

REACH

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis Intervention • Hope

Aspiranet and State of California Post-Adoption Support



**“A sibling is the lens through which
you see your childhood.”**

— Ann Hood

Welcome to our Summer Newsletter! We hope this season brings you warmth, joy, and plenty of opportunities to create lasting memories with your family.

This quarter, we are excited to focus on the theme **“Redefining Family and Preparing Siblings”**. As adoptive families, we understand that the concept of family extends beyond traditional boundaries. It’s a rich tapestry woven from diverse backgrounds, unique stories, and a shared commitment to love and support one another.

In this edition, we explore how to navigate the complexities of redefining family dynamics, particularly when preparing siblings for the arrival of a new family member. Sibling relationships play a crucial role in the emotional and social development of children, and preparing them for an adoption can foster strong, supportive bonds that last a lifetime.

Effective communication is essential when integrating new members into the family. We provide practical tips on how to talk to your children about adoption, addressing their concerns and curiosities in an age-appropriate and empathetic manner. By fostering an environment of openness and understanding, you help your children embrace the changes with confidence and positivity.

Additionally, we delve into strategies for building healthy sibling relationships, ensuring that each child feels valued and secure. From involving siblings in the adoption process to creating shared experiences that strengthen their bond, our goal is to help your family navigate this transition smoothly.

Remember, every family’s journey is unique, and seeking support is a vital part of the process. Our REACH social workers are here to offer guidance and resources tailored to your needs. We also invite you to join our monthly virtual Parent Education and Support group, where you can connect with other adoptive parents, share experiences, and gain valuable insights.

We hope the information in this newsletter provides you with the tools and encouragement you need on your parenting journey. Your dedication to nurturing a loving and inclusive family environment is truly inspiring.

Together, let’s continue to build strong, resilient, and loving families.

**State
Summer 2024**

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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

Lexi Clements

Support Counselor
aclements@aspiranet.org

151 E. Canal Dr.
Turlock, CA 95380
Ph: 209.669.2577
Fax: 209.669.2593
aspiranet.org

reachadoptionhelp.org

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 (KPID) 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

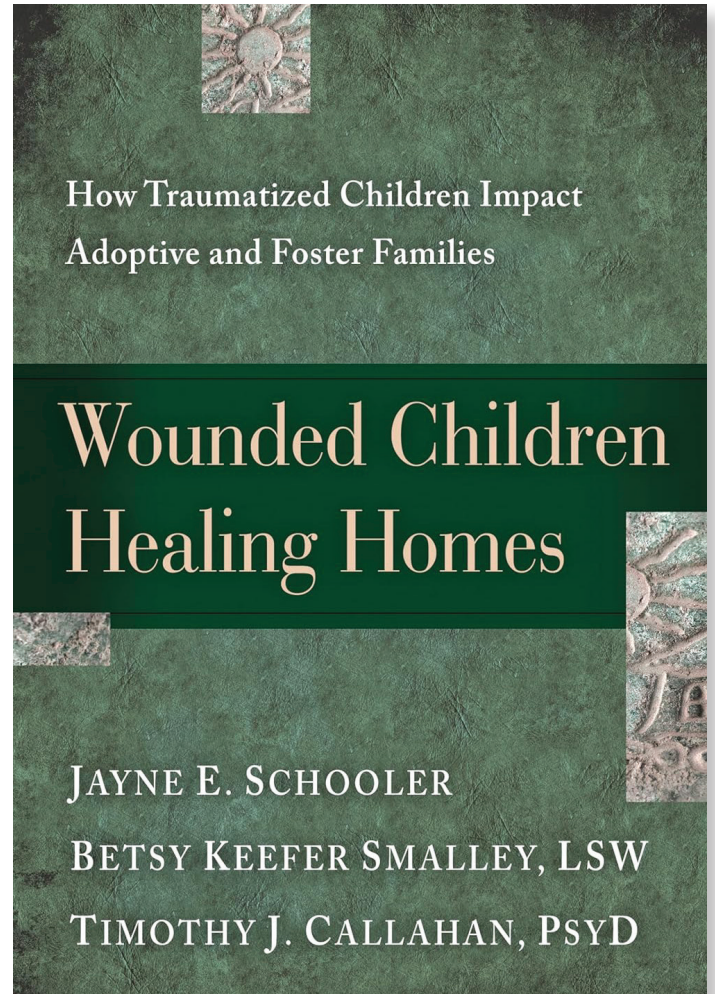
As adoptive parents, resource parents, and social workers, we are entrusted with the profound responsibility of providing care and support to children who have experienced trauma. In *Wounded Children, Healing Homes: How Traumatized Children Impact Adoptive and Foster Families*, authors Betsy Keefer 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>

Parent Education and Support Groups

July

- 9 Parent Café “Staying Positive in a Negative World”**
(Tuesday) 6:30-8:00 p.m.
- 25 Parent Education and Support Group (English)**
(Thursday) 5:30-7:30 p.m.
- 26 Virtual Parent Education and Support Group (English) on Zoom**
(Friday) 9:00-10:30 a.m.
- 31 Grupo de Apoyo (Espanol)**
(Wednesday) 9:30-11:30 a.m.

August

- 13 Parent Café “Parenting in the Schoolhouse”**
(Tuesday) 6:30-8:00 p.m.
- 22 Parent Education and Support Group (English)**
(Thursday) 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
- 23 Virtual Parent Education and Support Group (English) on Zoom**
(Friday) 9:00-10:30 a.m.
- 28 Grupo de Apoyo (Espanol)**
(Wednesday) 9:30-11:30 a.m.

September

- 10 Parent Café “Building a Bully: Do’s and Don’ts”**
(Tuesday) 6:30-8:00 p.m.
- 25 Grupo de Apoyo (Espanol)**
(Wednesday) 9:30-11:30 a.m.
- 26 Parent Education and Support Group (English)**
(Thursday) 11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.
- 27 Virtual Parent Education and Support Group (English) on Zoom**
(Friday) 9:00-10:30 a.m.

Some groups are being held via Zoom at this time.

Flyers will be sent out prior to each group with details to join.

If you’d like to be added to the invite list, please contact us!

Parent Education and Support Group (English)

This group is open to families in Madera County who are in the process of adopting, or who have already finalized an adoption, as well as families who have guardianship. For more details, including the meeting location, please contact Tara Soria at 209-202-0365 or email tsoria@aspiranet.org.

REACH Grupo de Apoyo (Espanol) on ZOOM

Este grupo está diseñado para padres que pronto adoptaran o ya adoptaron. Los enlaces de Zoom y los recordatorios se enviaran mensualmente. Para registrarse, comuníquese con Griselda Santillan Mejia llamando al numero 209-329-7402 o mandando email a gsantillanmejia@aspiranet.org.

Parent Cafe

Parent Cafes are open to new and experienced resource and adoptive parents. The topics and conversations focus on the five protective factors, which are factors that strengthen families and reduce risks. Each month features a new theme of discussion! This is a structured and interactive group that is held over Zoom. Training hours can also be provided upon request. For more information, please contact Tara Soria at 209-202-0365 or tsoria@aspiranet.org.

Virtual REACH Parent Education and Support Group (English) on ZOOM

This new group is open to families who reside in, or adopted from, the counties of Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Mono, or San Benito. For more details, please contact Tara Soria at 209-202-0365 or email tsoria@aspiranet.org. The schedule may change as family needs are determined. Monthly flyers will be emailed to families each month with the upcoming group’s date/time.

Adoption Preparation Training on ZOOM

This is a free online training series to educate and strengthen families built through foster, kinship care, and adoption and for the professionals who support them. Each session in this series will be offered by adoption social workers and cover a wide variety of topics to build knowledge, practical tools, and resources families need on the complex journey of permanency and adoption. This trauma-informed training series includes nine concise modules. The series is scheduled to begin in August, and will be held on nine consecutive Monday evenings from **6:00-8:00 p.m.** It is not required that participants attend all sessions. Registration information will be provided through email closer to the series starting.



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California Department of Social Services
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.