As an Intentional Parent we must realize that there are many reasons why our “job” as adoptive parent is not done at age 18. We have spent many years painstakingly building and maintaining a safety net for our children to help them know that they can trust. Being there for them no matter what-all the while unconsciously shooting for that magic number 18 where life would change and we could rest. Yes, there are changes but it is not necessarily time to rest. There’s a new twist as we are called to continue to Intentionally Parent our kids. It is now important to focus on preparing our children to move further from the safety net. We make the intentional choice to continue to co-regulate with them to solidify the understanding that the net will always be there because they are worthy.

There are four main reasons our teens still need us to continue to help them regulate in their lives:

1. Because of the trauma of being abandoned many young adoptees still filter life through a core belief of “I am not worthy,” especially in high stress situations like relationships or defining life-stages like moving away from home. Self-esteem is often impeded by that core belief so it is crucial that we understand that our children need even more consistent care and co-regulation as their biological counterparts get.

2. Because of the trauma of being abandoned many young adoptees need more time to allow their emotional age to catch up with their chronological age. We have to remember that just as parents of biological children grow their kids up to be independent we will too however the important difference is we have to allow our children to start from the beginning with us and then grow them up. So, if we adopt a 6 year old little girl we need to know that when she is chronologically 18 years old she is emotionally around 12 years old and she needs us to meet here there and be intentional about parenting her based on those needs. A 12 year old is NOT ready to move out and be on-her-own yet.

3. Because of the trauma of being abandoned many adoptees don’t feel like they “fit” anywhere. They struggle to feel whole in any given moment leaving them without a clear sense of “who” they are. As intentional parents we need to understand that these feelings are a real hurdle for our children, one that we need to help them address before they can be successful in the world.

4. Because of early life trauma many adoptees have emotional, physical and biological deficits that affect their daily lives. In order to help our kids understand that their disability doesn’t define them it is important that we educate our teens and young adults about these issues and help them find tools that they can learn to use to compensate for those deficits.

The first step in helping your child become an “adult” is realizing that they may need 18 **plus** years with you before they have a chance to put their puzzle together, giving them the all the parts they need to succeed.

**Having a Plan is Crucial**

**Where Do I Begin to help?**

**First move “your stuff” out of the way:**

It is important that we don’t let our hurdles get in the way of our children’s healing journey. In order to be the best Mom or Dad you can be you must know what is “your stuff” so you can deal with it which will enable you to be available to meet your child where they need you.

Some example questions to ask yourself:

-Do I feel I have failed as a parent if my children aren’t ready to go out on their own?

-Do I worry I don’t have it in me to keep going?—you just need a plan.

-Do I have other plans and expectations for this part of my life?--traveling or retirement plans.

-Do I wonder if you are the right people to do this?

-Do I feel unappreciated?

How do I deal with “my stuff?”

Explore the root of and then grieve unmet expectations.

Understand your own attachment and how that effects your needs.

Create your new normal.

Tweak your plans.

Discuss it with your spouse.

Remember-your child didn’t ask you to adopt them

**Next if you haven’t done it already you need to educate yourself.**

-What are your child’s diagnoses? Learn about them. Causes, Signs and Symptoms, etc.

-Look at all the diagnoses commonly given to kids who have lived through trauma (RAD, ADHD, SPD, ODD, Bi-Polar, Sexual Abuse, Conduct Disorder, Dyslexia, Auditory Processing Disorder and Retained Primitive Reflexes just to name a few)

-Educate yourself about developmental stages that people go through from pre-adolescence to young adult.

-Attachment Styles

-Limbic System

**Finally, continue to use the tools and techniques that have worked to create and maintain the safety net your child relies on.**

-Be confident and concise—you are the parent you know what is best!

-There is no right or wrong in this project. Honesty is truly what we need here. **If you can’t handle their honesty don’t have them do the project.**

-Giving lots of choices about whether to do something or not isn’t always the best scenario for our adoptive kids—especially in a new situation.

-Be able to be open to the fact that our kids have different forms of emotional expression then we do, it will keep trauma at bay.

-Remember that you are dealing with a person whose core belief is “I am not worthy” or “I am bad at the core” (whether it looks like it or not) is incredibly important in the effort to create healing.

-Remember that co-regulation is still key…even to an 18+ yr old. We just tweak it now and let them “think” they are doing it on their own.

-Remember that most of the behavior our children display is rooted in emotion so dealing with the emotion rather than the behavior is key.

**Supporting your child to complete the assignments…**

You are their best bet at success and even if it doesn’t look like it they do believe you, they do want to have a relationship with you, theydo need you.

**Your job**…Your job is to support your child in gathering, repairing and finding his missing pieces! We will begin this process together! **Specifically**-watch the video, ask questions about the assignments and supporting your child on the Facebook Q & A sessions, help your child to do assignments, be on the calls and post their projects on Pinterest.

As you support your son or daughter with the This Is ME class be careful not to make it a battle zone. Take a neutral supportive approach. In lots of cases it would not work for you to show you are really emotionally invested in your child doing this project—it will cause too much anxiety for them and they will sabotage it. Just be matter of fact and neutral in the presentation. It would be ideal if you could just give it to them and not offer it as a choice. You don’t need to be crabby about it, just authoritative. You are the parent you know what is best—this is where a little finesse may need to happen depending on your situation. You may need to make it “part of the rent” or give some kind of motivation to get it done but for the most part I think they will enjoy it when they get going.

Some details Parents need to consider before presenting the project:

**-to decrease anxiety**…decidebe particularly conscious about how much you give your child in regards to the assignments. Some will do well with just giving them the whole list and letting them go for it. Some may get overwhelmed with more than one at a time. You know your child you can make the best choice. In some cases it will be important that they go in the order listed and I will let you know that information ahead of time.

**-be intentional**…if there is a way to help your child invest-in and/or accomplish this project. Do it! Buy new art supplies, allow or encourage them to try a medium that fits them…some of these projects could be done with a slant in photography, as a movie, a recorded voice or on the computer. There is no “right” or “wrong” way to do it!

**-this could/should get messy if it is going to be healing…**The extra art projects are not a must but are highly recommended and I would also recommend that if your child wants to do the art on a larger format and more in depth--make that happen for them. Purchase larger paper, canvases, multiple mediums like paints, inks, chalks etc..

**-be careful not to influence the outcome by interpreting the assignments…** Youshould help your child accomplish this project but you should not tell them how to do it. Many of our kids get very anxious when things aren’t perfectly clear or when they think there is a right or wrong way of doing things. In this case the best thing to do is to make sure they understand that there isn’t a right or wrong way and then help them understand things like the definition of a word etc. If your child asks for your help regarding details of a specific puzzle piece—dates, names, places—help them! **Meet them where they are at!**

**-repeat…**When your child is finished and you are giving them **feedback** be positive but neutral. Don’t go too crazy either way – good or bad. If they are slow to get into things that is okay, this is scary for them.

**BE SURE TO-**

**Tell your child to:**

-do their best work—that is all you expect. There is no right or wrong way

 when it comes to content.

-keep it clean (language, suggestive art, etc) –\*\*\*families need to set

 individual boundaries here

-dig deep when called for

-be honest in every letter on the page—even about me (Mom and Dad)

-know that this is non-fiction

-do this well it will take a while

-talk to you about ideas they may have in regards to the projects

**Supplies Needed:**

A variety of art mediums to include: paints, chalks, markers, good quality colored pencils, pencil crayons, pens, etc.

Glue, variety of papers, ribbons, buttons, brushes, cardboard

Magazines, newspaper, other printed items (that can be cut up)

**Additional Supplies Recommended:**

larger pieces of paper

larger canvases

large drawing pad

lots of extra supplies

computer

video camera/camera/recording device

other ways your child can express themselves

\*\*We may need a few other things but I will give you plenty of warning!