

Conference 2019 Workshop Schedule - Family Day - Saturday November 9th

Participant Exercise: The Brain Architecture Game

This is an experiential activity facilitated by the **A Child's Song** team that builds understanding of the powerful role of experiences on early brain development—what promotes it, what derails it, with what consequences for society. The goal is to build a brain that is as tall as possible, which represents functionality, and as sturdy as possible, which represents the ability to withstand stresses. After the initial period of early childhood development, weights must be hung from the structure of the brain when life hands out stressors. Will the foundation withstand these weights, or will it collapse?

Keynote: Filling in the Gaps: Relational Experiences Your Child Need to Master Current Challenges

When children repeat behaviors or insist on maladaptive coping strategies they are stuck at a stage of development with an unmet need. This can often present itself in the form of parent child conflict, unreasonable levels of distress as well as demanding and defiant behaviour without obvious gain for the child. This workshop will help parents to identify the missed developmental stage or experience in a child's history and the relational experience required to help them move forward.



Andrea Chatwin MA, CCC is the Founder and Clinical Director of A Child's Song. She specializes in effective responding to attachment and trauma, particularly focusing on children who have had caregiver losses and placement disruptions. Andrea has extensive experience in early childhood mental health and has worked overseas in orphanages studying the effects of abuse, neglect and developmental trauma on children of various ages. She is an adoptive parent herself and therefore experienced firsthand the unique challenges of parenting through adoption. Andrea is a keynote speaker and workshop facilitator addressing parents, professionals and policy makers.

Breakout Sessions

A1 – A Parent's Guide to Understanding Executive Functioning

Executive functioning skills are necessary for your child to do well at home and at school. This workshop will explain what executive functioning is about and discuss how it impacts emotion behaviour and cognition. Parents will learn how to identify which executive functioning skills their child has and those they need further improvement in. The facilitator will offer strategies to support improvement in areas that are lacking. In addition, parents will learn how to work with their child's school to introduce ideas that will support further development of executive functioning skills throughout the child's day.



Dr. Joanne Crandall is a Registered Psychologist, with a Ph.D. in Counselling Psychology. Joanne has extensive experience as an Early Childhood Mental Health Psychologist, and is a graduate of the Infant-Parent Mental Health Program (University of Massachusetts-Boston). She specializes in attachment and trauma, particularly focusing on children who are currently in care and who are in the process of being adopted. Joanne holds expertise on the neuro-developmental impact of abuse and neglect. She is also a skilled workshop facilitator who has discussed the impact of trauma and neglect on children provincially, national, and international conferences. Joanne is also an adoptee herself, so she continues to reflect on her own lived experience as an adoptee and she brings that very valuable perspective.

A2 – Brothers and Sisters in Adoption: Attachment Strategies for Parenting Siblings

Sibling relationships are the longest relationships in our lives and play a significant role in forming our future relationship templates. Whether siblings are joined together through adoption and/or birth or step parenting – each child will have unique needs specific to their early experiences. Knowing how to prioritize and meet the unique needs of more than one child at a time, is often very challenging for adoptive parents. This workshop will explore the common challenges and experiences of siblings through adoption, and/or birth or step parenting, as well as highlight the importance of understanding each child's history, to be able to identify what the child's behaviour is communicating. Parents will be provided with helpful strategies to encourage the development of secure relationships with both parents and siblings.



Meagan VanDiermen, MA, RCC holds an MA in Counselling Psychology with specific training in (OEI) and Lifespan Integration Therapy, dynamic body-based trauma interventions that are effective in working with people of all ages to provide deep healing. Meagan is dedicated specifically to the areas of trauma (especially preverbal trauma) and anxiety with a focus on the therapeutic nature of the parent-child relationship. She is able to work with parents to understand the roots of their child's experiences and implement strategies that process and minimize trauma induced responses. Meagan is actively involved in adoption research, seeking to understanding of the unique challenges that adoptees struggle with and the most efficient and meaningful processes that promote healing.

B1 – Responding to Sleeping and Eating Difficulties with Attachment Based Parenting

Children with early trauma and attachment losses may experience significant disruption to the development of healthy eating and sleeping patterns. This can be particularly distressing when the child has been living for years in a safe and loving environment, yet parents continue to struggle with how to feed and soothe their child to sleep effectively. Understanding how the development of a child's low brain is connected to these difficulties offers a great deal of insight into how early patterns were formed and how they can be shifted. This workshop will discuss therapeutic parenting strategies for responding to sleeping and eating difficulties with compassion.



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B2 – The Power of Open Adoption

This workshop features a panel of guests including a birthparent, adoptive parent and adoptee who will be sharing their personal experiences with openness. Open adoption evolved from the belief that people handle their lives and their destinies best when addressed with truth and honesty – instead of protective secrecy and half-truths. Although practiced in Alberta for 35 years now, open adoption continues to be plagued with misunderstandings, myths and misconceptions. We will look at the realities of open adoption, exactly what the process is for all parties involved, hear personal stories from those who have experience with open adoption and examine why this option needs to be recognized and understood by the greater community.



Sheryl Proulx, BSW, RSW began her social work career with Alberta Children's Services as a case manager and investigator. Her social work path was forged following a personal experience with an unplanned pregnancy and later in life dealing with the challenge of fertility loss. Her personal journey led to a lifelong commitment to ensuring all individuals in such circumstances find a supportive professional social worker readily available to provide unbiased options counselling, and additional community resources to further support the individuals' needs. She joined the Adoption Options team in 2003 and is now the acting Executive Director.

C1 – Settling the Alarm Through Play and Sensory Strategies

Children with early histories of trauma and attachment disruptions are chronically dysregulated and this makes them difficult to soothe. Parents need strategies that will calm the nervous system of the child and make it possible to build trust and connection. This workshop looks at the use of play and sensory interventions that help to keep kids regulated and calm. Specific strategies and interventions will be offered that will help parents to meet the child's real need, rather than just responding to behaviors. A specific parent child play is described and demonstrated so that parents can immediately implement this tool. Sensory interventions that meet the needs of stressed kids are discussed, and specific strategies offered so parents leave with new tools and ideas.



Renae Regehr, MA, RCC holds a Masters of Counselling Degree from the University of British Columbia. She has experience working with children, youth, and families who have been impacted by trauma and attachment disruptions. As a mother to three children, biological and adoptive, Renae is passionate about child development from infancy through adolescence and she aims to support adoptive, foster and biological parents to ensure their children have strong family connections, optimal social skills and emotional regulation, and a coherent sense of identity. While trained as a generalist she has advanced skills in trauma, infant and child development, attachment, adoption, body image, Interpersonal Neurobiology (IPNB), Emotional Focused Family Therapy (EFFT) and Lifespan Integration (LI).

C2 – Understanding and Advocating for the Needs of Adoptees in School

It is important for adoptive parents, and the professionals that support adoptees, to advocate for the unique needs of these children, in their learning environments. If a child's experience is acknowledged, and validated, they are able to trust that adults understand them, and are able to meet their needs, opening up opportunities for learning. This workshop will assist parents and professionals to assess whether a child is able to tolerate their learning environment, to identify their experiences and understand how it relates to their history. Parents and school professionals will also explore what adaptations are most useful in creating successful learning environments for adoptees in the classroom.



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