

REACH

Tulare
County

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support



Greetings!

Fall 2013

Fall is upon us! Temperatures are slowly dropping, puffy white clouds are filling blue skies, sunsets are turning purple and orange, and wind blown leaves are falling to the ground. Our homes smell like apples and cider, cinnamon and pumpkin pie, even if it comes from a candle! Winter festivities quickly approach, but we have a lot to focus on now.

Big changes are afoot with REACH Adoption Support Groups. WE ARE RELOCATING to the Visalia Boys and Girls Club and will meet ONCE A MONTH beginning in October. Training hours and child care will be provided at our new location, however, PARENTS MUST RSVP FOR CHILD CARE. Child care is appropriate for children old enough to play in a group setting. Infants are welcome to join parents. Depending upon interest, groups will also be facilitated at the REACH office for young children, youth or young adults. Please call or email Marji Peterson, if you would like to participate. See page 6 for more support group details.

In This Issue: REACH has a great article to share called *Talking with Your Adopted Teen: It's Possible and Important* by Ellen Singer, LCSW. This article is informative for all adoptive families, including parents with young ones. As we all know, its best to address adoption issues sooner than later depending on a child's developmental understanding, and we can never prepare for the teen years too soon! Often parents and children want to talk about adoption but they don't have words to express their thoughts and feelings. REACH is here to support families as they learn to communicate about adoption, and the REACH Lending Library has MANY books for parents and children that make talking about adoption easy.

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NEED HELP?

Is your adoptive child exhibiting any of the following behaviors?

- Frequent running away
- Sexualized behavior
- Posttraumatic stress disorder
- Aggressive/assaultive behavior
- Oppositional/defiant behavior
- Self-injurious behavior
- One or more hospitalizations in a Mental Health facility
- Substance use disorder
- Fire starter
- Minor criminal behavior
- School behavior/truancy problems
- Beyond control of parents and/or primary care adults
- Mild Developmental disorder not recognized by a Regional Center

If so, we can help! The REACH program can connect adoptive families to services that can help. Some of the services available to your family include Therapeutic Behavior Services (TBS) and Tulare County Wraparound. TBS is an intensive one-to-one behavioral mental health service. The service is available to parents/caregivers of children/youth who experience serious emotional challenges. Tulare County Wraparound provides high-risk youth and their families an alternative to group home care. Wraparound is a family-centered, strength-based, needs-driven philosophy promoting the reestablishment of at-risk youth and families into community support systems.

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Talking with Your Adopted Teen: It's Possible and Important

by Ellen Singer, LCSW-C ©2003

Ellen Singer, an experienced clinical social worker, is an adoption specialist at the Center for Adoption Support and Education, Inc. (C.A.S.E.) in Maryland. At C.A.S.E. she leads support groups for adoptive parents, offers trainings about adoption issues, and writes articles for parents and professionals. Ms. Singer is also an adoptive parent.

Teens typically have an endless appetite for talking with friends, but when it comes to talking with adults or (even worse) parents, conversation often consists of one-syllable words, grunts, and eye rolls. When it comes to talking about adoption with some teens, parents might as easily climb Mount Everest. During adolescence, however, adopted teens need parental guidance, comfort, and support as much as ever, and parents must work to keep lines of communication open.

Extra Challenges for Adopted Teens

Identity formation and separation are adolescents' two main developmental tasks. Teens explore and answer questions like "Who am I?" and "What are my beliefs and values?" when establishing their identity. Separation involves moving toward independence and personal responsibility—a prospect both exciting and scary that can evoke a "leave me alone, but don't leave me" response in teens. Adoption adds extra complexity to these teen rites of passage. Questions of identity raise unresolved thoughts and feelings about birth parents from whom teens must still psychologically separate. For some adopted teens, separation can also seem like rejection and independence like abandonment—emotions associated with the loss of birth parents. Adopted teens who cannot express these troubling thoughts and emotions to someone (a parent or therapist, for example) are at risk for potentially serious emotional and behavioral problems including depression, substance abuse, school failure, etc.



Why Communication Is Difficult

Parents who have trouble getting young children to stop talking may be stunned with the wall of silence and withdrawal that accompanies adolescence. Teens, though, have good reasons for keeping to themselves.

- Teens may stop talking to create distance from their parents. Distance helps teens feel separate and independent, and even children who used to share

every thought with their parents may desire complete privacy. Parental attempts to communicate may fail because teens often perceive personal questions as intrusive.

- Adopted teens may not be able to articulate what they are feeling—even to themselves. Adoption-related issues can be some of the most emotionally loaded issues teens will ever face. They may experience sadness or anger without really knowing why.
- Thoughts about birth parents may make teens feel disloyal to their adoptive family. This added guilt can make adoption conversations with parents extremely uncomfortable.

So, what's a parent to do?

First, parents must think about their teen. What is he like? (Quiet? Analytical? Dramatic?) What times of the day does she seem more receptive? Next, parents must be honest about their own communication style. Many teens complain that parents don't pay full attention when they are trying to talk. When teens actually want to talk, parents should take the time to really listen.

Five Principles for Effective Parent Communication with Teens

One: Send a clear message that you are open and willing to talk about adoption. Find ways to reach out that diminish the chances of emotional confusion or overload. Many attempts will be rejected, but you may well get credit for the effort.

Kevin was a thoughtful, bright, and athletic 17-year-old who had never talked much about feelings and even less about adoption. One night, while he and his parents were watching television, a news story came on about an adoptee/birth family reunion. When Kevin abruptly got up and went to his room, his parents were certain it was because of the news story.

Kevin's parents knew that if they directly asked him for his thoughts on the news story, he would politely deny that he had any. Instead, they decided to send an e-mail to Kevin the next day. It read: "Kevin, We know we are being typical worried parents, but we love you very much and were wondering if you stopped watching TV because of the story about the young man meeting his birth mother and birth sister. If you had feelings about this, we just want you to know that we're here for you if there's anything you want to talk about. Love, Mom and Dad."

That night, Kevin wrote back: "I would never want to search.

You're my mom and dad and that's it." Kevin's parents then shared their thoughts about searching, and their willingness to support him if he chose to search. Several weeks later at dinner, Kevin casually told his parents that he might like to meet his birth parents some day. They discussed that a bit and then Kevin changed the subject.

Some parents take a more indirect approach. In news stories, movies, and books, themes of loss, uncertainty, and complexity abound. Teens may be willing to share their feelings about such stories without having to directly address adoption or their own story.

Two: Communicate respect for your teen's feelings and show how much you value her opinion. This rule applies to all situations with teens, but be especially careful of your emotions when discussing adoption. Your teen will be watching for signs that you are uncomfortable or disapproving.

Sixteen-year-old Maurya knew that she was conceived during a short-term sexual relationship when her birth mother was 17, and when she entered her junior year of high school, Maurya suddenly began dating several different guys and staying out past curfew. When her parents confronted her about her behavior, Maurya yelled, "I know you think I am a whore just like my birth mother!"

Maurya's behavior and words communicated the pain and anger she felt about her birth mother and her adoption. It was as if she were waiting for her parents to confront her and was relieved by her outburst, but her parents wisely sensed that they could not set limits without first exploring Maurya's feelings. After consulting with their daughter's therapist, Maurya's parents shared their concerns for her safety and well-being, and gently asked to hear Maurya's thoughts about her birth mother and her adoption story.

Because Maurya was willing to express her anger, her parents could talk with her about making different choices than her birth mother, and finding better ways to handle her anger. These discussions eventually relieved some of Maurya's pain and helped her to better understand and forgive her birth mother.

Three: Look for red flags in your teen's behavior. Certain behaviors signal what is going on inside. (See "Six Spots Where Adopted Teens Get Stuck" below.)

Lisa, 15, entered therapy after symptoms of school phobia, peer problems, and self-destructive behavior led to intense family conflicts. While exploring adoption issues, Lisa expressed an interest in her birth history. Without knowing who her birth parents were, she said, she couldn't figure out who she was. Lisa was also frustrated that her mom couldn't understand why she started wearing one green and one blue contact lens (her birth mom had blue eyes; her birth dad had green eyes).

Lisa's dramatic behavior reflected a desire to communicate, but it conflicted with a desire to keep thoughts private since she felt disloyal to her adoptive parents when she spent so much time thinking about her birth parents. Even though Lisa's mother knew about her daughter's conflicted sense of identity and interest in her birth parents, she missed Lisa's signal. As Lisa's mother admitted, she had been minimizing Lisa's feelings and had a very hard time "walking in Lisa's shoes."

Four: Share all available adoption information. Many parents want to protect their children from potentially painful aspects of their adoption story—birth histories, for instance, that involve drug abuse, mental illness, incarceration, or sexual assault. Teens, however, need birth family information as they work to figure out who they are while being supported within their families.

As Joyce Maguire Pavao writes in *The Family of Adoption*, "It is our job to protect our children...from harm. The greatest gift we can give children is to tell them their truths and to help them make sense of these truths, especially when they are complicated and harsh."

Five: Help your teen make connections to his heritage and past. Many adoptees find comfort in learning about and visiting places associated with their birth family or birth culture. A trip to the place a child was born (or a homeland tour for internationally adopted children) may enable her to connect to the past, answer questions, or better understand the choices that led to her adoption. Some teens prefer to seek direct contact with and answers from their birth family.

Jemal, 13, joined his adoptive family at age three after living with a foster family for a year and a half. While participating in a teen adoptee group, Jemal learned he was the only one there who had lived with a foster family before adoption. When Jemal began to ask questions about his former foster parents, his parents asked their child welfare agency if he could meet the family. The foster father had died, but the foster mother was delighted to see Jemal, tell him what he was like as a toddler, and show him pictures she had kept of him. The meeting was very positive for Jemal.

Getting Support

Normal adolescence, when overlaid with adoption issues, may increase a teen's need for guidance when emotions become overwhelming. Friends who are not adopted won't understand, nor will most school counselors. Teens may not let parents help either. The best resource is a therapist trained in adoption issues who can normalize adolescence for adopted teens while watching for signs of adoption-related stress.

Debbie Riley, executive director of the Center for Adoption Support and Education, Inc., has been providing teen

therapy for more than 25 years, and working with adoptees for the past 10 years. "Many wonderful adoptive parents," she notes, "find it hard to understand the power and depth of their children's feelings of ambivalence, uncertainty, and loss. Their responses often are not helpful, not because they don't try, but because they simply don't comprehend how powerful and necessary these extra tasks are." Adopted teens must deal with feelings about their birth and adoptive families.

Ms. Riley has found that parents often respond to their children's pain in ways that will make the parents feel more comfortable. Others may think they have made their teen feel better when they have only scratched the surface. Her advice: "Keep trying to walk in their shoes." Ms. Riley encourages parents to read more about teen issues and adoption, attend parent support programs related to the topic, and check the Internet for information and suggestions.

Finally, says Ms. Riley, "Teens need to know that parents are human too. We make mistakes, we miss things." The most important thing, she says, "is to let the kids know we are trying, that we care. Say to your teen, 'I feel really bad, but I don't understand what you're trying to tell me.' Or, 'I feel bad that I didn't get it.' Then, make an effort to learn more. Part of being an adoptive parent is trying to make sure your teens aren't walking alone."

Websites

Recommended Website for Adoptive Families

By Rachel Sievers Herrera, MFTI

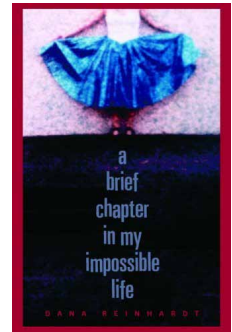


Adoption.com is a virtual hub for all things adoption. This website has everything: domestic and international adoption, fertility, pregnancy, fostering, blogs, forums, and more. I am particularly interested in the Search and Reunion and the Post Adoption tabs. The Search and Reunion tab links users to articles about everything from adoption laws and regulations, to search tips, to blogs written by people searching for birth family members. The Post Adoption tab is jam packed with information for adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents. So much information can be overwhelming so this website is especially valuable if you are comfortable navigating the net.

Family Book Review

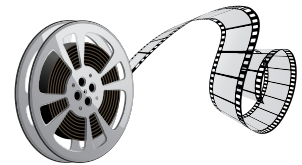
A Brief Chapter in My Impossible Life

By Dana Reinhardt



A Brief Chapter In My Impossible Life is told through the eyes of Simone; a quirky, funny, honest, and likeable teenager who experiences a life altering event that changes her perspective on the definition of "family". Simone considers her life to look pretty "normal." She has two loving and successful parents and a positive relationship with her younger brother. She does well in school, has a group of close friends, and she is involved in extracurricular activities. Even though her life may SEEM normal, Simone admits that she "has always felt different." Simone knows she is adopted and this was never a secret. Her parents were open and honest with her about how they came to be a family, and this was enough for Simone. Her parent's stayed in contact with Simone's birth mother, Rivka, and this was fine with Simone but she did not wish to know any more than that because she's "happy with her family, just as it is, thank you." This all changes when Rivka decides she wants to meet Simone. Simone's head floods with questions and uncertainty. She eventually chooses to meet with Rivka and these encounters further enrich Simone's definition of family in addition to forming her identity, core values and beliefs.

Film Review



October Baby

October Baby was released in 2011, directed by Andrew and Jon Erwin. The film addresses the anxieties and fears adoptive parents may have about discussing difficult information with their children about their birth family history and the nature of their adoption. The film also shows the natural internal conflict that can occur within an adopted individual and the need for support from family, friends, and community in order to work through their grief and loss process.

October Baby is about Hannah (Rachel Hendrix), a 19 year old who discovers she was adopted. After collapsing on stage at a university play, Rachel's parents (John Schneider and Jennifer Price) learn that she has been struggling with feeling "lost" and "unwanted" and decide to tell her that she was adopted. In this emotional scene, they also disclose that Hannah's birth mother tried to abort her. Hannah struggles with feelings of anger, sadness, uncertainty, and identity confusion. She decides to embark on a journey to find her birth mother with the help of her best friend, Jason. Hannah travels to her birthplace and discovers more shocking things about her birth family that she was not prepared for. She ultimately ends up seeking the comfort and support of her best friend, her adoptive parents, and a local Catholic priest who encourages Hannah to "forgive" and "let it go". He said, "Hatred is a burden you no longer need to carry. Only in forgiveness can you be free."

SUPPORT GROUPS

October

- 1** Tulare REACH Parent Retreat, Visalia Boys and Girls Club 6:30 to 8:30 pm, Visalia
- 8** Kings REACH Support Group 5:30 - 7:00pm Hanford Family Connections, Hanford

November

- 6** Tulare REACH Parent Retreat, Visalia Boys and Girls Club 6:30 to 8:30 pm, Visalia
- 12** Kings REACH Support Group 5:30 - 7:00pm Hanford Family Connections

December

- 3** Tulare REACH Parent Retreat, Visalia Boys And Girls Club 6:30 To 8:30 Pm, Visalia
- 6** The Adoption Process, 9 Am to 12 Pm, Cos Room Pending, Visalia

Tulare REACH Support Group – Location Change

TULARE REACH SUPPORT GROUPS MEET THE FIRST TUESDAY OF EACH MONTH

NEW LOCATION:
VISALIA BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB
6:30 TO 8:30 PM
 215 WEST TULARE AVENUE, VISALIA CA
 DIRECTLY BEHIND THE VISALIA YMCA

REACH TULARE & KINGS ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUPS

KINGS COUNTY REACH ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP

This group is designed for adults thinking about adoption, parents awaiting adoptive placement and parents of adopted children. October 8 and November 5 – NO MEETING IN DECEMBER

Time: 5:30 to 7 PM

Location: Hanford Family Connections, 315 Lacey Blvd., Hanford, CA (Between McDonalds & Burger King)

Training hours provided. **PARENTS MUST RSVP FOR CHILDCARE.**

Infants and pre-toddlers remain with parents/caregivers.

Contact: Toni Brown, M.S., 559-741-7358 ext. 4509

Email: tbrown@aspiranet.org

TULARE COUNTY REACH PARENT RETREAT

This group is designed for new and experienced adoptive parents as well as others touched by adoption.

October 1, November 5, December 3

Time: 6:30 to 8:30 PM

Location: The Boys and Girls Club, 215 W Tulare Ave, Visalia, CA

Training hours provided. PARENTS MUST RSVP FOR CHILD CARE appropriate for children playing in a group setting. Infants are welcome to join parents/caregivers.

Contact: Marji Peterson, MFTI 559-741-7358 ext. 4512

Email: mpeterson@aspiranet.org

COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS FOSTER & KINSHIP PROGRAM

The College of Sequoias Foster and Kinship Program offers training for foster and adoptive parents at no charge in Visalia and Hanford.

For a complete list of classes Google COS Visalia Kinship. Register with Linda Paredez at 559-737-4842 or lindap@cos.edu.

Classes are presented in English and Spanish. Classes in October, November and December include: **Healthy Boundaries, The Effects of Meth on Children, The Behaviors of Trauma Effected Children, and Sensory Processing Disorder.**


TRAINING LOCATION INFORMATION:

College of the Sequoias
 915 South Mooney Blvd.
 Visalia, CA 93277

Kings Human Services Agency
 1400 W. Lacy Blvd.
 Hanford, CA 93232

Aspiranet
151 Canal Drive
Turlock, CA 95380

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Visalia Aspiranet
4128 S. Demaree, Ste. B
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Phone: (559) 741-7358
Fax: (559) 741-7368



We're on the Web:
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.