

REACH

Tulare
County

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis Intervention • Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Adoption Support Program



**“Affix your own oxygen mask first. When that is in place, you may help your child.”
- Flight attendant, any airline**

I saw the above-mentioned quote in a book familiar to many of you, entitled “Wounded Children Healing Homes,” by Jayne E. Schooler, Betsy Keefer Smalley, LSW and Timothy J. Callahan, PsyD. More specifically, the quote was included in a chapter called “Taking Care of Yourself: The Parent’s Neglected Task”. Really, if one thinks about it, if we don’t take care of ourselves, who will be available to take care of our children?

As some of you know, I recently returned from the Empowered to Connect Conference. This conference uses curriculum from Trust-Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI). It is designed for parents of children with trauma-based behavioral issues and provides parents with practical problem-solving and parenting skills. The entire program is designed to build a stronger parent-child connection, which leads to better behavior. The conference was rejuvenating both as an adoptive parent and as an adoption professional. It definitely counts as a weekend of self-care! Call the office or make an appointment with a REACH social worker if you are interested in receiving some TBRI® training.

“What soap is to the body, laughter is to the soul.” - Yiddish proverb

This quote was pulled from an excellent Wellness Action Guide entitled “I’d like to Run Wild!” by Jean Steel. Ms. Steel challenges readers to question the last time they laughed (really laughed with tears running down their faces, doubled over, stomach hurts kind of laughter). In her discussion about the topic, Ms. Steel states that laughter has been known to...

- Lower the level of Cortisol, a stress hormone
- Be a great coping device
- Stimulate the immune system
- Lower blood pressure
- Reduce pain
- Bring people together
- Improve creativity

So what’s stopping you? Watch a funny movie with your family. Create a list of friends you can call and who can make you laugh. Don’t ever be afraid to be silly with your kids, they’ll love you for it.

Included in this issue are articles and activities designed to address the importance of self-care for parents, as well as those who work with parents and children. Although so much of what we do is inherently joyful and fulfilling, it can also be challenging, as well as physically and emotionally depleting at times. It’s our hope that you all take time to acknowledge the weight of your contributions along the way, as well as, your on-going need for support and nurturance.

Good News at Tulare REACH!

We are happy to welcome a new REACH social worker to our team. Becky Elms joins our team with a commitment and passion for serving adoptive families. In college, Becky spent a summer working at a Romanian orphanage. She followed up this experience by becoming a mentor for a teen girl aging out of the foster care system. Becky spent the past four years working for Tulare County Adoptions and understands the value of supporting adoptive families and their children. Please join us in welcoming Becky!

Spring 2015

Inside This Issue

1. Good News
2. Self-Care (Why is it important and what exactly does it look like?)
3. Self-Care Interviews with Adoptive Parents
4. Self-Care Assessment
5. Calendar of Events, Support Group Info
6. REACH Services

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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.

SELF-CARE

(Why is it important and exactly what does it look like?)

by Kathy Steele, LCSW. Based in part on material from "Wounded Children Healing Homes," by Jayne E. Schooler, Betsy Keefer Smalley, LSW & Timothy J. Callahan, PsyD

In all honesty, I chose to write about the critical topic of "Self-Care" more for myself, but you can ease drop if you like. After all, practicing a good wellness program applies to all of us involved with raising children.

When I think of my own role as a parent, I realize how stressful it can be at times. For parents who are raising children who've been exposed to trauma, stress levels can be even higher. For example, stressors on the adoptive or foster families may include some of the following:

- Unmet expectations regarding adoption and family life
- Feelings of failure, guilt
- The impact of adoption or foster care on other relationships (within the family or with close friends)
- Coping with a child's needs or challenging behaviors
- Dealing with multiple service providers (or the lack of adoption-competent service providers)
- Difficulty in finding substitute caregivers to provide occasional respite or relief
- School Issues

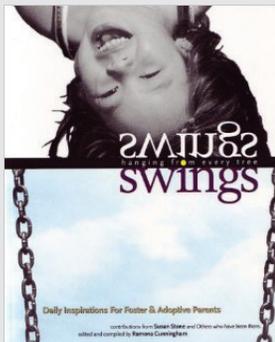
Stress can propel a family or individual into a crisis. Unfortunately, current research also informs us that chronic stress has a profoundly negative effect on our overall emotional, mental and physical health. In an effort to minimize undo stressors in the home, we need to practice "Self-Care."

Principles of Self-Care for Foster and Adoptive Parents may include some of the following:

- Recall often that you are not the source of your child's problems. Your children came into your family with adverse histories (i.e., neglect, abuse and abandonment, etc.). Parents are not in charge of "fixing" their children. Rather, they are responsible for providing a stable environment in which a child can be in charge of his own healing. Of course, a significant challenge for parents is in accepting that this can be a long term process.

- Maintain a sense of humor. Parents who can maintain humor in the face of parenting challenges will find it much easier to cope.
- Connect with other foster and adoptive parents. Refrain from becoming isolated. Instead, reach out to other parents via Support Groups (refer to group listings in this issue or engage in informal online chat rooms for adoptive or foster parents)
- Stop comparing yourself to other families. Other families do not live your life, and they are not raising your children. Remember that you are comparing your "insides" to other families "outsides."
- Find an adoption-competent family therapist. Not all therapists are knowledgeable with regards to the dynamics of adoptive family life.
- Stay regulated. Don't jump into a child's fear. In brief, learn to "teach and model" how to regulate emotions through your own ability to do so.
- Find outlets for your own emotional, spiritual, and physical needs and design opportunities to enjoy them. These outlets may include activities such as regular exercise, hobbies, spiritual or recreational reading.
- Do a role check. Is one parent carrying most of the load? If so, seek a better balance.
- Choose your battles. Not all behaviors need to be addressed. In short, prioritize.
- Take a break-find respite. Parenting is demanding. Give yourself permission to seek help from family and friends.

For a more complete and comprehensive listing and understanding of these principles access a copy of "Wounded Children Healing Homes." This book is also available for loan through the REACH Lending Library. Please contact us if you are interested.



Family Book Review: Swings Hanging from Every Tree: Daily Inspirations & Reflections for Foster/Adoptive Parents

by Susan Stone Reynolds

Susan Reynolds offers this book as a collection of stories from foster and adoptive parents who speak to their own experiences of raising children from hard places and the joys, challenges, and laughter that come with it. Susan states, "We believe the power of the stories contained in this book will make a difference in the lives of the people who read them. All of us in our daily lives need to hear the stories of others to keep us inspired, motivated and refueled." If you're looking for a book that will touch your heart and offer a sense of calming validation, than this is the book for you.

Self-Care Interviews With Adoptive Parents

A mother's perspective (in italics) and **a father's perspective (in bold)**

1. "Parenting isn't for wimps" is a common quote. How would you complete the following sentence? Parenting is for people who...
Parenting is for people who don't mind a little chaos in their lives.

Parenting is for people who are willing to lay down their own wants and needs for the sake of their children. It is no easy task and it will result in many failures on our (parents') part, but it is well worth it.

2. I believe my one greatest strength and/or quality as a parent is...

I think one of my greatest strengths as a parent is setting appropriate expectations of my son, because if I don't expect great things from him, he won't be able to rise to his potential.

I believe my one greatest strength as a parent is that I'm fun. Play is hugely important in our kids' lives and in our own. My kids and I joke, wrestle, tease, do superhero training, etc. It's fun. And we connect in the midst of it.

3. When I feel challenged or frustrated in my role as a parent, I tend to go to the following person(s) for support and guidance...

I either go to my husband or I will go to some of the other parents who I have met in the REACH support groups. There are a couple other adoptive moms who are on my speed dial that I have a lot of respect for. These moms can relate to what I'm going through better than other parents. Other parents see my child's behaviors – temper tantrums, awkward stages, grief and loss, and they feel like its normal behavior that their children experience. Other parents don't understand. It's so nice to have my adoptive mom friends say things like, "Wow, he must be dealing with hard things...how are YOU doing?"

When I feel challenged or frustrated in my role as a parent, I tend to go to my wife for support and guidance. She is an amazing wealth of knowledge and wisdom and is always ready to lend a listening ear. When we're both frustrated as parents, we reach out to the REACH support group, other adoptive families, our family and our church as well. The more people around to support you, the better.

4. I feel that support for parents is important because...

Parenting is no joke. We are directly responsible for who these little people become.

I feel that support for parents is important because there is no way we can do this alone. This is too hard and too important to try to run solo. We need to use the wisdom, knowledge and experience of others in order to help our children and ourselves.

5. What helpful advice would you give to parents, many of whom are parenting children who have complex needs and are exhibiting challenging behaviors?...

Hang on to the good moments. Retell the good stories over and over to yourself, to family and friends, and whoever will listen. Those moments, whether they are a few minutes or a few hours, will bring you through the next challenging behavior. Children deserve to be seen as their best selves and sometimes that is really hard. Remember that children have the potential to be who they are in those good moments, every day.

Take care of yourself. It is never easy to get away for a date, some alone time, etc., but you have to do it anyway. You need it and your kids need it. Sometimes we tell our babysitter that our kids need a break from us. It's true. And, yes, we have to re-teach our kids almost every rule in our house after someone else has watched them, but the answer is still the same: Do it anyway. It's amazing how a little self-care helps you to keep going as a parent.

6. Self-Care is important for parents. Things I do to take care of myself are... Something fun or of interest I would like to try over the coming summer is...

I have some time built into my week where my son is at preschool and I'm not working. I have hours built into my schedule that are not about caring for someone else which is very helpful. I'm also part of a book club so I keep up with whatever book we're reading for the month. It gives me an opportunity to go out to dinner once a month with friends and the book gives us a topic other than kids to talk about. I also take an art class once a week in the evening, and I go to support group once a month. I've also found ways to practice self-care with my son. During naptime we go on walks and he rests or sleeps in the jogging stroller. I get to exercise and listen to a podcast on headphones for an hour each day. We also like to go on "Starbucks Dates" together. It's a great time for my son to learn how to act in an adult environment. My husband loves backpacking and we have done several backpacking trips together, but not since we've been parents. It is hard to do now because it would mean we would be out of cell phone range for several days. So instead this summer we are planning to go on a camping trip – which will be a first for us and our son!

Self-Care is important for parents. Things I do to take care of myself are: exercise, pray and Bible study, making sure to go out on a date at least twice a month with my wife, making the kids stick to a bedtime schedule so my wife and I can have an hour or two in the evening to connect with each other and/or watch a TV show that isn't a cartoon. Something fun or of interest I would like to try over the coming summer is to hike and climb Half-Dome in Yosemite.

Self-Care Assessment

The following worksheet for assessing self-care is not exhaustive, merely suggestive. Feel free to add areas of self-care that are relevant for you and rate yourself on how often and how well you are taking care of yourself these days. When you are finished, look for patterns in your responses. Are you more active in some areas of self-care but ignoring others? Are there items on the list that make you think, "I would never do that"? Listen to your inner responses, your internal dialogue about self-care and making yourself a priority. Take particular note of anything you would like to include more in your life.

Rate the following areas according to how well you think you are doing:

5 = I do this frequently

4 = I do this occasionally

3 = I barely or rarely do this

2 = I never do this

1 = This never occurred to me

Physical Self-Care

- Eat regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch, and dinner)
- Eat healthily
- Exercise
- Get regular medical care prevention
- Get medical care when needed
- Take time off when sick
- Get massages
- Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, or do some other fun physical activity
- Get enough sleep
- Wear clothes I like
- Take vacations
- Take day trips or mini-vacations
- Make time away from telephones
- Other:

Psychological Self-Care

- Make time for self-reflection
- Notice my inner experience – listen to my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings
- Have my own personal psychotherapy
- Write in a journal
- Read literature that is unrelated to work
- Do something at which I am not expert or in charge
- Attend to minimizing stress in my life
- Engage my intelligence in a new area, e.g. go to an art show, sports event, theatre
- Receive from others
- Be curious
- Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes
- Other:

Emotional Self-Care

- Spend time with others whose company I enjoy
- Stay in contact with important people in my life
- Give myself affirmations, praise myself, love myself
- Re-read favorite books, re-view favorite movies
- Identify comforting activities, objects, people, places and seek them out
- Allow myself to cry
- Find things that make me laugh
- Express my outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, protests
- Other:

Spiritual Self-Care

- Make time for reflection
- Spend time in nature
- Find a spiritual connection or community
- Be open to inspiration
- Cherish my optimism and hope
- Be aware of non-material aspects of life
- Try at times not to be in charge or the expert
- Be open to not knowing
- Identify what is meaningful to me and notice its place in my life
- Meditate, Pray
- Have experiences of awe
- Contribute to causes in which you believe
- Read inspirational literature or listen to inspirational talks, music
- Other:

Parenting Self-Care

- Celebrate small successes
- Monitor the messages I say to myself, e.g. "I am a failure."
- Join a parent support group

Overall Balance

- Balance among work, family, relationships, play, and rest

http://www.ballarat.edu.au/aasp/student/sds/self_care_assess.shtml. Adapted from Sakkwitne, Pearlman, & Staff of TSI/CAAP (1996). And In part, adapted from "Loving and Living with Traumatized Children," by Megan Hirst.

Support Group Opportunities

2nd Time Around Moms – Tulare REACH has started an informal meet up group for moms who are parenting for the "2nd time around". These moms include grandmothers who are parenting their grandchildren and moms who are parenting a second generation of children. Please call the REACH office if you are interested in this support opportunity.

REACH is beginning a second monthly Adoption Support Group in April! This group will meet the 3rd Thursday of the month. Look for the new dates on the REACH calendar of events.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Upcoming Calendar of Events

April

- 7** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Boys and Girls Club, Visalia
- 8** 2nd Time Around Moms Support Group
9:00 am - 10:30 am
Visalia Aspiranet Office
- 14** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church, Hanford
- 16** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Boys and Girls Club, Visalia
- 23** Talking to Children About Adoption
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
Kings CO HSA Cedar Room, Hanford

May

- 5** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Boys and Girls Club, Visalia
- 7** Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
COS Kern 735, Visalia
- 12** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church, Hanford
- 13** 2nd Time Around Moms Support Group
9:00 am - 10:30 am
Visalia Aspiranet Office
- 14** Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
COS Kern 735, Visalia
- 21** Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
COS Kern 735, Visalia
- 21** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Boys and Girls Club, Visalia
- 28** The Adoption Process
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
Kings CO HSA Cedar Room, Hanford

June

- 2** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Boys and Girls Club, Visalia
- 9** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church, Hanford
- 10** 2nd Time Around Moms Support Group
9:00 am - 10:30 am
Visalia Aspiranet Office
- 11** Understanding the Impact of Parenting a Traumatized Child
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
COS Room pending, Visalia
- 15** Understanding the Impact of Parenting a Traumatized Child
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
Kings Co HSA Cedar Room, Hanford
- 18** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Boys & Girls Club, Visalia

TULARE COUNTY REACH ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP

This group is designed for new and experienced adoptive parents as well as others touched by adoption. Training hours provided. **PARENTS MUST RSVP FOR CHILD CARE.** Infants are welcome to join parents/caregivers.

Where: Visalia Boys and Girls Club (directly behind the Visalia YMCA)
215 Tulare Ave., Visalia, CA 93277

When: 1st Tuesday of the month 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM

• April 7th • May 5th • June 2nd

3rd Thursday of the month 6:30 PM – 8:30 PM

• April 16th • May 21st • June 18th

Contact: JulieAnn Jones (559)741-7358, ext. 4506 or ujones@aspiranet.org

KINGS COUNTY REACH ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP

This group is designed for adults thinking about adoption, parents awaiting adoptive placement and parents of adopted children. Training hours and childcare provided. **PARENTS MUST RSVP FOR CHILD CARE.**

Where: Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church
12536 Hanford Armona Road, Hanford, CA 93230

When: 2nd Tuesday of the month from 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

• April 14th • May 12th • June 9th

Contact: Toni Brown (559)741-7358, ext. 4509 or tbrown@aspiranet.org

COLLEGE OF SEQUOIAS FOSTER & KINSHIP PROGRAM

The College of Sequoias Foster and Kinship Program offers training of interest to foster and adoptive parents at no charge in Visalia and Hanford. For a complete list of classes, Google the key words **COS Visalia Kinship**. Register for classes with Linda Paredes at (559)737-4862 or email lindap@cos.edu. Classes are available in English and in Spanish.

REACH will be conducting the following trainings through the College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Program:

Talking to Children About Adoption

Kings Co HSA Cedar Room, Hanford
April 23rd from 6 PM to 9 PM

Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent

COS Kern 735, Visalia
May 7th, May 14th, and May 21st from 6 PM to 9 PM

The Adoption Process

Kings Co HSA Cedar Room, Hanford
May 28th from 6 PM to 9 PM

Understanding the Impact of Parenting a Traumatized Child

COS Room Pending, Visalia
June 11th from 6 PM to 9 PM

Understanding the Impact of Parenting a Traumatized Child

Kings Co HSA Cedar Room, Hanford
June 15th from 6 PM to 9 PM

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We're on the Web:
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Strengthening Children, Youth, Families and Communities



REACH and Tulare County Adoption Support Services

Resource: We provide 1) telephone support and 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 once 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 and 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.