

# Adoption: A Lifetime Journey

Third Annual Collaborative Conference for Birthparents, Adoptive Parents, Adoptees, Siblings, Extended Family and Advocates

Saturday, March 9, 8:30 AM – 5:00 PM in Oakland, CA



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## Workshop/Affinity Groups: Titles, Descriptions & Speakers

*Afternoon sessions will require a minimum of 15 people per session. Please let us know which workshops you are interested in attending prior to February 15, 2013 so that we can schedule accordingly and assure that your preferences are available.*

### Afternoon Session I:

#### **Birth Parents Only: Changing Needs, Changing Strategies**

*Brenda Romanchik*

Brenda will facilitate a discussion of a birth parent's changing needs immediately following placement through the years that follow. Workshop participants will identify some of the common challenges a birth parent faces, discuss strategies to cope and address how those strategies may change over time. Topics may include how and when to reveal your placement to those close to you, how your relationship with the child will change as he or she matures, and how to build and maintain a healthy support system.

#### **Navigating Open Adoption Relationships**

*Ann Wrixon & Rachel Herndon*

Recognizing that there are no cookie cutter approaches to building a positive triad relationship, we will address common questions about relationships between adoptive and birth parents. Speakers will offer practical guidance as well as research-based insight into how adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents manage their complex feelings about one another with particular emphasis on avoiding interactions that place children in the middle or feeling as if they must choose who to be loyal to.

#### **Talking with Children in Closed Adoptions about Their Journey**

*David Brodzinsky & Micky Duxbury*

Speakers will address common questions such as how do birth parents play a role when it is a closed adoption as well as whether or not parents should consider opening their child's adoption. We will talk about how to support children's curiosity and pain in developmentally appropriate ways when they don't have direct contact with birth parents and explain the research about the importance of openness in adoption, as distinct from open adoption.

#### **Talking with 0-5 Year Olds about Adoption**

*Anne Brodzinsky*

Addressing the unique questions and issues inherent to the experience of being adopted, we will discuss the developmental stages that children go through and how each stage changes their understanding and questions about being adopted. This workshop will include practical suggestions for how to bring up adoption to very young children and specific guidance about handling sensitive or painful issues of adoption.

#### **Technology and Adoption: New Communication Frontiers**

*Lisa Clark*

Texting, email, twitter, Facebook, Skype and blogging—balancing and navigating the new ways for triad members to stay in touch throughout their lives. Hear from an adoption professional who has seen things change over the years as well as a birth mother who has personal experience communicating the her child's adoptive family (and her child) via social media. We will discuss benefits and drawbacks to these new ways of connecting.

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## Afternoon Session I, *cont'd*:

### **Schools and Adoption: Curriculum, Bias & Inclusion**

*Beth Hall & Julia Weber*

Schools are places where children spend a great deal of their time, starting with preschool and extending through the high school years and beyond. How can parents assess schools in terms of their adoption friendliness, inclusion and knowledge? How can parents get the most out of their child's school and advocate for their child when the curriculum is challenging to adoption and/or other adoption related issues arise?

### **For Professionals Only: Pre and Post Adoption Needs of Adopted Children and Adults**

*Joyce Maguire Pavao & A Panel of Adopted Adults*

Hear from the children who have grown up as they speak to what they needed (and currently need) from adoption related professionals including placement practitioners, clinicians, teachers and other child welfare advocates. The discussion will include suggestions regarding best practices and insights into the experiences of adopted adults whose lived experience, coupled with their professional feedback, will give professionals working in the field concrete ideas to apply to their own practice.

### **Planning To Adopt: Choices & Implications**

*Lynne Fingerman & Lynne Silver & Malaika Parker*

It is typical for pre-adoptive parents to place a heavy emphasis on the "how-to's" of adoption. This workshop will focus on the choices and decisions that parents make during the adoption process and how they will impact their long-term family values with an emphasis on preparation and tools that parents have to consider regarding the adoption of children with prenatal exposure, racial identity different than their own, ongoing contact with birth family members, gender selection, older child placement and matching in adoption.

### **Birth Parent Stories: Where the Adoption Journey Begins**

*Susan Dusza Guerra Leksander & A Panel of Birth Parents*

The adoption journey begins with a birth parent's decision to place their child for adoption, yet this story often goes untold or unheard. Hear directly from a group of birth parents who represent a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. Workshop participants will be invited to challenge stereotypes about birth parents, such as who places and why. Panelists will discuss why this story is important and how understanding, respecting and valuing it benefits all members of the adoption constellation.

## Afternoon Session II

### **For Professionals Only: Pre and Post Adoption Expectant/Birth Parent Needs**

*Brenda Romanchik & A Panel of Birth Parents*

Hear from men and women who placed children for adoption as they speak to what they needed (and currently need) from adoption related professionals including placement practitioners, clinicians, other child welfare advocates. The discussion will include suggestions regarding best practices and insights into the experiences of birth/first parents whose lived experience, coupled with their professional feedback, will give professionals working in the field concrete ideas to apply to their own practice.

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## Afternoon Session II, *cont'd.*

### **Reunion: Opening Closed Adoptions – Issues for Triad Members**

*Leslie Foge & Lynne Silver*

This workshop will cover how to support children's curiosity and desire to know/find their birth parents as well as when and how parents should initiate search his or her self or support their children should they decide they want to search themselves. Additionally, we will discuss how to assist international adoptees in opening their adoptions with birth or foster families. Suggestions for anticipating outcomes and preparing parents and children for the ups and downs of reunion will be offered.

### **Transracial/Transnational – Voices of Those Who Have Lived The Experience**

*Katie Wynen & A Panel of Transracially Adopted Adults*

Hear from adults who were raised in transracial or international adoptive families about their experiences. They will discuss their own growth over time and offer concrete suggestions about parenting strategies that helped them navigate their racial and adoptive identity as well as cautionary tales of those that did not while addressing the lifetime issues common to being raised by parents of a different racial or ethnic group.

### **Interpreting Children's Behavior: Is It Development, Adoption or Something Else?**

*Beth Hall*

Certain emotional issues that may arise for adopted children, birth parents and adoptive parents are normal under the circumstance of adoption. Sorting out the behaviors of children and interpreting them in the context of the additional issues that adoptive families face can be confusing, hear about strategies and tools that are useful in sorting out the behavioral language of children. We will also discuss temperament, parenting styles and strategies for handling/avoiding power struggles.

### **Siblings In Adoption: By Birth, By Adoption**

*Susan Ito and A Panel of Adopted Adults*

Adoption creates all kinds of sibling connections – children in the same family who have entered that family after being born to different birth parents or as sibling groups from the same birth parents, children growing up in different families due to the adoption of one sibling and not another (or the adoption of genetically related siblings by different families) and non-adopted and adopted siblings living in the same family. Each of these relationships has complexity that parents and children must navigate.

### **Race, Class & Gender in Adoption**

*Malaika Parker*

Adoptive parents of color must explore how adoption intersects with the experiences they are already living relative to the intersections of race, class and gender. Discussions about race in adoption tend to focus on racial differences generated in transracial placements, but this workshop will focus on other important aspects of exclusion and marginalization and how those experiences tap into children's experience of being adopted. An intersectional analysis will be applied to better understand the complex and interlocked ways in which each of these shows up in our community interactions as well as with birth families.

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## Afternoon Session II, *cont'd.*

### **The Foundation Shakes: Divorce, Re-marriage, New partners and other challenges**

Rachel Herndon & Melissa Holub

If adoption is truly a lifelong journey, then many changes will occur for all members of the adoption triad over a lifetime; some positive and enriching, others more unpredictable and potentially destabilizing. We will discuss how all members can support one another to help children understand and manage these changes. Discussion will be appropriate for both adoptive parents, birth parents and professionals working with families touched by adoption.

### **LGBTQ Adoptive Parenting: Navigating Family Acceptance**

Our Family Coalition & Charlie Spiegel

How to advocate for school and other community environments that support children with LGBTQ parents. Suggestions for handling related bullying and bigotry that are supportive of kids who are struggling with other identity issues as well. Speakers will discuss how to address family issues in developmentally appropriate ways including discussion of questions from outsiders as well as your adopted children and their friends.

### **Parenting of Adopted Tweens & Teens**

Joyce Maguire Pavao

A tween/teen's job is to figure out who he or she is in the world. The tween and teen years, which can start as young as ten or eleven, have often been compared with the preschool years because of the dramatic changes that occur during the move to greater independence. Teens develop a new ability to be introspective and analytical and emotionally their job is to separate from the family, which raises new identity issues for the whole family. The workshop will include practical guidance and parenting strategies.

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## Affinity Focus Group Lunchtime Gatherings

*We've added a series of informal "Affinity Focus Groups" which will be held during lunch, to create safe spaces where folks can enjoy shared experiences or interests. For some of these groups, (where designated), only those who are members of the group are invited to participate. Safe spaces will be created for the following communities which are marked "CLOSED," those who are not members of the group are asked to respect these spaces.*

### CLOSED Groups

- *Fathers, Adoptive and Birth*
- *Adoptive Parents of Color*
- *LGBTQ Parents*
- *Adopted Adults*
- *Birth Parents*
- *Single Parents*

### OPEN Groups

- *Parents of Children with Learning Disabilities and ADD/ADHD* – Share information, resources and create community with other parents and/or providers who are working with children with these diagnoses (or suspected diagnoses).
- *Adoption Museum Project* - The Adoption Museum Project, headed by adult adoptee Laura Callen, is working to create the first museum dedicated to exploring the story of adoption. We invite triad members only to offer ideas and suggestions for what parts or aspects of the adoption experience should be represented and explored.
- *International Adopters* – Join other international adopters to explore issues particular the experience including home country travel and current issues regarding ethical conduct of child placement.