



## Bridging the gap: adolescence into adulthood

While all teens face the crisis of identity and need to explore who they are in relation to their families, adopted teens must also explore who they are in terms of adoption and what they know about their own adoptions.

Adolescents begin to focus on how they look and behave. While younger children often look to their parents and immediate family as guidance for their behavior, adolescents begin to look to outside their family to measure their identity and acceptance. Peer relationships take on added importance.

Caregivers and parents should be aware that some teens may become concerned that their own physical appearance doesn't match the rest of the family. Transracially adopted teens might be especially vulnerable to try to find a way to fit into a world that doesn't necessarily reflect their birth cultures. Those families who have managed to redefine family to include multi-racial and multicultural definitions will have an easier time of raising their teens than those who have attempted to make their own family fit into traditional family definitions.

The teen's search for identity doesn't just mirror issues of peers and culture, but reflects a search for occupation, sexual identity, religious identity, and values.

## Did You Know?

In 1891, Michigan was the first state to require that "the judge shall be satisfied as to the good moral character, and the ability to support and educate such child, and of the suitability of the home, or the person or persons adopting such child."



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For all teens, this search can result in an "identity crisis" which is usually resolved through the process of identity achievement. At the start of a teen's college years, they recognize their identity conflicts, confront issues of their own identity, explore alternative identities and commit to a particular set of values.

Some teens appear to have achieved a solid identity, demonstrating commitment to specific values, a career path and a role in life, only to discover they have entered into identity foreclosure, which is committing to an identity before having a chance to explore alternatives. In these instances, an "identity crisis" was never recognized or confronted. Often these young adults become what parents or caregivers assumed they would without ever challenging their own skills, values and desires.

While all teens face the crisis of identity and need to explore who they are in relation to their families, adopted teens must also explore who they are in relation to adoption and what they know about their own adoptions.

Some young adults may choose this time to search and gather additional information about birth families, while others might repeat a cycle of grief in order to move forward. Adoptive parents and caregivers can help the young adult through these confusing stages by bringing up the questions and concerns that their young adult might be afraid to address.

*(Excerpted from Adoption Resources of Wisconsin website, [http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/167/AdoptIssuesLate&Young-FINAL\\_AdoptIssuesLate&Young-FINAL.pdf](http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/library/167/AdoptIssuesLate&Young-FINAL_AdoptIssuesLate&Young-FINAL.pdf))*

## Preparing for developmental grieving

Developmental grieving is grieving experienced at milestones in a child's, youth's, or adult's life. Stages of grieving (denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance) can repeat themselves throughout a child's life. A child who has experienced abuse or neglect may take years to heal and may always be affected by the early losses. Even after reaching a level of understanding (or acceptance or resolution), children and youth will continue to experience times of anger and depression – even when things seem to be going so well.

### Critical Events that May Trigger Grieving

- A move to a new foster home
- Birth parents rights are terminated and/or visitation changes
- Holidays and birthdays
- Small losses – such as loss of privileges or toys
- Returning home to foster care after a visit with the birth parent(s)

### Times When Grieving Behaviors May Be Repeated

- Right after placement
- After visits
- During adolescence
- When a young person returns home, moves into adoption, or moves out
- At the time of marriage
- At the birth of the young person's first child
- At any significant developmental milestone.

### Preparing for Developmental Grieving

- Talk with other children and youth in the home
- Remind one another of the developmental grieving stages
- Think of ways to help children and youth talk about angry and sad feelings
- Think about possible grieving behaviors before they occur

The support and understanding given to the child during the grieving process is a major factor in their adjustment to a foster family or adoptive family. As partners, we must encourage the child and give the child permission to “move on.” Permission to move on is needed from all the adults who care for and are involved with the child.

Help the child gain pleasant experiences in their new home by responding in a calm, non-reactive manner to the child's problem behaviors.

## According to Law

In Florida, “a stepparent may adopt without the spouse joining in the adoption as long as the spouse consents to the adoption. A married person may adopt without the other spouse if the spouse's failure to consent is excused by the court.”

*(Florida.adoption.com/articles)*

“Children aren't happy without something to ignore, and that's what parents were created for.”  
*Ogden Nash*”

## Adoption Support Groups

We'd like to hear from you! What topic(s) would you like to see addressed in upcoming issues of our Adoption Matters newsletter?

Are you interested in having an adoption support group in your area? Yes/No  
Would you be interested in becoming a peer facilitator? Yes/No

Send your comments to: Children's Home Society of Florida  
Attention: Adoptions Newsletter  
11 N. Magnolia Avenue  
Ocala, FL 34475

or email [Linda.Franc@chsfl.org](mailto:Linda.Franc@chsfl.org)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

## 2009 Calendars

We are very proud to announce that thirteen of our children are each featured on Children's Home Society's 2009 Calendar. These calendars are available at any of the Children's Home Society offices listed below. A \$5 donation per calendar is appreciated.



Ocala  
11 N. Magnolia Ave.  
352.732.1412

Gainesville  
605 NE 1st St.  
352.334.0955

Lake City  
1389 US Hwy 90 W. #110  
386.758.5757

Lake & Sumter/Tavares  
1300 Duncan Dr., Bldg. D.  
352.742.6170

Citrus/Inverness  
2315 Highway 41 N.  
352.860.5149

Hernando/Brooksville  
11331 Ponce De Leon Blvd.  
352.544.2301

## Remembering Randy

Randy may have been born with multiple physical and cognitive challenges, but he lived to overcome those challenges. Randy passed away on January 17, 2009. Over 150 people attended his funeral. Many people spoke about Randy's faith in God and his desire to help others. One of his classmates from Forest High School who also had physical limitations said that she was going to miss Randy because he would help her eat during lunch. Another remembered how Randy was always helpful and would hold the door for all of them. Randy is survived by his two brothers, Andrew, who was previously adopted, and Tom, who aged out of foster care a year ago. Randy, too, was available for adoption and though he was visiting with an adoptive family, he had not been adopted. One person who attended the funeral thoughtfully commented after the ceremony, "I guess God adopted Randy."



J.S. Photography



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Inspiring Lives.



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# Adoption Matters