

# Family Ties



Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc.

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Newsletter

November/December 2016

## **Advice for Adoptive Parents**

from Summer 2004 *Adoptalk*

*adapted from August 2003 remarks by keynote speaker Brenda McCreight, Ph.D. at NACAC's 29th annual conference in Vancouver, British Columbia Brenda McCreight has worked in adoption and foster care since 1982 and authored three books: Recognizing and Managing Children with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Effects: A Guidebook, Parenting Your Older Adopted Child and Eden's Secret Journal: An Older Child Adoption Story. She now counsels foster and adoptive families in British Columbia, offers telephone coaching internationally, and trains parents and professionals throughout North America. She is also mother to 14 children, 12 by adoption, and has two grandchildren.*

People often ask me what they need to know to successfully adopt and parent older children. Well, I don't have a magic answer (sorry, but I really don't think there is one), but I do have some suggestions to make it easier.

### **Be Prepared to Change**

When an older child joins the family, we need to learn what her needs are and how to meet them. I don't mean simply reading about the child's history or diagnoses, I mean finding out what the child needs from us, the parents. We should ask, "What does this child need for me to be her mom in a way that's going to make her life better and help her become part of the family?"

Too often, we go to conferences and therapists hoping to discover how to change our child's behavior. I'm the first to admit that the behaviors can be challenging (all right, they can be downright awful) and hard to live with. So, when I go to workshops to learn about how to manage a certain disorder, I reframe offered strategies to look at what I can do differently. I ask, "How can I change myself to make it easier for him to comply? What am I doing to make it easier for my child to live in this family?" I have to change myself to become the mom my child needs me to be (and I mean needs, not wants).

The wonderful part of this is that my kids don't need me to be perfect or right all the time. They just need me to be trying really hard, and they need me to be malleable, and they need me to have realistic expectations about what they can do at this point in time.

I'm not suggesting you have to change your values or core being; that all stays the same and is the foundation for everything you offer your child. But your skills and your approach will have to be tweaked for each child, because what each needs from you will be different from what the others need or from what you expect him to need. It's a constantly changing process. The payoff is that we can end up being more grounded, capable, loving, and (for some) more spiritual people than we ever dreamed we could be. That's partly why I have so many children; I keep trying to be a better person. But as my children remind me, "You're not there yet, Mom."

### **Develop Patience**

An important change for many parents is the need to develop more patience. That has been hard for me (I really was made to run an army or a maximum security prison, or maybe rule some planet—anything where people would give me total and immediate obedience), but I make myself remember that my children need me to wait while they learn to behave and to belong. After all, my children waited years before they got the permanence and stability of their own family, so it's only fair that I wait for them to learn how to live with us. Parents have told me, "It's been six months, and we're still having these problems." If the child is five or ten

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been six months, and we're still having these problems." If the child is five or ten years old when he is adopted, six months is a drop in the bucket. The truth is our children are likely to have difficulties throughout the time we're raising them.

Patience also means developing a broader view. Although that's hard when we're in crisis, we still need to work on it. We need to say, "I can wait until you feel some kind of love for me. I'm not going to go anywhere. I can wait the rest of your life." It's not so much patience on a day-to-day basis, but rather a lifetime of patience. For us—as it was for our children—waiting is just part of the adoption package.

## **Embrace Adoption for Life**

Adoption is forever. Where I live, many adoption professionals are going through a phase of telling children that they are going to be placed with their "growing up family" rather than with their "forever" family. The professionals fear that the adoptions won't last. I still call adoptive families "forever families" because that's what it's about. Children may come and go from our lives for different reasons, but it doesn't mean the end of an adoption.

At 15, my oldest son, Jason, was a plague on humanity; he set fires, stole cars (and crashed them because he didn't know how to drive), pulled break and enters, and was very aggressive with his much younger brother. The aggression made him too dangerous to live in our home, and we weren't sure what to do. Fortunately, his behaviors caused the law to intervene and the courts kindly offered him an alternative place to live, but only for a short time. After he was released from the detention center, I had to decide if he could safely come home. I was really fearful for my younger son, so I arranged for Jason to stay with his birth grandmother. That was the best thing I ever did.

However, not everyone agreed, and they were quick to tell me so. Professionals and friends accused us of throwing our son out and "dissolving" the adoption. I pointed out that we hadn't broken up the family at all. We paid child support to his grandmother, my son phoned home nightly, and visited often. We never thought he was out of our family; he was just out of the house. And it never occurred to him that he wasn't ours. After he moved through this difficult stage, he bounced in and out of the house until he was finally successful with his independent adulthood. I never worried about losing Jason, and he never worried about losing us. He is always and forever my son, but that was the process we needed to go through with him to keep everyone safe. When these situations come up in your family, remember that your commitment is forever. Your adoption, your family, isn't going to end just because you have a crisis or because your child needs more help than you can give her at home. You are going to be the grandparents of your children's children. You are there for the good and bad—forever. Maybe our kids can't always live with us, but it doesn't mean we have to leave them.

## **Treasure Other Adoptive Parents**

I have deep respect for adoptive families because most of us cope very well with the transformation from a typical family to a family that daily has to deal with challenges that our friends and families only read about. Adoptive parents start out as pretty normal people, and then we adopt older children who dramatically change our lives. We have to give up being like other families, and we have to grieve that loss and focus on what we have gained.

And what have we gained? Well, how about a universe full of colors and richness and beauty. Learning to see the world through the eyes of a child with FAS means learning to see beyond the limits, learning to see the possible in all things. And learning to see the world through the eyes of a child who has been hurt beyond measure means learning to value all that is good and right and decent about ourselves and our lives. We all need to honor each other and value the knowledge and skills and joy and success that we have to offer.

To honor and value our families, we should do things like go to the NACAC conference. After all, adoption isn't our hobby, it's our lives. We need to share time with others traveling the same road. When we do, we go home to our children as stronger and more committed parents. For me, time with members of my adoption culture (as at NACAC), where we can share and strengthen one another, is no luxury; it's essential.

## **Be Faithful and Fearless**

Basically, we adoptive parents have to be faithful and fearless—faithful to our children through thick and thin. We have to be faithful to who they are now and who they may become. We must faithfully meet their needs and be their parents. We also must be fearless—we cannot be afraid to turn ourselves into what they need us to be. We have to be brave enough to stretch ourselves with each new child so every one of them can find the safety and stability he or she needs.

# Adoption Awareness Month

*Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine & The Kinship Program had the pleasure of celebrating Adoption Awareness month in November with the many amazing resource families across the state, as well as the Office of Children and Families Service, the Department of Health and Human Services and private agencies.*

On November 1st AFFM held the annual tea at the Blaine House. The day was filled with speakers recognizing adoptive families for the amazing work they do. AFFM Executive Director Bette Hoxie and AFFM Board President Barbara Ford welcomed families. Bette presented the two Angel in Adoption recipients John and Gail Neher. Thank you to all who attended and of course a huge thank you to the Blaine House and staff for once again hosting the event.

On November 7th adoption legalizations will take place at the Portland's Children Museum & Theatre of Maine. Guest will snack on treats donated by Coffee by Design and enjoy exploring the museum! Thank you Portland museum for allowing families to celebrate their adoptions in a special way.

November 16th OCFS will hold an awareness event in Augusta at the Hall of Flags. Guest speakers, agencies with information and activities as well as treats and give aways will all be a part of this fun filled event.



*Thank you to all those who once again made this November  
so special for adoptive families!*

*"Longing for a child to love,  
I'd wish upon the stars above.  
In my heart I always knew,  
A part of me was meant for you.  
I think how happy we will be,  
Once I adopt you, and you adopt me.  
I dream of all the joy you'll bring,  
Imagining even the littlest things.  
The way it will feel to hold you tight,  
And tuck you in every night.  
The drawings on the refrigerator door,  
And childhood toys across the floor,  
The favorite stories read again and again,  
And hours of games with make-believe friends.  
The day you took my outstretched hand,  
A journey ended, but our lives began.  
Still mesmerized by your sweet face,  
Still warmed inside by our first embrace.  
I promised to give you a happy home,  
And a loving family all your own.  
A house you've now made complete,  
With laughter, smiles and tiny feet.  
A parent is one who guides the way,  
Know I will be there everyday.  
Rest easy as each night you sleep,  
A lifetime of love is yours to keep.  
Longing for a child to love,  
I'd wish upon the stars above.  
In my heart I always knew,  
A part of me belonged to you."*

**Teri Harrison**

## Did you know AFFM provides post-adoption support?

AFFM's Post-adoption support includes but is not limited to:

- Support groups
- Material goods such as clothing; furniture and household supplies
- Lending library
- Annual conference
- Trainings specific to adoption
- Discount Card Program
- Events/activities/passes to museums, fairs and more!

***AFFM honors families who have opened their hearts  
and homes to Maine's youth in care.***



**Adoptive & Foster  
Families of Maine, Inc.**  
 & The Kinship Program

## Celebrate Adoption with Jockey Being Family!

AFFM is excited for our continued partnership with Jockey Being Family to provide newly adoptive families with backpacks and totes! The backpacks are embroidered with the child's new family initials, and the backpack is complete with a comforting Jockey Being Family® fleece blanket and cuddly teddy bear. Adoptive parents also receive a tote filled with post-adoption resources.

For future youth being legalized, please send family's name and contact information, the name, age and gender of the child and AFFM will complete the requests and get them delivered.

Thank you notes can be sent to AFFM and will be forwarded to Jockey Being Family.

**AFFM Orono Office:** 34 Main Street, Orono, Maine 04473

**AFFM Saco Office:** 333 Lincoln Street, Saco, Maine 04072



## Adoption Announcements

Have you recently legalized an adoption? Want to share the exciting news with others? AFFM would love to create an adoption announcement in the Family Ties newsletter. Send a write up and photo (if you wish) to [meagan@affm.net](mailto:meagan@affm.net).

AFFM looks forward to hearing from you!

## MattressFirm Foster Kids

Mattress Firm Foster Kids, through the [Ticket to Dream Foundation](#)<sup>TM</sup>, a recognized 501(c)3 non-profit, was launched in December 2015 to make a positive impact on the lives of thousands of foster children in need. Throughout the year, the MattressFirm Foster Kids program holds donation drives at select stores to collect essential items such as pajamas, clothing, shoes, holiday gifts, and school supplies for foster children in need. After each drive, donations are distributed to non-profit foster care partners.

AFFM is thankful for the continued partnership with the MattressFirm Foster Kids program in providing Maine's youth in care with school supplies; sporting equipment; shoes; clothing; pajamas; and toys. Along with the donation drives, AFFM was able to assist 51 youth attend camp as well as other extra curricular activities thanks to MattressFirm FosterKids annual dollar drive!

AFFM is excited to continue working with the MattressFirm Foster Kids program and provide youth in care with these amazing opportunities.







Because of your generous donation my Eagle Scout project was a huge success! I was able to fill and donate 50 backpacks to Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine Inc. and The Kinship program.

# THANK YOU

Zack Morrell, Troop 546



Dear Bette

Thank you for being the beneficiary for my project. It was a huge success!

I passed my Eagle Board of review on September 14 2016!

## Kinship Corner

### Bangor Holiday Party

Sunday November 27, 2016 from 1-4PM **Location:** Bangor Ramada Inn (357 Odlin Road, Bangor) Remember to bring your bathing suits and a dish for the potluck **RSVP:** 1-800-833-9786 or [info@affm.net](mailto:info@affm.net) If you plan to bring food please let us know when you RSVP.

### Portland Holiday Party

Sunday, December 4, 2016 from 11-1PM **Location:** Portland YMCA (70 Forest Ave, Portland) Enjoy arts and crafts, pizza and swimming! **RSVP:** Meagan Sprague at 1-800-833-9786 or [meagan@affm.net](mailto:meagan@affm.net)

*AFFM is delighted to have purchased an American Girl Doll in honor of Bill Giason to raffle off at the Bangor Holiday Party! For raffle tickets contact Jan Strout and Jan Patridge 495-3864*

*AFFM is still taking request for the Holiday Gift Giving Program. Resource Families are invited to add their children's names, gender, clothing size and age to a wish list for holiday gifts. Once again, the amazing people from the Ogunquit Spirit of Giving Committee will work to provide holiday presents to kids in AFFM programs. Give the office a call at 1-800-833-9786 and have your child's information and gift wish ready. **We ask that you keep requests to under \$50.00 per child.** Funds are limited for this program however if you find yourself struggling this holiday season feel free to contact us. Additionally, if your child is in foster care please contact your caseworker as they may have gifts available. The sooner AFFM has your information the more likely we are to fulfill the children's wishes.*



# Adoptive & Foster Families of Maine, Inc. & The Kinship Program

## State-Wide Resource Family Support Groups

At times meetings are cancelled due to weather and other unforeseen circumstances, cancellation notices are sent out via the AFFM email list serve and Facebook. Families are urged to call or email [info@affm.net](mailto:info@affm.net) to be added to this service. For more information and to RSVP for the support groups please call AFFM @ 1-800-833-9786 or 827-2331. AFFM asks families to RSVP 3-4 days in advance so the facilitator and childcare provider can plan accordingly.

**Key:** A= Adoptive, F=Foster, K= Kinship, CC= Child care is available upon request

**Augusta** – Kinship only/CC: 3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the month from 5:30 – 8:00 pm at the Buker Community Center (22 Armory Drive Augusta) call Jan Partridge at 207-495-3864.

**Augusta** – A/F/K/CC: 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of the month from 6:00 – 7:30 pm at Magic Years Center (25 Industrial Drive).

**Bangor** – Kinship only /CC. Facilitated by AFFM staff. 2nd Tuesday of the month from 6:00-7:30 PM Location: Redeemer Lutheran Church, 540 Essex St. Bangor

**NEW Berwick**— F/A/K: 3rd Wednesday of the month from 6:00-7:30pm at Berwick Town Hall (11 Sullivan St.)

**Biddeford** – Kinship only/CC: 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month from 10:00 – 11:30 @ J Richard Martin Community Center, 189 Alfred St.

**Bridgton** – A/F/K: 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month from 6:30 – 8:30 pm at the Community Care (Behind Reny's) 15 Depot St. RSVP Vanessa Jones 647-2317

**Brunswick** – A/F/K/CC: Last Tuesday of the month from 5:30 – 7:00 pm at St Paul's Episcopal Church, 25 Pleasant St. Meetings are not held during Summer.

**Caribou** – A/F/K: 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of the month from 5:30 at Caribou Adult Education Building on Bennett Drive in between Caribou Rec and the gas station.

**Damariscotta**— F/A/K: 1<sup>st</sup> Thursday of the month from 5:30-7:00 PM at the Skidompha Library (184 Main St).

**Dover-Foxcroft** – A/F/K/CC: 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month from 6:00 – 7:30 pm at Mayo Regional Hospital, Borestone & Sebec rm.

**Ellsworth** – A/F/K/CC: 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month from 5:30 – 7:30 pm at Moore Community Center (133 State St.) RSVP Mindy Kane, CHCS 263-2014 or 461-8878

**Farmington** – A/F/K/CC: every 3<sup>rd</sup> Tuesday of the month from 6 – 7:30 pm @ Roberts Learning Center (room 107, 203 & 207), UMF.

**Houlton** – A/F/K/CC: every 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of the month from 5:30 – 7:30 pm at Houlton CHCS, 2 Water Street.

**Lewiston** – A/F/K/CC: every 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday of the month from 6:00 – 8:00 pm at 200 Main Street Lewiston.

**Lincoln** – A/F/K/CC: 1st Thursday of the month from 6:00–7:30PM at the Community Evangel Temple, 124 River Rd.

**Lincolntonville**— F/A/K/CC: 2nd Monday of the month from 6:00-7:30pm at the Lincolntonville Central School (523 Hope Rd.)

**Machias** – A/F/K/CC: 4th Thursday of the month from 6:00 – 7:30 pm @ Rose M Gaffney Elementary School, 15 Rose Gaffney Rd

**Norridgewock**— A/F/K/CC: 2nd Tuesday of the month from 6:00-7:30pm at First Congregational Church (36 River Road).

**Orono** – A/F/K/CC: 3<sup>rd</sup> Monday of the month from 6:00 – 8:00 pm at AFFM (34 Main Street Orono).

**Portland**— A/F/K/CC: 2nd Tuesday of the month from 5:30-7:30pm at 901 Washington Ave. Portland.

**Presque Isle** – A/F/K/CC: 3rd Tuesday of the month from 6:30 – 7:30 pm at the Wesleyan Church (387 Centerline Rd.)

**Rockland**—A/F/K/CC: 3rd Monday of the month at 6:00PM-7:30PM at the Knox Center-Pen Bay Healthcare (6 White Street)

**Saco**—A/F/K/CC: 4th Wednesday of the month from 5:30PM-7:00PM at AFFM's Saco office (333 Lincoln Street).

**Sherman** – A/F/K: 1<sup>st</sup> Monday of the month at 7 Cow Team Road in Sherman. Please contact Debbie Irish at 365-7133 for more information. This group does not meet in the summer.

**South Paris**— A/F/K/CC: 1st Thursday of the month from 5:30-7:00PM at the University of Maine Cooperative Extension (9 Olson Road).

## Please Remember to RSVP to Support Groups

It is very important for you to notify the support group facilitator before every support group meeting. Please let the support group facilitators know at least 3 days in advance (if possible) that you plan to attend a meeting. (We understand that unexpected changes happen).

**Notifying the leader of your support group helps in the following ways:**

- ♦ It helps ensure that there are enough childcare providers available.
- ♦ It helps invited speakers/guests preplan their agenda.
- ♦ It helps us decide the quantity of snacks, drinks, and handouts.
- ♦ It helps to ensure that we have a meeting space that meets everyone's needs.
- ♦ It also helps us to know who we should contact of an unexpected cancellation.



The contact for each support group is listed on the Support group listing on page 6. The listing is sent out in the AFFM welcome packet, and can be found online on AFFM's website at [www.affm.net](http://www.affm.net). Reminders for support groups are sent out through AFFM's email list serve. If you are not receiving emails from AFFM give a call to 1-800-833-9786 to sign up today!

## Are You Prepared for the Cold Months Ahead?

Whether we like it or not winter is on it's way. Be proactive this year and know what assistance may be available to you. Check out <http://www.mainehousing.org/programs-services/energy/energydetails/low-income-home-energy-assistance-program> for information on Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Local churches and towns offer general assistance as well.  
Stay warm this winter!

## Businesses Needed for Discount Card Program

**Are you a Family in York, Franklin, Androscoggin, Hancock, Oxford, Sagadahoc or Somerset County?**  
**AFFM is seeking out businesses in your area to participate in the discount card program.**



If you have a suggestion for a business or organization that AFFM can approach to participate in the discount card program, please contact us. You can also print off and send the completed business application form to 34 Main St. Orono, ME 04473.  
Application forms can be found at [www.affm.net](http://www.affm.net)

## Save the Date!



**AFFM's ANNUAL SPRING TRAINING CONFERENCE WILL BE HELD  
APRIL 13-15, 2017 AT THE HILTON GARDEN INN BANGOR  
(250 HASKELL ROAD, BANGOR).**

**KEEP AN EYE OUT FOR MORE INFORMATION AND MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine, Inc.  
34 Main Street, Orono, ME 04473

Phone: 1-800-833-9786 or (207) 827-2331  
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Affiliated With:  
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National Foster Parent Association  
Generations United

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COMMENTS TO: EDITOR, FAMILY TIES, AT THE ADDRESS ABOVE.

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**Adoptive & Foster  
Families of Maine, Inc.**  
& The Kinship Program

***New Resource Families Welcome! You are now receiving the Family Ties newsletter as part of your complimentary membership to AFFM! Learn more about AFFM and services offered by calling 1-800-833-9786 or visit [www.affm.net](http://www.affm.net)***

**Locations:** 34 Main Street, Orono, Maine

& 333 Lincoln Street, Saco, Maine

**Phone:** 1-800-833-9786

**Email:** [info@affm.net](mailto:info@affm.net)

**After Hour Emergency Support:** 207-745-4159

**Website:** [www.affm.net](http://www.affm.net)

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