

REACH

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis Intervention • Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Adoption Support Program



Happy New Year!

As we forge ahead, with the New Year comes a sense of fresh beginnings, inspired goals, and new experiences. In the spirit of new beginnings, we're excited to announce a bountiful new resource opportunity for families and youth! Aspiranet is proud of our long history of providing a wide variety of quality support services to families and youth touched by guardianship and adoption. However, we understand that the past two years tainted by the COVID-19 pandemic led countless families to struggle with harrowing challenges. As a result, Aspiranet is pleased to offer expanded financial services and linkages to resources that may not have been previously accessible. Please visit aspiranet.org/aspsp to apply and see how Aspiranet can help strengthen and support your family!

Continuing our theme of protective factors in the newsletter, this quarter focuses on Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development. We encourage you to reflect on how you have gained knowledge of parenting and understanding children, whether it is from your own personal experiences or from those close to you. Adoptive parenting often requires self-reflection and the ability to be adaptable to the children in your home. If you have made it a goal to improve your family's stability and finding more responsive ways to help your children be successful, REACH is here to support your family's journey.

"The reality is that most of us communicate the same way that we grew up. That communication style becomes our normal way of dealing with issues, our blueprint for communication. It's what we know and pass on to our own children. We either become our childhood or we make a conscious choice to change it."—Kristen Crockett

I would also like to take this time to introduce myself. I had the honor of working for Aspiranet, in the Bakersfield Office doing foster care, adoption and WRAP services. After several years of working for Aspiranet, I had the opportunity to move to Minnesota and work with adults with disabilities. There, I supported clients to be able to live independently and facilitated social skills and awareness of emotions groups. I also became a Licensed Marriage Family Therapist. After 16 years in Minnesota, I wanted to be closer to family and found that Aspiranet had an opening in their Tulare office as a REACH Social Worker. I am excited to be back at Aspiranet and working with this population since I, myself, am an adoptee.

This year, we hope to bring parents more opportunities to increase their Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, one of the five protective factors proven to keep families strong and thriving. In taking this first step to build a more resilient family, we encourage you to participate in one of our parent groups. If you would like to learn more about our direct services or schedule a consultation, please don't hesitate to reach out to us!

We hope you enjoy this Winter edition. Warmest regards,

Beth Hurlbert

Tulare County Winter 2022

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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
- Schoolbehavior/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.

Flexibility in Adoptive Parenting

By Jade Yang, MSW

What makes a successful adoptive parent? One key characteristic is flexibility, which is defined as “bending easily without breaking” or “willingness to change or compromise.” Flexibility in parenting is the ability to acknowledge when something isn’t working and having the willingness to try a different approach. This could be in regards to behavioral expectations or the rules put in place for your child, as well as how you communicate and teach your child new skills. Regardless of how long you have been a parent, every child is different and will require parenting specifically tailored to them. But to get there, mistakes will happen and adjustments will need to be made.



Parenting a child with a trauma history will require flexibility to understand your child and help them thrive. Unfortunately, children do not come with “how-to” manuals and no parent knows everything about children. The “perfect parent” is simply someone who tries. A parent’s knowledge of parenting and child development will likely develop from their personal experiences (the way they were raised

or raising their children), from other family members, friends, or sometimes their community. Being flexible might mean stepping away from those traditional routes to better enhance parenting skills and understanding your child. This may include:

- Seeking out professional expertise on your child’s physical, mental, emotional, or social health
- Participating in parenting classes, trainings, or workshops
- Finding support in friends who are in similar situations or joining local support groups
- Reading books or online articles on parenting or child development

Parenting is an ever-evolving journey that will require flexibility as children grow and enter different developmental stages. If you find yourself wondering if you could be doing more in your parenting, take some time to reflect on these questions: Do I use age-appropriate parenting skills in my expectations, discipline, and communication with my child? Does my child respond positively to my approaches? Do I have a reliable source of parenting information if an issue were to arise? To learn more about parenting education offered in your community, contact your local REACH office for guidance.

Impact of Trauma on Child Development

by Marsha Baker, MSW

One of the hardest jobs in the world is parenting. Unfortunately, it does not come with an instruction manual. Yes, some things may come to you naturally, but most of it is on-the-job training. In your parenting journey, it is so important to have knowledge and understanding of child development, which is one of the Five Protective Factors in creating a strong family.

Increasing your knowledge of the physical, cognitive, language, and social and emotional development of children can help you understand what to expect during each developmental stage. There is a strong link between what parents know about child development, and how they behave with their children. The stronger the knowledge, the more likely parents will engage in positive parental behaviors. Parents with limited knowledge are more likely to use

parenting techniques that yield more negative outcomes or behavior in their children.

Let’s take a look at four areas of functioning that may be impacted by trauma and early adverse experiences:

- **Capacity of Relationship**

Our ability to develop close relationships, such as giving and receiving affection, is the foundation of other developmental capacities. These include language, self-regulation, positive identity, as well as cognitive and social abilities. Well-nurtured children are emotionally connected, however, those who experience early trauma usually have a fear of trusting others and this fear can lead to anger, numbing emotions, and withdrawal.

- **Felt Safety & Control**

Children who have been wounded and unable to protect themselves have a difficult time feeling safe, even when they are no longer in an unsafe environment. They often feel powerless and have a strong need to control their environment.

- **Self-Regulation**

The ability to regulate emotions is an outcome of a secure attachment between the parent/caregiver and the child. Children who have been poorly nurtured may have impairments in their brain that control impulses and facilitate reasoning.

- **Identity/Sense of Self**

It is common for children who have experienced maltreatment to see themselves as unlovable. They often struggle with their history and feel rejected and feel a sense of shame. This leads to an inability to make sense of who they are and form a positive self-identity.

It is important to understand the impact that trauma has on child development. Although you may already know a lot about good parenting, you can never have enough knowledge. In many cases, the way we parent is usually a direct reflection of how we were parented. For this reason, some parents can become rigid and inflexible in their parenting techniques. However, we all know that

every child is different, especially those children who have complex early traumatic histories. Remember, those early developmental milestones can only be achieved with the right nurturing and environment. To mitigate the negative impact of trauma on the areas of functioning listed above, parents will need to continue to seek out knowledge on child development and stay attuned to their children's needs and behaviors.

Sources:

Center for Adoption Support & Education (C.A.S.E.) NTI (National Adoption Competency Training Initiative)

Center for Family Strengthening <https://cfssl.org/five-protective-factors/>

Center for the Study of Social Policy <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/HO-2.1c-CW-Knowledge-of-Parenting-and-Child-Development.pdf>



Book Review

FASD: Trying Differently Rather Than Trying Harder

By Diane Malbin

Although this work was written with FASD, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, in mind, the principles apply in working with any brain-based condition, or broadly referred to as FANB, Fetal Alcohol/Neurobehavioral conditions. Most of you may not realize that such a child may already live in your home. Research has revealed that one in every 20 children in the general population has been impacted by prenatal exposure to alcohol but the percentage of children in foster care/adoption impacted by this is 80%. When we consider that prenatal exposure to other drugs, chronic maternal stress during pregnancy and other adverse childhood experiences (such as a difficult birth, abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, etc.) have detrimental effects upon brain development, we realize that the approach laid out for us in this booklet can benefit ALL of us parenting our children.

Those of you who have delved into TBRI, Trust-Based Relational Interventions, have likely learned from Dr. Karyn Purvis that trauma changes a child's brain. But the next question to consider is, how? This booklet, Trying Differently

Rather Than Trying Harder, though written more narrowly for the effects of alcohol exposure, points us in the right direction. This booklet is often referred to by parents of those on the FANB spectrum as their parenting Bible. The booklet has several charts, graphs, and diagrams that aid our understanding.

Section One talks about the FASD diagnosis, the effects of alcohol on the developing brain, how identifying differs from labeling, and the link between brain-based differences and behavior. It lays a framework for how to recognize when your child's (or loved one's, because this is not something that can be "outgrown") behavior might be due to a brain difference.

Section Two helps us reframe our child's behavior from "won't" to "can't." It helps us understand which behaviors are a direct reflection of a brain-based difference, and which behaviors are a reflection of the child feeling misunderstood, unheard, or frustrated by the poor fit between what they are capable of and the expectations placed upon him/her in various settings.

It explains dysmaturity or the gap between the social/emotional age of a child and his/her chronological age. Unlike immaturity, where a child is capable of “acting their age,” with dysmaturity, the child has a slower developmental pace, which is brain-based. The section also walks us through the tendency for a child to “collect diagnoses” having failed to improve behaviors despite numerous interventions offered by well-meaning professionals who simply have not learned to assess brain function in the clients they serve. This section then speaks of “disorders” commonly diagnosed in those who are on the FANB spectrum.

Section Three discusses traditional behavioral interventions, and why they so often fail... and why they can even make things worse by addressing behaviors without assessing what has caused those behaviors – a brain that works differently. It helps us to identify strengths and talents, and how to build upon these in creating a better fit for our child, between how their brain works and what others, who don't understand them, expect. When there is a better fit, there are fewer “negative” behaviors, identified as secondary and tertiary behavioral symptoms – these are the behaviors that trigger reactions from parents, teachers, and many other professionals – the behaviors which lead a child into therapy in the first place. This section helps us to look more closely at our child's environment, from cues that are detected through our senses, as well as invisible elements, such as biases

Family Activity By Tara Soria, M.A.

Exposure to music is immensely beneficial to children in countless ways, from supporting their cognitive development to providing an outlet for their creativity and emotions. There are plenty of different aspects to explore, including movement, singing, rhythm, sounds, learning about instruments, and making instruments. As we move into the winter months and spend more time indoors, here are some fun ideas for homemade musical instruments to inspire your child's musical growth:

Rainsticks- Push some thumbtacks into a long, thick cardboard tube, fill the tube with dried beans, buttons, popcorn kernels, rice, or other filler, and then seal both ends. Once the ends are sealed, cover it with paper or foil, and decorate.

Bell bracelets- Thread some craft bells onto pipe cleaners so the children can wear them as jingly bracelets.

Paper plate tambourines- Decorate some sturdy paper plates, make holes all around the edges, and tie craft bells onto them.

Drums- You'll need some balloons with their ends cut off, some tins or tubs, some tape or rubber bands, and materials to decorate. Stretch the balloons over the tins/tubs and secure them with tape or rubber bands. Use wooden spoons for drumsticks.

Xylophone- Fill an assortment of glasses or jugs (or both) with varying levels of water. Line them up in order from least to most

and traditionally held values. This section closes with a discussion of how powerful shifts can occur when we, as parents, teachers, and professionals, learn to look at behavior through a brain-based lens.

Section Four walks us through several examples of primary characteristics of FANB, as well as examples of accommodations that can be made to create a better fit. Examples that Ms. Malbin provides include memory problems, processing pace, difficulty generalizing learning from one setting to another, rigid and inflexible thinking, speech and language, difficulties with transitions, being overly sensitive to various sensory cues, dysmaturity, and others.

Ms. Malbin concludes by addressing frequently asked questions, and she provides the reader with the solid foundation of research upon which she has based her work, as well as a bibliography of suggested reading, for those who want to dig deeper.

Ms. Malbin created an organization, FASCETS.org, to raise awareness of FANB and to train others in how to better serve those who have been impacted by prenatal exposure to drugs, alcohol, toxic stress, and other causes of these brain-based differences. We hope that you will find this book helpful, and that it will empower you to lessen the stress parenting your child, for you and your whole family.

full. Give your child a mallet (a wooden spoon works well) and have them experiment with different sounds by gently tapping on the rims of the glasses.

Guitar- To make a homemade guitar, simply stretch several large elastic bands around a cardboard box with an open top. A tissue box with a hole in the center also works well. Choose elastic bands that vary in width to ensure that all of the “guitar strings” will produce different tones and sounds when they're plucked by little fingers.

Cymbals- Loop a strip of fabric through the hole of an old CD and tie it off at a point where the fabric strap will slide snugly around three or four fingers of your child's hand. While your CDs don't make the resounding crash that real cymbals do, they certainly produce a fun and satisfying “clack”- and they are shiny like real cymbals!

Want to get your child up and moving but you don't have time to make any instruments? Have a Streamer Dance! Give them ribbons or scarves and put on some music for them to dance to with their streamers (try this activity using music of varying types and speeds).

Sources: First Discoverers

<https://www.firstdiscoverers.co.uk/music-activi>

Support Groups and Events

JANUARY

- 19 FKCE: Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent**
Presented by Tulare REACH Aspiranet
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
- 20 REACH Parent Café**
10:00 am – 11:30 am
Zoom Meeting – RSVP: bhurlbert@aspiranet.org
- 25 REACH Parent Support Group**
6:00 pm – 7:30 pm
Zoom Meeting – RSVP: bhurlbert@aspiranet.org
- 26 REACH Parent Support Group - Spanish**
9:30am- 11:30am
Zoom Meeting – RSVP: hcasarez@aspiranet.org

FEBRUARY

- 17 REACH Parent Café**
10:00 am – 11:30 am
Zoom Meeting – RSVP: bhurlbert@aspiranet.org
- 22 REACH Parent Support Group**
6:00 pm – 7:30 pm
Zoom Meeting – RSVP: bhurlbert@aspiranet.org
- 23 REACH Parent Support Group - Spanish**
9:30am- 11:30am
Zoom Meeting – RSVP: hcasarez@aspiranet.org

MARCH

- 17 REACH Parent Café**
10:00 am – 11:30 am
Zoom Meeting – RSVP: bhurlbert@aspiranet.org
- 22 REACH Parent Support Group**
6:00 pm – 7:30 pm
Zoom Meeting – RSVP: bhurlbert@aspiranet.org
- 23 REACH Parent Support Group - Spanish**
9:30am- 11:30am
Zoom Meeting – RSVP: hcasarez@aspiranet.org

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all in-person group meetings have been suspended until further notice. Support groups continue to meet online via Zoom. Please watch your inboxes for invitations from the coordinators. We will continue to assess the safety of returning to in-person group meeting.

REACH Parent Support Group

This group is designed for adults thinking about adoption, parents awaiting adoptive placement, parents of adopted children, and guardianship parents. Training hours provided. ZOOM links and reminders will be sent monthly.

Where:	When:
Online	4th Tuesday of the month from 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm
	January 25
	February 22
	March 22

Contact: Beth Hurlbert at 559.741.7358 ext. 4511 or email at bhurlbert@aspiranet.org

REACH Parent Support Group - Spanish

This group is designed for adults thinking about adoption, parents awaiting adoptive placement, parents of adopted children, and guardianship parents. Training hours provided. ZOOM links and reminders will be sent monthly.

Where:	When:
Online	4th Wednesday of the month from 9:30am – 11:30am
	January 26
	February 23
	March 23

Contact: Hortencia Casarez at 559.741.7358 ext. 4513 or email hcasarez@aspiranet.org

Parent Café

This is an online group to support parents in finding the resources and connections their families need to grow and thrive. ZOOM links will be sent monthly.

Where:	When:
Online	3rd Thursday of each month from 10:00 – 11:30am
	January 20
	February 17
	March 17

Contact: Beth Hurlbert at 559.741.7358 ext. 4511 or email at bhurlbert@aspiranet.org

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 <https://www.cos.edu/fostercare>. Register for classes with Miriam Sallam at 559.737.4842 or email miriams@cos.edu. Classes are available in English and in Spanish. Please note childcare is not available.

FKCE: Becoming a Trauma Competent Healing Parent • Presented by REACH
Wednesday, January 19th • 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm • virtual



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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.