

The Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange is a program of Judson Center and is funded by the Michigan Department of Human Services.

To learn about foster care adoption and view photolistings and videos of waiting children, visit our website at www.mare.org.



The name is bond ... family bond

Fun ways to make newly-formed relationships flourish

WRITTEN BY **KELLI OSTROSKY**, MARE ADOPTION NAVIGATOR

Forming a new family is an exciting and monumental life event, but it can also take a great deal of effort to create new relationships and bonds. Know and understand that interactions may feel awkward or unnatural at first, and that's OK (and actually quite normal!). You may have dreamed of an instant, automatic connection, but in most cases, that won't be a reality. Here are some simple ways to increase bonding and get everyone actively involved, while having fun together at the same time:

Tip: Foster youth sometimes have a hard time doing structured activities such as sports and board games. Focus on process vs. product. (What did they do independently? What did they try to do for the first time?) This will be a great way to introduce new activities without any added pressure.

Plan it out: Write down favorite activities on a Popsicle stick and choose one for each day to incorporate all of the family members' interests. Making an activity calendar with color-coded days for each family member's ideas can also bring a comforting level of predictability to the daily routine. Work towards planning activities that all members enjoy and can benefit from in some way.

Keep in mind: The child's past experiences could make trying new things difficult. They may trigger memories, create anxiety, and bring about emotions and challenging behaviors that could impact the effectiveness and enjoyment of your family's daily routines and activities. Utilize "safe touch," which involves respecting each other's personal space and comfort zones. Observe the child for any sensitivities regarding games and activities that involve

touch. If you notice a discomfort during any activity, stop immediately and speak to the child's therapist. Also, keep in mind that even if a child is a certain age, his or her developmental age may be years younger. An example would be a 10-year-old who possibly has never been rocked on a parent's lap. Gauge each activity accordingly, keeping all these factors in mind.

- **Be unconventional!** Try writing with chalk on the driveway and spray it with water to create masterpieces with the newly formed chalk paint. Have a pajama day at home and watch movies with homemade popcorn. Create an "all about me!" Lifebook story using various art supplies and magazine clippings. Maybe even create a self-portrait painting in the lifebook. Read the books together when they dry.

- **Keep it simple ...** Make edible art, brush and style each other's hair, play in the rain, play "rock paper scissors." Many foster children are scared, intimidated or nervous trying things that other kids have already experienced. All of these new faces and activities can be overwhelming!

- **Go the natural route.**

The great outdoors can be very therapeutic. Take a walk, plant/water a tree or garden, go on a picnic. Incorporating animals into your day can also be helpful. Visit a petting farm, volunteer for the humane society, perhaps give horseback riding a try. Volunteering as a family to clean up a local park would be a rewarding way to spend time together, too!

- **Make your time sensational!** Children may have sensory See **Relationships** on page 2



TURNING HISSES INTO PURRS

Treated right, sibling relationships can be the cat's meow

WRITTEN BY HANNAH SHIER, MARE INTERN

Sibling relationships are often the most enduring in a person's life. However, bringing an adoptive sibling into a family changes family dynamics, and it can be challenging and unpredictable.

For instance, how will kids already living in the home react to a new sibling? Will they get along? Will jealousies arise as parental attention is divided?

These concerns are legitimate, but research shows that adoptive sibling bonding can and does occur in adoptive families. According to a 2007 study, genetically unrelated siblings demonstrated strong bonds into adulthood.

Siblings will need time to get to know one another. Even after they've started to grow closer, they may argue.

Researchers found that a shared environment in childhood led siblings to stick together even after major life transitions such as leaving home, getting married, and having children of their own. To facilitate this bonding, there are several things parents should keep in mind.

First, it is important to prepare kids already living at home for the new addition. In a journal article for the Child Welfare League of America, Minnesota adoption workers Ellen Steele Mullin and LeAnne Johnson suggest including children already living in the home in different steps of the adoption process including family

assessment, education, and support groups. When to tell them about a new sibling depends on age and maturity, but it is important that they are included in the process. Things such as putting a child in charge of making a family scrapbook can encourage their participation, the workers say. Parents can also encourage questions and open communication about the process. Talking about growing the family in a positive way can foster excitement about a new sibling.

Secondly, remember that every family is different, and every child is different. Kids will interact in their own ways depending on differences in age, gender, interests and talents. Siblings will need time to get to know one another. Even after they've started to grow closer, they may argue. Treating each child according to his or her individual needs is important. Since adopted children with special needs may have emotional difficulties, they may require more time or a different level of attention.

Childwelfare.gov offers some tips on treating children appropriately even if they require different levels of care:

- Empathize with and do not minimize either child's worries.
- Address each child keeping in mind their personality and individual needs.
- Find ways for kids to have positive interactions. Common interests and family activities will be important in bonding.
- Encourage siblings to resolve arguments between themselves, to the extent possible.

Finally, try to create an environment where siblings can bond. Design shared experiences and traditions unique to your family. Have children teach new siblings about those traditions and their importance to the whole family. Allow time for shared interests to present themselves, and then encourage siblings to do these activities together.

Relationships, continued from page 1

aversions or crave sensory input due to various reasons. Older children may also crave certain activities for this reason. Sensory-based activities can bring comfort to a child in times of stress and can be a great way to spend time together. Have a car wash, jump rope, sing a song together, or go swing together at a park. Rub lotion on feet and paint or clip / manicure nails. Any activity that requires the use of senses will have the added bonus of helping to balance the nervous system! This sensory input can help a child feel safe and secure.

• **Let's do this, together!** Hold hands across a bridge, go rock climbing, or help your newest family member learn to do something new. These activities can help your child build trust

in you. Remember, if your new family member tries something new with your help, that's a huge step in itself! Celebrate small accomplishments, even if the activity wasn't completed fully.

• **Don't be afraid to seek professional help!** With so many professionals involved with the child and adoption efforts, it may be a tough decision to add another. During this transitional time, however, it can be helpful to consult with a family therapist who has experience with adoption. Helping the family as a whole (family therapy) can be beneficial in working through the transition. Starting off on the right foot takes quite a bit of work and commitment as a family. The experience of a knowledgeable professional coupled with your high level of involvement can help make it a success!

MARE's 'Dream Teens'

Our roster is chock-full of All-Stars

Teens offer plenty of exciting milestones for adoptive parents to help celebrate:

- Dates and proms
- Driver's training
- Exploring college
- First jobs
- Graduations
- Holidays
- Learning DIY skills
- Managing money
- Moving on and up
- School functions
- Sporting events
- Starting careers



Brandie
(C08535)



Gregory
(C07783)



Tiana
(C08510)

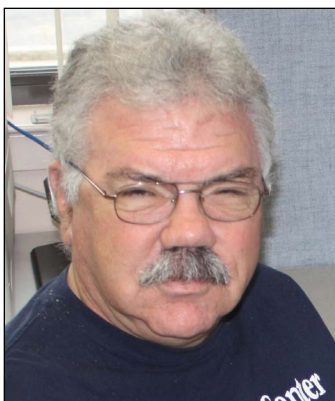


Nathaniel
(C07602)

Step up to the plate, and give teens a chance!
Call MARE at 800-589-6273 or visit www.mare.org

MAKING DREAMS COME TRUE

His expertise with teens is a handy asset for adoptive parents



Mac Ballentine
MARE Adoption Navigator

After meeting his wife, Helen, and moving to the United States in 2001, Mac Ballentine had two goals: one was to become an American citizen, which he proudly accomplished in June of 2008, and the other was to adopt a child in need and bring her into his family's life, which Mac and Helen did later that same year when they adopted their teenage daughter.

Mac had many years of experience working with teens as a hockey coach and referee for 15 years.

"I always knew that someday we would adopt," says Mac. "My family had been foster parents for years in Canada, and my great grandfather had been an orphan who had been sent to Canada as a child, so adopting was

something that was a natural thing to us."

After adopting his daughter, Mac's interest in helping others grew, and he became the leader of a support group for foster and adoptive parents. Because of his leadership and advocacy, he was invited by the North American Council on Adoptable Children to travel to Washington, D.C., to meet with lawmakers and share his perspective on older child adoption.

"I have continued to advocate for older child adoption," says Mac, "and when I was offered a chance to become an Adoption Navigator it was a 'Dream Position' for me. Suddenly I had a chance to help many people achieve a dream, and also it was a chance to give back and use my experiences so that others may experience the joys of adopting that my wife and I have had."



**Michigan Adoption
Resource Exchange**
3840 Packard Rd., Suite 170
Ann Arbor, MI 48108

Phone: 800.589.6273

E-mail: mare@judsoncenter.org

Web: www.mare.org



Find us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Pinterest

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

November 1, 2014

Kent County Match Party!

11 a.m.-2 p.m.

MARE would like to invite you to a match party! It is our hope that many "forever families" will be formed after an afternoon of food, fun and games. Match parties are unique experiences that allow prospective adoptive families to mingle with our waiting youth. These events are fun for both families and our children!

All prospective adoptive families MUST have an approved adoption homestudy to attend these events. If you have further questions, contact MARE Youth Specialist, Jennifer Brooks at jennifer_brooks@judsoncenter.org or 734-528-2061.

November 8, 2014

SNAP (Special Needs Adoptive Parents) Training, Sessions 1-4

9 a.m.-3 p.m.

D.A. Blodgett - St. John's, 805 Leonard St. N.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49503

This training is free to attend, and no RSVP is required.

November 11, 2014

SNAP (Special Needs Adoptive Parents) Orientation

6:30-8:30 p.m.

D.A. Blodgett - St. John's, 805 Leonard St. N.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49503

This orientation is free to attend, and no RSVP is required.

November 13, 2014

Adoptive Family Support Meeting and Adopted Youth Club

6-8 p.m.

Judson Center, 3840 Packard Rd., Suite 170, Ann Arbor, MI 48108

Details: Come have dinner with other families who have adopted. After dinner we'll split into two separate discussion groups. Please RSVP to Tracy Kapusansky at 734-545-3831 or tracy_kapusansky@judsoncenter.org

Adoptive Family Support Meeting: Share your challenges, ideas, and support and in exchange ... BE SUPPORTED by others!

Adopted Youth Club: An opportunity to meet other adopted individuals, participate in fun activities (art, creative writing, and games), share your story, provide support, learn ways to handle life's ups and downs, and make new friends.

November 13, 2014

Parents Helping Parents Support Group, for Foster/Adoptive Parents

7-9 p.m.

Lapeer Community Church, 80 N. Lake Pleasant Rd., Attica, MI 48412

Free childcare is provided, but you must RSVP in advance. To RSVP, please call Kim Hall at 810-664-4743

November 14, 2014

A-OK Support Group

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Hands Across the Water, 781 Avis Drive, Suite 200, Ann Arbor, MI 48108

Hands Across the Water is offering a support group for parents who have adopted an older child through foster care, internationally, or domestically. Come and share experiences, ask questions and gather advice at this monthly group. Please call 734-477-0135 to preregister.

November 25, 2014

Michigan Adoption Day

Events happening statewide

Visit www.mare.org/miadoptionday for details.

December 11, 2014

Parents Helping Parents Support Group, for Foster/Adoptive Parents

7-9 p.m.

Lapeer Community Church, 80 N. Lake Pleasant Rd., Attica, MI 48412

Free childcare is provided, but you must RSVP in advance. To RSVP, please call Kim Hall at 810-664-4743.

*Please check the event calendar on the MARE website to view the most updated list of trainings, events, and support groups.

www.mare.org.

