

REACH

Tulare
County

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis Intervention • Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Adoption Support Program



Greetings!

Winter 2017

Happy New Year! We hope you've enjoyed the holiday season with your loved ones and are ready to embrace a new year. Have you made any resolutions or set goals for your family? At Tulare County REACH, our goal is to make the New Year one of growth, healing, and authentic connection for our families. I am excited about my recent attendance at the TBRI® Practitioners training (Trust Based Relational Intervention) and look forward to using the materials to bring hope and healing to our REACH families. If you haven't heard of TBRI®, please call the office! We'd love to share our excitement and have several videos and books you can check out from our lending library.

I'd also like to take a moment to reflect on what 2016 brought for our program. In addition to several REACH trainings provided to families and professionals, REACH was able to offer four social opportunities for our families. In the spring, REACH parents attended a luncheon with speaker (and adult adoptee) Ken Huey. In the summer, our families enjoyed a free evening at our local Imagine U Museum. This fall, parents enjoyed our first ever "Parents Night Out"! REACH employees and volunteers had a great time with their children while the parents enjoyed an evening of self-care. A special thanks to Melissa Hudson (Aspiranet), Sally Saunders (CASA) and Debbie Benavente (CWS) who volunteered their time to help make the evening a success. We'd also like to express our gratitude to Little Caesars Pizza who not only donated pizza for the event but had their mascot deliver! The children loved it. Lastly, this fall we had the privilege of celebrating with families who completed Tulare County adoptions in 2016 at our annual Roller Towne event. It is our hope that we can continue to provide these social opportunities for families to connect with others in their local adoption community.

In our Winter 2017 Newsletter, we chose to focus on helping families understand how to initiate conversations (using positive adoption language), listen, and respond to their children about adoption related feelings and experiences. We hope you enjoy our articles and consider utilizing our lending library for some of the mentioned resources.

Warmly,

- JulieAnn

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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.

Ages & Stages: Developmental Needs of Adopted Children

By Alison M. Acton, LMFT

Adoption is a lifelong process for the adopted child and their adoptive parents (referred to as parents throughout the rest of the article). As children grow and develop, their needs and understanding of adoption progresses over time. Each age presents unique challenges in the life of the adopted child and their parents.

Infant to Toddler Age: During this stage, children are adjusting to their new home and developing a secure attachment. The world is experienced through movement and senses. The infant and toddler are learning to trust that their needs will be provided for. At this age, adoption is not understood. An older toddler may be able to repeat a story told to them about their adoption but this does not mean that they understand it. It is not too early to introduce the adoption conversation. Letting your child know about the day they moved in, reading age appropriate books to your child with an adoption theme such as **Horace** by Holly Keller and **A Mother For Choco** by Keiko Kasza, and celebrating your child's adoption day are all good activities and help lay the ground work for what will come later.

Pre-School Age: During this stage children are developing motor and language skills, becoming more autonomous, and are prone to magical thinking. Children begin to understand that babies grow inside a woman's stomach. They may begin to ask questions regarding this. Children at this stage generally still do not understand adoption fully. It is important when they ask a question to make sure you understand what it is they are asking and then respond simply to the question asked. For example, if they ask did they grow in your tummy, they do not need a long explanation on why not and the ins and outs of adoption. The response should be honest, simple, and provide reassurance to the child. It is important for children at this age to know that they are loved, that they are wanted by their parents, that adoption is for always, that their adoptive family is a forever family. Talking to your child about how they came to be in your family, i.e. we got a call that you were born and picked you up at the hospital (and continue with details of the story). Just as non adopted children generally like to hear about their birth many times, it is important to share stories of coming into the family with adopted children. Parents can make a point of mentioning that other children they know of are adopted, i.e. Alex was adopted. Additionally parents can point out fictional or cartoon characters that their children are familiar with that are adopted, such as Kai-lan from Ni hao Kai-lan (cartoon) or Bowen from the Power Rangers. Making adoption a normal part of conversation continues to lay the ground work for what will come later. Parents can continue to read books to their children with adoption related themes such as **Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born** by Jamie Lee Curtis, **Over the Moon, an Adoption Tale** by Karen Katz, **The Day We Met You** by Phoebe Koehler, **Happy Adoption Day** by John McCutcheon, **The Family Book** by Todd Parr, **We Belong Together** by Todd Parr, and **How I was Adopted** by Joanna Cole.

Early to Middle School Age: During this stage children are learning and accomplishing many new skills, growing in knowledge and expanding their world to include school and community. Children are beginning to realize that most children are not adopted. At this age a child's curiosity increases and children may want more details about themselves, birthparents, and birth siblings. Children may begin to experience painful feelings as they do not understand why they did not remain with birthparents. Children may keep painful feelings to themselves because they are unsure about security within their adoptive family. Parents should be prepared to answer more direct questions and to provide more detailed information along with providing a lot of reassurance. Children need to know that it is okay to talk to their parents about their feelings -

good and bad - and that no one can take them away from their adoptive family. Children tend to feel responsible for what happens to them, i.e. I was bad, so my birth mom gave me away. It is important to let children know that they are not bad and that their birthparents could not take care of them because of their own problems. Questions about adoption will likely pop up at the child's school; parents can help by providing information to the school, a good resource book about adoption for school is **All About Adoption: How Families are Made** by Marc Nemiroff. Parents should have books available for their children to read regarding adoption such as **The Mulberry Bird** by Anne Braff Brodzinsky, **Little Bunnies Say Goodbye to Birth Mom** by Sherri Mallory, **A Safe Place for Caleb** by Kathleen A. Chara et. al, and **Finding the Right Spot** by Janice Levy.

Pre-Teen Age: Pre teens are beginning to form their identity more and increase their independence. At this age children are more able to utilize abstract reasoning, tend to assert a greater need for privacy and may withdraw more from their parents. Children at this stage may be more in touch with losses related to adoption. For some children this will cause more grieving. It is important for parents to continue to provide reassurance to their pre-teenagers and tolerate their alternate need to talk and/or withdraw regarding their feelings. Parents should let their child know that they are available to talk and are open to discussing their child's feelings regarding adoption and birth families. Parents should provide opportunities to talk as well as respect their pre-teenager's need for silence. A good activity for pre-teenagers that parents can assist them with is creating an Adoption Life Book which chronicles their story. Books such as **How it Feels to Be Adopted** by Jill Kremetz and **The Secret of Me: A Novel in Verse** by Meg Kearney are good options for this age child. Some additional adoption related books for this age group are **Double Play at Short** by Matt Christopher and **Heaven** by Angela Johnson.

Teen Age: Developmentally, teenagers work on forming an identity separate from their families. The adopted teenager may express wanting information about their adoption, birth family, the reason they were adopted, etc. Teenage years can be volatile and it is not uncommon as an attempt for teenagers to establish their independence for them to attempt to use adoption as a weapon, for example yelling "Why should I listen to you, you are not my real Mother?" Statements such as this are attempts by the child to manipulate their parents and are often not about adoption. The best response a parent can have is to not react to a hurtful statement such as this, to not be diverted from the real issue, to not engage in a talk about adoption at that time and to attempt to get at the bottom of what is truly bothering their child. If adoption has been talked about throughout the child's life and is a comfortable topic for the family, it is less likely that the teenager will use this tactic. By the time a child is reaching 18 years old it is important that they know their adoption story and that their parents have provided them with all the information they know. If the ground work has been laid by the parents at an earlier age, it will be much easier to handle adoption issues with teenagers. It is essential that teenagers and young adults know that it is okay for them to talk with their parents about their feelings and issues related to their birth families. Books for teenagers include: **Adopted Teens Only: A Survival Guide to Adolescence** by Deanea Gorbett, **All About Adoption, how to deal with questions of your past** by Anne Lanchon, and **Dear Wonderful You, Letters to Adopted & Fostered Youth** by Diane Rene Christian.

Authors Note: Check out the REACH Tulare County's Adoption Library for Adoption related books for all ages. Access titles online at www.reachtularecounty.org or stop by the office. For more information call JulieAnn Jones at (559)741-7358.

Interview with an Adult Adoptee By Toni Brown M.S.

Can you briefly describe the details about your adoption?

I was adopted from Germany when I was 3 months old by my loving parents.

How old were you when you discovered you were adopted? What was this experience like for you?

Growing up, I remember always knowing that I was adopted. Having a brother who was also adopted made this the “norm” in our family. I can remember explaining the concept of adoption to my preschool class.

Was adoption something that was openly talked about in your family? If so, what did this look like? If not, why do you think that is?

My adoption was a family fact but not something that we openly discussed until I was much older. There weren't books for children regarding the topic of adoption but my parents made sure that I always knew where I came from. What wasn't discussed were my feelings regarding the adoption. It wasn't until recently when I learned that the feelings I struggled with during adolescence were normal to adoptees.

Was your adoption something that you would openly share with your friends or anyone outside of your family? Why or why not?

I have always been very open about my adoption because I feel like it is part of me. My physical traits do not resemble my parents so I used my adoption as a way to explain where my dark curly hair and blue eyes came from. As an adult adoptee, I am a resource and advocate for adoption for my friends starting the process of adoption. Since sharing my story I am shocked at how many of my friends have an adoption story of their own.

Do you feel different than other individuals because you are adopted? Why or why not?

I do feel different and giving birth to a child of my own brought back those feelings ten-fold. My birth story is different than most non-adopted children because I didn't know basic birth facts. Every time I am asked about family health history it reminds me of my difference because there is a lot I don't know.

Do you think it is important for adoptive parents to initiate conversations and open up the dialogue with their children about adoption and adoption related feelings or experiences?

Why or why not?

Yes, my parents did a wonderful job sharing my adoption story but we didn't discuss any of my feelings about it. This was a hard concept to deal with alone. Learning that my feelings about being adopted were “normal” was a very powerful experience, even as an adult. Also having friends with similar experiences can be very healing.

Do you think it is important for adoptive parents to share details and facts about a child's adoption with them? Why or why not?

I do think it is important to share age appropriate information about a child's adoption. I love to find books to share with adoptive parents that they can read to their children so they can grow up seeing stories like theirs in the world.

In your experience, what was the most rewarding part of being an adopted child?

I grew up knowing that my birthmother made an incredible sacrifice for me. I was grounded in this idea growing up.

How do you feel about your birth family? Have you ever tried to find them?

I have always thought fondly of them and recently connected with my birthmother. We are in the beginning stages of our relationship but my love and admiration for her grows everyday.

If you could tell the next generation of adoptive parents one thing, what would it be?

My parents did a wonderful job discussing adoption but we didn't delve into the idea of my feelings or identity of being adopted. I would encourage parents to talk and listen openly about what their children are feeling.

If you could pass on any advice to an adopted child struggling with identity issues or birth parent angst, what would that be?

You are normal. Normal is such a relative term and it is what I always wanted to hear. Children are adopted everyday and grow into amazing people. It is complicated to deal with the concept of adoption but I love that it is part of my story.

An Overview of the Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI®) DVD's By: Toni Brown M.S.

“TBRI® is an attachment-based, trauma-informed intervention that is designed to meet the complex needs of vulnerable children. TBRI® uses Empowering Principles to address physical needs, Connecting Principles for attachment needs, and Correcting Principles to disarm fear-based behaviors. While the intervention is based on years of attachment, sensory processing, and neuroscience research, the heartbeat of TBRI® is connection..” –TBRI Website



Parenting children that come with a difficult history can be an overwhelming experience for both parents and children. At REACH we believe that the Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI®) approach is one of the most effective trauma-informed models for guiding children that come from “hard places”. These DVD's help parents understand their child's background and what experiences they have been through which lead them to display challenging behaviors. The DVD's also provide useful and concrete examples of parenting approaches and skills that help with developing the connection and attachment which leads to a better relationship, and thereby an improvement in the child's behavior.

Continued on Page 4

One of the examples on attachment and mindfulness that stands out with many of our families who have viewed the series comes from the "Attachment" DVD. This section presents an adoptive family who share their story of bonding with their adopted son. When he questioned if they had picked out baby clothes for him as they had done with their biological child, the parents responded honestly by letting him know that they did not but that his first parents had probably done that for him. They then went out and shopped for the baby boy clothes that they would have purchased for him if he had been with them since birth. They brought the clothing home and told him "we didn't get that opportunity with you but we would have loved to". They let him know that these were the clothes they would have picked out to bring him home from the hospital and how much they enjoyed the experience. This process made a powerful impact on both the parents and child and the honesty brought them closer together and strengthened their bond.

For more helpful examples, tips, and general parenting help and guidance feel free to stop by the REACH office and browse through our lending library. We have the full set of TBRI® DVD's available for check out. Titles for the DVD's include: Attachment, Sensory Integration, Healthy Touch, Facilitating Behavioral Change, Playful Interaction and many more.

Helping a Child Understand and Make Sense of Their Past, Particularly When it Includes Painful Information

By Kathy A. Steele, LCSW

For many families the topic of adoption, much less the painful circumstances that may surround it, are difficult to discuss. Yet experts in the field of adoption unanimously agree that discussions should be held from the beginning and that by the time an adoptee enters early adolescence they should have a general, more complete understanding of their "adoption story."

Over the course of my work in the adoption field, I've met families who have delayed telling their child of their adoption status (well into the child's adolescent years). Other families have chosen to withhold the information altogether. Of course, many of the families I've worked alongside have chosen to introduce the topic of adoption early on and have provided more intricate details of their child's history over time. For those parents who avoid the topic of adoption, Jayne E. Schooler, co-author of *Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child*, suggests that parents ask themselves "Why don't we talk about this?", "Is it because we think he's not ready to know, or because we're not ready to tell him?" Keep in mind that a child has "lived" that part of the story, so they have a sense of it already and knowing more details will provide them with a fuller understanding of their history. When parents, often in their desire to protect their children, withhold key pieces of information, the outcome can be devastating for the child and the child/parent relationship. For example, children who "discover these secrets," may experience a sense of "misplaced shame," in being part of a secret, or they feel a sense of betrayal by the adoptive parents. Adoption expert, Holly van Gulden, in her article entitled "Talking with Children about Difficult History," explains that "every human being has a need and right to the facts about their heritage, ancestry and personal life journey. Withholding information because it may be painful or shameful denies our children the opportunity to develop, over time, a clear picture of the players and the forces at work in their history, and the chance to develop coping skills to process and externalize difficult information and feelings."

Following are some steps parents can take in sharing difficult information with their children:

1. Check the facts. Consider the source and explain it within that context. For example, "Your social worker at the time of the adoption explained that you and your brother were found in a shopping mall." Caution should be taken in not using the word "abandoned," as it gives the impression that a child was discarded when, in reality, leaving a child in a public place to be found quickly may have been closer to the reality of the setting.

2. Once facts are assessed for accuracy, parents need to spend time evaluating their own values as they relate to a child's circumstance (i.e., a child born out of wedlock or who was conceived during a rape) in an effort to not pass judgement through one's tone, choice of words or facial expressions. Children easily pick up on cues with regards to their birth heritage and ultimately view themselves as shameful.

3. Evaluate a child's readiness to process information (i.e., self image, current functioning, ability to manage feelings and process difficult information, etc.). Interestingly, a parent's instinct is to share difficult information until a child is in later adolescence, yet research has shown that children in middle childhood generally process negative information more easily. Of course this is not without pain, confusion and some self-blame, but Holly van Gulden states that they are less likely to internalize the self blame/shame for the actions/choices of others during this developmental stage.

4. Plan what words to use in telling or sharing a child's history and be sure to validate a child's feelings (i.e., When talking with a child in middle school about their birth mother you might begin by saying "Your birth mom got hooked on drugs (or alcohol) because she listened to the wrong people and made some bad choices. What do you remember about that time? How do you feel about it now? What questions do you still have?") Be careful not to excuse the birth parent's behavior, rather listen to what your child's feelings might be about them. Always make sure that the child knows that he/she is not responsible for the adult's behaviors or actions. The goal is to be open, honest and caring and with as few biases as possible. At REACH, we have excellent articles that will provide you with adoption language and explanations you can use to talk with children at various developmental stages and who come from difficult circumstances (i.e., children who have incarcerated birth parents, birth parents who have substance abuse issues, etc., histories of prostitution or other criminal involvement, etc.)

Never hesitate to consult with REACH or another adoption competent professional if you are struggling in this area of concern. We can also assist you when you talk with your child about adoption, though it is preferable that as the parent you take the lead. After all, as the parent you are loved and trusted by them and helping them understand and make sense of their histories is one of the greatest gifts you can provide.

SUPPORT GROUPS & EVENTS

Upcoming Calendar of Events

January

- 3** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
CANCELLED
- 10** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church, Hanford
- 18** 7 Core Adoption Issues
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Hanford
- 19** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Radiant Kings Building, Visalia

February

- 3** Attachment: Embracing the Journey
9:00 am - 12:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Visalia
- 3** Edificando a Cuidadores Capaz de Sanar un Trauma Parte I - En Español
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Visalia
- 4** Edificando a Cuidadores Capaz de Sanar un Trauma Parte II - En Español
9:00 am - 3:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Visalia
- 7** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Radiant Kids Building, Visalia
- 14** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church, Hanford
- 16** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group -
TBRI Video Night
6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Radiant Kids Building, Visalia
- 21** Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent Pt. 1
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Hanford
- 24** Understanding the Impact of Parenting a Traumatized Child
9:00 am - 12:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Visalia
- 28** Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent Pt. 2
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Hanford

March

- 7** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Radiant Kids Building, Visalia
- 14** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 pm - 8:00 pm
Koinonia Christian Fellowship Church, Hanford
- 16** Tulare REACH Adoption Support Group
TBRI Video Night
6:30 pm - 8:30 pm
Radiant Kids Building, Visalia
- 28** Relative Raising Children
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Hanford

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: Radiant Kids Building - 615 E. Center Avenue, Visalia, CA 93292

When: 6:30PM- 8:30PM

1st Tuesday of the month

- January 3rd **CANCELLED**
- February 7th
- March 7th

3rd Thursday of the month

- January 19th
- February 16th
- March 16th

Contact: JulieAnn Jones (559)741-7358, ext. 4506 or jujones@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
• January 10th • February 14th • March 14th

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

COLLEGE OF SEQUIOIAS FOSTER & KINSHIP CARE EDUCATION PROGRAM

The College of Sequoias Foster and Kinship Care Education 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 Miriam Sallam at (559)737-4842 or email miriams@cos.edu. Classes are available in English and in Spanish. REACH will be conducting the following trainings through the College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Care Education Program in the Winter of 2017.

7 Core Issues in Adoption
Wednesday, January 18th
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Hanford

Attachment: Embracing the Journey
Friday, February 3rd
9:00 am - 12:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Visalia

Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent (Spanish 2 part training)
Friday, February 3rd 6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
Saturday, February 4th 9:00 am - 3:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Hanford

Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent (2 part training)
Tuesday, February 21st and 28th
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Hanford

Understanding the Impact of Parenting a Traumatized Child
Friday, February 24th
9:00 am - 12:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Visalia

Relatives Raising Children
Tuesday, March 28th
6:00 pm - 9:00 pm
COS Room Pending, Hanford

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



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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 regularly held 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.