

# the family knot



## Welcome!

August is a time of transition, regardless of whether your kids are starting school or not. We hope that you enjoy this transition-themed issue of our post-adoption newsletter!

As always, please let us know if there are topics you would like to see covered or if you would like to submit a photo for our featured child section!

### Summer 2015 Statistics May - June - July

80

Waiting Child Matches

4

Ukraine Child Matches

106

Children Home from China

3

Children Home from Latvia

1

Children Home from Bulgaria

## Coping with Transition

Some quick tips to make transition a bit easier for the little one in your life

Let's face it: we like knowing what's going on and what to expect. As adults, many of us don't appreciate being informed we have a newly scheduled meeting coming up in 10 minutes, or to find out last minute that our babysitter cancelled. Larger life changes – marriage, adding a child to the family, divorce, death – are very stressful, even when they are happy occasions or we are well prepared. Transitions, or times of change, are inevitable, and part of life is learning to cope with these transitions.

Children are not immune to the challenges of transition. In fact, in some ways they are more susceptible to these challenges, as they are typically in control of very little in their lives. Most children do not have the opportunity to arrange their own schedules, to plan ahead, or to decide what they'd like to do and have the power to make it happen. They are also typically less informed about what is happening behind the scenes. Parents or teachers may be aware of weather concerns or changes to schedule due to illness or other more pressing needs – but children are not involved in these decisions, and so are surprised when the planned schedule changes.

Many people thrive in routine, including children. When there are transitions or changes, they undermine self-confidence, assurance, and stability. This explains, in part, why most people are afraid of change. For children, especially children with a history of trauma, this fear can be crippling. The combination of fear and insecurity can cause your typically sweet tempered child to turn into a screaming, kicking mess just because you decided to stop at the bank before you went to the park, instead of the other way around.

transitions, with the new school year starting and families with all ages of children switching from the summer schedule to the more business-like structure of the school year. The key is to be aware of big transitions and prepare your children for them when possible, and to balance schedules as much as you can to help your children have both stability and the opportunity to learn how to cope with transitions effectively.

- Try to follow a predictable routine each day. Have mealtimes and bedtime at the same time, and incorporate rituals with these times to help your kid's transition. This may be reading a book each night at bedtime, or having your child help set the table each night before dinner. Rituals give your child the chance to learn new skills and behaviors, but also to become confident in their abilities.

- If your child is particularly sensitive to transitions or change, give them a rundown of the day's schedule each day, and keep them informed when things might be changing.

- When you know a small (to you) but significant (to them) change is happening, like a change in teachers, start of the new school year, a field trip day, or a major change to the schedule, talk to your child about the change ahead of time. Try to find ways to coach your child on what the change will entail, and how they can cope with any feelings of fear or insecurity, and also things they can do to feel more prepared. For younger children, it may help to act out the change or playact with stuffed animals or dolls what they might do during the change. Older children may be able to have a conversation and talk out how the change might look.

So what do you do? This time of year is rife with

*(continued on pg. 3)*

## Adopteen: From a Parent

By Sarah Hopkins

Mother to two adopted girls, Sarah shares her experience with Adopteen.

I accidentally discovered Adopteen two years ago through a Facebook post about their Adoptees Giving Back Orphanage Service Trip (AGBOST) to China, one of several programs they offer. We had just watched the documentary *Somewhere Between*, which profiles a group of Chinese adoptees growing up in the U.S. My then 14-year-old daughter was suddenly way more interested in China and adoption. When I mentioned the trip, she said, "I want to go!" She was too young for 2013, so I marked the 2014 application date on my calendar and hoped her interest would last the year. It did, and she attended her first Adopteen event, traveling to Beijing and Shenyang in the summer of 2014.

It sounds cliché, but the trip truly was a life-changing experience for her – a chance to return to China with a group of teens just like her (all adopted, all from China), to rediscover China with a group of her peers, and to give love back to children living in an orphanage. She'd struggled with homesickness at past sleepover camps, yet she had absolutely no trouble on this 10-day trip halfway around the world! When we video chatted during her week at the orphanage, she was in tears, but over the circumstances of some of the children living in the orphanage, not any homesickness on her part. She felt like she was doing something good. She loved every minute of it and never felt that she wanted to be anywhere else.

So the China trip originally caught my attention, but it was Adopteen's website that sold me on the rest of the programs they offer – the words under *Who We Are: Belonging* is when you never have to explain why you belong. Celebration. Inspiration. Pride.; the photos from a summer camp-conference of 100+ Chinese adoptees laughing, hugging, playing together; and most of all, the FUN that permeates everything. It sounded perfect, one of those rare organizations that truly connects with teens.

This summer, my daughter decided to attend the San Diego camp-conference (many in Adopteen probably do the U.S. summer camps before embarking on the China trip – she did it in reverse). She also applied and was accepted for the leadership committee that plans the camp-conferences, develops workshop ideas, teaches some of the workshops, and works as group leaders/camp counselors. The emphasis is on having fun together, not on Chinese culture or adoption (although those topics also come up). Even though my daughter knew only a handful of people from the previous summer's trip, she felt an instant bond and comfort with everyone there, an immediate closeness and acceptance.

The absolute best thing about Adopteen's programs is that they are led, organized and directed by teen and young adult adoptees, with expert guidance by co-founder/director Amy Zhong. The teens and young adults set their own path and make the decisions. There's a lot in our children's early lives



that happened to them that they had no control over, and some live in communities where they feel different from everyone around them. With Adopteen, they get to be together with others who are just like them (but also very diverse) and create their own space and own activities. They celebrate who they are. It's empowering and confidence-building.

If you are new to Adopteen and have a pre-teen, teen or teen+ who was adopted, here's what I would do:

- Read everything on Adopteen's website and sign up for the mailing list: <http://adopteen.org/>.
- Follow them on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Learn about their many programs and projects – the camp-conferences, Adoptees Giving Back, AdopTween, #StoptheAwkward, Adoptstronauts, and more!
- Look though the 2,000+ photos of this summer's two camp-conferences on Adopteen's Facebook page – who would want to miss that craziness? <https://www.facebook.com/ilikeadopteen>
- Watch the AGBOST video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GCAX3Y7f9rw> – I absolutely recommend this trip for any China-adopted teens who are ready!

When we parents started the adoption process many years ago, we found one another and created our own support networks and communities that helped us connect and create positive experiences for our kids. How wonderful is it that we now have Adopteen, created by our children to continue the community, but also creating the community that THEY need and want? It feels great to make the handoff.

*For more information on Adopteen, contact Adam Alberti at [info@adopteen.org](mailto:info@adopteen.org), or (303) 850-9998 ext. 26.*



## Your Child and School

Help your child find everyday comfort at school

Starting a new school year can be an exciting, yet stressful, prospect for both parents and children. This is a momentous transition period, whether your child is starting a brand new school or simply moving grades. This can be especially difficult for children with a history of trauma, or children who struggle more than usual with transitions, or “holding it together” for a long school day. While your child is still getting used to the idea of school, it is a great idea and perfectly acceptable for you to meet with their school and address any concerns that your family may have, in order to make this transition an easier one.

Before meeting with school staff or your child’s teacher, talk with your child about how much they want them to know. What do they want to keep as their own and what are they comfortable with other people knowing? What do they want their classmates to know? Can they talk to their teacher about their story, or do they not want to talk about that with anyone? Some children are completely open about their history with everyone they meet – teachers and students alike, and some don’t want anyone to know about it. Either approach is perfectly okay. However, try to talk to your child and come to an agreement about at least a minimal amount of information to share with the teacher so that they can help your child be successful in class.

Here are some important subjects and questions to cover with your child’s school staff and teachers:

- If there is assigned seating can your child come in before school starts and pick a seat out? Schools will usually announce classroom assignments a week or so before school starts and sometimes give parents and students a chance to meet their teachers beforehand. Once you find out who your child’s teacher will be, try to set up a meet and greet so your child can meet the teacher and see the classroom. Prior to the meeting, talk with the teacher and see if there will be assigned seating - if so, can your child pick out their seat? If the

teacher says no, ask if the desks will already have children’s names on them so they can see where they will be seating. This can sometimes help in finding their footing before they go to class.

- Is it possible to have a water bottle with your child and/or snacks every few hours? Many children do best when they have a small snack and access to water at least every two hours. If this is your child, ask the teacher how she/the school handles snack breaks during the day. Is there a water fountain nearby that they can easily access? Would it be possible to bring a small water bottle to class? Can they keep a couple snacks in their backpack if they need them? If they’re hesitant to allow food in the classroom ask if it would be ok for them to go to the nurse’s office for a small snack. Once you have a plan with the teacher, help coach your child about how to ask permission to be respectful of the classroom if they have a need of a snack or a drink.

- Change in routine and transitions. While we understand that routines sometimes change and things happen, this can be very difficult for adopted children to cope with. If there is a change to the typical day plan (teacher will be out, there will be a field day or an assembly) ask if the teacher could notify you so that you can prep your child before they even go to school.

- Difficult assignments. Assignments such as making a family tree, bringing in baby pictures, or writing a self-biography can make your adopted child feel out of place, uncomfortable, sad, angry, or shamed. Make sure the teacher is aware of your child’s situation and together try to come up with a fun spin on the typical family trees and biographies. It’s not realistic to suggest that a teacher remove an assignment completely from their curriculum, but you should know about it and they should be able to change your child’s specific assignment so as to not ostracize them.

*(Coping with Transition, continued from pg. 1)*

- Sometimes transitions happen suddenly, or big life changes (death, a friend moving away) happen that can’t be planned for. In the moment, help your child feel safe by reassuring them, acknowledging their feelings of fear or frustration, and helping to remind them of strategies they have practiced in smaller transitions. These strategies can include looking for things they are comfortable in or confident with, and focusing on those things rather than what has changed, having a close friend or family member to talk to and support them, or to engage in an activity that they find calming (coloring, listening to music, playing outside).

- Many children who struggle with transitions are also more aware than most of the subtle transitions the rest of us ignore – like growing older, maturing into adulthood, and eventually

dying. Although there is often nothing concrete to do or say to help counteract these fears, it can be a good opportunity to help kids learn to challenge their own thoughts and feelings. Acknowledge that your child feels fear or uncertainty right now, but are their thoughts and feelings based on what is true? An example from the past may be helpful – remember when your son thought the very coolest thing would be the new Power Ranger toy and he waited months to get it for Christmas, but as soon as he got it he realized it wasn’t as fun as he thought? The same is true of all thoughts of the future. In reality, we don’t know what will be true yet. What things does your child enjoy that she can do today? Maybe in a few years, she will enjoy something else just as much, but doesn’t know to expect that yet. All of us will grow older, but really all we can truly know and enjoy is today. When tomorrow gets here, we’ll be a bit older and a bit better able to cope with what comes then.



## Featured Child

In each issue, we love to feature a CCAI child or family!

This is Emme MengTao Jankowski! Emme is 4 years old. Her Chinese given name, Meng Tao, means sprouting peach. She loves growing peaches(!), but her favorite thing to do is arts and crafts - she loves to paint! Emme came home from Inner Mongolia one and a half years ago and has been an absolute blessing ever since. During the adoption process roller coaster, parents go through the highest of highs and the lowest of lows; all the while people say "Hang in there! It will be worth it!" At the time it can be hard to stay positive watching the timeline grow seemingly ever longer, but you know what? It was worth it! Every second, every minute, every hour of the 7 plus year wait got us to one place...being matched with this little girl that we absolutely 100% know in our hearts was meant to be. This child, our child, is home with us and we love her dearly. Thank you CCAI for making this possible.

Would you like to share a picture to be shared in our Featured Child Section next time? Send the picture and a description to [postadoption3@ccaifamily.org](mailto:postadoption3@ccaifamily.org).

## Coming Soon!

In the coming months, CCAI together with AdoptTeen will host programs available to ALL adoptees. For more information on these programs, contact Adam Alberti at [postadoption3@ccaifamily.org](mailto:postadoption3@ccaifamily.org), and stay tuned for more announcements!

### *September:*

9/12/15, 1-4p: AdopTween kicks off with its first program of the school year! Open to all adoptees age 9-12, \$30

9/19/15, 11a-1p: CCAI will host a panel of adoptees, who will answer questions relevant to their experience growing up. Open to all families, suggested donation of \$15

### *October:*

10/17/15, 1-4p: AdopTween, open to all adoptees age 9-12, \$30

10/10 & 10/17, 9-2p: Xpress Yourself Teen, open to all adoptees age 13+, \$95.



[www.ccaifamily.org](http://www.ccaifamily.org)

For more information about our Post Adoption Department, programs, or for any questions or concerns, please contact Heather Diaz at [postadoption@ccaifamily.org](mailto:postadoption@ccaifamily.org), or (303) 850-9998 ex. 22.