



A Season of Change

by Pat Hoopes, MSW, LICSW
Director of Clinical Services

"An Ounce of Prevention..."

Do teachers still ask students to write essays titled "What I did on my summer vacation?"

While looking back may be a good exercise for our kids, as parents we know that we need to be one step ahead of them at all times! To that end, I'd like to suggest a *mental essay* for parents called "What I will do to prepare my child for the end of summer and the beginning of (fill in the blank)."

Whether your child is starting kindergarten or going off to college, transitions raise a range of emotions from joyful excitement to downright terror. Most kids fall somewhere in the middle. Children with a history of trauma and loss may be among the most vulnerable in new situations. Some children who join their families through adoption may be among this group.

Before beginning your *mental essay*, consider the following questions:

- What do I know about my child that might make her vulnerable in the transition ahead?
- Who can I line up to act as an ally for my child on my behalf?
- What conversations should I be having with my child to prepare her for what lies ahead?

What do you know about your child that might make her vulnerable in the transition ahead? Consider some of the following:



- Your child has recently joined your family and is starting school in your community for the first time. Is your child ready to leave you? The last time your child left her home (orphanage, foster home, etc.), she never went back. What will happen when she is sent to school?
 - The summer has been a difficult time for your child. Perhaps overnight camp or staying with family didn't work out so well. Do you know how your child is feeling about what happened? Do "upset feelings" linger?
- Has your child suddenly begun asking questions about her adoption? Has something occurred that prompted this?
 - Your child had been the victim of bullying/teasing/racism at school. Will this school year be more of the same?

There are so many variables, some adoption related and many not, that may affect your child's ability to "start off on the right foot." Take some time to consider your child's current emotional well being.

Who will advocate for your child when you cannot be there for her?

It is important to line up as many "allies" for your child as possible. These may be day care providers, teachers, school counselors, religious educators, babysitters or other adults who are responsible for your child's well being in your absence. Some tips for forming allies include:

- Ask for time to discuss your concerns. Acknowledge that you may be just one of several parents asking for a meeting. Be respectful and flexible around meeting times.
- Be specific about what concerns you have and ask for ideas around how you can work together to support your child's success.
- Share your child's "triggers" and discuss concrete plans for how to intervene if your child needs help.

- Ask teachers and others about their experience with children who were adopted. Find out if a "family tree" or other assignments that might pose a challenge for your child will be assigned.
- Find out what the best times are to follow up. Let your "ally" know that you want to stay in touch.

Take time to talk with your child about what to expect.

There are "pitfalls" awaiting all children as they enter new situations and the more vulnerable the child, the more pitfalls await them. Common pitfalls include: missing mom and dad, feeling lonely, not "fitting in" and feeling "picked on." Some adopted children are especially vulnerable to feelings associated with separations from their parents and related difference. Parents can help by using the following strategies:

- Anticipation - Have that conversation about what might happen and how your child might feel. For example, "Sometimes being on the bus for the first time feels uncomfortable. You may not know where to sit or who to sit with. You might feel scared or a bit sad."
- Normalize - Make it "OK" to have these feelings. "This is the way most kids feel in the beginning. Sometimes these feelings go away quickly and sometimes it takes a while."
- Strategize - Make concrete suggestions to help your child cope. "Would you like to bring Buddy (i.e., stuffed animal) along in your back pack? He can sit with you on the bus and be your bus pal. Then, when you get to school he can go in your pack and wait for you until the bus ride home."

Anxiety about riding the bus is just one example of conversations you can have with your child to prepare them for the transition ahead.

Hopefully you are ready to begin your mental essay. Find some quiet time, put your feet up and make a cup of tea! Being able to anticipate pitfalls and missteps allows you to reduce your stress level and be better able to help your child cope with hers.

Good luck!

GLIDING INTO FALL: Sensory challenges in the new season

by Barb Drotos, MSW, LICSW
Post Adoption Counselor, NH Office

Already? Getting ready for the school year? It's still summer! But with adoption, getting ready is the name of the game in so many ways. Adoptive parents become experts in "getting ready" for so many things, from the beginning of the adoption journey and then at many stages throughout the life of their child. School is just around the corner and whether you have children who are infants, toddlers, school age, or teens, there is a rhythm to the seasons and children sense this. They know this intuitively, and "summer into fall" is a time of transition.

What do children sense?

- Changes in the weather
- The smell of different flowers blooming and leaves starting to change
- The ocean or lake waters are warmer
- The night air is starting to get cooler
- The smell of barbeque grills in the neighborhood at dinner time
- No mosquitoes or black flies to swat and consequently, gone is the routine smell of bug spray
- The shorter length of daylight hours
- The hurry of school shopping, buying fall clothing, and stores being more crowded
- The flutter of trying to "fit everything in" before the summer ends
- Daily routines and bedtime rituals beginning again, to prepare for the school schedule

The list goes on and on... but rest assured that no matter what their age, your child senses the rhythm of the season about to change!

In adoption, change is especially worth paying attention to. Some children have experienced significant change, transition, and loss. It is important to pay attention to transitions and the loss or uncertainty that it can trigger for children. Children need reassurance that although there is change, there is a predictable, reassuring rhythm to change itself. What a complex lesson to learn! So, how do we help our children prepare for change, something as simple and predictable as a change in season? Some of the following suggestions might be helpful:

- **Read with your child.** There are a number of books about change, loss, or the seasons. There are books for every age group.
- **Draw with your child.** Draw picture of the seasons and use the opportunity to talk about the changes coming up.
- **Take photos of the environment and notice the seasonal changes.** Review photos from seasons past to note differences.
- **Point out the senses and what is changing.** Smell the flowers or leaves together and notice the differences. Touch the ocean water and talk about how is August so it is warmest but soon will be getting colder again.
- **Use a calendar and mark the days each morning or every night.** Help them to understand, both visually and experientially, how time passes and with that, some things change and some things remain the same.
- **Make a visual calendar of the current month and the upcoming month ahead,** with photos, drawings, or symbols of the day's events.
- **Read about creating a Life Book** and begin one with your child. Start with documenting the present time and the upcoming months.



Your child needs to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the new season is coming and although that brings change, there is predictability and comfort in their relationship with you. You can cherish the moments of the summer sun and playtime while also preparing for the new schedules of the fall. This is a perfect way to let your children know that change is coming and there are things to look forward to.

Summer is an amazing time for families. It is a time for building memories and can be filled with moments that help us to establish healthy, strong bonds with our children. For adoptive families, this is especially important. Take advantage of the warmer weather and be outside together, splash in the water and run your toes through the grass. Make sandcastles and picnic at the park. But also remember to honor the foundation of adoption in your family. Your child needs to know that you are paying attention...to their adjustment, to their transitions, to them as they glide into the fall season with all of the love and guidance that you have to offer them.

TRANSITIONS & TEENS

by Deb Shrier, MSW, LICSW

Post Adoption Counselor, MA Office



"...There are a thousand emotionally charged transitions that we all face in our lives, and most come without a road map..." Jeffrey Zaslow, *The Girls from Ames*

If you are a parent of a teenager, you have probably already encountered a handful of normal adolescent behaviors that are set in place to help with the upcoming separation at the end of high school. Some of these behaviors can be interesting and exciting to see, others can be very challenging. If you listen to conversations of young people as they think about their life beyond high school, you can easily detect a host of varied feelings. *Excitement. Doubt. Confusion. Relief.* The years between 13 through 18 have been aptly termed "Identity vs. Confusion" by Danish-American psychologist Erik Erikson. This period describes the life stage where all adolescents launch into adulthood.

Consider yourself during your teen years. When you were a teen, what were your joys, challenges, hopes or dreams? How did your experiences during this time influence your life today? Are any of those experiences events you hope your child will share? How did you make your decisions on "next steps" – which decisions are you grateful for and which ones did you stumble through? Try to understand some of the feelings that your child may be facing.

Throughout high school, your child has been finding their way towards greater independence, learning more about how he/she exists outside of your family as he/she tries to understand the answer to the question we all experience – "who am I?" Although your teen may present as excited and eager for this next stage, recognize that some underlying anxiety or fear about their plans after graduation is truly normal. Will they get a job? Learn a trade? Travel? Marry? Attend college? Consider a "gap year" before beginning a college? Live away or stay at home?

With so many choices, how will your child choose the "right one"?

For all teens, these decisions mark another transition and loss in life. These two areas are both aspects of an adopted person's life that can present challenges. Transition is clearly a loss of control – even if the teen has confidently made the decision of what job to take, what college to attend or even where to live. As parents, the key is being able to emotionally support your child as they move through this very normal life stage, being respectful and giving the teen room to grow.

Things your child might be thinking about

As your child approaches his/her later teen years, they are moving from extreme thinking to more interpretive thought. They have moved from simple black and white thoughts to issues that are more grey. Fortunately, they are beginning to consider possible outcomes and their influence on situations. Some of his or her thoughts might include:

Who am I?

What did I inherit from my birth parents? (Additional thoughts about birthparents are very common during this life stage including search and greater interest in biological history.)

What did I learn from my adoptive parents? Will they still love me, no matter what?

As I meet new people, what do I share about myself?

How do I fit in with others? Will I make friends – what if I don't?

What if I fail? What if I succeed?

Six simple tips to supporting your child at this stage:

1. **Reassure place in family:** Be sure you share with your son that he will always be your child – that relationship doesn't end once they move out, turn 18, get married or become a parent.
2. **Respect where your child is at:** some young people are not ready to venture out into the world yet. Realize that your son may be interested in living at home for a while before taking on another responsibility.
3. **Resist making excuses for your child.** Find pride in what your child chooses or accomplishes.
4. **While tempting, don't try to "fix" your daughter's challenges.** Part of her experience is being able to resolve issues on her own. Certainly, let her know that you are available for assistance, if needed.
5. **Be a part of her life but recognize the need to for her to be separate.**
6. **Continue to love and nurture the unique person your teen has become.** As a parent, you will always remain an important person in his/her life.

AUTUMN AND ADOPTION

by Barb Drotos, MSW, LICSW
Post Adoption Counselor, NH Office

With the change of seasons come many changes. As children, this is the time when we study nature, the life cycle, and the beauty of the changes in New England. "Leaf Peepers" travel far and wide to come to New Hampshire to look at our brilliant foliage in September and October. We celebrate with fall festivals in every corner of our amazing state!

Adoption brings with it many themes and one of those is grief and loss. Autumn is a beautiful way to talk to children about loss in a manner that honors that change is inevitable and with it, brings beauty that is beyond compare. Autumn is a perfect time to talk about change as a natural part of life and with change, there is amazing opportunity. Joy and sadness exist in the same story and this is a metaphor for children in adoption that is tangible, physical, and easy to understand. At the same time that we marvel at the brilliant colors and variety of foliage, we also know that the leaves will fall and die until they reappear in the spring with new life. At the same time that there was a separation from birth family and birth culture for adoptive children, your child joins your family and begins a most precious journey. The earlier children begin to understand both of these elements, the easier it will be for them to integrate when they are older. Simply stated, they are more likely to have an inner peace that comes with understanding and acceptance of themselves.



The concepts of adoption become more complex and layered as children age and their questions become deeper. Autumn is the opportune time to lay the groundwork for future conversations about adoption, family, birth, death, and change. For children who are not adopted, the conversation about autumn is also filled with the joy of witnessing the brilliant hues and preparing for the sadness of loss as the leaves fall and become part of the earth. The cycle of life is a natural part of the conversation, regardless of your religion or belief system. Parents everywhere, I encourage you to take this conversation to the next level. Joy and sadness in the same conversation; it exists in many areas of our lives. It is a complex, but important lesson. For children and families in adoption, this is critical. It is about remembering the past, while also rejoicing in our present and our future together.

You can weave this conversation into any number of fall activities. Here are some suggestions that will help you to dive right in!

Fall festivals:

Read your local newspaper to notice listings of pumpkin and harvest festivals near you

Leaf pressing:

Remember this from elementary school? Collect leaves and press them between contact paper from your local craft store.

Crafts:

Your local craft store will be packed with ideas this time of year. Include your child in finding some that involve leaves, trees, or seeds that are native to your area.

Nature walks:

Visit your local Audubon Center or state park for trail maps. Bring a camera to take nature photos or a bag to collect leaves, pine needles, and seeds.

Have fun!

FAMILY STORIES

Our Transforming Family by Alison Noyce



Our boys, Mikias and Jemberu, love playing with Transformers. They are cool toys that start as one thing, perhaps a car, and with a few twists and turns change into something completely different, like a robot.

Transformers kind of remind me of families. Look through any family's photo albums and watch a family transform. A couple adds a child and turns into a family. A family of three turns into a family of four. Babies transform into teenagers! Families are the ultimate transformers!

My husband Kurt and I were married in 1983. We made our transformation into a family in 1988 with the birth of our daughter Devyn. We transformed again in 1991 when our daughter Madison was born. We stayed this way, a family of four, for a long time. We were a pretty typical family. You wouldn't give us a second thought if you passed us on the street. If I were at the supermarket with my biological daughters, no one would feel compelled to ask us how we became a family.

Our biggest and most obvious transformation came in January of 2006 in the form of a 4 ½ year old Ethiopian boy named Mikias. When Mikias joined our family, we changed from a white family to a transracial family. A family that you wouldn't think twice about to a family that attracted second looks everywhere we went. A family with teenage girls to a family with a preschool age boy with a loud voice and energy

A Year Ago by Melissa Pronovost



A year ago today, Mike and I were in Yekaterinburg, Russia, making our way to Kamensk-Uralsky to see a little boy. The uncertainty of that trip and all the emotions are still vivid in my memory. The road was a long one, about 2 hours south from Ekaterinburg, and along the way we tried to chat with our coordinator. Then

just to add some fun to the mix, we were stopped by a police officer. I am told now that this is a common occurrence in Russia. The police still pull people over to try to get money from them. However, we didn't know that then and all I could do was sit wide-eyed in the car as our coordinator walked across the street and got in the police car. I stared at Mike and asked, "Now what?" He wasn't sure but wanted to know if we had the phone numbers handy. I told him no, that they were back at the hotel except for our coordinator's and that wouldn't help. It seemed like forever, but she soon returned and we were again on our way.

A year ago today, Mike and I walked into a baby home in Kamensk-Uralsky and were led up the stairs to talk with the director of the baby home. She seemed nice as she talked to us about this little boy. Now I know that she is nice and a wonderful person to take care of those children and love them as she does. We were then led downstairs and outside to the play area.

A year ago today, Mike and I stood outside the baby home wondering how it would be to see this little boy. He was 14 months old then and probably unaware of the emotions raging through our minds and hearts. And then, he was

that couldn't be contained. We transformed into a family that learned how to share about our son, adoption, Ethiopia and how we came to be a family. We also became a family that learned how to tactfully protect our son's privacy in the telling of our story. In turning into this family of five, we learned how quickly and deeply we could fall in love with our newest member.

That same year, 2006, we transformed yet again as Devyn graduated from high school and left for college in South Carolina, a long way from our Massachusetts home. It was hard for all of us to adjust to a life that did not include Devyn everyday. It was particularly hard for Mikias, he and Devyn had forged a very close bond and he missed her terribly.

In December of 2007, we transformed into a family of six, with the addition of our 3 ½ year old son, Jemberu, whom we also adopted from Ethiopia. Mikias showed us that he was born to be a big brother. He took his new role seriously and even now over a year and a half later, he continues to be Jemberu's best friend. Our boys seem meant to be together. It is now impossible to picture one without the other. They are affectionate, play hard, love each other and us deeply. They are ridiculously loud and energetic. They infuse every day with their big giant love.

We are preparing for yet another transition. Madison graduated from high school in May and is heading off to Texas for college in the fall. I will adjust to setting the dinner table for four again. The boys will miss having her around as much as Kurt and I will. I am not looking forward to her leaving, although thanks to having gone through this once already, I know we will be okay.

Kurt and I will transform into a family that will mostly be the boys and us, as for so long it was just the girls and us. We have changed from young parents of girls, who could travel under the radar of notice to older parents of boys of a different race. This now feels normal to us. I am pretty sure we still make heads turn when we are out but I can honestly say that I rarely notice it anymore. Mikias and Jemberu transformed us into a family that is not quite typical, but feels right and complete to the six people in it.

brought out to us and our coordinator placed him in my arms.

A year ago today, Mike and I held a little baby boy who would change our lives forever. He came into our lives then and for many months thereafter we fought paperwork, emotions, and separation to bring him home to us and our families.

Today, we have been home for 4 months but yet it seems Colby has been ours forever. What an amazing voyage we have made in just 1 year.

Today, I am the mother of a beautiful 26 month old named Colby. And that little boy we met one year ago has changed so much.

ASK THE SOCIAL WORKER

Dear Social Worker,

My husband just received notice that his job will be eliminated at the end of the month. Although he will receive a severance package, it may take some time for him to find another job. We realize that our family is not unique in this situation. We also do not want to alarm our children, ages 10 and 7, and do not feel that this will force us to move or make significant changes. How do discuss this with our children?

Sincerely,
Rebecca from IL

Dear Rebecca,

Many families are facing this type of work transition at this time. It is good to hear that you are looking for a useful way to talk to your children about this upcoming change. It is likely to add some stress on family members and your children may wonder exactly what this means to them.

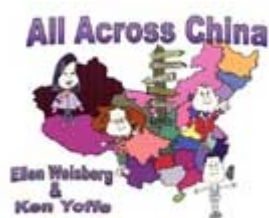
One idea that families find useful is to have a regular family meeting. This allows time for everyone to “check in” and to talk through any issues that might be going on with everyone in the family. With so many busy schedules, a dedicated time to talk shows your children that communication is important and that you are making time for one another.

During one of your discussions, introduce your husband’s job change. Be sure to give your children some concrete examples of how this change will impact the family. Will you have dinner at home more often? Are there decisions (purchases, vacations, activities) you might need to re-think due to finances? If you feel it would be helpful, you might brainstorm ways to reduce costs at home. It is fine to let the children know that the loss of job may also add some stress. Assure them that you and your husband are responsible for leading the family through this transitional time.

Keep in mind that there might be an association with a child’s adoption story as well. In some adoption stories, one reason for relinquishment of a child may be due to poverty. Although your situation sounds transitional, recognize that there might be some concern from your child about what the job loss might mean in terms of being able to stay together as a family. Make sure your child knows about resources available to your family and some of the steps you are taking towards future employment. Reassure your child that your family will not change as a result of this situation.

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Post Adoption Counselor, MA Office

BOOK REVIEW: *All Across China*



By Ellen Weisberg and Ken Yoffe

All Across China is part of a children's geography series by Ellen Weisberg and Ken Yoffe. It follows four characters around China as they travel to all thirty-four provinces. Cai, Na, Ning and Song are four friends who make their way across China visiting other friends and learning about the geography, culture, and important sights of each province. Told with rhymes and illustrated with colorful pictures, *All Across China* makes learning about the country easy and fun for children.

Although this book is not about adoption, adoptive parents will find it helpful in teaching their children about Chinese culture. It also may serve to open the dialogue about adoption with their children. Pre-adoptive parents can use this book as a tool to introduce their current children to the country as the family prepares for the arrival of their new daughter or son from China. Adoptive parents with children from China are able to share their children's culture with them through an enjoyable story.

All Across China is available on Amazon.com or at major bookstores, such as Barnes & Noble.

EDUCATIONAL & SOCIAL EVENTS

Register today for upcoming WHFC workshops and family events:

Date	Event	Location
10/2009	Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens	Waltham, MA
10/17/2009	RI Family Pumpkin Picking - Hosted by PAC	Johnston, RI
11/10/2009	Health Issues in Domestic Adoption	Waltham, MA
11/14/2009	Parade of Nations 2009: A Multicultural Fair	Dalton, MA
12/1/2009	Developmental & Medical Issues in International Adoption	Waltham, MA

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

Center For Family Connections Announces New Training

Center For Family Connections and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation announce a new 8-month training for families and individuals touched by international or transracial adoption, as well as for the professionals with whom they work. View additional details in the [course announcement](#) and [curriculum outline](#).

MEET THE TEAM

Our Post Adoption team of counselors is dedicated to providing clinical and program support to families. [Learn more and contact one of our counselors](#) with your questions.

Pat ~ Barb ~ Betsey ~ Deb ~ Nicole

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