Center for Adoption Support & Education welcomes you to

**Strengthening Your Family**

an empowering and inspiring webinar series

**Beyond the Home Study: Navigating Real Life as an LGBT Adoptive Family**

*featuring Ellen Kahn, Cynthia Cubbage, and Beth Wheeler*

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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
Beyond the Home Study: Navigating Real Life as an LGBT Adoptive Family

Presented by
Ellen Kahn, Cynthia Cubbage
and Beth Wheeler
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
The LGBT Family

- There are approximately 600,000 gay and lesbian families, and that they live in 99.3% of all U.S. counties.

- Same-sex couples raising adopted children are older, more educated, and have more economic resources than other adoptive parents.

- Adopted children with same-sex parents are younger and more likely to be born in another country.

- An estimated 65,500 adopted children are living with a lesbian or gay parent.

- An estimated 14,100 foster children are living with gay and lesbian parents.

- More than 16,000 adopted children are living with lesbian and gay parents in California, the highest number among the states.

- Gay and lesbian parents are raising four percent of all adopted children in the United States.

(Statistics from the U.S. Census 2000, the National Survey of Family Growth 2002, and the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System 2004)
History of LGBT Adoption

- LGBT parents were considered as a resource for “certain children”.
- In the mid 80’s, gay men were allowed to be foster/adoptive parents to babies and children with HIV/AIDS.
- In the 90’s and today – older children, special needs from foster care
- “Hierarchy” of placement
History of LGBT Adoption

- In 1990’s, early 2000’s international adoption – countries allowed ‘singles’ to adopt, not LGBT (China, Guatemala)

- Late 1990’s – majority of professional organizations declared - no valid reason for preventing placement

- Many parts of the country still have bias and obstacles continue to exist (waiting children)
The Adoption Process

- Must first consider the extent to which you are “out”
- Family’s support or lack of
- Concerns about professionals’ attitudes – are they aware of the positive research on LGBT families
- Post-adoption – parenting will force you to be out
The Home Study

- Is not just supposed to be an assessment of you, but also preparation and education about raising adopted children; adoptive family life. Were there missed opportunities to be better prepared?

- If single, may not discuss SO or GI/GE ???

- What will young child be told?

- If there was not full disclosure in the process it could cause difficulty when a child is placed.
The Importance of Being Out

- The impact of secrecy on children and families
- The impact of being out with foster parents/birth parents
- The impact of being out with extended family and family friends
Making the Transition to Coming Out

- Decisions about who to tell and why now
- Share worries and fears
- Share need for support – educate about becoming adoptive parent(s) including how they can support your child(ren)
- How and what to tell your child if they don’t know – explaining reasons for secrecy, etc.
LGBT Parents:...

Examining “internalized homophobia”. Abigail Garner’s book, *Families Like Mine* describes the following about a “Coming Out” and a families process...

- If a parent feels they want to wait until the child is old enough to understand what “gay” means- By that time the child could easily have a homophobic attitude that is prevalent in our society. This is very similar to the adoption belief of using adoption books, movies, to “normalize” adoption at an early age. You want to “normalize” the gay and lesbian family as much as possible early on.

- If kids are told when they are young, just like with adoption, they do not make assumptions that must be undone. Also - because they do not yet fully understand what sexuality is, they are less likely to have developed homophobic views that will make it harder for them to accept their parent’s sexuality.

Ask yourself:
How “OUT” are you?

For example: Are you less affectionate with your partner at grandma’s house as opposed to when you are at a friend’s house?
Common Experiences of LGBT Parents: Are You Prepared?

- LGBT families must help their adopted children “make sense” of their family since it looks different than most of the families they see around them.
- Medical Forms at the pediatrician’s office have “mother and father”
- How and what do you communicate with your child’s school? How will you ask the school to make adaptations to ensure that your child feels “safe” at school. E.g. Family tree assignment, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day
LGBT Families

- How do we distinguish between “normalizing” our families and “minimizing” the reality that we are different?
- How and when is it important to give the message that we are like “all other families?”
- How do we have conversations with our young children about anti-LGBT bias?
LGBT Adoptive Families

LGBT Adoptive Parents must make sure they understand adoption through the eyes of their child at different developmental stages.

DO: It is important to know that children between the ages of 5 and 7 usually begin to feel:

- Inquisitive about the birthing experience
- Have physical and racial differences from their families
- Realize their family looks different from most families around them (same-sex parents)
- Some may even begin to realize that he/she lost something in order to be adopted, begin feelings of loss and grief

This is important because the adopted child may often have fears of being rejected and since LGBT families are still rejected in society - the fear of rejection could be increased.

LGBT families must make sure they receive the education and support necessary to address children’s issues that may arise due to their adoption AND understand how being an LGBT family adds an “extra layer of difference” for their family.
LGBT Parents …

Understand your child may ask many questions you need to be prepared to answer

- Do I have a mommy?- for a two dad family
- Do I have a daddy? -for a two mom family
- Will I be gay like you?
- Is my birth parent gay?
- Did my birth parents know I was going to be living with gay parents? Did you lie?
LGBT Parents....

Understand child’s feelings about LOYALTY to adoptive parents and birth parents

Just as an adopted child may not tell their adoptive parents they are thinking about their birthparents often, they do not feel comfortable talking to their parents about the struggles they may be having due to having parents that are a same sex couple.

Do Not:

- Wait for your child to tell you they are getting teased about being part of an LGBT Family
- Wait for your child to tell you they have been asked intrusive questions about their adoption or family make-up
- If you have asked your child whether or not they have received intrusive questions about their family or if they have been teased at school. DO NOT assume that they are telling you the truth. They may try to protect you and do not want to hurt your feelings. They may take on a caretaker role.

Do: Prepare them for homophobia, racism, and questions about adoption
Talking With and Supporting Our Older Children

- Middle and high school age children may not want to be “out” about their family structure.
- How do you balance privacy and secrecy?
- How do you respect the boundaries your child needs in their peer relationships?
Color Blind and Gay Blind

**Color Blind**- Adoptive parents parenting a child of a different race than their own will sometimes assume that all children are the same no matter what color and that I don’t care about the fact that I’m parenting an African American child.

**Gay Blind**- Example: “Being part of an LGBT family isn’t a big deal, just ignore people who may say negative things about our family..you don’t need to worry about it”
Color Blind and Gay Blind

Parents need to take a “color conscious” approach.

They need to teach their children about race, racism, and give their children the language and tools to respond to questions about adoption, but to give them the skills and language to use to address homophobic and racist remarks.
Parenting transracially adopted youth presents unique challenges surrounding race and culture.

- Much of what transracial adoptive families want to do is help their adopted child fit and feel that they belong – that they are NOT different.

- When a child is transracially adopted, they are visibly different. It can be challenging for families to find the balance between integrating the child into their family and dealing with reality that differences exist.
Adoptive Families and Identity

- Transracial adoptive parents must provide their children with racial socialization.
- All adoptive parents, including same race families, face challenges around helping their children develop self-esteem and healthy, secure sense of identity.
IDENTITY

Who am I?
Who am I like?
Where did I come from?
Children develop sense of self by:

- Seeing how they are similar to their families
- Seeing how they are different from their families
- Discovering how others see them
- Integrating parts of self from the past, present and future dreams.
Identity Involves...

- Intra-psychic component
- Family relationships
- The social world beyond the family, peers, teachers, coaches
The adoptive child’s family should be reflected in their community

DO Ask yourself: Do you have friends that come to your dinner table often that look like yours (same-sex couple, trans-racial adoptive family)?

This is extremely important because it NORMALIZES the differences which leads to less fear of rejection, less negative views of being different, and healthier sense of self-esteem.
Thank you to our SPEAKERS

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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 will be available later this week.

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