group meetings. We are proud of both of you!

I hope to see all of you at the July picnic.

Phyllis

An Adoptive Adolescent's Struggle by Molly, age 18

The following is re-printed with permission and is an excerpt from Molly's senior thesis, May 2001.

My adolescence has been very complex and filled with anger. A lot of people do not understand why, and as a result, they do not understand me. The reason is that I am adopted. Even if people say that they understand how I feel, they really do not.

In adolescence, feelings are key. Anger is a part of every adolescent's experience. You are really angry at your family, at your friends. But you can at least resolve the anger you have at the people who are there. But when you are adopted, you can't resolve the hate and anger that you feel toward your birth parents. They are not there. The absence of the birth parents also means that you cannot express any love you may have for them. I have stored up these feelings and the only way that I have been able to release them is to express anger towards my adopted parents. It's a little like "tough love". I put them through a test. By being angry with them, it allows me to see if they will leave me like my birth parents did.

I also play out these feelings with my friends. I have about ten different groups of friends. When ever I get the feeling that I am getting too close to any one group of friends, I can leave them for an other group. I don't think that is the same kind of test that I put my parents through. I tend to just leave friends before they can leave me, while with my parents; I try to intentionally push them away. It's kind of ironic that the fear of rejection leads me to dare people to reject me, therefore creating a vicious circle. Fear is one of my biggest problems.

As my adolescence went on I broke away, but when my parents go away I still worry that something is going to happen to them. I often tried to test their limits on how much they care about me and how much they would put up with. In order to let my parents into

my life I have tried to push them away many times. I have felt fits of rage and the unbelievable feelings of hate and rage that I have built up against my birth parents have been taken out on my parents. I think that, like other adoptees, I tend to take it out on my parents because they are the ones in my life. They have never stopped loving me, there are times when I thought I had finally succeeded in pushing them away.

I think a very hard time when abandonment comes up is when my parents get sick. Even if it is only cold or the flu, I worry about them. The worst time that these feelings were apparent was when one of my moms got breast cancer. It really brought up the feelings and emotions around death. I got really angry at her. I withdrew and I was very mad at her because I thought it was her fault.

I deal with each of my moms differently. I feel a little closer to my mom Lynn I think because she was home with me when I was a baby. When she gets sick I get worried and frantic.

Since I have recently turned eighteen, the issue of abandonment is very much present in my life. At this time in my life it feels like I am being abandoned all over again. I am less than four months away from leaving my family. I have to start a new life, a new identity; I have to start living on my own. I have a lot of "news" coming up. And the "news" do not include my family. To quote one of my adopted friends, she told her parents last Christmas, "well, I guess this is the last Christmas I will be spending with you guys." Adoptees feel like once they leave home, they are no longer a member of their family. I remember saying the exact same thing to my parents last Thanksgiving. In fact it is very common for adoptees to feel that when they are approaching their "last" times at home they will no longer be a part of their family and will not be able to come home again.

Thinking back now it would have been great to be able to share this feeling but one of the things about being adopted is that you do not share your feelings. You learn to cope with your abandonment by showing the world that you can be independent, you do not need others, and you are not vulnerable.

I want to help others understand what it is like to be adopted and the issues that adopted adolescents grapple with. The issues of worrying every time my parents and I are separated and that this time they may just not come back. The thought that two of my best friends, who introduced will decide they do not want to be around me any more and will stop being my friends, especially before I have the chance to leave them. It's perfectly fine for me to stop being in relationships with people just as long as I leave them first.

Through writing this I have been able to learn that I am not alone. There are others out there who feel the same way I do and help is available. This has been very hard though because I am approaching the time when most adoptees start to feel as though they lose their family and their identity. I trust I have provided the reader with a greater understanding of what it feels like to be adopted and the consequences of those feelings in relationships with others. And now that I have explained my behavior and the way I think, I will continue my pattern and leave (my high school) before they can leave me.



Its Vacation Time



School is out, the weather is pleasant it's time to take a family vacation to the mountains to the beach to Disneyland or to visit friends and relatives. Vacations are fun and bring families closer, right? Wrong! Families with foster or recently adopted children need to understand family vacations are stressful times. Before you make vacation plans here are some facts you should keep in mind.

Children whose lives have been disrupted by placement in foster care and/or eventual adoption are naturally suspicious of change. They function best in a consistent and predictable environment. Changes in routine, (even if the routine is only slightly relaxed) causes these children to feel anxious and threatened. They immediately begin testing the limits to see where they fit into **this** routine. Many children regress to old behavior problems in a vacation setting. Behaviors like whining, lying, stealing, lack of compliance, and bed-wetting may re-occur.

Control issues often surface when children argue, complain and refuse to obey even simple requests. Often it seems like they are out to ruin your well-deserved vacation. The truth is children who joined your family through adoption and foster care have no reason to trust you to make enjoyable choices for them. Birth children know from experience their parents will include activities which are fun for kids, will make sure meals appear and parents will keep children safe in a new environment. Adoptive and foster children don't have this history with you. Their basic need for safety may be threatened.

A third problem is that vacations often involve a physical closeness which your child may not be able to handle. The confines of the family car, the same motel, guest room, tent or camping trailer may create anxiety in a child who is struggling with issues around closeness. When kids feel uneasy about a situation, they work like crazy to get out of it. The result can be family conflict.

The long anticipated visit to Grandma's, Uncle Bill's or family friends may be fraught with problems. Parents are naturally anxious to show off their new son or daughter may unconsciously pressure the child to be on their very best behavior. There is nothing wrong with this scenario except many children are unable to handle these pressures and react in negative ways by withdrawing or acting out. Many children feel unsafe with strangers' even relatives. Children who have been sexually abused by family members, in the past, may be especially uneasy. Does all this mean you must forego your summer vacation plans? Of course not! Here are some suggestions to help make your summer outings more enjoyable.

1. Prepare the child ahead of time. Tell him or her exactly where you are going, what you plan to do, where you will eat and sleep, and who, if anyone you will visit. If you have taken that trip or a similar trip before, talk about it. If you have photos of other vacations, show them to your child.
2. Because of past experiences, your child may equate change with "something bad." Emphasize to your child that he or she will not be left behind at home or "dumped" at your destination. Be sure your child understands you will all leave together and return together. Recognize the child's fear of abandonment and encourage the child to talk about these fears and to ask questions.
3. Maintain consistency. The rules for acceptable behavior, as well as times for meals, and bedtimes, should be maintained if at all possible. Remember, children whose lives have been disrupted do best on a schedule.
4. Watch your child's diet. Too many sugary snacks or greasy foods can result in upset stomachs or "sugar highs." Many families carry a small cooler filled with milk or juice in small cartons, raw vegetables, fruit, meat, cheeses, and bread for healthy lunches and snacks in the car. It is also handy to have food "on board" in case lunchtime arrives when you are 50 miles from a restaurant.
5. Avoid situations, which may prove to be over stimulating. It may be best to postpone the trip to Disney-

land or to a large family reunion until the child has been with you several months to one year. Keep vacations simple and as low stress as possible. Avoid long tiring periods of driving. Structure your time so everyone gets plenty of rest.

6. Warn friends and relatives ahead of time the visit may be difficult for your child and enlist their cooperation. You might say, "Jack has been hurt in ways you can't see and he doesn't handle new situations very well. I hope you will understand if I maintain the same schedule and rules as we have at home. He feels safer when I do that."
7. Reward yourself. If you are tired and frustrated after months of coping with the demands of a new child in your family, use respite care and spend some time alone with your spouse or with a friend. A weekend with another adult away from parenting and work responsibilities is certain to "recharge your batteries" more than a two-week cross county car trip with the whole family.

Treat yourself well, maintain realistic expectations, keep vacation plans simple and enjoy your summer.

Reprinted from *Growing Together Newsletter*

Question of the Week:

*How can I help my child deal effectively with his anger?
It's a frequent problem.*

Adopted children who have survived abuse and neglect often have a great deal of pent-up anger and lack experience in the proper expression of strong emotion. Even with professional anger management therapy, anger may continue to be a companion. We can stress that it is not anger per se that is the problem, but how each of expresses our anger that matters. Share with your child how you express anger in healthy ways. Your example is important. Many adults use exercise and sports as an outlet. Sports help kids in many ways. Sports teach them self-control and the importance of practice, teamwork, planning and sportsmanship. An excellent article full of practical tips, by the American Psychological Association, "Controlling Anger Before It Controls You," can be found at:

<http://helping.apa.org/daily/anger.html>

Money for Camp

The Office of Mental Health Offers the Madeline Moore Summer Camp Grant will provide up to \$600 for a child to go to camp. To be eligible you need the following:

- Child must be a Philadelphia resident- if they are under DHS custody, even if living outside of Philadelphia they are eligible (explain this on your application.)
- Child must have an Axis 1 diagnosis- meaning ADD, ADHD, ODD, Learning Disorder.
- Child cannot be receiving Mental Retardation case management.
- Children in Therapeutic Foster care are eligible; children in a Residential Treatment Facility are NOT eligible.

You select the camp the child goes to (it cannot be an educational camp). Over half of the camps' activities need to be recreational in nature.

Applications started being processed on March 15th deadline for applications is June 30th but funding may run out before that date.

Call the Office of Mental Health at 215-685-4745 for an application.

Legislation

Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell signed HB 1423 on March 30, 2004. HB1423 sponsored by Rep. Katie True, amends adoption procedures and alters child relinquishment criteria. The minimum period for petitioning a court for relinquishment has been lowered to 3 days from 30 if the adoptive parents have exclusive care of the child. The ability to revoke consent to adopt has been altered from the date the court enters its decree to a set period which is the later of 30 days after the birth of the child or 30 days after the birth parent(s) execute the consent. While this is not what we had hoped for, as NJ has a 3-day binding consent law, it is a positive step toward the future.

HB345 was passed by the House to promote the adoption of special needs children by providing for adoption assistance. The bill was approved without the 40 unrelated amendments. The bill is now before the Senate Committee on Aging and Youth.

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