

Adoptive Parent Quotes and Stories

Below you will number of quotes and stories that are designed to demonstrate the importance of adoption support, including adoption assistance. Use these and your own quotes and stories to bolster your advocacy message.

Quotes

When looking for quotes, seek those that are focused on the child's needs and demonstrate an outcome (adoption or improvement of behavior as a result of support). If you are an adoptive parent, make your own quote based on the circumstances of your family. For example, "I wouldn't have been able to adopt three teenagers from foster care without the health care and ongoing support." "The adoption assistance covers the cost of therapy that Jack needs to recover from his early abuse. Since he started with the therapist, he's doing better in school and feels more secure in our family."

The following are quotes from adoptive parents that NACAC has used in its advocacy efforts:

- "The assistance enables us to continue mental health treatment, pay for trips to out-of-town doctors, get respite when we need it, and obtain specialized childcare. The services are what keeps us together."
- "If we didn't have the assistance, we couldn't adopt. We would not have the resources! [Our] adopted child is a special needs child and I have to have assistance."
- "[Adoption assistance] took the weight off and moved us from thinking, 'Can we financially make this work?' and put the focus back where it should be—'Can we love and care for this child? Do we have the love and commitment to parent this child?'"
- "We couldn't have adopted a sibling group without assistance and the medical card."
- "Frankly because we have handicapped children, we wouldn't be able to care for them without [adoption assistance]. It enables us to get them the best medical care, therapy, equipment, etc. We want them to have the best care possible, and the assistance makes that happen."
- "Post-adoption services saved our family. I don't know if we all would have survived as a family without the counseling and support we received."
- "[Adoption assistance is] imperative, because my child has special needs—so respite and personal care attendant services make it so much easier to care for him."
- "If I didn't have the assistance, then I could not have as many children as I have. Four of my children are total care. So, I need the help especially the Medical Assistance. It's a god-send."

Adoptive Family Stories

Depending on how you are communicating with decision makers, you can also use stories like the ones below in your advocacy efforts. See the next section, “Telling Personal Stories,” for more about how to find and develop your own stories.

Ryan and Kristina

In March 2002, Patrick and Kelly began fostering 22-month-old Kristina and her newborn brother Ryan, who were placed in care by their young, homeless, and drug-addicted parents. Kristina came from another foster placement while Ryan, who was born prematurely, remained in the hospital. “To establish early bonding with Ryan, Kelly visited him daily in the hospital until he came home with us in May,” explains Patrick.

After a few years, the birth parents’ rights were terminated and Patrick and Kelly adopted Kristina and Ryan. Kristina, now six, and Ryan, four, both have special needs. Patrick and Kelly have worked hard to find services to help improve their children’s lives. Because she had moved between families several times while in care, Kristina needed therapy to help her form a close attachment with Kelly and learn how to manage her oppositional behavior. She receives additional counseling to help her deal with anger and fear from witnessing domestic violence between her birth parents.

During his first year, Ryan received physical therapy to help him with muscle tone problems. More recently, he was diagnosed with high-functioning autism. “At first we didn’t know what was wrong,” explains Patrick. “We thought his behaviors were possibly a response to the trauma. . . . After we had him tested, we learned he had autism.” Ryan now has a behavioral therapist, who will teach Patrick and Kelly how to better meet Ryan’s needs, as well as how to understand his behaviors.

Without adoption assistance, Patrick and Kelly know they would never have been able to afford the services that have been a vital part of their children’s physical, social, and emotional growth. They are happy their children are doing well and getting the support they need. Patrick explains, “As far as being able to understand the issues and know how to work with the children in a therapeutic way to resolve those issues—without some kind of special guidance and support, we would have been lost on our own.”

Joseph and Patrick

When she first saw the one-and-a-half-year-old twins Patrick and Joseph, Tina recalls, “My heart went out to them. I thought they were the cutest little boys I had ever seen. I thought I was blessed to have them come to live with me and to be able to adopt them.”

Tina recalls, “They were sick babies. They were born drug-exposed and there were complications. They were small for their age and they were slow in developing their motor skills and had speech problems.” Tina helped Patrick and Joseph develop their motor skills and speech, and they have made tremendous strides in their physical development. “My favorite thing to do with the boys is to take them to the park. I like to see them run and play,” says Tina. “It was so long before their motor skills were good. They were nine before they could really run. They

knew how to walk, but their coordination wasn't very good. Now the boys love to play baseball and shoot hoops.”

Patrick and Joseph's mental health, emotional, and educational development has been more of a challenge. After they turned eight, they began to have serious outbursts of anger and destructive behavior, both at home and in school. The twins both have individualized education plans and are in special education classes. Tina recently learned that mental health issues and violence have been ongoing concerns on both sides of the boys' birth family.

Although they can be sweet and loving, the boys need vigilant supervision. They are fascinated by fire, so Tina is always on guard. The boys also sleep poorly. “They usually can't fall asleep until after 2:00 in the morning. They say, ‘Good night, Mommy,’ and give me a hug, but they don't go to sleep,” says Tina. Tina receives 40 hours a month of respite care, which she carefully uses when she needs to get a good night's sleep.

One of the biggest hurdles Tina has experienced caring for Patrick and Joseph is securing mental health services for them. The adoption assistance the family receives makes it possible for Tina to get some of the support that Joseph and Patrick need so desperately. With the adoption assistance, she is able to partially cover the cost of childcare and offset some of the expenses for the boys' therapy. She knows that the boys are likely to need more intensive services, and worries about what will be available to them and what she can afford.

Despite their special needs, Tina is proud of her sons and the progress they are making. The boys are an integral, affectionate part of her extended family—they love their grandmother and often play with Tina's grandsons. “The boys can really be sweet,” says Tina, “Anytime we are out shopping, they remember their grandmother. They adore my mother, and love to buy her favorite peppermint candy.”

Semaj, Patricia, and Shakoya

An experienced foster parent, Sonya had three girls placed with her in foster care. Semaj was born drug-addicted due to her mother's chemical dependency. At four months old, she still suffered from withdrawal. Sonya was told Semaj probably wouldn't walk or talk until she was two. Two-year-old Patricia was very reserved and withdrawn. “She was a melancholy child. When we had family visits she would go to the corner and wouldn't talk or engage,” Sonya remembers. Three-year-old Shakoya, says Sonya, “talked about being molested, and we knew her experience was real because she used adult language to describe what happened.”

The girls' birth parents' rights were terminated and Sonya began the adoption process, but she worried about whether she was financially equipped to meet the girls' special needs. Her agency assured Sonya that she would receive adoption assistance to cover most of their extra expenses. She has received assistance paying for child care, therapy, medical expenses, tutoring, and an academic summer camp that gives the girls a jump-start on the school year. Without the years of counseling, tutoring, special classes, and services made possible through adoption subsidies and other post-adoption support program, Sonya is sure her daughters wouldn't be where they are today. She knows she couldn't have done it without these services.

Semaj, whom doctors predicted might not walk or talk until she was two, “walked at 7 months, talked at 10 months. And right now she is number two in her school,” says Sonya proudly. Withdrawn Patricia “is a social butterfly. She wants to be a schoolteacher and she advocates for herself,” explains Sonya. “Shakoya was in therapy for about four years, and now she is doing well. [The agency] has left the door open, just in case I need to put any of the girls back in therapy,” adds Sonya.

Sonya says, “I look at [my children] all the time and I get tears in my eyes. Some people thought I was crazy to take them on. And I thought, no, they just need to be loved. And they reciprocated.”

Madilyn and Tyler

Alissa and Sean are the parents of four children: Breanna, Noah, Madilyn, and Tyler. When they first made the decision to adopt, they knew they wanted a child younger than Breanna and Noah. “Madilyn was the answer to our prayers,” says Alissa. Yet “the doctors told us that she would never walk, talk, eat, or take in stimulus. We didn’t care what they said. In our minds, she deserves a loving family and permanence like any other child.”

Alissa and Sean worried about being able to pay her significant medical bills. Madilyn is hydrocephalic with a shunt, has mild cerebral palsy, chronic evolving lung disease, retinopathy, and behavior problems. When they learned there were adoption assistance funds to help pay for needed treatments and therapy. Sean said, “It took the weight off and moved us from thinking, ‘Can we financially make it work?’ and put the focus back where it should be—‘Can we love and care for this child? Do we have the love and commitment to parent this child?’ That was never in question!”

Sean and Alissa say that Madilyn is their miracle baby. While she does have some persistent problems, she has proven all the doctors wrong: she walks, talks, and eats.

Madilyn’s successful adoption opened the door for Sean and Alissa to adopt Tyler. Tyler also has significant medical needs. He was exposed to meth, moved several times, and suffered neglect. He has complex eating issues and is fed through a G tube. Since Tyler joined the family, he has turned into an expressive, enthusiastic child with a great vocabulary.

Alex

When Alex was three years old, he was adopted by single dad Vernard. “I knew Alex had endured some extremely traumatic events because he had been in 10 placements before I got him,” recalls Vernard. Due to his early trauma, Alex suffered from reactive attachment disorder.

Vernard recalls, “I made absolutely sure I received adoption subsidy prior to the adoption, because I knew accepting even a minimum amount of subsidy would be in Alex’s best interest. I knew that if Alex required residential treatment or out-of-home placement—due to his multiple placements, and the neglect and physical and sexual abuse he experienced—there was no way I could afford \$300 to \$400 a day or even trained respite support.”

Alex is eligible for a small monthly adoption assistance payment, but it is not enough to meet his

serious emotional disabilities. During their first years together, Vernard spent more than \$850 per month, including four different therapies to help Alex. Today, Vernard can no longer afford therapy for Alex, but continues to attend conferences, read, and implement multiple strategies to help Alex work through his abandonment, grief, and loss.

In spite of the challenges and Alex's ongoing need for treatment and services, Vernard knows that his loving support has already made a tremendous difference to Alex!

Matthew, Katherine, and Michael

Andrea and Bill happily adopted three children—five-year-old Matthew, four-year-old Katherine, and two-year-old Michael—in 1987. “Matt had been in seven foster homes and the younger two had lived with several families,” Andrea remembers. “We would have the monitor on and we would hear Matthew say to Michael, who was two, ‘We have to be quiet so they don’t send us away.’ It would break my heart.”

School was difficult for all three children, but more so for Katherine and Michael. Matt has intermittent explosive disorder and ADD, Katherine and Michael have ADHD. All three children received special services at school, but often wouldn’t take advantage of the accommodations—such as being given a longer time to complete tests—because they hated feeling different in front of their peers.

The children had Medicaid cards but Andrea says, “In Bucks County, few therapists accept Medicaid. Fortunately we were able to use my husband’s medical insurance to cover the kids’ therapy. We used their adoption subsidy money to pay for the unpaid portion of their therapy costs from my husband’s insurance,” explains Andrea.

Looking back, Andrea believes all three children have suffered from undiagnosed depression and varying levels of reactive attachment disorder. “They all were oppositional and there were periods of rage. They would make holes in the walls. We would say, ‘It’s time to make the bed’ and they would say ‘No’ and kick a hole in the wall. I can’t tell you how many times we have spackled our walls,” recalls Andrea.

Matt, Michael, and Kathy are now young adults who are doing well. “I called the police and sent Matt to jail a week before his 18th birthday when he started swearing at me, threatened to knock my head off, and started punching holes in the wall when I said he couldn’t use the backyard trampoline at 11:30 one night,” says Andrea. “Matt now tells me that was the best thing I could have done for him. He has since graduated from college and is preparing to take the LSAT for law school.”

“Although parenting has been extremely difficult and challenging at times, my husband and I know that adopting our three beautiful children was worth it. The sadness we so vividly saw in their eyes the day they moved into our family is rarely, if ever, seen as they continue to grow emotionally,” explains Andrea.