

REACH

Tulare
County

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support



Summer 2009

POST-ADOPTION SERVICES PROGRAM

Summer is upon us! Many parents are busy planning summer events and activities for their children. Additionally, many REACH parents have questions about their children's behavior. They wonder: "Is this a normal response to adoption, or something I need to worry about?" In response to this question we've included an article that address children's developmental understanding of adoption. We've also included an article that explores behaviors that might indicate a need for mental health services. Finally, we've provided a list of low cost summer activities for children and families. Feel free to pass this newsletter on to friends or request additional copies from our staff. Best wishes to all REACH families for a fun, safe, and relaxing summer season!

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

COS FOSTER & ADOPTION WORKSHOPS

College of the Sequoias offers many informative workshops on foster/ adopt issues. Summer topics include Educational Rights, Personalities & Parenting Styles, Coping with Oppositional & Defiant Disorders, and The Effects of Meth on Children. Instructors, dates and times, are listed on the COS website @ www.cos.edu. Click on the Site Index and search for the Foster & Kinship Care Education Program. Follow directions to register.

KINGS COUNTY POST ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP

The REACH Kings County post adoptions support group meets the second Monday of the month in Hanford at Jefferson Elementary School from 4:30-6:30 p.m. Support groups in Madera and Oakhurst are also held on a monthly basis. Contact Kathy Steele, LCSW, at (559)222-4969 for more information.

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PARENTING CLASSES

The Family Referral, Education, & Empowerment (FREE) Collaborative offers parenting classes in Spanish and English throughout Tulare County. Call Rebecca @ 559-622-1853 for times and dates.

Your REACH Tulare County Support Team

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Welcome our newest member!
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What's New at REACH?

REACH Tulare County Open House

On Tuesday July 28th, 6:00 to 8:00 PM, the REACH program is hosting an Open House. We are located at 2436 East Valley Oaks Drive, Visalia, CA, 93291. We will celebrate the success of our program and the expansion of our lending library. Since our program began in November of 2007, more than 60 Tulare County families have received pre and post adoption services, and we recently added 75 new items to our lending library. Please join the REACH community and celebrate with us on Tuesday July 28th! There will be finger foods and treats for the whole family, along with face painting and story telling. Additionally we've invited several teens to dress in costume and read out loud to the children!

Lending Library Update

The REACH Library has expanded! We now have more than 75 new books and 200+ items overall. Please remember that parents can continue to access our library online @ reachtularecounty.org. You can call the office to ask for items to be held for you, or ask for books to be delivered to the next Parent Retreat Support Group. Also, feel free to drop by our office anytime!

Our library is full of information on the joys and challenges of raising children who have been adopted through foster care. There is always something to learn about adoptive parenting!

Parent Retreat and Support Group Meetings

Parents continue to report they enjoy REACH Parent Retreat/Support Groups. Meetings occur the second and forth Tuesday of each month, 6:30 to 8 PM. We meet at the Visalia YMCA on the corner of Court St. and Tulare Ave. Participants can receive credit for 1.5 training hours per meeting and child care is provided free of charge. Also parents can request a reminder email or phone call a few days before the next Retreat.

Parent Retreat members say they appreciate being able to share their experiences with other adoptive parents. No two stories are the same, but many parents share similar questions and concerns. Parents say they enjoy the support they receive from each other because no one understands what its like to be an adoptive parent, unless they are an adoptive parent!

During the summer months we plan to explore adoption topics in new ways. We are looking forward to an adoptive parent guest speaker, watching an adoption video, and exploring a creative project. If you cannot attend a Retreat that interests you, please go to our website @ reachtularecounty.org to access a summary of the meeting. A list of reference materials is also provided on the topic.



"I'm So Bored!"

There's Nothing To Do!"

- **Movies & Mask Making For Adopted Teens**
- Adopted teens are invited to attend three meetings this summer on Thursday evenings. We will meet at 6:00pm for a light dinner and watch a movie that relates to adoption. We will also work on a mask making project to explore our thoughts and feelings about being adopted. Youth between the ages of 13 and 18 are invited. If participants are comfortable, they can share their stories and see what they do or don't have in common with other adopted teens. If you're intersted in attending, please save these dates:

- Thursday, July 9th 6:00 to 8:30 pm
- Thursday, July 23rd 6:00 to 8:30 pm
- Thursday, August 6th 6:00 to 8:30 pm

The event will be held at 2436 East Valley Oaks Drive, Visalia

Low Cost Summer Activities

- ☼ Summer church programs/camps
- ☼ Arts & Crafts classes at Home Depot, Lowe's, Joann Fabrics, Michael's, Arts Visalia, or the Clay Café
- ☼ Sport camps
- ☼ Boys & Girls Club
- ☼ Fresno Children's Museum & Zoo
- ☼ Waterparks
- ☼ Horseback Riding
- ☼ Miniature Golfing
- ☼ YMCA summer camp/scholarships available
- ☼ Tulare County Office of Education summer musical
- ☼ Tulare County Library reading programs
- ☼ Bustamante Learning Center offers books and videos for check out and access to computers on site, along with many reading activities.
- ☼ Free trial class at The Little Gym
- ☼ Day trips to the Sequoias w/ public transportation

Please mark these dates for upcoming Parent Retreats:

- July 14 Adoptive Parent's Questions & Answers
- July 28 REACH Open House
- Aug. 11 Mask Making Project
- Aug. 25 Overcoming Adoption Parenting Hurdles
- Sept. 8 Guest Speaker: An Adoptive Parent's Story
- Sept. 22 Video "Is Anyone There? Adopting a Wounded Child"

Is This Behavior a Normal Response to Adoption... Or Something I Need to Worry About?

By Marji Peterson, MFT Intern

At REACH we like to remind everyone that adoption is a life-long process. That means families formed through adoption might have needs that extend beyond finalization. After all, raising adopted children has its own challenges and rewards!

While most challenges are relatively easy to overcome, other challenges wear families down. If your family has tried different parenting and discipline strategies, and you are still wondering – Is this behavior normal, or something I need to worry about? It might be a good time to consider mental health services.

Parents have a variety of complaints when it comes to children's behavior, including lying, stealing, lack of bowel and bladder control, compulsive or repetitive behaviors, physical aggression and tantrums, fire starting, and lack of remorse. These behaviors become problematic when lying continues beyond 3 to 6 years, when stealing extends beyond 3 to 5 years, and lapses in bowel or bladder control extend beyond 8 or 10 years. It's also a concern when parents suspect this behavior is deliberate.

While compulsive, repetitive behavior is normal in children under 18 months, and again at 3 to 4 years, it's not common when it's excessive or continues beyond 4 or 5 years of age. While some children experiment with fire starting, it's a problem if it extends beyond 4 to 8 years of age. Finally, little or no remorse is common in children under 8 years of age. While true remorse does not develop until mid-elementary school, it's a problem if it does not develop by middle school. If parents feel like they need support, they might explore the following before seeking professional help:

- Become more educated about developmental milestones and behaviors
- Consider recent changes in the household, such as conflicts, new siblings, or divorce
- Attend parenting classes
- Encourage adoption communication - make sure everyone is comfortable in sharing their thoughts and feelings
- Provide opportunities for children to interact with other adopted children
- Join an adoption support group
- Schedule an appointment with your medical care provider to rule out physical problems

Because children don't always have the ability to express their thoughts and feelings, parents can take cues from their behavior. The following behaviors indicate professional help might be considered:

- When children cry or worry all the time
- When children are teased at school
- When there are sudden changes in personality or temperament
- When children don't seem to care about anything
- When children start engaging in risky behaviors
- When grades suddenly drop at school
- When children have suicidal

thoughts - seek immediate professional help.

If you've decided to explore mental health services and your child(ren) are insured by Medi-Cal, contact a Tulare County Mental Health Clinic. If you have private insurance, ask your insurance carrier for a list of local providers covered by your plan. Finding a therapist can be an overwhelming task when families are in crisis, and REACH can help with this process. We can also provide assistance while mental health services are being established. After a therapist or psychologist is located that's taking new clients, parents might ask the following questions:

- Do you have experience with foster care and adoption?
- Are you comfortable talking about adoption?
- What experience do you have with families like mine?
- What do you (the therapist) need to know about my family?

If you have questions or concerns, or would like to meet other adoptive families that have engaged mental health services, call the office or come to a Parent Retreat/Support Group. REACH parents have a lot of experience and wisdom to share. Your REACH community is a valuable resource when it comes to adoption and mental health issues.

For more information on this topic go to www.adoptivefamilies.com and refer to the following books available through the REACH Library:

Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self, by Brodzinsky
 Beneath The Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens by Riley & Meeks
 Raising Adopted Children: Practical Reassuring Advice for Every Adoptive Parent by Melina

Ages & Stages: Developmental Needs of Adopted Children

By Alison M. Acton, LMFT

Adoption is a lifelong process for the adopted child and their adoptive parents (referred to as parents throughout the rest of the article). As children grow and develop, their needs and understanding of adoption progresses over time. Each age presents unique challenges in the life of the adopted child and their parents.

Infant to Toddler Age

During this stage, children are adjusting to their new home and developing a secure attachment. The world is experienced through movement and senses. The infant and toddler are learning to trust that their needs will be provided for. At this age, adoption is not understood. An older toddler may be able to repeat a story told to them about their adoption but this does not mean they understand it. It is not too early to introduce the adoption conversation. Letting your child know you got them on a special day, reading age appropriate books with adoption themes such as Horace by Holly Keller and A Mother For Choco by Keiko Kasza, and celebrating your child's adoption day are all good activities and help lay the ground work for what will come later.

Pre-School Age

During this stage children are developing motor and language skills, becoming more autonomous, and are prone to magical thinking. Children begin to understand that babies grow inside a woman's stomach. They may begin to ask questions regarding this. Children at this stage generally still do not understand adoption fully. When they ask a question, make sure and understand what they are asking and then respond to the question asked. For example, if they ask, "Did I grow in your tummy?", they do not need a long explanation on the ins

and outs of adoption. The response should be honest, simple, and provide reassurance to the child. It is important for children at this age to know they are loved, that they are wanted by their parents, that adoption is for always, and their adoptive family is a forever family. Talking to your child about how they came to be in your family is recommended, i.e. -We got a call that you were born and picked you up from the hospital. Just as non adopted children generally like to hear about their birth many times, it's important to share stories of coming into the family with adopted children. Parents can make a point of mentioning that other children they know are adopted. Additionally, parents can point out fictional or cartoon characters that their children are familiar with that are adopted, such as Kai-lan from Ni hao Kai-lan (cartoon) or Bowen from the Power Rangers. Making adoption a normal part of conversation continues to lay the ground work for what will come later. Parents can continue to read books to their children with adoption related themes such as Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born by Jamie Lee Curtis, Over the Moon, an Adoption Tale by Karen Katz, The Day We Met You by Phoebe Koehler, Happy Adoption Day by John McCutcheon, and How I was Adopted by Joanna Cole.

Early to Middle School Age

During this stage children are learning and accomplishing many new skills and knowledge and expanding their world to include school and community. Children are beginning to realize that most children are not adopted. At this age a child's curiosity increases and children may want more details about themselves, birth parents, and birth siblings. Children may begin to experience painful feel-

ings as they do not understand why they did not remain with birthparents. Children may keep painful feelings to themselves because they are unsure about security within their adoptive family. Parents should be prepared to answer more direct questions and provide more detailed information, along with a lot of reassurance. Children need to know that it is okay to talk to their parents about their feelings, good and bad, and that no one can take them away from their adoptive family. Children tend to feel responsible for what happens to them, i.e. I was bad, so my birth mom gave me away. It is important to let children know they are not bad and their birth parents could not take care of them because of their own problems. Questions about adoption will likely pop up at the child's school; parents can help by providing information to the school. A good resource book about adoption for school is All About Adoption: How Families are Made by Marc Nemiroff. Parents should have books available for their children to read such as The Mulberry Bird by Anne Braff Brodsky.

Pre-Teen Age

Pre teens are beginning to form their identity and increase their independence. At this age children are more able to utilize abstract reasoning. Children at this stage tend to assert a greater need for privacy and may withdraw from their parents. Children at this stage may be more in touch with losses related to adoption. For some children this will cause more grieving. It is important for parents to continue to provide reassurance to their pre-teenagers and tolerate their need to talk and/or withdraw regarding their feelings. Parents should let their child know they are available to talk and are

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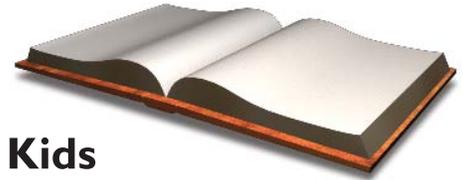
open to discussing their child's feelings regarding adoption and birth families. Parents should provide opportunities to talk as well as respect their pre-teenager's need for silence. A good family activity for pre-teenagers is creating an Adoption Life Book which chronicles their story. Books such as How it Feels to Be Adopted by Jill Kremetz and The Secret of Me: A Novel in Verse by Meg Kearney are good options for this age child.

Teen Age

Developmentally, teenagers work on forming an identity separate from their families. The adopted teenager may want information about their adoption, birth family, why they were given up for adoption, etc. Teenage years can be volatile and it is not uncommon for teens to establish their independence by using adoption as a weapon, for example yelling, "Why should I listen to you? You are not my real Mother!" Statements such as this are attempts by the child to manipulate their parents and are not about adoption. The best response is to not react to a hurtful statement such as this, to not be diverted from the real issue, and not engage in a talk about adoption at that time. Instead get at the bottom of what is truly bothering the child. If adoption has been talked about throughout the child's life and is a comfortable topic for the family, it is less likely that the teenager will use this tactic. By the time a child is reaching 18 years old it is important that they know their adoption story and that their parents have provided them with the information that they know. If the ground work has been laid by the parents at an earlier age, it will be much easier to handle adoption issues with teenagers. It is essential that teenagers and young adults know that it is okay for them to talk with their parents about their feelings and issues related to their birth families. Books for teenagers include: Adopted Teens Only: A Survival Guide to Adolescence by Deanea Gorbett and All About Adoption, how to deal with questions of your past by Anne Lanchon.

Authors Note: Check out the REACH Tulare County's Adoption Library for Adoption related books for all ages. Access titles online at www.reachtularecounty.org or stop by the office. For more information call Marji Peterson at (559)741-7358.

Book Reviews



Book Review for Kids

Horace

by Holly Keller

The book Horace, by Holly Keller, consistently appears on recommended reading lists for adoptive families. It's a beautiful illustrated book about an adopted spotted leopard being raised by a family of striped tigers. Every night before Horace goes to sleep his mother tells him, "We chose you when you were a tiny baby because you had lost your first family and needed a new one. We liked your spots, and we wanted you to be our child." After an adventure in the outside world, Horace returns home and asks, "Mama, if you chose me, can I choose you, too?" "That would be very nice," Mama said. "Then I do", Horace whispered, and he was asleep." This book is a joy to read and share with others. We hope many REACH families read this book together and enjoy Horace's poignant story.

Book Review for Parents

When Love is Not Enough – A Guide to Parenting Children with RAD-Reactive Attachment Disorder

by Nancy L Thomas

When Love is not Enough was recommended to REACH by a Tulare County Social Worker. The book was originally published in 1997 and it remains one of the most highly recommended books on parenting children with compromised attachment issues. When Love is Not Enough was updated and expanded in 2005. The new edition offers parenting techniques to help foster/adopt children as they transition to their adoptive homes. It also helps parents understand the causes and symptoms of Reactive Attachment Disorder. And most important, the book offers effective solutions!

Movie Review for Families

Babe

Babe was a surprise hit in 1995 and nominated for six Academy Awards. Babe is about the title character, a heroic little pig who's been taken in by a friendly farmer who senses that he and the pig share a common destiny. Babe is a mischief-maker and is adopted by a border collie and raised as a puppy. He also befriends a duck who thinks he's a rooster. In the end, Babe saves the day as a champion "sheep-pig." Babe has a supporting cast of talking barnyard animals and a chorus of singing mice. The movie is hilarious, visually imaginative, and a family classic.

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We're on the Web:
www.reachtularecounty.org



Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support Services

Resource: We provide 1) telephone support & referral to local services 2) referral to local adoption related community trainings 3) linkage to local therapists with experience working with adoptive families 4) lending library and website access 5) quarterly newsletter which includes book reviews, and relevant adoption related information.

Education: Educational support groups and meetings are held twice a month and offer a variety of topics pertinent to adoption. In addition, access to the lending library and website offer many opportunities to learn more about adoption and the impact of adoption on all members of the triad (adoptive parents, adoptees and birth family).

Advocacy: We are here to help navigate common issues facing adoptive families. We assist adoptive parents with advocating for the assistance needed in working with educational, legislative and community partners to best meet their children's needs.

Crisis Intervention/Case Management: Participants are eligible to receive short-term therapeutic services, free of charge, by master's level social workers who are trained and experienced in adoption-related issues. Families are also eligible to receive in-home case management services as needed. Spanish translation services are provided.

Hope: We utilize our agency values of Respect, Integrity, Courage & Hope (RICH) to guide our work with adoptive families. Our goal is to promote safe, healthy and stable adoptive families through access to our services.