

# REACH

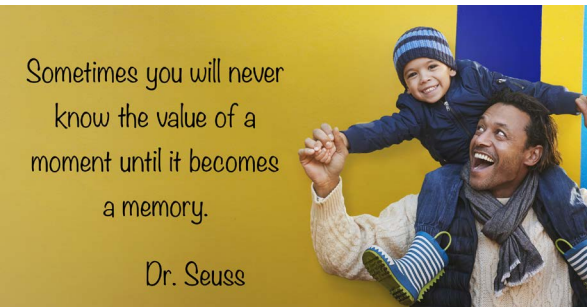
Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis • Intervention • Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Adoption Support Program



## Happy Summer REACH Families!!

Welcome to our first TOTALLY DIGITAL format of the REACH newsletter! We hope you'll still take time to browse through our articles and save the



Sometimes you will never  
know the value of a  
moment until it becomes  
a memory.

Dr. Seuss

information to peek  
back on from time  
to time.

In this newsletter,  
we continue with  
our Seven Core  
Issues in Adoption  
theme. This  
summer we are  
focusing on guilt,

shame and grief. In addition to great articles from our REACH social workers, we've included a couple of activity ideas. We hope that you will enjoy trying out some of our suggestions with your kiddos. We know that summer vacation can be overwhelming and unsettling for some of our children. Maybe it's time to consider setting a summer routine and creating traditions that will provide your children with both memories and the comfort of structure. Perhaps a library day? Family fun night? Picnics in the park? For more ideas check out this link ([click here!](#)) Try asking your kids what activities they'd like to add into the routine. This communicates that their voice matters and that they can count on you to meet their needs. Double bonus!

We hope that you all have a wonderful summer! If you haven't tried out one of our support groups, maybe this is a good time to expand your support circle. We always offer free child care!

Enjoy,

*JulieAnn*

Tulare County  
Summer 2019

### Inside This Issue

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6. REACH Services

### Your REACH Tulare Support Team

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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.

## BACK TO SCHOOL: Preparing for Talking about Adoption at School

Hortencia Casarez, B.A.

One day your children are joyfully enjoying summer, freely splashing in the water, going on summer trips, and cheerfully playing at the park. The next day your children are tasked with trying on school clothes, preparing their backpacks, and restlessly looking to see who their new teachers are. Back to school can be a really exciting time, as well as daunting for many, particularly for children who are adoptees or have recently joined a new family. The situation is exacerbated for adopted children who have had to move to a new and unfamiliar school.

As children get to know one another and become more familiar with their friends' families, the conversation is bound to come up... "that" conversation, the one where your child's schoolmates begin asking questions about the difference in your family. And most likely, this will happen multiple times through your child's school years. Along with the sunshine of adoption come some clouds, and school experiences can be pretty stormy for our kids. Picture this: it's recess, your child is blissfully swinging upside down from the monkey bars and everything is fine until some kid starts asking him/her where their "real" mom is. Your child tries to explain that you ARE their real mom, but the other child insists that because your child was adopted you could not be their "real" mother and goes on to probe as to why their real mom "gave them away". Maybe the circumstances surrounding your child's adoption hadn't occurred to your child yet. And now they're devastated.

Our children's experiences at school are beyond our control as parents. Neither we, nor our children are always prepared when they encounter others who do not understand adoption, or who try to describe it in hurtful ways. Not only can parents not control these conversations and experiences, we often never even know about them. Parents aren't in a position to be able to run interference and protect our children from questions and comments that may lead them to feel uncomfortable, embarrassed, confused, and just plain hurt. Parents should prepare children to handle those types of situations when they arise. Consequently, teaching your children how to handle inevitable, and sometimes unwelcomed, comments and questions at school may be one of the most crucial "back to school" steps you can take.

Before we delve into helpful tips, let's remember that talking to your child's friends and teachers about adoption is more about them understanding your child's

experience than trying to teach about what adoption is. People not exposed to adoption may not know anything about it and are genuinely curious. Others may have misinformation or simply use negative adoption language. Because every adoption looks different, even other adopted children's experiences with adoption could be very different from your child's. Here are some tips that may help:

- Volunteer to read a book about adoption to the class and answer children's questions.
- Teach your child healthy calming strategies when negative encounters arise.
- Point out that they never have to answer questions that they don't want to answer.
- Explain to your child that their story is theirs to share, on their terms.
- Ask a grown-up for help, especially when your child is experiencing cruelty or meanness.
- Talk with your children's friends jointly with your child to help answer questions.
- Tell your child that it's okay to walk away and they have a right to not be treated disrespectfully.
- When school-children ask "Where is your real mom?" your child might begin their response with, "Oh, you mean my birth mother...."
- Help your child understand that other's perspectives, comments, and opinions will often not be the same as your family's.
- Contact your local Aspiranet REACH office for book recommendations or other adoption-related support services at 559-741.7358.
- Explain to your child that it's natural for others to be curious and to have inquisitive questions, but it is never acceptable to be ridiculed or bullied.
- Talk to your child's teacher. Maybe provide the teacher with examples of questions that may come up and provide them some answers that you would be comfortable with.
- For more ideas on responses, read the W.I.S.E. Up! Powerbook together. This is a great resource for helping kids handle personal questions about adoption.
- Be proactive with school assignments: it is good to know in advance about assignments that may be problematic for your child, such as holiday crafts, creating family trees, or requests for baby pictures.
- Practice responses together. Brainstorm with your child how to answer questions in a way that feels comfortable to them. Help your child decide whether to use humor, ("My dad doesn't look pretend to me, so he must be real"), express their feelings ("It hurts when you say things about my family"), or deflect ("That's private").

## Activity Suggestions for Processing Guilt/Shame/Grief

By Patricia Kasper, M.A.

There are several things you can do to initiate conversations with your children about any feelings of guilt, shame and grief. But first, let's differentiate between guilt and shame. Both guilt and shame convey a negative judgement and are therefore very uncomfortable feelings. People are known to go to great effort to avoid feeling either guilt or shame. But what are they, and how do they differ? While guilt and shame are often experienced together, they are not two words for the same feeling. In a nutshell, guilt refers to an action taken that was against a rule or law, or which caused harm in some way or another. Shame refers to an individual's sense of self. While guilt infers my actions were bad, shame infers that I am bad. Grief, the third core issue of adoption to be focused upon in this issue, refers to intense sorrow, generally related to either guilt or shame, or to loss.

It is critical to remember that one primary challenge we face as adoptive parents is to view all behavior as the communication of a need. Nearly all children who are placed for adoption through the foster care system are considered to be from "hard places." Recall that, with children from hard places, "bad behavior" is not the result of willful disobedience, but rather the implementation of the very survival skills that enabled the child to survive until placement. However, because childhood (and adolescence) is a time when "it's all about me," children tend to believe that good things happen when they are good, and that likewise, they are to blame for the bad things in life. Thus, feelings of shame are easily multiplied, even without parents who may be blaming or otherwise unwilling to accept accountability for their actions.

Remember also that one of our key responsibilities as adoptive parents is to give voice to our children. Children from hard places often have no voice, for a variety of reasons. Traumatic memories shut down the language center of the brain whenever painful emotions are elicited, leaving children (or adults) struggling to find the words to explain their distress. Helping children to identify what they are feeling is therefore of the utmost importance. Because of this, strong negative emotions, such as guilt, shame or grief, are often overwhelming. You can try any of the following ideas to help your child/ren identify and process these feelings.

## Transracial Adoption Loss

By Linda Gutierrez, M.A.

**"Transracial adoption is an issue, complex to be sure. When a family adopts members of different races, each person receives the opportunity to understand and experience life from a new point of view never before imagined. The family as a whole has the chance to move forward to develop its own new form." –Gail Steinberg**

As noted in the above paragraph, transracial adoption can be a topic that creates various complexities within an adoptive family unit. Some of which may highlight racial differences, create confusion, (contined on page 4)

## Band-Aid Activity:

Pair up with your child and make sure each of you has a Band-Aid. Ask your child if they have a hurt, on the inside or outside, that needs care and upon which you can place a Band-Aid. Then reverse roles. This exercise helps a child to articulate where in their body they are experiencing feelings, to identify the feeling and to build empathy.



## Sentence Completion Activity:

Ask your child to complete a sentence about their negative feeling, such as

"I feel shame because\_\_\_\_\_."

Then counter their negative belief with something positive:

"You say \_\_\_\_\_, but your preciousness says \_\_\_\_\_."

Communicating a child's preciousness to them several times per day is a powerful way to counter the shame that is inevitably packed inside their "invisible suitcase."

Remember to ask for eye contact at least three times a day and during that eye contact, tell them something about their preciousness – speak worth into their hearts. You can do this when doing either of the activities above, at random times throughout the day, or when you are reconnecting with them after an issue has arisen in your home. It is important to never ask for eye contact if your own eyes are not going to reflect your child's preciousness - our children need to see soft eyes of love that trigger their attachment system, not the hard eyes of judgment which will only trigger their fear system. Doing this will build upon your connection with your child and will build up your trust-bank account balance, which in turn will help a child to heal from their past hurts.



resentment, anger, even loss of identity (pg. 1, Lin, J, 1998). The racial differences and self-perceptions can interfere with children having the capacity to conform, adapt and accept their new families. New beliefs and cultural expectations may cause a child to lose their identity - which is a loss oftentimes overlooked. Parents who have children of a different ethnicity and cultural background may struggle with being able to discuss the “purple elephant” in the room. It is imperative that parents understand how their child of color may perceive their newly imposed family culture, in addition to the various losses and complex trauma they have experienced. Therefore, the “unspoken” can place an emotional, distant wedge between parents and their child, which can impede the cohesiveness within the family. So yes, having genuine on-going discussions with your children regarding race and culture is the beginning to becoming aware of the “transracial adoption issues” that linger within your child’s mind.

#### **How can we/you help your child regain, and accept their culture?**

1. Don't be afraid to ask questions, this will not only help your child to feel wanted, but will show him/her that your love is unconditional and that you want to embrace their roots (i.e. learn to cook their favorite meals and explore common traditions).
2. If you're struggling in getting your child to identify “their traditions,” you can begin to make your own family traditions.
3. Empower your child, let them begin to explore when they are ready.
4. Be genuine, don't be afraid to communicate your own confusion or uncertainty regarding cultural and ethnic differences, keep in mind the focus should be about you (parent) learning where your child is at developmentally, and how he or she perceives themselves (using “I” statements).
5. Don't get caught up in feeling guilty for being of a different ethnicity than your child, rather celebrate that you can learn from each other and embrace an appreciation for one another.
6. Implement “Lifebook” work, a tool to help your child tell their own story and place the missing pieces together in addition to making new memories. Please contact REACH regarding Lifebook work.

In summary, understanding “transracial adoption issues” is a gradual process that can be complex and confusing to parents and children. However, we can begin by facilitating and modeling a sense of feeling “safe” and “accepted” from a non-judgmental perspective. This can be taught by enabling families to explore and identify the obvious similarities and differences. Transracial adoptive families should not be burdened by the unknown, but rather remain focused on helping their child regain and accept their culture by looking deeper. This will help your child heal from past hurts, develop a strong sense of self and become the best version of themselves.

Credits: **Jeanne Lin** - “Helping Your Child Develop a Positive Racial/Ethnic Identity” (An Adoption Alliance, 1998). **Gail Steinburg & Beth Hill**- “Inside Transracial Adoption” (2000)

## **Tear Soup**

**By Pat Schwiebert & Chuck DeKlyen**

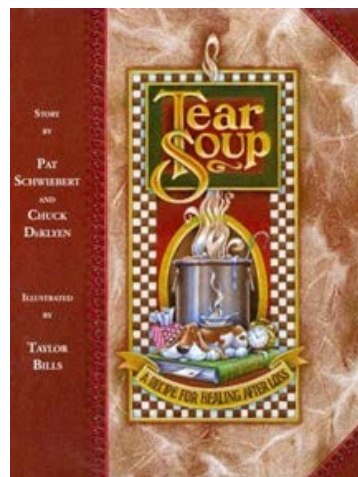
**Book Review by: Patricia Kasper, M.A.**

*Tear Soup* is a delightful, illustrated book on grief and loss written by a registered nurse and her son. Pat has served the bereaved in a hospice setting for over thirty years. She has written six other books, including *When Hello Means Goodbye*, a guide for parents whose babies have died and *We Were Gonna Have a Baby, but We Had an Angel Instead*.

*Tear Soup* draws the parallel between cooking and grieving, notably between making soup and grief work. Good soup, which we often prepare when we are in need of comfort food, is an artistic creation where the chef improvises the ingredients in such a way that it both satisfies our hunger and soothes our soul. As the author notes, “What is true about soup making, is also true about grieving.”

The book follows “Grandy,” as she makes a unique batch of *Tear Soup* following a big loss in her life with ingredients that will bring her comfort and ultimately fill the void in her life left by her loss. This book “affirms the bereaved, educates the unbereaved and is a building block for children.” When thinking of this book for children (our children in care have, after all, lost a great deal in their young lives), it will be most

appreciated by older children who have the capability to understand abstract thought. I typically suggest that parents read the book prior to sharing it with/reading it to their children, and have been told that *Tear Soup* has brought comfort also to the parents. *Tear Soup* is also available in multimedia, on DVD.





# Support Groups & Events

## July

- 2 Tulare REACH Parents Corner  
6:30 pm – 8:30 pm  
Congregation B'nai David, Visalia
- 9 Kings REACH Adoption Support Group  
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm  
South Valley Community Church, Lemoore

## August

- 2 Trust-Based Relational Intervention®  
Overview Training  
8:30am – 2:30pm  
COS Visalia, (room pending)
- 6 Tulare REACH Parents Corner  
6:30 pm – 8:30 pm  
Congregation B'nai David, Visalia
- 13 Kings REACH Adoption Support Group  
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm  
South Valley Community Church, Lemoore
- 22 Becoming a Trauma-Competent Healing  
Parent, Part #1  
6:00 pm – 9:00 pm  
COS Hanford, (room pending)
- 29 Becoming A Trauma-Competent Healing  
Parent, Part #2  
6:00 pm – 9:00 pm  
COS Hanford, (room pending)

## September

- 3 Tulare REACH Parents Corner  
6:30 pm – 8:30 pm  
Congregation B'nai David, Visalia
- 10 Kings REACH Adoption Support Group  
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm  
South Valley Community Church, Lemoore

### Tulare County REACH Parents Corner

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:

Congregation B'nai David,  
Education Building  
1039 S Chinowth Street  
Visalia, CA 93277

#### When:

1st Tuesday of the month 6:30 – 8:30 PM  
• July 2nd  
• August 6th  
• September 3rd

**Contact:** JulieAnn Jones at (559) 741-7358 ext. 4506  
or [jujones@aspiranet.org](mailto: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:

South Valley Community Church  
1050 W. Bush Street  
Lemoore, CA 93245

#### When:

2nd Tuesday of the month  
6:00 – 8:00pm  
• July 9th  
• August 13th  
• September 10th

**Contact:** Hortencia Casarez at (559) 741-7358 ext. 4513  
or [hcasarez@aspiranet.org](mailto:hcasarez@aspiranet.org)

### College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Program

The College of Sequoias Foster and Kinship 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](mailto:miriams@cos.edu). Classes are available in English and in Spanish.

#### Trust Based Relational Intervention® (6 hours)

Friday, August 2nd  
8:30 am – 2:30 pm  
COS Visalia, Room TBA

#### Becoming A Trauma-Competent Healing Parent, Part #1 (3 hours)

Thursday, August 22nd  
6:00 pm – 9:00 pm  
COS Hanford Campus, Room TBA

#### Becoming A Trauma-Competent Healing Parent, Part #2 (3 hours)

Thursday, August 29th  
6:00 pm – 9:00 pm  
COS Hanford Campus, Room TBA

## Aspiranet

151 Canal Drive  
Turlock, CA 95380

## Visalia Aspiranet

1840 South Central  
Visalia, CA 93277  
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Fax: (559) 741-7368  
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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 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 constellation.

**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.