

Adoption: The Long View Transcript

Dr Chaitra Wirta-Leiker

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Lori Holden, Intro

This is Adoption: The Long View, a podcast brought to you by Adopting.com. I'm your host, Lori Holden, author of [The Open-Hearted Way to Open Adoption](#). Join me as we take a closer look at what happens *after* you adopt your child and begin parenting them. Your adoption journey isn't over then -- it's just beginning.

In this podcast, you'll hear from a variety of thought-provoking and influential guests as we help you make the most of your adoption journey. Like any trip worth taking, there will be ups and downs and challenges. Here's what you're going to wish you'd known from the start. Ready? Let's go.

Lori Holden, Greeting

Parenting a child of a race different from yours adds a whole new element to adoptive parenting. And while this episode will focus on raising an interracial adoptee (also called a transracial adoptee), becoming more comfortable with talking about race is a worthy goal of any parent – any person, really. So stick around, even if you think this episode isn't relevant to your situation.

Today we're going from basics to deeper levels about the concepts of race and how to navigate race in today's highly charged climate. My disclosure is that I am a white woman, and am not parenting adoptees of color. I am learning along with you listeners, from one of the experts in the field of transracial parenting and adoptive parenting, a gem of Colorado's adoption-competent therapy scene – and beyond, as you'll discover.

With me today is **Dr Chaitra Wirta-Leiker**, a fellow Coloradoan who has navigated adoption and race issues her entire life. She is a licensed psychologist, international/transracial adoptee of color, and an adoptive parent. She specializes in providing mental health support, focused on adoption, trauma, and racial identity work, through her private practice based in Denver. She is a frequent speaker and trainer at adoption agencies, camps, and conferences throughout the US, and the creator of the National Adoptee-Therapist Directory (you are gonna wanna get your hands on that). She is also the author of *The Adoptee Self-Reflection Journal*, *The Adoptive Parent Self-Reflection Journal*, and the *Adoptees Like Me* illustrated series for elementary readers. I definitely recommend you check out these resources, which are included in the show notes.

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Hello, Dr Wirta-Leiker. Thanks for being here.

Dr. Chaitra Wirta-Leiker: Thanks, Lori. I appreciate you having me.

Lori: We have so much to cover, so let's get right into it. What was your impetus and path to becoming a psychologist who specializes in trauma and adoption? I'm thinking it's probably a little bit related to you being an adoptee and being an adoptive parent but tell us about how all that comes together.

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah, absolutely. So it really definitely culminated and becoming an adoptive parent was where I really saw the need. But throughout my life, being an adoptee, I always knew I was adopted, but we didn't have a lot of conversations, in depth, about adoption or race or how those things impacted me. So, it really wasn't until I was an adult and started seeing things through a different lens that I started to recognize the influence those parts of my identity have had on me throughout my life.

And then in the process to adopt our child, going through the required trainings, I found that a lot of the people who were conducting the trainings were looking to me, as an adoptee, to provide insight and experience. And a lot of my work up until that point had been with kids who were in the foster care or group care kinds of systems. And it was work I enjoyed. It was a lot of trauma and attachment related work. And so, being in those trainings and recognizing what a need there was for adoption-competent professional kinds of interventions, I really decided that needed to be my focus. So, my practice has specialized in that from the beginning.

Lori: And you bring the lived experience of the racial piece as well. So, let's get to that emotionally-charged topic of race. Why is it important for parents to talk about race with their children, not just for transracial adoptive families, but really for all families?

Dr. Chaitra: For me, I think, at the core, it's about having a sense of respect for others. And being able to celebrate our differences and acknowledge them. It's like, if you had a friend who had a broken leg, you wouldn't keep inviting them to go on ski trips. I mean, we have to see the ways that everyone is unique and recognize all aspects of their identity in order to really have respect for them and to recognize what their needs might be in the world. So, I think race is just one aspect of that and an important part that we're not often taught how to have conversations about.

Lori: Yeah. One thing we know about all parenting is that children want to be seen for who they are. And if you're not seeing a very visible aspect of them, and other characteristics of them, then they're not being seen and they're not being nourished in that very, very crucial way.

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah, absolutely.

Lori: So, what is race, actually? And what is racism?

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah. So, I mean, many books written on those topics; very big questions. But in general, I mean, race is a social construct. It's not something that's inherent in us. I mean, we as humans created the categories of race, but they don't really exist; they're pretty arbitrary. We could have decided to categorize people based on their shoe size or the tone of their voice or their height. But skin color and certain facial kinds of characteristics are things that we use to categorize. And you'll find, a lot of times, those categories don't exactly fit because humans rarely fit into boxes.

And then when we talk about racism, I think it's really important to distinguish between sort of the micro versus the macro level of interaction with that, that we can have prejudice, which is a biased thought, and we can act in a discriminatory way with a biased action and then we can look at something as far as racism, which is an entire oppressive system. So, that system that's built off and on, those kinds of prejudices and discrimination. Those three are always influencing one another.

But racial oppression is more about the systems that are built with the idea of essentially being white as the norm or the default. So, things like walking down a makeup aisle at the store or getting clothing that's supposedly skin colored or flesh toned, band aids; things like that, that we often, you know, if you are white or your skin is a lighter color, you may not think about those things because they automatically match for you. But when you have a darker skin tone, you notice when there aren't things there for you that seem to be easily accessible to other people. So, it's those things that are just there on a daily basis that we may not even recognize, but at the same time they are having a really big impact.

Lori: That's so interesting. I saw a post on social media sometime in the last week where a woman was saying that she finally figured out that it wasn't that every single automatic water faucet that she went to in a public space didn't work. It was that her skin was of a tone that didn't trigger the automatic faucet to go on. So, I'm putting that in the Band-Aid category, too. Probably the dolls category and all that. Yeah, yeah.

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah, lots of things like that.

Lori: I'm also seeing that being able to talk about race isn't just for families of color. White families like mine need to be able to talk about race too, because we're all in this community together and we need to build those connections and make sure that we are taking care of people and not taking away from people in big and small ways. And there are so many small ways that we may not even be aware of.

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah, absolutely.

Lori: How can parents craft their conversations around race in accordance with an adoptee's developmental stages? What are some of those tips that you have to offer?

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah. I mean, there are so many things that are dependent really upon the particular child's level of understanding; where are they at in their cognitive and emotional and social development. Because that will help you to kind of get a sense of what are the words or the concepts that will make sense to them. So, for younger kids, things that are much more concrete will be helpful. Things like using – a lot of times, we'll talk with parents about using a garden, talking about, “Look, all these flowers, different shapes and colors and sizes. Just like people; we're all different on the outside. And all those flowers need the same things to grow big and strong. They all need water and sunlight and soil. And it's the same thing with people. We all need the same things to grow healthy and strong. And so, being able to acknowledge the differences and the commonalities is really helpful. So, that garden analogy helps to make it concrete for younger kids.

Or sometimes, I recommend parents use something like M&Ms. To keep the kid's attention, use that candy. So, you have the different color M&Ms on the outside and they're all the same on the inside.

So, when you're starting to already talk about those differences and acknowledge that there are things to be noticed and celebrated, but not things to discriminate against or make assumptions about, it sets the foundation to have those conversations as they get more complicated with age. And, really, by the time kids are in their teens, they should be able to have fairly adult conversations about racial topics. If you've sort of been preparing them and, you know,

sometimes I'll see parents avoiding certain movies or books or television shows because they feel like it's not a good message. But for me as a psychologist, I view everything as helpful because even something that has a really awful message is something that can be talked about and discussed. And that helps kids to build critical thinking skills so that they're able to go out into the world and think about things in a very self-aware way and to understand the context as opposed to just seeing things through a singular lens that really limits their ability to have those conversations.

Lori: Such an important call for adoptive parents is to be able to talk about the hard things and bring them up. And sometimes movies and books are ways to bring them up and have a common place to speak from. So I know that children become aware of their adoptedness and what that means to them, incrementally, over the years and I'm sure that happens with race as well. Are there any other stages about maybe elementary school age, later elementary, middle school age, tips about talking about race with your children?

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah, I mean, a lot of it is to use those moments of curiosity as jumping off points for discussion, too. So, if you're at the grocery store and your elementary-aged child sees someone who's of East Asian descent and says, "Why does that person have funny shaped eyes?" Instead of going, "Shh. No, we don't say things like that. We don't talk about that." We say, "Well, it's because that person looks like they may be East Asian. When we get home, let's look at a map and I'll show you where there are a lot of people who have similar facial features. And we can look at pictures of people around the world and notice their similarities and differences."

So, it's really, more than anything, it's not about having certain words to say or certain concepts to present. It's really about the grownups having comfort around uncomfortable conversations. And the quote I used in all of my trainings on race is the Mr. Rogers quote, "What's mentionable is manageable." So, anything we can talk about, no matter how awkward or uncomfortable, if we get through it together, everyone comes out the other side better for it. And I think that's absolutely true when it comes to race.

Lori: This kind of leads into a question I have, which is like, what are some of the challenges that adoptive parents may have in getting it and becoming willing and able to have these conversations? What are our barriers, our challenges?

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah. I mean, I think they're the same barriers of anyone who's white essentially, that there's a lot of guilt that can come along with recognizing what racism looks like on a daily basis. I mean, most people in our country are not engaging in overt kinds of racism. We think about using racial slurs or crosses burning on lawns or things like that as racism, but there's an iceberg to it. Those are the very tip and the things that we see and can agree on most obviously, is being racism. But there are so many things underneath the surface; these microaggressions or systemic things that really can cause a lot of harm and a lot of racial trauma over time. And so, when we haven't seen those things or potentially have contributed to them, and that includes people of color as well, that we can take part in that racism as well. Really being able to recognize the ways that we influence the communities of color around us and we get to that place of self-exploration and really trying to take stock of that, there's a lot of guilt that could come up and a lot of just general discomfort that we want to avoid and not feeling ashamed of ways we might have hurt others. So, that's why I think it's so important for parents to be the

ones to do the work first so that they can understand how to have those conversations with their kids in more open ways that probably were not available to them when they were young.

Lori: Do you have a quick resource or two for how to start doing that inner work?

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah, I mean, there – So, on my website actually have something called the Ultimate Adoption Resource Guide and there are sections on there, specifically for books on race and racism. And so, not just for transracially adoptive families but for everyone. And one of the things that I think is really important about that is I think it's really helpful for people to look at a few books, read the descriptions, see what resonates for them, and follow their intuition around what they'd like to read or which documentaries they'd like to watch. Because when someone's assigning something, it can sort of feel like, "Oh, maybe that fits for me, maybe it doesn't." So, I always like to offer a wide range and tell people to go with what their gut tells them.

Lori: This episode is about transracial parenting and adoptive parenting and all that. When we think of transracial parenting, we usually think of white people raising non-white people. But how might these conversations about race sound for parents of color who adopt a white child? What's the same and what might be different?

Dr. Chaitra: Well, in a lot of ways, I feel like I'm not even necessarily the most qualified person to answer that, being a parent of color to a child of color. But I think the lived experience of that is probably very different in some ways. And I think in general, the fact that, you know, the education for kids who are white, I mean, they're seeing their history everywhere and they're learning about people who look like them and seeing those racial mirrors all around them and in the media. So, in some ways, I think it's easier access for them to have a sense of pride in their skin color and their identity. And then there are also the explanations of why people may be treating their parents or their siblings differently because of their skin color, or even why kids may have a lot of questions for them.

So, some of that comes down to being a transracially adopted family means you are a conspicuous family; that people notice you, they get curious. They tend to lose their sense of tact when it comes to having questions and conversations. So, some of those things are the same. But I think that awareness of the child is the one who holds the privilege in that family. That definitely creates a different dynamic.

Lori: And if anybody wants to know more about that, I did interview Lynn Brown on that in [episode 308](#). She's a black woman raising two white daughters and a black son. So, they have a lot of conversations about race. She's laid a lot of groundwork for them. And then as they go out into the world, into school and everything, they bring in more richness and texture to their conversations. I found that fascinating.

You talked about microaggressions. I want to ask what can adoptive parents do when they happen to our children?

Dr. Chaitra: It depends on what kind of microaggression. First, I mean, some of them are verbal and some are nonverbal. So, the verbal ones can be somewhat easier to address, just because they're more obvious; someone asking, "Oh, where are you from?" or "What's your ethnicity?" Even some of the backhanded compliments that, "Oh, you're Asian. You must be really good at

math.” or “You’re black. You must be a really good athlete,” those kinds of things, being able to definitely say something in that moment to show your kids that it’s not okay is important when they’re young.

But as they get older, I think it’s really key to have conversations with them in preparation, not if this happens, but when; because those moments will happen. What do you want me to say? What do you want me to do? How do you want to handle it? How would you like to respond? And really making sure that the kids feel like they have input in those moments. Because the goal isn’t for parents to come in and rescue them and protect them every time. We want them to be advocates and allies. But the goal is really to empower those kids to grow up and feel like they can navigate those kinds of situations on their own when they need to. So, when that umbrella of white privilege is no longer there, that they feel confident in their ability to handle that.

And when it comes to the nonverbal ways that those microaggressions come up; someone clutching their purse tighter as a Latinx teenager walks by or someone just kind of staring too long or glaring. Those things can be more difficult. And a lot of times, a nonverbal response in kind of responding to that can be something that’s really useful to use your body language in response.

Lori: I find that adoptive parents often want to know what to do and what to say, and I try to go deeper than that and say, “That comes after you look inside. Figure out where you are oriented, where you want to be oriented. And then once you root in that place of orientation that is right for the situation, then the words and the actions and the wisdom to know what to do and say will come from that place. It’s not like a recipe where you add this.”

What I’m hearing when I listen to you, I’m thinking this is hard for parents who are fixers who want to just fix the situation, go talk to the principal and bring that other kid in or whatever it is that it is. Because what you’re saying is, with empowering our child, first, we need to get alongside them. Feel with them, probably. Not impose our feelings on them. See what they’re feeling, and then calmly craft a together, like you were saying, generate some ideas for what could we do about this.

Dr. Chaitra: Right. Yeah. Collaboration is really key. And I think sometimes too. I mean, the parents who come in and try to rescue or make it better or fix things, I understand the intentions are positive, but maybe that idea of remembering when you do that, you’re also inadvertently sending the message that you don’t feel like your child is competent enough to handle the situation or that you don’t trust them to make a good choice. And so remembering, the good intentions, do they match up with the message you actually want your child to receive? And if the goal is for your child to feel like they know how to handle tough situations and they can respond to adversity, then it helps give you some guidance on how you can collaborate.

Lori: Yeah, I talk a lot about, people ask about birth parent relationships, and I’m thinking about how you gradually hand over the reins over the years of those relationships. So, I’m seeing this in this situation as well, where gradually helping them move outside of the umbrella and be ready, all along the way, so that when they do leave home or go on to their next step and they’re in the world by themselves, they have already learned the things they need to learn by watching you, by doing it with you, by doing it on their own, with your having their back and all of that.

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah, it's scaffolding, just like anything else that you teach a child, that you start off by showing them; role modeling. You move into helping them to do it on their own and eventually they are able to do it independently.

Lori: Do you have any success stories to share about parents who did struggle with race conversations, but they eventually became pretty agile at having them?

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah. I mean, I think that's almost every white adoptive parent I know that, at some point in the journey it was really difficult, and at some point, especially when their kids arrived, they really started to open their eyes to the things that they needed to do differently. And just this new lens of viewing the world through. I think some of the most rewarding experiences I've had are families who actually choose to move to more diverse areas for the sake of their kids to make sure that they have racial and cultural mirroring around them every day. Just amazing to me to see the shift in those kids' experiences that oftentimes they stop needing therapy. That support isn't needed anymore because I'm not the only racial mirror in their life or the only person of color they know. So, I think that's honestly one of the most amazing things I've seen any families do for their kids. And it ends up being a really positive experience for everyone in the family to experience that kind of diversity. I think everyone's life is richer when we can be around people who have different backgrounds than us, and it just helps us grow.

Lori: Has there been an aha moment or something that makes things click for parents that you see more in a frequent way?

Dr. Chaitra: Oftentimes it's an experience their child has; some sort of microaggression or more overt form of racism. It's something they can no longer ignore or feel like, maybe it'll happen, maybe it won't. The analogy that I use for most parents is the traffic analogy. That **they're afraid to talk to their kids about race because they don't want to scare them or make them think the world is a cruel place. But when it comes to traffic, we teach our kids about traffic safety so they know when it's safe to cross the road and they can make informed decisions and be prepared.**

And it's the exact same thing when it comes to race. We're not afraid our kids are never going to cross the street because they'll be too scared that we prepared them. So, **if we talk about race, it prepares them.** They can feel more empowered and confident and they know how to handle situations. So, **it's not scaring, it's preparing.** And I think when parents really get that and recognize this is something that will happen at some point. And that moments of not understanding how to navigate through racism are really some of the most trauma-inducing moments, especially for transracial adoptees that laughing along with that joke or not recognizing that you are engaging in something that actually was harmful to people who look like you and then recognizing it later on when you have no ability to go back and change the past, that does create a lot of trauma.

So, we want to enforce that idea of you have the ability to make informed decisions because you know what this is. You can name it. You know your options for responding as opposed to not feeling prepared and feeling like it causes more harm later on.

Lori: I really love what you said: It's not scaring, it's preparing. And that traffic analogy goes right there with the M&Ms analogy, as one that I will be able to remember and relay to other

people crediting you, because those are both really helpful ways and simple ways for us to really just suddenly get it. So that's great.

You have put together the very robust National Adoptee Therapist Directory. Why is it important for adoptive families to find adoptees who are therapists?

Dr. Chaitra: I think there's just something really special about lived experience as a way to connect and feel seen and understood and validated. Certainly not all adoptees are focused on working with adoptive families or have competence in that area. That may not be what they've trained in as a specialty. So, I wouldn't say that all adoptee therapists are going to be the best fit. But in general, if there is an adoptee who has chosen to work with adoptees and their community, most likely it's because they've also done some of their own work around being an adoptee. And so that's what that directory is. All of the profiles in there are submitted by the actual therapist, so that shows that they want to be in that space and they want to work with that community.

It gives kids a place to feel really just automatically this unspoken bond occurs. I've had that experience so many times with clients of all ages that if they're adopted and as soon as they learn that I'm adopted, you can just see this relief in their body language. It's this sense of, "All right, someone who gets it. I don't have to educate my therapist or explain this to them. They'll just understand on some level."

Lori: So, what I'm hearing you say is that if they're on your National Adoptee Therapist Directory, which we will link to in the show notes, that they have opted into adoption-nuanced care, and they're an adoptee. But I guess I want to just address; can we assume that being an adoptee and a therapist means that you're adoption-competent as a therapist?

Dr. Chaitra: No, absolutely not. I mean, those things are definitely helpful. But like you said, the training that comes along with that and really the self-exploration is what's important. And, like I say, in general, if people have chosen to be on that list, it's because they've done a lot of that work.

And I do have a caveat on there that I'm not guaranteeing that everyone on there is adoption-competent because it's just me running the directory. So, I don't have the ability to do those full kinds of background checks.

But one of the things that I also have on my website is a blog that helps you in screening for an adoption-competent therapist. So, it goes through different questions you can ask the therapist; things that you would want to hear in their responses or would help you to know that they've actually done a lot of that work in training. So, you can also use that, in combination with the directory, as a resource to really find someone who is adoption informed.

Lori: I imagine it's like what you said earlier about some of your other resources, kind of let your intuition guide you. So, you find a name and you do the research and then you kind of feel them out and just see if there's that click, if you can get a pre-consultation or something like that.

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah. I always recommend that clients, when they're seeking out a therapist, because that relationship is the most important part of therapy actually being beneficial and

effective. I always recommend shopping around. Meet with 2 or 3 people, see who feels like the best fit and absolutely just trust your intuition.

Lori: I wonder if you've noticed this in the way that I have, too. Years ago, when people started asking me, "Do you know of any adoption-competent therapists in this city or that city?" it was hard to find. And now, you've put together this directory, which is such a great service to all adoptive families and to adoptees too. But are you noticing that there's just more of them like people are becoming; people are seeking to understand adoption better?

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah. It's hard to say. I don't know if there are more of us or if we've just kind of found our community more; those spaces where we can exist together and connect. I think there were a lot of us out there before, but we didn't know each other. There was no way for us to. Yeah, yeah. So, yeah, I mean the directory. And in four years, now there are only two states that don't have adoption-competent therapists or adoptee therapists listed. I mean, it's pretty incredible to see. And I believe one of those states that will change the summer because there's something called Psypact, which allows for psychologists to practice across multiple states who have passed certain legislation. So, myself included, we're able to practice in over half the states. So, I think right now, more than ever before, this directory is a space where you can really find someone who fits your needs.

Lori: Do you want to give a shout out to those two states? One of them hopefully falling off?

Dr. Chaitra: You know, I'm not sure if I remember exactly what they are. One of them is the Dakotas. I can't remember what the other one is, but I believe by the summer, North Dakota will be covered.

Lori: Okay, great. I was going to say, if any listeners happen to be an adopted therapist and want to be on there, that would be great. But anyway, this directory has certainly made it easier for me to answer that question when it comes to mef. So, thank you for having the foresight to do that and keeping it up. I know it's a lot of – it's some labor and point taken that it's not a thoroughly vetted list.

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah, the people have to complete a profile. They have to show confirmation that they are an adoptee and that they are fully and independently licensed as a practitioner. And then the other things that they list are things that I sort of check. But I, like I said, don't have the ability to check into everyone's education and training credentials. So, some of that, like I say, is still up to consumers to do their homework.

Lori: Okay. Circling back to race and racial conversations, is there anything important that we haven't covered in our time together yet that you would like to share?

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah, I think the most important thing is for anyone who is considering adopting transracially to start doing their own work first. And the best place to start with that is to listen to adult transracial adoptees. There are so many blogs and documentaries and books out there, and I think it's really crucial to start listening to those voices and noticing how it affects you and what's coming up for you and what you need to address before you even consider bringing a child of color into your home. So, do that exploration first from the people who have lived it and then decide what feels like a good fit.

Lori: When you said, “what's coming up for you,” I found in my journey that those are the places where I grow. When something does come up for me and then I look into it and ponder it for a while and noodle on it in my heart and in my brain, that's when I get more expansive and that's when I can better be present for my person who I'm trying to be present for. So, yeah.

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. That's a beautiful thing about discomfort is that change can grow out of that. That's the only place change grows out of. But yeah, it's so rewarding when that happens.

Lori: It's hard not to want to run from it and avoid it. What do they say? It's not in the way it is the way.

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah, right.

Lori: And Chaitra, you have recently released the second in a series. Can you tell us about this series and how people can get their hands on it?

Dr. Chaitra: Yes, absolutely. I'm so glad you asked. So, The ***Adoptees Like Me*** series is an illustrated series for elementary-age readers, and these are essentially the books that I wish I would have had as a child.

The first story is about Marie, who is an adoptee who goes to the park and has the experience of people asking questions about why her and her mom don't have skin that matches or where she was adopted from, what happened to her first parents. And she isn't sure how to respond. And that's really the experience of many adoptees, myself included, when I was young. It was a sort of deer-in-headlights feel, or I have to answer all of the questions, even if it feels uncomfortable.

So, Marie's story is called *Marie Discovers Her Superpowers*, and it gives specific tools, five particular tools of ways to respond to other people's adoption questions. And it really helps to focus the idea of the narrative being something that you own, that your ability to share your narrative and decide when you share it or with whom is your superpower.

So, that story is something that I've gotten great feedback. It's been really helpful to a lot of families, and even people who aren't adopted have felt like the tools in there are, “Wow, I have power over my story. I can choose how I share it.” And so, I think it even expands beyond the adoption community.

But the second book is *Casey Conquers Bedtime*, which just recently was released. And that one is all about navigating through anxious bedtimes and sleep routines. You know, kids who really struggle with sleep and don't feel safe asleep. That's a really common experience for a lot of adoptees. And so, Casey Conquers Bedtime is a story about helping children to find tools to navigate through that.

And what I really love about the series is that not only is it empowering young adoptees, but it's also normalizing the experience of seeking out mental health support, because in each book, the kids are, you know, the story is told from their perspective, but they are coming to the office of Dr. Chaitra for a play therapy session. And so, I'm in the books as a cartoon character, which is always a little strange, but it's something where I get to use all the years of experience and

skills I have to reach kids who may not have access to adoption-focused mental health care. It gives me an opportunity to invite all of them into my office.

Lori: Oh, there's so much to love about that. I love the superpower thing because we were talking about empowering our children. And when I think about the bedtime one, I'm thinking just of the closeness that happens between parent and child when they're reading that too, and they're both understanding it together at the same time, and they have kind of a shared experience then from which to talk about it later. Can you give us any sneak peek of other volumes that you're going to be that you're going to be releasing and covering?

Dr. Chaitra: I'd love to. So, I will say the caveat is that I have a fundraiser going for this series because I'm self-publishing the books to ensure that the adoptee voice is protected in this. It doesn't kind of go through that mainstream way of making adoptee voices more palatable. So, the fundraiser is really what will determine if the other four books in the series are able to be released. So, definitely support with that would be very much appreciated.

But the third book is called *Noah's Family Trip*. That one is all about how to navigate the experience of returning to your birth country for the first time as an adoptee and dealing with some of the implicit or body memories that may be there and how to navigate through those emotions.

And then fourth book *Alex Celebrates Differences* is all about really identifying and feeling proud of all the ways that you may feel different or unique or quirky and finding ways to feel a sense of connection with others who may sort of feel on the fringe of things.

And the last two books are dealing with things like perfectionism and fear of mistakes or failure; how to how to navigate through those kinds of sense of, you know, it's okay to be flawed as a human being, which I think we all need reminders of that. And the other book is about how do we as adoptees deal with things like birthdays, holidays, adoption anniversaries, things like Mother's Day and Father's Day; things that can bring up a lot of really intense and a wide range of emotions.

So, I'm really hoping all of those stories will be able to be out in the world. And the illustrator, Penny Webber, is incredible. She just brings the stories to life; the facial expressions, the way she shows connection on the page is absolutely beautiful. So, yeah, I hope, support for that series can continue.

Lori: I will make sure that we have links to the books and to the fundraiser, which I have supported and I encourage everybody else to support too, because I'd love to see the rest of those books out in the world.

Dr. Chaitra: Thank you, Lori.

Lori: So, the last question which I'm asking of all Season 4 guests. Chaitra, how can parents best support adoptees in building healthy identities and connections right from the start or from today?

Dr. Chaitra: I think connecting with other adoptees and their families is one of the best things that you can do, because being an adoptee is a culture within itself, and being a transracial

adoptee is a very specific culture. And even though every story is unique and every journey is in a different place, having people who share that lived experience is so important in being able to form your own identity and to feel like you have value. You know, it's hard to feel like you matter if you never see anyone around you who resembles you in some capacity. So, I think that's the most important thing they can do is connect with the adoption community, and especially adoptees who have been there and who know what it's like.

Lori: You and I are both involved with adoption camps. And I know adoption camps are not the be-all-end-all, especially for the child, but it does give them some time with that subculture. And what it does for us parents when we are at these camps is we're learning these things and we're getting to our edge and we're getting to that uncomfortable space in a safe space. And so there's value in camps for that as well.

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah, I think it's a great place to start building those relationships and communities that, like you're saying, it shouldn't just be one time a year, but when you're there, find those people start connecting and build those relationships long term.

Lori: That's an excellent point, is that's a way to start building a community. Can you recommend any other ways to find other families that are like yours? I'm thinking what I would do is maybe go to my adoption agency and see if they know of any ongoing group or help me build a group or something. Do you have any other ideas?

Dr. Chaitra: Yeah, I mean, there are a lot of, you know, for adult adoptees, if you look at things like adoptees connect is they're national, there's chapters all around the US and even internationally. So, even like connecting with some of those adult adoptee groups to ask them where the communities are, I think that can be really useful. And then, like you said, camps and agencies and even things like, Angela Tucker has the virtual adoptee lounge for teens and adults and is doing one-on-one mentoring programs. So, I think, just taking an hour to Google, too, you're likely to find something around you if you're in kind of a major metropolitan area. And if not that, there are those virtual options available.

Lori: Yeah, you made me remember Adoption Mosaic also, which has a transracial piece, a good transracial piece, and that's done virtually as well. So, that's another resource. These are some great resources and I'm going to try to remember to add all of them to the show notes.

So, Chaitra, thank you so much for sharing your experiences, your wisdom and your heart with us today.

Dr. Chaitra: Thank you.

Lori: Special thanks to Adopting.com for producing and sponsoring Adoption: The Long View. Find this and other adoption resources at Adopting.com. And consider joining other savvy and generous listeners by sharing this episode with others who will benefit from the insights of our guests. Make sure to subscribe and give this episode a rating wherever you listen to help us grow.

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adoption's Long View. May you meet everything on your road ahead with confidence, curiosity, and compassion.

Show Notes

- Chaitra's website, [Growbeyondwords](#)
- *Adoptees Like Me* [books](#)
- *Adoptees Like Me* [fundraiser](#)
- National Adoptee-Therapist [Directory](#)
- [How to screen](#) for an adoption-competent therapist
- **Ultimate Adoption Resource [Guide](#)**
- [Ep 308 with Lynn Brown](#), Black transracial adoptive mom
- [Adoptee Lounge](#) with Angela Tucker
- [Adoption Mosaic](#) with Astrid Castro
- [Adoptees Connect](#) chapters around the US