HIV & ADOPTION RELATED ISSUES

Adoption-related issues such as pre-adoption trauma and loss, and child behavioral and developmental issues took priority over HIV-related medical concerns.

“Her HIV is not a big deal. She responded to treatment really well and very quickly, so I have a friend who always used to say, ‘I spend more time on my daughter’s hair than her HIV.’” (Parent)

“Adoption comes with a whole bunch of things because of great loss and a lot of emotional pain and hurt. HIV is just part of that package for us.” (Parent)

“And also with international adoptees, you never know exactly their birthday. She has since age of 12, looked like a 15-year-old girl.” (Provider)

ADOPTION MOTIVATIONS

Faith and the desire to help children who are in the most need were guiding factors in parents’ decisions to adopt a child with HIV.

“We had felt a God-calling into adoption in the first place, so we felt like every decision would need to be guided by Him.” (Parent)

“But really what it boils down is my oldest says, ‘If I’m going to have a sexual relationship, I’m just wearing a condom. It’s not a big deal.’ I can’t get him past that. I’m like, ‘Honey, it doesn’t matter what protective measures you’re taking. You need to let the girl know exactly about your status.” (Parent)

“Certainly that will be an aspect of the conversation that we have to have with him that we wouldn’t have to have with a child that wasn’t living with HIV. This is absolutely important that he understands the responsibility that he had and the importance of taking his medications, and if disclosing to his partner or future wife or whatever.” (Parent)

“We’re getting into adolescence now and sex becomes a topic and things that with our own Christian points of view don’t necessarily work with the world.” (Parent)

Providers acknowledged difficulty offering evidence-based sex education due to parental religious beliefs.

“Sexuality related concerns

Findings confirm previous research that:
• Faith plays a pivotal role in the decision to adopt with HIV from another country
• Medical issues experienced by IACH were mild
• Children’s future romantic relationships and sex education were major concerns

All adolescents with HIV, regardless of adoption status, should be informed on ways to prevent HIV transmission and unintended pregnancy.

Parents of IACH could benefit from the support of healthcare and social service providers to better understand the importance of sexual and reproductive health education during adolescence.

More longitudinal research is needed on IACH in order to address the physical, social, educational, and emotional needs of this growing population.

REFERENCES
2. Health Outcomes of International HIV-Adoptees in the US. Adoption Quarterly. 19