

Playshop Goals & FAQ

Jane Brown's Adoption Playshops™ are appropriate for adopted children ages 5–13 and for new as well as returning participants. Parents of children participating in Playshops are strongly urged to attend Jane's Friday night workshop for parents and educators on March 17, 2006. The adult workshop is also appropriate for waiting parents and parents of children who are still too young to participate in Playshops. It's a great way to become familiar with issues you and your children may face as they get older.

Playshop Goals

1. To help children network with other adopted persons so that they know that their thoughts, feelings, fantasies, and questions about adoption are normal and healthy.
2. To explore what it means to be adopted. In the two youngest Playshop sessions, there is only a little bit of talking about birthparents and circumstances--it is parents' responsibility and right to introduce this information to young children. (Older children often bring these issues up at Playshop, whether or not they talk about them with you at home.)
3. To build strategies for resisting stereotypes and race prejudice and to respond effectively to teasing and bullying.
4. To encourage children to recognize their feelings and to talk to their parents about their feelings.
5. To embrace the many types of families in the adoption community and to celebrate the way in which each child joined his/her family.

Who Is Jane Brown?

Jane Brown, MSW, has been an adoption educator for more than 20 years. She is the mother of 8 children by birth and by adoption, and has been a foster parent as well. Having raised 4 Korean adoptees to adulthood, she is now also a grandmother. Jane has worked on adoption policy for the state of Arizona, is on the advisory board of *Adoptive Families Magazine*, and writes regularly on adoption issues for magazines and internet forums.

Many years ago, Jane began doing children's workshops to help young adoptees explore what it feels like to grow up adopted. Talking and playing with their adopted peers gives children the opportunity to express thoughts and feelings they may not realize other children share. Through her work with children, Jane has discovered that young adoptees who participate in group workshops tend to be more open with their parents and acquire skills that they can transfer to settings with non-adopted peers.

Jane will be available to parents before the group by phone or e-mail and will meet with parents after each session to give feedback on children's reactions to the experience. Jane will use age-appropriate fun, games and lots of creativity to help our children understand that the questions, thoughts and feelings they have about adoption are normal and OK to talk about.

Registration & Communication

Please use the age-appropriate Playshops registration forms to enroll your child(ren). With more than 140 kids expected to enroll, we need to communicate with you efficiently, so please be sure to provide a valid email address if you have one. **Please also subscribe to the Playshop e-mail announcement list** so that you get all updates and Playshop assignments as soon as they are available. Send a blank email to FAIR-Playshops2006-subscribe@yahoogroups.com and set your spam filter to allow messages from yahoogroups.com. For further assistance, please contact Amy (for March sessions), 415-751-2724, amyk@stanfordalumni.org; or Mollie (for April sessions), molliemcleod@aol.com, 408-269-4693.

Frequently Asked Questions about Playshops

Are Playshops only for children adopted from China?

No! Playshops are for **all** adopted children. Registration is first come, first served, with priority given to FAIR members if any session is oversubscribed. (You can join FAIR as part of your Playshop registration, if you wish). Some age groups fill quickly. Please send in your registration form promptly.

When can I register?

Registration forms for March sessions will be e-mailed in early February to list members of the Playshops yahoo group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/FAIR-Playshops2006>) and will also be available for downloading from the group's Files section. Forms for April sessions will be e-mailed to listmembers and posted on the group site in mid February.

How will group assignments be handled in 2006?

Playshop age divisions on the registration forms are **tentative** and may change depending on actual 2006 registrations. We will contact you at least two weeks in advance via the Playshops yahoo group to let you know each child's group assignment or, if Playshops are oversubscribed, to let you know that your child has been placed on a waiting list. Our overriding aim is to place each child in an age-appropriate group so that the maximum number of children can participate. Kids born in **early 1997** may register for Playshop 5 (March 18) and will be included if space allows; otherwise their registration will be transferred to Playshop 4 (April 9).

What if I can't make the session my child is assigned?

If you cannot make an assigned Playshop session, please let us know **by March 4 (for March sessions) or April 1 (for April sessions)**. Your check will be shredded, and your child's place will go to the first child on the waiting list for his or her session. After March 4/April 1, your check will be shredded only if there is a child on the waiting list who can take your child's place. No refunds for no-shows.

How should I prepare my child for Playshops?

Please share with your child that you will be attending an adoptive family support group event and that there will be special groups just for children. Tell your child that this will be a fun group in which they will be playing, but also learning and sharing thoughts about being adopted. The more matter-of-fact, upbeat, and direct you are, the better.

What is the setup like at Pacific Rim International School?

When you arrive, parents and children will gather in a large open space. There will be things to play with together in the 15 minutes before Playshop begins. When it's time to start, Jane will call the children, Mentors (adult adoptees), and Junior Mentors (preteen and teen adoptees) into a separate classroom nearby in the same small building. (For children in Playshop 1, parents will be included in the first activity.) During Playshop, which lasts 1-1/2 to 2 hours (sometimes a little shorter for Playshop 1), parents can hang out in the open space, take a walk, or drive off for an hour. When Playshop is over, two parent volunteers will take the children outside to the school playground while Jane talks with the parents in the open space. If it's raining, the children will get the large open space and the parents will go with Jane into the classroom. Bring snacks and something to drink for your child to have after Playshop.

Where will the oldest groups meet this year?

The Preteen Group (tentatively, kids born 1994-95) will be at Pacific Rim International School in Emeryville. The new Young Teen Group (tentatively, kids born 1991-93) will meet at a wheelchair-accessible location in San Francisco, TBA.

What types of activities will Jane do with the children?

Children learn through their senses, processing and integrating information in different ways at different rates. Therefore, Jane will use drama, drawing, crafts, active games, objects, puppetry and discussions during Playshops. All are designed to teach children about adoption, help them to share what they think, bring some of their feelings to the surface, and help them realize that it is a good idea to ask questions and talk to their parents. The groups will explore racial identity and diversity. They will look at teasing and what children can do about it. Some children may share that they have

been asked “too many questions” or have heard a negative comment because of the way they look or because they are adopted. Preteen and Young Teen groups will explore these issues through age-appropriate activities and small-group discussions.

What should I do if my child says that she/he doesn't want to go?

Be firm but enthusiastic. Tell your child this is something important and special that you don't want her or him to miss it. Tell them they will not have to talk or participate if they don't want to, but you want them to go check it out before they decide. Tell them that lots of kids say the same thing but then decide that it was a really terrific group and that they are really glad their parent(s) took them.

Will Jane bring up the term “abandoned” with my child?

Jane will examine the adoption process but will not be delving into abandonment as a topic of discussion. Playshops are designed to be a gentle introduction to exploring growing up adopted. Abandonment is not an issue that young children are ready to discuss in a group setting without their parents. Older children, however, may bring the topic up for discussion if it is on their minds.

What would happen if another child uses that term or brings up things that my child hasn't yet heard about her story?

By the time a child is 5, Jane would encourage parents to have shared what they know of the pre-adoption story with their child, if they want to get there first! Otherwise, it is quite likely that someone else will introduce pieces of the story—and not necessarily in a gentle, accurate, supportive way. What Jane and the children will discuss in Playshops should not be beyond what children have already heard from their parents and are ready to process in a fairly simple way. Should another child raise the topic of abandonment, Jane will need to provide accurate information—as parents would, of course—but then she would change the focus of where the group is headed, since she believes that it is the parents' prerogative to get into this area when and as they wish.

What if my five-year-old cries?

With the youngest group, parents are going to be in the room for a portion of the first activity to help their children get comfortable in the group. Jane will ask parents to leave and ask the children to wave goodbye and blow them a kiss. If your child cries and is uncomfortable having you leave, Jane will ask that you stay and sit quietly with your child. As soon as your child is more comfortable, Jane will quietly excuse you. If your child is resistant and not ready, Jane will suggest that you stay for a little while more. Most of the time, children DO eventually allow their parent to leave the room. Should your child start to cry during the session (unlikely, but it does happen sometimes with the little ones), someone will come to fetch you and bring you into the room. Jane will ask you to sit quietly and wait for your child to feel comfortable again before suggesting that you leave.

What is the role of the adult adoptee Mentors?

The adult adoptees will have a very important but limited role to play. Jane will be facilitating the activities. The adult adoptees will be playing with the children, sharing glimpses of their childhood experiences (as Jane asks them to), and telling the children about their current lives to provide some modeling as to what the future could be like (i.e., “Yes, I do have a boyfriend. I go to school, too. I have a job and friends. I am STILL adopted!”). The children almost always LOVE them, and you might expect to find your child giving away hugs and smiles, running her hands through the hair of one of the adoptees, and talking about them long after the event has ended. These are very special VIPs in the lives of these children!

Who are the Junior Mentors?

Junior Mentors are 10 years old or older and participants in the Preteen or Young Teen Group. By helping out with the younger groups, they are learning that they have an important role to play too—that their experiences can help younger adopted children just as the adult adoptees help them. Their main job will be to accompany children to the bathroom during Playshop so that Jane and the adult Mentors do not have to leave the room.

My child has a special friend who is older/younger. Is it OK if I ask for an exception to be made so that they can be in the same group?

The activities are designed to be age-appropriate. Therefore, it would be very difficult for all involved and not helpful to the children to make this sort of exception. One of the things that you might do

instead is to plan some time after Playshops for the children to socialize and share with one another what their group did. This will help children process the work and strengthen their friendships.

We have a very different type of family. Will the language be inclusive, or might my child come away feeling even more different in a group of her adopted peers?

The adoption community is very diverse--thank goodness! Children need and deserve to know that they and their parent(s) will be welcomed and respected when they attend an adoptive family event. This is particularly true when a child is alone in a group where questions or comments can come up about adoptive parents and families. Jane is especially sensitive to this issue and will do everything in her power to make sure that children know that their families are honored and respected. Inclusive language is a given!

I am feeling anxious. Is this normal?

It is not only normal, it is healthy and appropriate for parents to feel anxious about having someone they do not know (or know only through articles) work with their children around sensitive topics. Anticipating issues likely to be discussed or played out brings our anxieties right to the surface. It causes us to wonder whether we are handling this part of parenting effectively or whether we measure up to others' standards. It increases our desire to protect our children from what is sure to be confusing or painful and also brings us face to face with the reality that we can't always be there to protect them when the occasion arises. It is an act of faith for parents to take this step and allow their children to participate in Playshops. Parents should realize this is the situation their child might face some day at school when we are not there to control what other children say to them about adoption, race, or anything else. Each child needs and deserves preparation for these challenges in a setting that is controllable, sensitive, and supportive.

If there's something special about my child that I think Jane should know, what do I do?

Jane is very happy to have parents call to chat so that they might decide whether Playshop is right for their child or to talk over any sensitive issue or concern. You can reach Jane at janebrown77@earthlink.net or 602-690-5338. The only thing she asks is that the long-distance phone call be on your bill, not hers. If you reach her voicemail, leave a message and try again later.

What's FAIR?

FAIR exists for adoptive families. Through its all-volunteer organization FAIR offers information, education, support and fellowship to adoptive and preadoptive families. Founded in the late 1960s by parents who were adopting transracially, FAIR grew to include families with Korean-born children and then expanded to families adopting older children, U.S.- and internationally born children, children with a variety of physical and emotional challenges, and adoptive families in general.

Recognizing that adoption brings all the joys and challenges of ordinary parenting plus a number of differences and extras, FAIR provides the opportunity for connections between families. FAIR has experience with all kinds of special needs, transracial, and transcultural adoption and shares resources and encouragement with its extended family of members.

FAIR Warm Line (650) 856-3513

www.fairfamilies.org