

REACH

**Tulare
County**

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support



Spring 2011

REACH Pre & Post Adoption Services Program

Greetings to REACH families and adoption helpers. Once again spring is fast approaching. While we enjoyed the long quiet nights of winter and celebrated the holidays with our families, our children have grown and changed. It may be time to address questions or concerns that have been gestating over the winter months, specifically issues related to the life long process of adoption.

The 2011 spring issue of the REACH newsletter will focus on the life cycle of adoptive families and the unique adjustments parents and children encounter along the way. For parents, adoption adjustment can begin with infertility issues or empty nest syndrome. One way or another, parents begin to consider adoption as a means of growing their family. The adjustment process continues as children are integrated into existing families and begin to learn their adoption story. Once children know they're adopted, they begin to consider what being adopted means and their connection to two families. This plays a part in their growing sense of themselves as individuals. New and unique challenges may occur with the onset of adolescence and adulthood and joys and challenges emerge all along the way. In this manner, adoption is a lifelong process for everyone involved. How children and parents cope with these unique issues varies according to their specific circumstances. REACH provides adoption services including support counseling, a lending library, support groups and referrals to local adoption professionals. These services are available to anyone touched by adoption in Tulare County. REACH has settled into our new office at 4128 West Demaree Suite B, Visalia CA, 93277. We look forward to meeting your family and hearing adoption stories from parents, teens and children as well as birth parents, adoption helpers, and professionals. If you have any questions or concerns about adoption, feel free to contact a REACH staff member at @ 559-741-7358.

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Getting Past Adjustment Disorder

by Alison M. Acton, LMFT



Adjustment Disorder is characterized by the development of emotional or behavioral symptoms in response to a stressor. The symptoms of adjustment disorder cause distress and impair social, academic, or occupational functioning. There are six different subtypes of Adjustment Disorder based on the individual's predominant symptoms. These include Adjustment Disorder with: depressed mood, anxiety, mixed anxiety and depressed mood, disturbance of conduct, and mixed disturbance of emotions and conduct. Typically Adjustment Disorders do not last more than six months. (American Psychiatric Association, Desk Reference to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV-TR, 2000, pages 285-286).

There are many adjustments that accompany adoption and they are quite normal. New adjustments in and of themselves do not cause adjustment disorders. An adjustment disorder is only diagnosed if the individual experiences more distress than what is to be expected and experiences impairment in functioning. With adoption some emotional or behavioral symptoms are to be expected. If these symptoms persist over time and cause marked distress and impaired functioning, then the criteria for an adjustment disorder is met. The good news is that Adjustment Disorders are very treatable and usually can be resolved within six months. Successful treatment of an adjustment disorder can help family members return to experiencing the joys of family life and adoption.

Anyone, including any member of the adoption triad consisting of the adoptee, the adoptive parent, or the birth parent, is susceptible to experiencing adjustment issues that may or may not rise to the level of an Adjustment disorder at some time in their lives. Different adjustment issues will arise for members of the adoption triad at different periods over their lifespan but most of the time these do not result in the development of an Adjustment Disorder. Because adoption is a lifelong commitment which coexists with the development of family life stages and the adopted child's continuing development, there are many times at which adjustment issues can arise. Similarly adjustment issues typically arise in all families, adoptive or not, as they go through differing developmental stages. Birth mothers and fathers involved with the child welfare system are not immune to adjustment issues and often go through periods of intense grieving as they adjust to a life without parenting their children.

If you believe that you or your loved one is experiencing an Adjustment Disorder, counseling with a professional therapist experienced with adoption issues can be beneficial. REACH Tulare County offers support counseling with Master's level Counselors who have expertise in the area of adoption, and provides referrals to experienced adoption counselors in the community. To schedule an appointment with REACH staff or get a referral to local adoption professionals, contact Marji Peterson, MFT Intern at (559)741-7358.

Factors That Support Adoption Adjustment

- Sufficient information about the child's background.
- Participation in pre and post placement support groups.
- Financial subsidies.
- Professional adoption support services for children's behavior, academic, and other challenges.

Factors That Hinder Adoption Adjustment

- Parental inflexibility in roles, rules and patterns of interaction.
- Parental unrealistic expectations for children who are considerably different than the parents expected.
- Lack of support for mothers from fathers and other social support systems.

Support and Resources

Tulare REACH Support Groups & Workshops

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 call Marji Peterson or Toni Brown @ 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 provides an open forum for parents to share their experiences with other adoptive parents.

- April 12** Mini Workshop: Biological Children's Adjustment to Adoption
- April 26** Parent Retreat Open Discussion
- May 10** Mini Workshop: Adoption and the Internet/Social Networking
- May 24** Parent Retreat Open Discussion
- June 14** Mini Workshop: Specialized Parenting & Self Care for Parents
- June 28** Parent Retreat Open Discussion

ADOPTED TEEN SUPPORT GROUP

We are looking to expand our adopted teen support group designed for teens in high school. For a screening interview please call Marji Peterson or Toni Brown @ 741-7358.

WAITING OR IN THE MAKING FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP

This new support group is designed for families licensed to adopt. Parents may be waiting for adoptive placement or have children recently placed in their homes. This group will focus on important periods of adjustment for all adoptive families. Please call Marji Peterson, MFT Intern, for more information @ 741-7358.

Community Support and 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 in April, May and June include: Caring for a Mentally Ill/Challenged Child, Adopting the Second Time Around, ADHD, 10 Days to a Less Defiant Child, and Parenting Children Adopted Through Foster Care.

ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUPS IN NEARBY COMMUNITIES

Call Kathy Steele, LCSW
(559)222-4969, ext. 2626

Hanford

2nd Monday of the Month
5:30-7:30pm

Oakhurst

3rd Monday of the Month
5:30-7:30pm

Madera

4th Monday of the Month
5:30-7:30pm



Welcome Books:

A Great Way to Help Children Adjust

Based on an article @ comeunity <http://www.comenunity.com>

- Welcome Books are a great way for parents help children
- prepare for their new home. A Welcome Book is a simple
- collection of photos with short descriptions, no more
- than 5 to 10 pages long. Hopefully parents have had
- contact with their children before they arrive at their
- new home, and the book can be presented then. If not,
- the book can be mailed ahead of time, or parents can
- present the book when they meet their children.

- It's best for parents to use Welcome Books to show
- children what a regular day is like in their new family.
- The purpose is to help children bridge two worlds,
- reduce anxiety, and increase feelings of safety.

- When it comes to making a Welcome Book, parents
- can be as simple or elaborate as they like. Some
- books have photos with captions made with magic
- markers or computers. A photo album, a blank book
- or construction paper can be used. This is a great way
- for waiting families to prepare to grow their family.
- If children are already placed in parent's homes,
- families can make a Welcome Book together.

Things to include in your Welcome Book:

- A photo of your child
- A photo of you, your spouse and children
- A photo of your cars
- Photos of the inside and outside of your house
- A photo of your child's bedroom
- A photo of the kitchen table with a prepared meal
- Photos of immediate family members or neighbors
- Photos of your pets

Adoptive Parenting Sweet Spots

From 20 Things Adoptive Parents Need to Succeed

by Sherrie Eldridge



When I work through my personal issues thoroughly, in order to hear the heart needs of my child.

When I identify with my child on his emotional level and to mirror acceptance.

When I accept and nurture the nature created within my child's first home, the birth mother's womb.

When I learn and accept the complex realities of adoption as a unique life challenge and try not to change the challenges into what the non-adoptive world expects.

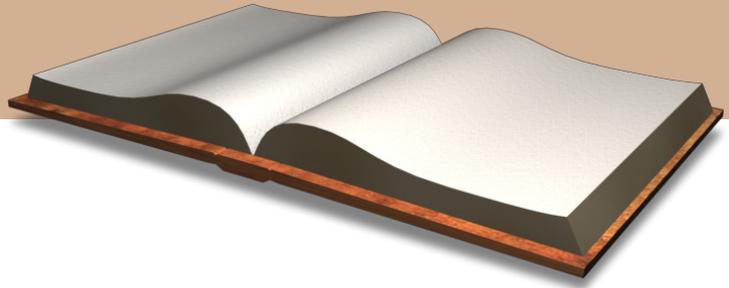
To base love and acceptance of my child on his personhood, not his performance.

Easing Adoption Adjustment for Infants and Toddlers

- Prepare as much as you can beforehand
- Get your support system in place early
- Take time for yourself
- Minimize your baby's exposure to anyone outside the family for the first few weeks
- Recreate your baby's routine
- Focus on building attachment



Book Reviews



Book Review for Parents: Making Sense of Adoption, a Parent's Guide

By *Lois Ruskai Melina*

When to tell, what to tell, and how to tell children they're adopted... In this wise and timely guide, Lois Melina, also the author of Raising Adopted Children, helps parents anticipate and respond to these concerns in ways that build self-esteem. Through sample conversations, reassuring advice, and age-specific activities, parents will find answers to such questions as:

- When should I give my child the letter her birthmother wrote?
- How do I share information that might upset my child?
- How can I know when my child is wondering about adoption?
- What should I tell teachers, family and friends about my child?
- How can I be sure we talk about adoption enough, but not too much?

Making Sense of Adoption will open the door to a lifetime of growth and understanding for adoptive families. This book is available in the REACH Library.

Movie Review for Families: Steps to Stability: Moving Children to a New Home

DVD from the Education Institute Kinship Center

This video presents practical information on helping children in the child welfare system transition from one setting to another. Youth and families speak about their personal experiences in achieving permanence and stability, and experts in the field add tools and techniques for parents, social workers, child advocates and mental health professionals. This DVD is available in the REACH Library.

Book Review for Children: Motherbridge of Love

by *Xinrin*

The text of Motherbridge of Love is credited to an anonymous adoptive mother and takes the form of a series of heartfelt, parallel musings about a birth and adoptive mother. "The first one gave you life; the second taught you to live it.... One found a home for you that she could not provide, the other prayed for a child; her hope was not denied." The women are portrayed realistically for the most part. However in later illustrations, the birth mother is transformed into a benevolent spirit, for example a moon that shines down on the adoptive mother and child. Thus the author and illustrator offer comfort and encouragement to parents and children. This book is available in the REACH Library.

Book Review for Youth: All About Adoption-How to Deal with the Questions of Your Past

by *Anne Lanchon*

The breezy tone and ample colorful graphics make this book appealing and accessible to teens and their parents. It offers reassurance that most anxieties about looks and fitting in are shared by biological as well as adopted teens. For adoptees, and for parents seeking a way to initiate a discussion about difficult topics, this is a welcome resource. Among its powerful messages is that being adopted is not the cause of life's every disappointment. Many quality guides exist for parents and for those researching adoption, but this one is unique as it's modeled on popular teen guidebooks about sex and friendships, making it an excellent choice for young adults. This book is available in the REACH Library.

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We're on the Web:
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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.