

REACH

Tulare
County

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support



Greetings!

Summer 2014

Summertime! Days are long; nights are short... What's on the horizon for your family? Are you visiting friends and relatives? Swimming, building sand castles, picking fresh berries or peaches, eating s'mores and corn on the cob, blowing bubbles, or napping on fresh cut grass and stargazing at night? The wonderful thing about summer is you don't have to go anywhere to enjoy it. More daylight provides opportunities to strengthen family connections through the little things we do together, no matter where we are.

Dr. Karyn Purvis wrote, *"Adoptive parents become biological parents through connections"*. Dr. Purvis and Dr. David Cross developed a program to build connections called **Trust-Based Relational Interventions (TBRI)**. It's based on Empowering, Connecting and Correcting Principles. With empowering principles, we teach our children to voice their needs (rather than meltdown) and help them feel safe. Connecting principles build trust and strengthen attachments, and correcting principles teach strategies to discipline children that build trust and connections at the same time.

REACH launched its first TBRI training in May and we look forward to more in the future. One participant commented, *"TBRI was very informative and helpful for me as an adoptive parent. There were practical skills and tools given to us. I recommend this training for all foster and adoptive parents."* If you're interested in learning more about TBRI, please call a REACH Social Worker at 559-741-7358.

In This Issue: Many REACH families are in the process of adopting siblings, if they haven't already. While the number of siblings available for adoption is on the rise, it can be difficult to find families willing and able to open their hearts to several children at one time. These parents need extra support to address the special needs of each child in their home. In this issue we will explore sibling relationships and share the stories of three REACH families who have chosen to adopt a sibling group.

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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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About Adopting Siblings

By Toni Brown, M.S.

The bond between brothers and sisters is unique because it's the longest relationship most people will have throughout their lifetime. This bond exists in children raised in well-adjusted families, but it is even stronger for brothers and sisters who come from families that struggle. These children learn to depend on each other to cope with their common problems. One of the benefits of growing up with siblings is that children gain positive self-esteem when they see good qualities in their brothers and sisters. Also, siblings are sometimes able to reveal parts of themselves they might not share with anyone else, and this deepens their attachment to each other.

We know that separating siblings in foster care or adoption compounds the loss of their birth parents because the children must process their loss all over again. This separation can be more traumatic because when children experience abuse or neglect at the hands of their birth parents; they may have stronger ties to each other than their parents.

Why are siblings separated? The decision to separate siblings is not taken lightly. In recent years new policies have been developed to protect sibling relationships. The court, child welfare, and the children's lawyers are part of the decision making process. Adoptive parents may have strong recommendations, but they do not make these decisions. Sometimes children are separated because they have a better chance of being adopted, especially when there is a large age gap between the children. Sometimes the combined problems of several children may be too much for one family to manage, and the undivided attention of two parents may help children reach their highest potential. Sometimes there is aggression or violence between siblings as they recreate the life they had with their birth parents. Occasionally, the eldest member of a sibling group will have a hard time giving up their role as a caretaker.



This may cause siblings to be separated so the younger children can bond with their adoptive family and learn to become children again.

While these concerns are valid, research indicates individual and family therapy can help. Also, brothers and sisters separated due to sibling rivalry learn to deal with conflict by walking away, which hinders future relationships. If the eldest child or caregiver in a sibling group can learn to trust the adoptive parents, younger children will follow their lead. Research also indicates some children do not benefit from being an only child, and when a sibling is removed from the home, the remaining children can lose trust in their adoptive parents. They can wonder if and when they will be sent away.

How do we make decisions about sibling placements?

If you're thinking about adopting a sibling set, consider the importance of these relationships throughout the children's lifetime. They may not be close now, but they may be in the future. Consider the feelings of the children as part of the decision making process, and make your decision after consulting with anyone else who's played an important part in the children's lives. Document all the reasons for and against keeping the siblings together. If the decision to separate has been made, make a plan to maintain contact and visit regularly.

REACH Families Parenting Adopted Siblings

If you are thinking about adopting a sibling group, or have already, read on to see what REACH families have to say about it.



John & Cindy: 4 Siblings in Fost/Adopt Placement Ages 3 to 7 - Our biggest joy of adopting siblings is spending time with our kids; it's the simple things like baking together, finding sand dollars at the coast, making 4th grade missions, or just sitting and watching the children enjoy each other. We love to see them playing and laughing together, seeing the love they hold for each other and how they've included us in their bond.

The biggest challenge with a sibling group is for the children to learn and accept, to fully trust their adoptive parents and depend on them for their daily needs, instead of each other. This can only happen when there is trust between the children and parents, and this takes time on a daily basis.

We've learned spending one-on-one time with each child is a key factor, as each child is different in their own way. Truly letting them express their inner feelings about the past or present is very important to them. This helps them not fear their past. Making new memories with our children, for their future, is the best help we have to offer.

John and I would advise parents to step forward and feel the love that these children have to offer. They only want to be loved and have a safe place they can call a "home of their own". Yes, there are daily challenges just as there would be with biological children. These children will ALWAYS hold a very special place in the hearts of their adoptive parents, along with special social workers and therapist that helped them through the years of change. If you can love these children as your own, then come forward and see their smile on a daily basis.

April & Dan: 3 Siblings in Fost/Adopt Placement Ages 3 to 7 - The first couple of months were a big adjustment for everyone. It was very positive when we started seeing the kids talking and playing together. They have some inside jokes and we loved hearing their laughter. I have to say, there isn't much boredom with a sibling set, there's always someone to play with and lots of energy around the house.

Adopting three children at the same time takes more patience than we ever dreamed. My husband and I have learned a lot! Even if you've worked with children your entire life... this is completely different. It's challenging because there is so much energy in the house! It can be exhausting. Often times the younger kids copy the behaviors of the older children, so that can add to parenting issues.

If I spoke to another family thinking about adopting siblings, I would tell them to really be aware of the children's trauma histories and know that it brings a lot of stress into your family. Plan for it to take a full year before your children are adjusted in your home and feel secure. Most importantly – make sure you have plenty of support. You can't do it without family or friends who will truly support and help out. You need time to yourself to maintain your sanity.

Mary and Jerry: 2 Adopted Siblings Ages 6 & 11 - When we started this journey our intention was never to adopt. We became foster parents because that's what we were called to do. As the months rolled by, our love for the two little girls placed in our home became stronger and stronger. Then they come up for adoption. We would send them off for visitation with pre adoptive families and we would just feel sadness, frustration, and yes, even

anger. We were thinking, "Who are these people anyway!" They're not the ones who took our 5 year old to therapy and worked through the meltdowns, fit throwing, feelings of rejection and lashing out at us for things we didn't do. But none the less, we were her foster parents. Who else was there to lash out at?

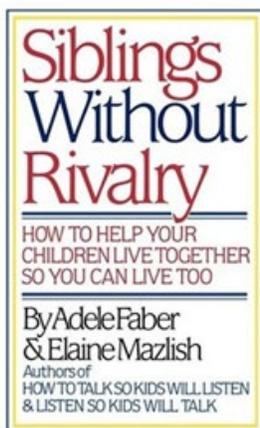
Our younger daughter was placed with us at 6 months old. We loved her, we cuddled her when she didn't want to be cuddled, we taught her to say momma, daddy, and we were the ones she took her first steps with. We came to a place where Jerry and I didn't even need words to realize these were our children. WE were the adoptive parents!!

The joy comes from knowing we kept two little sisters together. Of course we can't imagine life without either one. We see at times a lot of pressure on the older sibling. She remembers her past, she knows the feeling of being and doing without. She knows how it feels to be hungry, wondering if today she will eat. At times she will look at the younger child and think, you have NO IDEA! And even be jealous of her. But that being said, she is also is very protective of her little sister's feelings and she's careful how she words things to protect her.

We are older adoptive parents but as we look around these days there seems to be lots of grandparents out there raising grandkids, so we find ourselves in a world where it's more the norm. At times we wondered, "Are we doing right by these children, by adopting, not being young in age?" Much prayer went into this and when the doors just kept opening up we had to say, YES ALL IS WELL, and we know God will continue to give His strength to us as we continue to raise these lovely young ladies.

Keeping siblings together brings strength into a home. We would encourage anyone thinking of adoption to always keep their mind open to the joys of adopting siblings! It's a lot of hard work. There are many times you might need to pray for strength for the minute, not the day!! But in the end it will be all worth the effort as the sound of laughter, the noise and clutter of children at play, bug collections and fashion shows fill your home. You'll be able to look at each other and say, YEP IT WAS WORTH IT and we would do it again in a heartbeat!

Family Book Review



Siblings Without Rivalry

by Brenda McCreight

Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish wrote the book *Siblings Without Rivalry* which was published in 1988 and remains a best seller. The central message of the book is parents need to avoid comparing their children, but oftentimes that's easier said than done. Faber and Mazlish talk parents through different situations and outcomes to help teach their children a new set of responses. The highly informative text has helpful summary/reminder boxes and cartoons to illustrate key points. It's a must-read for parents with children because rivalry is inevitable. The authors help parents manage the rivalry with intelligence and compassion, and offers a wealth of good advice.

Web Resources for Parents Adopting From Foster Care

Adoptive Families/Siblings- www.adoptivefamilies.com/foster/

Books to Help Prepare Children for the Adoption of a Sibling- www.creatingafamily.org/adoption/suggestedbooks/books-to-help-prepare-children-for-the-adoption-of-a-sibling.html

Sibling Issues in Foster Care and Adoption- www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/siblingissues.pdf

SUPPORT GROUPS

UPCOMING CALENDAR OF EVENTS

July

- 1** Tulare REACH Parent Retreat
Visalia Boys and Girls Club
6:30 – 8:30 PM
- 8** Kings REACH Support Group
Kings County Office of Education
Lemoore Conference Center
6:00 - 8:00 PM

August

- 4** Tulare REACH Parent Retreat
6:30 to 8:30 PM
Visalia Boys and Girls Club
- Becoming a Trauma Competent
Healing Parent
6:00 - 9:00 PM
COS Location in Visalia, Room Pending
- 11** Becoming a Trauma Competent
Healing Parent
6:00 - 9:00 PM
COS Location in Visalia, Room Pending
- 12** Kings REACH Support Group
6:00 - 8:00 PM
Kings County Office of Education
Lemoore Conference Center
- 18** Becoming a Trauma Competent
Healing Parent
6:00 - 9:00 PM
COS Location in Visalia, Room Pending
- 21** The Adoption Process
6:00 – 9:00 PM
COS Location in Visalia, Room Pending

September

- 2** Tulare REACH Parent Retreat
6:30 - 8:30 PM
Visalia Boys And Girls Club
- 9** Kings REACH Support Group
6:00 - 8:00 PM
Kings County Office of Education
Lemoore Conference Center

TULARE COUNTY REACH PARENT RETREAT

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 W. Tulare Ave., Visalia, CA

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

- July 1st
- August 4th
- September 2nd

Contact: Marji Peterson, MFTI at (559) 741-7358 ext. 4512 or email mpeterson@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 provided. **PARENTS MUST RSVP FOR CHILD CARE.** Infants and pre-toddlers remain with parents/caregivers.

Where: Kings County Office of Education Lemoore Conference Center
876 E. "D" Street, Suite B, Lemoore, CA 93245

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

- July 8th
- August 12th
- September 9th

Contact: Toni Brown, M.S. at (559) 741-7358 ext. 4509 or email 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 Paredez at (559)737-4862 or email lindap@cos.edu. Classes are available in English and in Spanish.

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

Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent

COS Location in Visalia, Room Pending
August 4th, 11th, & 18th
6:00 - 9:00 PM

The Adoption Process

COS Location in Visalia, Room Pending
August 21st
6:00 – 9:00 PM

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We're on the Web:
www.reachtularecounty.org



ASPIRAnet
Strengthening Children, Youth, Families and Communities



REACH and Tulare County 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.