

# REACH

**Tulare  
County**

*Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope*

*Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support*



## REACH Pre & Post Adoption Services Program

**Fall 2010**

Greetings REACH families and adoption helpers! We hope your summer was restful and the first weeks of school went well. Typically the REACH program gets busier when school starts. That's when parents need support, advocacy, and information to help their children succeed at school. Please let us know if you have concerns about your child's education; good communication between parents and teachers and appropriate expectations can enhance positive classroom experiences.

As we mentioned in the previous newsletter, REACH is making some changes! Our Parent Retreat/Support Group will continue to meet at the Visalia YMCA the second and the fourth Tuesday of the month. Child care will continue in the main building. However, parents will meet in the YMCA board room to enjoy a quieter setting, comfortable chairs, and access to a kitchen. The board room is located in the YMCA house east of the main building. Parents will drop their children off in the main building and enter the board room from the back of the house. The second Tuesday of the month we will offer specific adoption training, led by local adoption professionals or panels of speakers with interesting stories to tell. The fourth Tuesday of the month we will continue to provide a place for adoptive parents to share their challenges and accomplishments with other parents.

Another REACH change involves the development of adoption support groups for children. More information will be provided at the October 12th Parent Retreat/Support Group. Please call Marji Peterson, MFT Intern if you would like to register. Our children's support groups will be scheduled according to the number of children interested and their ages. Also, look for interviews with local adoption professionals in the REACH newsletter.

Finally, the biggest change of all. REACH is moving! As of October 1st, our new address is 4128 South Demaree, Suite B, Visalia CA 93277. This location is a few blocks south of the Demaree/Caldwell intersection. Our phone numbers and email addresses will not change. Hope to see you there soon!

### Inside This Issue

1. Services Program, REACH Staff
2. Working with Adoptive Families In A Mental Health Setting, National Adoption Day Celebration
3. Community Resources, Support Group Updates
4. Helping Children Exposed to Prenatal Drugs & Alcohol Manage Their Emotions
5. Managing Holiday Stress, Book Reviews
6. About REACH

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# Working With Adoptive Families In A Mental Health Setting

*Interview with Connie Treis, MFT, RN*

Connie Treis, MFT & RN, has been working children with compromised attachment issues for more than 20 years. She is an expert on Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD), which occurs when a child is unable to form healthy social relationships, particularly with primary caregivers. Often children with RAD seem charming and helpless to outsiders while they wage a campaign of chaos within the family. RAD is frequently seen in children who have inconsistent or abusive care in early childhood, including children adopted from orphanages or foster care.

## **I: What do you look for when you begin working with a family?**

**C:** For the most part I look for parents who have the capacity to nurture children and address their own mental health needs. Also, I look at the parent's discipline and attachment styles because if they are different, if one parent believes there's a problem and the other minimizes outrageous behavior, progress is unlikely. I've noticed that parents are reassured and relieved at first because I believe them. I understand RAD kids know how to push their parent's buttons and bring out the worst in them. It takes parents a lot of time and energy to do this work so I look for parents who are deeply committed.

## **I: When adoptive families come to you for treatment, what are their most common concerns?**

**C:** Parents want to know how to manage tantrums; the more severe the past trauma, the more prolonged the fits. Also, parents have to be sensitized to lying and stealing. It's best to say things like, "Truth telling is important in our home" instead of, "You can't lie." The reason kids lie is because they

are survivors, they've lived through terrorist situations and they lie to take care of themselves. Now they are in a different situation where there's plenty of food and people are nice, but kids are still reacting to the past. By lying and stealing kids regain control; they can become aggressive and display a lack of wanting to join with the family.

## **I: Where should parents start?**

**C:** The most effective thing parents can do is take care of themselves and if they are married, take care of their relationship. Parents tend to go in one of two directions. Some parents become co-dependent and believe there's just one more thing they can do or try, and their faith and love will turn things around. Other parents become angry that their child isn't responding to normal boundaries. They yell louder, get stricter, and use corporal punishment. Neither of these patterns are productive. Parents with special needs kids, especially with attachment issues, need to learn where the kid is coming from and what their needs are. They need to know a lot about RAD and they need know how to not to take things personally.

## **I: What can parents do?**

**C:** Parents can make sure they have a good support system and the ability to advocate for their child. They need to work as a team with people on the same page, including teachers, social workers, and therapists. While parents know the most about what's going on, they need others to work with them for the best results. Parents have to take an advocacy role, they can't just wait for things to happen or assume things will take care of themselves. Sometimes parents need to educate others because professionals don't always know the best thing to do with RAD.

## **I: How do you know treatment is helping?**

**C:** I see a lot more loving eye contact and notice kids respond quicker to what their parents ask; they obey in a positive way. Most of all I notice a lot more laughter.

## **I: Do you have a pearl of wisdom when it comes to adoptive parenting?**

**C:** That's simple: the kids are worth it!

## **Hang On To Your Hats! National Adoption Day Approaches**

National Adoption Day provides an opportunity for courtrooms across the nation to open their doors and celebrate children who are adopted through foster care. Since 2000, more than 30,000 children had their adoptions finalized on National Adoption Day. This year on Saturday, November 20th, families, adoption advocates, policymakers, judges and volunteers will come together to celebrate adoption through foster care at the Tulare County courthouse in Visalia.

In celebration of adoptive families in our community, Tulare County Adoptions partnered with REACH and Aspiranet to host a National Adoption Day event at the Imagine-U Museum. The event will take place on November 13th, the exact time will be determined soon. Look for a flyer in the mail or call 559-733-6180. Like last year, many fun filled child friendly activities are in the works. Local adoption leaders will read adoption stories and families will receive an adoption book to take home. Come celebrate adoption with us!



# Support and Resources

## Community Resources

### COS FOSTER & ADOPTION WORKSHOPS

The College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Care Program offers trainings of interest to foster and adoptive parents at no charge. Register with Linda Paredez at (559) 737-4842 or lindap@cos.edu. Topics include ADHD, the effects of meth on children, fetal alcohol syndrome, autism spectrum disorders, and helping kids through the holidays.



### 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 4:30-6:30pm. Support groups in Madera and Oakhurst are also held on a monthly basis. Contact Kathy Steele, LCSW, at (559)222-4969 for more information.

### 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.

## Tulare REACH Support Groups

### NEW SUPPORT GROUP FOR ADOPTED CHILDREN

REACH offers support groups for adopted children. Dates and times depend on the number of children who register and their ages. For more information attend the October 12th Parent Retreat/Support Group or call Marji Peterson, MFT-I @ 741-7358.

### PARENT RETREAT SUPPORT GROUP

Join our dynamic group and share your adoption story. Enrich your parenting by learning from experts and other adoptive parents! Child care provided. Training hours available. RSVP with Marji Peterson @ 741-7358.

Visalia YMCA @ Court & Tulare Ave  
2nd & 4th Tuesday of each month  
6:30 to 8:00pm

The 2nd Tuesday of the month is led by local adoption professionals or panels. The 4th Tuesday of the month is designed for parents to share their stories with other parents.

October 12th	<i>Mini Workshop: Meeting the Needs of Adopted Children: Support Groups for Children – Alison Action, LMFT</i>
October 26th	<i>Parent Retreat</i>
November 9th	<i>Mini Workshop: What is an IEP and 504 Plan? - Learn more about special education options - Brenda Beatty, MSW</i>
November 23rd	<i>HOLIDAY-No support group held today</i>
December 14th	<i>Mini Workshop: What is the difference between private or international adoption and fost/adopt? - JulieAnne Jones, MSW</i>
December 28	<i>HOLIDAY-No support group held today</i>

### ADOPTED TEEN SUPPORT GROUP

This group is designed for teens between 13 and 18. Call Marji Peterson, MFT-I for a screening interview. There are no assigned topics for this group. We meet the first & third Friday of the month 5:00 to 7:00pm. This group is held at 4128 South Demaree Suite B, Visalia, CA.

# Helping Children Exposed to Prenatal Drugs & Alcohol Manage Their Emotions

By Alison M. Acton, LMFT

Dealing with children's emotions such as anger is often difficult for parents. We know that children often repeat what they learn at home from the way their parents express emotions. Children are also wired with certain tolerances and dispositions genetically, and this has serious implications for children that have been drug exposed. According to Ira J. Chasnoff, M.D., a leading expert in the field of drug exposed children, these children reach the threshold for stimulation quickly, are easily over-stimulated, and react impulsively in attempts to release escalating tension (Chasnoff, 2001). When tensions escalate these children may experience over the top severe melt downs and have great difficulty calming down. Most parents will attempt to soothe and calm the child in traditional ways and yet this often falls short and does not provide the child with relief.

The drug exposed child can have more difficulty managing frustration and stimulation and regulating their moods. This can show up as behavioral problems at home and in the classroom. This is not the child's fault but a result of how the drug exposure has affected receptors and nerve endings in their brain (Chasnoff, 2001). Many adoptive parents of drug exposed children report that there is an intensity in emotions and reactions when their children are having difficulties.

Typically much attention is spent on helping drug exposed infants due to their age, vulnerability, and medical issues. By the time the child is older usually the adoption is finalized and the support system that was in place to focus on the infant's needs is no longer available. Often severe behaviors begin to be noticed when the child starts school, pre-school and/or kindergarten. In the most severe cases some children get kicked out of pre-school programs for aggressive and out of control behaviors and have difficulty maintaining self control as they proceed into kindergarten and the elementary grades.

**There are a number of things that parents can do to help their drug exposed children manage emotions and behavior in order to prevent over stimulation and melt downs. If your child is affected by pre-natal drug exposure some strategies to utilize include:**

- 1. Recognize and acknowledge that your child has some differences in their brain that account for their over the top reactions and behaviors and your child is not just choosing to be disruptive, aggressive, out of control, etc.**
- 2. Do not raise your voice with your child, keep a calm and firm tone; raising your voice can escalate the child's reactions.**
- 3. Utilize consequences for behavior that are early and immediate and not warnings with future threats (i.e. if you don't stop you won't be able to play with your friends tomorrow). When attempting to relieve tension drug exposed children will not be concerned with the future (Chasnoff, 2001).**
- 4. Teach you child to recognize when he/she is starting to feel out of control (before their behaviors escalate) and strategies to cope with this such as deep breathing, counting to 10, asking for a time out from the situation, meditation, exercise, etc.**
- 5. Set up 5 to 6 simple rules at home regarding behavioral expectations, go over with your child, reinforce good behaviors with praise or stickers, and specific small rewards that your child can work towards.**
- 6. Provide stable routines so your child knows what to expect and their environment is predictable and consistent. This structure helps children with self regulation problems.**
- 7. Take your child to a pediatrician that is knowledgeable about drug exposed children.**
- 8. Educate yourself, a good book to start with is *The Nature of Nurture, Biology, Environment, and the Drug-Exposed Child* by Ira J. Chasnoff, M.D.**
- 9. Attend an Adoption Support Group and meet other parents who have adopted drug exposed children to find out what has been helpful to them.**

# Managing Holiday Stress



by Marji Peterson, MFT Intern

The holidays tend to be stressful for families in general, and we are fast approaching the busiest holiday season of the year. The way holidays affect adoptive families depends on many things, including family stability, how and why your child was adopted, and your child's age and heritage.

For children adopted as newborns or infants, adoption may not affect family holidays. However, when small children are adopted into existing families, parents must prevent resentments by making sure all children are treated the same.

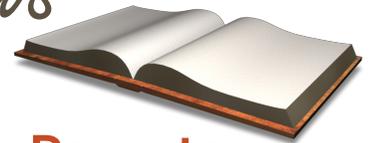
Children adopted at an older age tend to experience holiday stress. If a child is adopted after age 7 due to abuse or neglect, holidays can remind them of their past. These children have strong memories, so parents need to ensure celebrations are something to look forward to. Incorporating traditions or activities from your child's first family, along with creating new traditions for the adoptive family, can be beneficial.

Stressful holidays can also occur in cross cultural and mixed race families. While cultural issues may not come into play until children are older, different cultural beliefs and traditions can surface down the road. In this case, parents and children can learn together; parents can embrace their child's heritage and incorporate different traditions into family celebrations.

## The following tips may also help your family avoid or relieve holiday stress:

- *Recognize that memories tend to resurface during the holidays; let your child know you understand and his/her feelings are normal.*
- *Allow your child to talk when ready. Try not to push or avoid conversations. Consider counseling or support groups to work through emotions.*
- *Identify with your child by sharing your own stories about difficult holidays. This helps avoid feelings of isolation and fosters open communication.*
- *Keep your child active but remember the holiday season tends to be busy anyway, so don't overdue.*

# Book Reviews



## Book Review for Parents

### Parenting From The Inside Out: How A Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive

by Daniel Siegel, M.D. & Mary Hartzell, M.Ed.

In this highly acclaimed book, the authors focus on what's going on inside the parent's brain to help them understand why they parent the way they do, and how to become better parents. The authors stress the importance of parents making peace with their past to improve interactions with their own kids. By making sense of their lives, parents can deepen their capacity for self-understanding which leads to better parenting. The authors offer the reader a mix of straight narrative, introspective journaling exercises, and lessons in neurobiology. The material requires a lot of focus and attention but it's worthwhile. This book is a new addition to the REACH Lending Library.

## Book Review for Youth

### The Secret of Me: A Novel in Poems

by Meg Kearney

This novel in verse follows 14-year-old Lizzie through a tough year when she is plagued by a personal secret; she wants to know the story behind her adoption and her own identity. Her lack of information leads her to worry obsessively and she wonders if being adopted makes her less of a person. The Secret of Me is appropriate for adults working with young adoptees and young teens who enjoy self reflection and thoughtful family stories. The author includes insights into family discussions about adoption. This book is available in the REACH Lending Library.

## Movie Review for Families

### The Lost Child

A 2000 Television Movie with Mercedes Ruehl & Jamey Sheridan, The Lost Child is a story about Rebecca, a woman who goes in search of her natural parents. Her adoption was not a secret in her loving adoptive family, but things changed when her adoptive mother passed away and her father's new wife showed no interest. Years later Rebecca is contacted by a Navajo woman who is looking for her siblings. Rebecca is welcomed with open arms on a visit to the reservation but she must integrate the old and the new so that her whole family can be together happily. This movie is appropriate for older children and it's available through Amazon.com for \$4 to \$5.

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We're on the Web:  
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Raising Hope. Empowering Community.



## 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.