

REACH

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis Intervention • Hope

Aspiranet and Tulare County Adoption Support Program



Summer is Here, REACH Families!

Dear Families:

As we say goodbye to Spring, we look forward with excitement to the freedoms Summer symbolizes—walking along the beach with bare feet in the cool sand, visits to amusement parks, outdoor picnics and barbecues with loved ones, and our golden sunny California days. The dark cloud of COVID-19 has not entirely left us. But we hear of things improving—many have been vaccinated which is correlated to less crowded hospitals, less restrictions of movement, and less fear of becoming ill. We felt it would be good to explore some of the positives we have experienced because of the pandemic. First, we have learned to cherish our loved ones more and to express love for them more often with longer hugs and warmer kisses. Next, we have learned to appreciate spending time with ourselves and enjoying the simpler things in life when we had less access to things we once thought were essential. Another positive is the fact that so many of us, old and young alike, have become adept at Zoom conferences and working online. Things may never really go back to “normal” again, and to be honest, many of us prefer some of the changes that the pandemic has brought to the world.

At REACH we continue to serve, bringing hope, support, and encouragement to as many who express a need for our services. This quarter we will focus on the Five Protective Factors that research has shown help to strengthen families. These are parental resilience—the ability to bounce back from all types of challenges that emerge in every family’s life and knowing to seek help when necessary; social connections—accessing networks of support that are essential to parents and who provide emotional support and help parents to solve problems and give concrete assistance and advice; knowledge of parenting and child development—gaining accurate information about child development and appropriate expectations for children’s behavior at every age, and helping parents see children in a positive light; concrete support in times of need—meeting basic needs like food, shelter, clothing and health care. Also providing treatment and help for family members to get through crises and achieve stability; and social and emotional competence of children—parents helping their children to interact positively with others, self-regulate their behavior and effectively communicate their feelings. We are excited about being able to explore some of these rich themes together. We hope that as you read this letter all is well with every one of your families and you are enjoying whatever changes this new season brings.

Sincerely,

The REACH Team

Tulare County Summer 2021

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NEED HELP? Is your adoptive 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 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 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.

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/>

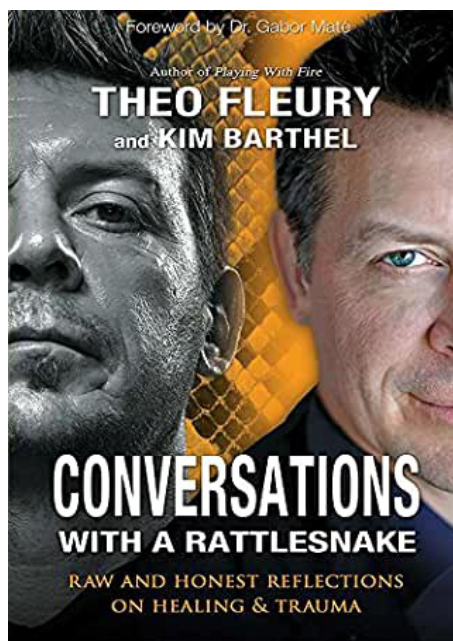
Ottawa Public Health/Have That Talk: [Building Social Connectedness Adult Activity Guide](#)

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 insignnia. 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.

Upcoming Support Groups & Events

Tulare Parent Support Groups have now been changed to the 4th Tuesday of each month. This is a joint meeting with Fresno and Kern Counties. In addition to support groups, REACH's Parent Cafes will be on the 1st Thursday of each Month from 3-5 p.m. See below for details.

Kings Parent Support groups continue to be on the second Tuesday of the month from 6-8 p.m.

July

- 1** Parent Café
3:00 pm – 5:00 pm
Online ZOOM Meeting
RSVP: mbourne@aspiranet.org
- 13** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
Online ZOOM Meeting
RSVP: hcasarez@aspiranet.org
- 27** Tulare REACH Parents Corner
6:00 pm – 7:30 pm
Online ZOOM Meeting
RSVP: mbourne@aspiranet.org

August

- 5** Parent Café
3:00 pm – 5:00 pm
Online ZOOM Meeting
RSVP: mbourne@aspiranet.org
- 10** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
Online ZOOM Meeting
RSVP: hcasarez@aspiranet.org
- 24** Tulare REACH Parents Corner
6:00 pm – 7:30 pm
Online ZOOM Meeting
RSVP: mbourne@aspiranet.org

September

- 2** Parent Café
3:00 pm – 5:00 pm
Online ZOOM Meeting
RSVP: mbourne@aspiranet.org
- 14** Kings REACH Adoption Support Group
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
Online ZOOM Meeting
RSVP: hcasarez@aspiranet.org
- 27** Convertirse en un Padre Competente en Trauma
6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
RSVP to: miriams@cos.edu
- 28** Tulare REACH Parents Corner
6:00 pm – 7:30 pm
Online ZOOM Meeting
RSVP: mbourne@aspiranet.org

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, all in-person meetings have been suspended until further notice. Support groups continue to meet online via Zoom from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. on the fourth Tuesday of the month for Tulare County and the second Tuesday of the month for Kings County from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. Please watch your inboxes for invitations from the coordinators.

Tulare County REACH Parents Corner

This group is designed for adults thinking about adoption, parents awaiting adoptive placement, parents of adopted children, and guardianship parents. Training hours provided.

Where:

Online

When:

4th Tuesday of the month 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm
July 27th
August 24th
September 28th

Contact: Marva Bourne at (559) 741-7358 or email mbourne@aspiranet.org

Kings County REACH Adoption 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.

Where:

Online

When:

2nd Tuesday of the month 6:00 pm – 8:00 pm
July 13th
August 10th
September 14th

Contact: Hortencia Casarez at hcasarez@aspiranet.org for link to join.

REACH Parent Café (ZOOM)

ZOOM links and reminders will be sent monthly via email.

1st Thursday of each month 3:00 pm – 5:00 pm

July 1st, August 5th, September 2nd

Contact: Marva Bourne at (559) 741-7358 or email mbourne@aspiranet.org

College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Program

The College of Sequoias Foster and Kinship Care Education Program offers training of interest to foster and adoptive parents, at no charge, at Visalia and Hanford COS campuses. 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.

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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.