

BREAKOUT SESSION SUMMARIES



I A. Exploring Openness Through the Lens of the Birth Parent

Adoption has come a long way from secrecy to openness. There is value in maintaining healthy connections between adoptive and birth families. But those relationships vary markedly from one family to the next. A panel of birth families will share their experiences, discussing the differences in cultivating and maintaining these ties and the impact that the experience has had on their lives. *Moderator: Saara McEachnie*

I B. Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me About Transracial Parenting

Transracial parenting requires intentional effort and hard work. Often adoptive parents who thought they were prepared encounter realities that are both surprising and painful as they come to terms with the racism and injustices their children face. A panel of families who are parenting children of a race other than their own will share their perspectives, including what they wish they had prepared for before adoption and what they have done to meet the needs of their children related to race and culture. *Moderator: Beverly Clarke*

I C. Talking with Children About Adoption: An Ongoing Process

Adoptive parents report that one of the biggest challenges is how and when to talk to their children about adoption. Conversation about adoption is not a one-time event but an ongoing process that begins when a child is an infant and proceeds through the teen years and beyond. At times it involves proactive discussions initiated by the adoptive parents or others in the child's life. Or those discussions start in response to a child's questions (which often come out of the blue, usually in the car!). The presenters will explore common parental concerns in discussing adoption with children, how children at various stages of development may be thinking about their adoptions, and how to empower children to view adoption from a healthy perspective. *Presenters: Varda Makovsky and Eliza Niemann*

I D. Navigating the Complexity of Birth Family Relationships

Birth family members are an important part of any adoption story. While the relationships can be a confusing combination of complicated, wonderful, and challenging, they are important to acknowledge and maintain. During this session, we will explore both the benefits and challenges of maintaining birth family connections. Using both real-life professional and personal experiences, the presenter will help answer the question of why birth family relationships are important to maintain and will share tips for managing the complexity of these very special connections. *Presenter: Chauncey Strong*

II A. Genetic Testing and Adoption Search

Genetic testing has dramatically altered the landscape for adoptees and birth parents interested in searching for and connecting with birth relatives. While in the past, searches could be initiated only with the involvement of state officials or adoption professionals, genetic testing through sites such as Ancestry.com or 23andMe can connect a searcher to birth parents and other members of the birth family without the benefit of guidance or counseling, which can lead to unintentional results. In this session, the moderator will present a brief overview of how the tests work in adoption search. Then a panel of adult adoptees will share their experiences of searching

or being found through genetic testing sites. *Moderator: Varda Makovsky*

II B. It's Not "Just" Parenting: Special Obligations in Transracial Parenting

Parents who choose to adopt transracially have a unique set of obligations to their children. The presenter, an ethicist and international transracial adoptee, will explore how to help your child answer tough questions, how to provide space for identity exploration, and how to help your child with loneliness. At the end of the workshop, parents will leave with a list of important things to consider before (and after!) adopting transracially. *Presenter: Nabina Liebow, Ph.D.*

II C. Loving You... Just the Way You Are

People often come to adoption after years of longing to be a parent. During that time, it is natural to build an image of who you think your child will be. Just like with biological parenting, the image you have of your child and the reality of who your child is can be very different. In this workshop, we will explore the ways that parents can put their pre-conceived notions aside and fully embrace the unique joys and challenges that come with parenting. Learning to cope with and accept the unpredictable nature of adoptive parenting can be daunting but is a necessary skill to have! A panel of adoptive parents will share how they have navigated parenting kids with unique needs and have learned to accept and embrace the unpredictable journey of parenting. *Moderator: Emily Marshall*

III A. Insights into Blended Families: A Dialogue with Siblings by Birth and Adoption

Families formed by adoption and by birth deal with unique challenges related to family relationships. A panel of sibling sets from both international and domestic adoptive families will reflect on how parents and youth might best deal with the issues that arise. These young adult panelists will also provide insights into how their sensibilities and world views were enlarged by growing up in a blended family. *Moderator: Sue Hollar*

III B. Pressing Beyond Your Breaking Point

All parents reach that moment when it can be hard to function effectively to meet their children's needs. There might be days or weeks when parents feel like they have been pushed to their "breaking point" or that they lack the tools or energy to push through the challenges of parenting. By better understanding themselves and their triggers, parents are better able to care for themselves and their children. The presenter will share her personal and professional experiences "pushing through the tough times." *Presenter: Debbie Schugg*

III C. Maintaining Cultural Connections and Building a Strong Identity

Cultural connection plays a significant and empowering role in the identity formation of international adoptees. Knowledge of the culture, history, and customs of their respective homelands is integral for adopted children and adolescents as they grow and forge their personal identities. This background is especially important for their families, who often have little information on their adopted children's personal backgrounds. A panel of adult adoptees will share their experiences and recollections of how they learned about their culture and offer suggestions to adoptive parents on how to help their child maintain cultural connection and build strong identities. *Moderator: Tina Ji*