



Who Am I? The Complexity of Teen Identity and Adoption

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NJ Adoption Resource Clearing House

www.njarch.org / www.kinkonnect.org



NJ Adoption Resource Clearing House (NJ ARCH) www.njarch.org

NJ ARCH: *The One-Stop Resource for those Touched by Adoption;* website includes over 1500 sortable pages of resource information on adoption and foster care. Free lending library, newsletter, training workshops, and more.

Start-up Grant from Adoption and Safe Families Act in 2003.



Website: www.njarch.org

- ▶ Services
- ▶ Resource directory
- ▶ Links to adoption related sites
- ▶ Adoption bibliography
- ▶ Upcoming events
- ▶ Newsletter
- ▶ Information on new Adoptees Birthright Act



NJ ARCH WARMLINE

Phone: 877-4ARCHNJ (877-427-2465)

E-mail: warmline@njarch.org

Our warm line is open 24 hours / 7 days per week. Warm line specialists are available to answer calls during business hours.



All contacts are confidential; calls or e-mails are returned within one business day; resolved within a week.



Resource Directory

- ▶ Adoption Agencies
- ▶ Summer Camps
- ▶ Children's Crisis Intervention Services/ Mobile Response
- ▶ Family Services Association of New Jersey
- ▶ Fetal Alcohol Diagnostic Centers
- ▶ Mental Health Professionals
- ▶ Pre and Post Adoption Counseling
- ▶ Support Groups



Free Lending Library and Article Library

- ▶ Over 3,000 books, articles and videos on adoption, foster care and kinship care in our free lending library

- ▶ Includes:
 - ▶ Professional
 - ▶ General for families and individuals
 - ▶ Children's Books
 - ▶ Spanish books



Kinship Care Clearing House (KinKonnnect) www.kinkonnnect.org

KinKonnnect: *An Information Center for Kinship Legal Guardianship and Kinship Care Families;* website includes over 600 sortable pages of information related to Kinship Care. www.kinkonnnect.org



NJ ARCH and KinKonnnect are programs of
Children's Aid and Family Services



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Workshop Objectives:



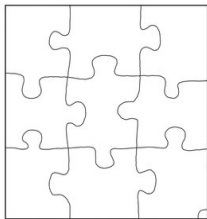
- ▶ Describe the developmental and emotional changes of adolescence.
- ▶ Identify how adoption impacts teen identity formation.
- ▶ Develop skills and techniques to help your teen navigate through adolescence.

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What pieces make up your identity?

MY IDENTITY

What different pieces make up my identity?



Think about:

- ▶ What factors shape your identity?
- ▶ Are there parts of your identity that you hide from others?
- ▶ Do you think society sees you the same way as you see yourself?

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Teen Development

The teen years are defined by growth:

- ▶ Puberty
- ▶ Hormones
- ▶ Brain growth
- ▶ Changes in sleep
- ▶ Challenges with intimate relationships and friendships
- ▶ Autonomy



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Teen Development: Emotional changes

- ▶ Why is my teen so moody and irritable?
- ▶ Difficulty regulating their emotions
- ▶ Emotions change rapidly
- ▶ Withdrawal becomes common
- ▶ Develop strategies to cope
- ▶ Embarrassment increases
- ▶ Shame
- ▶ Increasing stress and anxiety



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Trauma and Development

- ▶ Did your child experience trauma as an infant or child?
- ▶ Consider how these early experiences could've impacted their development.
- ▶ Be mindful of how their backgrounds can impact them during this time.



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Identity Formation

- ▶ During adolescence, your teen is learning more about their own identity and exploring:
 - Who am I?
 - Where do I come from?
 - What do I want to become?
 - Friends
 - Appearance
 - Music
 - Deeper opinions about more complex issues
- ▶ These are normal changes that are part of your teen's expanding identity.



Do you remember when you were a teenager?

- ▶ How invincible you felt?
- ▶ How carefree you were?
- ▶ How much energy you had?
- ▶ How many times you overslept or never slept?
- ▶ Your first fender bender?
- ▶ When you failed? A test, at sports or your parents?
- ▶ Fell in love?
- ▶ Fell apart?
- ▶ Made mistakes?
- ▶ Thought you had it all figured out?



Adoption and Teen Identity

- ▶ For adopted teens, learning about identity can be more challenging because they have a more complex story.
- ▶ To begin to talk about teen identity, we need to recognize how it was disrupted in the first years.
 - Knowledge of the self, family, and society, may be incomplete
- ▶ Teen may begin to ask more questions about birth family.
- ▶ Their questions may become more challenging.

Stages of Change Model

- ▶ Pre-contemplation
- ▶ Contemplation
- ▶ Preparation
- ▶ Action
- ▶ Maintenance
- ▶ What stage might your teen be in?



"Being a parent is like jumping out a plane with a bunch of people who don't know how to open their own chutes..."

*So, you fly around doing it for them...
Then you hit the ground, but you don't die.
You get up and cook dinner."*



What can parents do?

- ▶ What do teens need:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uPT6-ASRhzo>
- ▶ Is this a "teen" thing or is it related to adoption?
- ▶ A parent's hard job is to walk their teen through the complexity.



Reflect on Ambiguous Loss

- › Ambiguous loss: when someone is physically absent but psychologically present.
- › Identity also has to do with “Who isn’t here?”
- › Why is this loss coming up now?
- › Allow space for your teen to recognize this loss.



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Talking About Adoption

- › Teens think about their birth parents and adoption a lot more than you realize.
- › Make it a safe subject.
 - Make it known that you are willing to talk about adoption.
- › Many teens feel guilty or disloyal.
- › Don’t wait for them to bring it up.
- › Provide more details – even difficult or upsetting information about their history.



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Transracial adoption

- › Help your child learn about his/her culture.
- › Help your child connect within his/her racial group.
- › Learn about racism, prejudice and white privilege.
- › Avoid a “color blind” approach.
- › Prepare for incidents of racism or microaggressions.
- › Empower your child with coping skills.



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Build Relationships with Birth Family

- › Understand your child’s need to understand their roots.
- › If an open adoption – keep up the conversation.
- › Search – teen may express a desire to find out more information about birth parents.
- › Reunion – teen might want to contact birth family.



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Help your teen talk to others about adoption

- › Your role is to provide your teen with skills and tools they need to feel confident.
- › Help them to anticipate questions from others.
- › Reassure them that they don’t have to share every detail.
- › They are in charge of what information to share about their adoption story.



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Find Ways to Connect

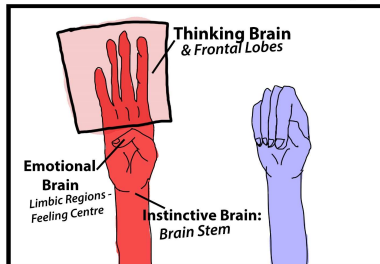
- › During the day, parents are often so busy that opportunities for connecting are overlooked.
- › It can sometimes be easier to allow time apart.
- › Notice bids for connection.
- › Turn towards by showing interest, asking questions, affirming and showing empathy.
- › Zip up your mouth – with teens less is more.



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“Flipped Lid” – When to Talk

The Hand Model of the Brain (Based on Dan Siegel's model, 2014)



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Take a breath

- ▶ Stay calm – the ability to stay calm can be challenging however, it creates the opportunity for teens to keep coming back to you.
- ▶ Breathe and give yourself time to think how you want to respond.
- ▶ Respond instead of react.
- ▶ Your calming presence will help your teen to feel calm and present.



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Step in Your Teens Shoes

- ▶ Try to understand what your teen is feeling.
- ▶ Young people appreciate when they are understood and listened to.
- ▶ This helps to develop a trusting, respectful relationship.
- ▶ Brene Brown video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Ewgu369Jw>



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Problem Solving

- ▶ Set consistent, clear limits while allowing some independence.
- ▶ Allow for gradual increase in your teen's independence.
- ▶ Differentiate between angry feelings and angry behavior.
- ▶ Give your teen a voice in decisions (collaborative problem solving).
- ▶ Reaffirm their place in your family.

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Self-care

- ▶ Give yourself permission to make time to relax and recharge (without feeling selfish).
- ▶ Think about things you enjoy on vacation and add a little more of that.
- ▶ Build in 5 minutes of deep breathing.
- ▶ Get enough sleep.
- ▶ Write down things you love about your teen and read when needed.
- ▶ What form of self-care can you use to manage your emotions?



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Summary

- ▶ Adolescence is a period of dramatic change.
- ▶ Adoption adds complexity to the developmental tasks of teen identity formation.
- ▶ Be available.
- ▶ Let your teen express their emotions without judgement.
- ▶ Let your memories of being a teen guide your parenting.
- ▶ Take care of you!



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Q & A

- › Questions?
- › Comments?
- › Closing
- › Handouts will be on the CPFA Website to download.
- › Thank you for being here today!



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Contact us

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