

*What's*  
**ADOPTION**

*Got to Do  
with It?*



**26th Annual Adoption &  
Foster Care Conference  
and Barker's Annual  
Teen Connections Event  
Saturday, March 14, 2020**

**THE  
BARKER  
ADOPTION  
FOUNDATION** since  
1945

**The Barker Adoption  
Foundation Presents**



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**26th Annual Adoption & Foster Care  
Conference and Barker's Annual  
Teen Connections Event**

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS:**

**Julie Lopez**, adopted person, mother, founder of The Viva Center in Washington D.C., trauma expert, former university professor, National Association of Social Workers (NASW) social worker of the year, architect of The Resilient Brain Project, and author of the book *Live Empowered!*

**Saturday, March 14, 2020**

**The Universities at Shady Grove  
Conference Center**  
Rockville, Maryland

# What's Adoption Got to Do with It?

The Barker Adoption Foundation has been supporting families for 75 years and was one of the very first adoption agencies in the country to offer post-adoption services, including counseling, support groups, search and reunion services, parent and professional training and education, and kids groups and teen programs. In this 75th year of making a difference in the community, we are extremely proud to once again host our Annual Adoption & Foster Care Conference, which brings together hundreds of adult adoptees, birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoption professionals from around the region and the country.

This year's conference, ***What's Adoption Got to Do with It?*** will provide participants the opportunity to explore the nuances of adoption and the lifelong impact that an adoption can have on an adoptee, their birth parents, and their adoptive parents. By popular demand, this year's conference will also include a Teen Connections component for youth in 6th–8th grades and 9th–12th grades. The program, facilitated by Kristen Reighard and Seth Soldonz, will include engaging and fun workshops that will allow adoptees to safely explore their thoughts about adoption, identities as adoptees, feelings about birth parents, and peer and social issues.

Please join us on Saturday, March 14, for multiple opportunities to grow your understanding of the many facets of adoption:

- Learn about implicit memory therapies and how to use them to recognize and reframe long-held thought patterns
- Understand what's behind difficulties some children have in regulating emotions, and strategies for helping them manage those
- Learn how to navigate the process of deciding which type of child you're equipped to handle as a parent
- Hear from adoptive parents who have been through the grief and loss associated with infertility about those feelings and their paths to adoption

- Gain skills in using trauma-informed strategies in parenting children who have had challenging early experiences
- Hear from adult adoptees about the experience of transracial adoption in a society in which race still profoundly shapes reality
- Gain insight into the decision adoptees face about whether and when to share that they were adopted
- Learn alternative strategies for avoiding the power struggle in parenting children who have experienced trauma
- Hear from adoptees who have navigated search and reunion to understand what to expect
- Listen to the stories of birth parents who navigated the path to choosing adoption
- Learn about the science behind emotional dysregulation and strategies for parenting children who experience it
- Gain skills for navigating the educational system to get required services for children with special needs
- Learn how to prepare and engage grandparents and other extended family members for adoption.



# Conference Guest Speakers

## Julie Lopez

Dr. Julie Lopez is a speaker, master clinician, and the Founder of Viva Partnership, a mental health organization dedicated to sparking a mental health revolution.

Her personal mission? To help build stronger leaders and organizations by empowering them with mental health truths that help them reach greater levels of performance excellence. When leaders understand and harness the power of mental health in their companies, everyone thrives, says Dr. Julie.

Making the invisible visible is part of that mission. Her core message – that you can thrive in business, love, and life – has helped her audiences to realize their ultimate potential and move aside the roadblocks that obstruct their greatest level of performance. By leveraging brain science, Dr. Julie loves to illuminate hidden pathways to increased excellence, empowering her audiences talk by talk.

As a human systems expert with a niche in performance enhancement, Dr. Julie works with individuals, teams, and organizations to feel empowered within their professional, personal, and relational realms. Because of her thorough understanding of how the body adapts and survives the stumbling blocks of life, Dr. Julie speaks and works with individuals and teams in a way that is both effective and relatable.

Her clinical specialty is working with implicit memory (hidden, cellular memories) by using advanced brain-based therapies, including EMDR, Brainspotting, and Neurofeedback. After beginning her career as a systems engineer, she quickly gained an interest in viewing the human body as a system – specifically how humans store and deal with trauma in the body and the compulsions often developed to cope and adapt to trauma.

Over the years, Dr. Julie has been cited as a trauma and addictions expert and has been featured by the Associated Press, Fox News, Telemundo, and a host of other print and broadcast publications. She also served as adjunct faculty for The Catholic University of America's graduate social work program for nearly a decade.

Come hear adopted human Dr. Julie's keynote, in which she will uncover the invisible and sometimes-complicated parts of "the adoption story" by leading us all through the neuroscience of how our human system works. She will share how you can use this knowledge to improve your life and the lives of those you love. In her keynote, she will activate your senses so



you can experientially understand how implicit memory works. She will explain why words and love and all the good intentions can never create the happiness we desire. And she will share parts of her own healing journey – what worked, what did not, and why.

### **Andrea Malkin Brenner, PhD**

Andrea Malkin Brenner is a sociologist who works with high school and college students, parents, faculty, and staff on all things related to college transitions. She is the creator of the nationally recognized American University Experience (AUx) Program, the mandatory full-year, first-year transition course at American University. Before that, Andrea served as a faculty member in the Department of Sociology at American University for 20 years, teaching classes on inequality, social problems, and diverse family structures.



Andrea has received multiple awards for her teaching and program design and frequently speaks about first-year transition challenges to families, high schools, and colleges. She is co-author of *How to College: What to Know Before You Go (and When You're There)* (Macmillan, St. Martin's Griffin, 2019) and is a 2019–2020 fellow at the University of California National Center for Free Speech and Civic Engagement.

Andrea is an adoptive parent and is passionate about adoption advocacy. She serves on Barker's Board of Trustees, has chaired Barker's Program Evaluation Committee, and is currently working with Barker staff to implement programming for adoptive grandparents.

### **Nabina Liebow, Ph.D.**

Nabina Liebow is a transracial, international adoptee. Nabina works at American University as Director of the College of Arts & Sciences' Leadership and Ethical Development Program. In that role she seeks to make ethics education accessible to students from all backgrounds. Her academic research is focused on the intersection of ethics and race. She earned her BA from Carleton College in 2011 and her PhD in Philosophy from Georgetown University in 2017.



Nabina's personal history and identity as a transracial, international adoptee, experience as an educator, and professional background in race and ethics situate her to provide unique workshops on pressing and important ethical questions brought up by transracial and international adoption. With her workshops, Nabina hopes to provide participants with tools for thinking through the complexities of transracial and international adoption to inspire best practices.

## Dewanna McDowell, MSW, LCSW-C

Dewanna McDowell is a licensed clinical social worker with 20 years of experience working in the world of foster care and adoption. Her interest in child welfare was sparked when her own biological parents became foster parents, ultimately providing a safe haven for nearly 20 children over two decades of service. Dewanna has worked in various positions in the public child welfare system, providing foster care case management, adoption matching, parent training, and family support services. For the last nine years, she has worked as a contractor with the Barker Adoption Foundation's Project Wait No Longer, providing pre-service training to families interested in older child adoption. She is passionate about preparing adoptive families to successfully parent the children who join their families and supporting those families through placement and beyond.



## Debbie Schugg

Debbie Schugg is a nationally known speaker with more than 30 years of experience working with families of vulnerable youth. She has extensive experience offering individualized, trauma-informed coaching to adoptive families in crisis and training professionals who work with adoptive families nationwide. Debbie is a Family Coach and

Trainer at Kinship Center in California and a Senior Consultant with the National Center on Adoption and Permanency. She is the mother of eight children, seven of whom were adopted from foster care as sibling groups.



## Barker staff presenters include the following:

Beverly Clarke, LCSW-C, LICSW, Senior Director, Clinical & Support Services

Cynthia Cabbage, LCSW-C, LICSW, Director of the Family and Post-Adoption Services Department

Susan Hollar, LCSW-C, LICSW, Executive Director & CEO

Varda Makovsky, LCSW-C, LICSW, Family and Post-Adoption Clinical Specialist

Emily Marshall, LCSW-C, LICSW Director of International Programs

Saara McEachnie, LCSW-C, LICSW, Director of Domestic Adoption Programs

Barker staff bios may be found at <https://www.barkeradoptionfoundation.org/about-us/staff>

# Program

- 8:15 – 8:50**      **Registration, Resource Fair, and Breakfast**
- 9:00 – 9:15**      **Welcome & Introductions**  
Sue Hollar
- 9:15 – 10:00**    **Julie Lopez, Keynote Address:**  
*Relinquishment Hurts...Adoption Has NOTHING to Do With It*
- 10:00 – 10:30**   **Networking and Resource Fair Morning Break**
- 10:30 – 11:45**   **Breakout Session I**
- A. Deep Dive into Implicit Memory
  - B. Press Reset! Rewire your Child's Brain to Establish Improved Emotional Regulation
  - C. Getting to Yes: How Do I Know If and What I'm Equipped to Handle as a Parent?
  - D. Infertility, Grief, and Loss: Do the Feelings Go Away?
- 11:45 – 12:45**   **Lunch**
- 1:45 – 2:00**      **Breakout Session II**
- A. Parenting Children by Birth or by Adoption: What's the Difference?
  - B. Transracial Adoption Is Not Colorblind
  - C. "Because I Said So" Is Not Enough: Strategies to Avoid the Power Struggle
  - D. Navigating Search and Reunion
- 2:00 – 2:15**      **Afternoon Break**
- 2:15 – 3:30**      **Breakout Session III**
- A. A Birth Parent's Journey to Adoption
  - B. Parenting a Dysregulated Child
  - C. Actually, My Parents are White: Coming Out as Transracially or Internationally Adopted
  - D. The Complexities of Adoptive Grandparenting: A Workshop for Adoptive Parents and Grandparents
- 3:45 – 4:20**      **Plenary Panel:**  
*What's Adoption Got to Do with It? Reflections of Adoptees, Birth Parents, and Adoptive Parents*
- 4:20 – 4:30**      **Closing Raffle**

# Teen Connections

"ME"

"You can't spell  
**AWESOME**  
without **ME**"

**(Taylor Swift, American Singer-Songwriter)**

What do you think of when someone says "identity"? What influences our identity? How important is it? How does my meaning of identity fit into my understanding of myself, relationships, family, culture? We all bring our own individuality to the process, and we encounter different experiences along the way. Identity is something we shape as we interact with others over our lifetimes. Having a clear sense of identity helps us feel that the different aspects of ourselves fit together in an understandable way. It also helps us make meaning of the past, understand ourselves in the present, and anticipate the future.

In this full-day workshop (8:15–4:30, including lunch at 11:45) for teens (grade 9–12 and 6–8), we will explore and discuss important questions through digital art, music, and movie clips. Who am I? What makes me unique? What are the strengths and challenges of being an adoptive family? How can we better understand self-esteem, relationships, race, culture, and connection? Teens will create an artistic digital image as a way of addressing some of these questions. If your teen chooses, they can have their digital artwork presented in a slideshow at the close of the day.

Teens will be asked to bring their cell phones, tablets, or borrowed parent phone or tablet to use for parts of the day. One week before the conference, we will send all registered participants more detailed instructions on what to bring the day of the conference. Please dress comfortably because there will be activities that require some movement. See you there!

# Teen Connections Facilitators



## **Kristen Reighard**

Kristen Reighard is a Nationally Certified Counselor who has worked with Barker for almost 10 years. She facilitates Barker's monthly Adult Adoptee Discussion Group and co-facilitates Barker's adopted kids' groups and annual Teen Connections event. Kristen is both a counselor and herself an adoptee. She was adopted as a baby from Seoul, South Korea. She is mother of a 2-year-old boy and has been married for 6 years.

## **Seth Solondz, MSW, LCSW**

Seth Solondz has more than 20 years of experience working with children, adolescents, and adults. He has co-facilitated the Barker Teen Connections program since its inception and enjoys facilitating groups involving children who have been adopted and supporting siblings and parents. In his private practice, he provides therapy to individuals who have been adopted, including children, adolescents, and young adults. He also works in the school system as a school social worker, serving youth and families with a wide range of backgrounds, including those who are at risk and those with special needs.



## **Lilly Trone**

Lilly Trone was adopted as a baby from Colombia, was raised in Arlington, Virginia, and is happy to be assisting with Barker's 2020 Teen Connections Program. She has returned to Colombia on several occasions, first on the 2011 Barker Homeland Tour and then again in 2018 to volunteer for two months, after which she worked as a project coordinator for about a year on that same project. During that year, she met her birth mother and birth family and now is back in Virginia.



The Barker Adoption Foundation is a non-profit, comprehensive adoption agency serving all members of the adoption community – birth parents, adoptive parents, and adopted persons. For nearly 75 years, Barker has provided compassionate, professional counseling and support to more than 30,000 pregnant women and placed over 7,500 children with adoptive families. In addition, Barker has a long history of innovative leadership in adoption education.

To learn more, please visit our website at [www.barkeradoptionfoundation.org](http://www.barkeradoptionfoundation.org)

### **Join our online community:**



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## **Conference Location**

### **The Universities at Shady Grove**

9630 Gudelsky Road  
Rockville, Maryland 20850

A facility map and parking directions can be found at [www.shadygrove.umd.edu/conference-center](http://www.shadygrove.umd.edu/conference-center). Onsite parking is available in the Traville Gateway Garage for a fee.

THE  
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**ADOPTION**  
FOUNDATION <sup>1945</sup>

**Serving Adoptive Parents, Birth Parents  
and Adopted Persons Since 1945**

7979 Old Georgetown Road  
Bethesda, Maryland 20814

[www.barkeradoptionfoundation.org](http://www.barkeradoptionfoundation.org)  
301-664-9664

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# Breakout Session Summaries

## I A. Deep Dive into Implicit Memory

Children's earliest life experiences bring with them an emotional intensity that can contribute to and shape their later beliefs, expectations, behaviors, and feelings. This session will focus on helping adult adoptees, biological parents, adoptive parents, and prospective adoptive parents understand how the brain is shaped by early life events. Participants will learn about a range of implicit memory therapies: what their key components are, how they work, and why they do. They'll also gain hands-on experience in understanding how implicit memory works and how codes have been laid in everybody's system for better or for worse. Plus how when using the right tool these codes can be changed. *Speaker: Julie Lopez*

## I B. Press Reset! Rewire your Child's Brain to Establish Improved Emotional Regulation

Do you have a child struggling with emotional, learning, or behavioral issues? Did you know that we actually have an eighth sensory system called interoception and that understanding this system can assist parents in helping their child regulate their emotions? Parents who teach their child ways of handling Big Feelings give them one of the most powerful life-preparation skills. Discover how toxic stress, anxiety, and pre/post-natal trauma have impacted your child's brain. Learn the basics of how to address your child's emotions and not lose your cool. Walk away with resources to help you rewire your child's brain to foster coping, calming, attention, and increased emotional regulation skills. *Speaker: Cynthia Cabbage*

## I C. Getting to Yes: How Do I Know If and What I'm Equipped to Handle as a Parent?

During the home study process, prospective parents are asked to consider the needs of children they feel best equipped to parent. For some the answer is easy, but for most it is not. How do I decide what I am equipped for? What are the implications of a certain history or medical need, versus no history or information at all? A panel of adoptive parents will discuss how they navigated this decision process with their partner or support network and share their advice and experience regarding their process of introspection and self-assessment that eventually led to saying "yes" to the joys and unknowns of parenting. *Moderator: Emily Marshall*

## I D. Infertility, Grief, and Loss: Do the Feelings Go Away?

Some individuals and couples who build their families through adoption have initially experienced infertility and undertake fertility treatments. Such treatments are physically and emotionally painful, and when unsuccessful typically result in feelings of sadness, grief, and loss. Regardless of how fulfilled an adoptive parent may be with their family, it is natural that some of these feelings resurface during the adoption process and parenting journey. In this session, a panel of adoptive parents will address their experiences, their paths to adoption, and how feelings surrounding infertility have affected their lives at various stages. *Moderator: Varda Makovsky*

## II A. Parenting Children by Birth or by Adoption: What's the Difference?

Parenting is parenting, or is it? We will look at traditional methods of parenting, including when and why they can be effective...and how they can backfire with children coming from challenging beginnings. Debbie will share trauma-informed strategies for effective discipline and ways to shift your approach to parenting to meet the needs of your children, regardless of how they came to your family. *Speaker: Debbie Schugg*

## II B. Transracial Adoption Is Not Colorblind

We used to think of the term "colorblind" as promoting equality, oneness, and acceptance of differences. In reality, it does quite the opposite. To be colorblind is to be dismissive of a whole person, their identity, and their heritage. In transracial adoption, adoptees struggle with acceptance and finding their place within a family that does not look like them. They straddle the fence of assimilating into a world that is familiar, by virtue of their adoption, and dealing with the

realities of their own skin. Participants will hear from adult adoptees who have navigated two very distinct realities within a society that is anything but colorblind. *Moderator: Saara McEachnie*

## II C. "Because I Said So" Is Not Enough: Strategies to Avoid the Power Struggle

Children who have experienced trauma require specialized parenting. For children who have been adopted at an older age, or from foster care, difficult life experiences may further impact their emotions and behavior. During this session we will explore the realities of trauma and discuss how children can be impacted by negative experiences that are beyond their control. We will also explore common parenting responses and styles that are more likely to result in power struggles. Finally, we will discuss alternative parenting strategies that are more likely to result in effectively meeting the emotional needs of youth while achieving the desired behavior. *Speaker: Dewanna McDowell*

## II D. Navigating Search and Reunion

A panel of adoptees who initiated searches with a variety of outcomes will address their respective journeys and experiences with search and reunion. This workshop will explore topics including the decision to search, preparation for the search process, fear of rejection, issues of family loyalty, navigation of new relationships with the birth family, and post-search outcomes. *Moderator: Varda Makovsky*

## III A. A Birth Parent's Journey to Adoption

The birth parent experience is one filled with many layers and continues to evolve with increased access, information, and connections to adoptive families. The journey to choosing adoption is uniquely complex because it includes happiness and sadness, hope and despair, unconditional love, and sacrifice. Understanding the beginning of their child's story not only gives the adoptive family some tools for greater connection but also creates space for empathy in a deeply personal decision. This birth panel joins us to share their unique stories of how they charted their own course and gave the ultimate gift of life and family. *Moderator: Saara McEachnie*

## III B. Parenting a Dysregulated Child

Whether you call them tantrums, meltdowns, or blowups, episodes of dysregulation can leave parents feeling exhausted and frustrated. (And it doesn't feel great for the kids either.) In this session, we will look at the roots of dysregulation and what is really going on in the body and brain of the dysregulated child. Debbie will offer specific, implementable strategies for parenting in a way that helps the child heal and the family thrive in a more peaceful home. *Speaker: Debbie Schugg*

## III C. Actually, My Parents are White: Coming Out as Transracially or Internationally Adopted

Many adoptees struggle with the decision about whether and when to tell friends and colleagues that they were adopted. For transracial and/or international adoptees this decision can feel especially challenging. In this session we will unpack why this decision is not only emotionally challenging but also *ethically* challenging. We will discuss and evaluate strategies for dealing with "coming out" as adopted in different contexts. *Presenter: Nabina Liebow*

## III D. The Complexities of Adoptive Grandparenting: A Workshop for Adoptive Parents and Grandparents

Adoption comes with a learning curve, and adoptive parents enroll in classes that teach and support them during their adoption process. Though adoptive grandparents may play a significant role in adopted children's lives, they aren't offered the same educational benefits or encouragement. This session will include a panel that provide advice and offer tools that adoptive grandparents can use to support their children through the adoption process, including grandparenting across race and culture, using positive language in your adoption narrative, grandparenting both biological and adopted grandchildren, and explaining adoption to friends and family. *Moderator: Andrea Malkin Brenner*