

# 2024 Barker's Annual Conference

Discover our enlightening and empowering panel discussions

## **Nurturing Bonds: A Guide to Being an Exceptional Adoptive Parent**

Becoming an adoptive parent is a profound and transformative journey, marked by unique challenges and rewards. This session is designed to provide prospective and current adoptive parents with a comprehensive toolkit of knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for creating a loving, supportive, and thriving family environment.

## **The Story of a Lifetime: Talking About Adoption as Your Child Grows**

Telling your child his adoption story is not a one-time event; as your child grows, so does the story. Talking with your child about adoption doesn't require a social work degree, but it does call for honesty, an awareness of a child's developmental needs, and an ability to see through your child's eyes. This interactive workshop will explore the ways to start conversations at an early age and strategies for sustaining and building upon those conversations well into adolescence.

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## Inside Transracial Adoption

It is often difficult to see the full picture in adoption. Adoptees and adoptive parents have individual and unique perspective and struggles that don't get seen side by side, particularly when parents and children are of a different race. This workshop offers a window into the journey of an adoptive family with all the highs and lows. Adoptive mother Julie Etter and son Isaac Etter open up to give adoption professionals and adoptive parents a window into their real live struggles, lessons, and joys and will share how they learned to see each other's viewpoints.

## Older Child Adoption Done Right

Adopting an older child can be a deeply rewarding journey, and it comes with unique challenges and considerations. We will explore the nuances of older child adoption and provide attendees with valuable insights, strategies, and real-life stories from experienced adoptive parents, professionals, and older adoptees themselves. By addressing the emotional, social, and practical aspects, this session will equip attendees with the tools and knowledge necessary to facilitate positive outcomes for both the adoptive family and the child.

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## **Domestic Search and Reunion: Differing Outcomes and Perspectives**

Every search and reunion process follows its own unique path. Some finish in “dead-ends” when birth relatives wish for no contact while others result in happy reunions and lasting ties. Most fall somewhere in between, with both parties spending months or years seeking to find their appropriate places and roles in newfound relatives’ lives. Regardless of the outcome, the journey often involves challenges and emotional highs and lows. Three domestically adopted adults who have searched, and had markedly differing outcomes, share their thoughts about their experiences and the effect their searches have had on their lives.

## **Openness in International Adoption**

International adoptions have traditionally been closed, with little opportunity for openness, indirect contact, or reunion in adulthood. In recent years changes in attitudes, laws and social media have brought about increasing changes in contact between adoptees, adoptive families and birth parents. This session features a panel of internationally adult adoptees who will provide families who adopted internationally with concrete steps to enhance openness surrounding their children’s adoptions, and to prepare for the possibility of expanded information, contact, and reunion in the future.

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## 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.

## Empowering Middle and High School Students toward Success in School and Beyond

At times adopted youth struggle in school despite being bright and talented. Some may be diagnosed with learning disabilities, ADHD, executive functioning impairments or other complications. All face an added developmental issue which – for some – can also potentially contribute to academic challenges. This session will discuss how parents can recognize appropriate resources. It will also empower adoptive parents to avoid the “helicopter parent trap” and develop strategies that foster their children's independence and resilience. By setting and focusing on long

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## **Becoming an Inclusive Family**

Parenting children in a culture where gender and sexual identity are increasingly part of public discourse can be a challenge, especially among the adoptee community where identity development has additional considerations and sensitivities. This session will explore the value of all parents, regardless of their identity or that of their children, creating a family culture in which individuals feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, feelings, and concerns without fear of judgment, criticism, or negative consequences. Adoptees from the LGBTQ + community will courageously share will offer concrete ideas about how parents can foster an environment in which children and youth can grow and safely explore all aspects of identity.

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