

Another Star in the Constellation: Supporting Siblings Living in Adoptive Homes

Moderator: Molly Heaton

Panelists: Emma, Emily, Tricia, Jessie

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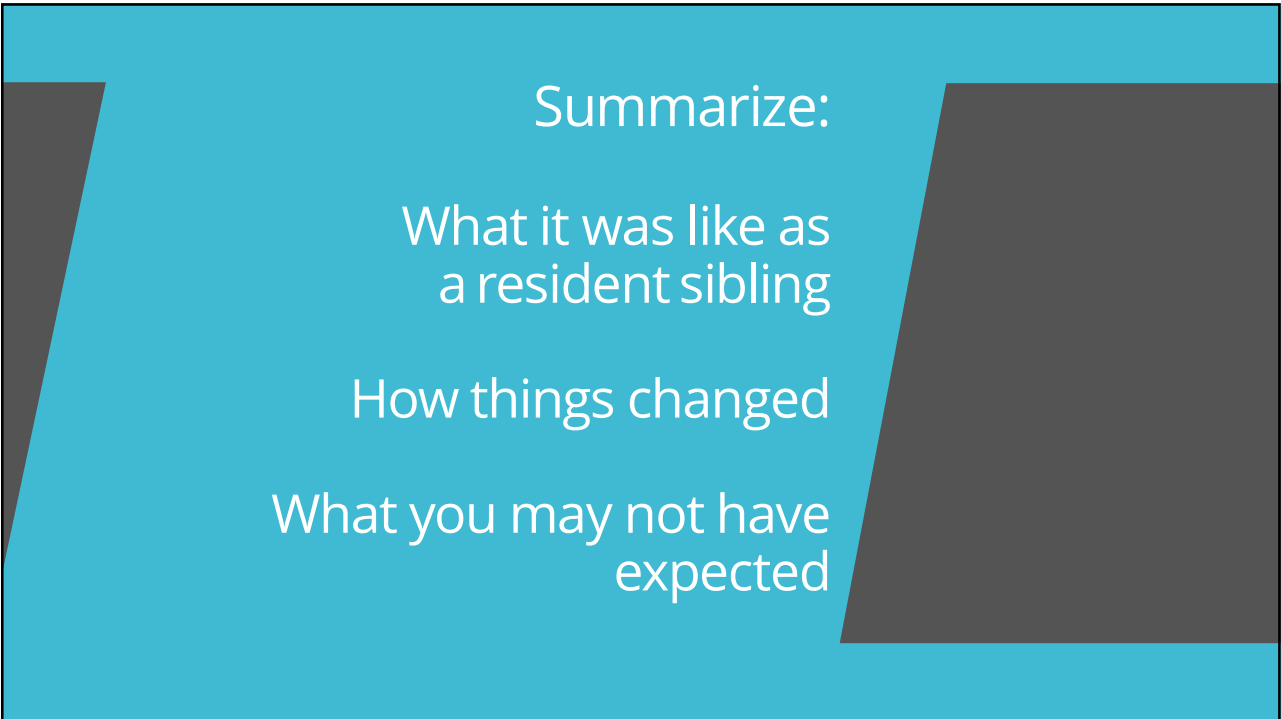
Introducing our
panelists

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How onboard were you with adopting?
Were you involved in the decision making?
Were you asked about what you wanted?
How were you prepared in the adoption
process?
What were you expecting adoption to be like
and what was it really like?

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Summarize:
What it was like as
a resident sibling
How things changed
What you may not have
expected

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How did the relationships in your home change?

...between siblings (both resident and adopted)?

...with your parents?

...extended family?

...support systems?

...friends?

...how did you feel?

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What stories did/do you
have about being
a resident sibling?

What stories do you think
your adopted siblings have
about resident siblings?

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What was most impactful
(good or bad) in your
journey?

What was most harmful?

What was the most helpful?

What was missing?

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What did you need from your parents?

Your adopted sibling(s)?

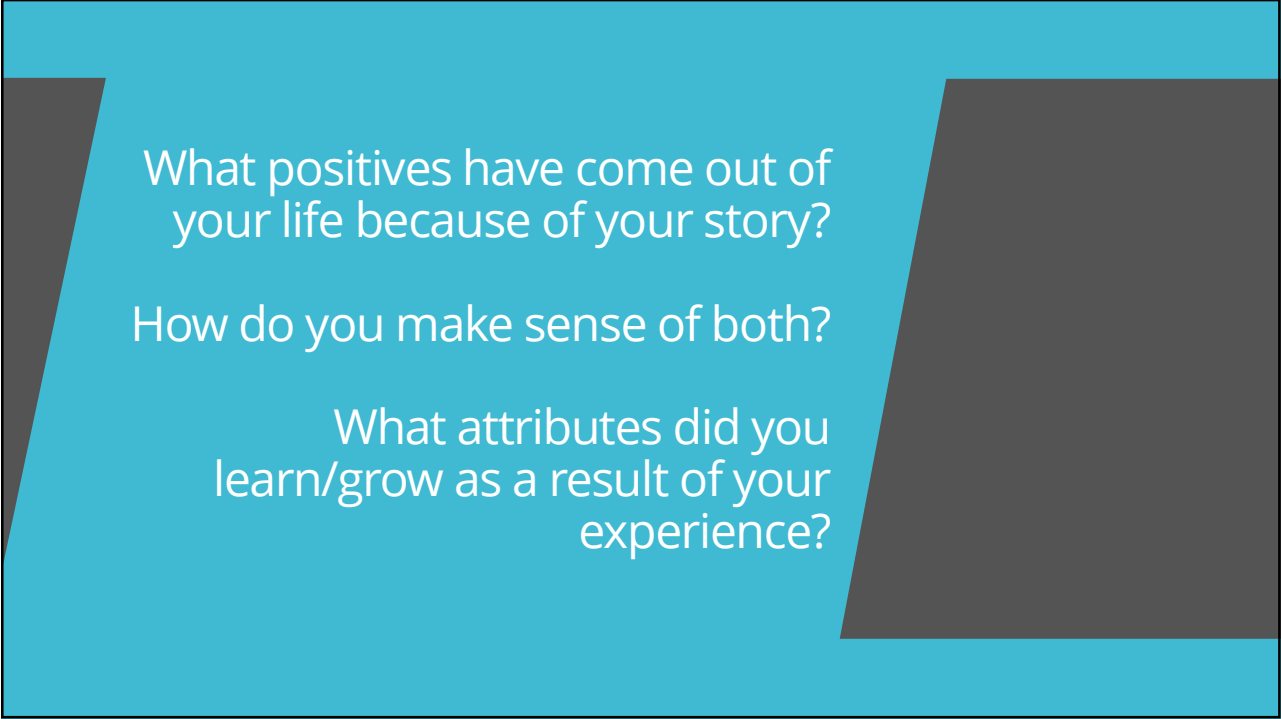
Your friends?

Your support system?

Were you able to get any of that?

What was it like having needs met/not met?

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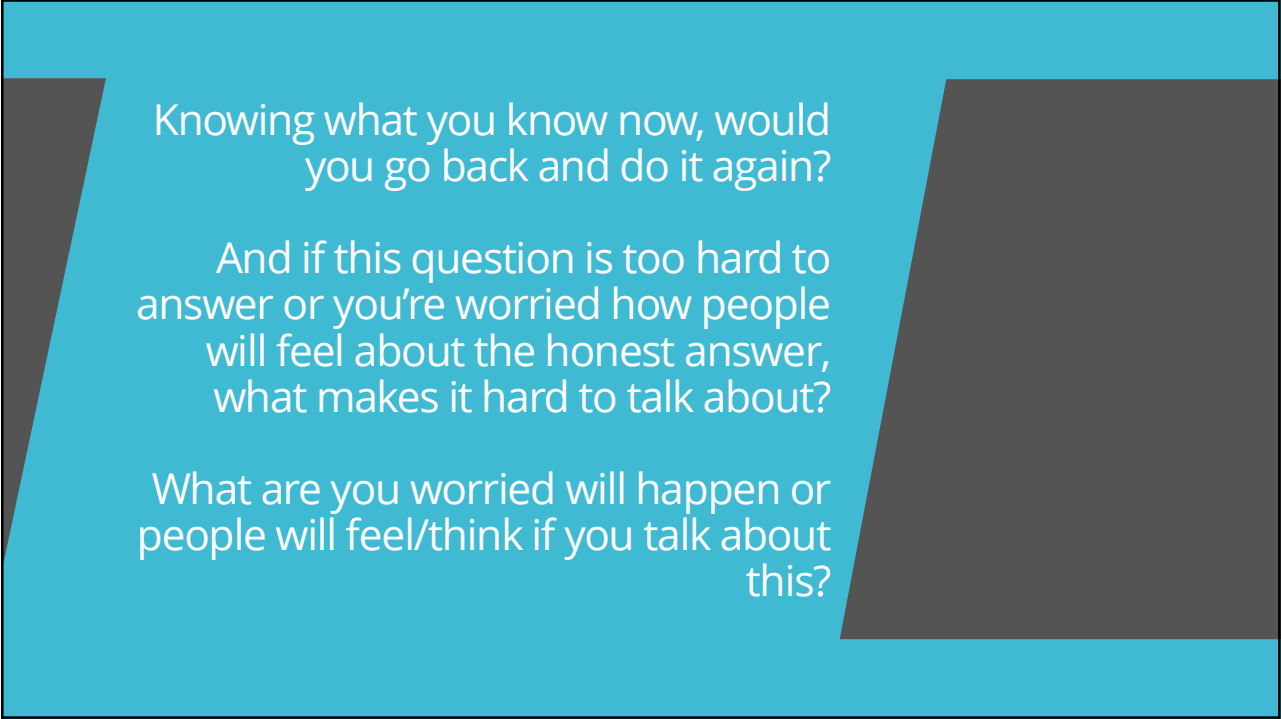


What positives have come out of
your life because of your story?

How do you make sense of both?

What attributes did you
learn/grow as a result of your
experience?

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Knowing what you know now, would
you go back and do it again?

And if this question is too hard to
answer or you're worried how people
will feel about the honest answer,
what makes it hard to talk about?

What are you worried will happen or
people will feel/think if you talk about
this?

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What else would you like people (parents, professionals, people unfamiliar with adoption, friends, etc.) to know about being a resident sibling?

About being an adoptive family?

About adoptees (from your observation/experience)?

About adoption?

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Resources to support your resident siblings

- Suddenly Siblings
 - <https://suddenlysibs.com/>
- *In Their Siblings Voices* by Rita Simon & Rhonda Roorda
- Adoption Council research article
 - <https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/publications/2020/09/adoption-advocate-no-147>

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Tips for Parents

Be receptive. Respond with curiosity, not judgment. Oftentimes when we feel criticized, especially when we feel critical of ourselves, we respond with defensiveness. The hard part of disarming that defense is acknowledging that both experiences are true: parents are doing the best they can AND resident siblings still feel _____. When our child tells us about their experience, we cannot invalidate their perspective. We have to affirm that this is the truth for them. If you feel yourself prepared to negate or argue with your child, take a deep breath and ask, "Can you tell me more about that?" It will be hard to hear. But it is also really hard to live with these feelings when we don't have anyone who will listen.

<https://www.adoptioncouncil.org/publications/2020/09/adoption-advocate-no-147>

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Tips for Parents

Ask questions. Be tentative about guesses. This shows our child we are listening and curious. Asking questions is a good way to help our child use their voice and open up about their needs and experiences and find words to describe their experiences. Curious, tentative questions also keep us as parents from dominating the conversation with our needs, wants, or defenses.

Try: "What do you think about..." "Tell me about..." "I am wondering if..." "What do you need?" "How do you feel about..." "Can you help me understand..." "Can we talk about..." "Will you tell me more?"

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Tips for Parents

Model openness. Being honest with our children about our own experiences can help validate their experience. Be aware of not placing responsibility on your child during this, but try phrases like:

"I am struggling with _____ (i.e. asking for help too.) Can we practice that together?"

"I am having a hard day because _____ (i.e. I need more sleep), I do best when I sleep well. Will you tell me about your hard day?"

"I am feeling _____ (i.e. sad). And that's okay. Do you want to sit and feel sad with me too?"

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Tips for Parents

Affirm preciousness. No matter what happens or what your child tells you, let them know that you love them and care for them and no matter what you will listen to their voice. Knowing our worth is an inherent need for humans. By reminding our child of their preciousness, we are signaling that their relationship with us matters and that we want to know about their needs even when it may be hard.

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Tips for Parents

Mindfulness. These discussions are never easy. They are hard, scary, and make us as parents feel immense amounts of guilt/shame. Those feelings are not our children's responsibility. It is the parents' responsibility to care for their own emotions and the emotions of the child.

If we feel fear, guilt or shame, imagine how much bigger it feels for the child talking to you. If the emotions get too big for you, let your child know that you want to keep talking but you need to take a break to eat/rest/take a walk/regulate.

Come back to the conversation when you can. Big feelings that we have as parents can be taken to professionals we still work with, safe support systems, spouses or safe friends, and especially any counselor or therapist you utilize.

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Tips for Parents

Mindfulness (continued). If you can, journal about those feelings. Ask yourself "Why do I feel ____? When was the first time I felt this way (it could be the first time, the recent past or our own childhood)? What does that feeling need in order to feel resolved? What do I think this feeling means about me? Can I reframe those stories (see activity below)?"

When you are with your child, be present with their feelings. Remind your feelings that you will address them later when you are not with your child.

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Tips for Parents

Parents need support too. It's one thing to know we need to talk about this, it's another thing to do it. You may need to add supports in one area to give you capacity in another. Can you trade off with a partner to get one-on-one time with a child? Can you ask a friend or family member for help with your adult chores so you can spend that time with your children? Can you do activities—like cooking or walking the dog or driving in the car—together in order to get precious time with your child? Can you allow your older kids to stay up later so you can get some time together without younger siblings interrupting?

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Activities to do or discussions to have

Then vs now: what was life like before? What is it like now? Try to balance the conversation that there are good and hard things during both times, but more than anything, validate the real feelings that arise.

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Activities to do or discussions to have

Good, hard, better: what is good about what life is like right now? What is hard? What could be better? All answers are good or correct answers. A “correct” answer is simply the discussion you and your child have.

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Activities to do or discussions to have

Stories: what stories can your child name or identify that they hold about their roles in the home? If possible, reframe the story in a way that is still true, but is not placing value on the story (not good or bad, it just is). Also talk to your kids about what they can do when those stories come up for them.

i.e. “my siblings’ needs are not as important as mine” becomes “my siblings have a lot of really big needs that take up a lot of time and attention. The size and intensity of my siblings’ needs sometimes overshadows my own. When this happens, I leave my parents a note where they will see it to come find me so I can talk to them about what I need.”

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