

Aspiranet

REACH

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis • Intervention • Hope
Post-Adoption Support Services for Fresno County



"You can't pour from an empty cup. You have to look after yourself first."

– T. West

"Sometimes the most important thing in a whole day is the rest we take between two deep breaths."

– E. Hillesum

Fresno Fall 2018 Newsletter!

Self-care is critical at all times, but most especially during the fall season when school begins and holiday activities occur. Included in this quarterly issue are great articles and ideas to support families as they navigate through the next few months.

In addition to sharing seasonal information, I'm excited to announce that beginning mid-September, REACH will be launching a six-week co-ed group for adopted children between the ages of 9-11. As such, we are reaching out to many of our REACH families who have children that meet the criteria for the group and would like to participate. Some of the topic areas that will be covered during the six-week group include: "Helping your child understand their adoption story" and "Understanding and developing their unique identity." Our goal is to offer similar groups in the future as well as a group for our adopted teens. If you have a child or teen that would benefit from attending a group with their peers, please let us know.

With regards to groups, we continue to hold our monthly parent educational support group here at Aspiranet. We meet the third Thursday of each month between 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. In addition to addressing a wide array of parenting topics, we provide childcare. However, due to limited space for this service, we ask that our families inform us of this need at the time they RSVP for each group.

Prior to closing, I want to recognize Adoption Awareness month, which occurs in November. We, at REACH, feel incredibly fortunate to be a part of your adoption journey and we celebrate this time with you and your family!

Until next time, please know that REACH remains committed to our goal of providing support for our post-adoption families. That said, please don't hesitate to contact us with your individual questions, concerns or needs.

Best,

Kathy Steele, LCSW

Aspiranet REACH Program Supervisor

(559) 222-4969 – work / (559) 246-3307 – cell ksteele@aspiranet.org

FRESNO COUNTY

Fall 2018

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Your REACH Support Team

Kathy Steele, L.C.S.W.

Program Supervisor – ksteele@aspiranet.org

Chad Valorosi, MSW

Program Director II – cvalorosi@aspiranet.org

Jade Yang, MSW

Post-Adoption Social Worker

jayang@aspiranet.org

Linda Gutierrez

Social Worker/Trainer – ligutierrez@aspiranet.org

1320 East Shaw Ave., Suite 140

Fresno, CA 93710

Ph: (559) 222-4969

Fax: (559) 222-0106

aspiranet.org

Balancing Loyalty Conflicts During the Holidays **Patti Kasper, M.A., M.TH.**

We've all heard for many years that holidays bring out not only joy, but also depression in a great many folk. This is generally due to unfinished grief and loss work that a person is experiencing. As adoptive parents, we must remain mindful that no one comes to adoption without experiencing loss, especially our children who have come to us through the foster care system, even if they were adopted as infants. Often times, the holidays serve to remind our children that they have another family. They wonder about them – Are they safe? Are they healthy? Are they happy? Are my birth family members thinking about me? Do they want me to be happy in my adoptive home? Or would my birth family wish for me to want to come “home”? An adoptive family is, after all, a blended family, but one in which the child often feels guilty and torn between loyalties.

A child struggling with loyalty conflicts during a time when it seems all of America is supposed to be celebrating family togetherness and closeness will often appear withdrawn. They may be afraid of hurting their parents' feelings by voicing their feelings of loss, pain and confusion. Without being able to talk about these feelings of loss, feelings of “differentness” and isolation may become amplified. Often, they may not have the words to express their inner turmoil.

As adoptive parents, we have work to do to help our children through these times. A long-term adoption professional, Sherrie Eldridge, lists several things you can do to help your child/ren:

- Be sensitive to your child's unspoken need for connection
- Be aware that he may be feeling “different” than other family members
- Plan activities that will keep your child, teen, or adult connected to you in a positive way
- Remember that touch is a powerful way of connecting (hand on the shoulder, high five)
- If your child chooses isolation, ask him to share his thoughts with you. Use probing questions and affirm his emotions.

If your child was older at the time he or she joined your family, ask what holiday traditions his/her birth family had. Consider incorporating these into your family in much the same way as you blended your holiday traditions with those of your spouse/partner. You can also have them choose holiday greeting cards for their birth family members and enclose letters to them. Send them if that is appropriate and/or if you have the contact information, or tuck them away in your child's adoption box if not. This will help to honor your child's history and will be very affirming. Remember too that connections are empowered through play – refer to the holiday fun article in this newsletter for ideas.

Self-Care: Making Your Well-being a Priority **By Natasha Burton, MSW, LCSW**

Being a parent is one of the most rewarding jobs you have, but it can also be the most stressful. You probably spend a lot of time fulfilling a laundry list of responsibilities, but too often you put your needs at the bottom of the list, or not at all. Well maybe tomorrow, right? And if you're a parent raising a child that has experienced some form of trauma, then it likely your time becomes increasingly limited, because you are helping your child navigate the impact of their history at each developmental stage of their life. Does anything sound familiar?

You are not alone, and many parents believe they don't have time and must do it all on their own, to the point of exhaustion. Do you want to be the best version of yourself for the important people in your life? If your answer is yes, well here are a few gifts you can give yourself this fall, so make “me time,” a new practice and priority. I want to highlight two important points for you to remember, ask for help when you need it & create a support system.

Take 10-15 minutes a day (you can break it up throughout the day (5 minutes here or there):

- Walk outdoors
- Sit quietly with a cup of tea
- Dance
- Find things to laugh at (movie, etc.)
- Make someone else laugh (tell a joke, etc.)
- Journal/write (get your thoughts on paper)
- Meditate
- Spend time with your partner
- Call a friend
- Socialize wherever you go
- Sit outdoors

Schedule time for self-care (you'll need a little more than 15 minutes):

- Get lost in an activity (maybe a hobby or a sport)
- Exercise
- Nourish your body & brain with healthy food
- Read that book you bought months ago or buy a new one
- Be creative or join your child in an activity
- Get together with friends
- Join a support group
- Spend time with friends
- Regularly schedule date night
- Watch something you enjoy
- Take a long shower or bath
- Add your own (think of at least 3 activities)

*Relax and have
some fun, parents
deserve it!*

The Effects of Good Nutrition on Children's Behavior **Marva Bourne, DMFT, LMFT**

Good nutrition is important for all children, but it is especially so for children who experience a history of trauma (such as prenatal exposure to drugs, alcohol or stress). For these children, good nutrition is essential in promoting improvement in brain function and in the enhancement of physical, emotional, and behavioral well-being. As individuals who have been educated on the effects of trauma on the brain, many of us know that the resulting behaviors are often misdiagnosed as ADHD. The American Nutrition Association corroborates this by stating, "There are a number of conditions whose clinical picture may mimic or accompany ADHD. ADHD exists alone in only about one-third of the children. Many of these other disorders require different treatments and need to be considered separately or integrated into the treatment planning."

The APA defines attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD, as a developmental disorder that affects the behavior, attention and learning of children. A study published in the journal "Pediatrics" looked at the role of diet for treatment of children with ADHD. After comparing 70 studies on diet-based treatments for ADHD, the authors suggest healthy eating could help kids reduce their ADHD symptoms. "A greater attention to the education of parents and children in a healthy dietary pattern, omitting items shown to predispose to ADHD, is perhaps the most promising and practical complementary or alternative treatment of ADHD," said study authors.

You may think that your child's behavior changes after eating a particular food, and you may just be right. Some organizations try to allay parents' concerns by claiming there is no reason to be alarmed about the additives and dyes that are prevalent in our foods. On the other hand, individuals such as Dr. Lawrence Wilson claim that any food can cause reactions that affect the nervous system and that one possible reason for these reactions is that histamine, the chemical that is released in allergic phenomena, can be released in the brain causing alterations in brain chemistry. Dr. Wilson also states that brain allergies are often overlooked in the search for reasons for anti-social behavior. He indicates that the cause of ADHD is a reaction to allergic foods or chemical additives found in children's foods. Depression has also been linked to food allergies or allergies to chemicals in food or drinking water. Whom should we believe? According to MayoClinic.com, ingredients in the food your child eats fuel many of the factors that affect his/her behavior. U.S. News and World Report Health also reports that certain foods can affect mood. These foods can trigger chemical and physiological changes within the brain that alter your child's behavior. If your child does not eat regularly, get enough complex carbohydrates, get enough omega-3 fatty acids or consumes too much fat or not enough iron, he/she could experience mood swings causing him/her to become cranky, tired and depressed, which can influence his/her behavior. Kids who eat healthy are able to cope with stress and regulate their emotions better, says the American Psychological Association.

The Prevention Institute reports that good nutrition not only contributes to young children's physical development, but affects their cognitive development as well. Children who consume unhealthy foods can have trouble concentrating, become easily fatigued, listless or irritable and are likely to face difficulties in learning, which can lead to behavioral and social problems. Establishing healthy eating habits early in your child's life can lead to good behavior as they move into adulthood, according to APA.

HealthyKids.nsw.gov.au states that it is important that parents and kids work together to make healthy choices, including eating a balanced diet, consuming appropriate portions, and choosing fruits and vegetables over sugary treats and fast food. Developing positive eating habits isn't always easy, but following proper diet and nutrition at an early age can lead to healthy decisions in the future and health benefits that could last a lifetime. They share the following tips on how to assist kids in making healthier choices:

- Enjoy all foods in moderation.
- Don't binge on 'occasional' or 'extra' foods.
- Cook meals at home and try to encourage your children to help you. Involve your kids in the menu planning and shopping, too.
- Talk about healthy foods from the five food groups and what they do for your body.
- Ensure your child's diet is balanced and contains a variety of foods from all the five food groups.
- Encourage your kids to eat a nutritious breakfast every day,
- Encourage water instead of soft drink and or other drinks containing added sugars.
- Place a limit on the number of "occasional" or 'extra' foods eaten each week. These foods shouldn't be eaten daily.
- Fill your fridge and pantry with a variety of healthy foods that are easily accessible.
- Discourage eating in front of the TV or computer as this is often done mindlessly without paying attention to hunger cues and can result in the consumption of unnecessary [calories].
- As often as possible, eat together at the dinner table and turn off the TV, even if the whole family isn't present.
- Children start to form food likes and dislikes from an early age, so always offer variety. It may take many attempts for your child to like a new food, so don't give up. Offer small amounts and try presenting it in a fun engaging way.
- Avoid using food as a reward or bribe, or holding back on foods as punishment. Use activities or trips to the park as alternatives.

A healthy diet and good nutrition are crucial in preventing some of the behavioral problems that result from a history of complex trauma that many of our children inherit. How your child eats today will have a striking impact on his/her health throughout adolescence and adulthood. Consuming nutritious foods helps children and teens grow, develop, do well academically and feel good about themselves. Children require a variety of nutrient-dense foods such as fresh fruits, vegetables, whole grains, meat, fish and adequate calories in order to grow and develop properly. It's crucial that your child is consuming the essential nutrients he/she needs to grow. The way children eat influences their growth and health during childhood, during adolescence and for the rest of their lives. As you contemplate these facts, make sure that the foods you give your children are not only healthy, well-balanced, and nutritious, but also appealing, delicious, and fun.

- <http://americannutritionassociation.org/newsletter/nutrition-childrens-behavior-problems>
<https://www.childrensmn.org/2016/05/03/healthy-eating-for-kids/>
http://drlwilson.com/articles/emotions_and_behavior.htm
<https://healthyeating.sfgate.com/importance-good-nutrition-kids-6236.html>
<https://healthy-kids.com.au/parents/developing-positive-eating-behaviours/>
<http://herohealthroom.com/2015/07/01/jane-evans-trauma/>
<https://www.thechaosandthelutter.com/archives/nutrition-for-childhood-trauma>
<http://adoptionnutrition.org/raising-good-eaters/>



Family Fun!

(Holiday activities that promote attachment and create memories)

By: JulieAnn Jones, MSW

- Holiday Light Tour:** Pile the kids in the car, crank the holiday tunes, make a thermos of hot chocolate, and drive around to homes or neighborhoods known for their over-the-top light displays.
- Wreath Making:** You can take the kids on a walk to gather evergreen branches and pine cones. Attach them to a foam or wire wreath and add ornaments, bows and whatever their creative minds think up! You can decorate your own home or visit a neighbor and let your children present their homemade gift.
- Holiday & Christmas Movies:** This is a holiday must! Let each family member pick a favorite holiday movie and either enjoy a marathon or choose a special night each week to watch. Snuggle up on the couch with some popcorn or Christmas cookies.
- Popcorn Garland:** Turn on the holiday tunes and create a popcorn or cranberry garland. All you need is a needle and thread – be creative and alternate your garland and make a cranberry and popcorn pattern! If your children are too young to use the needle, have them create the pattern and hand you the pieces for threading.
- Holiday & Christmas Cookies:** This is one of my favorite traditions. I love making cookies with my children and my mom when she's in town! We never decorate the tree without our favorite cookies, it's a Christmas tradition.
- Cookie Swap:** Nothing is more fun than doing a cookie swap with neighbors and friends. Have everyone bring over a few dozen of their favorite holiday creations to sample and swap. It's fun when others bring their recipes to share.
- Gingerbread House Party:** Gather your kids and their friends for a gingerbread house making party. Each child can make their own house! Or you can create teams and see who can be the most creative. Here is a link to an easy recipe <https://www.foodnetwork.com/how-to/articles/the-worlds-easiest-gingerbread-house>
- Homemade Ornaments:** Nothing is more special than adorning your home with "kid-made" decorations. Mark the year on the ornament and enjoy reminiscing each year you pull them out.
- Hot Chocolate Buffet:** Pick a special night during the holiday season and make a buffet of toppings for your hot chocolate. Your kids will love creating the hot chocolate "menu". Some fun ideas include whipped cream, marshmallows, crushed candy canes, shaved chocolate, chocolate chips and cinnamon dots. Let your kids get creative!
- Holiday Festivals:** Many communities offer a chance to come together during the holidays – tree lighting ceremonies, Kwanzaa cultural celebrations, Hanukkah events, ugly sweater competitions – step out of your comfort zone and enjoy a community experience with your kids.
- Donating to Charity:** The holidays are a great time to talk with kids about helping others and to model selflessness. Help your children experience the joy of brightening someone's holiday. There are many opportunities and charities to choose from. If you need ideas, here is a link to holiday charities: <https://www.thespruce.com/charities-that-help-children-at-christmas-3129334>
- Indoor Snowball Fight:** This is my personal favorite! Many years ago we received indoor snowballs as a Christmas present. It is one of my all time favorite gifts! I think it's the most fun when you have teams – you and your children will be giggling with delight! If you've never seen these in the store here is a link from Amazon: https://www.amazon.com/Fake-Snowballs-Indoor-Outdoor-Play/dp/B07CBKCHG8/ref=sr_1_2_sspa?ie=UTF8&qid=1534263588&sr=8-2-spons&keywords=Indoor+snowballs&psc=1

I hope your holidays are full of magical moments with your kiddos! For more ideas check out

FamilyEducation.com

SUPPORT GROUPS & EVENTS

Aspiranet REACH Post-Adoption Support Groups for Fresno County

(Please note that unforeseen last minute changes may occur with regards to a group's time/location.)

Please RSVP to confirm your attendance and childcare needs.

Groups are held at Aspiranet Fresno Office
1320 East Shaw Avenue, Suite 140, Fresno, CA 93710

Thursday, October 18th 5:30 - 7:30 pm - Identity in Adoption

Thursday, November 15th 5:30 - 7:30 pm - Adoption Celebration

Thursday, December 20th 5:30 - 7:30 pm - Navigating the Holidays





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

1320 E. Shaw #140 Fresno, CA 93710
(559) 222-4969
www.aspiranet.org



Fresno County Department of Social Services
2135 Fresno Street, Stop 109
Fresno, CA 93721



Aspiranet REACH Post-Adoption Support Services for Fresno County

Educational/Support Groups – Monthly meetings where families are able to receive education/training and meet other adoptive families in the community.

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 will be made available.

Lending Library/Resource Directory– The REACH lending library is open and available for book review and check outs for families. A resource directory of local providers is also available to families.

Case Management – Ongoing case management is provided. REACH clients are provided with information, resource referral or other assistance as needed.

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