

Groups of Support

The camaraderie of fellow adoptive families is more important than you think, says the author of this November/December 1993 article.

by **Suzan Black**

The song "Everybody Needs Somebody Sometime" reveals what an Adoptive Parent Support Group (APSG) is all about. It's a group that provides support for adoptive and prospective adoptive parents and those who were adopted. And that support may be more important than you think.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT

Almost every adult adoptee I have talked to who was not involved in a group with his or her family has mourned this fact. Almost everyone has said, "When I was growing up, I wish I had known other kids who were adopted just like me. I had no one to empathize with what I was going through. I felt really alone at times."

Our children will face many, many issues regarding their adoption as they grow up, and a group will allow them to interact with other children who have been through similar feelings and issues.

I myself desperately needed our support group at one time. Our first adoption went smoothly, but our second adoption was emotionally taxing. Two referrals fell through under very difficult circumstances.

Friends gave us a shoulder to cry on while we grieved for the sons we had lost. At the same time, group members gave us encouragement that there was a healthy baby for us.

FINDING A SUPPORT GROUP

Finding a group that is best suited to the needs of you and your family requires research and energy. To

find one, contact your local adoption agency or adoption attorney. The National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (NAIC) also provides a list of adoptive parent support groups by state. Contact NAIC at 800-251-0075, www.calib.com/naic. Research each group in your area to see what each group offers, and make your choice from there.

WHAT GROUPS OFFER

The best support groups offer families a variety of services, including some or all of the following:

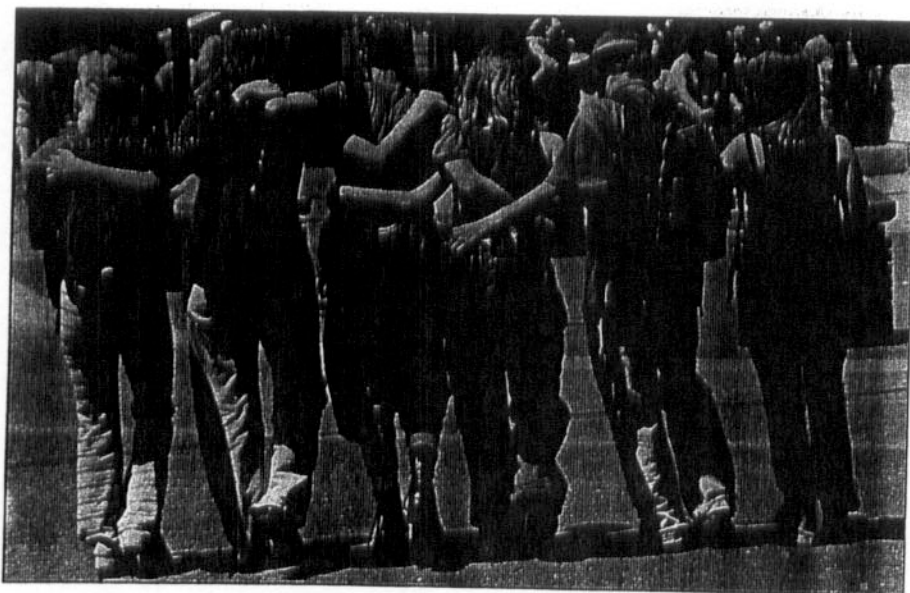
- **Emotional support and guidance**—Support groups provide a shoulder to cry on for families who are riding the emotional roller coaster of the adoption process or guidance to families who are having problems with their children.

- **Newsletter**—Most groups publish a newsletter for their families. A good newsletter will contain adoption-related articles, parenting articles, a waiting child section, a listing of social and educational events, and more.

- **Adoptchats**—These are usually livingroom dialogues with adoptive parents and/or adoption professionals on various topics relating to adoption. Sometimes these may be informal chats with birthmothers, foster parents, adult adoptees, and the adoptive parents sharing experiences. These talks create a bond between group members.

- **Educational workshops**—Most groups offer conferences and workshops to their families and the extended community throughout the year. Some examples of topics you can expect:

1. Classes on how to help children face various issues during each developmental stage in their lives.
2. Workshops on how to confront adoption prejudice and handle it in a positive manner.
3. Classes for prospective adoptive families on how to get started in adoption and how to choose the agency or program best suited to



the person and their family.

4. Cultural orientations and training for families adopting transracially.

5. Classes on the various challenges of special needs children and information on how to obtain government funding and assistance.

6. Issues in adopting an older child such as how to deal with adjustment problems, how to deal with differences in languages and cultures, and basic "survival techniques" for both child and family through the adjustment period.

7. Classes in basic parenting skills such as infant care and childhood nutrition.

• **Information and referral services**—A support group provides current information regarding local adoption agencies and attorneys to prospective adoptive families. Recent adopters may explain how to do paperwork, and costs and

lengths of various adoption programs. Groups also match up families who have recently adopted with prospective families who are interested in the same programs.

• **Social activities**—Many groups sponsor social gatherings throughout the year. These social events are a great way for families to get to know each other and for children to form long-term friendships with each other. Groups may have picnics, parties, cultural events, dinners, camping trips, bowling nights, and a chance to just have fun with other families. In one group, families take over a resort for one week in the summer so their children can vacation together.

ONGOING SUPPORT

Adoptees and their families need support and guidance throughout their lives. Our families need assurance that we are "real" families

with "natural" children who chose to build our families in a different way. We need to be there for each other and connect with each other. Adoptive parent support groups remind us and our children that adoption is, in fact, a beautiful way to build a family.

So keep your child (or prospective child) in mind as you begin your search for a local support group. And remember: adoption is for always, and we and our children need to have a positive attitude about it. That reason alone is why you should make the effort to join a group and make it an important part of your life through the years.

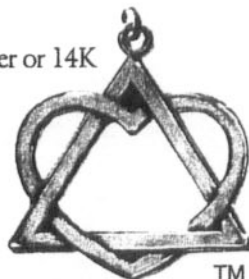
Suzan Black is a board member of InterCountry Adoption Network (ICAN) and founder of Joyful Noise Adoption Support Group. She and her husband are parents of two children and live in Glendale, CA.

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