Center for Adoption Support & Education welcomes you to

**Strengthening Your Family**

an empowering and inspiring webinar series

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**What’s Adoption Got to Do with It?:**
Talking with Children and Teens about Sexuality

*featuring Sean Delehant, LCPC*

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*All participants will be muted throughout the presentation.*
Jockey Being Family generously funds our monthly Strengthening Your Family webinar series.

Who is Jockey Being Family?
Jockey International is a manufacturer, distributor and retailer of underwear and sleepwear for men, women, and children and is active in more than 120 countries. Jockey® created Jockey Being Family, a foundation that helps adoptive families remain strong and stay together-forever because Jockey believes that even one failed adoption is too many. To learn more about Jockey Being Family, please visit www.jockeybeingfamily.com

Jockey International’s C.E.O., Debra Waller, was adopted herself as an infant.

“Jockey Being Family is about bringing people together and it is exhilarating to have impacted the lives of so many families. We set out to strengthen adoptive families but we here at Jockey have also been equally touched by this program, the families, and their stories.”

-Debra S. Waller
What’s Adoption Got to Do with It?
Talking with Children and Teens about Adoption

Sean Delehant, LCPC
The Center for Adoption Support and Education
www.adoptionsupport.org
With decades of experience, our mission is to strengthen the well-being of children and families of all adoptive experiences by providing them the adoption competent services and resources they need, including:

- Pre- and post-adoption counseling, assessment and therapeutic services
- Individual and group therapy for kids, teens and adults
- Crisis intervention, support and assistance with school issues
- Training, education & interactive workshops – for families, educators and professionals
- Nationally recognized post-adoption models
- New family game: 52 Ways to Talk about Adoption
- Award-winning print publications, articles, newsletters and online resources

For more information, visit www.adoptionsupport.org
Sean Delehant, LCPC, CP, Program Director of the Prince George’s County, MD office, earned his graduate degree in Clinical and Community Psychology and is a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor in Maryland and Washington, D.C. He is an adoption therapist who specializes in working with teens and has provided individual, family and group psychotherapy for over 25 years. Sean is certified in psychodrama, sociometry and group psychotherapy and is a Certified Supervisor in Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TF-CBT). He is also a Becoming a Love and Logic Parent Facilitator. In addition, Sean presents locally, nationally and internationally on numerous adoption–related topics. Aside from clinical and training responsibilities, Sean has been developing the technological capacities of C.A.S.E., producing webinars and podcasts and exploring the development of e-publishing, distance therapy and distance training.
Talking about the birds and bees usually creates parental anxiety. Adoptive parents may feel “extra” anxiety because…

adoption and sexuality are intertwined in complex ways.
Within a child’s/teen’s adoption story – the circumstances behind conception and reasons for placement involve sexual behavior.

As soon as parents share the adoption story, the first lesson on how babies are made is introduced.
“…parents of adopted children have no choice but to teach them early in life about sexual issues.”
Pre-School

“There are two ways families are formed. One is by birth and the other is by birth and adoption.”

“You were born to another woman and man and then I or we adopted you / you became part of our family / we became your parents / you became our son/daughter.”
• Preschoolers are aware of pregnant women: mothers of their peers, relatives, neighbors, women in the community, etc.

• Precocious preschoolers may express sadness that their adoptive mothers did not give birth to them.
Some pre-school books even refer to sperm and egg:

1. **Twice-Upon-A-Time:** Born and Adopted by Eleanora Patterson

2. **Mommy Did I Grow in Your Tummy? Where Some Babies Come From** by Elaine Gordon
5-6 yrs.

- Inquisitive about pregnancy and birth - want to know where babies come from
- More questions may lead to more information given about reproduction
School-Age: 7-12

- ALL parents are talking with their children about the birds and the bees

- *It’s So Amazing: A book about eggs, sperm, birth, babies and families* by Robie Harris – this book talks about all different types of families including adoptive families, LGBT families, and families formed through third-party assisted reproduction
Implications for adopted children

- They understand concept of adoption
- Want to know **WHY** they were placed for adoption
- As parents share their child’s adoption story, reasons for placement are discussed.
Reasons for placement can lead to difficult questions about sexual behavior

- single birth mother
- unknown birth father
- marital affair
- adolescent birth parents
- incest / rape
- child removed because of sexual abuse
Children cannot understand adult difficulties/ challenges/ circumstances, i.e. if you are poor – get a job. If you are single – get married.

Child might wonder/say: "Why did my birth mother (or birth father) have sex if she didn't want a baby?" "Why did she have sex with more than one person?"
Challenge is to give message that imparts your values about healthy choices re sexual behavior without being judgmental or negative about the birth parent(s).

(Their decisions, choices, behaviors)
When birth parents are viewed in a positive, empathic and respectful way by adoptive parents, it is usually easier for children to openly express curiosity about their birth family. They also have an easier time incorporating their history into a healthy sense of self and a stronger identity.
Pre-adolescence

- Going through puberty (physical and emotional changes, sexual attraction)
- Human development/sex education is being taught in schools
- Increasing media exposure to sexuality
Adolescence

- Self-esteem, sense of identity and decisions about sexual behavior are impacted by thoughts and feelings related to adoption
- Adolescent wants deeper and more detailed information about his adoption story
- Reasons for placement
Reasons for placement can lead to difficult questions about sexual behavior

- single birth mother
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IDENTITY

• Who am I?
• Who am I like?
• Where did I come from?
• What does my birth parent’s sexual behavior say about me
• Does their sexual behavior define me?
The adolescent ponders...

- Who am I? Am I like my adoptive parents or my birth parents or both?
- How can I possibly figure out who I am knowing little about where I came from?
- Does this mean I am promiscuous?
- Am I “illegitimate”, a “bastard” or unworthy?
Remember the Challenge:

Adolescents must figure out how they are alike and different from two sets of parents.

How do they accomplish this critical developmental milestone in the absence of information about their birth family?
If adoptive parents adopt because of infertility:
Do teens want to identify with them when they may think…

Infertility = Asexuality

What else do teens think about their parents’ sexuality? (single parent, gay/lesbian)

**Goal:** Make sure teen knows they can talk to you about sex.
• Vs. identify with birth parents’ sexual behavior?
• If they identify with them, may ponder if they are like them.
• If they view their birth parents’ sexual behavior with perception that birth parents were “poor” or “anti-social”, may think they (adoptees) are “genetically inferior” to their adoptive parents.
• Therefore, identification with birth parents may influence teen to emulate birth parent’s behavioral choices
• Or – may influence them to go in the opposite direction
• Some research has found that adopted teens are at greater risk for pregnancy
• Teens want to experience what they imagine their birth parents have (especially in the absence of birth parent information)
• Teens may want to “undo” their parents’ relinquishment decision.
• Teens may desire biological connection
Parental Response: Fears/ reactions/ feelings about teen’s developing sexuality

• Adoptive mother may feel jealousy, sense of inadequacy re: fertile, sexy, sexually active daughter

• Adoptive parents fears re: adoptee following birth parents’ path. May become overprotective/restrictive. Projected fear can become self-fulfilling prophecy
Complicated incest taboo (boundaries)

- Without biological connection, there can be sexual attraction, especially in older child/teen adoptions
- Between adoptive parent – teen
- Between unrelated siblings
- Between adoptee and other family members - cousins
What happens when the adoptee comes with a history of sexual abuse? What is the impact on sexual behavior?

• Sexual abuse may have happened when child/teen living with birth family, in foster care, or orphanage
• Impact: 1) on developing child’s sexuality 2) can result in sexual confusion/discomfort 3) can affect feelings/expression of intimacy in non-sexual way (fear of intimate relationships of any kind – including with adoptive parents)
What Parents Need to Do

- Parents (and teens) need to know that curiosity and interest in sex is part of being a normal adolescent.
- Masturbation – Parents and teens need to know what is normal/acceptable.
- Teens are often interested in pornography - help teens define what is OK and what is not OK. Parents need to find out what their teen is viewing – may provide insight into the teen’s pre-adoptive experience.
- Talk with other parents – need to know what is happening in your teen’s school, social sphere – don’t bury your head in the sand – 
• Make time and learn how to communicate with your teen about sex.
• Media will present many opportunities to bring the topic up.
• Attend a local adoptive parent support group to explore these issues and get support from other parents of teens.
• If possible, involve your teen in an adoption-specific teen group where adoption and sexuality are safely discussed.
• Explore books for yourself and your child/teen.
Resources

- *It’s So Amazing* by Robie Harris
- *Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens* by Debbie Riley
- *Adopted Teens Only: A Survival Guide to Adolescence* by Danea Gorbett
- *Adoption and the Sexually Abused Child* by Joan and Bernard McNamara
- *The Teen Health Book: A Parents’ guide to Adolescent health and Well-Being* by Ralph Lopez, M.D.
- *Changing Bodies, Changing Lives: A Book for Teens on Sex and Relationships* by Ruth Bell
Certificates of Attendance

Email request to arroyo@adoptionsupport.org
For information on our monthly “Strengthening Your Family” webinar series, please visit www.adoptionsupport.org/strengtheningyourfamily

Registration is FREE for first 150 registrants! The coupon codes are announced in the monthly e-newsletter

For a schedule of our pre-recorded webinars on our most requested topics, please visit www.adoptionsupport.org/indemand