



Infant Care Classes



2004 Statistics



Adoption Connection Workshops



Recent Arrivals



Recent Arrival



■ **Phoebe Stella-Marie Lynch.** Born 3/24/04.

# Connections



## THE ENTRUSTMENT CEREMONY:

# Creating Meaningful Ritual in Open Adoption



(From left) Chris & Karen Easton, baby Jonah, and birth mother Denise after the hospital entrustment ceremony.



ituals have always been used to signify a change, a rite of passage, or to mark a transition in the life of a person or community. Although they are often interwoven with religious traditions a ritual can be anything that symbolizes and celebrates a life change. We mark birthdays, baptisms, bar/bat mitzvahs and weddings with a special ceremony, so why not an adoption?

The transfer of parental rights from one family to another in an open

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ADOPTION  
CONNECTION  
STAFF

Randie Bencanann, LCSW  
Lynne Fingerman, MSW  
Co-Directors

Cindy Levin  
Administrative Coordinator

Debbie Parelskin, MSW  
International Program  
Coordinator

Karin Rice  
Administrative/Intake Assistant

Leah Sheldon  
Coordinator of Adoptive  
Parent Programs and  
Connections Writer

Julie Schuchard  
Outreach Assistant and  
Connections Photographer,  
Page 8

Nan Toder, LCSW  
Case Coordinator

Dana Washington  
International Administrative/  
Intake Assistant

*Social Workers*  
Linda Acosta-Antons, LCSW  
Eddie Arbetman, MFT  
Heidi Bonfigli, MS  
Annette Eastman, LCSW  
Cate Greene, LCSW  
Cathy Levenstein, MSW  
Sheri Merg, MSW  
Tammy Noel, MFT  
Anne O'Quinn, MSW  
Julie Raudebaugh, MFCC  
Melissa Sipolt, MA  
Angela True, MFT  
Gail Jayne Zwetsch, MA

Adoption Connection is a full-service, licensed adoption agency and non-sectarian program affiliated with Jewish Family and Children's Services of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties.

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San Francisco Art Department

# Infant Care Classes

It is all about loving,

**A** adoptive parents prepare themselves for first time parenting just like biological parents do. They read how-to books, quiz their family and friends, and use their own personal experience caring for infants and children. More and more couples and singles are also looking into taking infant care workshops to better prepare themselves for the joys and challenges of a baby's arrival. We asked Georgia Montgomery, a Perinatal Educator and Childbirth Doula, to answer a few questions about what adoptive parents should expect from newborn care classes.

## Why do you think an infant care class is a good idea?

In the past we had the wise woman of the village going from hut to hut giving new mothers the advice and wisdom that came from experience and training. Now we have to fend for ourselves! A newborn care class can provide important "operating instructions." Topics include information on infant health, sleep, feeding, bonding and helping new parents to understand what is "normal." Hands-on practice with diapering and swaddling is helpful as well as learning comforting techniques for fussy babies. You can also learn what products are safe to use with your baby such as newborn skin care lotions... the list goes on.



Georgia hosts infant care classes just for adoptive parents.

## Is there a benefit to having a class tailored to adoptive parents?

Many adoptive parents have told me that they feel self conscious about sitting in a room full of pregnant moms with big bellies. Although adoptive parents are certainly expecting a baby too, that particular situation sometimes makes them feel awkward or excluded. In my classes (and other classes for adoptive parents) everyone is in the same boat and asking a lot of the same type of questions.

touching, attending, listening and taking good care of the baby's physical needs.

### **Is there anything different about adoptive parents caring for newborns than biological parents doing so? If so what?**

Good question. After 14 years of work with newborns, including many of their adoptive parents, I'm convinced that there's nothing different at all! Case in point: Some adoptive parents simulate breastfeeding while some biological moms never breastfeed at all. It is really all about loving, touching, attending, listening and taking good care of the baby's physical needs. That's the job of every parent adoptive or not. A parent is anyone who takes loving, nurturing care of a child.

### **What do you like best about working with adoptive parents?**

There seems to be an openness and unique appreciation for the new little life they've brought into their home. Adoptive parents have a profound and consuming desire to include a child in their lives; that is very inspiring to me.

### **What are some good "rules of thumb" you give adoptive parents?**

Well, it's really the same for all parents, although many adoptive parents have expressed to me the concern that they're afraid they

don't have the same instincts a biological parent has when it comes to infant care. They certainly *do* have good instincts! One doesn't have to be pregnant to have good parenting skills. I advise apprehensive parents to find ways to feel more confident — like taking classes and reading, but most of all I tell them to trust their instincts and use common sense when dealing with their new baby.

### **Any last pieces of advice for adoptive parents with an infant?**

Since the adoption process has its own set of challenges and emotional stressors adoptive parents may be holding their baby, looking into the sweet little face, and it suddenly hits them... "Now what?!" Some adoptive parents think about preparing the baby's room in advance, but they may not fully prepare themselves for baby care.

My advice: Go ahead and prepare the baby's room if you must, but also prepare yourself. Get good, current medical and practical information. Educate and empower yourself, and you will learn to trust your instincts! You'll be very glad you did, and both you and baby will benefit in the long run.

*Adoption Connection will be hosting another Infant Care Class with Georgia this spring. Georgia's Web Site is: [www.birthsisters.com](http://www.birthsisters.com).*

### **Recent Arrival**



■ **Kasia Elizabeth Miller.**  
Born 10/08/2004

Just like with all festive rituals flowers, food, candles, wine and meaningful music can be a part of the ceremony.

adoption can be bittersweet. The birthmother is giving up her role as caregiver while the adoptive parents are gaining a new family member to love and nurture. The role of a ritual – or entrustment ceremony – to honor this event has become more and more prevalent as adoptive and birth families feel empowered to create open and trusting relationships.

### Making a Plan

Just as each adoption unfolds differently, each entrustment ceremony is unique and can be tailored to fit the needs of the birth and adoptive family. Janina Nadaner, an experienced therapist and consultant, has worked to create entrustment ceremonies with birth and adoptive parents for many years. She feels that a ceremony can be an important ritual of healing for the birthmother, while also signifying the shift of parenting responsibilities. “The ceremony should emphasize that the two families are now creating a new, extended family connection which will forever honor and respect the birth mother’s biological bond to the child.”

Janina stresses that a ceremony should be directed as much as possible by the birth mother and her family, but can be orchestrated by an adoption professional, clergy member or adoptive parent if it suits the situation. Most ceremonies will include the presence of the birth mother and selected family members of her choosing, along with the adoptive parents and the baby. Where and when it takes place will differ, depending upon what feels right for the two families. Poems or religious passages may be

read, or perhaps both the birth and adoptive parents speak about their hopes and love for the baby. Everyone present should have a role in the celebration, however small. Just like with all festive rituals flowers, food, candles, wine and meaningful music can be a part of the ceremony.

There is no right or wrong way to plan an entrustment ceremony. Although birth parents may suggest it, often the adoptive family or adoption professional brings up the idea. **When Karen and Chris Easton suggested the idea of creating one with Denise, their son’s birthmother**, they were hesitant about what her reaction to the idea would be. The Eastons met Denise just a week before their son Jonah was born. Prior to meeting the couple, Denise had been working with another adoptive family who backed out of the match at the last minute.

Denise was reticent to trust another family, but when the Eastons suggested the ceremony, Karen says, “things really started coming together for Denise. Having something for her to plan was comforting during the tough time at the hospital, and I think it was a big part of why our adoption went forward.”

Before the ceremony took place the Eastons videotaped Jonah’s birthmother holding him and saying her goodbye on camera (she had said a private goodbye the day before). The family brought in a local pastor to lead them in a few readings and the Eastons shared an oath and a commitment to raise Jonah in a strong and loving home. Flowers were exchanged and Denise’s mother and friend were

present to witness the ceremony.

For the adoptive family the ceremony secured the feeling that Jonah was “officially” their son and legitimized the adoption process. “I felt like Denise was saying her goodbye and we were saying hello. I think if we had just left the hospital with the baby [without the ceremony], it would have felt strange. It made the adoption feel official, kind of like a marriage.”

## The Ritual Unfolds

**Eric and Robin Goffney** originally planned on a ceremony at the hospital as well, but plans changed when Shelly, their daughter’s birth mother, had an unexpected Caesarean section. Much of her family wouldn’t be able to make it. They decided to meet at the birth family’s home the day after Shelly was released from the hospital when her extended family could participate. Shelly and her mother were able to develop and frame pictures of the baby taken at the hospital, as well as images of family and friends to display around the house. The birth grandmother ordered a sheet cake with four candles for the four days of life their daughter had had. Eric says, “We called it a ‘Celebration of Life’ so it wouldn’t take on a religious tone, and it really was a celebration. The family had put together family heirlooms for us to take home for Madison, including Shelly’s silver baby rattle.”

The Goffneys knew that Shelly and her family were private people, so instead of speaking publicly at the party they decided to give her a letter that they had written the night before. “We didn’t want to

## Recent Arrival



■ **Victor Alan Berdoulay gets a kiss from his big sister Isabelle. Victor (Russia) arrived home on 10/04/04**

embarrass her or make her feel uncomfortable at the party but we wanted to let her and her family know how thankful we were for them and how much we loved our daughter,” says Eric.

**Bobbie and Eli Havens and their birth mother Ashlee** waited until two weeks after their daughter’s birth to host a ceremony. It coincided with the signing of Ashlee’s relinquishment papers, making the adoption legally binding. Bobbie says, “We decided to incorporate the emotional sign-off with the legal sign-off. It felt like a good decision for everyone because leaving the hospital was such an emotional experience for all of us. After we left I held Faith and cried all the way from Fresno. I know that the two weeks gave Ashlee time to grieve and have her own space too.”

*Continued next page*

## 2004 Statistics

So far this year Adoption Connection has completed **166 homestudies** (international and domestic).

Adoption Connection has welcomed home **45 children through international adoption** (countries include Kazakhstan, Russia, China, Guatemala and Mexico) and completed **74 domestic placements.**

## Recent Arrival



■ **Alexander and Lucas.**  
Born June 3, 2004

During their ceremony Ashlee conveyed her hopes for Faith's future to the adoptive family. The couple welcomed Ashlee into their extended family. The Havens family presented their birthmother with a special bracelet that was inscribed with the words "Faith, Hope and Courage," which matches one Bobbie wears.

### Take the Long View

A ceremony or party is not going to be appropriate for every adoption and Randie Bencanann, Co-director of Adoption Connection, feels that adoptive parents can do little things in the hospital that can make an adoption go smoothly. "Whether you send flowers to the birth mother or have her family participate at the hospital in feeding the baby, there are things you can do to create a feeling of trust and ongoing tradition, things that you can tell your child about later on."

**Bill and Danielle James** suggested such a ceremony to their daughter Cassandra's birth mother. Danielle says, "We talked before the birth about something small we could do at the hospital, but basically she never got back to us." The birth grandmother wanted to be the first to hold Cassandra. The James family felt that making it easy for her to have this time with her granddaughter was a way to show their respect for the emotional process that the family was going through. "We were able to find a little room next to the nursery where a rocking chair would fit so that she could have some quiet moments with Cassandra and be the first to hold her."

"Think about your lifetime raising your child versus this birth family's contact in the first few days or weeks after an adoption" says Danielle James. "Stay calm, be generous and take the long view" is her advice on bringing up the entrustment ceremony and dealing with emotional ups and downs at the hospital and after the birth.

### An Event to Remember

When **Bridget chose to place her son with Erik and Christina Eberhart** she was hesitant to go forward with an entrustment ceremony at the hospital. "I was initially scared and only agreed because Erik and Christina wanted to do one. But it turned out to be very powerful for me." Since the Eberharts are Catholic they brought in a member of the clergy to say a few words during the ceremony.

Bridget would definitely recommend a ceremony to other birth mothers. "It doesn't have to be religious, whatever helps the adoptive parents is going to help your child. They are the ones who will be nurturing the child and telling him or her about the adoption."

Her advice to birth mothers is, "Be open-minded to the adoptive parents' ideas and just let them plan it if you feel scared and overwhelmed." She also felt that taking pictures and videotaping the event was a good idea.

Ellen Roseman, an adoption facilitator, has hosted numerous entrustment celebrations. She always suggests that adoptive parents offer the idea of ceremony to the birthmother when appropriate. Ellen says, "When

# Workshops

*You do not have to be a client of Adoption Connection to take advantage of our great workshops! Here are a few:*



Birth mother Ashlee (left) and Bobbie Havens exchange vows and bracelets at the entrustment ceremony of daughter Faith.

adoptees start to ask questions about where they come from they want to taste, touch, and feel as much of the early stuff as they can. Having a video or pictures of the entrustment creates a legacy of caring and love for the child.”

The Eastons agree that they wouldn't have had the feeling of closure if it were not for the ceremony. They feel good knowing that as their son gets older, having the photographs and video to show him will lead to positive feelings about his adoption and his birth family.

The entrustment ceremony can be a ritual that benefits both the birth and adoptive families. Just as importantly, it can show the growing child that his or her adoption was a deeply loving choice based on a conscious decision by the birth mother.

*If you would like more help planning a ceremony call Adoption Connection.*

**Adoption Connection Domestic Orientation** Introduces prospective adoptive parents to the domestic, infant adoption process and our services. Free of charge. Held twice per month in San Francisco. (Also held in Sacramento, Palo Alto, and Walnut Creek.)

**Adoption Connection International Orientation** Introduces prospective adoptive parents to the international adoption process and our services. Free of charge. Held in San Francisco.

**Preparing for Domestic Adoption** A five-session series for adoptive parent(s) adopting domestically through open, infant adoption. Topics include understanding open adoption, birthmother relationships and raising an adopted child. Guest speakers include adoptees, adoptive parents and birthparents. Fee: \$95 per person.

**Preparing for International Adoption** A three-session series for adoptive parent(s) adopting a child internationally. Topics include overseas travel, attachment, choosing a country, age range of child, and raising an adopted child. Guest speakers include adoptive parents, Int'l agencies, and adoptees. Fee: \$75 per person.

**Finding the Words** Held in hospitals, clinics and social service centers, an in-service for professionals whose clients are facing unplanned pregnancies. Topics include a discussion on open adoption and how to approach clients about the adoption option, and an overview of current adoption policy. Free of charge.

**Adoptive Parents Group** A support and discussion group for parents of adopted children ages two to five years old. Get the support you need and meet other adoptive parents. Fee: \$25 per session

**Should We Adopt Again?** You are finally a family! Should you tilt the balance and go for a second? Weigh the issues such as: parental age, parenting two versus one child and cost. Fee: \$30 per session

**Talking to Your Child About Adoption** Learn how to talk to your child in an age-appropriate way. Learn appropriate language to feel comfortable and confident answering your child's questions. Fee: \$25 per session.

**Relationship with Birth Families** Learn about negotiating a lifelong relationship and how to handle challenging situations. Fee: \$25 per session.

**Creating a Lifebook** Learn how to create a special book for your child that illustrates and celebrates how she/he came into your family. Fee: \$25 per person.

**LGBT Parenting Issues** Geared toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender couples or individuals who are in the process of adopting or considering adoption or who have adopted. Explore special issues involving adopting and parenting in a gay or lesbian family. Fee: \$35 per person.

**Newborn Care for Adoptive Parents** A two-session baby care class just for prospective adoptive parents. Gain hands-on practice swaddling, bathing, and taking a temperature. Topics include learning about hunger cues, colicky babies, selecting a daycare and baby products. Fee: \$150 per couple, \$75 for singles.

*Call us for dates and times. Our calendar can be found at: [www.adoptionconnection.org](http://www.adoptionconnection.org).*



# Creating New Families!



his year we will be adding more adoption stories and images to our web site: [www.adoptionconnection.org](http://www.adoptionconnection.org). The Hettler/Turners and Ardena, their birth mother, let us document some of their special moments together before and after the birth of Sierra.



Susie Turner and Paul Hettler and their son Jackson visit with Ardena, their birth mother, 6 weeks before her due date.



Susie, Ardena and baby Sierra enjoy a hospital visit from Lynne Fingerman, Co-Director of Adoption Connection.



Just one day old! Sierra Jane Hettler, Born 10/28/04.

We believe that in an adoption, everyone gains when given a chance to learn about one another. **Committed to education, counseling and support**, our goal is to empower both birth and adoptive parents before and after the birth to create the adoption that works best for everyone involved. **Adoption Connection** welcomes couples and individuals of all ages, religions, and ethnic background or sexual orientation.

**Adoption Connection**  
 A program of Jewish Family and Children's Services  
 1710 Scott Street  
 San Francisco, CA 94115  
 Phone: (415) 359-2494 Fax: (415) 359-2490  
 families@adoptionconnection.org  
<http://www.adoptionconnection.org>



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