

REACH

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis Intervention • Hope

Adoption Support Services for Fresno County



Fresno County
Spring 2022

“If a child needs nurture and I give him structure, I harm his ability to trust me. If a child needs structure and I give him nurture, I harm his ability to grow. Nurture and structure must be used hand in hand.”

—Karyn Purvis, Author/Co-founder of Karyn Purvis Institute of Child Development

The REACH Spring 2022 newsletter focuses on the protective factor of **Social and Emotional Competence of Children**. Parents can help support healthy social and emotional development of children by modeling and teaching how to properly communicate emotions, self-regulate, and interact with others. These skills are learned and nurtured through a child's relationship with a trusting and caring adult. These trusting relationships set the stage for a child's future relationships and will positively impact their cognitive skill-building, social competence, mental health, and overall well-being.

In the world of permanency, there will be ups and downs as parents navigate the journey of learning to balance nurture and structure. Our newsletters are designed for parents to gain new knowledge and skills to strengthen their families, and our monthly parent groups are an opportunity to learn from others who are on a similar parenting journey. REACH continues to provide trainings and events to families, including our annual Journey to Hope Youth Symposium on April 5-6, 2022! This event will be virtual, and designed for parents and youth ages 13-21. We will keep you updated as details are finalized!

Aspiranet REACH continues to strive to support the permanency and resiliency of families, especially through our Aspiranet Statewide Permanency Support Program. This program provides financial support and linkages to services, such as specialized therapies, camps, respite, and much, much more! Please visit www.aspiranet.org/aspsp to apply and for more information! If you would like to learn more about REACH services and how we can support your family, please do not hesitate to contact your local REACH office for more information.

We hope you enjoy the Spring edition of our newsletter!

Sincerely,

Your REACH Team

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Social and Emotional Learning in Children: Why it Matters and How to Start

by Hortencia Casarez

There is a lot of talk these days about SEL, Social Emotional Learning - but what exactly is it? SEL is the process of learning social skills and emotional regulation. This learning process is most effective when learned early in childhood and continues to be built upon up through the high school years. Social-emotional skills are essential for success in school, work, and life. Through SEL, children learn to manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, practice empathy, and show appropriate levels of affection and care. They also learn how to overcome challenges, solve problems, make responsible decisions, set healthy boundaries and maintain thriving relationships. Through SEL children learn to recognize what is happening within them, bring awareness to their emotions, and effectively regulate impulsive behaviors. It helps them pause, take a deep breath, and think about a situation before acting out on it. Children also learn to identify other people's perspectives and emotional cues, which helps them have more friends, show compassion despite having differences, solve conflicts in peaceful ways, and communicate clearly about what they need. This helps children feel more connected to others and their community and lessens their risk of being left out or bullied. Children who learn and practice SEL achieve more academically, have improved attitudes and behaviors, and act in disruptive ways much less often. Students with healthy SEL skills are twice as likely to earn a college degree, 50% more likely to graduate high school, and have a full-time job by age 25! When children learn how to recognize and manage their own emotions and respond appropriately to others, their lives can be better overall. It is not difficult to imagine how this skill set is important at school, on the playground, and at home. Simply put, social-emotional learning is a vital skill that children need to be successful in every facet of life.

Now that you know what SEL is and its importance as a protective factor across the lifespan, let's talk about a few simple ways that you can nurture these fundamental skills early on in your children's lives.

MODELING

One of the best skills that caregivers can develop with their children is the ability to experience, express, and manage emotions, communicate needs, and establish positive and rewarding relationships. Skills like sharing, cooperating,



taking turns, and checking in with one another are behaviors that caregivers can model daily and effortlessly. Caregivers who can model these skills and provide space to develop and practice these skills are building resilience in their families!

NORMALIZE

Expressing emotions and having them accepted and validated is important for both children and grown-ups. And there's a whole spectrum of emotions to feel! While many grown-ups view emotions as good or bad, the truth is that emotions are not good or bad — they just are. Emotions are a way for your body to give you clues as to how it's reacting to its environment. To be a well-balanced individual who experiences the full range of human experiences, we need to show children that all emotions are valid and welcome so they can express those emotions in appropriate and healthy ways.

EDUCATE

When children, teens, adults, and parents understand why they felt an emotion, why they had a thought, or why they chose to react in a certain way, they can better understand themselves. They can begin to make connections between feelings, thoughts, behaviors, and events. Education is such a powerful tool! Educating your children about their emotions helps them better express themselves and better understand others. Use feelings charts, lists of feelings words, read children's books and ask questions about the characters' reactions, and make up silly songs about feelings. Make learning fun!

Even if you didn't have proper role models when you were a child, you can give your child their own beginning and start right where you are, with what you have right now. Raising children who are emotionally and socially competent is as easy as modeling, normalizing, and optimizing small opportunities for learning in their daily lives. Teachable moments present themselves regularly. Use them to your advantage and leverage their power to make big differences!

The Importance of Social-Emotional Competence

By Yaneth Arceo

The ability of children to interact positively with others, regulate their behavior, and effectively communicate their feelings has a positive impact on a child's relationship with their family, adults, and peers. A child will sometimes have difficulty expressing his emotions because he does not understand them. This can be frustrating to both him and the caregivers who want to help him. However, developing the child's abilities to express his feelings can help him deal with these feelings. Children who have nurturing relationships with caring adults who provide consistent care develop skills that help them to develop social and emotional intelligence. These relationships provide a safe environment where children feel secure in expressing their thoughts and feelings

According to research by Michigan State University Extension, everyday interactions, such as the following, can assist in building the protective factor of social and emotional competence in children:

Role modeling: When children are around adults who show positive behavior, they will mimic their actions and words. Ensure your children are surrounded by positive role models by using constructive and respectful words and actions.

Safe environments: Make sure children can express their feelings through play and language. Let your child know you understand all their feelings by responding to them.

Guidelines: The rules for children should be clear and reasonable. Children may act out when the rules are changed. Be sure to clearly communicate rules and consequences to your children.

Calm and steady actions and reactions: Children are counting on you for stability and structure. Pay attention to good behavior, and keep calm when you can't. Plan ahead. Think about how your daily schedule might change, and make sure you have extra clothes, snacks, or toys on hand.

Self-care: The energy needed to care for the children in your life depends on you being able to manage your own stress and anger. Finding ways to handle your stress and anger will help you relax and be able to care for the children in your life.

Know where to go: Take advantage of the many resources available to assist with caregiving. Use recommendations from teachers, childcare providers, counselors, medical care providers, clergy, and local human service agencies to guide you when you need additional assistance.

Credit: Gail Innis, Michigan State University Extension

Book Review: Far From the Tree

by Robin Benway

What does it mean to be a family?

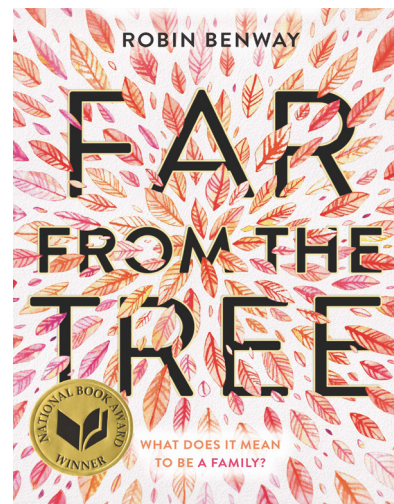
This topic is addressed in the fictional book *Far From The Tree* along with adoption, teen pregnancy, foster care, and LGBTQ.

Grace was adopted at birth and raised as an only child. During her junior year of high school, Grace gives birth to her daughter, who Grace nicknamed Peach, and makes a plan of adoption for Peach with a loving couple. This spurs Grace to want to meet her birth mother and find out how she felt when she made a plan of adoption for her all those years ago.

During her search for her mother, Grace discovers she has two siblings. A younger sister, Maya, was adopted at birth by a couple who thought that they could not have children. After adopting Maya, her parents had a biological child, Lauren. Maya, with her snarky attitude and brunette hair, tries to find where she fits in with her family, filled with people with red hair and positive attitudes.

Grace's older brother, Joaquin, who was raised in foster care, has never felt he was worthy of love and belonging. He believed if his mother did not want him, who would? Joaquin's current foster family approached him about adoption but after being in foster care for seventeen years, Joaquin knows the letdowns and twists that exist in the world. To protect the foster family from his hurt he keeps his secrets to himself and tries to push them away.

While fictional, *Far From the Tree* is an engaging story that provides insight into many different aspects of adoption and foster care and how different people view and feel about their roles in their families. Grace, Maya, and Joaquin all come from different upbringings but learn they are a family. Together they realize what family means in all its different forms and how to search for it, accept it and hold on to it.





Building Social Emotional Competence in Children

By Griselda Santillan Mejia

A child's relationship with their parents plays a significant role in the child's healthy social and emotional development. Parents model how to express and communicate emotions, how to self-regulate, and how to create healthy relationships with others. The development of social and emotional skills are critical to a child's ability to have appropriate relationships with adults, peers, friends and family. The development of social emotional skills does not happen naturally. Research has shown that social-emotional skills develop through the relationship, interactions and experiences a child has with a consistent, caring and attuned adult. Children who have appropriate social-emotional skills are able to recognize their own and others' emotions and have the skills to be able to understand the perspective of others. They also have the skills to recognize appropriate or inappropriate ways to respond in situations.

How can parents help their child gain social emotional skills?

- Parents can create an environment where children feel safe to express their emotions by being respectful and respecting boundaries
- Being responsive and attuned emotionally by listening actively and engaging during conversation
- Modeling empathy by encouraging children to apologize or "make things better"
- Separating emotions from actions
- Ask open-ended questions about their emotions such as "what are you feeling?" or "where do you feel it?"
- Remind your child that feelings are okay to have whether they are positive or negative
- Talk about "what you are feeling" using feelings wheels like the one above

What are social-emotional skills?: Child development skills. Pathways.org. (2002, January 21) <http://pathways.org/topics-of-development/social-emotional/>

Wheel of emotions. (2012) Therapist Aid. <https://www.therapistaid.com/therapyworksheet/wheel-of-emotions-children>

Support Groups & Events

April

5-6 Youth Symposium

6:00 pm - 8:00 pm • ZOOM

21 REACH Parent Café

10:00 am - 11:30 am • ZOOM

26 Parent Support Group

6:00 pm - 7:30 pm • ZOOM

27 Parent Support Group in Spanish

9:30 am - 11:30 am • ZOOM

May

19 REACH Parent Café

10:00 am - 11:30 am • ZOOM

24 Parent Support Group

6:00 pm - 7:30 pm • ZOOM

25 Parent Support Group in Spanish

9:30 am - 11:30 am • ZOOM

June

16 REACH Parent Café

10:00 am - 11:30 am • ZOOM

22 Parent Support Group in Spanish

9:30 am - 11:30 am • ZOOM

28 Parent Support Group

6:00 pm - 7:30 pm • ZOOM

Due to the impact of COVID-19, REACH continues to identify creative ways of bringing services to REACH families. We will continue to keep you informed of our services and provide information on trainings and events.

Youth Symposium

REACH is planning our annual Youth Symposium for April 5th and 6th! This event, which will be held via Zoom, will consist of a youth training/group on April 5th and a parent and professionals training on April 6th. Please watch for emails on this event as the date gets closer!

REACH Support Groups for Parents

REACH Parent Support Group

6:00pm - 7:30pm via Zoom

Designed for adults thinking about adoption through foster care, families awaiting adoptive placement, and new and experienced resource and adoptive parents. Training hours provided. The Adoption Support Group is offered via Zoom on the fourth Tuesday of each month, 6:00-7:30pm. Please join us to share your family's challenges and triumphs. To register, email Jade Yang at jayang@aspiranet.org or Fernando Aquino at faquino@aspiranet.org and a link to the meeting will be emailed to you.

Parent Café

10:00 am - 11:30 am via Zoom

Based on the Five Protective Factors, Parent Cafe provides an opportunity for parents to explore their strengths and learn from each other's experiences. Training hours provided. Parent Café is offered via Zoom on the third Thursday of each month, 10:00-11:30am. To register for Parent Café, email Jade Yang at jayang@aspiranet.org or Fernando Aquino at faquino@aspiranet.org and a link to the meeting will be emailed to you.

REACH Parent Support Group in Spanish

9:30am - 11:30am via Zoom

Este grupo está diseñado para adultos que piensan en la adopción, padres que esperan colocación adoptiva, y padres de niños adoptados. Horas de entrenamiento impartidas. Los enlaces de Zoom y los recordatorios se enviarán mensualmente. El Grupo de Apoyo para Padres de REACH en Español se ven en el cuarto miércoles del mes. Para registrarse, comuníquese con Fernando Aquino at faquino@aspiranet.org y se le enviara por correo electrónico un enlace a la reunión.





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Aspiranet REACH 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.