

# 10 Parenting Skills An Adoptee Wants Parents to Know

**Concerned Persons For Adoption  
39<sup>th</sup> Annual "Let's Talk Adoption"<sup>sm</sup>  
Virtual Conference**

**Saturday, March 5 • 9:00 A.M. - 4:00 P.M.**

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# Disclaimer

- These skills are meant to support and strengthen parenting an adoptee.
- Each individual person has variables of emotions, memories, triggers and sensations, which show up in their behavior, as an external attempt to get their needs met.
- Some adopted children have also been in foster care, which means their vulnerability scale of symptoms will be more intense, more frequent, and last longer.
- It is recommended to practice these skills and know there is no perfect parenting.
- If there are adoptees present, you can use these skills to re-parent yourself.
- If you feel as a parent, you wished you received this approach, you can also re-parent yourself.
- Trust this is a process. A lifelong process. Life is paying attention to what matters.
- There are no easy fixes and we don't get over experiences, we are continuously moving through them.
- Rule out medical causes for behaviors that are extremely challenging to manage.
- Have your child psychologically tested every 2 years, and make sure the psychologist includes testing scales for Anxiety, Trauma, and Depression.



# Skill #1 Parent Yourself First

- *You are more important than you know.*
- *Take care of your mind, body and soul.*
- *Acknowledge your own feelings of grief, loss, anger and despair.*
- *Empathy begins with you.*
- *Find a listening partner or therapist.*
- *Make sense of your own story, from your family of origin.*
- *Your own attachment/parenting histories will often be awakened as you raise your child.*
- *When you feel like blowing your top, you've reached your window of stress tolerance. Take a TIME OUT.*
- *Accept meeting 6 out of 10 needs is good enough parenting!*
- *Know you will parent the way you were parented, and now you GET to parent differently.*
- *You have immense impact in your tone, your modeling, and in your consistency.*
- *Maintain a sense of humor.*



ADOPTEE'S HOUSE

YOU'RE NOT MY REAL MOTHER! I DON'T HAVE TO DO WHAT YOU TELL ME TO! IF MY REAL MUM WAS HERE, SHE'D LET ME DO WHATEVER I WANT BECAUSE SHE LOVES ME MORE THAN YOU LOVE ME!!



NON-ADOPTEE'S HOUSE

I HATE THAT YOU'RE MY REAL MOTHER! I DON'T HAVE TO DO WHAT YOU TELL ME TO! I WISH I WAS ADOPTED! IF I WAS, MY ADOPTIVE MOM WOULD LOVE ME MORE THAN YOU LOVE ME AND SHE WOULD LET ME DO WHATEVER I WANT!"



# Skill #2 An Adoptees Brain and Body Remembers

➤ Every second of prenatal life, 50,000 neurons- brain cells are produced - information units. They are vulnerable. If there is chronic stress in utero - stress hormones are pushed into the brainstem of the baby. Which has the opportunity to be repeatedly reactivated (via triggers) throughout one's life. Nerve cells can even be destroyed. - Dr. Thomas Verny

➤ *"A fault or fracture occurs to the somatic sense of self."* **IBP Therapy**

- Early Separation from the mother, is considered an overwhelming traumatic experience.
- This early pre-verbal life experience creates a blueprint, bringing up "miscued" feelings of abandonment, feeling unwanted or unlovable, and lack of trust in current relationships assuming it will happen all over again

**Overwhelming behavior, is a coping stress response of an unhealthy internal threat in the body.**

What's hysterical we must assume is historical.  
**Your Absence Can = Make Me Feel Abandoned**  
**Your Love Can = Make Me Feel My Loss**

*Your child is trying to avoid these overwhelming feelings.*

- **Triggers can't be just turned off, it's like a light switch, the sensations, images, thoughts and feelings in the body/mind connection have no rhyme or rhythm when they will show up.**
- **Trust & Bonding Intervention** – 3x a day, when your child doesn't expect it, give him/her a loving gazing look "smiling" "loving" validating there need for love and approval - no matter what. No words needed. Imagine yourself hugging them in your mind. Provide this same compassion for yourself.



# Be Trauma Informed

➤ Paradigm Shift changes from....

➤ **“Won’t behave?”**

➤ to....

➤ **“*Can’t behave.*”**

➤ Adoptees DO have special needs. They can’t be parented the same as other children. They need a *different approach than non-adoptees.*





REMEMBER!

*Challenging  
behavior is a  
symptom of  
trauma!*

The Trauma Informed Teacher



# Be Trauma Informed

➤ Paradigm Shift changes from....

➤ **“What’s wrong with YOU?”**

➤ to....

➤ ***“What HAPPENED to YOU?”***

➤ *Please do not take there behaviors personally. They are having a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.*

*You are caring for a spirited child, a deeply feeling child, who feels deeply about their experience.*



# What are the Emotional Needs for Adopted Children?

## ► Emotional Needs

1. I need help in recognizing my adoption loss and grieving it. If I don't grieve my loss, my ability to receive love from you and others will be hindered.
2. I need to be reassured that my birth parents decision not to parent me, had nothing to do with anything defective in me.
3. I need help in learning that absence doesn't mean abandonment.
4. I need permission to express all my adoptive feelings and fantasies.

# What are the Psychological Needs for Adopted Children?

## ➤ Psychological Needs

1. When I'm oppositional or avoidant, call it getting "stuck." I really do want to do the right thing, I just can't always give you the control. It scares me!
2. Vulnerability with you sometime feels like a "near death" experience.  
I will need to control you to reduce my anxiety, please tell me  
"I am right here" and "I know this is hard."
3. I will "over-identify" with being adopted, like "I'm" a condition... I need you to separate my adoption experience from my "identity" and tell me  
"I was adopted."

# What are the Validation Needs for Adopted Children?

## ► Validation Needs

1. I need validation of my dual heritage (birth and adoptive).
2. I need to be assured often that I am welcome and worthy.
3. I need your validation that I have suffered a profound loss before I came to you and you are not responsible.
4. I need to be reminded often by my adoptive family that they delight in my biological differences and appreciate my birth family's unique contribution to our family tree through me!



# What are the Relational & Spiritual Needs for Adopted Children?

## ► Relational Needs

1. I need friendships with other adoptees!
2. I need to be taught that there is time to consider searching for my birth family and a time to give up searching.

## ► Spiritual Needs

1. I need to be taught that my life narrative began before I was born and that my life is not a mistake.
2. I need to be taught that loving families are formed through adoption, as well as birth.



# Skill #3 Assess and Attune To Your Child's Emotional and Psychological Age

- Children inherently want to please. They do not want to misbehave.
- Ask yourself: What age do you see when your child exhibits their BIG emotions?
- Map hysterical moments. Who, What, Where, When and How? Measure the intensity, frequency and duration of the hysterical behavior.
- **BE EXPERT READERS OF YOUR CHILD'S 7 NON-VERBAL CUES**  
OWL = Observe, Watch and Listen - eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice, posture, hand gestures, timing and intensity of response.
- Know your child's window of stress tolerance. Times and places.
- All behavior is a form communication of an unmet need.
- 5 A's: Emotional & Psychological Needs = Attention, Affection, Autonomy, Acknowledgment & Appreciation
- Don't assume a negative motive, or you will make that more prominent.
- If you know me, see me, and join with me to support me...

*"I will feel seen, heard and received. This will calm me."*



**O-BERVE  
W-ATCH  
L-ISTEN**



## Skill #4 Shame Fuels Inner Self-Rejection

### ■ CHILDREN WHO EXPERIENCE TRAUMA BELIEVE IT WAS THEIR FAULT

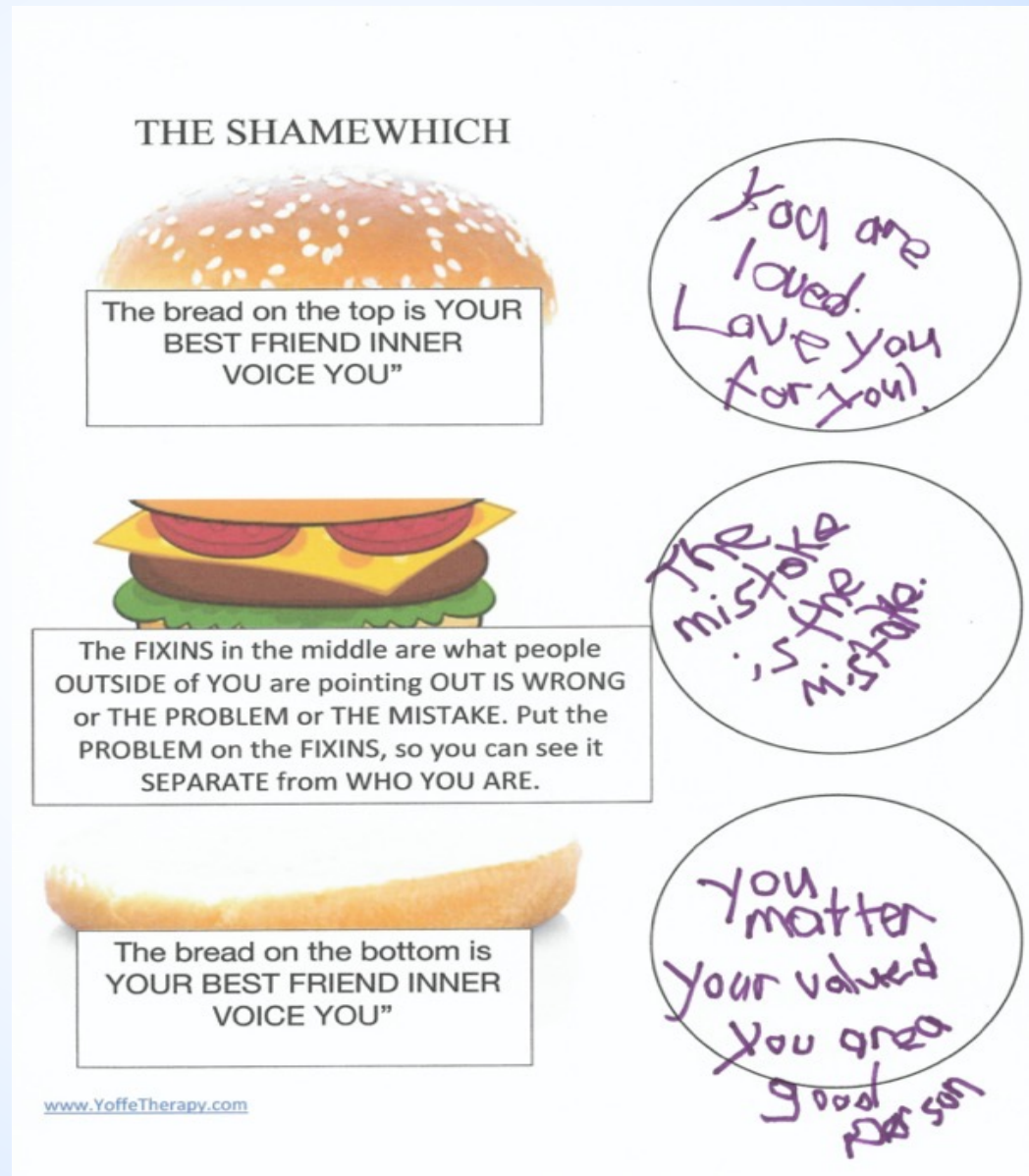
- Shame is directed towards the self, guilt is directed towards the behavior and causes distress for the “other” person.
- Shame experiences the “self” as bad, worthless and unlovable. the person feels that there is little he can do to fix it since he does not feel able to change the core of who he is. As a result, he is likely to deny, lie, make excuses, or blame others for his behavior.
- Excessive shame prevents the development of guilt and prevents him from accepting responsibility for his actions.
- Individuals who are rated high on measures of shame are rated low on measures of empathy for others.
- Individuals who experience guilt readily when wrong are rated high on measures of empathy.





# The SHAMEWHICH

**Parenting Approach:**  
Separate the child, from their behavior, with the SHAMEWHICH METAPHOR.



# The SHAMEWHICH

Sometimes a person looks like a mommy or a daddy on the outside but they are really a kid on the inside.

Can a kid take care of a kid?

## THE SHAMEWHICH



The bread on the top is YOUR BEST FRIEND INNER VOICE YOU"



The FIXINS in the middle are what people OUTSIDE of YOU are pointing OUT IS WRONG or THE PROBLEM or THE MISTAKE. Put the PROBLEM on the FIXINS, so you can see it SEPARATE from WHO YOU ARE.



The bread on the bottom is YOUR BEST FRIEND INNER VOICE YOU"

You were born like every other person. You are loveable.

All children need to be taken care of. Some adults are Not able to take care of any child. They are still learning how to take care of themselves. It's not that they won't parent, they can't.

You were born like every other person. You are loveable.



# Good Parent Messages

## Early Life

- I love you.
- I want you.
- I see you and I hear you.
- I welcome and cherish you.
- I'll take care of you.
- Over and over, I will show you how to trust.
- My consistency of meeting your needs, will last longer than your chaos.
- I am not leaving.
- Sometimes I will tell you no, and that's because I love you.

## School Age

- I love you. I want you.
- I give you permission to be different from me.
- I see you and I hear you.
- My patience is stronger than your anger.
- My consistency of meeting your needs, will last longer than your chaos.
- You can trust your inner voice.
- It is not what you do but who you are that I love.

## Teen

- I love you. I want you.
- I give you permission to be different from me.
- I see you and I hear you.
- My love is bigger than your hate.
- My care is more lasting than your rejection.
- It is not what you do but who you are that I love.
- I will not give up on you.
- I have confidence in you.
- I am proud of you.



Focus on Strengths	Focus on Vulnerabilities
You showed great honesty in facing that.	It is so hard for you when you are not allowed to do that.
Great job to control your anger when you were mad at your mom/dad.	You really are hard on yourself when you do something wrong.
It took a lot of courage to bring that to me.	Nothing seems to be going right for you lately.
You really want to get good at that. I see how important this is for you.	Sometimes you get so upset it seems to ruin your whole day.
Your friend is really important to you.	It seems so hard to just relax and be confident that things will go your way." Your friend is really important to you."
You are so brave to tell your mom how you feel.	<i>It must be hard if you think you're bad.</i>
You have a lot of energy today!	If you think "I don't love you" that must be so hard for you
I am so proud that you told me that you think I don't care. I see how important our relationship is to you.	If you think "I don't care" does it effect what you think about yourself?
I appreciate your honesty and deep feelings you expressed to me earlier. I see you and hear you.	I am sorry you do the best that you can and it still doesn't feel good enough for you. I see how hard your are on yourself.



A person with long red hair is sitting on a large, dark rock in the foreground, looking out over a calm body of water. The water is misty, and the background is a dense forest of evergreen trees. The scene is captured in a soft, ethereal light, possibly during dawn or dusk. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

## **The Seven Core Strengths of Adoptees**

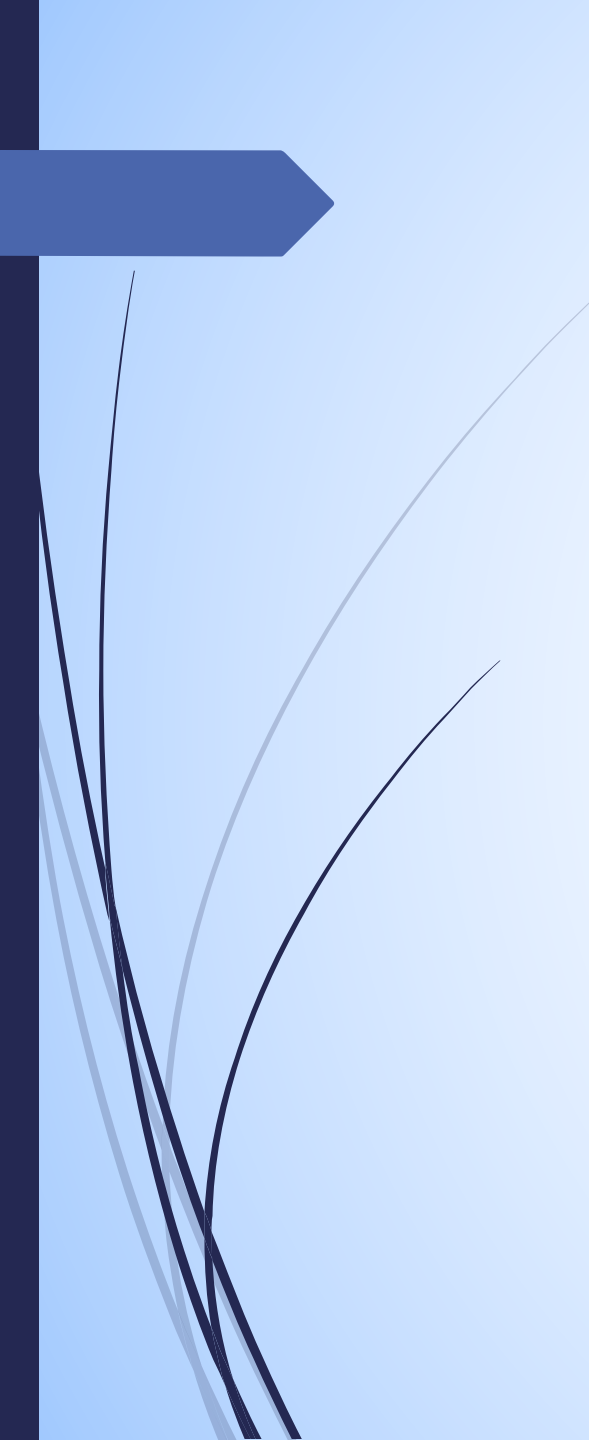
**Compassionate  
Highly intuitive  
Adaptable  
Creative  
Brave  
Wounded healers  
Strong willed  
Unrelenting when driven!**

**- Jeanette Yoffe**

# Skill #5 Create Emotional Safety

- **BE AWARE OF YOUR 7 NON-VERBAL CUES** - eye contact, facial expressions, tone of voice, posture, hand gestures, timing and intensity of response.
- 95% of communication is non-verbal communication.
- You are the thermostat----**Maintain a positive affective tone that influences your child, rather than letting their negative tone influence you.** “If you react to my negative emotional states, then I will feel powerful and in control. By remaining calm... time, time and again, I will eventually see you as strong enough to deal with me and my pain and I will stop testing you. Trust me!”
- **Parent who yells, child perceives parent as a threat of REJECTION.** Convey information in a storytelling try getting below eye level, in relaxed posture, have empathy and say “I’m right here with you.” Science, this activates an adaptive neural network and builds the executive function of the brain.
- To support transitions, Let them know the beginning, middle and end of what is going to happen.
- 75% ask open ended questions.
- AVOID saying to an idea “it doesn’t matter” or “I don’t care” this can trigger shame.
- AVOID blaming, shaming, name calling and becoming defensive in your stance.
- AVOID words such as “ you -always, never, should” “~~why?~~”
- Say YES AND..... not BUT (this implies conflict and negates all before)





*Breaking someones  
trust is like  
crumpling up a  
perfect piece of paper,  
you can smooth it  
out but it will never  
be the same again*

[www.facebook.com/jillblakeway](http://www.facebook.com/jillblakeway)

# P.A.C.E. You and Your Child

## Playfulness

Humor is very important to create a quality of lightness and openness.  
Laughter builds memories of unconditional acceptance of each other.

## Acceptance

Understanding a child's reaction represents the child's best effort at the time. *"He/she is doing the best that he could." "You are doing the best that you can."*

## Curiosity

Have a nonjudgmental, "not knowing" stance to inquire about the child's inner life that led to the behaviors so the child feels safe that his inner life will not be criticized and hide his questions. Allow yourself to be surprised.  
*"What do you think happened earlier?" "Tell me about that?"*

## Empathy

Empathy must be conveyed with both nonverbal and verbal expressions.  
The child is not rescued from the event or is the problem solved for him.  
*"That must be SO hard for you!" "It is really hard, and you're doing it and struggling with it." "I am so sorry this hurts so much."*  
*"Even though, I am having a hard time, I can still have love and compassion for myself."*



# Skill #5 Create Emotional Safety Continued

- 7 STEP Communication – CONNECT BEFORE CORRECT
- 1. **Describe the facts:** "I see... I hear....\_\_\_\_\_."
- 2. **Be Curious:** "Do you feel sad/mad/upset...about\_\_\_\_\_"
- 3. **Try to understand the reason for the feelings:**  
"Because you want or need or feel strongly about\_\_\_\_\_"
- 4. **Make a request or clear suggestion:**  
"Would you be willing to\_\_\_\_\_ .... Would you like to....\_\_\_\_\_"
- 5. **Set a limit:** "We do not hit because....."
- 6. **Redirect behavior:**  
"Would it work for you too\_\_\_\_\_" or "Let's find another way for you to \_\_\_\_\_"
- 7. **Compromise and Provide 2 Choices:** "How about we do this\_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_?"

# Engaged Responses For Connection

- *"Wow" "I believe in you! You inspire me in so many ways."*
- *"You ask great questions!"*
- *"I never thought of it that way before. I like the way you think!"*
- *"I'm not sure I understand, tell me more about that?"*
- *"I wish things could go better between us. Let me know if you have any ideas about how we can do that."*
- *"We seem to be at a standstill. Let's meet to talk about this again (some time in the future.)"*
- *"I can really see why you'd be so (mad, sad, upset, frustrated.)"*
- *"That seems difficult for you. Let me help you."*
- *"I'm sorry. I made a mistake."*
- *"What do **you** think about that?"*
- *"What do **you** think should happen?"*

**Learning and attachment is enhanced when we lighten up.- Improvisational tool**



## Skill #6 Accept and Embrace Your Differences

- Write down 3 qualities you can begin to accept about your child that is different from you.

***“I accept my child is highly sensitive.”***

- Emotionally
- Physically
- Intelligence
- Talents
- Ethnicity
- Racially
- Culturally



# Mantras for Parenting

- I accept I sometimes fumble and stumble as a parent.
- I accept both me and my child are doing the best that we can.
- I accept I am a human being before I am a parent.
- I accept I don't always know the right way.
- I accept my child may become emotional.
- I accept we both, at a deep level, want our family life to improve.
- I accept we are both trying to establish safety by controlling each other.
- I accept I can't fix the pain in my child's story.
- I accept explaining some parts of their story will be painful.
- I accept I cannot do the work for my child, nor can I save them.
- I accept I can validate, comfort, and teach my child how to cope.
- I accept I can lose my center worse than my child does.
- I accept I don't always know how to respond to my child.
- I accept I am sometimes ashamed to admit my own failings.
- I accept my imperfections and my imperfect life.
- I accept my child is their own unique person separate from me.



# Skill #7 Importance of Inter-Subjectivity

- Inter-subjectivity is joining a Child in his experience, experiencing it with him, matching his affective state, and exploring the experience with him to make sense of it.
- **1. Attunement or Shared Affect:** the ability to listen to the meaning of the nonverbal communication, then be able to match the rhythm and intensity of the meaning by which the affective state is expressed without “acting out” the emotion itself.

Child: “No one ever listens to me!!”

Parent: “No one!! How hard that must be if it seems like no one listens to you!”

- **2. Shared Attention, Child & Parent focus on same event:** Their attention must be shared on the same thing inter-subjectively. By not sharing the same focus of the child, there will be no influence. Parents will have more success if they suspend all judgments about the child’s “motives” while dealing only with his behavior.

Parent: “I see you are watching T.V. Let’s watch for 10 more minutes, I will join you, then we will pause, and I want you to put your clothes in the hamper. Then you can return.”

- **3. Shared Intentions, regarding the activity together:** Enjoying each other, communicating interest in the same event, teach or learn about a shared interest. This is central in the development of cooperation.
- **Playing, laughing, movement (parallel play-ping pong) helps deescalate the arousal system. i.e. painting side by side, watching funny movie together**

## Skill #8 Provide Opportunities to Connect with Sensory Body-Mind for Regulation

- **How does your engine run analogy?**
- **Teach Hand Model of the brain and I messages**  
**“I FEEL ...” close your eyes and see what your body feels...**
- Say “I FEEL ...” SAD, MAD, SCARED, or GLAD **“WHEN .....”**
- **“WHERE is the feeling in your body.....?”**
- **“What does your body need?” “I NEED ...” 5 basic needs...the 5 A’s...**
- Say “I NEED....” AUTONOMY OR ALONE TIME, AFFECTION, ATTENTION, APPRECIATION, AND/OR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.
- **Tapping In** Peaceful place, Wise, Loving or Protective Figure
- **Breathing** with Lavender or imagine birthday cake

# Ways to Hack A Dysregulated Nervous System

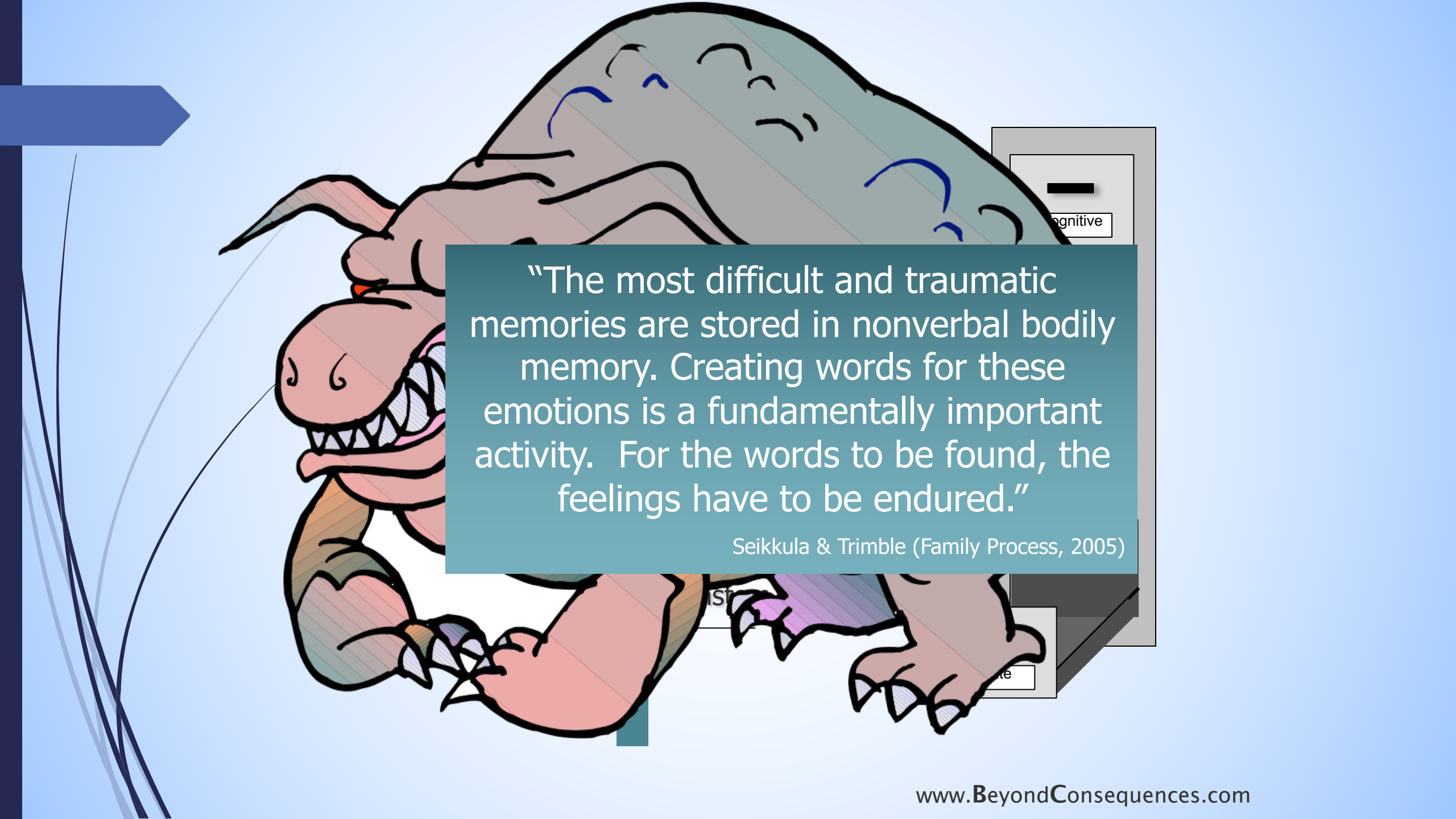
- Gently and firmly, hold your child on your lap, rocking, snuggling, without words, so they feel “felt” Non-verbal touch is powerful and can calm the non-verbal loss.
- Body Scan – Tighten and Release, Squeeze it and Release it
- Mindful Breathing with Lavender or imagine birthday cake
- “Havening” Arm Sweep
- Cold Water exposure
- Hand on head and hand on heart then deep breathing
- Hand on heart, hand on belly then deep breathing  
*“Even though, I am feeling overwhelmed, I can still have love and compassion for myself.”*
- Butterfly Heart hug- tapping in
- Humming or Singing
- Dancing to rhythmic music. The brain thrives on movement to self-organize.
- Orienting outside the body, what do you hear, see, smell, feel?
- Find something pleasurable in the body

## Skill #9 Learn to Grieve With Your Child

- ▶ **Children need to be allowed**, and given permission to experience and accept their distress, even if it might cause others distress.
- ▶ **Give voice to the ambiguity...** *"I'm so sorry you feel so sorry for your loss i.e. missing your foster family, thinking about your birth mom."*
- ▶ **Help the child identify what has been lost...** Create a "loss box, question box," , "Sad/Mad Pillow", or designate a Grief comfee doll.
- ▶ **Sometimes certain events trigger feelings** of loss such as holidays, birthdays, or the anniversary of the initial separation from birth family or foster family or birth country. Create a candle ritual to honor that loss.
- ▶ **Create transitional objects** for child to hold when there is separation, i.e. Experience book, keychain with parent's picture, necklace with locket, piece of clothing of parents that is recognizable, picture of parent and child together,
- ▶ Validate you can have love for both of your families, love for your birth family and love for you adoptive family.

***"I UNDERSTAND and ACCEPT you have love for both of your families or more?....."***





"The most difficult and traumatic memories are stored in nonverbal bodily memory. Creating words for these emotions is a fundamentally important activity. For the words to be found, the feelings have to be endured."

Seikkula & Trimble (Family Process, 2005)

# WHAT IS ADOPTION FOR KIDS

THE QUEST FOR ANSWERS



WITH JEANETTE YOFFE



WRITTEN BY BERT BALLARD & ART BY JESSICA EMMETT


# 6

An adoptees need to search is not just about curiosity, but about gaining the raw materials needed to fill in missing pieces of their lives, and derive an integrated sense of self. Adoptees report feeling closer to their adoptive parents after reunion.



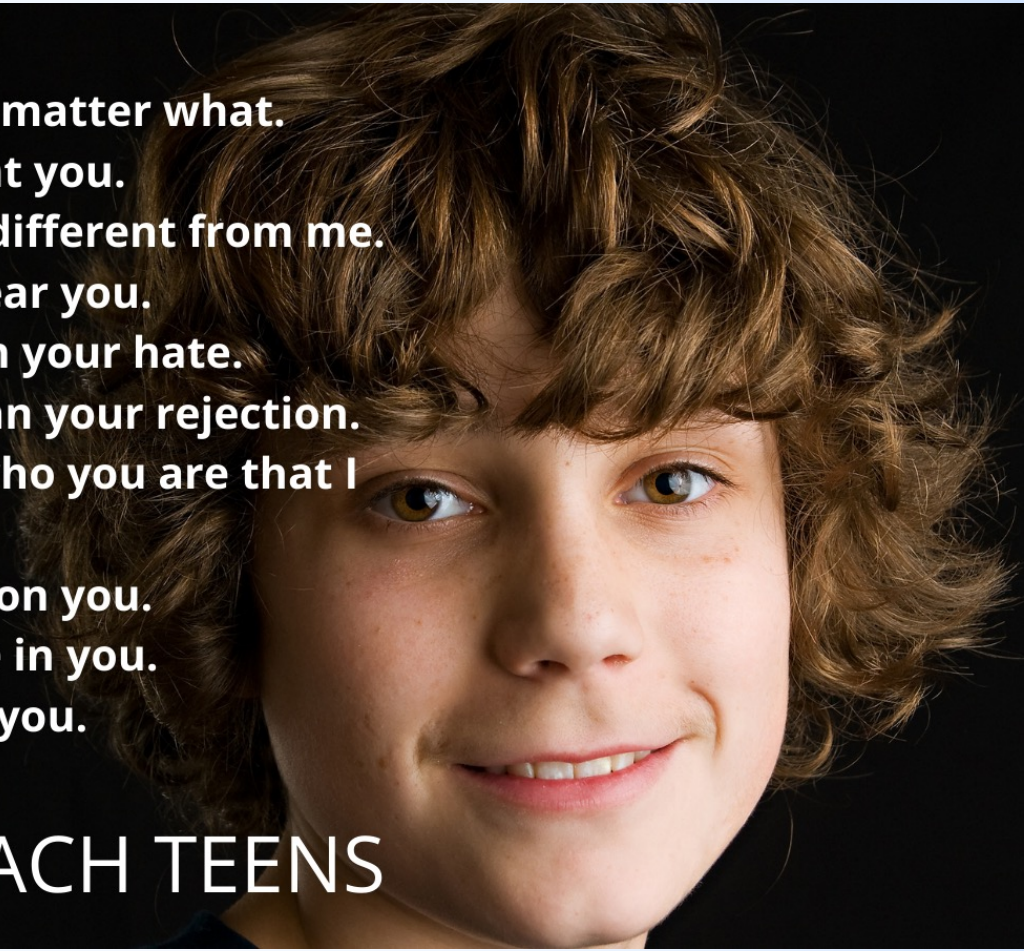
# Skill #10 Importance of Connection & Repair

- **Family is about "we."** Use "we" instead of you. "We are going to figure this out together." Focus on the problem together with the relationship.
- **I need your connection, not correction.** Lectures are not effective with me because they are actually educating me to comply with authority rather than to develop my own meaning about an issue. It's like giving a prosecuting attorney more information to work with!!!
- Please do "storytelling" with me. K.I.S.S. when relaying information Keep-It-Short-Sweet
- **I need structure, routine, repetition, and predictability**, it actually calms me down this knowing what's going to happen next beginning, middle and end. This will help me understand cause and effect. This helps me feel safe, secure, and organized.
- **\*\*\*\*\*I need you to accept responsibility for initiating repair with me when we've had BLOW UP.** If you insist I "apologize", you are communicating that I'm responsible for the continuity of the relationship. I will then think "the relationship is not important to you & it will be highly unlikely that I will have the confidence to take the first step which will lead to a downward spiral of negative distancing and possibly 'Take FOREVER'" or if I do initiate repair, I'm going to experience resentment that I had to be "the good adoptee" and be "sorry" before my parent would welcome me back again into their mind and heart.
- **NO NAME CALLING.** If you have expressed an attack on your child's character. Please repair this by taking responsibility. If not, this will compromise trust in the relationship.

- 
- ▶ You are loved.
  - ▶ You are loveable.
  - ▶ You are valuable
  - ▶ You are worthy.
  - ▶ You are attractive.
  - ▶ You are as deserving as everyone else.
  - ▶ You are smart and capable.
  - ▶ You can make and keep friends.
  - ▶ You have common traits with your peers and family.
  - ▶ You are loved for who you are, not what you do.

## HOW TO APPROACH TWEENS



- 
- We are here for you no matter what.
  - I love you. I want you.
  - I give you permission to be different from me.
  - I see you and I hear you.
  - My love is bigger than your hate.
  - My care is more lasting than your rejection.
  - It is not what you do but who you are that I love.
  - I will not give up on you.
  - I have confidence in you.
  - I am proud of you.

## HOW TO APPROACH TEENS



# As your parent, I want to be your source of healing...

- ...I will strive to help you... to feel safe with me.
- ...I will discover... what is unique about you.
- ...I will discover your strengths and vulnerabilities.
- ...I will listen to you very hard...to understand your experience.
- ...I will never leave you... when you are in distress.
- ...I will love and accept you... especially when I address your behavior.
- ...I will help you discover... what you and I both think, feel and want.
- ...I will remember ...why you argue with me, ignore, and do not trust at times.
- ...I will always remember...that attachment relationships are very important to you.
- ...I will be very clear... in telling you what is happening and going to happen.
- ...I will provide....routines and therapeutic rituals that support your mental health.
- ...I will not forget you...when we are apart.
- ...I will give you what you need ...for safety and success!

# You will know I am healing when...

- ...I can tell you how I am feeling, I will ask you for help and accept your help without a physiological reaction.
- ...I smile back!!!
- ...I receive you with "eye contact" and can take you in emotionally.
- ...I can take in "compliments and feel good about myself.
- ...My "BIG FEELINGS" decrease in intensity, frequency and duration.
- ...I feel proud of my accomplishments.
- ...I can apologize for "*what I do*" and not for "who I am."
- ...I understand my story and have compassion for my biological family.
- ...I tell you "I love you."

*We are always healing, never healed.*

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**Celia Center Support Groups:** <https://celiacenter.org>

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