



pact's

point of view

The newsletter for adoptive families with children of color

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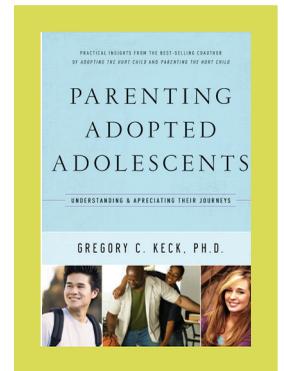
Book Review

Parenting Adopted Adolescents

Understanding and Appreciating Their Journeys

By Gregory Keck

Reviewed by Alison Seevak



Not long ago, my kindergartener ran away from home, stuffed dog and blanket packed into her Dora the Explorer backpack. Anna made it as far as the corner before she turned around and ran back into my arms. I stood on the front steps of our house, watching the drama unfold, and thought this is cute now, but if it's like this at six, what's it going to be like when she's sixteen?

Like many parents of young children, I worry about the turbulent teenage years. And as an adoptive parent, I have the added worry of how adoption issues might intertwine with and possibly combust alongside the tasks of separation and self-definition that all teenagers face.

Gregory Keck deals with these concerns in his new book, *Parenting Adopted Adolescents: Understanding and Appreciating Their Journeys*. Keck is in a unique position to write this book. He is the founder of the Attachment and Bonding Center of Ohio, specializing in the treatment of children and adolescents who have experienced developmental interruptions. The co-author of two books, *Adopting the Hurt Child* and *Parenting the Hurt Child*, he is also the father of two sons, both adopted as teens.

Written in a casual, accessible style, Keck's underlying point is that all children who are adopted into their families must deal with the developmental issues of adolescence as well as adoption-related issues, either simultaneously or alternately. To be adopted as a teenager means having the added challenge of needing to balance attachment to and separation from one's adoptive family. In chapters covering identity formation, loss of the birth family, physical and sexual development, transracial adoption and the meaning of turning eighteen, Keck gives an overview of what the issues are, how they intersect, and the impact they may have on adoptees and their families.

Keck mines his experience as a clinician and includes stories from his many years of practice. In one chapter, he simply lets teens and young adult adoptees (and their parents) speak for themselves. They explore topics ranging from life in multiple

foster care placements to growing up as a transracial adoptee to one mother's bittersweet reflection as she sends her adopted daughter off to college. This chapter is particularly revealing, poignant and hopeful. (Editor's note: Pact Director Beth Hall and her children Sofia and James contributed to this chapter.)

Keck attempts to cover so much material that I couldn't help but wonder if *Parenting Adopted Adolescents* could really be two books, not one. It feels a bit like a book with an identity crisis. Is it a guide to the very real challenges of adopting a teenager? Or a general overview of the issues that all adopted teens grapple with, no matter the age at which they were adopted? Keck's personal and professional experience allow him to write with expertise about the ups and downs of adopting a teenager, and the topic deserves its own volume. He shows a special sensitivity to teens who come from chaotic beginnings and have lived in multiple foster homes, and to the issues of young men, in particular.

Because Keck is trying to cover so much ground, he is only able to scratch the surface of some of the questions he raises. For example, he touches on the important issue of privacy and adoptive families. Any adoptive parent, and especially those with transracially adopted children, will relate when he writes "adoptive families may need to intervene to protect their child from rude, interrogating outsiders – whether teachers, counselors, doctors, or the folks next door." However, he doesn't offer many examples or stories of how families deal with these "unexpected intrusions into their lives." His suggestion that families come up with "funny and creative responses to ridiculous inquiries" left me wanting more.

Despite these small lapses, *Parenting Adopted Adolescents* is an important work which should not be missed by anyone with an interest in adolescence and adoption. It will be useful to adoptive parents with children of all ages, but particularly to those considering adoption of a teenager.

Alison Seevak lives in the San Francisco Bay Area with her daughter Anna.