



Searching in Cyberspace

This morning an adoptive mom told me that her twenty year old daughter, adopted from Russia at age four, searches the internet for sites showing Russian orphanages and waiting children. An eighteen year old recently told us he found his birth mother on Facebook. Meanwhile, thousands of adoptees read blogs and chat online with others from their country, province and sometimes even orphanage.

Today, technology is all about connections. There are endless sites promising to help you find the love of your life or a long lost relative. Historically, adopted persons reconciled themselves that their birth connections were "somewhere out there" in the universe and would likely remain there. Advances in technology are changing all that.

While current technology will prove to be enormously helpful to many adopted persons, giving them access to long lost birth connections, it may also open doors that some are not ready to pass through. Adoption professionals have begun recognizing the pros and cons of today's advanced technology and are prepared to help all members of the adoption triad to think through these opportunities and challenges.

This edition of *Beyond the Horizon* focuses on the changing face of social media. While we don't know what advances in technology will bring, we do know that secrecy in adoption is a thing of the past.

"Get a Facebook" she says!

By Barb Drotos, LICSW

When I asked 16 year old Chelsea what her advice would be to other adoptive kids regarding social media, she quickly replies, "Get a Facebook!" It was that simple. Throughout our interview, she remarks with enthusiasm that it is the way to get connected and remain connected to friends and family. All kinds of family, that is.

Chelsea has a story not unlike many other kids in adoption. She has the desire and need to connect to her siblings and birth parents. An energetic and talkative teenager, social media has proven to be a clear and simple tool for her to find and to stay in touch with relatives and friends.

It is not uncommon for today's teens to have a Facebook account and to also use other forms of social media. Yet as parents and professionals, we are not always as savvy as they are in using this form of media. I learned much from Chelsea in our short time together. I learned about her priorities, her perception of the relationships in her life, and her search for identity as an adolescent.

Barb (B): Hi, Chelsea. How old are you?

Chelsea (C): 16. Well, just turned 16 last month.

B: What types of social media do you use?

C: Facebook, just Facebook.

B: How frequently do you use it?

C: Not that much. My mom does not let me use it but I do anyway. I have over 400 "friends."

B: Why doesn't she let you use it?

C: I don't know. I think trust. It's an issue we are working on.



B: So, would you say you are on Facebook once a week, once a day?
C: I'd say up to once a day.

B: Do you communicate with friends or family?
C: Both!

B: Can you give me some examples of topics of conversation? What do you talk about on-line?

C: Lots of things. School, friends. I also found my birth dad. Well, he found me. Through this other guy who I don't even know! He wrote to me and told me that my dad was looking for me. So, I wrote to him. He lives in Kansas, though, so I have not met him and probably won't ever. I also met my brother and uncle on Facebook. It was good to find out a few things, since I never met my dad. It was cool. I didn't even know that I had an older brother and I found that out. I was psyched. I like writing to him.

B: When you found your dad, did you talk to your mom or bring it into counseling? Did you talk about it?

C: Yes, I did. Both. I talked to my mom and I talked about it with my counselor. I also talk to my step dad on line. I had not seen him in a long time because he went to prison. I got an apology out of him. That was really great. He said that he was sorry that I have been through so much in my life. I can't even get an apology out of my mom, and she is the one that I really want it from! So, it's good to have an apology for some things that happened.

B: Do you talk to them now on Facebook?

C: My dad, not really. But my uncle and my brother, we write a lot.

B: What are some positive things about using Facebook?

C: You can find almost anyone you want to! I found this friend of mine from when I was younger. It's awesome, that we found each other on Facebook.!

B: What are some negative things about it? Something you do not like?

C: Stalker people. You cannot delete them.

B: What do you mean by "stalker people"?

C: You see you can see anyone on your friend's page and then also their friends; it keeps going and going. So, if I have 400 friends, I can go to the pages of any of their friends. And they can look at my friends. There are people who just keep writing to you and you don't even know them!

B: Yeah, that is complicated. Does it scare you?

C: No, not really. You just have to be careful who you talk to.

B: Do you have advice for other adoptive kids who want to use Facebook?

C: Get a Facebook!! And, be careful what you put on there. Everyone can see it. There are some strange "groups" out there. They are like these things you join and then information gets passed around. Stay away from those.

B: And do you have advice for adoptive parents?

C: Yes. Get a Facebook! Go on line and talk to your kids. Let them have a Facebook (she smiles).

Chelsea has an outgoing personality and is articulate about the fact that she enjoys this way of connecting with others in her life. Is it frightening to think that she and so many other adopted adolescents have been using social media as a means to find and connect with birth family? Is that intimidating us as adoptive parents and professionals? It is a reality of the world today. It is estimated that 73% of today's teens are using social media (<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1484/social-media-mobile-internet-use-teens-millennials-fewer-blog>). In our own WHFC survey of adoptive parents, 60% of you are using Facebook. Therein lays a discrepancy. It would greatly benefit us to become more familiar with social media and embrace it. Do not allow it to divide you from your teen. Make it a way of connecting with him/her. Think of it as a way of "speaking their language" while also creating safety for them on-line.

Chelsea used social media to find and connect with birth family. This is becoming one way that teens are able to initiate the process of search. If you are connected to your teen through social media and you are open in communicating with your teen about birth family, then your teen is more likely to include you in the decisions regarding search. Just as we would advise you to talk to your child about adoption throughout their lives, proactively discussing the option of search through social media is critical in today's world. Some teens have questions about search and birth family and some do not. For those who are curious and have the desire to search for information, they are inevitably going to consider social media as an avenue at some point. Be in the conversation with them and be on line with them.

Some helpful tips for on internet safety can be found on the following sites: <http://www.onguardonline.gov/topics/safety-tips-tweens-teens.aspx>

<http://www.netismartz.org/safety/safetytips.htm> (this site also has internet safety pledges for tweens and teens)

Why should you become a "FAN" of Wide Horizons on Facebook?

When you "Like" or become a fan of Wide Horizons For Children on Facebook, you will:

- get updates about our events
- connect with other adoptive parents
- view and share photos
- learn about new WHFC programs

... and much more! To become a fan go to www.facebook.com/widehorizons or log in to your Facebook account and search for "Wide Horizons For Children." It's easy! Become a fan today!

A Pocket Guide to Social Media and Kids

Source: <http://blog.nielsen.com/nielsenwire/consumer/a-pocket-guide-to-social-media-and-kids/>

Digital media is an enabling framework for brands, parents and educators—it's on demand, interactive, sensing and connected. And social media adds expression and sharing capabilities. A vast menu of web and mobile tools has been developed to facilitate information sharing and commentary on the Web. Applications and outlets have kept pace as consumers rush to populate blogs, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, forums, message boards and online communities.

Their influence is immediate, highly viral and authentic...

In the marketing world, the buzz is all about consumer-generated media. Companies have discovered that no paid-for communication campaign has the impact of missives penned by consumers grounded in relevant, first-hand experience. Their influence is immediate, highly viral and authentic, with an extremely long tail attributable to archived material.

Giving voice

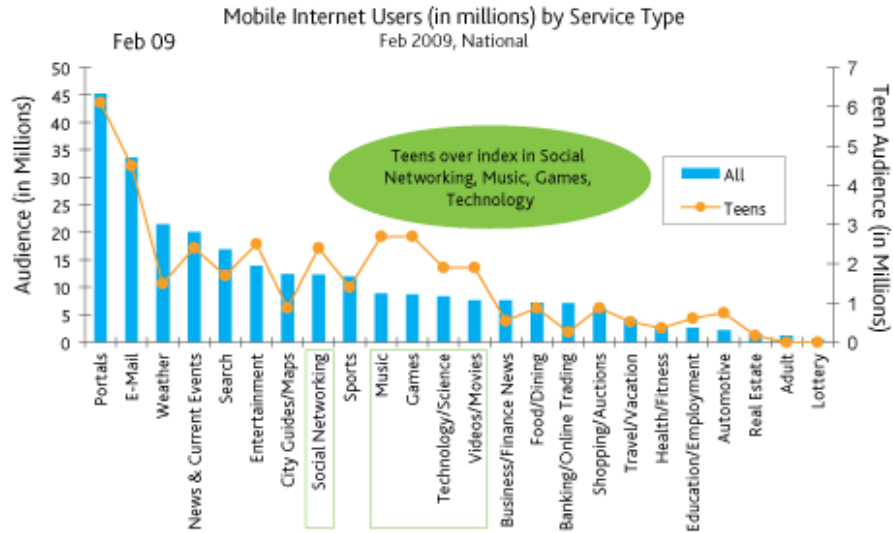
What motivates people to go online and on the record with personal opinions and information? In part, it is the very human need to be heard and to connect with others. It is the desire to make a difference, to influence the world around us. It is the drive to evangelize on behalf of the things and the people we love. And it is the ongoing quest for authenticity in a world governed by image.

Mobile devices represent a major impetus behind the social media movement, driving part of the 250% audience increase for the year ending February 2009. Teens represented 19% of the 12.3 million active social networkers.

Childhood connections

To adults, cell phones are a communications device. To children, they are a lifeline. Consider that the average 13-17 year old sends more than 2,000 text messages per month. Compared with the total mobile Internet population, teens are much bigger consumers of social media, music, games, videos/movies and technology/science.

Social Networking Is A Key Frontier



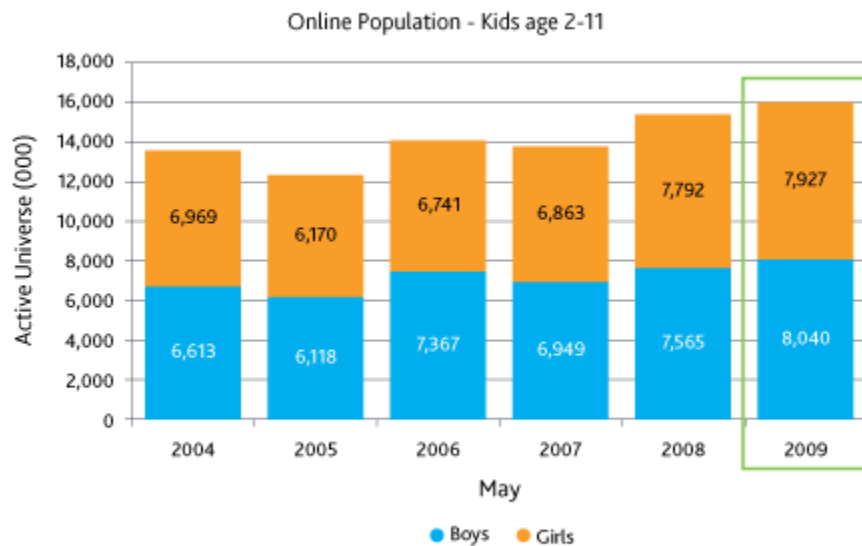
Source: The Nielsen Company

Parental use of advanced data services mirrors that of their tween kids. If their children text, then 80% of parents will text as well. Although following their kids' lead on devices and media, parents still set limits. Six in ten forbid downloads onto their children's phone for financial and security reasons.

TV times

Even as social media dominates press coverage, TV viewing is on the rise among children and teens. Younger children age 2–11 spend almost 102 hours per month watching traditional TV at home—a 17% increase from May of 2008 to the second quarter of 2009. The increasingly popular time-shifted TV option averaged 5:26 hours during the timeframe, a 26% year-over-year increase.

Growing Up, And Growing Fast



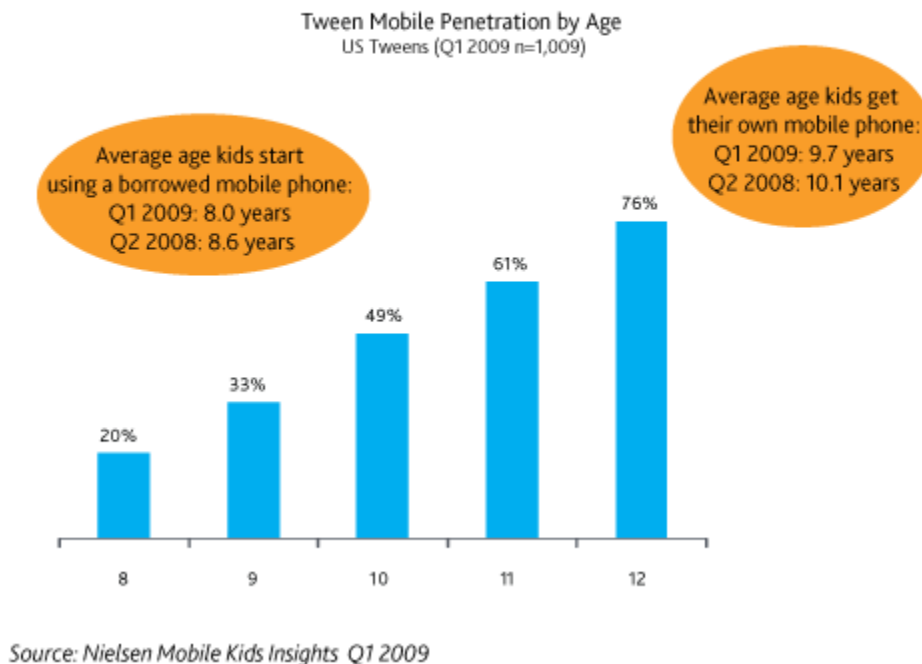
Source: The Nielsen Company

Traditional TV viewing expanded at a slower rate (13.5%) among teenagers than among younger kids—to 101+ hours, and teen time-shifted viewing showed a 35% growth rate with 4:54 hours of watching time. Interestingly, Internet use was down (-15%), to 10:22 hours per month. The biggest media gainer was video viewing on the Internet, where Hulu and YouTube helped spike time by 66% for a total 2:41 viewing hours. Teens deployed mobile phones to catch videos, spending 6:30 hours with mobile video streams—a 20% year-over-year increase.

Young enough

The debate rages on: what is the right age to give a child their own phone? The answer seems to be younger every year, and if you don't give them a phone, they'll just borrow one. In 2008, the average age when kids started to borrow a cell phone was 8.6 years; in 2009, it was down to just 8 years old. As to ownership, in 2008, a child typically was given a mobile phone at age 10.1 years; by 2009, it was down to 9.7 years old.

Phone Usage/Ownership Pushing Down In Age



The next time you hear “everybody’s got one”, the fact is, that classic play may be true. By age 10, roughly half of children own a mobile phone. By age 11, six in ten own a mobile phone. By age 12, fully three-fourths of all children have their own mobile phone.

Game on

How do they use phones? Two-thirds of tween mobile phone owners took pictures with their camera phones in the last year. Half spent time playing the pre-installed games. Four in ten activated the speakerphone feature. Twenty-eight percent filmed a video clip, and 24% listened to the MP3 capability.

More than half of the youngest (age 8) mobile phone owners used their cell to send text messages in the last 12 months. That figure soared to 81% for 12-year-old mobile users. The vast majority of text messages were directed to friends and family (90%). All other cell phone uses tracked in the single digits, such as voting on TV shows (8%), buying a ringtone or music (9%), buying wallpaper or a screensaver (4%), buying a game (5%), responding to an ad (5%) or looking up their horoscope (4%).

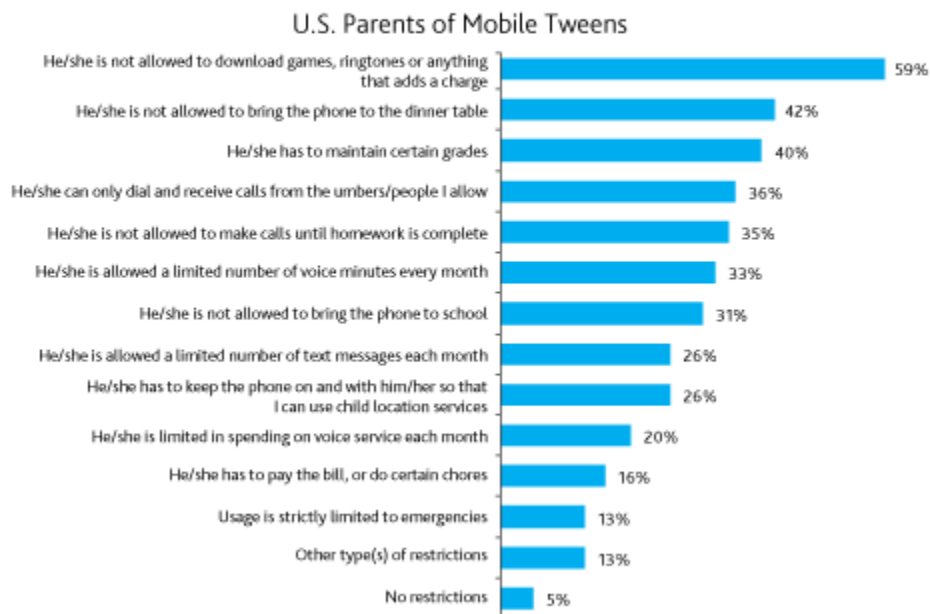
More than half of parents do not apply any parental controls...

Parental controls

Surprisingly, given all the publicity about cyber stalking and cyber bullies, more than half of parents do not apply any parental controls offered by service providers to their children’s cell phone usage—although the use of these paid-for controls is increasing. Among those who do assert these built-in controls, 20% limit the number of calls, texts or instant messages, followed by download limits (17%), talk time or voice minute allocations (16%), mobile website access limits (15%), locator services and restricted in/outgoing number access (13% each), time of day restrictions (11%), and alerts to unauthorized texts, IMs or callers (6% each).

While the use of paid-for controls may not be high, just about all parents restrict how tweens use their phone and six in ten prohibit downloads that incur charges. Not taking the phone to the dinner table and maintaining certain grades are other rules put in place by 42% and 40% of parents, respectively.

Parent-Imposed Restrictions on Mobile Phone Use



Source: Nielsen Mobile Kids Insights Q1 2009

Coming challenges

From a media perspective, choice leads to fragmentation, and ultimately, divided consumer attention and diminished import for a single medium. Even as social media gains popularity among the general public and marketers, there is no accepted benchmark or measure of effectiveness, making it difficult to forecast or predict the impact of a campaign.

A particular challenge for companies wanting to incorporate social media into their communications arsenal is the blurred line between private and public information, given the highly personal nature of many postings. Advertising models are still in flux, exploring boundaries of ethics, taste and transparency.

Untapped potential

Social media presents a world of new possibilities. Not a better mousetrap, but a new operating DNA for interacting with consumers. It can serve as an early radar or warning system, alerting to trouble spots and yielding fresh insights.

For parents, old rules still govern new media. They will need to stay engaged, enrolled and involved in their children's lives. The motto "trust but verify" applies. For advertisers, old rules also are still in force. The need for transparency and trustworthiness becomes amplified on new media circuits. Ultimately, the nature of new media will prove its value, as all parties engage in an interactive, ongoing, mutually beneficial conversation. Social media is organic and ever-evolving, constantly presenting new opportunities and challenges.



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MOVIE REVIEW: *The Kids Are All Right*

Directed by Lisa Cholodenko

Winner of the Teddy Award for Best Featured Film at the 2010 Berlin International Film Festival

Review written by Deb Shrier, MSW, LICSW

I tend to like movies that are surprising – not predictable – with great actors and an even better story line. As a fan of Annette Bening, Julianne Moore and Mark Ruffalo, this movie had a great deal going for it before the reel even began. This summer's release of *The Kids are All Right* did have some of the right ingredients that make for a good film, yet the overall predictability of this film was disappointing. Nevertheless, *The Kids are All Right* is a dramatic-comedy that is thought provoking and entertaining. It has several controversial issues that have sparked a flurry of discussion amongst viewers.

Although the story is not about adoption per se, it does hold many of the same components that are involved with unknown history: wonder, interest and confusion. The story line is not complicated – an 18 year old teen (“Joni” played by Mia Wasikowska) is getting ready to leave for college and is asked by her 15 year old brother (“Laser” played by Josh Hutcherson) to help search for their biological father, an anonymous sperm donor. Interestingly enough, Donor Dad (“Paul” played by Mark Ruffalo) is contacted by the fertility clinic. Not only is he easy to locate but his lifestyle as a single, owner of a restaurant is extremely appealing when contrasted to the busy-ness of Joni and Laser’s family.

The children’s parents (“Nic and Jules” played by Annette Bening and Julianne Moore), seem to have built a good foundation for their children in terms of their openness around their journey to the family. Sperm donation is no longer a secret: assisted reproduction is an option for many singles/couples who would like to have children. Similar to adoption, discussions regarding “search and reunion” for donors are becoming more widespread. (This has similar elements to how adoption was viewed 20 years ago.) Each parent has her own unique reactions to the idea of search and subsequently, reunion. Their concern, question and ambivalence about meeting Paul are reasonably normal for any parent – he is a stranger to the family despite his biological connection. Throughout the film, the adult characters spend a great deal of time sorting through this “relationship” to the family unit. The teenagers, interestingly enough, are figuring it out but with less obvious external turmoil.



The key focus of this film is clearly on “relationships.” Each of the characters has a relationship with one another and the compelling factor in this film is how those relationships play out. For the two moms, their relationship has endured parenting newborns to teenagers, career challenges and life changes as well as what it means to be a couple in spite of a long-term partnership/marriage. (Special note here: these experiences are clearly not unique to same sex couples.) The teens are also exploring their relationships – within the family as well as outside. Joni is about to launch from the nest and navigate the world on her own. Laser remains at home in the midst of his own self-discovery. They are both at critical points of their own identity development and varying stages of their relationships with their moms as well as one another.

Paul’s entrance shakes up this neatly organized family. This brings to light one of the controversial issues raised in this film: what is Paul’s relationship to the family (as a unit as well as to each individual)? Although Paul is related through biology, he has not shared history or experiences in order to be truly embraced. He seems easily accepted by some of the family – and maybe too easily at that. Where does he belong? What does he know about being a father and what truly defines fatherhood? Now that he has contact with this

family, does his biological connection entitle him to a yearly invite at Thanksgiving Dinner? Perhaps the answer will be revealed in a sequel to address the aftermath of this reunion (although none has been planned.)

In my communication with other moviegoers (many in complex families), it is not clear if this film is a “must see.” For some, the portrayal of the same sex couple was too choreographed and somewhat offensive. Others found the logistics of search and reunion oversimplified, predictable and unrealistic. Yet other viewers describe *The Kids are All Right* as an entertaining movie about the realities of contemporary families and the varying challenges faced in long-term relationships. As I was reminded by a colleague, it is just a movie.

ASK THE SOCIAL WORKER

Dear Social Worker,

I started an adoption blog 3 years ago during my homestudy and it became quite popular among my friends and in the larger adoptive community. My 6 year old has been home a year now and just started school last week. At our first conference, his kindergarten teacher wanted to talk about his behavioral needs in the classroom. I was surprised because it seemed that he was doing quite well. It turns out that she reads my blog and she is worried because of some of what I have written. On the one hand, I feel confident about what I wrote and hope it will be helpful for her as a teacher. On the other hand, I feel badly that she is anticipating trouble based on my accounts of some very bad times right after he came home. Do you think I made a mistake writing about my son? What should I say to his teacher? Do you have any advice for adoptive parents about how and when to include stories about their child on their blogs?

Sincerely,
Jessica from CA

Dear Jessica,

This is a wonderful question. It is not surprising that your six year old child had some difficult behavior in his first year home and writing about him may have been helpful to you at the time and may also help other adoptive parents understand the realities of the initial adjustment. But, as you pointed out, it may also have some implications for how others see your son. The important question is how you should respond now to this teacher. I would suggest that you spend some time with her and make sure that she has some understanding of adoption issues. Let her know that the behaviors you were seeing at home during his first year may be a factor in the classroom but may not. Some children struggle with the intimacy of a family setting but never receive a bad report from the teachers. Other children, have attention or sensory issues that may make the school setting difficult for them. Make a plan to check back in with the teacher after the first month, to discuss how your son is doing in her classroom. (This is probably a good idea for any 6 year old starting school for the first time.) Ask her to observe your son as she would any new child in her classroom and let her know that you would be happy to work with her to address any issues that come up.

The internet, and blogs in particular, have really changed the world of adoption. Blogs have undoubtedly contributed to a much better public understanding of the homestudy process and what it takes to adopt a child, making adoption more accessible and less scary to potential adoptive parents. Time after time, during initial conversations and education with adoptive parents, they tell me something they have learned from reading accounts of adoption on the internet. Internet chat groups and blogs have also done a remarkable job of connecting adoptive parents to one another during the process and after their children come home. Parents facing similar challenges can share research they have done and insights they have gained with one another. A parenting community is a critical component of raising children. Unique parenting concerns related to adoption, however,

Some Suggestions

Consider your audience: Who do you want to have information about your child’s adoption and early life with you? For most of us, there are people who have been linked in to your blog by families and friends, just like the teacher in the question above, and you may not be aware that they are reading your blog. What information are you truly comfortable sharing about your child with this wider group?

Decide what information is off limits: You may know that your description of an amazing visit with your child’s birth family in Ethiopia might be really interesting to your extended family and other adoptive parents to whom you have become close. However, this is precious information to your child and, at least in the early years, your child may be too young to know or understand many of the details. Is there a way in which you can talk about the insights and experience you had during this visit without sharing any facts?

Do not be afraid to delay writing or to take a break: There are critical junctures in an adoption when your world is upside down: when you first receive your referral, when you meet your new child, when you have a visit with birth family. It is tempting for parents who blog or chat on the internet daily to want to update internet friends immediately. Do not feel pressured to update in real time - let people know that you are going to take some time off to adjust to your new child. If you are afraid you will forget some of what you want to share, take notes in a private journal. Then, when you are ready to resume writing, you will have had some time to consider what you most want to share with everyone.

Seek help first: Blogging or engaging in an internet chat group during a crisis with your child is not a good

cannot always be understood at the local playground or on the soccer field. The internet has helped adoptive parents, who would otherwise be isolated, find a community.

Your question, however, brings up an important point. Once children are home, your blog is no longer just about you and your adoption process. It is also about your child, who is too young to make decisions about what to share or not share, or who should be able to read his/her story. Just as we reconsider everything else using the lens of a parent, I think it is important to consider how we talk about our children in the new world of social media.

Lisa Lovett, MSW, LICSW
Post Adoption Counselor, MA Office

idea. While people reading your blog may have ideas or suggestions, it is not likely that this is the quickest way to gain some relief and support from your crisis. Instead, use your resources - call your adoption social worker, a member of the Post Adopt team, or a therapist familiar with adoption and begin to get the help you need.

FAMILY STORIES: When I was young in Awasa

When I was young in Awasa my Dad would visit me on a special occasion because he was in the marines. One day a person came to my house and told me my father was dead. I was very depressed for many weeks.

When I was young in Awasa me and my friends would make the trophy for our soccer championships. Me and my friend Dagam would always win the championship and get the trophy.

When I was young in Awasa my mom got very ill. She stayed inside in bed feeling very ill. One day when I went in the bedroom I saw my mom with her eyes closed. I came closer and felt her. Then I said to my friend's mom to come. My friend's mom came and felt my mom and she told me she was dead. I cried and cried at that same day. I thought to myself God, why is this happening to me. My Aunt came to take care of me but every day there was a hole in my life.



When I was young in Awasa my Aunt did every thing a mother could do. One day my Aunt thought it was the best for me to and live some where else because it was not safe in Awasa. I went to the orphanage. When I got to the orphanage I met a lot of friends but I always stood at the gate waiting for my family.

One day I saw a car and that was my new family. I ran to my mom and hugged her. I was so grateful that I had a great family. When I flew to America I was frightened because it was my first time flying. When I got to America I saw my brother. I was so joyed. Every day I remember my life back in Awasa and what got me here today.

A school essay written by fourth-grader, Mahari, based on the children's book "When I was young in the Mountains." Mahari was adopted from Ethiopia at the age of five through Wide Horizons For Children in 2006. He currently resides in Virginia with his loving mother Kimberly, sister Emily and brother Troy. Mahari continues to play soccer and remembers his friends from Awassa and the orphanage fondly. In 2007 he raised over \$800 for Wide Horizons' humanitarian aid efforts in Ethiopia in lieu of birthday gifts and this year he collected several boxes of soccer equipment - cleats, shin guards, deflated soccer balls and a pump - which are being donated to children at Horizon House in Ethiopia.

Talking With Teachers

Starting a new school year can be an exciting yet stressful time for any family. Every child and parent needs time to get comfortable with a new teacher and a different set of expectations. It also takes teachers time to get to know each family's child and to understand their unique needs and individual learning styles. In the case of the adoptive family this time of year can present even more than the typical challenges.

Children who have experienced less than optimal care in the beginning of their life (orphanage care, abusive and/or neglectful birth home, extended or multiple foster care placements, etc) often have challenges (attachment issues, behavioral or learning issues, developmental delays, sensory integration needs, etc) that impact their school experience. And all adoptees (even those adopted at birth in their own country) have a need for their school environment to be an example of positive adoption language, and understanding. For these reasons and more adoptive families often benefit from beginning each new school year with a parent teacher conference.

Download the PDF at http://www.heartofthematterseminars.com/images/stories/pdf_files/talking_with_teachers.pdf.

EDUCATIONAL & CULTURAL EVENTS AT WHFC

Register today for upcoming WHFC workshops and family events:

Date	Event	Location
TBD	RI PAC's 3rd Open Forum	Providence, RI
9/25/2010	Ethiopia Family Gathering	New Castle, NH
10/2/2010	New York Family Picnic 2010	Oyster Bay, NY
10/4/2010	Is my adopted child disorganized, unprepared & impulsive? Discussion of executive function challenges	Online
10/16/2010	RI Family Pumpkin Picking - hosted by PAC	Johnston, RI
10/23/2010	Clambake & Auction - benefit Humanitarian Aid	Newburyport, MA
10/30/2010	Eastern European Family Fest	Belmont, MA
11/6/2010	Parade of Nations: A Multicultural Fair	Dalton, MA
11/20/2010	Latin American Fest	Belmont, MA
12/6/2010	On Becoming a Multicultural Family: An interactive discussion	Online

Additional events are added frequently. View the [complete schedule and register online](#).

Systematic Training for Effective Parenting (S.T.E.P.) at WHFC

WHFC is pleased to offer a 4 week training course for parents with children ages 0-6 years old. This course will teach a combination of preventive as well as reactive communication and problem solving techniques. S.T.E.P. will be led by Lani Peterson, Psychologist and Parenting Coach, with assistance from Pat Hoopes, WHFC Director of Clinical Services.

Place: WHFC's office in Waltham, MA

Dates: October 14, October 21, October 28, and November 4

Time: 7:00 - 9:00 PM

For additional information or to register, contact Lani Peterson at 978.475.1047 or lanip@arnzengroup.com