

REACH

**Tulare
County**

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support



REACH Pre & Post Adoption Services Program

Winter 2011

One of the primary functions of the REACH Program is advocacy. An advocate defends, supports and promotes the interests of another. You don't have to be an adoption professional to take on this role. Every time parents educate or inform someone, they are advocating for adoption.

Advocacy is not a one time event. Rather, it's a slow process that evolves over time. First time parents or families in crisis may be overwhelmed and need to take things slowly. However, the longer you are an adoptive parent, helper or professional, the easier it is to promote adoption as a great way to form a family.

As parents, one of the easiest and effective forms of advocacy is positive adoption language. Your children and others will naturally follow your lead. When someone asks, "Where's the real mom?" you might respond, "You mean the birth mom?" If someone asks, "Why was your child given up for adoption, you might respond, "That's an interesting question, why do you ask?" or "Adoption was the best option for my child."

REACH provides adoption advocacy by walking side by side with parents and children. We attend meetings with parents, work with adoption professionals, and provide referrals, education, and information to help parents make informed decisions. If we don't know the answer to your questions and concerns, we will find someone who can.

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 Paredes at (559)737-4842 or lindap@cos.edu. Topics in January, February and March include The Road to Permanence (in Spanish), Learning Disabilities, Bi-polar Disorder, and Physical vs. Emotional Trauma.

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 4:30-6:30pm. Support groups in Madera and Oakhurst are also held on a monthly basis. Contact Kathy Steele, LCSW, at (559)222-4969 for more information.

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.

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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

Toni Brown, MFT Intern,
Adoption Social Worker
tbrown@aspiranet.org

REACH Tulare County
4128 South Demaree, Ste. B
Visalia, CA 93277

Ph: (559) 741-7358

Fax: (559) 741-7368

www.reachtularecounty.org

Unpredictable Kid/Frazzled Parent: Coping with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

By Alison M. Acton, LMFT

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) a disorder that occurs in children, may continue into adulthood, and is characterized by three main types of symptoms: inattention, hyperactivity, and impulsivity. There appears to be a link between prenatal alcohol and/or drug use and this disorder although a connection has not been widely researched. I have spoken to many adoptive parents whose drug exposed children are struggling with this disorder as well as physicians who are treating these children. The remainder of this article will explore assessment, symptoms, and treatment of ADHD.

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder is usually first diagnosed during the elementary school years, when school adjustment is difficult (American Psychiatric Association, Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV-TR, 2000, page 90). Assessment typically includes input from the children's parents as well as the their classroom teacher, a trained pediatrician, psychiatrist, or mental health therapist. An Assessment Scale that is used commonly is the NICHQ Vanderbilt Assessment Scale, which has a section that is completed by the child's parent as well as a section that is completed by the child's teacher.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health Attention deficit/hyperactivity (ADHD) disorder:

1. Is one of the most common childhood disorders and can continue through adolescence and adulthood.
2. Symptoms include difficulty staying focused and paying attention, difficulty controlling behavior, and hyperactivity.
3. Studies suggest a potential link between cigarette smoking and alcohol use during pregnancy and ADHD in children.
4. Children who have suffered a brain injury may show some behaviors similar to those of ADHD.

There have not been significant studies regarding prenatal methamphetamine use and subsequent ADHD; however, methamphetamine is a powerful neurotoxin that adversely

affects the brain and can cause brain damage. New research published in the April 2009 issue of Neurology describes the impact of methamphetamine exposure before birth and confirmed earlier reports of significant brain changes in these children. The risk of ADHD and various learning disabilities appears to be higher in children exposed to meth prenatally (Mothers Against Methamphetamine website, www.mamasite.net). According to Davies & Bledsoe, (Prenatal Alcohol & Drug Exposures in Adoption, Pediatric Clinics of North America 52(2005)1369-1393) very limited research on methamphetamine exposed children describes possible links between aggressive behavior, peer problems, and hyperactivity. All three of these issues can be present in children with ADHD. When untreated and undiagnosed the symptoms of ADHD can wreck havoc for children and their parents at home and school. Typically the problems come to light in the school setting where symptoms of inattention, impulsivity, and hyperactivity do not bode well.

ADHD is commonly treated with psycho-stimulant medications including: Ritalin, Concerta, Daytrana, Adderall, Vyvanse, and Methylin. A nonstimulant drug that is also used to treat ADHD is Strattera. When the medication is effective it helps children improve their focus, do their schoolwork, decrease impulsivity, decrease hyperactivity, and increase learning.

In addition to the use of medication
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A child with ADHD will have some of the specific symptoms listed below and there are different types of ADHD depending on the symptom compilation.

Inattention

Hyperactivity

Impulsivity

Fails to give close attention to detail, makes careless mistakes

Often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat

Often blurts out answers before questions have been completed

Difficulty sustaining attention in tasks or play

Often leaves seat in classroom or in other situations

Often has difficulty awaiting turn

Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly

Runs or climbs excessively in situations in which this is inappropriate

Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g. butts into conversations or games)

Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish tasks

Difficulty playing or engaging in leisure activities quietly

Difficulty organizing tasks and activities

Is often "on the go" or often acts as if "driven by a motor"

Reluctant to engage in tasks requiring sustained mental effort

Often talks excessively

Often loses things necessary for tasks or activities

Easily distracted by extraneous stimuli

Often forgetful in daily activities

(American Psychiatric Association, Desk Reference to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV-TR, 2000, pages 65-66)

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to manage symptoms, ADHD can be treated with therapy and behavioral interventions as well as strategies that parents can try at home. The National Institute of Mental Health offers the following tips to parents to help kids with ADHD stay organized and follow directions:

1. Schedule – Keep the same routine every day, from wake-up time to bedtime. Include time for homework, outdoor play, and indoor activities. Keep the schedule on the refrigerator or on a bulletin board in the kitchen. Write changes on the schedule as far as advance as possible.
2. Organize everyday items – Have a place for everything, and keep everything in its place. This includes clothing, backpacks, and toys.
3. Use homework and notebook organizers – Use organizers for school material and supplies. Stress to your child the importance of writing down assignments and bringing home the necessary books.
4. Be clear and consistent – Children with ADHD need consistent rules they can understand and follow.
5. Children with ADHD often receive and expect criticism. Instead, give praise or rewards when rules are followed.

If you suspect that your child may be suffering from ADHD it is recommended that you schedule an appointment for your child to be assessed by a Pediatrician or Psychiatrist who has experience in working with drug exposed children (if applicable to your child) and experience in working with children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. For specific referrals to knowledgeable Pediatricians and Psychiatrists contact Marji Peterson MFTI at the Tulare REACH program at (559)741-7358. In addition another good place to start is a local full service mental health clinic for children in which both mental health and psychiatric (medication) services are available. Marji can also be contacted to obtain a list of local full service mental health clinics.

Support and Resources

Tulare REACH Support Groups

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 is designed for parents to share their stories with other parents.

January 11	Mini Workshop: Understanding the Mental Health Assessment Process facilitated by Synchrony of Visalia
January 25	Parent Retreat Open Discussion
February 8	Mini Workshop: Panel Presentation with teens from the REACH Adopted Teen Support Group
February 22	Parent Retreat Open Discussion
March 8	Mini Workshop: Parenting Children with Mental Health Concerns Facilitated by Tulare Youth Services
March 22	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 @ 741-7558.

WAITING FAMILIES SUPPORT GROUP

This support group is designed for parents who have been certified for adoption and waiting for adoptive placement. Please call Marji Peterson or Toni Brown for more information @ 741-7358.

Adopted Children's Friendships

By Marji Peterson, MFT Intern, Adoption Social Worker

Based on "Friendship Lessons" Adoptive Families Magazine

Parents often wonder about the role they play in their children's peer relationships, and the impact of adoption on their children's friendships.

Children begin to form friendships in kindergarten or first grade when they play together side by side or engage in similar activities. For the most part, conversation doesn't effect friendships until the third or fourth grade, when children begin to discuss their ideas and interests. Children who play well together have a lot of give and take and don't squabble often.



Adoptive parents can support their children's friendships by talking about how their family was formed. Adopted children need to know their adoption story, according to their level of understanding, to feel comfortable answering questions about why he/she was adopted and why people in the same family look different.

It's important for parents to take an active role in supporting their children's positive relationships. It helps when parents ask their children questions on a regular basis about who they play with, and what they like and don't like about their friends. If your child is having a hard time making friends, talking and listening to their concerns can help. Here are some strategies for parents to foster open communication and help resolve conflicts.

1. Wait for the right time and place to talk with your children; walking, driving, playing a simple game, eating together, or bedtime.
2. Practice nonverbal reinforcement when you child is speaking, look girls in the eye and sit side by side with boys. Use an empathetic tone of voice and don't laugh!
3. Avoid questions with yes or no answers. You might ask if something is bothering your child and follow up with questions about how things are working out.
4. If your child doesn't want to talk, don't pester. Wait and ask questions later.
5. When your child is talking, rephrase what they are saying and repeat it back to them in an even tone. For instance, when your child complains a friend is being mean, ask what happened next, or why their friend might act that way.
6. Be as patient as possible and don't try to solve problems until your child is finished talking. Remember criticism can make your child feel judged or ignored.

Medical Resources for Families Raising Drug Exposed Infants & Children

By Marji Peterson, MFT Intern, Adoption Social Worker

Approximately 98% of children adopted through Tulare County Foster Care are drug exposed in utero. Methamphetamine is the local drug of choice, and Drug Exposed Infants (DEI) typically exhibit signs of hypersensitivity to stimuli, changes in muscle tone, and gastrointestinal problems. Complications depend on the drug(s) the baby was exposed to, how the baby metabolized the drug(s), and the baby's temperament and tolerance. With methamphetamine use during pregnancy, severe withdraw symptoms do not necessarily predict problems later in life, and mild symptoms do not necessarily indicate an infant will remain symptom free.

Kaweah Delta and First Five Tulare County have partnered to establish a Pediatric Specialty Clinic in Exeter. Two physicians have been recruited thus far; Dr. Roberto Gugig, who treats children with lactose intolerance, food allergies, GERD, and other gastrointestinal problems, and Dr. Desiree Rodgers, who treats children with behavioral and developmental problems, including high risk newborn follow up, developmental delays, medical problems, ADHD, and learning disorders. Their expertise and services are new to our community and address the needs of many adopted children.

Dr. David Sine, a Pediatric Specialist at the Exeter Clinic shared that he has treated infants and children in and around Visalia for seven years. Many infants he treated in the past are school age now, and struggle with learning and impulsivity. He's observed that DEI and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) symptoms are similar but not quite the same, and psychotropic medications may help. For the best DEI outcomes, Dr. Sine recommends thorough school readiness assessments for three and four year olds, including hearing, vision and speech tests. These assessments can indicate learning problems early on when interventions are most effective. He suggests parents educate themselves, look into services early, write letters, and become "squeaky wheels" to advocate for their children at school. If you would like to know more about medical and mental health services available for children in our community, as well as help with advocacy and referrals to adoption professionals, please contact the REACH Program.

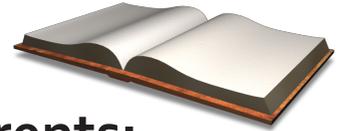
November 2010 National Adoption Day Update

By Toni Brown, MFT Intern, Adoption Social Worker

Nation wide November is recognized as National Adoption Awareness month. The Tulare County Superior Court and the Adoptions Unit celebrated the 11th Annual National Adoption Day on November 19th. During the event, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors recognized the Tulare County Adoptions Unit and adoptive families with a Proclamation. Refreshments, pastries, cookies, cakes, and hot beverages were served. The room was packed full with excited families awaiting their adoption finalizations. Extended family members and close friends were present with gifts and balloons to distribute once the documents were officially signed. Families exchanged smiles, hugs, and tears as they mingled and shared their adoption stories. At one point during the celebration, a gentleman stood up and announced through tears of joy, that he was truly thankful to be a part of the event. He rejoiced at knowing that after that day, his newly adopted children would be a permanent part of his life. Approximately eleven families finalized the adoptions of fourteen children at this event.

To honor families who have adopted over this past year, Tulare County Adoptions partnered with Aspiranet and the REACH Program to host an additional National Adoption Day event. On November 13th at the Imagine-U Kid's Museum in Visalia, adoptive families participated in many activities, including clown/face painting, story time, a bubble show, and arts and crafts. Imagine-U also provided pizza, snacks and drinks. Tulare County Adoptions staff members displayed their large felt Adoption Tree wall hanging with the names of children who were adopted in previous years. The hanging is a popular background for families to snap photos. The REACH Program also provided a private photographer to take family pictures. Several gift baskets were raffled off, including a family game night basket, and others containing books, toys and gift certificates. Finally, each family received a REACH bag with literature and children's books with adoption themes. Both events were a success and a great way for adoptive families to celebrate and share their adoption stories.

Book Reviews



Book Review for Parents: Experiencing Infertility

By Debbie Peoples, MSW & Harriette Ferguson, CSW

One in six couples in the US is affected by infertility, which often contributes to their decision to adopt. Infertility issues can resurface after adoptions are finalized, when children begin to ask how and why they were adopted, and parents explain how their families were formed. Experiencing Infertility provides comfort and insight into the emotional, medical, and financial considerations of infertility. Former patients and professionals offer valuable insights filled with emotional understanding and empathy. Experiencing Infertility is available in the REACH Library.

Book Review for Children: Lucy's Family Tree

by Karen Halvorsen Schreck

Lucy's family doesn't "match" and being different bothers her. A family tree project at school brings Lucy's feelings about her adoption out into the open, and she begins to explore what really makes a family. As she comes to understand that being different is part of life, Lucy finds a way to make a family tree that celebrates her past as well as her present. This book is available in the REACH Library.

Book Review for Youth: The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens

by Sean Covey

Based on his father's bestselling The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Sean Covey applies the same principles to teens with an entertaining style that keeps it fun. The book contains cartoons, clever ideas, great quotes, and incredible stories about real teens from all over the world. Open to any page and find real-life stories of teens who have overcome obstacles to succeed, and step-by-step guide lines to build relationships, create action plans, and much more. This book is available in the REACH Library.

Movie Review for Families: Snow Dogs

directed by Brain Levant

Ted Brooks, (played by Cuba Gooding Jr.) is in his 30's, and has no idea he was adopted. He discovers that his birth mom recently died and left him her estate - in Alaska! Ted flies to Alaska to take care of his birth mother's estate and finds his birth father. He's intrigued about how and why he was adopted, and wants to spend time with his birth father. The movie ends with Ted incorporating his birth family roots and his adoptive family's interests into his life as he practices dentistry (his adoptive father's career) in Alaska. This film is an easy way to bring the subjects of adoption, reunion, and family into the home. Snow Dogs has a happy ending and all three sides of the adoption triad, are depicted. Used copies of this DVD are available at Amazon.com for \$1.90.

Aspiranet
151 Canal Drive
Turlock, CA 95380

NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Stockton, CA
PERMIT NO. 451



Local Office
4128 S. Demaree, Ste. B
Visalia, CA 93277

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.