



Somebody to Lean On: Connecting With or Creating a Support Group

Families choose adoption for a number of reasons. Perhaps you chose adoption as a way to expand your family; now you've started to notice that parenting your biological child is or was a very different experience from parenting the child you adopted. Or, maybe your family chose adoption because of infertility issues, which comes with myriad emotions and expectations for both you, as a parent, and for your child.

Adoptive parents may encounter additional parenting challenges. Children who were adopted experience such things as grief and loss, attachment issues, have trauma histories, or possibly other types of special needs. Turning to other adoptive parents can be enormously helpful in handling these types of parenting issues. Though every adoption story is a personal and individual experience, it can be reassuring to know that you are not alone in your adoption journey—that there are other families out there like yours dealing with similar situations.

Very often, when dealing with tough

emotions, we turn to close family and friends. But you may not have family or friends available who understand the experiences and emotions you sometimes face when parenting a child who was adopted. Taking part in a support group with other adoptive families is often where adoptive parents feel heard, understood, and validated.



Support groups offer a great way to connect to other adoptive parents who have shared experiences. You can find parenting ideas and suggestions for a child with certain needs or challenges. Parents are able to share resources, like therapists for example, offer each other support and encouragement through trying times, and are there to

celebrate with you during joyful times. They are places where you can just talk with other parents who understand what you are going through and what you are feeling.

Another benefit is being able to learn from others who have been where you are or imparting your knowledge onto others. Sometimes, support groups bring in experts

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from the field of adoption or on a particular issue to help educate members on a variety of topics, such as learning disabilities or attachment issues. Education could mean that you learn parenting techniques for a child with ADHD or learn how trauma affects children who are adopted internationally, for example.

Types of Support Groups

There are supports for all types of adoption, such as international, foster care, and domestic infant adoptions, as well as general adoption groups. There are a variety of ways to become involved in a support group. One way is to look in your area for a local group that meets regularly.

In-person support groups are where members get together at a designated time and place on a regular basis to share stories, experiences, and learn from one another. The benefits of in-person support groups is the advantage of allowing face-to-face contact with others. This enables members to develop relationships and offers a more personal touch versus other types of support groups. Group members are able to connect and communicate with one another using more than just words. This non-verbal communication may allow members opportunities for sharing greater empathy and understanding.

In searching for a local group, checking with your adoption agency may be a good place to start. Another great way to find a support group is through contacting the [Wisconsin Adoption & Permanency Support \(WiAPS\) program](#) to locate a support group in your area. If there is not one in your area, your adoption agency or WiAPS may be able to help connect you to another adoptive family in or around your community to serve as a support and sounding board.

There are a number of web-based supports available now for families as well, such as

online support groups. Like in-person support groups, these groups can help families gain insight and support on parenting an adopted child.

Online support groups are commonly in the form of forums and blogs. A forum is usually separated by topics and members are able to comment, read, and post on any topic they choose to. Anyone can start a topic and anyone can respond if they so choose. Blogs are where the blogger (like a speaker) has control of the topic and allows questions and comments from the audience (you). These are anonymous ways to read and write about your adoption and parenting story.

There are also ways to connect through social media, especially through Facebook, where there are a number of private and public groups you can join. These have gained some popularity lately. Some are run by individuals or small groups, some are run by agencies or organizations.

You can request to join an open Facebook group. Open groups often post stories, information, and other resources for those who visit the group's page. Closed groups are a little different. You have to ask the moderator to accept you into the group. Unlike open groups, closed group postings are for members only. They work similar to a forum where members can post questions or ideas and anyone from the group can respond.

However, it's important to do your homework first, to ensure that you are connected to a reputable group. Often groups have monitors or administrators for just this purpose. Administrators often approve requests to join the group and welcome new members, provide new members with group guidelines, monitor posts, help to generate discussions, and offer information and resources to group members.

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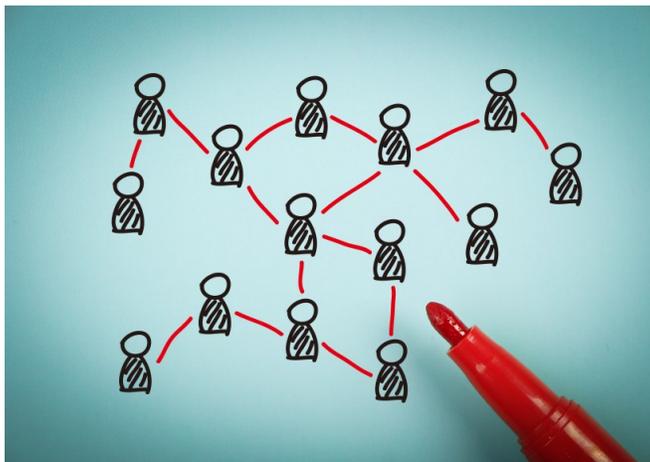
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Online groups offer anonymity, which, for some, is a more comfortable way to connect and seek information from others.

Sometimes in-person groups have an additional closed Facebook group for members to post in between in-person gatherings, giving the member a taste of both worlds.

When considering a support group, whether in-person or online, think about what you are looking to get out of it. Consider the amount of time you can commit and what you hope to gain from such an experience and how comfortable you are with sharing personal information about your family. It can be helpful to turn to others outside your immediate circle who may have had similar experiences.



- Determine where to hold in-person meetings. Talk to other group leaders or coordinators in your community to help get ideas on how to find a location. A little research up front can be quite helpful. There may be spaces in your community, such as a local church, library, or community center, which may have free or low-cost space available to you.

- If you are looking to start an online group, decide who will be responsible for accepting new group members and who will monitor postings.
- Establish guidelines up front for group participants. This helps with individual buy-in and ensures all members are comfortable and getting their needs met.
- Spread the word about your group. Perhaps you already know of some people interested in becoming a part of a group. If not, talking with others who have started groups can help you gain ideas on how to connect to other adoptive families in your community and how to advertise your support group. Again, contacting your adoption agency may be another way to get the word out to other adoptive families that may be looking for support.

Starting a Support Group

If joining an online group is not your cup of tea and there is not an in-person group in your community, you may have thought about starting your own group. Or, perhaps you are considering starting your own online group, such as through Facebook.

There are a lot things to think about when starting a support group, here are a few tips to help you along your way:

- Decide on what you want the purpose of your group to be. You may find it helpful to attend a group similar to what you would like yours to become. Whether online or in person, this can help give you an idea of what you may or may not want your group to focus on.
- Talk with other interested members to help you identify a good day and time to meet and for how long. Other questions to consider are, *Will you offer childcare? Will you have outside presenters coming in? How big or small would you like your group to be?*

It's often said that parenting is one of the

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toughest, yet most rewarding, jobs you will ever love. Watching a child grow, learn, and experience success are some of the wonderful rewards parenting brings. All of those rewarding moments can go a long way to counterbalance the more challenging times. And yet, when the challenges feel as though they are piling up, you may find that turning to others for support is exactly what you need.

Depending on what you are looking for in a support group, there are a number of options available to adoptive parents. The important thing to remember is that your family is not alone on your journey. Help and support is out there and available, but it is up to you to connect with or establish a support network for your family.

Contact us for help at info@coalitionforcyf.org or 1-800-762-8063. Please see the Resources section of this tip sheet for further information on support groups.



Resources

- [Impact of Adoption on Adoptive Families](#)
- [Adoption Forums](#)
- [Confessions of a Parent: Hope and Humor from the Trenches](#) (Blog)
- Book: *The Adoption Network, Your Guide to Starting a Support System*, by Laura Christianson
- [Community Champions Network](#)



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