

# REACH

Tulare  
County

*Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope*

*Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support*



## Welcome Fall

Fall 2012

Farewell summer fun and hot weather! The fall season is upon us and much to our dismay, Christmas ornaments are already on display at local retail stores. Families prepare and celebrate many rituals and traditions in October, November and December, so here we go, let's hold on to our hats!

Before leaving the summer behind, I'd like to mention the two successful adoption trainings REACH Tulare County facilitated in June. You may already know about the first training; Deborah Gray's "Nurturing Adoptions: Practical Approaches to Treating and Parenting Today's Adopted Children and Teens". This training focused on parenting and treating older children affected by prenatal drug and alcohol exposure. You can read more on this topic and other issues related to adoption in Ms. Gray's books: [Attaching in Adoption: Practical Tools for Today's Parents](#) and [Nurturing Adoptions: Creating Resilience After Neglect and Trauma](#). REACH highly recommends these books and more information is available through our office.

REACH also facilitated a second successful training in June. It was a webinar designed for adoption professionals called "Building Trauma Informed Training and Support Programs for Adoptive Parents – Assessment, Through Placement and Beyond". Ms. Schooler is an author and international speaker on adoption and other child welfare matters. Her training focused on helping professionals train foster/adopt families to become Trauma Competent Healing Parents. Ms. Schooler has written two excellent books: [Wounded Children Healing Homes – How Traumatized Children Impact Adoptive and Foster Families](#) and [Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child: Making Sense of the Past](#). REACH also highly recommends these books and more information is available through our office.

The Fall 2012 newsletter covers a variety of topics that touch on parenting children with a history of prenatal drug exposure and trauma, and how the holiday season can impact adopted children and their families. Our staff wishes all members of the REACH community a happy and peaceful holiday season beginning with Columbus Day and continuing through Halloween, Election and Veterans Day, Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, the first day of winter, Christmas and the New Year. That's a lot of celebrating!

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# Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent

By Marji Peterson, MFTI

Based on the work of Jayne E. Schooler, Adoptive Parent, Trainer & Author

Trauma has quickly become a popular topic for adoptive parents and professionals. As REACH families know by experience, the vast majority of children placed for adoption through foster care have histories of maltreatment. This maltreatment can involve trauma and pre-natal exposure to toxic substances. Trauma is an incidence of psychological injury or pain, and along with pre-natal exposure, can cause developmental delays and challenging behaviors.

Meeting the needs of traumatized children is a hard, 24/7 job. Parents need special training and a strong support system so they don't become overwhelmed and get to a breaking point. In response to these needs, the Tulare County REACH Adoption Services Program facilitates adoption support groups twice a month that enhances specialized parenting skills and mutual support for parents.

One of the fundamental tenets of adoptive parenting is understanding that children's behaviors are the only voice of their past. In fact, children's misbehaviors are often a language of unmet needs. Typically, traumatized children have specific behaviors developed to survive neglect, abuse and trauma. However in adoptive homes, these same behaviors can undermine attachment and adjustment. When challenging behaviors occur, it's helpful for parents to think about and discuss what the child needs or is trying to express.

For instance, an adoptive family is driving home from dinner at a restaurant. Suddenly a five year old starts screaming that he wants to go to a fast food restaurant, NOW! He thrashes in his car seat and everyone becomes upset. The parents don't understand how their child could be hungry right after he ate.

When calm was restored at home, the parents asked their child why he wanted fast food. He explained they were driving down a street where bad things happened, and he was afraid. The parents asked why he didn't say that at the time. He replied, "I don't know, all I could think about was (a particular fast food restaurant)." Most likely fast food restaurants evoke pleasant memories for this child; he did not want to eat again, he wanted to feel safe.

It takes time and patience to become a trauma competent healing parent, and lots of practice. For instance, it's essential for adoptive parents to remain as calm as possible, no matter how intense their

ability to form relationships, medical and body issues, the ability to label and express feelings, behavior, learning and language development, and self esteem. Also we are learning skills to parent effectively.

***"A strong attachment between a parent and their child is needed for healing to begin. This is the essence of becoming a trauma competent healing parent."***

child's moods or behaviors. This takes super human effort, and can be especially difficult when extended family and friends do not understand that changes in behavior happen slowly. Also that expectations and discipline strategies are different for traumatized children, not better or worse, but different. Adoptive parents are focused on developing attachment and trust with their children because a strong attachment is needed for healing to begin. This is the essence of becoming a trauma competent healing parent.

Currently REACH support groups, which meet the first and third Tuesday of the month, focus on parenting traumatized children. Among other things, we are learning how trauma affects children's

After the first of the year, REACH Support Groups will begin a formal series of meetings on parenting traumatized children. All adults thinking about adoption, and new and experienced adoptive parents are invited to attend. More information will be provided in our Winter Newsletter and through REACH Program email updates.

If you would like to know more about becoming a trauma competent healing parent, go to Jayne Schooler's blog @ <http://jayneschooler.blogspot.com/> or purchase her book, Wounded Children Healing Homes. Additionally, REACH can provide excellent training and resources for families and professionals working with traumatized adopted children.

## New "REACH Outreach" Program

**We Need Your Help!**

The Tulare County REACH Program is developing a plan to increase community awareness and help more families and individuals receive pre and post adoption services, free of charge.

**WE NEED YOUR HELP!** By virtue of being an adoptive family, parents can become adoption advocates and educators. What would you tell others about adopting through foster care if you had the chance?

Are you a part of a child/family friendly organization that might be interested in learning more about the needs of fost/adopt children? Would you like to have more support from your community and other adoptive families? Would you like to help develop an adoption friendly community?

Be on the look out for more information about REACH Outreach in the next few months. In the meantime, if you have suggestions or ideas about groups or individuals who might benefit from REACH services let us know! We need your help to increase adoption awareness and support in Tulare County.

# Reducing your Child's Triggers During the Holidays

By Vanessa Gutierrez, MFT Intern/Adoption Social Worker

The holidays are a time of family and togetherness. For some it is a time to rejoice in religious/spiritual beliefs. For others it's a time to celebrate the gift of friends and family uniting, all the while sharing special memories. The aroma of food cooking, cookies baking and family and friends engaged in laughter often warms our soul and fills our hearts with bliss.

Holidays can also be a time of unmet expectations, stress and disappointment. Adopted children may experience all of those emotions. The holidays may be a time of unanswered questions, a feeling of disconnection and a sense of emptiness.

For adopted children, holidays are often a reminder of birth parents and memories they will carry, even as adults. They might have happy memories along with reminders of abuse and neglect, and past trauma can trigger various responses. Children can behave as if a traumatic event that occurred in the past is happening all over again.

Children who have been adopted or are in care often wonder where they came from, the meaning of past relationships, and the future of present relationships. This may be true even for children who were adopted very early in life.

The first step in helping adopted children during the holiday season is to establish emotional safety, this is keeping the child psychologically safe through communication, regardless of the child's past traumatic events. After safety has been established, reconnecting children rapidly with familiar and reliable caregivers is perhaps the most effective psychological first aid.

## See below for steps in making it easier for your child to feel emotionally safe during the holidays:

### Include Your Child's Culture

Incorporate your child's culture in your holiday celebrations. Help your child preserve his culture and fond memories based on his or her heritage and traditions. Keep in mind that memorable foods can be a powerful tool for providing comfort and a sense of healing.

### Incorporate Your Child's Birth Family

Difficulty around grief and loss of parents/family members may often be experienced by your adopted child. You might help your child write out a card for their birth parents and keep it in a special place, or light a candle each night to honor the memory of family members no longer in the child's life, who remain in their heart.

### Simplicity is Key

Holidays are often overwhelming for an adopted child who may not be familiar with your traditions and your family; it just may be too much and cause unnecessary anxiety. Keep the holidays simple until your child gets adjusted to their new family. Limit the number of parties you attend, the gifts you exchange and the families you introduce them to. Talk with your child about how they may be feeling to understand their comfort level.

### Lower Your Expectations

The holidays are an emotional time, and when children are still processing their grief over the past, it is uncertain how they'll react and what their behavior will be like during this highly charged time of the year. Pushing your child to enjoy the holidays when they are not yet ready will only lock the two of you into repeated power struggles and arguments that'll put the entire family in a not so festive mood.

### Communication is Most Effective

Don't forget to talk to your adopted child about what the holidays mean to them, what they are thinking about and how they'd like to celebrate. Doing that can result in a more festive holiday celebration for your entire family.

# Lessons Learned from Deborah Gray's Presentation

By Alison M. Acton, LMFT

On June 20th a noted adoption author and counselor, Deborah Gray, gave an excellent presentation in Visalia on "Nurturing Adoptions: Practical Approaches to Treating and Parenting Today's Adopted Children and Teens". The training was sponsored by REACH Tulare County Adoption Services to address the needs of school age children who were drug exposed in utero. Deborah did not disappoint and presented several practical strategies to help caretakers parent drug exposed children. As a parent of a school age drug exposed child, I found the information to be relevant and helpful. The following is a list of some of the points I gleaned from the training:

**1.** Children who were exposed to amphetamines in utero can have a very difficult time shifting from one sense to another, especially from auditory processing to what their body is doing. In other words they can hear their parent telling them what to do, but have a hard time connecting what they should be doing with their body. Usually parents repeat their directions again and again, which is more auditory processing. A better strategy is to include pictures, modeling and practice with telling a child what to do. I began incorporating this into a daily behavioral chart with my son. We wrote down each behavioral expectation and paired it with a picture that represented the desired behavior. At the end of the day a point was earned for meeting each expectation and eventually points were exchanged for prizes. My son learned the expectations quickly from this type of chart.

**2.** Often children who were drug exposed respond best to role playing. We have actually tried this with our son with great success. He was having trouble with a boy in his class at the beginning of second grade. The boy wanted to fight our son and continued to boast about it. Our son did not want to fight, but he did want to appear cool, save face, and seem tough at the same time. Our normal response was to say things like, "Don't fight; tell the teacher when someone is bothering you" etc. We noticed these comments did not help our son and he continued to be bothered by this boy. Then my husband starting role playing with our son and came up with a great plan. They practiced the following scenario: my husband asked our son to fight and he responded by stating boldly "I don't fight at school!" This worked well for our son and soon after he was able to tell the boy what was bothering him (our son never saw this boy outside of school). The problem stopped.

**3.** Many drug exposed kids can be engaging conversationalists; however, long conversations are tortuous for them. For the most part, parent's long winded explanations are not effective. The best strategy is to make directions short and simple so children can see the cause and effect.

**4.** When children have massive uterine drug exposure, their brain is traumatized. They tend to react quickly to things to prepare for danger. This is an automatic response. Children with this issue need to be taught skills to calm themselves down. Since the child's brain is wired for high alert, the brain is impulsive rather than selective and inhibiting. Also the brain sacrifices the development of memory in favor of hypervigilance and scanning for danger. Sustained attention is difficult. In working with parents of drug exposed children, I've noticed many parents describe how their child gets revved up easily and can have severe, over the top meltdowns. Once the child starts revving up, it's very hard to soothe or calm the child. Parents voicing consequences in an attempt to calm the child are useless at this point. Teaching a child calming exercises or activities that they can employ before they get revved up is a much better strategy.

**5.** 92% of children who were exposed to drugs during the last trimester of their birthmother's pregnancy will likely have Attention Deficit Disorder. This usually becomes evident when the child reaches school age, however they can respond well to medication to treat this disorder. I have found this to be true with my son who was placed on medication in order to maintain himself and be successful in the school environment.

For more information regarding this training, Deborah Gray's books, or treatment resources for drug exposed children, contact Marji Peterson at the Tulare County REACH program at (559)741-7358.



## Books for Adults:

### Creating Ceremonies: Innovative Ways to Meet Adoption Challenges

By Cheryl A. Lieberman

All families, no matter how they are brought together, can struggle to thrive. For adoptive families where history is not always shared, rites and traditions can be more complicated. This is where the book, [Creating Ceremonies: Innovative Ways to Meet Adoption Challenges](#) can help. It's a rich resource to help adoptive families cope with the day-to-day joys, changes and challenges of family life. The stories are carefully written to reach out to a wide range of adoptive families and cultures. The ceremonies cover a wide spectrum and include ways to celebrate holidays as a family.

## Wounded Children, Healing Homes:

### How Traumatized Children Impact Adoptive and Foster Families

by Jayne E. Schooler, Betsy Keefer Smalley and Timothy Callahan

[Wounded Children, Healing Homes](#) is a valuable resource that includes the stories of real adoptive parents struggling with the challenge of raising traumatized children. The book provides parents with an understanding of their children's needs so they are better prepared to meet them. Divided in five parts, the book begins with a look at how unmet expectations affect an adoptive parent's response to his or her child—a child whose behavior seems to scream rejection. Part two examines attachment theory and the impact trauma has on a child and his or her adoptive family. Part three explores how crises can evolve and threaten the stability of adoptive families; it also includes suggestions on how to handle these crises. Part four discusses the educational needs of traumatized children and how adoptive parents can be effective advocates for their children. Part five offers useful parenting strategies. Appendices at the end of the book list resources for adoptive parents

## Books for Children:

### Adoption Stories for Young Children

By Randall B. Hicks

[Adoption Stories for Young Children](#) is a book that has photos of real babies, kids, birthparents and adoptive parents. It explains in very simple terms why some parents cannot care for their children and choose to place them for adoption. It also shows photographs of real adoptive parents who cannot bear children of their own and desperately want children. And it introduces the idea that adults have often been adopted too. Altogether this book provides a great introduction to the beauty of adoption as a way to build a family.

## Books for Youth:

### Wild Things

by Clay Carmichael

Eleven-year-old Zoe trusts no one. Her father left before she was born and after the death of her irresponsible mother, Zoe goes to live with her uncle, a former surgeon and famed metal sculptor. She's sure her uncle will fail her as everyone else has. Reclusive since his wife's death, Uncle Henry takes Zoe to Sugar Hill, North Carolina, where he welds sculptures as stormy as his moods. Zoe and Henry have much in common: brains, fiery and creative natures, and badly broken hearts. Zoe confronts small-town prejudice with a quick temper. She warms to Henry's odd but devoted friends, meets a mysterious teenage boy living wild in the neighboring woods, and works to win the trust of a feral cat while struggling to trust herself. Zoe's questing spirit leads her to uncover the wild boy's identity, lay bare a local lie, and begin to understand the true power of Henry's art. Then one decisive night, she and the boy risk everything in a reckless act of heroism.



## Top 5 Holiday and Winter Movies with an Adoption Theme

### 1. Elf

After visiting an orphanage, Santa discovers that one of the babies had crawled into his sack. One of Santa's top elves takes the baby to raise. As the child grows it becomes obvious that he is not of elf lineage as he's about 6'5" tall. He decides to go back to New York to find his birth father. This 2003 movie is hilarious with loads of fun and tenderness as the giant elf deals with cultural differences between his birth family and adoptive family.

### 2. Heidi

Heidi is orphaned and sent to live with a grumpy grandfather. He ignores her at first but as time goes on he grows to love and care for the little girl. An aunt appears who takes Heidi away from her grandfather and moves her to a different home to be a playmate for a disabled girl. Meanwhile, Heidi's grandfather searches for her.

### 3. The Little Drummer Boy

A bitter orphaned child finds comfort through music and a meeting with the Christ child. The Little Drummer boy sends a beautiful message of hope and healing after anger and abandonment.

### 4. Nester, the Long Eared Donkey

Nester was born with long ears and was teased for being different. The other animals kicked Nester out of the stable, forcing him and his mother to sleep in the snow. A snow storm comes and Nester's mother sacrifices herself to keep her son warm. Poor Nester is alone, until a cherub tells him that he will be chosen by a couple named Mary and Joseph for a very important journey to Bethlehem.

### 5. Snow Dogs

Miami dentist, Ted Brooks is about to get thrown into a whole new world when he receives word of a reading of a will. Ted, who is in his 30's, had no idea he was adopted and now he has discovered that his birth mom has recently died and left him her estate - in Alaska! Fun follows as Dr. Brooks makes his way to icy state, learns to deal with the elements, and discovers what all he has inherited.



### Adoption and the Holidays

[www.adoptionissues.org/adoption\\_and\\_holidays.html](http://www.adoptionissues.org/adoption_and_holidays.html)

### Educating Family Members

[www.adoptionssupport.org/newsletter/2009/November2009.php](http://www.adoptionssupport.org/newsletter/2009/November2009.php)

### Surviving the Holidays

[www.adoption.about.com/od/survivingtheholidays](http://www.adoption.about.com/od/survivingtheholidays)

# SUPPORT GROUPS

## OCTOBER

- 2** *REACH SUPPORT GROUP*  
Waiting/In The Making Families Mixer  
6:30-8:00pm Tulare County Location
- 9** *REACH SUPPORT GROUP*  
Kings County Adoption Support Group  
5:30 -7:00pm Kings County Location
- 16** *REACH SUPPORT GROUP*  
Parent Retreat /Speaker Presentations  
6:30-8:00pm Tulare County Location
- 22** *COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS TRAINING*  
Hoarding & Other Food Issues  
6:00-9:00pm College of Sequoias Location
- 30** *COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS TRAINING*  
Effects of Meth on Children  
6:00-9:00pm Kings HSA Location

## NOVEMBER

- 5** *COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS TRAINING*  
How to Talk so Kids Will Listen  
and Listen so Kids Will Talk  
6:00-9:00pm Kings HSA Location
- 6** *REACH SUPPORT GROUP*  
Waiting/In The Making Families Mixer  
6:30-8:00pm Tulare County Location
- 6** *COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS TRAINING*  
Rebuilding Child Lives  
6:00-9:00pm College of Sequoias Location
- 9** *COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS TRAINING*  
Guardianships & Extended Foster Care  
9:00am-12:00pm College of Sequoias Location
- 13** *REACH SUPPORT GROUP*  
Kings County Adoption Support Group  
5:30 -7:00pm Kings County Location
- 26** *COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS TRAINING*  
Shaken Baby/SIDS  
6:00-9:00pm Kings HSA Location

## DECEMBER

- 3&10** *COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS TRAINING*  
Autism Spectrum Disorder  
6:00-9:00pm Kings HSA Location
- 4** *REACH SUPPORT GROUP*  
Waiting/In The Making Families Mixer  
6:30-8:00pm Tulare County Location
- 4&11** *COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS TRAINING*  
Impact of Trauma on Child Development  
6:00-9:00pm College of Sequoias Location
- 11** *REACH SUPPORT GROUP*  
Kings County Adoption Support Group  
5:30 - 7:00pm Kings County Location

## REACH ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUPS

### Tulare County Location

Visalia YMCA  
211 West Tulare Ave. Visalia CA 93277  
Child care and training hours provided  
Contact Marji Peterson, MFTI  
(559)741-7358 ext. 4512 or mpeterson@aspiranet.org

### WAITING/IN THE MAKING FAMILIES MIXER

*1st Tuesday of each month*

This group is designed for adults thinking about adoption, parents awaiting adoptive placement, and parents with children recently placed in their homes. Topics relate to family transitions and adjustments.

### PARENT RETREAT/SPEAKER PRESENTATIONS

*3rd Tuesday of each month*

This group is designed for new and experienced adoptive parents as well as others touched by adoption. Participants are encouraged to share their family's challenges and triumphs. The topics are generated by parents and focus on developing specialized parenting skills.

### Kings County Location

Hanford Family Connections  
315 Lacey Blvd. Hanford, CA 93230  
(Between McDonalds & Burger King)  
Child care and training hours provided  
Contact: Vanessa Gutierrez, MFTI  
(559)741-7358 or vgutierrez@aspiranet.org

### KINGS COUNTY ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP

*2nd Tuesday of each month*

This group is designed for new and experienced adoptive parents.

## COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS FOSTER & KINSHIP CARE EDUCATION PROGRAM

The College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Care Education Program offers trainings of interest to foster and adoptive parents at no charge in Visalia and Hanford. For a complete list of classes google "COS Visalia Kinship". Register with Linda Paredes at (559)737-4842 or lindap@cos.edu.

*Classes are presented in English and Spanish.*

### Training location information:

College of the Sequoias  
915 South Mooney Boulevard  
Visalia, CA 93277

Kings Human Services Agency (HSA)  
1400 W. Lacey Blvd.  
Hanford CA 93230

Aspiranet  
151 Canal Drive  
Turlock, CA 95380

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We're on the Web:  
[www.reachtularecounty.org](http://www.reachtularecounty.org)



ASPIRAnet  
*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.