

REACH

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis Intervention • Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Adoption Support Program



Greetings, REACH families!

Can you believe we're halfway through the year already!? Wow, time is flying by. With summer break in full swing and our kids spending more time together than usual, our newsletter theme this season is Redefining Family and Preparing Siblings for Adoption. Changes are never easy, especially for our families.

In this quarter's newsletter, you'll find great information to help you reflect on your adoption journey and several learning opportunities, such as our monthly parent groups, topics on kinship/relative adoption, and a book review. Preparing our families and siblings for changes is so important. Oftentimes, children's roles change when new kiddos join the family. For example, an older brother can now be a middle child, or the youngest child is no longer the baby of the family. Sometimes children may ask if the reason you're adopting is because they are not good or because you don't love them. We've heard kids who are going through adoption ask if they are being "bought" and if that means they can be "sold" in the future. Adoption requires preparation, redefining the family and lots of discussion! We hope this newsletter will help.

One of the key highlights of REACH's summer and fall schedule is the upcoming Adoption Preparation Training series. This nine-part virtual training series, starting on Monday, August 19th, is designed to equip you with the necessary knowledge and skills for your adoption journey, whether you are a family new to adoption or an experienced family of adoption. It covers a wide range of topics including, Understanding My Child, Adoptive Parent Perspective & Preparing Siblings, Trauma/Developmental Perspectives, Attachment, Correcting/Discipline, Cultural Competency, Birth Family, Normative Adoption Issues/Stuck Spots, and Self-Care & Supports. We will be opening registration soon, so stay tuned!

If you are interested in learning more about our REACH services, please check out our website at www.reachtularecounty.org or call (559) 741-7358 x 4511.

We trust that you will find our summer 2024 edition informative and helpful in your adoption journey.

The REACH Team

Tulare County Summer 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.

Hope for All Members of the Adoptive Family: Communication

By Beth Hurlbert, MS

In studying, researching, and working with adoptive families, we often talk about the Adoption Triad: birth/first parent, adoptive parents, adopted child. These are all very important parts of adoptive families and without them, there would be no adoption. But there are members of adoptive families who are not mentioned when looking only at the Adoption Triad - adoptive siblings. The absence of critical individuals from the Triad, such as siblings and extended family members, is one reason the term Adoption Triad is being replaced with the more inclusive term, Adoption Constellation.

Adoptive siblings can be biological children of the adoptive parents or other children in the family who have been previously adopted. Jana Hunsley, LCSW, a Graduate Research Assistant at the Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development (KPICD) and an adoptive sibling herself, did a study on the experience of adoptive siblings with the hope of initiating the conversation with the larger adoption community. The study found areas of themes of concern among adoptive siblings and provided solutions for adoptive families to try.

Ms. Hunsley found that one of the most common themes, and what she felt, was the feeling of being invisible. Siblings may feel pushed aside or rejected. This is not said to assign fault or blame but to open an understanding of how this happens. Being aware of this occurrence and how siblings might feel invisible allows the family to address this issue before it gets out of hand.

Another finding was that of siblings becoming parentified. Siblings may become parentified to provide emotional support to the parents or to act as another parent to their siblings. They may struggle to see their steadfast, stable parents feeling overwhelmed by the needs of the adopted child. The adoptive parents aren't failing, they just likely didn't know what the needs of the adopted child would entail. Everyone in the family wants to help meet the needs of the adopted child and to help the child have the best life they can have.

In addition to being parentified, siblings may also take on the peacemaking role in the family. They want to ease tension, mediate, and keep the peace to help decrease the stress in the family. This can be done by bringing understanding to both parties or through an attempt at perfect behavior. They observe the stress in the family and act in ways they believe will fix it.

Finally, siblings experience secondary trauma. They live in the home with a member of the family who has experienced trauma. They may hear the stories and witness daily effects of the trauma on their siblings. Secondary trauma can have

a positive effect on helping siblings become empathetic, compassionate, and emotionally mature. It can also have negative effects, such as internalizing their trauma.

While all of this may seem challenging, Ms. Hunsley shared ways of improving the family system. The primary finding from the study was the need for open communication. The more families communicate, the more connected and cohesive they are. This includes being mindful of one's own mental and emotional states, triggers, and ways to regulate oneself. It is also being mindful of all family member's different needs. When this mindfulness occurs, parents are better able to meet those needs and keep the family connected.

Parents also need to model for children what they expect of them. If you want your children to be open and honest, then you need to model being open and honest with your children. Children learn by example and watch their parents for guidance. If parents model that it's safe to talk about your feelings, children will be more open with their feelings.

Parents should also ask questions. By asking questions parents show they care about their children and what is happening in their lives. Questions should be open-ended, to encourage responses other than "yes" or "no," and can be simple questions. This creates space for talking freely and sharing thoughts and feelings. One example of this would be "Tell me about your day." Another would be "What in your life is hard right now?"

Parents also want to be receptive. Being receptive includes hearing what the other person is saying and thinking about it from their perspective. This doesn't mean you have to agree but letting them know they have been heard. In a family, everyone can't always agree but as long as they feel they have been heard, the family can move forward in healthy ways.

Finally, parents want to affirm the preciousness of each child. The words need to be authentic and natural. You can even affirm a child through a text or actions, what matters is the child feels loved and seen.

While all this may seem overwhelming, adoptive families would not change their decision to adopt because the negative does not, for the most part, outweigh the good and positive that come from adoption. Let's move towards hope and healing for the entire family and start with a simple conversation.

Source: <https://child.tcu.edu/on-being-an-adoptive-sibling/#sthash.a86ibJjB.dpbs>

Defining Adoptive Families

By Fernando Aquino, MSW

***“Ohana means family.
Family means no one
gets left behind
or forgotten.”
—Lilo and Stitch***



Family—a word that often brings smiles to people's faces, accompanied by warm feelings. To most, family symbolizes the idea of connection— connection by blood, lineage, culture, religion, and more. To adoptive families, family may represent the connection of love and may not require a biological relationship. Many adoptive parents have their own definitions of what family is, which often influences their motivation to foster or adopt. Writer at Adoption.com and adoptive parent, Sue Kuligowski, shares her thoughts on defining adoptive families:

“We all have our own definitions, understanding, and realization that there is no cookie-cutter version of what it means to be an adoptive family. We have different dynamics, different experiences coming into adoption, and different relationships with our significant others, extended families, and our children. Our children's stories are different, too—they're here and now stories with us as well as their social and biological backgrounds.”

So, what are some ways to define or redefine a blended or adoptive family? Rituals are an easy way to begin. Rituals are small or large ceremonies between parents and children that honor each other and their own self. For some, a simple high-five in the morning is a way to welcome the day. Rituals provide an opportunity to create a shared language of love and communication within the family that can bring about a sense of belonging. This can include creating your own handshake, a shared family crest, or a visual family tree that includes all members. This also allows the family and youth to share each other's culture while also honoring their own, allowing new family traditions to form. In addition, family rituals can also include regularly reviewing and changing family values and

rules. These things will change as new members join the family.

Family relationships will always come with their ups and downs. Adoptive families often face unique challenges brought on by the idea of adoption and the societal stigma the word carries. Adoptive families may face unsolicited comments or questions about their family or adoption. These statements can strike a nerve and leave adopted families or individuals feeling anger, sadness, or shame. Those who are not familiar with adoption may default to responses like, “Do you think it's because they're adopted?” While adoption plays an important part in a child's story, it is not the only part. Adoptive families must encourage communication and prepare children for difficult or uncomfortable conversations.

Adoption can change family dynamics, and preparation and communication are key. Preparation can include parents learning and engaging with other adoptive parents, such as joining an adoptive parent support group or joining social media groups and forums. Communication includes educating family and friends about adoption and how to support the new family member. There may be biological children in the home, and we must acknowledge their thoughts and emotions even if they do not initiate the conversation. Including children who are already in the home in the adoption process, allowing open communication for questions, and addressing feelings or concerns can prepare children in integrating a new family member. In conclusion, adoption changes families and will require redefining the family system and lots of effective communication.

Source: <https://adoption.org/mean-adoptive-family>

Wounded Children, Healing Homes: How Traumatized Children Impact Adoptive and Foster Families

by Betsy Keefer Smalley, Jayne Schooler, and Tim Callahan

Book review by Lexi Clements, BA

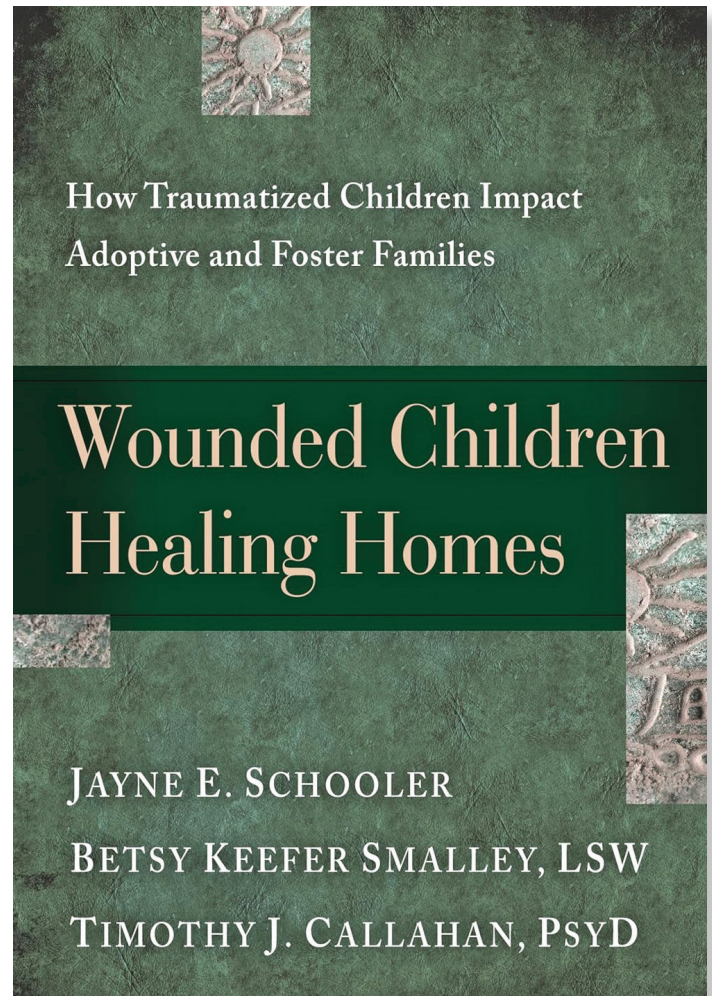
As adoptive parents, resource parents, and social workers, we are entrusted with the profound responsibility of providing care and support to children who have experienced trauma. In *Wounded Children, Healing Homes: How Traumatized Children Impact Adoptive and Foster Families*, authors Betsy Keefer Smalley, Jayne Schooler, and Tim Callahan offer an invaluable resource that delves into the complexities of trauma and its profound effects on both children and caregivers.

At the heart of this book lies a deep understanding of the intricate dynamics at play within adoptive and resource families. Through compelling case studies and insightful analysis, the authors illuminate the far-reaching impact of trauma on a child's development, particularly in the realm of attachment and emotional regulation. By exploring the intersection of trauma and family dynamics, they provide us with a framework for understanding the unique challenges faced by both children and caregivers in the healing process.

One of the book's most compelling aspects is its emphasis on trauma-informed care. Drawing from their wealth of experience in the field, the authors offer practical strategies and interventions aimed at supporting traumatized children and their families. From fostering a sense of safety and security to implementing trauma-informed parenting techniques, the book equips us with the tools necessary to create nurturing environments where healing can thrive.

What sets *Wounded Children, Healing Homes* apart is its compassionate and empathetic approach to understanding trauma. Instead of viewing behavior through a lens of pathology, the authors invite us to recognize the underlying pain and vulnerability of the child. By fostering a culture of empathy and understanding, the book advocates for a shift from punitive responses to trauma-informed practices rooted in compassion and connection.

Throughout the book, the voices of adoptive and resource parents take center stage, offering invaluable



insights gleaned from their lived experiences. Their stories serve as a reminder of the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative power of love and acceptance. As parents and professionals, we can draw inspiration from their journeys and learn from their triumphs and challenges alike.

In conclusion, *Wounded Children, Healing Homes* is an essential resource for adoptive parents, resource parents, and social workers. By blending research, real-life stories, and practical guidance, the book provides us with a roadmap for supporting traumatized children and their families on the path toward healing and wholeness. With empathy as our compass, we can work together to nurture resilience and create spaces where every child feels seen, heard, and valued.



Creating Memories as a Family

By Tara Soria, MA

Adding a child and/or sibling to a family changes the dynamics for everyone. Family bonding activities are an excellent way to foster connection and have fun together. Here are just a handful of ideas for activities to partake in with your children:

Incorporate traditions your child had before joining your family: Finding out the traditions your child had before adoption is a meaningful way to honor their past and to help them feel connected to their heritage, as well as feel more secure and valued in their new family environment.

Create a family craft together: There is fun to be had in working on a project together, such as painting a family mural on a large canvas or piece of butcher paper, making a clay “sculpture” of the family, working on a quilt together with each family member contributing a square, making a stepping stone for the yard (lots of options for kits online)—the possibilities are endless!

Volunteer Together: Choose a cause you all care about and volunteer together. This can build a sense of shared purpose and strengthen bonds between all members of the family.

Special Holiday Traditions: Develop unique traditions for holidays that reflect your family’s values and interests. This could be making a special holiday dish or a unique gift-giving and/or decorating tradition.

Personalized Family Song or Dance: Create a family song or dance that you perform on special occasions or just for fun. This can be a playful and memorable tradition.

Find a reason to laugh together: Laughter promotes bonding and has many health benefits! Try to find a reason to laugh with your children every day and encourage them to find humor when they can.

Create a photo book: Children love to look at photos of themselves and loved ones. Create photo books that capture highlights of the year and include captions and stories to go along with the photos.

Seasonal Celebrations: Mark the change of seasons with special activities, such as planting a garden in spring, a summer picnic, a fall hike, or winter crafts.

Family Gratitude Circle: Form a tradition of gathering and taking turns sharing things for which each family member is grateful. This can be a daily or weekly practice that fosters positivity and connection.

Time Capsule: Create a family time capsule with items that represent your current lives and plan to open it together in the future.

Family Recipe Swap: Each family member can contribute a favorite recipe, and you all cook these dishes together. This can be a fun way to blend different culinary traditions and introduce children to new foods.

We hope you find one or more of these activities beneficial to your family!

Sources: <https://creatingafamily.org>; <https://www.adoptivefamilies.com>

Support Groups and Events

July

- 1 **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

August

- 5 **Daytime Support Group**
10:00am – 11:30am – In person
- 13 **Parent Café**
6:30pm – 8:00pm – ZOOM
- 19 **APT Module 1: Understanding My Child**
6:00pm – 8:00pm – ZOOM
- 20 **Support Group**
6:00pm – 7:30pm - Hybrid
- 26 **APT Module 2: Adoptive Parent Perspectives, Redefining Family and Preparing Siblings**
6:00pm – 8:00pm – ZOOM
- 28 **Support Group in Spanish**
9:30am – 11:30am – ZOOM

September

- 9 **Daytime Support Group**
10:00am – 11:30am – In person
- 9 **APT Module 3: Trauma/Developmental Perspectives**
6:00pm – 8:00pm – ZOOM
- 10 **Parent Café**
6:30 pm – 8:00 pm – ZOOM
- 16 **APT Module 4: Attachment**
6:00pm – 8:00 pm – ZOOM
- 17 **Support Group**
6:00pm – 7:30pm – Hybrid
- 23 **APT Module 5: Correcting/Discipline**
6:00pm – 8:00pm – ZOOM
- 25 **Support Group in Spanish**
9:30am – 11:30am – ZOOM
- 30 **APT Module 6: Cultural Competency**
6:00pm – 8:00pm – 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 enviara por correo electrónico un enlace a la reunión.

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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.