

REACH

Tulare
County

Resource Education Advocacy Crisis Intervention Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Post-Adoption Support



REACH Pre & Post Adoption Services Program

Winter 2012

Greetings from REACH! We hope your holiday season was merry and bright and winter provides many opportunities for your family to relax and enjoy each other's company. Well... we can always hope about the relaxing part!

While parents can be distracted by holiday shopping and celebrations, short days and long nights are wonderful for spending time with children. Cooking special foods, playing games, reading seasonal bedtime stories and watching holiday movies can become family traditions. If parents have older adopted children, it's wise to incorporate holiday activities from their past and/or culture. That way everyone feels involved and embraced by their "forever" family.

On another note, be on the lookout for a letter from REACH to evaluate your interest in support groups for children and youth. If your children are interested, we need to know the days and times they're available. Please take time to complete and return your letter in the self-addressed stamped envelop. If you have not received a letter, please call (559)741-7358 ext 4512.

REACH support groups for children and youth will run six to eight weeks depending on the number and ages of the children who register. Groups will focus on talking with others about adoption, and responding (or not) to questions like; "Why were you adopted?" or "Why don't you look like your dad?". It's our job as parents and adoption helpers to give children communication tools so they're comfortable in social settings and at school. Also, support groups provide opportunities for adopted children to spend time with peers with similar stories and backgrounds. All siblings, adopted and biological, are welcome to REACH support groups.

In This Issue – The winter issue of the REACH Newsletter focuses on the sibling bond and its importance in foster and adoptive placement. We will hear sibling stories from a parent and teens, and learn more about the unique and longest lasting relationship most people have in their lives. While sibling bonds have highs and lows, our personal identity is intimately involved with our brothers and sisters. This newsletter will also explore recent sibling research findings, reasons for separating and keeping siblings together, and considerations to review while contemplating placement of a sibling set in your home. Siblings are a huge component of foster/adopt parenting and we will continue to explore this topic during our winter Parent Retreats and Waiting/In the Making Family Mixers. We hope to see you there!

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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.

Sibling Bonds & Separations

Relationships between siblings are likely the longest lasting, and help define us as individuals and members of a family. Sibling relationships are so significant they've been depicted through time in folk and bible stories, classical literature, and modern films such as *The Parent Trap* and *Twins*. In recent years developmental psychologists, researchers and therapists have come to understand the lifelong impact of sibling relationships, and the importance of keeping children together. We now know that siblings tend to have a lot of conflict when they come from families with a lot of conflict. And since brothers and sisters spend large amounts of time together as playmates and companions, their relationships influence social and cognitive learning as well as peer relationships. Additionally we know siblings tend to become closer when parental care is absent.

As parents and adoption helpers, we know children in foster care and adoptive families may or may not have contact with biological or adoptive siblings, and their bonds may be joyous or sad. If you are interested in learning more about siblings in foster care and adoption, and supporting sibling relationships in your home, please review the highlights below and visit the websites we've listed in this newsletter. Sibling relationships is a huge topic, and we look forward to more discussions at our Winter Parent Retreats and Waiting/In the Making Family Mixers.

Considerations for Sibling Placements & Separations

Reasons for Keeping Siblings Together

- Sibling group placement minimizes the trauma of parental separation
- Siblings may have stronger ties to each other than parents
- Siblings provide emotional support to each other and boost self-esteem
- All siblings may benefit from therapy and staying together

Reasons for Separating Siblings

- One or more of the children have special needs
- Siblings that reinforce behavior problems used to cope in previous abusive homes
- Unable to locate homes willing to adopt sibling groups
- Sibling physical conflicts/intense rivalry

Practices to Support Sibling Relationships

- Introduce children to a new family in staggered placements
- Joint sibling therapy sessions
- Shared vacations and respite care
- Maintain sibling communication and visitation in separate homes

Considerations for Separate Placements

- Safety
- Sibling emotional, physical or sexual abuse
- Siblings who do not recognize the sibling link
- Serious medical problems of one sibling

Negative Effects of Separation

- Greater risk of emotional disturbance
- Separation teaches family relationships are not important
- Loss of care giving by older siblings negatively affects both siblings

- Removing one sibling from an adoptive home reduces trust in adults

Considerations for Accepting and Working with Siblings

- Consider the importance of the sibling relationship over a lifetime
- Consider the child(ren)'s feelings
- Document all the reasons for and against keeping children together or separating them. Future and former foster parents, therapists, teachers, physicians and others who have played important roles in the children's lives, can provide insight and contribute to the decision making process
- If siblings must be separated, make plans to maintain connections via visitations, vacations, respite placements, telephone, letters and emails. Experience shows that the bond between children and new parents is strengthened when parents support sibling relationships

Sibling Placement Research Findings

- Separation due to sibling rivalry teaches the way to deal with conflict is to walk away. When siblings remain together, they learn how to resolve differences and develop stronger relationships
- Parentified, or overly responsible children, are not all bad. The care giving child can gradually become a child again, and can become a role model for younger siblings learning to trust adults
- An only child may receive a lot of attention, but the child may be expected to embody all the parent's aspirations. Only children may not be able to meet their parent's expectations
- When a sibling is removed from a home due to behavior problems, the remaining children may wonder if the same thing can happen to them, and reduce their ability to trust adults

TULARE REACH SUPPORT GROUPS & WORKSHOPS

For Tulare County adults and children touched by adoption

All Tulare County REACH Support Groups are held from 6:30-8:00pm at Visalia YMCA 211 West Tulare Ave. Visalia Childcare and training hours are provided.

PARENT RETREAT SUPPORT GROUP

Second Tuesday: Adoptive Parenting

This group is designed for new and experienced adoptive parents

January 10 – Sibling Rivalry

February 14 – Parenting Children with Histories of Trauma

March 13 – Tools For Talking With Children About Adoption

WAITING/IN THE MAKING FAMILY MIXER

Third Tuesday of the Month: Adoption Adjustment & Transitions

This group is designed for adults thinking about adoption, parents awaiting adoptive placement, and parents with children recently placed in their homes

January 17 – Parenting Tools for Easier Adoption Transitions

February 21 – Adjusting to Life After Adoption

March 20 – Helping Your Foster Child Become Your Adopted Child

ADOPTION STORIES

Forth Tuesday of the Month: Adoption Stories

This group is designed for interested persons to hear the stories of adopted youth, adults and others touched by adoption.

January 24 – Adopted Adult Stories

February 28 – Adopted Youth Stories

March 27 - Birth Family Stories

WEB LINKS TO ARTICLES ON SIBLINGS IN FOSTER CARE & ADOPTION

Sibling Bonds and Separations

www.adoptionssupport.org/pub/docs/sibling_bonds09copyright.pdf

Sibling Issues in Foster Care and Adoption

www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/siblingissues.pdf

The Sibling Bond: Its Importance in Foster Care and Adoptive Placement

library.adoption.com/articles/the-sibling-bond-its-importance-in-foster-care-and-adoptive-placement.html

Siblings in Foster Care

http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/downloads/information_packets/siblings-pkt.pdf

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Hanford Group	Parent Retreat			
Oakhurst Group	Waiting/ in Making Family Mixer			
Madera Group	Parent Retreat			

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 January, February and March include: Grandparent and Kinship Positive Parenting, Parenting Children Exposed to Domestic Violence, The Entitlement Free Child, Reactive Attachment Disorder, and Bouncing Back: From Risk to Resilience.

ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUPS IN NEARBY COMMUNITIES

Call Kathy Steele, LCSW @ 559- 222-4969 Ext. 2626

Hanford – 2nd Monday of the Month 5:30 to 7:30 PM

Oakhurst – 3rd Monday of the Month 5:30 to 7:30 PM

Madera – 4th Monday of the Month 5:30 to 7:30 PM

NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY & CELEBRATION

On November 1st Tulare County Adoptions and REACH Adoption Services celebrated National Adoption Month, at Roller Towne in Visalia, with families who've recently adopted. Nearly 100 people attended. Families and adoption helpers enjoyed pizza, cake and skating, as well as raffle prizes, family photographs, face painting and a bounce house. The magical evening was highlighted with a demonstration by a local roller derby team. Many local agencies and businesses contributed to the festivities and the adoption community appreciates their support.

Tulare County also celebrated National Adoption Day on November 18th when 100 people gathered to witness 12 families finalize the adoptions of 18 children. Three judges presided over the festive proceedings. Children received gift bags with stuffed animals, toys and balloons, and each family was presented with a beautiful plant.

Sibling Adoption Stories

By Marji Peterson, MFT Intern, Adoption Social Worker

Zack is 16 and has two adopted brothers who are biological siblings. They came home when Zack was 10. Sam is younger and Jake is older than Zack.

Zack has a good relationship with Jake because, "We were best friends when he first was adopted, and he would protect me and anybody else in my family. Jake is cool because he was the strongest kid in our school and everyone knew him. He introduced me to his friends, so lots of people knew me because of him."

Zack's relationship with Sam is more complicated. Zack said, "Sam is hard for me to get along with because he tries to be better than me in a lot of ways and he gets a lot of attention for being athletic."

"Adoption changed me by learning to adapt to change. That helps me get ready for anything that that happens in life. I'm a lot more patient with other people because of my brothers."

Cilicia is 19 and she was 15 when her brothers Anthony and Pablo came home. At that time, Anthony was 5 and Pablo was 2.

Cilicia is an only child and always wanted siblings. She recalls a car pulling up in front of her house with 2 bobbing heads in the back seat. The boys got out of the car, ran up the sidewalk, and gave everyone a big hug. Cilicia said, "We were done, we knew the boys were supposed to be part of our family."

Cilicia remembers adjusting to the boys was hard at first, because Anthony talked a lot about what he and his brother went through. It was sad and painful for Cilicia to hear what he remembered.

Cilicia and Pablo had a big bond when he was a baby. Now since Anthony is bigger, he and Cilicia talk openly about school, girls, bullies, and adoption. Sometimes Anthony talks to Cilicia before he shares what he's thinking with his parents. Recently he asked about his birth mom and dad. He wanted to see a baby picture of himself, meet his birth mom and dad and ask why they don't have him anymore. The family talked it out

Zack suggests that families try to be patient if they're adopting from a different country and try to learn the language. "The hard work really pays off, not right away but adopted kids do change and become part of the family. If parents are adopting more than one person, try to go places like a movie with your original family because it helps a lot to make time for your biological family too."

According to Zack, "Adoption changed me by learning to adapt to change. That helps me get ready for anything that that happens in life. I'm a lot more patient with other people because of my brothers."

and decided he can look for his birth family when he gets older.

Recently Anthony realized Pablo was his birth sibling. He didn't think so before because the boys act so different. Now Anthony seems nicer to his brother and the boys are connected at the hip. When the three siblings spend time together they have fun playing with the Wii and pranking each other.

Cilicia said, "Adoption is the best decision you'll ever make. It's about taking a child less fortunate, and giving them a better life. It feels like the boys are supposed to be part of our family. We don't feel complete without them. I'm even going to adopt when I get older, married and settle down. Having adopted siblings will help me become a better adoptive parent because I'll remember the things Anthony told me and put them into play."

Cilicia suggests, "Parents need to understand that every child is different. They act and learn in their own way. Adopted children haven't been fully raised by adoptive aparents, so parents need to be stern, but more understanding than anything else."



The REACH program provides adoption education and information, as well as support counseling to families with biological and non-biological siblings. Often adoptive parents are raising children with different needs and capacities to form close relationships; therefore managing relationships between siblings can be a joy and a challenge.

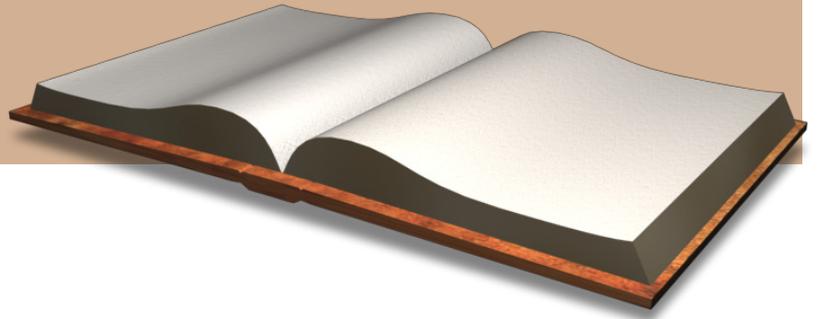
Laurel and Chris recently adopted two young boys who are not biologically related. Ephraim and Jordan are 24 and 20 months old. Laurel and Chris met Ephraim and took him home when he was 8 months old. They met Jordan when he was 20 months old and took him home six weeks later.

According to Laurel, parenting boys with two different personalities is a challenge. Ephraim has lots of energy, he's curious and loves to cuddle and play outside. He's an extrovert, clingy, and anxious at night. He's comforted by being close to his parents.

On the other hand, Jordan is a lover and fighter. He's very protective of his new family and loves roughhousing with Chris. Jordan is more introverted, and he's learning to let his parents comfort him with hugs and physical contact. Contrary to his brother, time outs help Jordan calm down so he can reconnect with others.

Laurel observed, "Parents have to be prepared for a lot hard work once they get a placement, yet we can't be totally prepared for the exact challenges that come up. Bonding takes time, work and creativity, and it's sweet to see the boys adjust, bond, and begin to love each other. For example Jordan started tickling Ephraim on his belly button. This is something the boys think its funny and it doesn't involve me or Chris. It's a little something only the two of them share."

Book Reviews



Parents & Youth - Let REACH know if you've read an interesting adoption book or watched a movie. We'll put your review in our next newsletter!

Book Review for Parents: Siblings Without Rivalry: How to Help Your Children Live Together So You Can Live Too

by *Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish*

This book was a bestseller when it first appeared in 1988 and continues to be popular today. The central message sounds simple: avoid comparisons. But parents know that's easier said than done. The authors talk parents through different situations and outcomes to help siblings respond to each other positively. The highly informative book has helpful reminder boxes and cartoons illustrating key points. It's a must-read for parents with (or planning on) multiple children. But parents of young children who get along fine (so far) should read it too--as the authors make it very clear, rivalry is inevitable. The only question is how to manage the rivalry with intelligence and compassion, and on that subject they offer a wealth of good advice. This book is available in the REACH Lending Library

Book Review for Children: My Special Someone A Child's Perspective of Adoption

by *Brittany and Sherry Kyle*

My Special Someone, for children ages 2-7, is the only adoption book written and illustrated by a 6 year old. Brittany tells how her family adopted a baby sister and describes the process from her point of view. There are also suggestions for bonding moments between parents and children and questions to help children express their feelings about a new sibling. Additionally there are 10 suggestions for smoothly transitioning a child into your home. Some suggestions and questions include:

Did your brother or sister look like what you imagined?

How did you celebrate the adoption of your brother or sister?

Talk openly as a family at the diner table about the upcoming adoption.

Read children's books about adoption and write your own story!

This book is available in the REACH Lending Library.

Book Review for Youth: Understanding Your Siblings and Yourself

by *Elizabeth Siris Winchester (non fiction)*

Like lots of kids, Jenny has trouble relating to her sibling. In this book, half brothers, stepsisters, twins and adopted brothers and sisters talk about how they get along and what happens when they don't. Famous adopted persons are discussed, as well as identity and adjustment issues. This book is available @ Amazon.com.

Book Review for Youth: The Other Sister

by *S. T. Underdahl (fiction)*

The Other Sister is appropriate for youth grades 7 and up. The main character, Josey is 15, the only daughter and the best student in her family. Then her parents reveal she has an older sister, now 25. Josey's brothers and two closest friends assume she will be delighted to have an older sister. Josey views Audrey as an interloper who eclipses her status in the family. Ultimately, with the support of her parents, friends, and especially Audrey, Josey comes to appreciate her own uniqueness in her evolving family. This book is available @ Amazon.com.

Movie Review for Families: Elf

with *Will Ferrell & Bob Newhart*

Elf is a smartly written, skillfully directed, and deftly acted story of a human being adopted by Christmas elves who returns to the human world to find his father. And because the writing, directing, and acting are good, Elf is genuinely funny. Will Ferrell, as Buddy the adopted elf, is hilarious. James Caan, as Buddy's father, is believably cranky and confused. Zooey Deschanel, Buddy's love interest, is delightfully tongue in cheek. The movie also features Mary Steenburgen, Bob Newhart, Peter Dinklage, and Ed Asner as Santa Claus. This DVD is available @ Amazon.com.

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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.