

# The Experience of Adoption & Foster Care

## Saturday, March 8, 2014



**Room** Workshops Session I: 12:30pm - 1:30pm  
Gym Complex = GC; St. Paul's House = SPH

**GC Gym** **More Finding Balance: Attachment, Baggage, Behavior & Discipline**  
*Regina Shields*

Regina will continue her discussion from the morning session with more specifics and the opportunity for participants to ask questions and get advice specific to their child and/or themselves. Practical guidance and strategies will be offered.

**SPH Room 2** **Setting Limits that Foster Connection and Healing**  
*Kathy Gordon*

All children need limits to feel safe in the world so they can learn and thrive. Foster and adopted children often experience that 'no' as a threat, causing severe dysregulation and upset. We will discuss why our children get off-track, what they are trying to tell us and why they have such a difficult time with limits. Learn how to say 'no' to the behavior, while saying 'yes' to your love and connection. You will leave with simple Hand in Hand Parenting by Connection tools you can use immediately to create more peace, connection and cooperation in your home. Hand in Hand Parenting by Connection is an attachment-based, trauma-informed approach with simple tools for nurturing the parent-child relationship.

**GC Library** **Deciding to Adopt: What Pre-Adoptive Parents Need to Know**  
*Pact, Family Builders, Adopt International*

Learn the basics about both domestic and international adoption and infant vs older child adoption so that you can find the right path. How to choose an agency and what questions to ask. What goes into a Homestudy and what should you be nervous about. How to choose a country and what questions to ask. Explore the options of choosing an agency, facilitator or attorney in relation to domestic adoption.

**SPH Room 1** **Family Visits: Creating Families for Older Foster Youth**  
*Lauren Reicher-Gordon & Sari Grant*

This workshop will discuss the changing world of adoptive parent recruitment and highlight an approach that has achieved success with older foster youth in Los Angeles County. Kidsave's Weekend Miracles program is the only program in the United States to incorporate child-specific advocacy with family visits and hosting opportunities to increase a child's prospects of finding a permanent family. With over 77% of active participants connected since the program's inception, this "family visit" program model addresses some of the key challenges that often prevent older youth from achieving permanency.

**SPH Room 3** **Open Adoption, 30 Years Later**  
*Lynne Silver & Sara Silver*

Mother and Daughter will discuss the issues that arose during the past 33 years with an open adoption. The roller coaster of openness is quite a ride, and takes continual adjusting and repositioning to maintain what is best for the young person growing up. The spiritual tie between children who are placed from one family to another create a life long bond. Self esteem, spiritual growth, and future relationships are examples of issues that arise in all members of the constellation.

**SPH Room 4** **What Adoptees Want You To Know**  
*Nancy Verrier*

What I wish I had known 44 years ago about the loss involved in separating babies and their mother, the dilemma of growing up in a non-bio family, the differences between coping mechanisms and personality, how needing to adapt affects the adoptee's sense of Self, and how transcultural adoption affects adoptees and their families. Adoptees need understanding, validation, and compassion for their losses before they can heal and experience a positive adoption experience. This workshop can contribute to the ways in which we as adoptive parents can help our children and ourselves as we travel this lifelong adoption journey.

**GC Room 102** **Positive Discipline: Solving the Mystery of Parenting Adopted Teens**  
*Cindy Raisicot*

Our parental role shifts as our kids enter their teens. We could control a lot of things when our kids were little, but realistically, as our kids get older the only thing we can control is ourselves! Why is this important? Because the main developmental task for teens is to figure out who they are while equipping them with the skills necessary to help them, eventually, launch into independent adults. Positive Discipline allows us to shift our role from pilot to co-pilot, handing over the reins of control to our teens to become capable, responsible, and respectful members of the community. Presentation includes handouts and practice exercises.

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**Room**      **Workshops Session II: 1:45pm - 2:45pm**  
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### **First Parents Speak: Doing Our Best to Support Our Children**

**GC**  
**Library**

**Susan Dusza Guerra Leksander and panel**

Parenting” does not end for first/birth parents at placement. While we are not parents in a traditional sense, we continue to try to make decisions that place our children’s needs at the forefront. Hear from a panel of first/birth parents as they discuss how they tend to their children’s needs through the years, learning as they go. We will also address ways that adoptive parents and adoption professionals can help us in our endeavor to maintain positive relationships with our children.

### **First Contact with Birth Parents in Open, Voluntary Adoption**

**SPH**  
**Room 1**

**Tara Noone**

This workshop describes likely means and scenarios of first contact with birth parents looking to make a voluntary placement with a prospective adoptive couple. It’s intent is to demystify the process, provide some concrete practical advice and real-world examples, and sensitivity to the feelings present on all sides.

### **A New Take on Openness in Adoption- Open Communication and Healthy Adoptive Families**

**SPH**  
**Room 3**

**Melissa Holub**

Research shows that parents’ openness to questions and conversations correlates with better adoption outcomes, and emotionally healthier adoptive youth (Brodzinsky 2006). Adoptive parents, however, often worry about broaching a number of key conversations. This workshop will focus on a different kind of open adoption, open in attitude regardless of whether there is active contact with birth family. This workshop will help participants clarify some of the common essential topics both before and after adoption. Participants will learn guidelines for getting tough or sensitive conversations off the ground.

### **Preparing Transracially Adopting Parents**

**SPH**  
**Room 2**

**Beth Hall**

Parents adopting across racial lines are better prepared to be successful if they are given real information that allows them to be educated in advance about race and racism and how these issues will play out in the context of a family in which children and parents do not share the same racial identity. If you are working with families involved in transracial adoption placements, you will want to be part of this workshop with one of the nation’s most respected experts on the topic. This workshop will utilize Pact’s federally funded self-assessment tool, *Below The Surface*, that will allow pre-adoptive and post-adoptive parents and professionals to assess both their strengths and challenges and explore what it takes to be a successful transracial adoptive parent. Beth will explore key elements of characteristics and choices that optimize the likelihood of success for transracially adopted people.

### **Adoption: A Visual Story**

**GC**  
**Room 102**

**Susan Ito**

Sometimes our stories can be effectively and beautifully created without words. Join adoptee Susan Ito for a visual workshop involving collage, simple drawing and other media to express our adoption stories. This workshop is open to all participants: adoptees, adoptive parents, birth parents, professionals and allies and will offer an opportunity to process some of the information and feelings expressed during the keynote sessions from the morning.

### **How to Talk to Your Kids About Race**

**SPH**  
**Room 4**

**Allison Briscoe-Smith**

In this presentation Dr. Allison Briscoe-Smith will facilitate a discussion for participants about children’s understandings about race and how parents can talk about race and race related topics in a way that is supportive and helpful. In addition research will be presented on how children are making sense of race at young ages and how children are impacted by both race and racism. Lastly participants will have opportunities to ask questions, connect with others and find out about resources to facilitate their own discussions.

### **Talking with Adopted Children About their Adoption Story and Experience**

**GC**  
**Gym**

**Malaika Parker**

Sometimes parents are uncertain how to jumpstart conversations about adoption or assess what their children understand. Malaika will share the “adoption facts” that we suggest using with young children and lead a discussion about how parents can teach and encourage conversations with their preschool and young school-aged children about adoption. She will give very practical examples and suggestions for language as well as approach to open the door to conversations about adoption which include discussion of first/birth parents.

# The Experience of Adoption & Foster Care

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**Room** Workshops Session III: 3:00pm - 4:00pm  
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**GC**  
**Library**

### **Birth Fathers Need A Voice**

*Lisa Clark and panel*

Often birth fathers are either ignored or misunderstood. It is important to keep in mind the history of state laws to give context about why birth father's are not included or seen as a "road block to adoption". Many times birth fathers are making decisions alone without support or the information they need. We will discuss talking to children about their birth fathers, whether he is known or not, or an active part of your child's life or not. This workshop will encourage families to keep an open mind and an open door to allow for future contact down the road. Most importantly we will hear from a panel of birth fathers about their experience with the adoption process, how they feel years down the road and what they want you to know about their side of the story.

**SPH**  
**Room 4**

### **Ages and Stages - Looking Back At Our Parenting Journey**

*Beth Hall, Nancy Verrier and Jill Jacobs*

Looking back over the years, these three experienced parents of adopted adults will share their perspective about what they have learned, what they wish they had know and what they might do differently now. They will focus on the parenting strategies they employed that we most effective in creating longterm health and connection between them and their children as well as the "missed" opportunities they now recognize and have learned from as well as offering some insight into the experience of parenting adult children.

**SPH**  
**Room 3**

### **Mental Health Issues in Adoption**

*Tara Noone*

This workshop provides concrete information on common mental health issues, their heritability and the effects of treatment during pregnancy. It will also provide practical advice for parenting children who have heritability of mental illness and advice and best practice in keeping connections with birth families over time, even in the face of mental illness.

**SPH**  
**Parish Hall**

### **Three Things We Wish We Had Known**

*Adoptive Parent Panel*

They say hindsight is 20/20. Come hear from a group of parents who have walked in your shoes. A diverse group of adoptive parents will address the issues that they wish they had known or focused on. In the excitement and preparation it is easy to get caught in fears and misinformation and even overlook the realities and only focus on the honeymoon phase. What got missed, what is necessary to know, and how do you get what you need?

**SPH**  
**Room 4**

### **Grief and Loss In Open Adoption**

*Ann Wrixon*

Questions abound as to whether infants placed in open adoptions are free of grief and loss issues as children and/or adults. Reviewing research and professional wisdom on this topic, Ann will help parents understand the ways in which open adoption addresses some grief and loss issues and introduces others. Practical tips and approaches for handling grief and loss with adopted children will be presented.

**GC**  
**Room 102**

### **Moving Together**

*Deanna Ross*

In this participatory workshop, we will explore physical, creative storytelling, sharing our adoption and foster-related memories and emotions through simple movement exercises. Working in cross-triad groups and pairs, we will use the techniques of mirroring and gesture study to honor our own and each other's experiences. No previous dance experience necessary. All stories, bodies and triad members welcome!

**SPH**  
**Room 1**

### **Play and the Brain: What Adoptive Parents Ought to Know**

*Katrinca Ford*

Play plays a critical role in early bonding and attachment, development of self regulation skills and the development of social skills. When these have been compromise by early trauma and loss play has an even more critical role to play in healing. This workshop provides adoptive parents with information on the impact of early trauma and loss on brain development. More importantly, information is provided on how play can used to overcome problems created by early trauma and loss and set a course toward healthier relationships. Games and actives for use by families will be taught. Presenter will demonstrate how activities may be adapted for use by children of different ages from infancy to adolescence. Come ready to play!