

REACH

Tulare County

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support



Spring 2009

Post-Adoption Services Program

In this issue REACH is focusing on parenting adopted teens. While some families manage adolescence with ease, others become stressed as their teens explore who they are at home, and who they want to be in the world. We hope information in this newsletter benefits adoptive parents and teens, as well as 'tweens' on their way to becoming teenagers.

What's New At REACH? REACH is responding to parent satisfaction surveys. We ask all REACH families to complete a survey 30 days after REACH services are initiated. There are three ways to complete the survey: 1) go to reachtularecounty.org and complete the survey on-line, 2) mail the survey to the REACH office, or 3) call a REACH staff member to complete the survey on the phone.

Have you visited the REACH website lately? If not, please do! You will find new resources based on Parent Retreat topics such as parenting styles and strengthening attachments through family activities. Additionally REACH developed a REACH Out discussion board. Log-in information was mailed to families two weeks ago. If you have questions about these new website features, please contact our office. REACH is always looking for ways to include new families in our growing adoption community.

Your REACH Tulare County Support Team

Shamra Tripp, Aspiranet Visalia REACH Program Director
stripp@aspiranet.org

Marji Peterson, MFT Intern, Adoption Social Worker
mpeterson@aspiranet.org

REACH Tulare County
2436 E. Valley Oaks Dr.

Visalia, CA 93292

Ph: (559) 741-7358

Fax: (559) 741-7368

www.reachtularecounty.org

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Parent Retreat/Support Group Meetings

As spring approaches with renewed sunshine and activities, many parents struggle to balance the demands of work and home. A lot of time is spent in the car, monitoring homework, and organizing extra-curricular activities. Attending Parent Retreats and making time for family fun can be challenging. Nevertheless, the surest way to strengthen parent/child relationships is for parents to spend time, pay attention, and play with their children. In addition, praising positive behaviors is a great way to see more of them. Mealtimes are great for fostering open communication as everyone describes the best and worst part of their day. Family movie night is another great idea because many television programs and movies contain adoption themes.

Parent Retreat/Support Groups are open to all Tulare County families who have adopted or are currently in the process of adoption through foster care. The group meets the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. at the Visalia YMCA, located at 211 W. Tulare in Visalia. Please call Marji Peterson at (559)741-7358 for more information.

Recent Parent Retreats have focused on adoptive parenting. This will continue to be addressed through the spring. Dates and topics are listed below: If you cannot attend Parent Retreats, please check out the new features on our website which provide links to support group topics.

April 8 – Adoption Therapy–How Obtain Services & Do They Work?

April 22 – Motivating Your Indifferent Child

May 14 – Positive & Negative Family Secrets

May 28 – Managing Parental Stress

June 9– Parent/Child Power Struggles

June 23– Overcoming Adoption Parenting Hurdles

ADOPTION & FOSTER CARE LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

As you may recall, President Bush signed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (HR 6893) into law on in October of 2008. Among other things, the act outlined new efforts to keep detained siblings together. Specifically, siblings removed from their home are to be placed in the same foster care, kinship, guardianship, or adoptive placement, unless the placement is contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings. In the case of siblings who are not jointly placed, frequent visits or other interaction is required, unless the visits are contrary to the safety or well-being of any of the siblings.

Since the 1980s, researchers and legislators have focused more and more attention on sibling ties. Siblings placed together are known to transition more smoothly into new homes, and research demonstrates attachments between siblings are worth preserving. When you stop and think about it, sibling relationships are likely to last longer than any other, including parent/child and spousal relationships.

California is a state that already supports efforts to keep siblings together, or at least connected in foster care. Gov. Schwarzenegger approved a bill in September of 2008 containing provisions for contact between adopted siblings who are not placed together. Under the new law, recommendations for sibling visitations are to be included in children's adoption case plans. Also, if the adoptive parents consent, courts can include information about sibling contact in the adoption order.

These developments are important to REACH families because 50% of Tulare County adoptions involve siblings. If parents decide their adopted child's best interests are served by maintaining contact with siblings living in a different setting, here are some tips:

- Phone calls and letters are a common method of sibling communication. Letters can include pictures or other mementos. E-mail is also an option; messages can include pictures and other attachments.
- When face-to-face contact between siblings is planned, children may be more comfortable meeting at a larger family event such as a picnic. Group outings can be planned to amusement parks or zoos, or other places where families interact and have fun. Parents might also consider sending siblings to a summer camp together.
- When children are in different homes in the same community, adoptive parents can arrange for siblings to spend time together with the same respite provider, or provide respite for each other. Separated siblings may benefit from sharing a therapist. Often siblings can help each other recall their history, which can help with their treatment plan.

Even though it's challenging to integrate a new child into a family, and support sibling contact at the same time, it's important work. Based on the needs of the child and family, adoptive parents can find ways to support sibling connections.

COS FOSTER & ADOPTION WORKSHOPS

College of the Sequoias offers many informative workshops on a wide variety of foster care and adoption topics. Spring topics include Reactive Attachment Disorder, Parenting Strategies, Talking to Teens About Love and Sex, Summer-time Activities, Depression and Suicide. Instructors, dates and times are listed on the COS website at www.cos.edu. Click on the Site Index and search for the Foster & Kinship Care Education Program. Follow directions to register.

REACTIVE ATTACHMENT DISORDER SUPPORT GROUP

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

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 or to RSVP.

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.

TEEN ADOPTIVE PARENTING RESOURCES ON THE WEB

parenting.adoption.com
adoptiveparenting.wordpress.com
adoptinfo.net
olderchildadoption.com
parentingteens.about.com

7 CORE ISSUES OF ADOPTION WORKSHOP

REACH is hosting a 7 Core Issues of Adoption training on Tuesday April 7th, 6:30 to 8 PM, at 2436 East Valley Oaks Drive, Visalia. Because adoption is a life long process for everyone involved, these core issues tend to surface during developmental milestones and times of significant change. Refreshments will be served, however child care will not be provided. Please RSVP at 741-7358 as space is limited. This workshop will be fun and informative for new and experienced adoptive parents. There will be prizes, so come and be a part of the REACH Tulare County adoption community!

Parents of Adopted Teens Tend To ...

1. Genuinely like and enjoy children
2. Reach out to others for support
3. Be happy with small steps of progress rather than perfection
4. Not expect children to be appreciative or grateful
5. Allow children to have memories and affection for others in his/her past
6. Have a good sense of humor
7. Deal with and accept expressions of sadness and anger
8. Recall and share their life experiences with others
9. Accept that love and affection from a child may take a long time or never come
10. Understand and accept that parenting children who need families is different from parenting birth children

Tips for Communicating With Your Adopted Teen

Open and trusting communication is essential for positive relationships between parents and teens.

Open communication occurs...

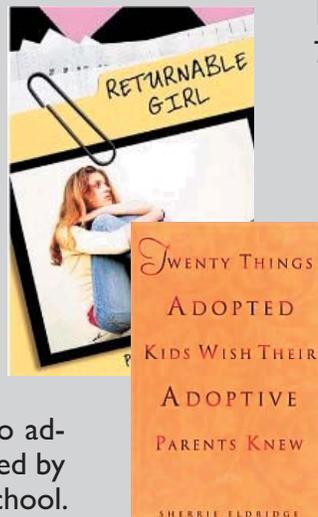
- When parents encourage teens to talk about their interests, listen without interruption, and allow teens to introduce new information and ideas. This lays the groundwork for conversations on topics that concern parents.
- When parents ask open ended questions about what teens are thinking and feeling, and avoid questions that can be answered with a “yes” or “no”.
- When parents control their emotions when they hear something they don’t like. This is the time for parents to take a deep breath and express their feelings in a positive way.
- When parents show respect for their teen’s viewpoint and try not to lecture, even when they know their teen is incorrect. Showing respect for a teen’s viewpoint teaches him/her to show respect for parents’ viewpoints.

Book Reviews

Book Review for Kids

Returnable Girl by Pamela Lowell

The main character of the book Returnable Girl is Ronnie, a 13 year old who was abandoned by her mother and “returned” from several foster homes. She keeps moving from home to home because she has problems with lying, stealing, and her temper. Ronnie’s very last chance is to make it work with a new foster mother, otherwise she will be placed in a treatment center. As Ronnie does her best to adjust to her new foster home, she gets sidetracked by trying to “fit in” with the popular crowd at school. Eventually Ronnie learns some hard lessons about being loyal to herself and her true friend named Cat. She also deals with feelings of distrust and loyalty toward the birth mother who abandoned her, and the foster mom who wants to adopt her. This book is a great read for teens as they navigate their way through adoption issues and in the end, learn how to remain true to themselves.



Book Review for Parents

Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew by Sherrie Eldridge

Sherrie Eldridge’s book, Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew, is a poignant read and highly recommended by adoptive parents and professionals. Eldridge was adopted herself and gives voice to the feelings and concerns of many adopted children. The author utilizes insights from children, parents, and professionals, and suggests practical strategies to help parents understand how to effectively nurture their adopted children. Eldridge’s positive suggestions give hope for adoptive children and families to achieve the health and happiness they so much deserve.

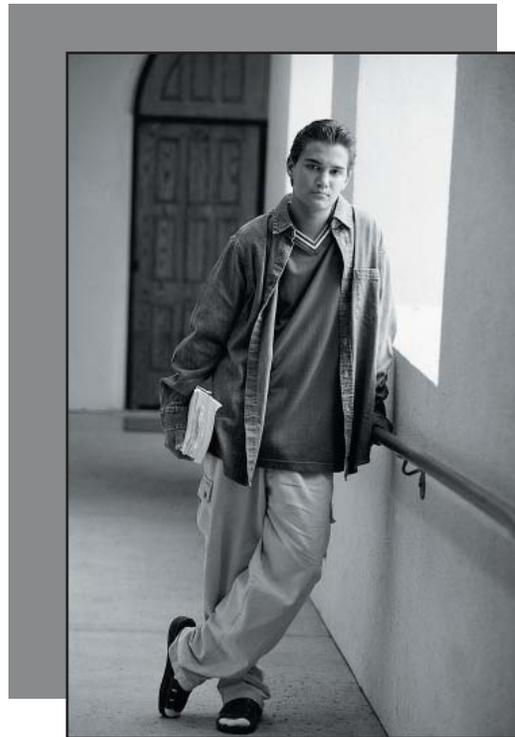
Teens & Depression & Adoption

By Alison M. Acton, LMFT

Teenage years can be an extremely turbulent time and as many as one in 8 adolescents suffer from clinical depression. For teenagers depression often shows up as irritability, disruptive behavior, school problems, social isolation, and reckless behavior. Unlike depressed adults whom usually display a pervasive sad mood, depressed teenagers often appear to have a pervasive irritable mood. Left untreated depression can wreak havoc in families and can lead to suicide. In 2004, suicide was the 3rd leading cause of death in teenagers age 15 to 19.

Adolescence is a time when teens grapple with creating an identity apart from their family. This can create an additional layer of challenge for adoptive families who may feel threatened by this normal developmental task. It is not uncommon for an adopted teenager to revisit issues about birth parents, why they were given up, their adoption history, etc. Noted adoption author and adoptive parent herself, Lois Melina points out that it is normal for an adolescent to want information about their birthparents and while this desire for information may sometimes be expressed as wanting to meet the birth parents, most teenagers do not really want to search for them at that time (Adopted Child Newsletter, 1992). For a depressed adopted teenager dealing with the challenges of adolescence can become even more difficult coupled with the complexity of issues related to being adopted.

The good news is that depression is a very treatable disorder and mental health treatment is highly effective. According to the National Institute for Mental Health, a combination of psychotherapy and antidepressant medication appears to be the most effective treatment for adolescents with major depressive disorder according to results from a major clinical trial (funded by NIMH 10/2007, Archives of General Psychiatry). A thorough evaluation for depression includes an evaluation by both a Psychotherapist – who is trained and licensed to provide psychotherapy and a Psychiatrist – who is a medical doctor with special training in medications to treat mental illness.



If you suspect that a child in your family is clinically depressed, it is important to have them evaluated by qualified professionals. Symptoms of clinical depression include: a depressed or irritable mood for almost every day for at least a two week period, loss of pleasure in almost all daily activities, change in eating habits (not eating or overeating), insomnia or sleeping the majority of the time, fatigue and loss of energy, decreased ability to think or concentrate, feelings of worthlessness, helplessness, hopelessness, and recurrent thoughts of death. Most children adopted from Tulare County have Medi-Cal insurance through the Adoption Assistance Program. Local full service children's clinics that accept Medi-Cal insurance and have both Psychotherapists and Psychiatrists on staff include:

Visalia Youth Services
(559)627-1490
Tulare Youth Services Bureau
(559)688-2043
Porterville Youth Services
(559)782-4165
Dinuba Children's Services
(559)591-6680
Sequoia Youth Services
(559)594-4969

Parents can call the clinic nearest to where they reside to set up an appointment for a mental health evaluation. For children with insurances other than Medi-Cal, parents can contact their insurance carrier for referrals to local treatment providers. Adoptive parents can also contact the REACH Tulare County program for a depression pre-screening and assistance with navigating their insurance and finding the right treatment provider. If you believe your child is imminently suicidal, you can contact the Tulare County Crisis and Information Line at (800)320-1616 at any time.

Once the depressed teenager is receiving effective treatment, issues that arise regarding adoption will be easier to address. It is important for parents to keep the lines of communication with their teenager open while respecting the teenager's space. This should include tolerating the teenagers positive and/or negative feelings regarding their birthparents as well the amount that they choose to talk or not talk about these issues.

From Pact, an Adoption Alliance:

Adoption & Stages of Development

Adapted from: **Who Am I? Where Am I Going?: Adolescence**

by Beth Hall

Adolescents' behavior is in transition rather than fixed; their feelings about the world and their place in it are tentative and changeable. Physical growth changes the body from child to adult, in preparation for procreation, but mental and emotional development may take years to catch up with the body. The adolescent's primary task is to establish a secure sense of identity. Being able to live and work on one's own, to maintain a comfortable position in one's family, and to become a contributing citizen in one's community are the goals. Adolescents need to take their independence rather than to be given it. A parent's most difficult task is to create a delicate balance of "to love and let go."

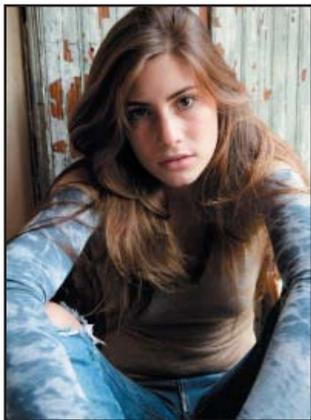
If normal adolescence involves a crisis in identity, it stands to reason that adopted teenagers will face additional complications. Adolescents often express their

reactions to loss by rebelling against parental standards.

Knowing that they have a different origin contributes to their need to define themselves autonomously.

Sexual identity is an issue to all adolescents. Adopted children often have conflicting views of parenthood and sexuality. On the one hand, there is the perhaps infertile adoptive parent; and on the other hand, there is the fact of the birth parents' fertility and decision - whether voluntary or otherwise - not to parent the baby. By conforming to others' behavior, beliefs, or expectation, adopted adolescents may be inhibiting a part of themselves for the sake of basic security or out of a sense of guilt or responsibility to their adopter(s).

Source: <http://www.pactadopt.org/press/articles/rights.html>



REACH Teens Speak Up

Over the past 18 months REACH provided individual services to more than 20 adolescents. Each adoption was different – they occurred at various ages, some knew they were adopted all along, and some found out years later.

Nearly all teens are busy trying to figure who they are now, and who they want to be. At the same time, adopted teens are trying to weave the threads of two family legacies into a single story they can call their own. Many have questions about their adoption and how it changed their lives. These questions can come with intense feelings for everyone involved, which can make questions difficult to ask and answer.

Collectively, REACH teens have a lot of wisdom about what they need from their parents. Recently several teens were asked to share their thoughts about the benefits of adoption, what they wish their parents knew before they adopted, and what parents can do to help kids grow up. Read on for their insightful responses. Some names were changed to protect privacy.

Ruben, age 16 remarked, "I feel like my family picked me and I feel grateful. I hope parents can understand how kids feel about wanting to meet their first family and how they hope things go well." Ruben said, "The one thing parents can do to help their kids grow up is try to understand a little more."

Vince, age 17 said, "Adopted kids don't exactly belong, and they try to fit in. I'm from a different culture. I tried to drop my old culture to fit in, but I couldn't. I think parents who adopt kids with a different ethnicity should not be surprised when they do stuff, like change their name to something that fits better." Vince also said, "Parents can help their kids grow up by embracing the fact that kids need to identify their self with their own people. If parents don't support them, kids will find a way to go around their parents."

Michael, age 17 said, "I thank my first parents for not keeping me so I could be adopted by a family that loves me. My parents have helped me grow up by always having faith and encouraging me. They're always on my case about doing well in school, and they never give up on me."

Tillie, age 15 said, "Parents need to know kids need a lot of love, not just rules. Sometimes the reason they seem distant, or act out, is a little because they feel alone and sad because they miss their past." She also said, "Parents need to talk about things in a loving way to encourage kids to trust them."

Bianca, age 15 said, "The thing I like about being adopted is I'm an only child, so I get more stuff!"

Aspiranet
151 Canal Drive
Turlock, CA 95380

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U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Turlock, CA
PERMIT NO. 696



Local Office
2436 E. Valley Oaks Drive
Visalia, CA 93292

Phone: (559) 741-7358
Fax: (559) 741-7368



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.