

# **The Importance of Support**

**by Becca Martinson**

I'll never forget the day I attended my first "Mommy & Me" class. I am a White, single, adoptive parent of an African American child. My daughter was about 2 months old at the time. There I was, surrounded by other new mothers, but all they wanted to talk about was postpartum depression, who their baby looked like and how much their in-laws were interfering in their lives. I was coming to recognize my status among the fringes in the brotherhood of parents.

In March I attended a conference on "Growing Up Adopted in a Multiracial Family." I was amazed at the sense of peace I felt being surrounded by hundreds of people who had adopted children of color. Suddenly, nothing needed to be said. Yet everything could be talked about.

And so it was that I came to be instrumental in setting up a support group for my family - for families who've adopted children of color. Our group, the North Bay chapter of "Pact Alliance of Families," has a small but solid core of members and is growing by leaps and bounds. We don't have a set agenda at our meetings. We just get together and do what comes naturally.

## **The Kids**

We seem to spend a lot of time just watching the kids be kids. Most of the children in our group are infants, but already they seem to have established a sense of camaraderie. They know each other and genuinely seem to enjoy being together. I'm glad my child will grow up having peers with similar backgrounds. As for me, I've come to care about the other babies almost as much as I care about my own. I love to see Carisa take her first steps and hear about Adam's first words.

## **The Adults**

In our group, we don't tend to call each other on a day-to-day basis. But when I do happen to be talking to someone on the telephone, our conversations are rarely less than a half hour long. There's always a lot to talk about and a lot to share.

Our group meetings are the same. The afternoon always seems to go a little too fast, and I really look forward to our next get-together. I can't really tell you everything we talk about. But I can tell you it all seems important. There are discussions about formula, strangers' comments, pediatricians, diaper rash, how our adoptions happened, birth family relationships, response of family and friends to our adoptions, joyful moments, finances and the future.

## **Racial Issues**

Recently, everyone was forced to face the ugly reality of racism in our country during the aftermath of the Rodney King verdict. As frightening as the events were to the general population, it had an especially profound effect on those of us who are parenting Black children. It reinforced for us the importance of paying attention to the racism in our everyday lives and to giving our kids a solid base of self-esteem. Many of us were eager to attend our support group meetings during those painful weeks. There weren't any answers for our grief, but I was enormously grateful for the chance to talk about it with others who understood its weight in my life.

I hope all adoptive parents of children of color are as fortunate as I am in finding a support group of wonderful, caring friends.