

REACH

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis Intervention • Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Adoption Support Program



Welcome Spring!

This quarter the REACH Newsletter is focusing on Normative Adoption Issues/Stuck Spots. These issues/stuck spots are common matters all families touched by adoption may encounter. A great way to work through any stuck spots you may be facing this season is by connecting with family in a fun way, such as:

Getting outside! Spring is a great time for renewal and getting outside, while it is warm enough to enjoy but not so hot you melt. Try a fun family activity, take a nature walk, blow bubbles, fly a kite, or have a picnic. The choices are endless. Make it a family affair from the start, where the children help by getting the materials together, picking where to go, make the bubble soap, etc. Family activities can be fun for all, including the parents, and done in a fun and connecting way.

Plan for Summer! Spring is also the time for starting to make plans for the kids for summer. What camps are they going to attend? What activities are they going to participate in? Sit down and make those plans now, so you don't have kids sitting at home bored all summer long or having to figure something out for them at the last minute.

Trainings and Activities! Check out all the great trainings and activities your REACH Program is offering this Spring! Learn something new and spend time as a family at a REACH activity/social event.

We hope you enjoy this time of renewal as well as the articles in this issue!

Sincerely,

The REACH Team

Tulare County Spring 2024

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NEED HELP? Is your child exhibiting any of the following behaviors?

- Frequent running away
- Sexualized behavior
- Post traumatic stress disorder
- Aggressive/assaultive behavior
- Oppositional/defiant behavior
- Self-injurious behavior
- 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
- One or more hospitalizations in a Mental Health facility

If so, we can help! The REACH program can connect adoptive and guardianship 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 residential care. Wraparound is a family-centered, strength-based, needs-driven philosophy promoting the reestablishment of at risk youth and families into community support systems.

The Six Stuck Spots of Adoption

By Tara Soria, M.A.

Adolescence is a complex life stage for everyone, but teens who are adopted can face unique challenges related to their identity and birth family history. In the book, *Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens* by Debbie Riley, M.S. with John Meeks, M.D., these challenges are referred to as “stuck spots.” This book is also featured in the Book Review section of this newsletter. The six stuck spots include:

Reason for Adoption: Teens may grapple with questions about the circumstances that led to their being adopted, and will search for a greater understanding of the past, including the big “why” questions: “Why was I abandoned? Why was I rejected? Why was I given away?” When children are younger and ask similar questions, they may be satisfied with simple explanations, however, during adolescence, they often demand fuller and more factual answers. While the adoptive parent can’t fix or change what happened in their child’s past, they can support their child in facing the pain and loss inherent in the adoption journey.

Missing or Difficult Information: Incomplete details about their adoption story can leave the adolescent feeling as if there are missing pieces or gaps in their identity. Their quest is for detailed facts and information that might help complete this puzzle or at least fill in as much as possible, knowing that sometimes information will be unobtainable. Each adoptee’s temperament and emotional/intellectual maturity will influence their readiness. Experts recommend that all details known by the adoptive parents should be shared by the time their child reaches adolescence. No matter how difficult the parents may believe the facts to be, the adolescent may have created more disturbing fantasies about the missing information.

Difference: While a normal part of adolescent development is the desire to fit in with peers, it is during this time that differences are most often highlighted. Feelings of being different can negatively affect a child’s sense of self-worth and security within their adoptive family. Some teens may shut down and internalize these feelings, and some may externalize their feelings while projecting their anger and frustration onto those closest to them. In addition, physical resemblances in biological families can be taken for granted, while in adoptive families those differences are at the forefront. The teen

may struggle with not knowing anyone else who looks like them or receiving unwanted attention for looking different than their adoptive family members.

Identity: Identity exploration is a natural part of adolescence, but adopted teens may face unique challenges in their search for self, leading the teen to explore their birth family and heritage: “Who am I and where did I come from? How am I similar or different from my adoptive parents, and from my birth parents?” One adoptee, who is now in middle-age, shared, “I felt as if I was on probationary status in my family. I was trying to figure out who I was, and there was nothing around me that was similar in order to figure that out- nothing that was like me. No mirror of sorts. I tried on lots of identities, lots of faces and masks and sizes.”

Loyalty: Many teens experience guilt related to their frequent and intense thoughts and feelings about their birth parents. They may fear upsetting their adoptive parents if they ask questions about their birth parents. Because they may take on these struggles alone, it is even more important that their feelings be normalized, and that they receive the support they need to explore their identity, including their biological heritage, without feeling obligated or disloyal to their adoptive family.

Permanence: Despite being adopted, some teens might worry about their place in the family and the possibility of abandonment. They may feel that because they have already lost their birth parents, they could also lose their adoptive parents. This may be especially true for those who experienced multiple moves before being adopted. Even as they grow into adults and begin living more independent lives, they need to hear that they will always have a family to come home to and that they will not lose their family when they turn 18 and become an adult.

As an adoptive parent or someone else of significance in an adopted teen's life, it is important to be aware of these potential “stuck spots” and to create a safe and supportive space for open communication and exploration. Validating their emotions and experiences related to adoption and connecting them with resources and therapeutic support can assist in the healthy exploration of their lifelong adoption journey.

Source: *Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens*, by Debbie Riley, M.S., with John Meeks, M.D. (C.A.S.E.)

The Seven Core Issues of Adoption

By Elizabeth Hanson, MA

Children who are adopted do not come with a set of parenting instructions. Children who come from trauma backgrounds have experienced challenges resulting in behaviors a parent might not feel prepared to manage. Additionally, children have to adjust to a new family and living environment while dealing with the loss of their biological family. Learning about the seven core issues of adoption can help parents understand their child's behaviors and how to address them. The book, *Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanency*, by Sharon Kaplan Roszia and Allison Davis Maxon focuses on the core issues and educates parents and professionals on how these core issues impact children in adoption and permanency. The seven core issues include: loss, rejection, shame/guilt, grief, identity, intimacy, and mastery/control.

There is both pain and gain in the truth about adoption and permanency. Loss is a significant pain children and youth who have been adopted must face as they lose a first family. As they get older, children try to determine the reason this loss occurred.

The feeling of rejection is inevitable because the child has lost her/his biological family for reasons that may or may not make sense to them. A child may feel the situation that resulted in their separation from the biological family could have been avoided, which results in the feeling of rejection.

Feelings of shame/guilt are another core issue of adoption. These feelings are a result of the child feeling they are to blame for their circumstances, that they were not good enough, or did something wrong to cause separation from their family.

Grief is a complicated issue in that society generally considers adoption a positive outcome and assumes everyone should be happy- a family has a child to parent and the child has a forever family. However, the loss a child experiences in adoption must be grieved.

As a child enters their teen years, a natural step in their growth toward maturity is to form their identity. This process can be complicated when adopted youth do not know, or know little of, their biological family. They may wonder "Where did I come from?" "What is my heritage?"



"What health issues are associated with my biological family?" They may be able to identify where their adoptive family comes from but those roots are not necessarily their roots, especially in non-relative adoption.

The core issues of intimacy and identity are connected, as one must know who they are to know what they have to offer in relationships and what they want in relationships. This holds true whether those relationships are with family members or in romantic relationships. Intimacy also requires an adoptee to have worked through the other core issues as, if they do not know themselves well, they will not know what they need from others.

The final core issue is mastery/control. Everyone needs a sense of control over their lives, which helps build resilience, and adoptees often struggle with feelings of control. So much of their lives and decisions made about them have been out of their control. Mastery is the goal of working through the seven core issues of adoption as this allows for feeling in control of one's life.

Understand that an adoptee's need to work through the seven core issues of adoption is the first step in supporting your child in this process. Open communication, allowing questions without judgment, and being present for your child are good ways to help them through this process. For more information on the seven core issues of adoption and how to work through them, please consult with your REACH social worker for guidance, or check out a book on this topic from the REACH lending library.

Sources:

Kaplan-Roszia, Sharon & Maxon-Davis, Allison (2019) Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanency. London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

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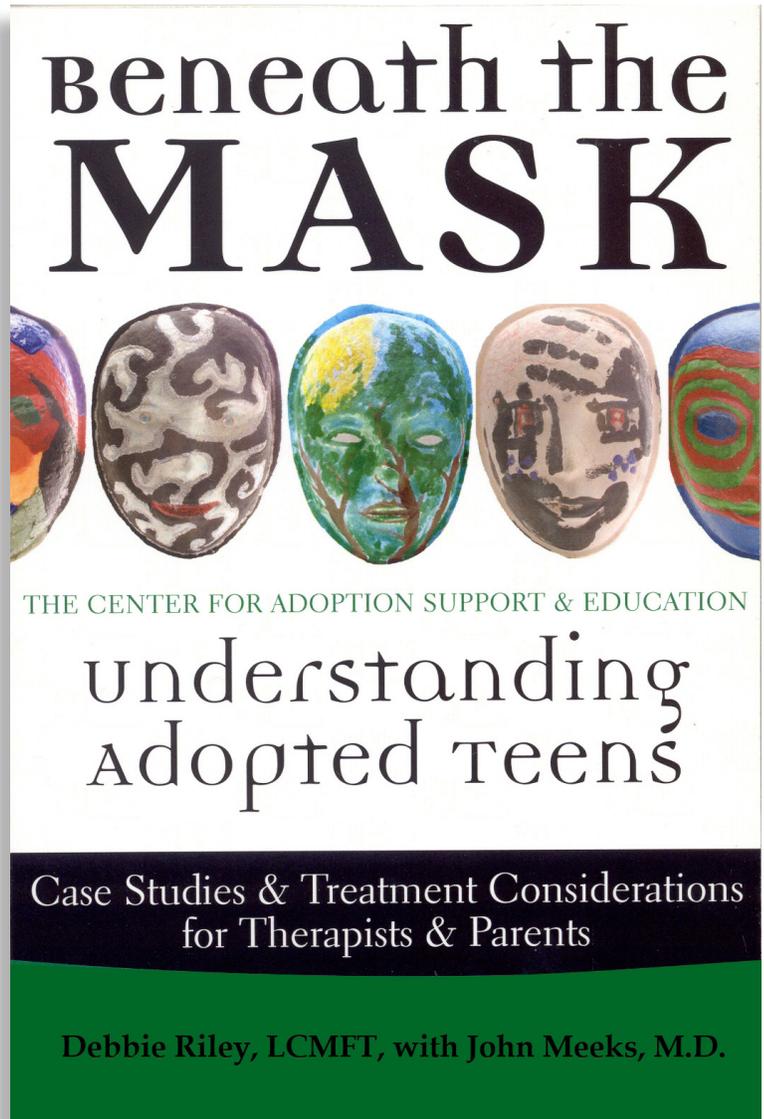
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Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens

by Debbie Riley, M.S. with John Meeks, M.D.

Book review by Griselda Santillan-Mejia, MA

Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens by Debbie Riley, M.S. with John Meeks, M.D. is a book written not only for those parenting teens, but also to prepare all adoptive parents for the teenage years. It is also a great resource for professionals working with adoptive children and families. The author, Debbie Riley, is a counselor and executive director of the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.). She used a combination of many years of experience counseling adopted children, along with knowledge gained from her education, to write this book. She focuses on the "stuck spots" that teens who are adopted are more likely to experience. The reality is that sadness, depression, anger, poor attachment, and anxiety are all normal reactions to grief and loss, which all children who were adopted experience. She takes the time to give information about the above-mentioned reactions to grief but also about how to help teens through the realities of having a difficult birth family history, not having the full story of their family of origin, transracial adoption challenges, feeling different because they were adopted, and not feeling like they fit in with their adoptive family. This book also provides tools that parents can utilize with their adopted children to help them cope with the difficult reality that their birth family could not care for them, which often creates feelings of rejection. The book is written in a way that makes it easy to read and understand. Ms. Riley also included various case studies to help parents have a full picture and a better understanding of what teens are experiencing or dealing with as they often struggle internally and do not have the appropriate language to express it. To help provide support for adopted teens, Ms. Riley has written a workbook, *Beneath the Mask for Teen*



Adoptees, designed to help teens and young adults share their stories and feelings about their adoption story. This book has great exercises, journaling pages, and various thought-provoking activities that help provide tools and insight for navigating the "stuck spots" independently, with their adoptive parents, or their therapist.



Activity

By Katia Hawkins, BSW, MS

Children who were adopted will ask questions about their birth families throughout their life stages. At times, they may feel as though they are wrong for loving two families. This activity is designed to create a positive and inclusive family opportunity to help families embrace and celebrate the uniqueness of their children's two families.

Materials Needed:

1. Large poster board or paper
2. Markers, crayons, and colored pencils
3. Family photos (both biological and adoptive family)
4. Magazines, scissors, and glue
5. Stickers, colored paper, and other decorative materials
6. Small potted plants or tree saplings

Activity Steps:

- 1. Family Storytelling Time:** Start the activity with a family storytelling session. Encourage each family member, including parents, to share happy memories from their childhood and experiences. Highlight the similarities and differences, emphasizing that each story contributes to the unique family tapestry.
- 2. Creating the Family Tree:** Provide a large poster board/paper for each family member. Have everyone draw a tree at the center, symbolizing the family tree. This helps children visualize and understand the concept of having roots in two families.

- 3. Photo Collage:** Create a collage around the tree, placing photos of birth parents, adoptive parents, siblings, and extended family members. Encourage the children to express themselves through drawings or captions.
- 4. Magazine Collage:** Use magazines to cut out images and words representing the family's diversity. Let each family member create a collage around their tree with these images, showcasing their lives and backgrounds.
- 5. Shared Artistic Expression:** Include collaborative artwork on the poster to represent family unity. Highlight that each family member is essential to creating a unique and beautiful family.
- 6. Planting Seeds of Connection:** Plant tiny seeds or saplings with the family. Explain growth and nurturing, how both families contribute to the child's development, and the importance of roots and branches.
- 7. Reflection and Dialogue:** After completing the activity, encourage open dialogue about feelings, experiences, and the beauty of having two families. Emphasize the strengths and positives of being part of a diverse and loving family.

Remember, it's essential to create a sense of love, acceptance, and belonging within the family by celebrating the unique diversity each member brings.

Support Groups and Events

April

- 5 TBRI Overview through FKCE**
9:00am – 3:00pm – In person
- 8 Daytime Support Group**
10:00am – 11:30am – In person
- 9 Parent Café**
6:30pm – 8:00pm – Zoom
- 16 Support Group**
6:00pm – 7:30pm – Hybrid
- 24 Support Group in Spanish**
9:30am – 11:30am – Zoom

May

- 6 Daytime Support Group**
10:00am – 11:30am – In person
- 14 Parent Café**
6:30pm – 8:00pm – Zoom
- 21 Support Group**
6:00pm – 7:30pm – Hybrid
- 22 Parenting that Heals! Reducing Toxic Stress and Regulating BIG Emotions – Allison Davis Maxon**
6:00pm – 8:00pm FKCE – In person
- 22 Support Group in Spanish**
9:30am – 11:30am – Zoom

June

- 3 Daytime Support Group**
10:00am – 11:30am – In person
- 11 Parent Café**
6:30 pm – 8:00 pm – Zoom
- 18 Support Group**
6:00pm-7:30pm – Hybrid
- 26 Support Group in Spanish**
9:30am – 11:30am – Zoom

College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Education Program

The College of Sequoias Foster and Kinship Care Education Program offers training of interest to foster and adoptive parents, at no charge. For a complete list of classes visit www.cos.edu/fostercare. Register for classes with Nelly Yanez Gutierrez at nellyy@cos.edu. Classes are available in English and in Spanish. Please note childcare is not available.

REACH Support Groups for Parents In Person – Twice Per Month

In person REACH Parent Support Groups are offered twice per month and are designed for adults thinking about adoption through foster care, families awaiting adoptive placement, new and experienced adoptive parents, as well as child welfare legal guardians. Training hours provided. The daytime support group is offered the first Monday of the month, 10:00am – 11:30am, in person. The evening support group is offered on the third Tuesday of the month, 6:00pm – 7:30pm, in hybrid format (in person and via Zoom). Please join us to share your family's challenges and triumphs. To register, email Beth Hurlbert at bhurlbert@aspiranet.org.

Parent Café

6:30pm – 8:00pm via Zoom

Based on the Five Protective Factors, Parent Cafe provides an opportunity for parents to explore their strengths and learn from each other's experiences. Training hours provided. Parent Café is offered on the second Tuesday of each month, 6:30pm – 8:00pm via Zoom. To register for Parent Café, email Beth Hurlbert at bhurlbert@aspiranet.org and a link to the meeting will be emailed to you.

REACH Parent Support Group in Spanish 9:30am – 11:30am via Zoom

Este grupo está diseñado para adultos que piensan en la adopción, padres que esperan colocación adoptiva, y padres de niños adoptados. Horas de entrenamiento impartidas. Los enlaces de Zoom y los recordatorios se enviarán mensualmente. El Grupo de Apoyo para Padres de REACH en Español se ven en el cuarto miércoles del mes. Para registrarse, comuníquese con Katia Hawkins at 559.741.7358 x4513 at khawkins@aspiranet.org y se le envirara por correo electrónico un enlace

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REACH and Tulare County Adoption Support Services

Resource: We provide 1) telephone support and referral to local services 2) referral to local adoption and guardianship related community training 3) linkage to local therapists with experience working with adoptive and guardianship families 4) lending library and website access 5) quarterly newsletters which include book reviews and relevant adoption related information.

Education: Educational support groups and meetings are regularly held and offer a variety of topics pertinent to permanency. In addition, access to the lending library and website offer many opportunities to learn more about adoption and guardianship and their impact on all members of the constellation.

Advocacy: We are here to help navigate common issues facing adoptive and guardianship families. We assist 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 permanency-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 families. Our goal is to promote safe, healthy and stable adoptive and guardianship families through access to our services.