



PARTNERS

THE NEWSLETTER FOR WISCONSIN'S ADOPTIVE & FOSTER FAMILIES



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"SURROUND YOURSELF WITH PEOPLE WHO GET IT!"

-- KATIE DOUCETTE

A photograph of three children jumping joyfully in a forest. The child on the left is wearing a white jacket and a red beanie. The child in the middle is wearing a light blue jacket and jeans. The child on the right is wearing a dark blue puffer vest, blue jeans, and a pink beanie. They are all smiling and have their arms outstretched. The background is a dense forest of tall trees with some autumn-colored leaves.

FROM THE CORNER OFFICE

Happy Fall Everyone!

I always see fall as one of those times of mixed emotions—we love the cooler temperatures so we can open windows and freshen the house. On the other hand, the days get shorter and the dark seems to come earlier and earlier. For some, the return of school is a welcome return to routine; yet we may worry about upcoming frustrations with classroom rules or assignments, or how to best work with those who simply don't understand our children or their needs.

In this issue of *Partners*, we chose to focus on building networks of support and care around you. We know that no one can exactly understand anyone's specific journey or stress, but families built through adoption and foster care share some similar experiences, and it can be very important to know you are not alone. At the very least, having someone who understands the interesting humor that we develop when caring for kids with unique strengths and challenges can be a wonderful relief.

We hope the articles provide you with some good reminders and new ideas and, as always, remember we are here to help you as you look to build that network.

Have a great fall!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Oriana".

Oriana

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How do you ask for help?

By Diane Behm

We all have our “people.” Those trusted few who we know we can go to when we need to blow off steam, or the friend we call when we need someone to commiserate with. We have the friend with whom we can be silly and do anything but act our age. And, we have the friend who can give us the tough love when needed.

As an adoptive parent, with one or two (or even five or eight!) children, do you have a network of friends on whom you rely? What do you do if you don’t know another person or family who has adopted, and you really need some advice or guidance? Google is a good friend to have, but a search engine can’t really meet your emotional needs. As parents with busy lives, a night out with friends becomes a unicorn; a beautiful idea, coveted by some, and forever elusive.

Your circle of friends may change over the course of your journey, but even if it stays the same, there will likely come a time when you need someone to say, “I get it,” and know in your heart that they do. Know that you don’t have to justify your discipline style or lack thereof. Know that you don’t have to apologize for backing out of another event because it’s just been that kind of day in your home.

I recently talked to a group of adoptive mothers who found their way to each other over time, through different methods, and asked them how they reached out for help.

C: Our former adoption worker wanted to connect us with another family that lived by us, had adopted a bunch of kids, had fostered a ton, and their kids had some of the same issues as our boys. He gave us their email and phone number. Turns out one of their daughters was in the same class as Z, so it was a small world. She and I are still good friends!

Coalition: How did you reach out that first time? Did you call or email?

C: I emailed, because I hate calling! Basically, I just introduced myself (our worker had already given her the heads up that I was going to be contacting her). We met up at school before pick-up time to talk a bunch of times and our friendship went from there. She homeschools now, all six of their kids. So, when I started homeschooling, she was (and still is) my go-to person.

J: I think I was frustrated and didn’t really understand the system, so I joined the Foster Parent Advisory Council (FPAC) so I could hear more from the inside. Typically, when I need insight, I’ll join a committee of some sort and be an observer until I learn some ins and outs. With the FPAC, it was more conversation and it made it easier to connect to other foster parents. Aka some of you fine ladies!

The best part about this “interview?” We were all sitting on our couches or beds, in our pajamas, at 10 pm. This particular

group of friends shares a group Facebook Messenger chat that is ongoing, and never closes. It serves a whole host of purposes, like a place to check-in:

“How is everyone holding up so far this week?”

- “It’s 8 am and I already want to go back to bed! Why is it when I actually sleep a full seven hours of uninterrupted sleep I am more exhausted?!?!”
- “Like we have five kids with traumatic brain injuries.”
- “School needs to come faster.”
- “50/50 here.”

The conversations aren’t all about the hard stuff. Light-hearted videos and funny stories make up the majority of the exchanges. These moms are people who can make you laugh when you need it, and who we can all go to to share success stories, as well.

Coalition: What do you think was the best thing you did when you were building your support network for adopting?

C: #doitscared. I stepped out of my comfort zone. My people found me. I forced myself to a support group meeting, and it went from there. They scooped me up like a wounded little birdy.

Pre-adoptive trainings are a great place to make connections with other families. I remember the trainer in my final pre-adoptive class was also a foster and adoptive mother, and she shared her phone number with me when we talked after the class. A few months later, I distinctly remember feeling terrified of what would happen next with our little girl’s case. She was on multiple medications and withdrawing from drugs at the time and we thought she might soon move to be with a family member. My heart was breaking. I sat on the living floor, feeding the baby, and dialed her number. I reminded her that I had taken a training class and she had given me her number. It was scary and I felt stupid. I thought, “What if she’s busy? Maybe she was just being nice.” I didn’t know if she would judge me for being sad, or tell me there was nothing she could do. Though there wasn’t anything she could do about the future, the best thing she did for me was listen. She said, “Tell me all about her. How old is she? What’s her name?” After that, she was someone I knew I could call, whether it was about the baby, her needs, or my emotions. And we have been reminding each other to breathe ever since.

When you need help, overcoming the fear of judgement or the perception of failure are the hardest steps. Don’t be afraid to reach out to your adoption worker, or a group on Facebook. Look for support groups or councils and start by getting to know people there. The first step is a doozy, but it will be worth it in the end.



Why a Support Network is a *Parenting Essential*

By Nikki Talakowski

“No man is an island,” begins a classic poem by John Donne. It’s a sentiment that has been repeated in a number of different ways over many, many years. And it’s something that holds true for parents. Regardless of how you created or built your family – foster care, birth, any kind of adoption – having a network of support can be a lifeline. Be it extended family members, friends, or peers, your support network can bolster you physically, emotionally, and mentally – in good times and in challenging times. For adoptive parents, including others in your support network who have walked a similar journey can be especially significant.

Support networks tend to grow and change with your family. Additional supports are added or subtracted to meet the ever-changing needs of your family. As a single adoptive mother to a young adult, I know from experience how essential a support network and self-care are. There have been countless times along my journey when having a strong support network has kept me moving forward – and moving in a positive direction.

There have been days when I feel like I am failing with my daughter. When a disagreement that she and I have had weighs heavily on my mind and my conscience. When her words, which stem from trauma, have hurt me deeply. My support network – family members, friends, coworkers, and my family therapist – keep me on track; giving me reminders, allowing me time to vent, responding as best they can when I ask for guidance or advice. And it is those same people who have also been my cheerleaders, sharing in celebrations and fun times as often as they help pick me up when I may be down.

Building a network of support that is right for you and your family has far-reaching benefits:

- **A SENSE OF BELONGING.** Spending time with others helps eliminate feelings of being lonely. Whether it’s other adoptive parents or friends with similar hobbies and interests, knowing you are not alone can go a long way toward coping with stress associated with everyday parenting issues, as well as any adoption-related issues that may arise.
- **AN INCREASED SENSE OF SELF-WORTH.** Maintaining positive relationships with other families or parents will reinforce the truth that you are a good person – and your family members are good people – and that, furthermore, those good people are good for others to be around, too.
- **A FEELING OF SAFETY.** Your support network gives you access to information, advice, guidance, and other types of support during times of need. It is comforting to know that you have people you can turn to during troubling times, that you are not in this journey alone.
- **A CHANCE TO PRACTICE SELF-CARE.** Having a support network allows you to safely take a break from parenting in order to take care of yourself when they need it. Being well means being a better parent.

More than anything, your support network is a safety net. A trusted group of people to guide, listen, and cheer you on. They will be there for you when you need a break, will pick you back up when you fall down . . . just as you, in turn, can be there for them.



Building a Support Network for Your Child

Networks of support are not only vital for parents and caregivers. The benefits of support networks extend to our children, as well. Friends are touchstones for children and young adults; someone they have fun with, feel comfortable being themselves around, or even just someone who creates a feeling of calm and safety during a stressful day.

For many children, making friends comes naturally. They somehow magically connect with the girl who sits next to them in class or the boy next door who is always up for a bike ride to the park. However, just as parents who have adopted sometimes need other parents who have walked a similar journey, children who have been adopted, or who are in foster care, sometimes take comfort in being around children who have shared similar experiences.

If your child spent time in foster care, there may be connections from a former placement who are important to him. It could be another child who was in the home (a former foster brother or sister) or it might even be a former foster parent. An easy first step is to ask your child if there are any kids (outside of those he sees at school or around his neighborhood) who he really likes to see or spend time with. Then keep talking – ask him about how he met this person or what they like to do together.

For families who have adopted, you might make connections with other families through support groups or by attending family fun events or conferences. We have often heard children say, “everyone here is like me!” when their parents bring them to Coalition conferences or events. (Wisconsin has six Post Adoption Resource Centers that cover the state, and each center plans both educational and fun events. We encourage you and your kids to take part!)

Once your child has made some connections, you can do a lot to encourage those friendships and relationships. Simple activities like play dates, sleepovers, family game nights, or group outings provide repeated opportunities for friendships to grow and flourish. (It may take a little extra planning or effort if the children in your child’s network aren’t part of your school or neighborhood community.) You can also take advantage of outings or opportunities planned by your agency, your local Post Adoption Resource Center, or your own network of support.

As is true for much in life as a parent, your children watch you and learn from you. By taking the time to build your own support network, you are modeling wonderful behavior for your child. Through your actions, your child will see that it’s okay to reach out to others. They will learn how to rely on friends – and how to be a good friend, in return.

All families can benefit from special services to help them through difficult times; however, families formed through adoption sometimes find that their unique needs go beyond the general parenting information offered in the community. That is where Wisconsin's Post Adoption Resource Centers, or PARCs, can help.

Each PARC serves a specific area of the state and focuses on families in many ways, including:

- Improving community awareness about adoption.
- Promoting a positive image of adoption and an increased understanding of the unique issues facing adoptive families, especially among public and private human service providers, schools, and medical providers, to enable these professionals to better serve adoptive families.
- Increasing the availability of services for adoptive families.
- Providing referral services for respite care, crisis intervention, legal help, family counseling, support groups related to adoption, Title XIX service providers, and planning for the transition of an adopted child into adulthood. We may also be able to help locate resources for after school and/or day care needs.

We invite you to learn more about your local PARC. Here are some examples of services that your PARC may provide:

- Conferences and retreats focusing on preparing and enhancing knowledge to better work with adoptive and foster children, as well as opportunities to network with others touched by adoption and foster care.
- Adoption celebrations and/or family fun events to bring adoptive families together.
- A lending library with resources including books, video, and audio materials, as well as articles and curricula.
- Websites with post-adoption links and resources.
- A newsletter featuring post-adoption articles, information, and upcoming events.

FIND YOUR LOCAL PARC HERE:

NORTHEASTERN WISCONSIN

Family Services of NE Wisconsin, Inc.

www.familyservicesnew.org/parc

1-800-998-9609 or 920-436-4360 ext. 1264

postadoption@familyservicesnew.org

Counties Served: Brown, Calumet, Door, Fond du Lac, Green Lake, Kewaunee, Manitowoc, Marinette, Marquette, Menominee, Oconto, Outagamie, Shawano, Sheboygan, Waupaca, Winnebago, and Waushara

NORTHERN WISCONSIN

Catholic Charities Diocese of LaCrosse

www.parc.cclse.org

1-888-212-4357

info@cclse.org

Counties Served: Ashland, Bayfield, Florence, Forest, Iron, Langlade, Lincoln, Marathon, Oneida, Portage, Price, Sawyer, Taylor, Vilas, and Wood

SOUTHEASTERN WISCONSIN & MILWAUKEE COUNTY

Coalition for Children, Youth & Families

www.postadoptccyf.org

1-800-762-8063 or 414-475-1246

info@coalitionforccyf.org

Counties Served: Jefferson, Kenosha, Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Walworth, Washington, and Waukesha

SOUTHERN WISCONSIN

Catholic Charities Diocese of Madison

www.parcsonthernwi.org

1-800-236-4673

postadoption@ccmadison.org

Counties Served: Adams, Columbia, Crawford, Dane, Dodge, Grant, Green, Iowa, Juneau, Lafayette, Richland, Rock, and Sauk

WESTERN WISCONSIN

Catholic Charities Diocese of LaCrosse

www.parc.cclse.org

1-888-212-4357

info@cclse.org

Counties Served: Barron, Buffalo, Burnett, Chippewa, Clark, Douglas, Dunn, Eau Claire, Jackson, LaCrosse, Monroe, Pepin, Pierce, Polk, Rusk, St. Croix, Trempealeau, Vernon, and Washburn

Support Group vs. Support Network

The terms "support group" and "support network" can sometimes be used interchangeably. To us, a support group is a more formal gathering – online or in person – of people connected by a similar topic or interest. A support network is more informal – the individuals and families with whom you surround yourself as you go along your parenting journey.

RESOURCES

Tip Sheets

<http://postadoptccyf.org/Resources/Tip-Sheets>

- **Somebody to Lean On: Connecting With or Creating a Support Group**
<http://postadoptccyf.org/Resources/Tip-Sheets/Taking-Care-of-Yourself/Somebody-To-Lean-On-Connecting-With-or-Creating-a-Support-Group>
- **The Balance Beam: Caring for Yourself While Caring for Your Kids**
<http://postadoptccyf.org/Resources/Tip-Sheets/Taking-Care-of-Yourself/The-Balance-Beam-of-Life-Caring-for-Yourself-While-Caring-for-Your-Kids>

Additional Information

- **Adoption Related Support Groups**
<http://postadoptccyf.org/Portals/parc/AdoptionRelatedSupportGroups2017.pdf?ver=2017-03-08-114609-447>
- **Calendar of Events**
<http://postadoptccyf.org/Resources/Training-Events>
- **Facebook Group: Post Adoption Resource Center of Milwaukee and South Eastern Wisconsin**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/PARCofMKEandSE/>
- **Facebook Group: Post-Adoption Families Support Group of Northeastern Wisconsin**
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/221260741260960/>
- **Find your Local Post Adoption Resource Center (PARC)**
<http://postadoptccyf.org/What-PARCs-Do>
- **4 Ways to Help Your Child Build a Support Network**
<https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/empowering-your-child/self-advocacy/4-ways-to-help-your-child-build-a-support-network>
- **Building a Good Support Network**
<http://studentsagainstdepression.org/get-support/building-support-networks/building-a-good-support-network/>
- **Foster Youth in Action**
<http://www.fosteryouthaction.org/>
- **Foster Club**
<https://www.fosterclub.com/>

Library

- *Swings Hanging from Every Tree – Daily Inspirations for Foster & Adoptive Parents*, by Susan Stone
- *The Kinship Parenting Toolbox*, Edited by Kim Phagan Hansel
- *The Foster Parenting Toolbox*, Edited by Kim Phagan Hansel
- *Adoption Parenting*, by Jean MacLeod & Dheena Macrae, Ph.D.
- *The Adoption Network: Your Guide to Starting a Support System*, by Laura Christianson
- *20 Things Adoptive Parents Need to Succeed*, by Sherrie Eldridge
- *Wasn't Love Supposed to Be Enough? Biographies of an adoptive parent support group*



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Family of websites:
coalitionforcyf.org
wiadopt.org
wifostercareandadoption.org
postadoptccyf.org

An umbrella of services over
foster care and adoption;
information and referral;
recruitment; training,
education and support for
families and professionals.



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