

REACH

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis Intervention • Hope

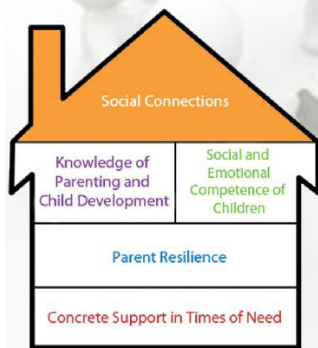
Aspiranet and State of California Post-Adoption Support



Social Connections



Build and maintain positive relationships that can provide emotional, instrumental, informational, spiritual, and other helpful support.



Dear Adoptive Families,

Dear Adoptive Families,

This quarter's newsletter focuses on the Protective Factor of Social Connections. As parents, we need other people who care about us and our children. When this sense of connectedness exists, we feel secure knowing we can share the joy, pain, and uncertainties that come with raising children. The unique needs we face in our parenting journeys- some of which can be quite challenging- can lead us to feel isolated when no one else around us seems to be going through the same struggles. Even finding just one other parent who can relate, and with whom we can share mutual support, can make a meaningful difference. Positive social connections can be formed with family members, friends, neighbors, community members, service providers- and with programs such as REACH. We hope you find the articles in this newsletter helpful and educational for your parenting journey!

If you're looking for ways to connect with other adoptive parents, please consider joining our monthly support groups. Details on page 5!

Take care,

The REACH Team- Sandra, Tara and Griselda

State
Summer 2021

Inside This Issue

1. Greetings
2. Social Connections
3. Activity & Book Review
4. Book Review continued
5. Calendar Events & Support Groups
6. REACH Services

Your REACH Support Team

Sandra Genova, LCSW
Core Program Director
sgenova@aspiranet.org

Tara Soria
Social Worker
tsoria@aspiranet.org

Griselda Santillan Mejia
Social Worker
gsantillanmejia@aspiranet.org

151 E. Canal Dr.
Turlock, CA 95380
Ph: (209) 669-2577
Fax: (209) 669-2593
aspiranet.org

Social Connections

by Yaneth Arceo, M.S.

Most people would agree that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted our social connections. What we once took for granted, today we appreciate more. The everyday activities, the hugging of friends and families, going for a walk, or the simplicity of eating out in public are interactions that people need in their daily life.

Why do social connections matter? It matters because having a solid relationship with family, friends, and the community helps people feel happy, secure, supported, and motivated every day. Studies indicate that being connected to others is vital for mental well-being and can be a defense mechanism against anxiety and depression.

Social connections refer to the feeling that you belong to a group and generally feel close to other people. There are different types of social connections, such as:

1. Intimate connections: people you love and care for, such as family and friends.
2. Relational connections: people with whom you cross paths every day and have similar interests.
3. Collective connections: people with whom you share a group membership or practice the same faith.

People make social connections every day without thinking, which keeps them thriving. Social connections are tied closely to our physical and mental well-being. Having a friend to talk to and to care about you is essential. In addition to having lower rates of anxiety and depression, research also shows that when people stay connected with others and have strong relationships, their self-esteem is higher. Those with social connections offer greater empathy for others and have more trusting and cooperative relationships. Parents with strong social connections are more likely to respond positively to their children. If we cultivate healthy connections, the research promises a longer, happier, and more prosperous life.

It is essential to have supportive relationships because they can positively impact our later years in life. Some research has shown that the risk of dementia is lower in those with good friends and positive family relationships. Research has also demonstrated that children who have at least one good friend may feel less lonely.

In conclusion, social connections are positive for us in



many ways. Without a doubt, the company of people we love and care about is worth significantly more than our financial wealth. Do not forget to reach out to your loved ones for support, keep positive vibes, and maintain social connections.

Sources:

<https://www.recovery.org/pro/articles/the-power-of-social-connection-during-covid-19/>

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/>

<https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>

<https://www.healthinsight.ca/managing-illnesses/social-connection-is-key-to-mental-health/#>

Activity: Building Social Connections

by Marsha Baker, MSW

Building social connections is essential to creating a strong family. Being connected with people you love gives you a sense of belonging. When parents feel connected and have people in their lives that genuinely care about their wellbeing, they feel more secure in their parenting. Having positive, trusting friends in the community provides a support system for meeting both practical and emotional needs. You can brainstorm about problems together, give and receive backup childcare, give each other rides, and meet other needs as they arise. Research studies have shown that parents with high levels of emotional,

informational, instrumental, or spiritual support are associated with positive parental mood. This leads to more positive perceptions of their children, as well as more responsiveness. It can also lower levels of anger, anxiety, and depression. Here are some activities that can help you build or strengthen your social connections:

1. Prioritize the people in your life who mean the most to you. Schedule time to connect with them regularly.
2. Connect with other parents with children the same age as yours and do family activities together. Early childhood programs, schools, churches, and community programs are great places for parents to connect with others.
3. Join a parent group where you can share the joys and challenges of parenting.
4. When you are having a tough time, reach out for support. Try to accept help when it is offered to you. It is during these times that we need those connections the most.
5. Challenge yourself to try new activities.
6. Reach out to neighbors or acquaintances that you may not have spoken to in a long time. Send a card, make a phone call or connect on social media.

If you have a hard time connecting with others, take small steps towards making a connection. Sometimes, just sharing a smile with someone can go a long way. Practice random acts of kindness, like holding a door for someone or ask how they're doing.

Remember to **PRIORITIZE, REACH OUT, and PARTICIPATE**. The more you connect with others and take part in your communities, the better you will feel. This will help strengthen your family and lead to more positive parenting.

Sources:

Be Strong Families: <https://www.beststrongfamilies.org/>

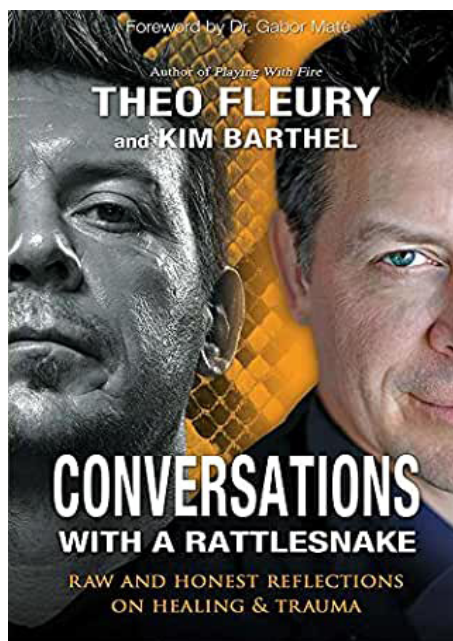
Ottawa Public Health/Have That Talk: [Building Social Connectedness Adult Activity Guide](#)

Wes Moss: [15 Ways to Stay Socially Connected](#)

Book Review: Conversations with a Rattlesnake

by Theo Fleury and Kim Barthel, LCSW

Reviewed by Patti Kasper, MA



This book is a very worthy read. The entire book reflects a series of conversations between Kim Barthel, a renowned therapist and international speaker from Canada, and Theo Fleury, a former NHL hockey player and Olympic gold medalist. Theo survived childhood sexual abuse but did not begin to address it in a healthy manner until he “hit bottom” and lost his hockey career due to numerous poor coping strategies.

What do conversations with rattlesnakes have to do with social connections, the topic of this REACH newsletter? Plenty! Behind the title selection, rattlesnakes bring to mind pain and death. Trauma, which every adoptive parent is familiar with, stings like a snake bite, both when it happens and whenever traumatic memories are triggered. Unresolved, trauma leads to a host of life-altering and sometimes life-ending events, either on a physical or emotional level. But there is a deeper and more hopeful reason why the authors chose the image of a rattler for their title - the snake is also a sign of healing and renewal, enough so that it is in the common medical insignia. How? Snakes shed their skins every year, sloughing off the old skin, as it has become tight and constrictive. So too have the effects of trauma on our lives become tight and constrictive, or on the

lives of our children, for whom we are healing agents.

But what belies the idea of having conversations with snakes? It is through conversations with trusted people about our traumas that we rewire our brains and alter our body's response to our memories of them. This book is written in such a way as to draw the reader in; the reader feels as though they are present in the room while Kim and Theo are talking. More than that, the reader will find him/herself pausing often during Kim and Theo's conversation to reflect on his/her own life experiences, both within their family of origin and in current life. In the book, Theo asks Kim, "What is the real sincere key to having deep insights about how we are and how we want to be? And what ultimately provides the motivation for wanting to change?" Kim responds, "It's surprisingly simple, isn't it? It's talking with trusted friends. That's what ultimately helps us feel better. Therapy can help, reading books can help, time certainly can help, but our closest friends and safe relationships are what it comes down to."

Early in the book, they focus on attachment, a familiar topic for those who have attended trauma-sensitive parenting workshops. Kim and Theo's conversation around attachment validates what is commonly taught in classes, that the quality of our interactions with our primary caretakers in infancy sets the stage for how we relate to others for the rest of our lives. Several times Kim reminds Theo/the reader that just as our traumas are not our fault, neither are they our parents' fault. Like all of us, our parents did the best they could at the time with the "hands" they had been dealt. Much time is spent looking at three basic attachment styles: Type A (avoidant), Type B (secure), and Type C (connection seeking). The reader cannot help but reflect on his/her own attachment style, and how that may have changed through the years as s/he came to terms with how their childhood and other life events shaped them. The discussion brings hope to any reader. Kim echoes other attachment gurus when she explains to Theo/the reader that our minds are physically changed by our experiences and that this includes learning how to become more secure in our interactions through mindfulness, another familiar and popular topic. This is the process by which we facilitate healing in the lives and minds of our children, who have come from hard places.

When the authors discuss safe and healthy relationships, they note that there are a few key components: boundaries,

honesty, vulnerability, and compassion. We all need relationships with these qualities. Not only so that we can be secure bases for our children to attach to, which set the stage for their future relationships and well-being, but so that we will have positive social connections. These connections will strengthen our families and promote resiliency in the face of hard times, such as COVID-19 or when we're trying to figure out how best to respond to our children's, at times, perplexing issues. Kim and Theo also discuss the healing impact of "relentless positivity," which consistently builds up the listener's (and our children's) inherent worth but does not condone poor behavior. Kim points out that during the first few years of life, our brains are hard-wired to pay close attention to the negatives in life, by which we seek to avoid danger. Furthermore, the ability to "hear" positive messaging doesn't begin to develop until 18 months of age. With our children from hard places, who have known abuse and neglect during these formative years, it falls to us to be even more vigilant in providing our children with authentic, relentless positivity. They also delve into the psychodynamics of addiction and how positivity can generate its own healthy addiction through the mini releases of dopamine in our brains that positivity creates. Shame is a recurrent theme in this book, and how damaging recurrent messages of shame, abandonment, and rejection (that began in those early months and years of life) can be until self-acceptance of our foibles and shortcomings can occur – oftentimes through meaningful conversations with safe and trusted people.

As a former therapist, I will always be a proponent of therapy, but therapists are not always available. Having a sufficient number of social connections will allow them to be there for us in a pinch, especially in this era of instant messaging and unlimited call plans. To this end, Aspiranet's REACH program has two different options for parents to build their social network with those who are on a similar journey: our Parent Support Groups and our Parent Cafés. Please see page 5 of the newsletter for the times these are offered, and consider joining us. Also, please consider picking up a copy of *Conversations with a Rattlesnake*. Not only is it a fascinating read that will grow and stretch you, it's simply a great read.

Virtual Parent Education and Support Groups

July

- 26 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm
- 28 9:30 am - 11:30 am

August

- 23 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm
- 25 9:30 am - 11:30 am

September

- 27 5:30 pm - 7:30 pm
- 29 9:30 am - 11:30 am



Virtual Parent Café for Adoptive Parents

Join us for the monthly Parent Café! Parent Cafes are a great way to get to know other parents, share tips, learn new things or to just have a little time with other adults!

First Thursday of every month from 3-5pm

Please note: Flyers will be sent before each group with details and Zoom links to join the meeting.

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
- 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 or guardianship families to services that can help. Some of the services available to your family include Aspiranet Wraparound. Aspiranet 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.



NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Stockton, CA
PERMIT NO. 451

Mailed From:
151 E. Canal Dr.
Turlock, CA 95380

www.reachadoptionhelp.org



STATE OF CALIFORNIA
Gavin Newsom, Governor

California Department of Social Services
Adoptions Services Bureau
Fresno Regional Office
1330C E. Shaw Ave., Fresno, CA 93710
(559) 243-8200
www.childsworld.ca.gov



REACH Post-Adoption Support Services

REACH offers services in Madera, Mono, Mariposa & San Benito Counties:

Monthly Educational/Support Groups – Monthly meetings where families are able to receive education/training and meet other adoptive families in the community. Please check with each respective site to learn if licensing or certification hours are provided.

Quarterly REACH Newsletter – Quarterly newsletters filled with adoption articles, local trainings, book reviews, on-line resources and more.

Educational Workshops and Trainings – A variety of workshops and trainings are made available in Madera and San Benito Counties.

REACH Library – The REACH library is open and available for book review and check outs during the monthly support groups or by appointment.

Case Management – REACH clients are provided with information, resource referral or other assistance as needed. Although Case Management Services are generally provided via telephone, special arrangements for face to face case management can be arranged.

Crisis Counseling – Crisis intervention is available. Please contact our REACH staff for this support.