

# Who Loves Ya, Baby: Finding and Engaging Marginalized and Absent Fathers



Brad Norman, LCSW, two daughters  
Gerry Rodriguez, Ph.D., three sons

**Family Partnership Institute**



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There are two lasting bequests  
we can give our children.  
One is roots. The other is wings.

--Hodding Carter, Jr.



# Roots

“In all of us there is a hunger, marrow-deep, to know our heritage - - to know who we are and where we come from. Without this enriching knowledge, there is a hollow yearning. No matter what our attainments in life, there is still... an emptiness, and the most disquieting loneliness.”

Alex Haley



# Children have a need for the sense of self that comes from family

- Children gain permanence, identity, and a true belief that they belong
- Once they know who they are and who cares about them, we see improvements in behaviors, ultimately increasing safety and stabilizing placement.



# It's about Loneliness and Love

- Loneliness is a primary issue that many youth face with the “unmet need” being meaningful family connections
- Most children living with their families hear that they are loved and or receive loving physical comfort almost on a daily basis
- Do youth in out-of-home care hear these words or receive physical comfort as often?



# One girl's story



Rebecca was adopted at an early age. out of a Korean church in Oakland by a church member. The Church burned down along with all the records of her adoption.

Her adoptive parents divorced when she was little. She lived with her adoptive mother and her new husband. The new husband abused Rebecca physically and sexually.

Rebecca was removed from her mother and placed in foster care.



Her adoptive father who lived in New Mexico, would visit her and try to attend court dates. Unfortunately the dates would often be continued. So, there was considerable cost for him, and he did not have a lot of money.

He was finally told by a social worker to not visit with Rebecca anymore. The SW told him that Rebecca needed to work on living in the foster home and his visits disrupted the bonding process.

He wanted what was best for Rebecca and stopped visiting. Rebecca was six years old.



When Rebecca entered our Program she was 14 yrs old.

She had not seen or heard about her family in eight years. When she turned 15 the team started Family Search & Engagement as it had just recently been introduced to our agency.

Our task was daunting. Here was a child who was in foster care, no identified family, and her adoption papers had been consumed by the church fire.

Where do you start with Family Search & Engagement?

We pulled her court orders that were in her file. We started going over all the names and dates of people mentioned in the court paper work.

We requested to search her records at DFCS. We found names. We found the name of her adopted father and mother.

We found a little yellow piece of paper with a name scribbled on it. It was the name of her biological mother.

We did internet searches. We found out that her biological mother had passed away a year before.

The name was there all this time, but there was never an opportunity for her to know her mother. We searched the internet for her adoptive mother. Nothing.

We searched for her adoptive father. A name and phone number came up for an older gentleman who might be connected with the father. We did not hesitate! We called.

It was Rebecca's adoptive father's father. Rebecca had a grandfather. He knew exactly who we were calling about after nine years. He asked if we wanted Rebecca's father's phone number and address. YES!! We called the number.

The lady on the other end was ecstatic!!

She reported that they had been waiting for years to hear about Rebecca.

She reported they had a picture of Rebecca when she was four on their refrigerator.

She said Rebecca's sisters ask about her all the time. She said she would have the adoptive father call.

When we spoke with  
Rebecca's father he  
said...



“We have her picture on our fridge and we talk about her every day. We haven’t moved or changed our phone number for 13 years just in case someone calls about her.”



# Rebecca's story



# Fathers and Medical Care

- Most medical and dental appointments for children include the mother and not the father
- Rarely are efforts initiated by physicians or dentists to increase the involvement of fathers
- Mothers and children are relied upon to represent the views of fathers if desired
- This pattern begins very early in the family's life.

# Fathers and Education

- Most parent-teacher conferences are with mothers only
- Mothers become the message-carriers between educators and fathers
- Rarely are efforts initiated by schools to increase the involvement of fathers.



# Fathers and Mental Health Care

- Most mental health intake appointments for children include the mother and not the father
- Unless the father is living with the child, efforts to include him are often minimal
- Mothers and children are relied upon to represent the views of fathers if desired
- The father's nonparticipation may be misinterpreted as disinterest.

# Mothers, Fathers, and Child Abuse

- Forty-seven percent (46.6%) of child victims were maltreated by their mothers acting alone or with someone other than the father
- Nineteen percent (19.4%) were maltreated by their fathers acting alone or with someone other than the mother
- Seventeen percent (17.3%) were maltreated by both parents
- Source: National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), 2005



# Fathers and Child Welfare

- Unless immediately available, fathers and their extended families are largely disregarded both for information and for potential placement resources
- Court orders preventing contact with the child often deter professional contact as well
- Fathers in jail or prison are rarely viewed as resources for information, planning, or visitation.

# Fathers and Criminal Justice

- Three out of four inmates are fathers
- Many programs specifically support maintaining mother/child relationships while the mother is incarcerated
- Some even allow the child to be with the mother in custody
- Incarcerated fathers and their children are almost universally denied these opportunities
- Many children are discouraged from having contact with their incarcerated fathers.

# So what does this mean for kids?

- Many children and youth in the child welfare system become disconnected from all family ties, especially from their fathers
- Multiple placements through foster homes, group homes, and residential treatment facilities leave many children alone and lonely
- For many, efforts to locate extended family resources have disregarded the entire paternal portion of the child's lineage.



# So where are the fathers?



**Perhaps they are not so hard to find  
as you may think...**

# Phases of Family Search & Engagement

- Setting the Stage
- Discovery
- Evaluation and Engagement
- Planning
- Initial Meetings
- Family Ties
- Sustaining
- Documentation and Evaluation.

# Evaluation and Engagement

- Team evaluates and determines whether to engage newly found family members as adding strengths and resources to the process
- Team meets with newly found family members to determine most appropriate contribution to the planning process for the youth
  - based upon youth's strengths: interests, talents, hobbies
  - based upon youth's needs: education, employment (life domains)
  - based on the need for connectedness.



# Engaging fathers and their families

- Determine what is desired from this resource
  - Information
  - Specific relationship activities or roles
  - Placement
- Spend time getting to know the father and his extended family
- Listen, listen, listen.



## A few search sites:

- [www.whitepages.com](http://www.whitepages.com)
- [www.myspace.com](http://www.myspace.com)
- [www.zabasearch.com](http://www.zabasearch.com)
- [www.peoplefinders.com](http://www.peoplefinders.com)
- [www.intelius.com](http://www.intelius.com)
- [www.ussearch.com](http://www.ussearch.com)

Let us put our  
minds together  
and see what  
life we can  
make for our  
children.

--Sitting Bull,  
Tatanka Iyotanka

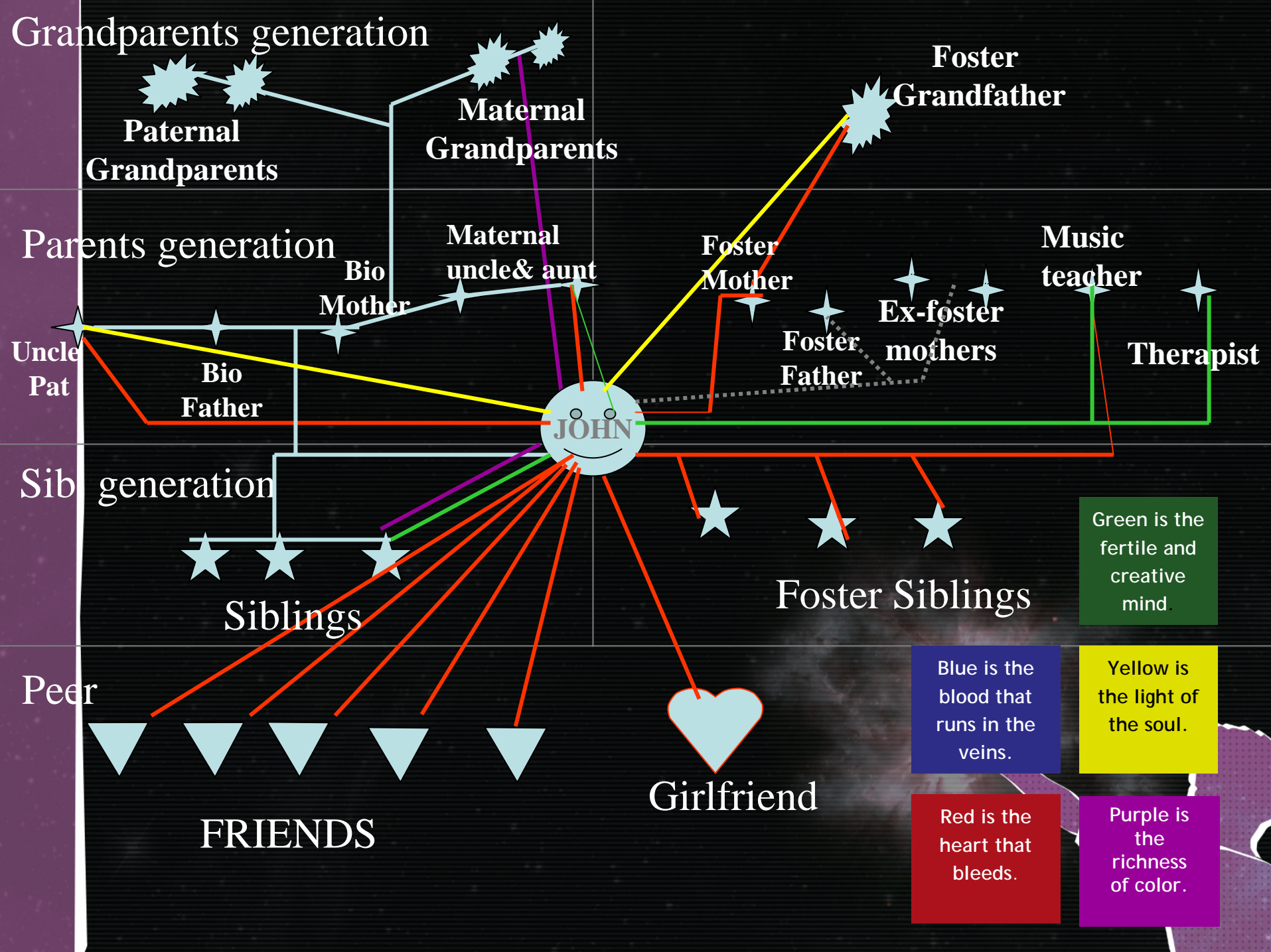


# Contacting us...

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# Mapping Connectedness

- **HEART** - Whom do you love? Who loves ya baby? Whom do you want to be loved by?
- **MIND**-Who teaches you? What are you learning? Whom do you teach? Whom do you think about?
- **BODY**- Who shares your blood?
- **SOUL**- To what or whom is your soul connected? Who inspires your passions and your spirit?
- **CULTURE** – Who helped you understand your history, traditions, values, and beliefs?



Grandparents generation

Paternal Grandparents

Maternal Grandparents

Foster Grandfather

Parents generation

Bio Mother

Maternal uncle & aunt

Foster Mother

Music teacher

Uncle Pat

Bio Father

Foster Father

Ex-foster mothers

Therapist

JOHN

Sib generation

Siblings

Foster Siblings

Green is the fertile and creative mind.

Peer

FRIENDS

Girlfriend

Blue is the blood that runs in the veins.

Yellow is the light of the soul.

Red is the heart that bleeds.

Purple is the richness of color.

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