

REACH Tulare County

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Post Adoption Support



February 2008

Post Adoption Services Program

Welcome to the third edition of our monthly newsletter. We are having terrific success with our program and have already provided many families with **R**esource, **E**ducation, **A**dvocacy, **C**risis Intervention, and **H**ope. We feel that we are meeting our goal of providing and enriching support to adoptive families in our community.

Our website, www.reachtularecounty.org, is launched. This is a work in progress and we will continue to add content, articles and information on a regular basis. Therefore, we invite you to visit the site regularly and encourage input to make this a useful site for you.

We have excitedly added about 20 books to our Lending Library and will continue to grow this service. We welcome you to come check out a book and would love to hear a review from you to ensure we have the most recommended books available to our families. Thank you for allowing us to serve you, and do not hesitate to come by our office or contact us to find out more information about our services.

REACH Tulare County
2436 E. Valley Oaks Drive
Visalia, CA 93292
Ph: (559) 741-7358
Fax: (559) 741-7368
www.reachtularecounty.org

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Post Adoption Services Program	1
Support Groups, Trainings	2
Book Reviews	3
“Parenting Traumatized Children” Article	4-5
“Prenatal Drug Exposure and Preschool Years” Article	5
Resources	6

Your REACH Tulare County Support Team and Services

The REACH post adoption support team consists of Master’s level Social Workers who provide crisis counseling, support groups and referrals to community resources. Please see the contact information below:

Adoption Program Coordinator

Angela Rodd-Terry, MA
aroddterry@mossbeachhomes.com

Adoption Social Worker

Marji Peterson, MA
mpeterson@mossbeachhomes.com

Listed below are a variety of services offered by REACH Tulare County:

- Information and Referral Services
- Monthly Parent Retreat/Educational Groups
- Post Adoption Crisis Counseling/
Case Management
- Monthly Newsletter
- Lending Library
- Website

Support Groups

POST-ADOPTION PARENT EVENING RETREAT AND SIMULTANEOUS CHILD PLAY GROUP

Open to all **Tulare County** families who have adopted or are currently in the process of adoption. Share your concerns and learn with others in a supportive environment. Meets the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month from 6:30 - 8 p.m. at the Visalia YMCA, located at 211 W. Tulare.

Upcoming Topics:

- Feb. 12: Transitioning from the Relative Role to the Parent Role
- Feb. 26: The Impact of Drug Exposure on My Child
- March 11: How to Work With Difficult Birth Family Members
- March 25: Staying Connected to Your Adopted Teen

Questions? Please call Angela Rodd-Terry or Marji Peterson at (559) 741-7358. Childcare provided.

POST ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP

The **Kings County** REACH Post Adoption Support Group meets the second Monday of the month in Hanford at Jefferson Elementary from 4:30 - 6:30 p.m. Support groups in Madera and Oakhurst are also provided on a monthly basis. Contact Kathy Steele, LCSW, at 222-4969 for more information. This month, the Hanford group will be held on Monday, Feb. 11. Please RSVP.

REACTIVE ATTACHMENT DISORDER

Meets the fourth Tuesday of every month from 7 - 9 p.m. at Porterville Youth Services. The meetings are comprised of an educational and group interaction component, Q&A time and networking, where parents/caretakers can learn and encourage each other. This educational component has a strong emphasis on parent interventions for the child with special needs. For more information, please contact Nancy Gomes at Porterville Youth Services at (559) 782-4165.

Foster & Kinship Care Education Program - SCHEDULE OF EVENTS for FEBRUARY 2008

To register for these workshops or for more information, please contact Linda Paredez, Director FKCE/ILP at (559) 737-4842 or lindap@cos.edu. Pre-registration is highly recommended so that you may be notified of any changes to the class schedule if they should occur.

SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILD (9 Hours):

Feb. 13, 20 & 27, 6 - 9 p.m.

Kings County HSA Training Room, Hanford
Bev Anderson, MFT

This workshop covers many aspects of childhood sexual abuse, including risk factors, symptomology, family systems, and treatment issues and concerns.

DEALING WITH DISCIPLINE ONE BITE AT A TIME (6 Hours):

Saturday, Feb. 23, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

COS Tule 512

Jacky Lowe, MPA, MS

This class explores why we discipline children the way we do, discusses different strategies for dealing with unwanted behavior, differentiates discipline from punishment, and helps participants to understand the connection between the child's self-esteem and punishment. Lunch provided. Advance registration required by Tuesday, Feb. 19!

LEARNING DISABILITIES (9 Hours):

Feb. 25, March 3 & 10, 6 - 9 p.m.

COS Sycamore IM 201

Sharon Williams, MPA & Jennifer Reimer, MA

Learning disabilities affect both a child's success in school and in daily living. This workshop covers a variety of learning disabilities and the treatment/services that foster parents and kinship care providers can use to help a child be more successful in school and at home. IEPs and school resources are also discussed.

MANAGING ANGER WITH EMPATHY

(2 Hours):

Thursday, Feb. 28, 7 - 9 p.m.

Tulare County HHSA Licensing/Adoptions Office, Visalia
- Terry de Forrest, MFT, PhD

When children feel inadequate to cope with a situation, when they don't even know what the reality of the situation requires them to do, it frustrates them, it makes them very angry. This informative class teaches caregivers how to deal effectively with children's negative emotions and behavior.

Book Reviews

Books reviewed in this section are available to check out at our Post Adoption Lending Library and/or through the Tulare County Adoptions Office. A complete listing of available titles can be requested from our office and/or accessed via the website: www.reachtularecounty.org. If you would like to review a book for upcoming newsletter editions, please contact Angela Rodd-Terry or Marji Peterson at 741-7358.

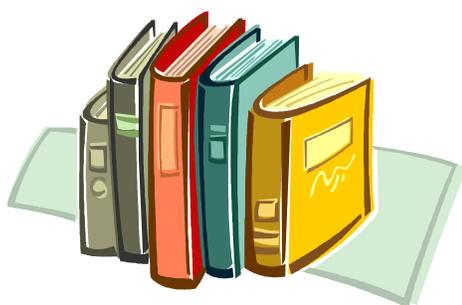
Over the Moon, an Adoption Tale By Karen Katz

The book is beautifully illustrated and is wonderful for toddler age children. The story describes the excitement of a set of adoptive parents as they await and prepare for their child: the inevitable call, “the baby is here at last”; the subsequent journey the parents go on to pick up the baby; and then, finally, the joy of being a new family. While this book, written by an adoptive parent, details an international adoption, the journey of receiving a child is transferable across experiences.

Children Who Shock and Surprise: A Guide to Attachment Disorders By Elizabeth Randolph

This book offers a concise, easy to follow guide to parenting children with attachment disorders. The author is an adoptive mother whose son suffered from attachment disorder and came to live with her at age 14 after several foster, group home and three failed adoptive placements. It is an excellent starter book to gain an understanding of attachment disorder and how to parent a child with this disorder.

The author, who is also a family therapist, describes and recommends holding therapy among other solutions. It is important to note that while this approach has demonstrated anecdotal effectiveness in some cases, it is controversial and not an approach that is utilized in California. The author makes an excellent point in this section that considerable time must be spent in therapy with the child’s parents, helping them to learn parenting techniques. Just forty-two pages, this book is well worth a quick read to learn basic information about attachment disorders.



Library Books Mailed Right To Your Doorstep!

The **College of the Sequoias** has a wonderful Foster & Kinship Care Education Resource (FKCER) Lending Library with titles on subjects including child development, behavior management, fetal alcohol syndrome, reactive attachment disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, self esteem, foster parent basics, and parenting skills. Additionally, the library has a small selection of books specifically on adoption. A number of books are available in

Spanish, and books for teenagers are also available. To check out a book, the only requirement is that you are a Tulare or Kings County resident. You can visit the library online at <http://www.cos.edu> (click on Division & Programs, then click on Consumer Family Studies, then click on Foster Care); once there, you can request what you would like to borrow by contacting Linda Paredez, Director Foster & Kinship Care Program/Independent Living Program by email (lindap@giant.sequoias.cc.ca.us) or phone (559-737-4842). You can pick up what you would like to borrow by making an appointment with Linda or by having Linda mail the books directly to your home. Books are allowed to be borrowed for up to one month at a time. Once you’re finished, you can either drop the book(s) back off at the College of the Sequoias FKCE library office or mail back (please note that on the return mailing, you pay for the postage).

Parenting Traumatized Children

by Alison M. Acton, LMFT

Children adopted from the foster care system have been removed from their birthparents for child abuse. Some are detained at birth while others live with abusive parents for part of their young lives. When children are removed from abusive caretakers and placed in loving homes, it is a chance for them to heal and for a new family to form. While each child and set of circumstances is unique, children who have suffered trauma often share similar post traumatic stress symptoms and reactions, which are normal given what they have been through. New parents will be better equipped to parent traumatized children by increasing their awareness and understanding of how trauma affects children. Symptoms that are normal reactions to early trauma may include:

Voracious Eating and Insatiable Hunger

Children who have been neglected may have gone hungry, may have not known when their next meal was coming, may have suffered malnourishment, and may have used food to numb painful feelings, etc. In school and recreational settings, these children may be overly focused on snack time, continuing to ask when is snack time, asking for drinks and food multiple times, stating that they are hungry or thirsty constantly. **Coping Strategy:** Provide repeated reassurance that meals and snacks are forthcoming on schedule. Some parents have found it helpful to have healthy snacks in a designated spot at home that children can access on their own in between meals and at night to address this symptom.

Trouble Sleeping

Children who have been traumatized may have difficulty relaxing due to having to always be on their guard; abuse may have happened at night, and once asleep, vivid nightmares of abuse may occur. This makes it very scary to fall asleep. Additionally, children who have been neglected may not have been put on any type of consistent schedule. When children do not get enough sleep this can result in increased irritation, fatigue and problematic behavior. Though the child is now with loving caretakers, their bodies remember the trauma and they automatically continue to try and protect themselves, which is a normal defense mechanism. This process can be quite exhausting for the child and puzzling for the parents. **Coping Strategy:** Regulating sleep cycles is important for children's well being. There are a number of simple strategies that parents can try to make sleeping more peaceful for their child (e.g. keeping the light on in the child's room is helpful to some children). Con-

sulting with the child's pediatrician and therapist, if applicable, can be helpful in resolving sleep issues.

Difficulty with Boundaries

These children may ignore their adoptive parents and run up to strangers affectionately, be overly permissive with people or conversely isolate themselves from people. When children are abused, their boundaries are not respected and it can be very confusing to know which adults to trust, etc. Additionally, getting close to adults can be very scary from the child's perspective; they may abuse them or disappear from their lives altogether. Developing trust takes time for traumatized children and this may be disheartening for the nurturing adoptive parents. Adoptive parents may see their child's lack of trust as a reflection on their parenting instead of the protective survival mechanism that it is for the child.

Coping Strategy: Parents will need to let the child know appropriate boundaries and set consistent limits (e.g. when a child tries to climb onto the visiting social worker's lap, the parent tells the child to stop using a loving tone of voice). The parent should repeat this as many times as necessary without raising his/her voice.



Difficulty with School

Pre-school age children who are not used to any type of structure may be overly defiant and resistant to school routines—additionally they may act out aggressively towards other children (biting, hitting, etc.). These children may have witnessed violent and inappropriate angry behavior prior to being detained and quite possibly did not have appropriate limit setting by birthparents, which is something children need as they develop. Older children may express sadness through angry acting out and may have difficulty concentrating. When children are traumatized, their sole focus needs to be on survival and learning school work is placed on the back burner. Once children are in a comfortable environment with competent caretakers, the memories of abuse do not disappear automatically. A child's traumatic memories of abuse can interrupt their day in the form of frequent scary flashbacks. This is a normal physiological reaction to being traumatized. Children who have been in abusive homes may not have gone to school on a regular basis as well and may be quite behind their expected grade level. This can lead to frustration, especially when they have not learned the basics necessary to understand what they are expected to be learning currently in school. **Coping Strategy:** Parents can help their child who has been traumatized by being a staunch school advocate and working closely with the child's Teacher. This

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should include letting the teacher know that the child has been a victim of trauma and how this has impacted the child's behavior.

Difficulty Regulating Emotions

Traumatized children often have difficulty regulating their emotions. They may react with too much of an emotion or too little (i.e. they cannot tolerate anger or they are always angry). They may be in a state of anxiety or hyperarousal, waiting for danger to return (even when threat of this is gone), or may shut down and appear to be frozen or numb. These responses are normal reactions to trauma. Children who have a numbing response may appear to be unaffected by trauma when, in fact, they are in shock, in fear or depressed. It is important to understand that these reactions are natural and common given what the child has been through. **Coping Strategy:** Children need to be able to express and vent their feelings in a safe environment without being shamed or judged. The best thing a parent can do is to provide this environment while at the same time setting appropriate limits with and not shaming the child.

Guilt

Children often feel responsible for the abuse they have suffered, and feel that it is their fault. This feeling can linger even when they are in a nurturing home. **Coping Strategy:** It is important for the child to be told that they in no way deserved to be hurt and nothing that they said or did was responsible for the trauma that they suffered.

Grief and Loss

Grief and loss are always part of trauma. These feelings are natural and common and children need to be allowed to grieve at their pace. It is important to understand that people do not just get over trauma in a snap; it is a timely process and one that may wax and wane over time. **Coping Strategy:** Allow children the space to grieve over time.

Often traumatized children are extremely resilient when placed in a loving and nurturing home. Healing from the impact of trauma takes time. Providing a loving home with consistent structure, appropriate limit setting, and empathetic nurturing, over time helps children to heal from the past. In some cases, therapy with a professional who specializes in the treatment of trauma can help to expedite the child's healing process as well as train parents to utilize effective coping strategies with their children.

For more information on how Post Traumatic Stress impacts children, check out the following websites:

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network:
<http://www.NCTSN.org>
- The National Center For Post Traumatic Stress Disorder
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/dms/ptsd/>
- The International Society For Traumatic Stress Studies
<http://www.istss.org>
- David Baldwin's Trauma Information Pages
<http://www.trauma-pages.com>

Prenatal Drug Exposure and Preschool Years

By Barbara Gross, RN

The best news about long term development of the child who had prenatal drug exposure is that his/her cognitive development (intellectual functioning) is based on a combination of genetics and the environment in which he/she is raised. However, this child may still face challenges related to his/her exposure to drugs. A toddler may have more tantrums, with part of them being due to his/her limited ability to process stimulation (especially with multiple stimuli). It is important to know which tantrums are willful and which are a result of sensory overload. A child will need help in getting the overload tantrum back in control. It is very important to remain calm in either case, because even involuntary "overload" tantrums can become purposeful if you, as the adult, over-react.

Difficulty with integrating incoming stimuli and regulating a child's behavior may show up in some of the following ways:

1. Exhibits behavioral extremes.
2. Low tolerance for stress: easily frustrated.
3. Difficulty organizing own play.
4. Distractibility, limited attention to tasks.
5. Auditory processing difficulties
6. Difficulty in handling changes in routines.
7. Poor organizational skills: scattered play.
8. Activity level: higher than other children his/her age.
9. Sporadic mastery of spatial-motor tasks (clumsiness).

To support development of self regulation in your child, use these approaches:

1. Maintain an orderly, consistent, child-appropriate environment—protect from over stimulation.
2. Have predictable routines and consistent schedules.
3. Have clear expectations and rules.
4. Establish patterns for transitions (such as a particular song at bedtime or always give advance warning that an activity will be ending); prepare the child for changes in routine.
5. Offer simple choices—"either/or."
6. Praise the child's efforts, not just successes. It may take your child many tries to get the behavior or skill that you expect of him/her.
7. Use anticipatory guidance to avoid difficult situations—discuss with the child what to expect when going someplace new so that he knows what to expect. For example, for the child's first visit to the dentist, read a picture book about dental visits, or ask if you can show him/her the dentist's office prior to his exam.
8. Match your expectations with the child's level of emotional maturity. The child's emotional maturity may vary within the same day. Expect at least some regression at the end of the day.
9. Make expectations of behavior explicit—"sit still and talk with an 'inside' voice"—not "just be good."
10. Set gentle but firm limits on harmful behavior.

Aspiranet
151 Canal Drive
Turlock, CA 95380



Local Office
2436 E. Valley Oaks Drive
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Phone: (559) 741-7358
Fax: (559) 741-7368



We're on the web:
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Helpful Resources

Adoptive Families Magazine

<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/>

The award-winning national adoption magazine is an adoption information source for families before, during and after adoption.

North American Council on Adoptable Children – NACAC

<http://www.nacac.org/>

NACAC helps to reform systems, alter viewpoints, and change lives through advocacy, education, adoption support, and leadership development.

Dave Thomas Foundation

<http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/>

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption is a non-profit public charity dedicated to dramatically increasing the adoptions of the more than 114,000 children in North America's foster care systems.

The Child Welfare Information Gateway

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/>

Child Welfare Information Gateway provides access to information and resources to help protect children and strengthen families.

Family Stories

<http://www.adoptuskids.org/resourceCenter/parentSupport/familyStories/neville.aspx>

Families share their personal experience about adoption.

Voice for Adoption

www.voice-for-adoption.org

Voice for Adoption (VFA) develops and advocates for improved adoption policies. Recognized as a national leader in special needs adoption, VFA works closely with federal and state legislators to make a difference in the lives of the families who adopt children from foster care.