

OLDER CHILD ADOPTION PROGRAM

top 6 things to remember

WHEN REVIEWING CHILD FILES

By: PWL Program Director, Beverly Clarke

- 1. Remember that kids are more than their files.** *If anyone was to take every seemingly "bad" thing you had ever done & put it all into one document – minus the context of what was going on in your life at the time, very few people would seem like "good" people.*
- 2. Be honest with yourself.** *Try to think carefully about your skills, strengths and weaknesses and be honest about your ability to meet the needs of the child you are considering. Many people talk about kids as being "bad" and very often it is not about a "bad" child, it is about an ill prepared or less than capable parent. Many kids that seem "bad" to one person prove to be the perfect son or daughter for someone else.*
- 3. Talk to current care givers.** *This is a big one. If you have the opportunity, try to talk with the person that is currently taking care of the child to see what daily life with your child might look like. The day in and day out realities of living in the same home with a person can make all the difference in the world. If you find a child endearing or charming, the most difficult behaviors can seem manageable, whereas if a child's daily habits are all of your trigger behaviors – even a relatively well behaved child can feel "unmanageable". The caveat to this is that you need to filter all information received through your own lens. Some caretakers may find certain behaviors to be a much bigger deal than you would.*
- 4. Look beyond the behaviors.** *Try your best to connect with the child's history and their story. Behaviors are often just symptoms of a larger emotions that your child is learning to manage. Holding on to that reality will help you to parent "beyond the behavior". Being in tune with the grief, trauma and sorrow your child has experienced will make you a much more compassionate and forgiving parent.*
- 5. Assess your resources.** *Support is the key to successful parenting. When looking at the needs of a child, do a careful assessment of the resources you will need in order to make parenting as low-stress as possible. Will they need therapy, tutoring, child care? Will you have to have a backup plan for school suspensions or Summer care? Whatever the needs, do a careful assessment of the support systems you will need and do a COST analysis of those needs to be sure that you are going to be able to access support services as needed to help your child have a successful transition.*
- 6. Be Realistic – Teenagers are teenagers.** *If you are looking at teen profiles, and don't want to parent a child who is sometimes withdrawn, combative, verbally disagreeable, entitled, ungrateful, lies and has fights over rules and technology then chances are, this type of parenting is not for you. Talk to your (honest) friends who are parenting teenagers. They will tell you that (whether by adoption or through biology) parenting teenagers can be rewarding and wonderful in many ways but that there are some basic behavioral and parental struggles that just go with the territory.*

Barker's 23rd Annual Conference

Don't forget to mark your calendars for the 23rd Annual Barker Conference! This year's theme, "My Family is My Family: From Ambivalence to Acceptance" is offering ample opportunities for PWNL families to learn and grow through various workshops, including:



- "What to Expect When You're Expecting an Older Child" presented by Ashley Rhodes-Courter, author of *Three Little Words* and *Three More Words*
- "Insights Into Blended Families: A Dialogue with Sibs by Birth and Adoption"
- "I Choose Whom I Call Family" presented by Chauncey Strong

Ashley Rhodes-Courter will be delivering the conference key-note address and there will be a special performance at the end of the day by Saul-Paul, a rapper, singer, songwriter, and filmmaker with his own story about his experience in foster care.

If you are a PWNL family who would like to attend the conference, but cost is prohibitive, please reach out to Beverly Clarke via e-mail at bclarke@barkerfoundation.org to learn more about limited scholarship opportunities.

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<http://tinyurl.com/PWNLBLOG>

So I Married an Ex-Foster Kid

Like most former foster kids, it's hard for me to trust anyone. More than five years after my adoption had been finalized, I still thought my parents might "send me back" if I displeased them. During my nearly ten years in foster care, I had more than 14 placements. I was moved home-to-home, school-to-school, often with no explanation. Sometimes I was with my brother, sometimes not. No one knew who my birth father was, and I had infrequent visits with my birth mother, including a two-and-a-half year period where she didn't see me at all. I felt like I was constantly being tossed out like trash, or returned because of some defect—all proof that I was worthless and unlovable.

To protect myself I became guarded, aloof, and cold. I had shut down my heart so it could not be wounded. This survival mode numbed me from the frequent disappointments as well as the physical and emotional abuse I experienced. In a self-fulfilling prophecy, I was attracted to guys who didn't return my feelings or who were quick to dump me. I was flattered when an older musician began to flirt with me and I dropped my guard. At first he was attentive and kind, but I soon discovered he loved the spotlight, applause, and the adoration of other girls, more than me. Not only that, he often criticized my appearance, my ambitions, and my friends. I was still magnetized by this man when I met Erick. Erick knew I was still smitten with the other guy, but listened to me woe and was a safe port in my stormy life. When I attended college in his hometown, he understood when I was busy, but also was available during any crisis. Friends accused me of using him, which I denied, but the truth was that I took for granted that he would be there when I needed him but make himself scarce when I had other plans.

While I was aware that I had spent years testing the Courtiers to see how bad I could be before they got rid of me, I was unaware that I was following the same pattern. Erick wasn't fazed. He persisted even when I didn't make time for him for weeks, but he was always available if I needed something from him. Eventually I began to compare other guys to him and slowly realized he was who I turned to more and more often. When I either wised up—or grew up—we began an exclusive relationship. We had been together one way or another for six years before he asked me to marry him on bended knee with a ring proffered and my family standing around to see my reaction. My first thought was that this was a prank. I didn't believe in fairy tales or that someone could make a life-long commitment to me romantically. Even when I finally decided to take a chance on him, I was still so haunted by my dysfunctional past. I was consumed with worry that I was unworthy, or that I would fail at being a wife and mother.

Blog written by Ashley Rhodes-Courter, a former foster youth and current author of "Three Little Words" and "Three More Words". Ashley will speak at Barker's conference in March, 2017. To read the article in full, visit the blog on <http://drjohndegarmofostercare.weebly.com>



Workshops, and Webinars, and Events... Oh My!

ADVOCATING FOR YOUR CHILD'S SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

When: Wednesday, April 5th, 7:00- 9:00 PM

Where: 7979 Old Georgetown Road, Bethesda, MD 20814

***Use code PWNL to register for this workshop for FREE.**

Register at:
www.barkeradoptionfoundation.org/advocating-your-childs-special-needs

FREE WEBINAR ON THE ADOPTION TAX CREDIT

When: Tuesday, March 7th, 2-3PM

What: Adoption Tax Credit Specialist, Becky Wilmoth, EA, will provide an overview of the credit—what is covered, how and when to file for it.

Where: Online

To Register, Visit:
www.adoptivefamilies.com

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S SEXUAL BEHAVIORS WEBINAR

When: Wednesday, March 8th, 6-8 PM

What: Explore the most effective ways to respond to children's sexual behavior issues, teach you how to build your own sexual safety plan for your family and home, and much more.

To Register, Visit:
<http://wiadopt.org/Resources/Calendar-of-Events>