



**national  
healthy marriage  
resource center**

# **December 2008 Webinar Transcript**

**The Challenges of Adoption on the Marital Relationship**

Moderator: Patrick Patterson

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12:30 pm CT

# The Challenges of Adoption on the Marital Relationship

**Operator:** Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for standing by. Welcome to the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center December 2008 Webinar conference call.

During the presentation, all participants will be in a listen-only mode. If at any time during the conference you need to reach an operator, please press star-0.

As a reminder, this conference call is being recorded Wednesday, December 3, 2008.

I would like to turn the conference over to Patrick Patterson. Please proceed with your presentation.

**Patrick Patterson:** Thank you, (Nelson). Good afternoon. Happy holidays and welcome to all to our December 2008 webinar entitled, "The Challenges of Adoption on the Marital Relationship."

This is another topic that we've heard from our audience about specifically hosting a webinar with this topic, so hoping to meet that need during today's webinar.

This discussion, you heard the title, but this discussion will also include so mention, some discussion on the positive aspects of adoption on the marital relationship as well.

We have two presenters that are well experienced, also personally have experience regarding adoption and marriage as well, so we hope to meet that need today.

My name, again, is Patrick Patterson. I'm the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center Program Manager and will be your facilitator for today's webinar.

Our presenters for today are Steven Durand, Executive Director of the Central Texas Fatherhood Initiative, and Shannon Durand, a trained marriage educator and applied behavioral analysis trainer who works with children with autism and other special needs. They are a happily married couple with lots of experience and insight on adoption and marriage and are the proud parents of three adopted children.

A few housekeeping notes before we get started -- this webinar is being recorded for those of you taking notes. And so I'd like to give a brief overview of how you actually submit questions via the webinar technology.

With that, I'll turn it over to Stephanie Wofford to take us through how you submit a question using our webinar technology.

Stephanie?

**Stephanie Wofford:** Thank you, Patrick. And good afternoon to everyone. I would like to direct your attention to the demonstration slide currently displayed on your screen. You should find the question and answer pane designated by the letters Q&A located at the top of your screen on your menu bar.

You can either click on that portion of the menu bar to open the pane or you can open and then drag the pane off the menu bar to (display) it as a standalone box.

To ask a question this afternoon, all you have to do is type your question in the box where I've highlighted here, then click where we've checked the Ask button. Once you do that, you will automatically receive a reply thanking you for your question and letting you know that your question has been forwarded to the facilitators.

This automatic reply allows us to free up your question and answer pane, which then enables you to ask another question if you'd like.

(Unintelligible) Patrick?

**Patrick Patterson:** Thank you, Stephanie. At any point, feel free to submit questions during - at any point of the presentation for today's webinar.

The way that we'll conduct today's webinar, we have two presenters who will present together. At the conclusion of their presentation, as we've done in the past, we'll do a general Q&A session. So if you have questions, again, feel free to submit those at any point. At the Q&A period, I will ask as many of the questions as I receive and try to get them all answered during the time that we have today on the webinar.

Our objectives for today's webinar are threefold. We've spent a little bit of time talking about the actual topic, but let's talk about how we plan to approach this today.

Our first objective is to teach perspectives from adoptive parents and marriage educators on sustaining a healthy marriage (or) helping others sustain a healthy marriage as adoptive parents.

Our second is to provide an understanding of the issues and stresses unique to adoptive parents. And our third objective for today is to teach how to incorporate adoptive parent issues into marriage education classes.

Several programs throughout the country are serving folks, are serving parents who've actually adopted children and are presented unique issues, unique experiences that might need attention that is different than what you do in traditional marriage education classes. So we hope to at least address some of those today.

Before we begin, I'd like to present a snippet of the research and some background information on adoption and marriage to provide some context for this webinar.

Steve and Shannon will be sharing their experience as adoptive parents, as well as healthy marriage practitioners working with adoptive parents today.

We want to give you an overview of the research on marital stresses in adoptive families and some facts to be aware of while working with adoptive households.

Importantly, we should note, adoption is a common form of the American family. It is not unique in that sense. It is a common form of the American family. In 2001, the US Census Bureau estimated there were more than 1.5 million adopted children in the US.

Of this group, 84% of the children lived with two parents. Of adopted children that lived with two parents, 44% -- 44% -- lived with the adoptive parent. Thirty-seven percent lived with an adoptive parent and a biological parent. And 3% lived with an adoptive parent and a step-parent.

These numbers illustrate the point that adoptive parents, adoptive families, are not homogenous and have various backgrounds.

Many of the experiences of adoptive parents are similar to any other parenting experience. Adoptive parents, just like other parents, went through the same exciting process of having a child and they experienced many of the same joys and growing lessons of raising their children as any other parent.

There are, however, unique factors that affect adoptive families and create stresses in relationships. While these stresses are unique, there is no research-based evidence or there is very little that points to the fact that adoption increases occurrence of divorce among adoptive families.

Research as we prepared for this webinar has shown us a couple of things, particularly or specifically should I say, there were seven core issues that we found in adoption for adoptive parents. The research suggests that these issues arise over the course of the adoption for adoptive parents at some point or another.

I'll mention them briefly while Steve and Shannon will delve into these more specifically during their presentation.

Of the seven, I'll go through them in this order. The first that was acknowledged was loss, the sense of loss. For many but not all adoptive parents, there is a sense of loss of self due to infertility and other health-related matters preventing pregnancy, the first point, the first core issue for adoptive parents based on the research.

The second is rejection. Couples sometimes - adoptive couples sometimes scapegoat or ostracize the other partner because of fertility issues or difficulties. This, again, occurs for many but not all adoptive couples.

The third, guilt and shame -- for many but not all adoptive couples, there can be a sense of shame associated

with infertility and a false perception of childlessness as punishment. Some people go through -- and this is not in all contexts, but some people go through a religious crisis due to infertility.

The fourth, grief -- many adoptive parents grieve the loss of the (sanity child), experiencing a pregnancy. Otherwise, there may be manifestations of blocked attachment towards the adoptive child.

The fifth, identity -- adoptive parents sometimes struggle with the issue of whether they are the child's real parents. This occurs at different stages and occurs for many, but all - but not all adoptive parents.

The sixth core issue in adoption for adoptive parents, intimacy in a relationship - for many but not all, unresolved grief over previous pregnancy losses may lead to intimacy and marital problems and might cause individuals to avoid closeness with the adoptive child to avoid loss.

And the seventh core issue in adoption for adoptive parent, control (gain) -- for many but not all adoptive parents, there is a misplaced sense of helplessness associated with adopting and parents place a false sense of mastery on the act of biological birth.

Steven and Shannon as I mentioned before professionally are very engaged in this work, but specifically on a personal note, they have firsthand experience regarding adoption. I'll do real introductions of both of them and then we'll turn it over to them.

Steven Durand as I mentioned earlier is Executive Director of the Central Texas Fatherhood Initiative, a non-profit organization devoted to motivating and training men to become better fathers and husbands. He has delivered fathering and healthy marriage education programs to a variety of populations, including adoptive parents. Mr. Durand is a graduate of Baylor University. He resides in Waco, Texas with his wife Shannon and their three adoptive children.

Ms. Shannon Durand is a trained marriage educator who frequently speaks at marriage conferences and retreats on issues including those facing adoptive parents. She is also an applied behavioral analysis trainer and works with children with autism and other special needs. A graduate of Baylor University, Ms. Durand has worked in foster care case management, preschool ministry, administration, and teaching. She also resides in Waco, Texas with her husband Steven and their three adoptive children.

We're delighted to have them. And at this point, I'll turn it over to Steve and Shannon Durand.

**Steven Durand:** Thank you, Patrick, and want to wish everybody good day and what a privilege it is to be here with all of you. Look forward to visiting with you folks and hearing from some of your comments and questions and concerns. And I just want to say how privileged we feel to be talking about something that we feel so passionate about, not only personally, but also professionally.

And that is not only adoption, but also just adoptive couples, adoptive families, and just want to applaud the work that the National Healthy Marriage Resource Center is doing to get this information out to so many folks, as well as what all of you folks are doing as marriage practitioners, marriage educators, to strengthen families in order to improve child outcomes and family outcomes. And so we're just delighted to be here with all of you today.

I want to give you a brief overview of what Shannon and I will be touching on this afternoon. And then we'll go through those things together and then would, again, love to have some time to visit with you folks question-and-answer-wise.

Initially we are going to be talking about some of the common challenges that adoptive couples face. This has come from not only our work professionally in the nonprofit sector.

Shannon as was mentioned by Patrick also has a history in being a case manager for a child placement organization. We have personal experience as adoptive parents.

We feel that we bring a wealth of experience in dealing with marriage enrichment activities and marriage education workshops and classes specifically targeting adoptive families, so this is something that we've been immersed in.

And we will be talking about some of the common challenges that adoptive couples deal with. Some of it will be personal stories, anecdotal from our own experiences as we reflect back over the last several years of our journey as a couple.

But we will also bringing in other anecdotes and other stories about other couples who've gone through the whole adoption process, both leading up to the adoption, during the adoption process, and then following the adoption, some of the unique challenges and strains that adoption may place on an adoptive couple.

We're also going to be dealing a little bit with specifically the adoptive mother and some of the challenges that maybe she is dealing with. We certainly want to address issues that are common to adoptive couples, but we also want to talk about the individuals.

And so we will be talking some specifically about the adoptive mother. We'll also be talking some about the adoptive father as well. We're going to be touching on some key issues to address with adoptive couples.

When you're targeting adoptive couples for your services, we want to give you some ideas on things to cover with them. Some of them are going to be things that you would normally do with just the general population, but we've found that adoptive couples are hungry and yearning for more information that will strengthen their marriage and will help them out, as well as information about adoption.

(And one) of the things that we'll touch on here in a little bit is the lack of support system for a lot of adoptive couples. And many of them are just, again, hungry for that type of a support and information resources that they can use.

We're also going to be touching some on some additional considerations, some things to keep in mind as you deliver your services, (you know), working with this special population of adoptive couples.

So I thought it would be helpful as we begin here today to just share a little bit, again, anecdotally from our own experience and what led us as a couple that had been married - we in total have been married, Shannon and I, for 14 years.

We went through several years of not having children in our home. And I will allow Shannon to just elaborate a little bit more further on our own personal journey. And then we'll get into some of the common strains that couples often deal with.

Shannon?

**Shannon Durand:** Yes, excited to share our story today and I hope I can keep it brief so we can get into the bulk of what we're going to be talking about.

But Steve and I met in college. And I can remember from a very young age always wanting to be a parent. I loved working with kids, babysat off and on throughout the decades, and oftentimes when I was dating would make sure that the person I was dating was very interested in having children eventually as well.

I also was very interested in adoption, even as a late teen, and thought that was something I might be interested in doing and so often would include that question to, you know, people I was dating more seriously, you know, what do you feel about adoption, is that something you feel you could do?

And I remember having conversations with Steve about that. And at that time, he was interested in adoption as well and open to that. Of course, we made no specific plans.

But my hope was always to have a couple biological children and maybe adopt one or two. And so that was kind of, you know, I went into marriage thinking okay, marriage and then a couple years we'll get pregnant and have a baby.

And so two years into our marriage, we started that process and I found out that I was pregnant. Seven weeks later, though, I did have an early miscarriage. And that was totally unexpected. You go into that thinking it will be perfect, everything will be fine.

And so that was our first little bump in the road with our first miscarriage. We didn't think anything, you know,

about it, didn't really have any pregnancy issues related in the family. And so there was no reason why we probably couldn't conceive again.

So, again, we began the process of trying and soon got pregnant again. This one went much farther, but I was not growing correctly and concerns started in the pregnancy early on with some of the testing done.

So I went this time about six months and the baby died in utero. And over the course of about 4-1/2 years, we had three early miscarriages and three babies die at about six months pregnancy.

And so the - as you can see, that was just very challenging. It was very emotional for me, something I had always hoped and longed for, you know, a right that I really felt like I had as a female to give birth to my own children was looking like it was not going to be possible at that time.

It was an emotional rollercoaster I'm sure for Steve at different times. You know, I was very depressed, very angry, very quiet, very sad. But he was with me the whole way and very supportive and very empathetic. And we walked through those valleys together.

After it became clear that getting pregnant was not a problem -- growing the baby properly and it making it full term was the problem -- there were very few doctors at the time that had any idea what was going on.

And at that time, we didn't have a lot of money to go around the world and find the one doctor that probably did have any answers. And so we started looking at adoption as a way to maybe bring children into our lives.

When that becomes your only option, I think at least I know for Steve and even for me, I was a little angry, a little hesitant at first because even though I'd talked about that, now that was probably going to be the only way that we would have children.

And so that took a little bit of kind of wading through. We did some research into how do we adopt, where do we go. There's all sorts of agencies. Do we adopt privately, do we adopt internationally? And then I became aware of adopting through the foster care system, which I was not previously aware of.

At the time, I was a preschool director and worked at a local church with their preschool ministry and met a family who had adopted a couple of children this way and was very interested in this and thought that I had found the ticket to a cheaper adoption.

I think we all are aware that private adoptions can be very expensive, anywhere from \$4000 to \$40,000. And so we wanted to try and keep it - at that time, we didn't have a lot of extra money, but we did desperately want children.

So we looked into adopting through the foster care system. And we got hooked up with an agency, went



through training and were trained as foster parents. And so we started that process with inviting foster children into our home.

And we really looked at it as a hope to eventually adopt them. We got our first in 2001 right before 9/11 happened. And then four months later, they called us about a little girl and we accepted her into our home. And then five months later, we got a call about a newborn that was needing a home and to go home from the hospital.

And we invited him into our home. So we got about three children in the span of nine months. And so we had two very young 2-year-olds and a newborn. And so we were an instant family.

And that's kind of how we got started in the process. And there were some big ups and downs in our story, but now I look back and I think I wouldn't do it any differently and love the family that we have.

**Steven Durand:** (Unintelligible).

**Shannon Durand:** Go ahead, Steve.

**Steven Durand:** Well, I was just thinking, just as a reminder, one of the reasons why we're sharing our own personal story here before we get started is just to give you folks a foundation of what typically adoptive couples struggle with.

As Patrick was going down the list of the various factors and I was kind of jotting some of those various things down, certainly it brings back personal memories with regards to loss and the feelings of rejection and guilt and shame.

And it's going to be various feelings that are going to be different for various couples, but I will say that our story is remarkably similar to so many of the other couples that we've dealt with at the retreats and the workshops that we help to facilitate and so many of the other folks that we've gotten to know over the course of time.

And as we get into these unique strains that people deal with who've adopted children, again, there may be some exceptions, but I think it's important to use our story as sort of a launching point for you folks to give you some background not only on us, but also on perhaps other adoptive couples.

We do want to get into some of those unique strains. And I think initially one of the first places to start is talking about the financial strains with regards to adoption.

And this is going to vary whether upon a person is adopting privately from a private agency where the cost is much higher or in the case of what we did where it was much less expensive to do it through the foster care system. But either way, I wanted Shannon to have a chance to just talk about some of the financial strains that

adoptive couples often are challenged by.

**Shannon Durand:** Well, like I mentioned before, a private option in the United States can cost anywhere from \$4000 to \$40,000 and up. And international adoptions can be costly and cost from \$7000 to \$30,000.

A lot of people don't have \$30,000 sitting around, so they may go into debt, take out loans, et cetera, to pay for these adoption expenses. And so, you know, besides a mortgage and car payments and things, they're adding this on top.

And we know that in typical marriages that are not affected by adoption, finances can often be a strain in a marriage and can be causes for arguments. And that is no different with adoptive parents and, in fact, can be even worse than maybe a little bit because they may have more debt due to some of the adoption expenses.

Or if they've gone through some major medical procedures like infertility treatments in vitro that are very costly, you know, they may have incurred debt trying to do that and then that didn't work and so they went on to adopt. So, you know, we know that finances can definitely strain a marriage.

In our case, we didn't incur debt through the adoption process. However, we are having ongoing expenses with medical care, with special needs that we weren't aware of that our kids, you know, we didn't know the background specifically.

We know some of their information, but we don't have access to all of it. And so as they age and grow, we are finding out that there's different tissues that they are dealing with.

Of course, some of them are - one of them's on medication for certain things. And so many times as a case manager, I found that there were ongoing costs for therapies and, you know, OTs and PTs and speech and maybe there's a need for a tutor for children who are maybe delayed a little bit because of the rough start they got early on.

So all of that has to be taken into consideration and can really lead to some of that financial strain in a marriage.

**Steven Durand:** Well, and I would also stress that when a couple gets into adoption, they consider the financial challenges very often. And the man may feel quite a bit differently about the financial situation than the woman depending upon his own self-need to perhaps be the provider for the family, you know, whatever the case may be.

But, again, as a couple goes through the adoption process and then after the adoption and then in the years subsequent, it's difficult to be able to project ahead of time as to what the needs may be. We have three children that've been adopted.

One of them may be in need of particular treatments that we at this point could not foresee. And that is often the case with a lot of adoptive couples that they incur this sort of ongoing expense along the way. And many of them look at that as something that just goes along with the process.

And then others of them may have to forsake some of their own financial challenges. Perhaps if a - say that you have both the man and the woman who both work outside the home, whenever you bring home a young child, one of the two, either the man or the woman, may have to stay at home or may have to find creative way to be able to make this work for their budget.

And it'll be interesting to see, I was talking with Shannon about this last night. It'll be interesting to see over the coming months what the current economy will do to adoption numbers. We won't know, obviously, for a long time whether or not it will have any effect on whether or not couples consider going to adoption.

But I would imagine if there's a couple that is concerned about the economic situation currently that was considering adoption beforehand may pause a little bit more than they would have before.

So that is definitely a strain that I think that you folks as practitioners, as educators, when you're dealing with adoptive couples, this needs to be acknowledged.

You will find a great deal of receptivity on the part of the couples as you validate this need and perhaps can give them some tools, some resources. I know that in some of our workshops and some of our retreats, we've brought up specific recommendations as far as resources that local communities often provide.

I know that oftentimes there may be a financial class, some sort of a training, meeting with a financial coach, that there are folks who often donate their time to adopt - to private adoption agencies that can assist couples with making a budget and planning ahead of time.

And if you folks as marriage educators can, again, identify what the specific financial needs are, (what) the strains might be, we do just need to acknowledge that.

We also do want to talk some about some of the unique emotional strains. And I often like to break this down for my own benefit, thinking of it pre-adoption some of the emotional strains that Patrick certainly addressed, as well as during the adoption process and then after the adoption and subsequent to that adoption.

We in some of our retreats often talk about hidden issues, things that are buried underneath the surface that when a couple is dealing with a particular event that comes up and they find themselves disagreeing or arguing, we know that as marriage educators it's often something that's below the surface that we need to help them perhaps identify and get to the root cause of so that we can begin to move forward there.

And we've found that over the course of a couple deciding yes, we're going to go through the adoption pro-

cess, those issues that are common to all couples begin to get bigger and bigger and bigger. And so we certainly want to address some of these unique emotional strains.

Shannon, do you want to talk about some of the pre-adoption challenges leading up (for couples)?

**Shannon Durand:** Sure.

Well, I know that in the seven core issues that Mr. Patterson listed, some of that fits in here with the sense of loss. I know I definitely felt a sense of loss, as I think you did as well. I think we all kind of have this feeling of a right to have children and that, you know, it's a definite kind of a done deal.

So I definitely grieved over that. You know, I had a sense of anger. I know that that rejection can be really felt if it is specific to one person. I did not feel that so much.

Steve was very supportive and never put any blame on me. And we were - it was my issue. I never felt that. In effect, he stood up for me when other people would say what was wrong with you or what is wrong with you.

So I felt very supported that way. But I could see where that would totally start a little division in two people who are married and just start that little crack in that foundation.

It is unfamiliar territory. Like I said, we were very interested in adoption to begin with, but when it becomes your only option, we were a little hesitant. I know Steve communicated the fear of always feeling like he was babysitting instead of being a dad. And, you know, no one could really speak to that, but, you know, once he was a dad and once those children were welcomed in our home, I mean, it was pretty instant that we felt the connection.

You know, our daughter took a little bit more time bonding-wise with some of our family members and the males in our family. But there definitely is that sense of kind of you just don't know what you're getting into. You think you know some things. And so that can be very emotional.

I think, you know, the fact that you put up with me for 4-1/2, 5 years through my ups and downs, I mean, I was very hormonal. I was pregnant, you know, a couple times a year, having great hopes that this pregnancy would work out and then, you know, the baby dying and having to deliver and see this baby and bury the baby and just those big ups and downs, many people don't make it through that.

And just ongoing support, I know our family and our friends and our church were so important to us during that time. And people really gathered around us and helped us through that.

So I think a support system is - was key for us in that. But I definitely could - can see those ups and downs and those hills and just think it takes so much patience, each spouse with each other, but I know that I feel like you

really had to have the most patience with me because I was going through all that. And I was pretty - I didn't hide a lot of my feelings I don't think, but anyway.

**Steven Durand:** You know, I would like to add also with regards to as I reflect back upon the conversations that I've had with couples, it's often common to find differences in opinion between both the male and the female leading into the adoption. One may feel more strongly about it than another, for whatever reason.

I was speaking with a friend of mine just yesterday who they have two adopted children. He was reflecting back on their own experience and talking about how he felt differently about it than she did. He was ready to move pretty strongly into the adoption process. He was tired of seeing his wife go through so much heartache through the pregnancy loss, and yet she was ready to keep trying to have children. And they had quite a few disagreements over moving forward into the process.

I know that at some of the retreats that we've dealt with, I've had very candid conversations with some of the men who were less excited about adoption, less excited about foster care than their spouses.

And part of that may be, again, just this feeling of moving into the unknown. We as men want to know what lies ahead. We want to be able to have a plan. And we have to come to a point where we recognize we don't know it all. And it feels very uncomfortable. And certainly women may have their own concerns related to the unfamiliar territory.

I also remember distress over having to make quick decisions whenever in our case adopting through foster care -- and many of you folks may deal with couples that are choosing to go through the foster care situation -- very often you get a call an hour, two hours, three hours before they bring that child.

When they call you and they say I have a child here that we would like to put in your home, will you accept, and you say yes, the process can be very, very quick.

Well, because of our experience in going through the heartache and the pregnancy loss and many couples that have gone through that, when they talk about we're going to bring this child there in the next two hours or whatever the case may be, it's frustrating because we looked at it as if we say yes to a child to be placed in our home, we're not just saying yes because this is going to be a temporary arrangement.

Yes, we knew that oftentimes in foster care situations children are placed back in their birth family. We understand that. But for us we were going into this thinking permanent.

And we - it just so happened that three children that were placed in our home, that was their first placement. And they've been with us throughout. And for our youngest son, when we got him at 3-days-old, we are all that he knows.

But I just remember really, really struggling with this having to make an instant decision and thinking this is not just a two-hour decision. This is something I need to take a week, a weekend. And a part of that was just that fear, this unfamiliar territory, moving in.

I know that as well one of the other points here that we've brought up is concerns over last-minute changes in the birth plan or failed adoptions. It is not uncommon for adoptions to get the point of consummation and then to fail for whatever reason -- the birth mother has a change of heart.

I know here in Texas, we have a 48-hour waiting period where a birth mother can change her mind after having the child. And I was speaking with a friend of mine who's the director of a local adoption agency.

And she was saying that many of the adoptive mothers that she talks to talk about how terrifying it is to be in a hospital room knowing that the birth mother is giving birth and that she might have a change of heart.

Where many in the maternity ward are excited that they may be starting their family, for adoptive couples who are hoping to be able to bring this little one home, that can be a real challenge for them. And so we certainly want to address those emotional strains.

And then lastly, dealing with caseworkers, birth families, extended family, if there are certain folks in an adoptive couple's sphere of influence that are not supportive and certainly that may be the case of extended family, in-laws, if you already have children within the home and you're going to be bringing in an adopted child home, whatever the feelings may be, there are oftentimes folks who are not consciously necessarily opposing the adoption, but may not be the most supportive person.

And with regards to caseworkers, there is just a great deal of turnover that we've encountered and that I know that others who've gone through the adoption process have encountered whenever you deal with caseworkers.

And that's just the nature of social service and we understand that. But adoptive couples often have stated that they feel that that can be a very frustrating thing to have to have - almost train a new caseworker with regards to their own specific situation. And you can bring in a wealth of people around you that can often put certain strains on a marriage.

Shannon, would you add anything to the challenges leading up to adoption?

**Shannon Durand:** No, I think we've covered quite a bit of it. I know while private adoptions and then how we adopted through the foster care system is - it is slightly different, I can't imagine what - I know what we were feeling at the time.

I remember very vividly just when (Tate) came to live with us and the possibilities of him, you know, his parents

getting back together and working the plan and moving on and him going back to their home was just this huge fear that I think I had, that you had, that my family had, that your family had.

We'd bonded with him within a few days of having him and just really grew to love him. And, you know, we didn't know for - it was about a year before he was adopted.

And actually he went quickly through the system and we adopted him within a year of getting him, but - which is rare in the foster care system. It usually takes much longer than that.

But, you know, just having those children in, bonding with them, attaching to them, working with them, being their parents, and them going back to birth families, et cetera, are very hard, especially if you do have that long-term view of adoption. And so it is - it can cause strain.

And then one spouse may get more bonded with the child than another and that can cause some strains as well.

**Steven Durand:** You know, we also - on the challenges after adoption, it is imperative when you're working with adoptive couples in a retreat or a workshop format to allow them time as a couple to grow.

We've found that at many of the retreats that we've done the (unintelligible) couples want to talk about adoption. They love being around other adoptive couples and sharing stories. And for many of them, it may be the first time that they've had something in common with people that they can share.

And yet it is so important to focus on the marriage issue for them because if that issue is not working, their relationship with their children is going to suffer.

And so we certainly want to address the fact that adoptive couples as is the case as you know for many couples who are married, whether they've adopted or not, often report having less opportunity for "couple time" after they bring children into the relationship.

And part of that for adoptive couples, it may be finding a sitter who maybe is skilled and able to take care of a child with special needs while that family is away. Maybe if that child has just been placed in the home, there may be this feeling of I can't abandon this child, we can't go out.

And yet couples need to be encouraged to make that relationship a priority. If they don't do that and have that sense of us-ness, this commitment to one another, we've seen situations - and Shannon may share a story here a little bit later on about a couple we know that the whole adoption process really strained their relationship in the couple time that they had.

And we know that adoption can shine a spotlight on already-existing problems within that marriage relation-

ship. If things are not strong to begin with, you may not be able to (tell) just by looking at a couple, but as time goes on, you can often see a spotlight shown on a crack or a fissure within a relationship that may cause additional strain.

And Shannon, do you want to talk briefly just about that one...

**Shannon Durand:** Yeah, I...

**Steven Durand:** ...couple that...

**Shannon Durand:** ...you definitely - I think we all have different times in our marriage where we struggle with things. And, you know, going through the whole adoption process can kind of bring out some of that and cause some cracks in the foundation like we said before.

We knew of a couple that had four children already, a loving family, great family involved in their community. They felt compelled to bring a child from overseas into their home with hopes of adopting her and put some time and money and effort into this. It took about a year or two to get everything set. And then she came.

And the process was difficult and not exactly what was presented to them. This little girl had more medical issues than previously acknowledged. And so the mom was taking the brunt of running her to another city to get some of that stuff taken care of, as well as being a mom and being involved in her four children's school. And so this was causing some strain.

And then this little girl often was a different persona in public than she was at home. She could be very manipulating. And they just didn't know how to handle her exactly. They were confused, felt that, you know, we've brought her to a better place, we've loved her, yet we don't see the fruit of that. We don't feel love back from her.

Yet she was very engaging to other people. And so there were two different sides to this. And it eventually led to this couple separating and divorcing because there was a spotlight.

And those cracks were, you know, getting larger and larger as that process happened. And the little girl who they were going to adopt didn't end up staying with them and went to another home and is adopted now.

But it just kind of did shine a light on some already-existing things and they thought they could kind of just gloss over them. They didn't really address them. And it got worse until they eventually divorced.

**Steven Durand:** And we also know that that can be an extreme case certainly, but it's not the only situation like that that we've encountered and have come across.



But (often) the emotional strains relating to (trans-racial) adoption, if both the husband and the wife are not on the same page about their openness to bringing a child from a different culture, a different race, into their home, if their family, their extended family, if their faith community, if their friends, whoever their support systems - the typical support system might normally be, if there's a person or persons within that support system that aren't on the same page with regards to (trans-racial) adoption, some of these unique challenges that come about by having a child of a different color, I know that we've certainly gotten some stares and some interesting comments from folks because two of our boys are Hispanic.

And our youngest one certainly looks nothing like us and he is just a part of our family, but for others that are not used to seeing a very, very dark child with a very, very light-skinned family, it can be interesting to see what folks will say. And so certainly you can get some interesting stories from some of the couples that you work with. I bet if you ask them that many of them would be more than willing to share a humorous story or two.

**Shannon Durand:** (Unintelligible).

**Steven Durand:** And then also societal misconceptions about adoption in general, I think it's so easy even though we guard against it to go into adoption with a set of expectations. We do this with parenting. We do this whenever we get married. We bring our expectations with us.

But when it comes to adoption, we often have this expectation that if I just love this child, this child will appreciate me. If I just provide a safe home, this child will react with gratitude and thankfulness and that my child willingly and gladly trade a hurtful past for a promising future.

And yet time after time after time, we talk to couples who have shared with us that their expectations have caused strain in their relationship because those were unrealistic expectations. It's important in dealing with adoptive couples, certainly with any married couple, but especially adoptive couples, to address expectations.

Are they realistic? Are you even aware of what some of your expectations were? Did you come into this relationship having communicated what your expectations were?

And then what happens for all of us when expectations go unmet is we feel a sense of loss, a sense of grief, and a sense of need certainly. And so these are all emotional strains.

We also just briefly want to touch on some of the unique strains that may not be the case for every adoptive mother or every adoptive father, but Shannon will talk about some of the unique strains that we've come across with regards to, again, adoptive parents specifically.

**Shannon Durand:** Well, and we've found that in working with these couples who are post-adoptive through the state and I've certainly felt this myself, a lot of times we as adoptive mothers can become the target for our adoptive child's anger, confusion, and ambivalence toward being in this family that we have created.

Unfortunately in many foster care situations, the dad is absent. He's not been really a part of the child's life. Not in all cases, but in many. And so the child is removed from his mother's care, his biological or her biological mother's care. And so when an adoptive mom comes in, she's taking that place and often can get the brunt of that because we're replacing what they've lost.

They can come from the worst situations -- abuse-wise, et cetera -- and still want to be with that biological connection. It's not really explainable, but I know I think on Mother's Day recently, I was told I was the worst mom my daughter had ever had. And she actually could say that. She's had a couple.

So unfortunately I - and if you know that ahead of time and know that that is a valid feeling that I feel like I get the brunt of her anger, maybe more than my - than Steve does, and Steve can be sympathetic and empathetic toward that, it helps in that.

I'm not sure we can really keep that from happening in the situation. But, you know, if I know that up-front that that may be something that happens, I can not take her words so personally and say you know what? She's just lashing out. She's confused. She may not even know how to verbalize what she's feeling. And so that will help me keep some perspective on things.

But we've found in working with these other couples that many moms have felt the same way, too. They just didn't know that they weren't the only one. They didn't realize that there's some research out there that says this is pretty common.

Now I've not talked to many adoptive mothers who have adopted privately that feel this. But I do think if you adopt a child who's older and not an infant, you're probably bound to run into this for sure.

**Steven Durand:** You know, and then also with regards to the adoptive father, we tend to discount what problems our wives are experiencing with the children because we are - we may be reacting to something that we've seen or something that we've heard, but it's important for us to remember that the primary parent -- and by that I mean the child - the parent who spends the majority of time with that adopted child.

In many cases, it is the mother -- may actually be experiencing a more genuine version of that child's emotional and behavioral status than the other caregiver.

I can certainly relate to that with times where I may come home from work and Shannon may have been home - at home with the children and there's a degree of strain. There's - it's been a difficult day for whatever the case may be.

And my tendency may be to try to fix things where I need to validate Shannon's feelings and support her and have her back so to speak when my daughter or one of our other children speaks to Shannon in a disrespectful tone, especially when it's deep down under the surface we know that it's relating to their own feelings of

frustration or anger and so I need to be supportive of her regardless.

I think it's important to provide as marriage educators and practitioners a safe place of community where adoptive couples can gather and know that they can vent, that they can share their frustration.

And all it takes is one person taking information like what we've just shared about the adoptive mother or the adoptive father and all of a sudden you may find yourself launching into a variety of discussions that take you down various paths. But it's a therapeutic process for a lot of folks to just know that they are not alone in this process.

And, again, this may not be the case for every couple, but there does tend to be some similarity between a lot of couples.

And in the - we've talked about the financial strains. We've talked about the emotional strains and certainly we could spend a lot more time talking about that. But we also want to talk about the common challenge of a lack of support system that a lot of couples deal with.

Shannon?

**Shannon Durand:** We have found as we've done these retreats with various couples that this is probably one of the biggest issues that - I think that we've seen that the face. A lot of them feel so isolated, especially if they're living in rural communities where maybe not too many people have adopted. It is common to adopt in the United States now, but there are some places that it's less common.

And they must may feel very isolated. We've had families who because of different behavioral issues, medication issues, special needs, they're - they don't feel like their children are very welcomed at a given church or, you know, the - certain community facilities.

And so they feel like they can't even attend a church on a regular basis because their kids are not welcome because they do, you know, they are challenging at times.

And so I think it's so helpful to let them know what resources are in that area for them to hook in with. And it - it's been so great to see these couples at these marriage retreats just talk to one another.

And I think that's been one of the biggest benefits. They get to hear other people's stories and know they're not alone. They've traded numbers. They've become each other's respite providers and babysitters so that they can get out more as couples.

And so I think just, you know, that lack of support and that feeling isolated is very real for a lot of adoptive couples. And, you know, it's just been exciting to see them get hooked up to some of the resources.

I know even though we have lots of support from our friends, family, and our church friends, we didn't necessarily have - know about the post-adoptive services that come with foster care after a child is adopted. And we became aware of that in the last couple of years and are reaping the benefits of that now.

I also think it's important for the children who are adopted to be around other children who are adopted and know hey, I'm not the only one who's ever been adopted. You know, we have been to various support network things where there's been a fun place for kids to play.

And there's other adopted children there playing and they've gotten to just play with those. And nothing may ever come up about adoption, but they have found that they're not the only ones. And so I think that's helpful as well.

**Steven Durand:** Well, and if that relationship between the a husband and a wife aren't strong to begin with, that may, again, exacerbate this lack of support. He doesn't support me, she doesn't support me, whatever the case, however we define support for that person, if that's not strong, then this lack of a support system is really going to be a very strong-felt need in their lives.

But I - I'm confident that if somebody were to take a handful of adoptive couples and just lock them in a room and just allow them to talk, you wouldn't even have to tell them to talk about adoption. Eventually the conversation steers in that direction.

But for many of these couples, they've never been around other adoptive couples. And automatically it becomes a support system for them. And it's a powerful, powerful thing.

We've seen older couples that you wouldn't normally think would connect with younger couples, we've seen couples from various social backgrounds that, again, you wouldn't naturally put together, but all of a sudden, I've often said that adoption is one of the issues around which you will find a great deal of camaraderie whenever you get adoptive families together.

There's very few things in life that can unite a group of folks quite like getting together adoptive families, adoptive couples, and to talk about adoption and to provide, again, safety and validation in that.

We also want to talk here in conclusion before we get into questions from you folks about specific issues to address with adoptive couples. I know the question may exist, do we need to as educators use a curriculum that is specific for adoptive couples or should we just use a more familiar, more widely distributed marriage resource?

And I don't think it's important as - or as important as covering a few key issues that seem to really resonate well with the adoptive couples that I know that we've dealt with.

And that is specifically how to promote safety in the marriage, how to communicate effectively with one another, how to (unintelligible) friendship in marriage, clarifying those expectations, identifying them, talking about how realistic those may be and what happens when those go unmet, dealing with forgiveness, identifying local adoption resources.

Any curriculum worth its salt that is specifically tailored for married couples will already generally deal with these things with the exception of, of course, identifying local adoption resources.

But I don't think that you necessarily have to use a curriculum specifically for adoptive couples. If there is something that's out there that's really strong, I know that there are some states and some communities that are piloting certain curricula and programs that they've developed or perhaps adapted from more popular marriage curricula. I think that those things are wonderful as well.

But I do think it's important to deal with these key issues for adoptive couples. Any time you get them together and you can focus on just one specifically and bring in a teacher to deal with those sorts of issues within the context of adoption or you can deal with all of them over the course of a weekend or a retreat type of a format.

And I do also want to elaborate and then I'll throw it to Shannon here, but with regards to dealing with forgiveness, (now) one of the things that I often think about is we've seen some real breakthroughs.

It's important to not ignore this topic of forgiveness when you're dealing with married couples in general, but with regards to adoptive couples, we've found that when there is safety and when there is community and there's validation, that you will find couples open up about amazing things that you would never expect them to.

For instance, we've had some parents who've talked about that if they knew all that they were signing up for whenever they were going to go through the adoption process, they don't know that they necessarily would do it over again. They've had a difficult time.

And if that's the case, they may feel like a bad parent. They may feel ungrateful. How can I feel that way after bringing in this child into my home that's been in such need and we've been blessed in such a powerful way?

But there is something validating about helping couples to see that there may need to be forgiveness, not only towards their spouse if there's some issues there, but also perhaps towards this adopted child for whatever reason. There may need to be some forgiveness that's given towards the birth family. And just acknowledging that can be a very therapeutic and powerful tool.

Shannon?

**Shannon Durand:** Well, and I wouldn't forget that we've seen and maybe with - more with the moms, but

forgiving themselves for feeling some of those feelings.

**Steven Durand:** Yeah, yeah.

**Shannon Durand:** I know I've had feelings of not sure that I would do this again, I'm not sure what I signed up for and just wondering how I could feel that because, you know, for many years we just wanted kids so badly. And then we have them and here I'm, you know, being ungrateful for what I have.

So being able to forgive yourself and...

**Steven Durand:** Mm-hm.

**Shannon Durand:** ...those circumstances and knowing that, you know, I definitely am not the only one that feels that way and teaching that process to our children. They're going to have to grow up and be able to forgive their biological parents that weren't able to raise them for some reason. And so I think that's important.

Also we've found that just in the retreats that we've done that've been a whole weekend, it's really allowed the parents to get away from everything and just focus on each other for a couple days and to have fun.

We've seen them go from just sitting next to each other and barely talking to sitting very closely, holding hands, stroking each other's hair, smiling at each other.

So I just think, you know, once we can take away some of those stressors of life and get them out of their moment, they can really reconnect again and give them some fun ideas, some fun activities, how can you do this on a budget, how can you - this is how you would incorporate children.

This is why you not - don't need to incorporate children. This is why you need a separate time for just you and your spouse and just really giving them ideas of how to restore some of that fun and friendship that they started with but that's maybe been crowded out by some of the stressors.

**Steven Durand:** And I think, you know, certainly folks have wondered about the type of format to provide services to adoptive couples. And I believe it just takes time. It takes time to break the ice. It takes time to build trust. It takes time to create a sense of community. You can't force it. But, again, when couples have a chance to get away, and for many of them, they haven't gotten away from their kids for a long time...

**Shannon Durand:** For years.

**Steven Durand:** ...yeah, for many of them. And many of the couples who have come to our retreats have six, seven, eight adopted children in their home, foster children, maybe a combination of the two.

And so it takes time. And certainly a one-time format is - if that's all you've got, it's like a 1-1/2 hour thing that you're putting together (unintelligible), but if you can do a weekend, get away. I would highly recommend that.

We're so fortunate here, Shannon and I, to live in a state here in Texas where we have a very, very involved Health and Human Services Commission that should be lauded for the great work that they're doing being an advocate for adoptive couples.

And some of the retreats that we've dealt with through them that they've helped to fund have been incredibly powerful. And so that takes obviously some financial resources to be able to get (unintelligible) through a grant or through some funding that comes from a different source.

If you can provide a weekend format, I would certainly recommend (unintelligible) again, it could be a family fun night that includes the children as well. We do believe that certainly anything that you do needs to be skills-based.

And it needs to be strength-based, too, not coming from a deficit model about what a couple is doing wrong, but helping them to see that we all bring strengths to this relationship.

We all have something that we can give, and giving them some actual tools and some actual skills that they can begin to acquire. That's how we speak constructively to one another, how we speak directly, how we (unintelligible) speak and communicate effectively if it's how to provide forgiveness, if it's how to problem-solve, whatever the case may be, skills are what these couples are so, so hungry for.

And then if possible...

**Shannon Durand:** (Unintelligible).

**Steven Durand:** ...and - no, go ahead.

**Shannon Durand:** I think it's helpful, too, for if you - you know, if you can have a male and female presenter to give both sides of the perspective, you know, women and men are different in our thinking...

**Steven Durand:** Mm-hm.

**Shannon Durand:** ...and communicating at times, but, you know, we have had personal experience with adoption. And I think that gives us some street cred when we are - there's an automatic door that's opened for us that really we can share with these people and get to know them and get community quicker.

I'm not saying you have to personally adopted to, you know, present this information or work with these couples, but I do think it's important to have someone, if there's a specific top that maybe is more adoption-related

to get someone who knows or has experience, works in the adoption realm or has worked with those families, to invite them in and speak on that as well because then that will give some credibility.

But I do feel like we don't have a lot of letters behind our name, but because of our personal experience with adoption, it has opened some doors and just enriched our relationships in these retreats that we do with these families.

**Steven Durand:** And I have to say just in conclusion for our portion here and certainly we'll be available to answer questions here from you folks that both Shannon and I, again, are passionate about this issue. We feel incredibly blessed to have gone through this adoption process ourselves.

And we encourage you to do what you can to focus on this specific special population. And it can be included in the overall context of marriage enrichment for just families in general, but if you can isolate adoptive couples and whether that's partnering with an adoption agency or partnering with a local community resource center that can help you to do something special for adoptive families, adoptive couples, I think it would be incredibly well received.

So we've enjoyed this portion and I'm going to throw it back to Patrick or to our moderator here for any questions.

**Patrick Patterson:** Thank you, Steve and Shannon. This is Patrick. I just want to say first of all thank you for being as honest and forthcoming as you were about your experience of it.

That was very helpful to the experience of folks on the line I think as we deal with adoptive couples, but also couples that haven't adopted, just your openness to share your story I think is appreciated.

I have a gang of questions in front of me. And I'm going to try to ask as many as I can. So I'll go through somewhat of a rapid-fire session with you guys. I'm going to ask as many of these questions as I can.

**Shannon Durand:** All right.

**Patrick Patterson:** Now some I'll ask both of you to respond. Some I'll ask directly to you, Steve, or to you, Shannon.

So the first question -- and either one of you can take this one -- if adoptive couples are the target population for marriage education programs, how and where would you advise the program to focus their recruitment and marketing efforts? I'll just repeat it real quick. If adoptive couples is the target population for a marriage education program, how and where you would advise the program to focus their recruitment and marketing efforts?

**Shannon Durand:** I would say that getting in touch with your local adoption agencies is a first step for you and



creating some relationships with those directors. I can't imagine them turning away some marriage education for people who are going through their program.

There's also CPS and the private foster care agencies. You know, as foster parents, we have to maintain certain credentials and have a certain amount of training hours.

And if this education can be provided for at a reasonable or a free rate, there are plenty of agencies that would welcome you to come in and train their adoptive parents.

So I think it's just looking at where you're at, your local agencies, maybe even partnering with CPS and your private agencies, getting to know the directors. I would start there.

**Steven Durand:** Well, and I would also...

**Patrick Patterson:** (Unintelligible) just - CPS, could you just make sure everybody understands what CPS is?

**Shannon Durand:** Child Protective Services, sorry...

**Patrick Patterson:** (Okay).

**Shannon Durand:** ...yes, which is the foster care entity. There are agencies that work with CPS, but they all need training hours to maintain, and that's in the foster care realm, but they all need hours to maintain as foster parents. And so you can count marriage education and communication and stuff like that as part of your training hours.

**Patrick Patterson:** Thank you. Go ahead. I'm sorry, Steve.

**Steven Durand:** Well, I was just thinking about all the difficulty that we've encountered with our partners here in the State of Texas trying to reach adoptive couples. Sometimes it takes some convincing, Patrick.

We - we've run into couples who just don't believe that something is being provided for them or they feel like they'll make excuses. Whenever you send something, you're going to have to do it multiple times because let's be honest, in my work with dads tells me that if I as a man and I'm - it's unfortunate that this is the case, but often if I get a flyer or a piece of information first about something that I may not be overly excited to go to, I may toss that before Shannon has a chance to look at it.

And I think a lot of dads are guilty of that. And so you have to put it in the hands of somebody who's going to really make this happen.

And for the ladies, if they do happen to get this information and they try to convince their husband or (twist their

arm) arm that he needs to be there, that can cause certainly some additional strain. And so it has to be something that will benefit the both of them and be easy for them to be able to (obtain).

But we've still encountered some amazing excuses that people have come up with to not participate. And it may take a personal phone call from somebody who's gone to...

**Shannon Durand:** Yes.

**Steven Durand:** ...a previous event saying I know this sounds too good to be true, but it's not too good to be true. You have to make this work. And you may have to put in extra effort in being able to do that. But I agree with Shannon in terms of certainly the adoption agency is the first place that I would start.

**Patrick Patterson:** Okay. That's good. Is that with - as your first contact, is that with printed materials or is it just a sit-down conversation? How do you guys approach that?

**Steven Durand:** Well, you know, I often initiate phone conversations. I believe in grassroots community movements and so I've got on the phone and I've developed relationships with folks.

And certainly the fact that we come from an adoptive background makes it a little bit easier, but it may just take a phone call and most folks would be willing to say yes, I'll engage in a discussion, let's have a meeting, and just simply, you know, can we conduct a focus group?

Maybe offering that sort of a relationship as marriage educators saying, you know, I'm interested in learning more about marriage resources and could we (put) perhaps a focus group, find out about needs here amongst some of the families that you deal with.

But, yes, I would initiate that because often adoption agencies will not initiate that. They've got their hands full as, again, we all do. But I think we have to seek them out.

And I think a great - another great way to do that is by developing a local healthy marriage coalition. If a community - and, of course, these have sprouted up all across the country where it's a wonderful thing to see. I know that we've tried to make efforts in that area here in Central Texas.

But whenever you can do that, I would certainly make sure that those folks are brought to the table, the adoption agencies. And it's going to take a personal invitation.

And if somebody can help make that introduction to the director of an adoption agency or whoever the case may be, yes, it has to be initiated by you because they often won't seek us out.

**Patrick Patterson:** Okay.

This question is for Steve. Do you do anything different with adoptive fathers? And if yes, what and how?

**Steven Durand:** I specifically deal with ways that we can support the mother because often the mother is the primary caregiver. And I - when I think about the fathers that I deal with, I often think of them feeling, again, this sense of confusion as to what do I do? And there may be...

**Patrick Patterson:** Right.

**Steven Durand:** ...some really help needs that they have with regards to some of the things that they were used to being a part of their relationship were more of a priority -- say, for instance, the sexual intimacy in the relationship prior to bringing these children into the home.

And if that begins to suffer, we've found that men very often if you provide them with a safe community will confess that their needs are not being met in that area. And that's going to cause additional strain.

So all I try to do is simply create a safe environment that identifies them specifically the unique and the valuable, irreplaceable contributions that a dad brings to the table, help him to feel that he's a valuable member of this because often he feels that he was brought into this without much of a say (unintelligible) helping him to see that he does have a voice.

He needs to speak clearly, but he also needs to listen and not try to solve all of his wife's problems whenever she does have a concern, because we have a tendency to try to do that.

And so you can easily take the things that would be covered in the marriage enrichment curriculum, a marriage education curriculum, and I - in my fatherhood support groups, I'm teaching a class this evening to a group of dads where specifically I'm going to take some of the things that I would typically do with couples and I'm going to boil it down and tailor it specifically for dads.

But I think it's just validating them as men and saying you do have a voice and your support for this child and for your spouse is key. And you have to do your part. You can't just allow the woman to initiate everything. You have to be willing to do your part.

**Patrick Patterson:** Thank you.

When working with adoptive couples, where - and this is specifically a question that's kind of supporting marriage educator or directed to marriage educators -- when working with adoptive couples, where should program practitioners focus their initial efforts? Is it around communication, finances, family, parenting? Or is there some other area?

And just take into context where you guys were (some years) ago and how that might've been helpful at that

time. Where should folks start if they're first approaching a - adoptive couples?

**Shannon Durand:** Well, I - all of those issues are fairly large and can probably take lots of time and training. But I tend to think that communication is kind of a base for a lot of these other issues.

And so if we can give them some good skills on clearly communicating to one another, respectfully communicating, that will hopefully work out some of these other issues and help them solve problems more effectively.

So I think communication is the basis and I think you've got to start with that. That comes - in our curriculum that we use, it's pretty much the first thing we do after getting to know the couples and such and sharing our story. We really get into some bad communication patterns and how we can change that and effectively communicate. So I think you've got to go there first.

**Steven Durand:** Well, and I also know that we try to only focus on those things that the couple can actually do something about. We know that as marriage educators, it is easy to certainly be aware of risk factors, something that may put this couple at risk for not making it, for their couple - for their relationship to not be very strong.

And whether it's conscious or otherwise, we have a tendency sometimes to look at those issues, but we need to focus on the things that the couple can actually do something about.

And that's why I think communication is so powerful. You can actually do something about it, but we're going to show you how. We're going to show you how you can communicate with one another.

Yes, we know that communication (unintelligible) again, we're going to give you some tools that you may not have used or you may not have used in this particular format, but we're going to teach you and we're going to give you a skill that you can walk away with that you can say what you need to say when you need to say it and have your own voice knowing that this other person has heard you and that it's safe to bring up specific topics.

Yeah, absolutely, I think if that part isn't working, the more (unintelligible) that create a healthy marriage, whether it's friendship, fun in their relationship, kind of rediscovering sexual intimacy, whatever the case may be, those things that all couples want and (one of) the things that drew them to each other in the first place. Those things are going to be pushed to the side (if they) can't get past this communication issue and can't get past some of the initial hard topics.

**Shannon Durand:** Mm-hm.

And I do think in our retreats that we do and other seminars, we've found that parents want some of those parenting issues answered. They want to know more about adoption, how can I fix this, how can I fix that.

**Man:** (Unintelligible).

**Shannon Durand:** But we really try and keep the marital relationship the focus of those retreats and not so much the kids because the kids have become the focus. And that is some of the problem. Kids are important, but you have to acknowledge that that marital relationship (was there) first and needs tending to. You can't just tend to the parent/child relationship.

And so, you know, I think she - the question was, you know, should we - what should we deal with and parent issues was one of them. That's always going to be an issue and parents always think they want to know that information.

But I would really stress if it's truly marriage enrichment and marriage education to keep it focused on the marriage relationship. You can maybe have some breakout sessions or some ongoing support later on that deals with well, what parenting issue are you having problems with? Is there bonding issue, is there attachment issues, are there, you know, a multitude of how to discipline positively, whatever.

But I would say we - not to get sidetracked, but to keep that marital relationship in the center. And I think communication is the basis for that.

**Patrick Patterson:** Well, we have time for one more question. And this is more on a personal note. You guys have shared a wonderful story I think and we both -- not we both, but we all have heard you guys talk about the highs and lows of the experience.

But in your journey, what are you most proud of? And this is a question for both of you to respond to. In your journey, what are you most proud of?

**Shannon Durand:** (Unintelligible) the family that we have. I look at our family and I love sending out Christmas cards. In the summer, it's very obvious. We have all shades of white and brown in our family.

And I wouldn't do it any other way. I think back to years ago when we were struggling and our hopes for starting a family and how I kind of had it mapped out and planned, but I'm proud that Steve and I have weathered a couple pretty big issues early on in our marriage and I think we know each other very well and have communicated. We've had a lot of - we had seven years together without children before we had children.

And so we know each other. We've communicated to each other. And I'm proud that that relationship has been intact. We've weathered some pretty serious storms for, you know, early on in our marriage. I think that's helped.

And I'm proud that we look different. I love to tell our story. Our kids are not shy to say they're adopted. That may change as they get a little bit older. And we'll have to be sensitive to that. But I love the family unit that we

are. I love how we've created that.

**Patrick Patterson:** That's awesome, awesome. Steve?

**Steven Durand:** Well, I would say I'm - I, too, am proud of that. I'm proud of the fact that adopting has opened up a door for us to be able to encourage other couples who have dealt with infertility or who have dealt with pregnancy complications or who have hit a dead end in their marriage relationship.

And our experience certainly allows us to be a comfort to others. And we've found a number of couples who had maybe talked about adoption at one time. They'd considered it.

But seeing our positive experience, they've gotten involved in that. And I'm excited that we've been able to help other couples put a positive spin on adoption. I've - we've certainly talked to other couples who've had misconceptions about adoption.

And we've been able to help kind of right some of those misconceptions and help them come away and see the positive experience that it is, certainly for the children, because that comes first and foremost.

But also for us as a couple, it's brought new life into our marriage. Now it can also be, again, a hindrance as well. But for us, it's brought new life and new purpose into our marriage.

And I'm also thankful, again, I'm proud of the fact that we have adopted children in an environment here in this country and then here in the state of Texas that we are where there's so many folks that care about adoption and about healthy marriage.

And I think that's what it's going to take. It's going to take all of us saying what can we do to promote this message of healthy marriage, because when we do it well, kids benefit, families benefit, and couples benefit.

**Shannon Durand:** Yes.

**Patrick Patterson:** Well, I would personally say I think I've enjoyed this webinar. I know your story. It's one I think is inspiring, to be honest with you. And I just feel privileged that you actually shared that during our webinar today, so I just want to express appreciation for the time that you gave us on today's webinar. I know that it's been helpful.

I will make a couple of points as we begin to close today's webinar. We will have a recording of today's webinar available on our web site. In addition, there were several questions, Steve and Shannon, that we weren't able to get to, but we will actually post those questions in a frequently-asked-questions format on our web site as well for folks to look at after this webinar.

**Steven Durand:** (Yeah).

**Patrick Patterson:** We will now go to a phase where we actually do an evaluation. And so we'll present now on the screen slides for you to present or to actually vote upon. There are four questions. These questions detail how you felt about today's webinar.

The answers you provide will help us know how the webinar went. If you - and when you vote, only you will know how you actually voted. One the screen goes to the next slide, you can not go back, so while the slide is up, we'll actually go through each slide.

Our first question, (I have learned perspectives from) adoptive parents and marriage educators in sustaining a healthy marriage or helping others sustain a healthy marriage as adoptive parents. (I have learned perspectives from) adoptive parents and marriage educators in sustaining a healthy marriage or helping others sustain a healthy marriage as adoptive parents. Strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, strongly disagree, and no vote.

Second question, I have a better idea of the issues and stresses unique to adoptive parents. I have a better idea of the issues and stresses unique to adoptive parents.

Third question, I'm better equipped to incorporate adoptive parent issues into marriage education classes. I'm better equipped to incorporate adoptive parent issues into marriage education classes.

And our final question, I found today's webinar to be informative and useful. I found today's webinar to be informative and useful.

These four questions were more or less quantitative indicators of how well we did. We'd also like to hear from you directly. Very often after each webinar, I get a series of emails providing insight about how well things went, but also things we could add or improve in the future.

So I'd like to also offer to you if you have other suggestions or comments, please feel free to send those to my attention at -- this is the email address -- [info@healthymarriageinfo.org](mailto:info@healthymarriageinfo.org). The address, again, is [info@healthymarriageinfo.org](mailto:info@healthymarriageinfo.org).

Or you can provide feedback to your federal project officer if you are a federal grantee.

A few reminders real quickly, for new and current information on the resource center, but also marriage in the country, please feel free to log onto our web site, [www.healthymarriageinfo.org](http://www.healthymarriageinfo.org).

Many of you have commented, we've actually redesigned the layout and also look and feel of our web site. We're very proud of that, about how that looks. So feel free to check the web site for information, new updates,

and also new materials for programs and practitioners.

Once again, a recording of today's webinar will be on our web site within seven to nine business days after today. Please feel free to go on to download either the recording or the actual printed materials that you received earlier today.

Finally, I'd like to bid you happy holidays, safe travels, and we'll talk to you soon.

Thanks so much.

END