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to all members of the adoption &  
foster constellation year after year

CALIFORNIA ADOPTION CONFERENCE

## Workshops Session I: 10:45am - 12:15pm

### **Raising Adopted Children in LGBTQ-Headed Families**

*Renata Moeria and Panel*

LGBTQ-headed adoptive families are wonderful and wonderfully different from other adoptive families. Hear LGBTQ adoptive parents discuss the social and emotional well-being of children raised in LGBTQ-headed families – drawing both from current research and their own observations and experiences as parents. We will look at the challenges children may face as part of any family that does not conform to the heterosexual, two-parent norm and address the current climate for adoption by LGBTQ prospective parents which continues to be marked by explicit barriers in an increasing number of states outside CA, as well as ongoing challenges around the cultural competency of service providers regarding LGBTQ prospective parents and LGBTQ adoptive youth.

### **Sex, Lies, and Red Tape: My Truth, Our Fiction, and the Co-Opting of Adoptee Rights**

*Gregory Luce*

This past year marked the 100th anniversary of Minnesota becoming the first state to close court adoption records to the public. From Minnesota's initial sealing of court records to today's common practice of sealing birth records from most adult adoptees, Gregory will discuss his personal legal fight to obtain his own records and what ultimately prompted him to become an adoptee rights lawyer. He will also provide an overview of current adoptee-related legislation as well as legal and practical issues encountered by adoptees, whether U.S. citizenship rights or the right to obtain an original birth certificate upon request. He will also discuss how, with the efforts of some advocates, the term "adoptee rights" has been co-opted and used to support arguments for less than equal rights. An open discussion of adoptee rights follows.

### **Talking With (not To) Children about Adoption and Foster Care**

*Beth Hall*

Initiating conversations with children about being adopted can feel scary for parents who want to protect their children from feeling "less than." Learn how to start conversations and introduce concepts without going over your child's head. Topics will include: understanding how children understand & experience adoption, why the words we use matter, why beginning with a child's birth makes sense, how to talk about first/birth parents and answering and anticipating children's questions, whether they ask them or not. This workshop is appropriate for pre-adoptive parents as well as adoptive and foster parents with young children.

### **Transforming Trauma: Therapies and Interventions to Heal Adoption Trauma**

*Lesli Johnson, CE Eligible*

"We have learned that trauma is not just an event that took place in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body." ~Bessel van der Kolk. When a traumatic event occurs memories become stored in the brain and nervous system in a maladaptive way – they are frozen rather than processed. Lesli will explore various therapies and interventions that can help all members of the adoption and foster communities heal including EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing) and Attachment Focused EMDR, mindfulness, Somatic Experiencing, Brainspotting, yoga and the importance of community. Lesli will walk the audience through an experiential resourcing exercise.

### **Voices of Lived Experience: Foster Alumni**

*Katie Stickles-Wynen, MSW and Panel*

Too often in the child welfare field, the voice and perspective of the youth in care is subordinated to that of the professionals and foster parents. The voices of former foster youth (aged out, not adopted) will be the focus of this panel as they are the truest experts on the experience of growing up in Foster Care. This workshop will be appropriate for foster parents, professionals, and families interested in fostering youth.

### **Newborns, Money, Competition, Desperation: Promoting Ethics in Infant Adoption**

*Susan DG Leksander, CE Eligible*

As the landscape of adoption providers continues to be heavily dominated by for profit entities and "do-it-yourself" online matching services, solid ethics in voluntary infant placement and adoption become all the more critical. This workshop will raise questions about current practices in voluntary placements, especially as they impact interactions with expectant parents and pre-adoptive parents. We will identify specific questions that pre-adoptive and expectant parents considering domestic infant placements can ask to determine practices that are ethical, non-coercive and child-centered and encourage adoption professionals to hold themselves to high ethical standards.



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## Lunch Session: 12:15pm – 1:15pm

### **Preparing to Adopt**

*Lisa Clark, Abby Williams, Tara Noone*

Learn the basics about domestic (both private and foster) adoption and international adoption, as well as infant vs. older child placement, special needs parenting and other options including gender and/or race selection and open adoption. This workshop will guide you in finding the right placement path for your family if you are considering adoption. Panelists will address the following: How to choose an agency and what questions to ask; What goes into a home study and what (if anything) you need to be nervous about; How to choose a country to adopt from and what questions to ask; How to choose which adoption professional(s) to work with and more.

## Workshops Session II: 1:15pm - 2:45pm

### **Should I Get My Child Tested?: How the Right Kind of Assessments Help Children and Their Families**

*Laura Anderson, Ph.D.*

Psychological and educational assessments have not always served adopted children well. Far too often, we hear stories of quickly doled out diagnoses including Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD). We will challenge these common narratives about adopted children, as well as harmful generalized narratives about psychological evaluations for adopted children. A thorough, early, and trauma-informed assessment can be incredibly helpful for children and their families and school teams and early intervention is critical for many of the issues frequently observed in preschool and school-aged adopted children. A good evaluation can be life-changing for children and families.

### **Honest Talk About Adoption and Race**

*Malaika Parker*

Our country is far from a “post-racial” society, as recent events demonstrate. How can parents and other adults talk with children about race and racism? How is the conversation different depending on the race of the child and parent? How does the conversation need to be different depending on the age of the child? Hear from an African American adoptive parent and professional about the intersections of race and adoption. Pre-adoptive and adoptive parents will learn how to confront racism and talk about it with their children in empowering ways that will build trust and closeness. Learn how to initiate essential open communication in a way that supports children in building a proud and strong racial identity.

### **Calm Yourself, Calm Your Child**

*Rachel Michaelsen, CE Eligible*

Parenting is a highly demanding job. Add to it other family issues, work demands, financial issues or health concerns and parents can start wonder if they will ever feel calm again. When we are stressed, those around us can have trouble remaining calm. Learn how the brain reacts to stress and techniques for calming your nervous system so those around you can also be calm. Through lecture, demonstration and experiential exercises, participants will learn techniques for nervous system regulation to use in self-care and with family members.

### **Integrating the Shadow: Inner Work for Adult Adoptees**

*Jemma Elliot*

We all have aspects of self that we nurture, celebrate, and shine out into the world. And equally, we have aspects of self that we suppress, hide, and relegate to our innermost corners. In the tradition of depth psychology, we recognize this as the manifestation of our inner shadow. For the adult adoptee, shadow pieces are seeded and cultivated via the messages of familial and relational patterns, the introjection of cultural messages, and a felt sense of being different, or other than. Using a depth psychological approach to working with the inner shadow, the adult adoptee can learn to integrate and reclaim those pieces of self which have been carefully hidden away.

### **Voices of Lived Experience: Transracial Adoptees**

*Katie Stickle-Wynen, MSW and Panel*

Are you planning a transracial adoption and/or international adoption, or are you already parenting across racial and/or international lines? In order to successfully meet your child’s needs, you must be prepared to think about, learn about, and talk about race and racism, as well as loss of country and culture. Hear directly from adult transracial and transnational adoptees about the challenges and joys of transracial and/or transnational adoption, as well as the importance of talking about race and not taking a “color-blind” approach. Other topics covered include how to handle comments about your “visible” family and building a diverse community.

### **Honoring the First/Birth Parent Voice**

*Susan DG Leksander and Panel*

A facilitated panel of first/birth parents will speak about their experiences, including factors that lead to the adoption, their relationship with their child and the adoptive family, what their life has been like since placement, and how they have navigated varying degrees of openness. Hear recommendations about how adoptive parents can address power differentials and build a lifelong relationship with first/birth parents founded on honesty, mutual respect, and putting the child at the center. Audience members are invited to ask questions.



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## Workshops Session III: 3:00pm - 4:30pm

### **Somatic Practices for Healing and Integration**

*Mikyo Black*

Trauma is stored in our body and nervous system and must be met there to be fully released. Come and learn somatic based methods for releasing and healing the trauma of adoption. This presentation will include simple, easy breathing techniques, movements, and postures for helping you, your child, or your clients to unravel trauma and its negative side effects, in the moment of PTSD and as a regular practice. Learn to regulate and restore the nervous system. These practices are a great method for anyone involved in adoption triad and process.

### **Becoming an Authentic Family: A Neuro-scientific Lens**

*Thomas Rector*

This workshop explains a methodology based upon current neuro-scientific research and practical application of the BioSocial Cognition Model to parenting. The model connects elements of neuroscience to a child's behavior, environmental influences that affect the child, and instills a honed ability to assess the child's needs. Utilizing this model takes parenting and family, to a new level that supports the development of a child into an adult who has positive self-esteem and tools to achieve their potential. Participants explore how to use the knowledge of neuroscience, and tools to communicate effectively and promote family connection.

### **Supporting Gender Expansive and Transgender Youth and Their Families**

*Laura Anderson, Ph.D. CE Eligible*

Research suggests that adopted youth are overrepresented in gender specialty clinics across the country. This presentation will examine those statistics more closely and explore the distinct needs of gender expansive and transgender adopted youth including the importance of family affirmation. This presentation will discuss the ways that adoptive family systems can bring both distinct strengths, and added complications, to a youth's gender journey. The presentation will highlight specific strategies for parents (adoptive and first/birth) to become the informed, affirming and advocating caregivers that their gender expansive and/or transgender children need them to be.

### **Reclaiming Birth Culture: Reculturation for International & Transracial Adoptees**

*Amanda Baden CE Eligible*

How do adoptees identify? What's most salient: race, adoption, or culture? How do we cope with the stigma associated with adoption and relinquishment? This presentation will attempt to answer these questions by exploring the development of an adoptee identity and means for adoption socialization. Amanda Baden workshop will present the process by which socialization occurs and introduces attendees to *reculturation*, or the processes by which the reclamation of birth culture can occur. This workshop will further delineate the process of reculturation and will include two clinical cases of atypical acculturation.

### **Adult Adoptee Panel: Ages, Stages & Changes in the Experience of Adoption – From Child to Adult and Maturity**

*Theresa Vitt & Panel*

Adult adoptees take the microphone to share their personal experience of adoption, in childhood, adolescence, and through the stages of adulthood. Adoption is a lifelong experience that can show up in our relationships, educational and professional choices, selection of life partner, parenting, and through reflection as we age. Our perspectives can change with time, self-awareness, and maturity. Adult adoptees often remark that the people closest to them "just don't get it", which can create obstacles to emotional intimacy with those most important to us. There will be time for Q&A at the end of the panel.

### **How Open Adoption Can Work in Foster Adoption**

*Beth Hall*

When children are removed from their families because of perceived and/or actual safety issues, does the current research that open adoption is in the best interest of the child still apply? We will explore the complexities of open adoptions in the context of foster adoption, including concrete suggestions and lived experiences for how to make it work while keeping children and adults safe. Are adoptees who have experienced abuse or neglect at the hands of birth family members less likely to desire contact with their first/birth parents/families? Hear from experienced foster/adoptive parents and a foster alum who have grappled with these issues in response to their children's questions and or desire to know more about their first families. We will make concrete suggestions based on lived experience as well as professional knowledge for how to make safe contact work while answering children's questions and supporting them in their own need to find answers for themselves.