

# Los Angeles County DCFS Adoptions Division Post Adoption Services (PAS) Newsletter

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Issue #5

## ***A reunion story...***

“John” entered foster care when he was three years old. He was in a couple of foster homes before he was placed with an adoptive family at age eight. Although he’s had his ups and downs, John has had a good adoption experience and a stable life. He’s 20 years old now and recently had a reunion with his birth family.

When John was a teenager, he wanted to search for his birthmother. He assured his adoptive mother that she was his “mom,” but he just had a desire to know his “roots.” His mom was secure enough to know that no one could ever replace her in John’s life and also believed that finding birth family is important for kids. John and his mom tried to find his birth mother using what little information they knew about her but were unsuccessful.

Then about six months ago, a call came out of the blue. John had an older sister that had been looking for him a long time, and had finally found him. This sister had cared for John when they were very little, and had for years dreamed of seeing him again. The day after John spoke to his sister on the phone, he and his adoptive mom flew out to meet her and their birthmother, who was living with the sister. John and his mom were filled with many mixed emotions anticipating the reunion. John’s birthmother and sister were at the airport to greet John and his mom, and the reunion was filled with tears. John’s embrace with his sister went on and on.

While John is very happy about his reunion, and about learning lots of things about his early life and birth family history, he is now focusing on going forward with his own life. He is grateful for the support of his adoptive mother through this experience and throughout his life, which continues to help him feel safe and loved and accepted.

The Post Adoption Services (PAS) Unit is committed to providing support and resources to adoptive parents, adoptees and birth families as they face the lifelong issues of adoption. Please contact the PAS Intake Line at (800) 735-4984 for any assistance we can provide.

## ***Consent for Contact***

Although the PAS unit did not assist in the reunion featured in this issue, we can facilitate reunions between adoptees, birth siblings and birth parents. In order to do this, we need written consents from all parties. To submit consents and see how we can help you in this way, please call our PAS Intake Line.

## ***Post-Adoption Conference***

Los Angeles County is pleased to present a Post-Adoption conference entitled “A Family’s Journey Through Adoption” on April 29, 2006. Due to the overwhelming interest, registration for the conference was quickly filled.

## ***Loss inherent in Adoption***

“Love is... Adopting a Child.” It is easy to talk about the love and joy involved with enriching and creating families. It is much harder to acknowledge that loss is at the heart of adoption. Everyone involved in an adoption experiences loss of some kind. To be adopted, a child must first experience significant loss; and loss becomes an issue that impacts the adopted child throughout his/her life.

An important skill for any parent is the ability to help their child cope with losses. This is especially true for parents who adopt children from the foster care system. Many adoptive parents feel uneasy or awkward when talking to their child about losses

caused by birthparents' substance abuse, mental illness, imprisonment, physical or sexual abuse, neglect or abandonment, especially when the cause makes the adoptive parent personally uncomfortable or strikes them as distasteful or inexcusable. Adoptive parents may worry that their child is too fragile, too young, or too upset to discuss what caused the separation or loss of the birthparent. They may be afraid that their older child will replicate the birthparents' behavior if it's spelled out. Adoptive parents may believe that their child seems to be adjusting well and that talking about the loss will only "rock the boat," or that their child will suffer additional emotional damage from being told about what really happened. However, it is important to understand that children are less likely to be scarred by what they are told by loving caregivers than by the fantasies (often frightening, self-blaming, or damaging) they concoct to figure out what has happened when they are not given accurate, age-appropriate information.

Some children are denied help after a loss because those around them (i.e. social workers, judges, foster parents, adoptive parents) discount the severity of its effects on them (i.e. "it happened a long time ago," "but he's in a good home now"). Losses may leave children with vulnerabilities that can be retriggered by new developmental tasks, new relationships or achievements, or any of the changes that come to people in the course of their lives. Unless the child is helped to resolve a major loss, even trivial subsequent losses are likely to provoke intense stresses and reactions. Often times, difficult behaviors in children can be directly connected to loss and grief. Appropriate support can help the child replace his troubling behaviors with more constructive expressions of inner turmoil.

Adoptive parents can benefit from learning how to recognize children's losses and work with their grief. One way adoptive parents can help their child is by overcoming their own reluctance to be open and honest about difficult subjects and developing the skills necessary to make that possible.

If you need a referral to a therapist or other resources in your area, or just need to talk, the Post Adoption Services Unit welcomes you to call us. Some of the above information was excerpted from "Helping Children Cope With Separation and Loss" by Claudia Jewett Jarratt. Free copies of this book are available to adoptive parents and CSWs from the Post Adoption Services unit. A great book for children that addresses loss and grief is "Tear Soup" by Pat Schwiebert & Chuck DeKlyen.

## ***Adoptive parent support groups***

PAS social workers facilitate monthly drop-in support groups (English and Spanish) for adoptive parents throughout L.A. County. No childcare is provided and groups are for adults only. Call PAS Intake Line for more details and information.

## ***Notes and reminders...***

➤➤ DCFS Revenue Enhancement is the unit responsible for processing AAP payments and recertifications. If you have not received an AAP check, or have a change of address, please call the AAP hotline at (800) 697-4444.

➤➤ Many resources for health, counseling and other services can be found in the online DCFS Adoption Handbook. To get to the handbook, go to DCFS' website (<http://dcfs.co.la.ca.us/>), click the light blue Adoptions tab and then click on "DCFS Adoption Handbook." In the Handbook, go to the last section entitled "Community Resources."

➤➤ Adoption Promotion & Support Services (APSS) is a resource for adoptive families, even after finalization. Community-based agencies will provide in-home services in order to nurture lifelong commitments and reduce adoption disruptions. These agencies have adoption expertise and are trained to focus on adoption-related issues. Services can include case management, individual/family therapy\*\*, mentors for parents and children, and linkages to childcare, health care, developmental services, regular/special educational services, etc. If you are in need of these services, please call the PAS Intake Line and request a referral to APSS.

\*\*Don't forget that therapy can be very helpful for children and their parents in processing the loss and other issues inherent in adoption.

## ***Post Adoption Services team***

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**\* PAS Intake Line: 800-735-4984 \***