

POST-ADOPTION RESOURCE CENTER

Newsletter

“Not Your Average Parenting” Book Club and Parent Chat

Adoptive, foster, kinship, guardianships parents and respite caregivers, please join us for a book club to explore books that offer insight, support and a sense of community. Child welfare professionals are also invited and welcome to attend.

Support groups and events are held in collaboration with MDHHS.

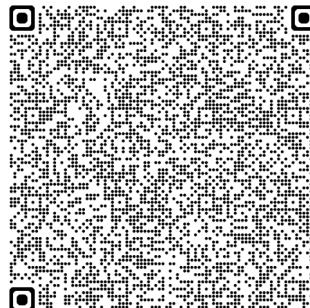
Last Tuesday of each month

12 p.m. or 6 p.m.

Virtually on Teams

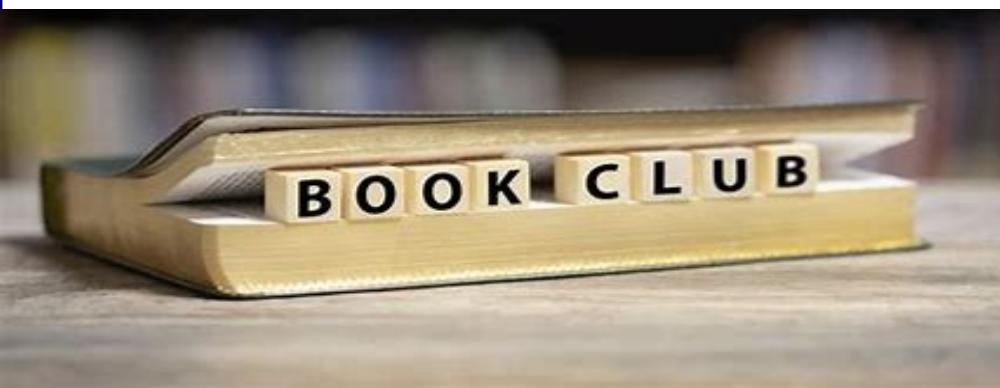
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For more information and/or to RSVP, contact:

- Alysa Sutinen at alysa@upkids.com or 906-250-0393.
- Shifra Cooper at shifra@upkids.com or 906-748-0022.
- Tylor Kistler at tylor@upkids.com or 906-458-0544.
- Lauren Meadors at laurenm@upkids.com or 906-281-7174.
- Beth Mulligan at bethm@upkids.com or 906-523-8927.



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UPkids.com

Contact a PARC specialist

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Check out upcoming events, webinars and resources on our Facebook page:
U.P. Post Adoption Resource Center
<https://www.facebook.com/906PARC>

Meet the PARC Staff

We're excited to share a few updates from our team: Please join us in welcoming our newest staff members, who bring fresh energy, experience and passion to our work with families in the Upper Peninsula.

At the same time, we're also recognizing a few internal staff movements and transitions. Some familiar faces are stepping into new roles or exploring new opportunities.

Change is a natural part of growth, and we're confident that these shifts will continue to strengthen our team and the support we provide. Stay tuned as we continue to grow and evolve together!

Alysa Cherubini-Sutinen

post-adoption program manager

I was born and raised in Michigan's Upper Peninsula and have proudly called it home my entire life. I currently serve as the PARC program manager, overseeing services across all 15 counties in the U.P. I've been with U.P. Kids for nearly eight years, and my passion is helping children and families grow, heal and thrive together.

I hold an Associate of Arts degree with an emphasis in Early Childhood Education (2011) and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Michigan Technological University (2014). More than 17 years of experience working with children with diverse needs, I bring a deep commitment and understanding to everything I do.

Outside of work, I love exploring the natural beauty of the Upper Peninsula. I enjoy hiking, running, playing cribbage and spending quality time with my family.



Shifra Cooper

post-adoption supervisor

I serve as the supervisor of the Post-Adoption Resource Center supporting adoptive families across the Upper Peninsula. I've been with U.P. Kids since 2021, and my work is driven by a passion for helping families to feel connected, supported and empowered.

I have a background in education and hold a Bachelor's degree and a teaching certificate from The University of New Mexico. I've completed additional training in trauma-informed and adoption-informed parenting, child development and family preservation, and bring experience in parent education and support services.



Originally from the Southwest, I now call the U.P. home with my husband, our three dogs and one cat. Outside of work I am usually baking or cooking something, but I also enjoy spending time hiking, reading, listening to music and anything Halloween-related.

Meet the PARC Staff

Tylor Kistler

post-adoption specialist

My name is Tylor Kistler, and I have worked at U.P. Kids for almost three years. I have spent most of my time here working in foster care, adoption and family preservation and am so excited to step into the world of post adoption services. Similarly to my time at U.P. Kids, I have lived in the U.P. for about three years.

I enjoy spending my time outdoors with my wife, Lily, and my dog, Ziggy. We go for hikes and bike rides and take endless trips to the beach. I also enjoy downhill skiing and softball. When I am not outside getting sunburnt, I enjoy relaxing indoors with a movie, book or video game. I am thrilled to be joining this community and look forward to my time in the post adoption resource center .



Lauren Meadors

post-adoption specialist

My name is Lauren Meadors, U.P. Kids' new post-adoption specialist in the Eastern Upper Peninsula. I am relatively new to both the field of social services and the Upper Peninsula. It has been almost a month now since moving up from Kalamazoo, where I received my Bachelor of Social Work

So far, it has been great to be around more trees than concrete! I enjoy spending time outdoors near the water, going to concerts and hanging out with my cat Ollie. I also love keeping myself busy with a good book or crochet project. I am very passionate about both community building and human rights. I'm excited to continue to learn and expand upon my values through this role and look forward to getting to know the area and all of you.



Beth Mulligan

post-adoption specialist

My name is Beth Mulligan, and I'm excited to join U.P. Kids as a Post Adoption and Parent Success Educator. I hold a bachelor's degree in Administrative Leadership with a focus in Adult Education. My career has taken me from the corporate world, working in training and human resources, to the school environment, where I served as a substitute teacher, secretary and paraprofessional.

Originally from Wisconsin (yes, I'm a proud Green Bay Packers fan!), I've lived in the Upper Peninsula for the past 10 years, after moving around downstate Michigan with my husband and our two boys. I truly cherish the years I was able to stay home with my kids, being active in their school lives and attending their sporting activities. I love being a mom and spending time with my family hiking, playing games and waterfall hunting. When I get a quiet moment, you'll likely find me reading, ideally soaking up the sun with the sound of waves nearby.



Self-Care: Being our own Caregiver

Tylor Kistler, post-adoption specialist

Being a parent or caregiver to a child can be one of the most rewarding and fulfilling experiences of our lives, but it can also be stressful, especially when we have multiple roles to play each day outside of being a parent/caregiver. Not only are we parents/caregivers, but we may also be partners, employees, friends, daughters/sons and members of our communities. Each role we take on comes with a slew of responsibilities. In order to maintain these responsibilities, it is crucial that we are tending to our most important role: ourselves.



As parents, we have a duty to care for our children. The way we carry out this duty looks different for every parent and child, but the essence is the same for all: we must do what it takes to ensure our children are safe, healthy and happy. This may look like attending doctor's appointments and mental health appointments, helping a child with homework or attending IEP meetings, providing daily meals, keeping a clean house, helping our children regulate their emotions... the list goes on! When asking parents/caregivers what their most important tasks are as parents/caregivers, we often list some of the things mentioned above but often forget to include caring for ourselves.

It is not that easy.

It is easy to say "take care of yourself" or "make time for yourself during the day" or "find a hobby," but, for many, it is not that easy at all. How do we take care of ourselves when it seems like all of our time is allocated to fulfilling our other roles (ex: going to work, caring for our children, helping a friend in a crisis, etc.)? How do we justify taking time for ourselves when our children need to be fed and our house is a mess?

We must first understand the importance of self-care. I believe the flight attendants say it best; "in an emergency, you must put on your own oxygen mask before you help someone else with theirs." As it applies to self-care, we must ensure our needs are met so we can best help others meet their needs. No water can be poured from a cup that is empty. It is incredibly difficult to help a child navigate their difficult emotions when we ourselves are dysregulated. Things like lack of sleep, lack of proper nutrients (not enough food/water), and limited time for enjoyable activities can create a breeding ground for dysregulated emotions, thoughts and behaviors. It is also important to note that, outside of needing to care for yourself so you can better care for others, you *deserve* to be cared for, not just by the people in your circle, but by yourself as well.

So self-care is important, what now?

We can agree self-care is an important part of being a human being and satisfying our roles ... But how do we actually DO it?

The answer is not simple and may not look the same from person to person, but through our understanding of our own roles in life and the knowledge of what it takes to care for oneself, we are all capable of being our own caregivers.

Self-Care: Being our own Caregiver

Tylor Kistler, post-adoption specialist

- **Start slow.** When we first think “take time for yourself”, it often invokes thoughts of long, lazy days on the beach or hours spent at home in our bathrobes. While those are excellent ways to relax and rejuvenate, they may not be what regularly fits in our crazy lives. When beginning the journey to caring for yourself, start small. Spend 10 minutes at the start of your day sipping a hot cup of coffee, reading a good book or journaling. Take five minutes before you pick up your kiddos from school to comb your hair or try out that face mask that has been sitting in your bathroom for too long. Plug in some earbuds and listen to your favorite podcast while you cook dinner. Find small pockets of time in your day to ask yourself what you need. Whatever amount of time you can allocate to yourself.
- **Keep it consistent.** If you can find those 10 minutes at the start of your day, or five minutes after your work day, try committing to it at least a couple days each week until you build a routine. You may find that even just 10 minutes of time that you can commit to yourself can make a huge difference.
- **Make plans to look forward to.** Outside of taking time each day to check in with yourself, start scheduling fun activities that you can look forward to. Just like our children, we also react well to positive reinforcement and being rewarded for our hard work. Having things to look forward to can help us keep going when life gets hard; a long week at work may not seem so bad when we know we get to have a little fun when it is over. This can be a monthly coffee date with a friend or a date night with your partner or a long bath on a Saturday morning. The important part is prioritizing your wellbeing and sticking to your schedule.
- **Ask for help.** Last, but certainly not least, rely on those around you to help when you need it. No human beings are built to do life alone, and that includes you! If you struggle sticking with a schedule, invite a friend to engage in self-care with you. That may look like a weekly yoga class, a monthly coffee date or a daily walk around the block. If you struggle with taking time away as a parent, ask your partner or a trusted adult to care for your children while you go on a bike ride or go shopping for new clothes. Everyone needs to care for themselves, but it is not something we have to do alone.

Being a parent/caregiver is a huge role to play, especially when we have so many other big and important roles in addition to it, but once we are able to find a balance between caring for ourselves and caring for others, we become much more well-equipped to do both.



Nature's role in reducing stress and building connections

Lauren Meadors, post-adoption specialist

Stress is something that we are all familiar with. How stress is dealt with, however, differs from family to family and kid to kid, especially when those families look a little different. Adoptive families come with unique circumstances and backgrounds that need some extra support at times. Learning new ways to approach stress can help to reframe how commonly experienced emotions that children who were adopted are explored. One area of research has made it its goal to highlight how getting outside for a walk with only a couple of set intentions can help ease levels of tension, anxiety and other symptoms that impact both physical and mental health.

This research is on the practice of Shinrin-yoku, which translates from Japanese into forest bathing. Beginning in the 1980s, this practice was introduced as a way to combat mental health issues that were being observed in workers in the city. The way it works is pretty simple: find somewhere outside and either go for a walk or take a seat! It is then important to create a sensory experience out of it and slowly take in your surroundings. Utilize your five senses and tune into them. What does the air smell like? Are there pine trees nearby filling the air? Or can you see them swaying in the breeze as you feel it against your skin? And what about your sense of touch, how does the earth feel beneath your feet as it holds you up? Or going back to the pine trees, what does the depth of its bark feel like? How many different sensations can you tune into? This experience is designed to bring you into your body and connect you with your environment. Much like the practice of the 5-4-3-2-1 grounding technique you may already be familiar with, except purposefully placing yourself in nature for it.

Participants see a reduction in stress hormones like cortisol and other benefits like improved sleep and decrease in blood pressure.

Shinrin-yoku also helps increase parasympathetic nervous system activity, which plays a vital role in calming the body down. This can lead to better emotional regulation and conflict resolution.



With Shinrin-yoku in mind, there are a handful of ways incorporating the outdoors can help, not only reduce stress in you and your child but also increase attachment through experiences. If you can get out to a trail away from the hustle and bustle and focus on getting in touch with your senses that's, great! If that is a little bit harder for you, try molding the practice to fit into your circumstances best. If you don't have access to a trail, try sitting outside your home wherever possible instead. Studies have shown that benefits were found in participants both in rural and more urban spots; there is an environment to connect with and experience through the senses anywhere. Maybe you have a kid who doesn't quite know how to listen and focus all that well yet; you could try making it into a sensory scavenger hunt. You could ask them to find certain color leaves along the forest floor or find a plant that smells good, whatever helps them get the most out of the experience. If there are physical limitations, taking the walk aspect out and focusing on a seated experience will provide the same benefits. Maybe you can't get out of the house at all; you could view guided forest bathing videos on YouTube or play a video of a river flowing through a forest on the tv. No matter the limitation, there is a way to bring a little bit of the outside into your senses and use it as a way for both your child and you to come into your bodies and environments.

Krala-Szkaradowska, M., Stencel, N. J., Skrzypczak, K. O., Stuczyński, S. K., & Konczewska, L. (2024). Effect of forest bathing ('shinrin-yoku') on human health—a literature review. *Medycyna Środowiskowa—Environmental Medicine*, 27(1), 12-17.

Park, B. J., Tsunetsugu, Y., Kasetani, T., Hirano, H., Kagawa, T., Sato, M., & Miyazaki, Y. (2007). Physiological effects of shinrin-yoku (taking in the atmosphere of the forest)—using salivary cortisol and cerebral activity as indicators—. *Journal of physiological anthropology*, 26(2), 123-128.

Big Brothers Big Sisters: Igniting the Power & Promise of Youth through One-on-One Friendship, Guidance, & Opportunities

At Big Brothers Big Sisters, we know that there is potential in every child, and we are here to defend it. Our programs inspire children to realize their full potential and build brighter futures by providing strong and enduring, professionally supported, one-to-one mentoring relationships. This opens up new perspectives for children by offering friendship, guidance and opportunities with caring volunteers.

The community-based program is what most people think of when they think of Big Brothers Big Sisters. This program offers the traditional Big Brothers Big Sisters friendship. That's why we refer to it as the *Traditional Mentoring Program*. In this program we create one-to-one relationships between a "Big" (an adult mentor 18+) and a "Little" (a young person between the ages of 6 and 16). Spending time together out in the community is primarily how the Big and Little develop their relationship. After all, to change a child's perspective of the world, it helps to spend some time out in it! Matches share time together engaging in fun, recreational and leisure activities within the community. Activities are chosen together by the Big and Little and can be simple like walking through the woods, sledding, cooking a meal together, listening to music, or just hanging out. Outings filled with conversations and shared activities foster a relationship that helps youth manage the everyday challenges that are part of growing up.

As a parent, you recognize the potential of your child better than anyone. By giving your child the opportunity to be part of Big Brothers Big Sisters, you're starting them down a path to an even brighter and promising future. Our one-to-one mentoring relationships support the critical social and emotional development needed to help build resilience and promote the mental health and well-being of the children we serve across the western Upper Peninsula. Big Brothers Big Sisters enrolls children and youth ages 6 to 16 years old from families of all structures without cost to the family. The initial commitment for a match is one year ... But, many of our Matches last longer than the minimum (we'll support a Match until the Youth is 25 years old if desired!) and the impact of our match relationships often spans a lifetime.



Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Western U.P. covers the following service area: Baraga, Houghton, Keweenaw, Ontonagon and Gogebic Counties in Michigan and Iron County, Wisconsin. Our main office is in Houghton, and we have a Branch Office in Ironwood.

For more information: [\(906\) 487-9855 or \[bbbs@upkids.com\]\(mailto:bbbs@upkids.com\)](http://upkids.com/enroll-child-biq-brothers-biq-sisters)

There are two BBBS Affiliates in the Upper Peninsula. **Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Central U.P.** is based out of Marquette and covers the following service area: Marquette, Alger, Delta, Dickinson and Schoolcraft Counties.

Overall, there are 10 BBBS agencies serving throughout Michigan and 220+ across the United States.



Real Change Happens in Real Moments

MOMENTS MATTER

Could your Little One Use a Big?

As a parent, you recognize the potential of your child better than anyone. By giving your child the opportunity to be part of Big Brothers Big Sisters, you're starting them down a path to an even brighter, more promising future...

Providing One-to-One Friendship, Guidance & Opportunities...

We provide strong and enduring, professionally supported mentoring relationships for youth in our Community. A free program for qualifying families.

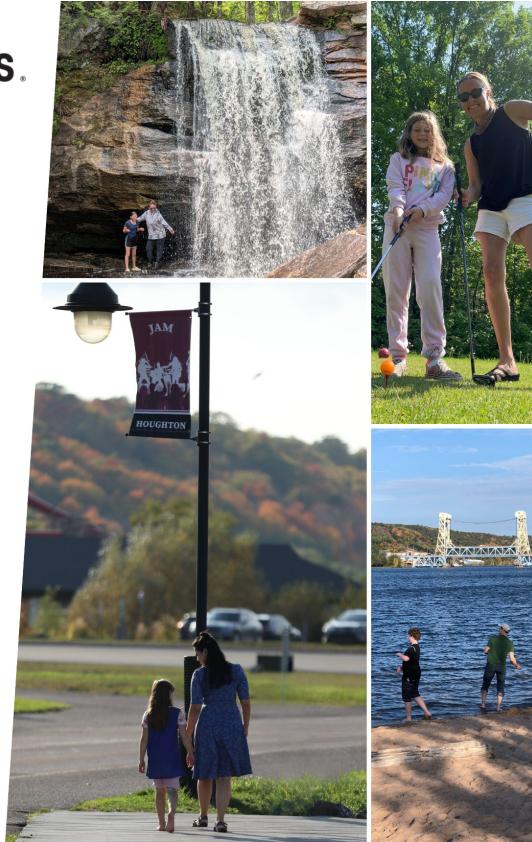
» **Children & Youth Ages 6-16 Years Old**

» **All Family Structures**

One-Parent, Two-Parent, Foster, Adoptive, Kinship Care

Enroll a Child UPKIDS.COM/BBBS

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We Are Here For You!

- Let us know how we can help.
- What training topics interest you?
- What activities would you like us to host for your family?
- How can we help you through our support groups?
- Do you have ideas or suggestions?
- Contact us through email, phone or our Facebook page.

