

While You Wait



ADVOCACY TOOLS FOR PROSPECTIVE FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENTS

NOVEMBER 2003

Celebrate Adoption Month this November



To celebrate Adoption Month this November, adoptive families in Minnesota will participate in family-planned and community-organized activities. While you wait to become a foster or adoptive parent, think about what it means to celebrate adoption and what kinds of rituals your family might want to embrace as you look forward to making the commitment to caring for a child or celebrating adoption.

Meaningful celebrations are built on things that already have value to your family; they involve finding new ways to make the daily activities of family life important. Sometimes celebrations are spur of the moment occurrences that get everyone involved and are remembered fondly for years. Other celebrations are planned and happen over and over again, becoming family rituals. Rituals can be anything from regularly attending worship services to always having waffles for the Saturday evening meal.

When planning new rituals to celebrate with your family, allow each family member to answer the following questions:

- What are the things that make our family unique?
- What values are important?
- What things do we already do to make each person feel connected?
- How do we have fun together as a family?

continued on page 2



continued from page 1

- How do we support one another in times of need?
- How do we show love, express feelings, and demonstrate respect for one another?

Adoption Month celebrations and year-round rituals can expressly involve discussing adoption, or they can just be planned times for togetherness. Here are some things to think about when you start building new rituals.

- Find out how your children's birth or foster parents celebrate holidays. Include the best ideas in your own celebration. If the child recalls negative traditions, create new, better memories.
- Each Adoption Month, repeat shared seasonal activities such as attending school events, taking apple orchard or fall foliage outings; participating in a community harvest or powwow; or getting outdoors for a final fall camping trip or picnic.
- Set aside a day (in addition to birthdays) to highlight each member of the family with a picture on the table or photo album for all to see. Include a storytime, during which every-

one tells a positive and enlightening story about that person. Make a badge or ribbon for the honored person to wear.

Mealtimes offers excellent opportunities for ritual building. You have the chance to nourish bodies and



photo by Pam Hasegawa

relationships and can build bridges of understanding and a sense of belonging to the family. You might:

- Set aside one day of the month as a special meal day. Choose and prepare a menu together, and use the best dishes. Candlelight can add to the mood.
- Encourage children who are new to your home to share some of their favorite foods or recipes.
- Serve certain food at a regular time of the week—for example, pizza on Friday's or popcorn on

Sunday nights—the association then becomes “pizza/popcorn time is sharing time.”

- As a family, gather and prepare the food for certain meals. For example, visit a farmer's market and have each family member choose a fresh vegetable. Then make a group salad or vegetable plate together.
- Go around the table sharing, on different days, a thought for the day, a favorite memory, a happening at school or work, a reaction to a current event, a joke, a dream, or a plan for the week.
- Have one-on-one mealtimes on a scheduled basis. For example, one parent takes one child out for breakfast early every Wednesday morning or out for lunch every other Saturday.

Be patient and keep things simple. Try to build in just a few things that most people in the family are likely to feel comfortable with. Then, revisit your family rituals and make changes or add new ideas as they are suggested or new members join your family.

Adapted from *Celebrations Family Style*, by Charles Numrich and Jan Hoppe, Professional Association and Treatment Homes (PATH), 1992



The Importance of Cultural Appreciation

When you think about the racial and ethnic backgrounds of children you are considering for foster care or adoption, think about how you might celebrate the cultures of those children and how you would heighten their sense of confidence by making their culture come alive. Cultural celebrations also foster anti-bias sentiments in children. Think about why it is important to promote cultural awareness and enhance children's self-esteem by:

- creating a home environment that reflects the child's racial background. Learn about cultural traditions, practices, and holidays. Look for artwork from various cultures, and look for places to get books or videos featuring different cultures and languages.
- becoming familiar with your child's heritage. Learn more about traditions, achievements, and style of dress within the

culture. Look for places in your area where you can join others to celebrate a holiday or attend a cultural festival.

- talking positively about each child's physical characteristics and cultural heritage. Think about telling a child how beautiful he or she is, and share pictures of other beautiful people who have the same ethnic background. Tell stories about

continued on page 4



Honor Adoption Each Day in November

- 1 Kick off Adoption Month by distributing adoption-themed posters or flyers.
- 2 Sign up for a November adoption conference or call your agency to find out about Adoption Month events that are open to the public.
- 3 Visit a restaurant, exhibit, or event that celebrates the ethnic or cultural background of possible foster or adopted children.
- 4 Donate time or money to your favorite adoption, foster care, or child welfare organization.
- 5 Light candles at your dinner table or in your place of worship to honor children waiting for adoptive homes.
- 6 Hold an art night for children or at a local parent support group meeting. Ask children to create images of family.
- 7 Visit your public library's adoption-related and child welfare-related book collection. Suggest additional volumes they should acquire.
- 8 Befriend a teenager who is aging out of foster care—become a mentor or offer a place to go on holidays.
- 9 Keep a journal to record your thoughts and feelings while you wait for your child.
- 10 Learn positive adoption language, then teach your extended family.
- 11 Begin a lifebook page for your future child. Include everything your child will want to know about your family and leave lots of room for information about your child upon arrival.
- 12 Attend a local foster or adoptive parent support group meeting. Make connections with other foster or adoptive parents and look for potential mentors.
- 13 Let a media outlet know that you appreciate its past attention to adoption and look forward to continued coverage of the issue.
- 14 Rent a video or read a book that spurs discussion about the meaning and importance of family.
- 15 Write or visit a newly elected official to share basic information about policies that affect adoptive families.
- 16 Outline the history of your childhood. What connection does your childhood have to adoption? Look for ways you relate to and empathize with a child who has been adopted.
- 17 Take a family photo and set a goal of taking a new family photo each year. Reflect how these photos will change as your family grows through foster care or adoption.
- 18 Invite an adoptive or foster family to dinner. Consider getting to know a family whose adoption story is different from the type of adoption you want to pursue (for example, if you adopted from foster care, get to know an international adopter).
- 19 Visit your local elementary school. Offer to read books on adoption to groups of children.
- 20 Give a teenager in foster care a gift certificate for a hair cut, new shoes, night at the movies, or tickets to a sporting event.
- 21 Spend an hour surfing adoption or foster care web sites on the Internet. Download useful information for your parent group or child's teacher.
- 22 Register to become trained and licensed as respite care provider to offer assistance to adoptive families who need a break from parenting.
- 23 Make cards for extended family members, letting them know that during Adoption Month you celebrate their role in your family.
- 24 Buy holiday gifts for foster children who are waiting for an adoptive family.
- 25 Send a letter of appreciation to someone who has supported your family as you wait for a child.
- 26 Ask your faith community leader to hold a special service in honor of children.
- 27 Host an adoption orientation at your home. Invite family and friends who would make good parents to listen to a presentation by agency staff.
- 28 Call another family who is waiting for an adoptive placement to let them know that you are thinking of them.
- 29 Ask your agency if you can send holiday cards to foster children during December.
- 30 End Adoption Month by reflecting with your family on all that you've done to celebrate, and making plans to continue your observances throughout the year.

continued from page 2

- people from that ethnic group of whom you are especially proud.
- finding mentors or role models. Children of color need to know other people who look like them, and experience the strengths and richness of their heritage. Associating with others of the same cultural background helps children to develop a sense of belonging and pride.
- finding books and films that celebrate different communities of origin. Educate yourself about common stereotypes so you can evaluate children's materials. Consider how you can teach children the difference between



photo by Pam Hasegawa

- fair images and images that can hurt people's feelings.
- understanding the grooming needs of different children. Look for an ethnic barber or beauty salon where you can discuss popular hair styles and appropriate skin and nail care.

- preparing special foods from different cultures. Practice making a meal at home.
- letting children know that unjust things can be changed. Examine how you might set an example by your own actions.
- listening respectfully and carefully to children's questions about themselves and others, what they want to know, and what they are feeling. If you do not have an answer, say so, and look into it. Children appreciate knowing that their inquiries are important enough to you that you will remember them and return with answers later. ♥

Looking Ahead to Adoption Support

Minnesota Adoption Support and Preservation (MN ASAP) provides an array of services, support, and free training to adoptive parents and adoption professionals. MN ASAP publishes a free quarterly newsletter, distributes fact sheets on a wide variety of adoption-related topics, and maintains an informational web site (www.mnasap.org).

MN ASAP's parent liaisons are experienced adoptive parents and are available to provide emotional support to parents, identify local resources, help parents advocate for their children's needs, and connect parents with nearby support groups. Visit www.mnasap.org or call 612-798-4033 or 877-9MN-ASAP for the parent liaison in your area.

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