

REACH

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis • Intervention • Hope

Post-Adoption Support Services for Fresno County



Happy Spring!

Spring is a time of growth and rebirth. It is the period between the hottest and the coldest months, and the weather seems to be perfect most days. The grass seems to be greener, the air fresher, and flowers of all hues are budding and blossoming. This season reminds us each day that there is hope and possibility of change, and that the world is still such a beautiful place. It is our desire that the perfection of the season be reflected in each of your homes in the relationships you develop with your children. To help you attain that goal, our REACH newsletter will continue to focus on Trust Based Relational Interventions (TBRI®) this quarter.

The articles, overall, highlight TBRI®'s Empowering principles that encourage optimal growth and performance of kids from hard places. Dr. Karyn Purvis, founder of the TCU Institute of Child Development, advocates that by helping a child feel safe, it will help them begin to reorganize their internal working model, allowing the child to begin developing trust, establish attachment, and begin the process of healing. We believe that positive relationships are necessary for healthy human development, but trauma undermines these life-giving connections. In light of this, one article addresses our children's need for felt safety which is the beginning of the development of a secure attachment bond. This bond is only the beginning in a family's life long journey that promotes healing and growth in our children.

Continuing with our theme of growth and rebirth, this edition addresses the important issue of healthy nutrition that is necessary for the optimization of brain functioning and the enhancement of the physical, emotional, and behavioral well-being of our children. Good nutrition is important for all children, but it is especially so for children who experienced a history of trauma. The article, "The Effects of Good Nutrition on Children's Behavior" reviews the types of foods that would help our children stay focused and connected and those that should be avoided. You also will be coached on some self-regulatory and empowering skills to introduce to your children that will help them better manage their emotions and behaviors.

Be sure to note that we have a REACH Family Social Event coming up in mid-April. The date is located on our events page of this newsletter. The event will be free but you must call the office to RSVP. We trust that you will enjoy reading this newsletter as much as we have enjoyed producing it, and as a result your family is healthier, happier, and better equipped to face the challenges that may be up ahead.

Best,

JulieAnn Jones, MSW

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Fresno County
Spring 2020

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Supporting Your Child's Brain Through Nutrition

By Carrie Ontiveros, MA

Most of us are aware that a balanced diet, including adequate hydration, is essential for a healthy body but did you know that good nutrition is also important for brain functioning? Healthy eating regulates blood sugar which enhances our ability to learn and regulate mood. On the other hand, a lack of nutrients can have a negative impact on the nervous system, resulting in behavioral and cognitive challenges. Children who have experienced abuse and neglect may not have had sufficient nutrition during those growth years and these early life experiences also impact brain development. Good nutrition can be a part of addressing the challenges resulting from this history.

Research has documented the negative health outcomes from the consumption of too much sugar and too many saturated fats (commonly known as “the bad fat,” found in some meats, high fat dairy products and certain oils). Research has also shown the benefits of consuming healthy foods and getting a sufficient amount of needed nutrients. According to the authors of The Connected Child, Karyn Purvis, PhD and David Cross, PhD, the Western diet typically lacks a sufficient amount of unsaturated fats (commonly known as “the good fat”) found in avocados, fatty fish, certain oils, nuts and seeds. Their research into nutrition has found that adding this missing nutrient to a child's diet can have a positive impact on impulsivity, emotions and cognition as well as symptoms of anxiety. Drs. Purvis and Cross have also found that dietary supplements can assist in meeting some nutritional needs in a child.

The idea of changing your child's diet may seem overwhelming and impossible. If so, start with one small change and make additional changes over time. Take a look at the Nutrition Tips below, which are included in The Connected Child, for additional ideas. As every child is unique and has unique needs, not all of the noted suggestions will apply to all children. Please consult with your child's pediatrician or a nutritionist before making any significant changes to your child's diet.

Nutrition Tips from The Connected Child

- Be sure your child has plenty of fluids to drink- especially water. Dehydration causes mental (cognitive) performance to deteriorate.
- Avoid giving your child caffeinated drinks. Caffeine affects brain chemistry- it increases mood swings, anxiety, and hyperactivity and it can promote dehydration.
- Counterbalance the high sugar load of sweet snacks, such as candy, fruit juice, or soda, by accompanying them with protein snacks, such as a handful of nuts.
- Use yogurt as a healthy snack. Yogurt with live cultures improves digestion and intestinal health. The intestines help produce the body's supply of serotonin, a “feel-good” neurotransmitter. Probiotic supplements are a useful alternative for those who can't tolerate milk products.
- Avoid deep-fried foods, including potato chips and French fries, which make the brain sluggish.
- Limit baked goods made with white flour and partially hydrogenated oil (most shortenings fall into this category), which also make the brain sluggish and have been linked to premature cardiovascular disease and cancer.
- It can be helpful to keep a food journal for a week, documenting the times your child has behavioral challenges and then recording the foods they ate recently (in the last five minutes to two hours). Many families have reported significant behavioral improvements when they eliminated or minimized certain foods from their child's diet. Offenders frequently include gluten (in wheat and other foods), sugar, dairy, and items that are loaded with colorings or other additives.
- Chronic stress and fear disrupt a child's ability to digest food and supplements efficiently. To be sure your child is getting maximum benefit, provide only multivitamins and fish oil tablets that are free from coloring and additives, and look for liquid mineral preparations, which are most easily absorbed by the body.

Source material: The Connected Child by Karyn Purvis, Ph.D., David Cross Ph.D., and Wendy Lyons Sunshine

Empowering Principles

By Linda Gutierrez

“Will all my love will be enough to heal my child?”

Parents may often ponder over this question “*Will all my love will be enough to heal my child?*” The question is not simple; it’s a profound question that may leave parents feeling overwhelmed and emotionally and physically drained.

As professionals and parents we teach children coping skills (i.e. “Take a deep breath,” “Count to 10,” “Go for a walk,” “Don’t forget to access your support system when you need help”). When children are feeling stressed, helpless, and frustrated, effective coping skills can help children regulate their emotions. From the perspective of a child who has encountered trauma, these feelings are often triggered by a child’s deep, primal fear. This fear can create a scary whirlwind which results in maladaptive (survival) behaviors.

However, as the adult or parent, we must be mindful that the child likely does not have the capacity to understand their behaviors are attributed to the fear and lack of feeling safe. The lack of “felt safety” often triggers maladaptive behaviors (i.e. lying, physical aggressiveness, stealing, defiance etc.).

According to Dr. Karyn Purvis, founder of the TCU Institute of Child Development, children who have suffered childhood trauma, “*may not have a basic moral compass that tells them not to hurt other people because they never connected closely with another person*” (Purvis, Cross, and Sunshine, 2007, p. 28.) Therefore, in addition to being reassured with words, these children need repetitive reassurance that displays patience, love, boundaries, kind words, gestures, eye contact, etc. By helping a child feel safe, it will help them begin to reorganize their internal working model, allowing the child to begin developing trust, establish attachment, and begin the process of healing. This type of “therapeutic” parenting will require the parent to be present and tuned in to the child’s needs. Parents must look for any potential window of opportunity in which they can continue to provide the child with a sense of “felt safety”, in turn, helping the child develop a secure sense of self.

A secure attachment and bond is a life long journey that will continue to grow. Thus enabling children to

begin the healing process and to develop their basic moral compass. All of a parent’s love, along with interventions that create a safe and secure sense of self for a child, can be enough to create a supportive and loving family system where a child can heal.

“Healing can’t be rushed, but you can help it progress dramatically- by giving your child the gift of feeling safe” (Purvis, Cross, & Sunshine, 2007, p. 72)

Series Review: “The Day I Picked My Parents”

by Carrie Ontiveros, MA

The Day I Picked My Parents, a series by A&E, features Kidsave, a non-profit that works with older children in foster care who face challenges in finding families for placement and permanency. Season One of this



series, released in 2019, has five episodes which features youth, who for their own reasons, are searching for permanency. Each youth’s history of challenges is discussed and provides

insight into their desire for a forever family.

The Kidsave program is unique in that it allows the youth to make the choice of whether or not they are interested in pursuing a relationship with an interested potential parent or family. The series follows a total of ten youth, two per episode, as they meet families and decide if a family is a good fit for them and their needs. Each story features the perspectives of the potential parents and the youth. The Kidsave program allows these youth, who often have had very little say or choice in their foster care journey, to be the ones who decide their future. The series highlights heartwarming moments where the story follows the path we hope it will but also documents the real challenges of potential parents and youth and the resulting disappointments when things don’t go as planned. Please consider watching this series and tell a friend about it. It demonstrates the power of choice that all parents can learn from and, as the show documents; one never knows when they will be called to be a forever family!

The Day I Picked My Parents is available for livestreaming at <https://www.aetv.com/shows/the-day-i-picked-my-parents>.

By Hortencia Casarez

It's important to highlight that before designating an item as a coping tool or skill, have a conversation with your child regarding what self-regulation is, the importance of coping skills, and talk about which skills and items they feel would be effective with them. Empower the child to come up with self-regulation ideas and tools themselves. Then practice, practice, practice! Practice using the skills in advance with your child before they would be expected to use them effectively in the midst of a meltdown!

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

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- A white plastic basket filled with various stress management tools. Visible items include a book titled 'The Way I Feel' by Rocky, a book titled 'Don't Stress' with a sun character, a small globe, a lava lamp, a small potted plant, a stress ball, and a small bottle of essential oil.

TIP: Keep a calm down box at home, in the car, and at a relative's home

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

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TIP: Add glitter and/or food coloring for added fun.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED:

- Coping Skills**

 - draw or color
 - take a short walk
 - take deep breaths
 - blow bubbles
 - do a puzzle
 - talk about your feelings
 - hug stuffed animal
 - eat a snack
 - listen to music
 - stretch in the yoga
 - take a break
 - think happy thoughts
 - squeeze stress ball
 - ask for a hug
 - read a book
 - ask for help
 - journal
 - drink water
 - repeat a phrase
 - squeeze a toy
 - make a plan
 - play with a pet
 - count down from 5

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Support and Education Groups & Events

April

- 7 Teen Support Group: **Cancelled due to Spring Break**
- 16 REACH Family Social Event! No Surrender (Private park event) **Please call the office to register: 559-222-4969 ext. 2629. This event is FREE, but you must register to attend.**
- 21 Parent Support Group
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

May

- 5 Teen Support Group: Owning your adoption story
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm
- 19 Parent Support Group
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

June

- 2 Teen Support Group: Faces of Resilience
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm
- 16 Parent Support Group
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

Please note that unforeseen last minute changes may occur with regards to a group's time/location. **RSVP is required to confirm your attendance as well as childcare needs.**

Unless otherwise stated, groups are held at the Aspiranet Fresno Office,
1320 East Shaw Ave., Suite 140, Fresno, CA 93710





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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.