

Aspiranet

REACH

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis • Intervention • Hope

Post-Adoption Support Services for Fresno County



“Perhaps we should love ourselves so fiercely, that when others see us they know exactly how it should be done.”

– Rudy Francisco

“Self-care is never a selfish act – it is simply good stewardship of the only gift I have, the gift I was put on earth to offer to others.”

– Parker Palmer

Compassion for self and others is the theme of our quarterly newsletter. When arriving at this this topic, it was the consensus of the REACH staff that it is one we often overlook, particularly when it comes to the area of self-compassion. As such, we hope you take time to read and put into practice some of the thoughtful ideas mentioned in this issue (many of which come from REACH families themselves.)

Speaking of our families, we were pleased to see many of them attend Aspiranet's annual Halloween Event in October and we hope to see many more at upcoming events including monthly REACH Parent Education and Support Groups. Typically, these occur on the third Monday of each month unless there is a special training such as the one planned for Wednesday, January 10th. “Stuck Spots for Adopted Teens,” based on the work of Debbie Riley and John Meeks, will be the topic presented that evening. Similar to the monthly groups, the training will be held from 5:30pm – 7:30 pm at Aspiranet's Fresno District Office and childcare is available (please note that due to limited capacity for this service, we encourage families who have this need to RSVP as soon as possible.)

In closing, we want to extend our gratitude to all of you who have participated in our program since it began on July 1st of this year. You've been wonderful and we admire your willingness to seek support for yourselves and your families. Sounds like good self care to us!

Regards,

Kathy A. Steele, L.C.S.W.

Program Supervisor

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FRESNO COUNTY Winter 2018 Newsletter

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COMPASSION

"I have learned that self-compassion means loving myself the same way I love my children. You have to learn to talk and view yourself that same way. Loving yourself allows you to love others so much better." **-Pam Mitchell, Adoptive Parent**

Most parents come into adoption with lots of love and compassion. We accept the responsibility of helping a child overcome their trauma and suffer alongside them through the journey. However, that compassion can become challenged when our children exhibit problematic behaviors, when there is a lack of resources or support, or when we are dealing with our own trials. At a recent REACH parent group, attendees were asked what they do to help themselves view their children more compassionately. A grandmother stated that family vacations or trips help to bring everyone together and create a family-oriented environment. Her husband stated that he gives the "gift of time," to the children in the home. He added that compassion can also be displayed by paying close attention to each child when they are speaking. In using our "active listening skills," we are helping the children feel valued and empowered. Yet another parent stated that their family has "electronic-free" evenings which encourage family members to engage in conversation with one another. This parent also relies on religion and biblical passages as a foundation of the relationship he shares with his children. Prior to ending the discussion, another parent who had yet to share, mentioned a recent struggle in which her young adult son announced that he was planning to leave college and enlist in the

military. When viewed from a compassionate lens, the parent knew she had to respect her son's dreams and decisions even when they differed from her own.

As adoptive parents, it is important to be mindful of the messages we are sending our children and to actively show them compassion. However, as well-known author and researcher, Brené Brown states, "we can't practice compassion with other people if we can't treat ourselves kindly." As nurturing parents and care providers, we often tend to the needs of our children and neglect our own. Overtime, this can lead to compassion fatigue and chronic stress. In fact, our levels of stress increase when meeting the challenges of parenting children who have been traumatized. Compassion fatigue can be experienced from witnessing and listening to the trauma stories of others. It can obstruct our everyday life leaving us feeling mentally and physically exhausted, disconnected, irritable, or with physical pain.

Much needed "self-compassion", refers to the ability to accept our own shortcomings and struggles, and addressing our own personal needs. In doing this, it allows us to honor and accept our humanness. It definitely makes us well-rounded, healthier adults who can, in turn, parent more effectively. That said, as we enter the New Year... let's make more of a deliberate effort to practice kindness and compassion.

- Jade Yang, MSW REACH Intern

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC: <http://self-compassion.org>

Self Care for Adoptive Parents

-Gabriela Martinez, LMFT, REACH Social Worker

You may have heard that practicing self care is a very important step to becoming a better parent. While many parents feel overwhelmed with the stresses of family life and trying to keep up with the daily tasks associated with caring for children including feeding, clothing, teaching, and disciplining, these tasks can be much more stressful for adoptive parents raising children with special needs. This makes taking care of yourself an even more important task. Self care includes the simplest, physical things such as making sure we get enough sleep and eating healthy meals. But it also includes more emotional, social, psychological, creative/artistic and even spiritual time for ourselves.

As parents, we often feel pressured to give so much to our children that we forget to take care of ourselves, or we even feel guilty for taking care of ourselves. But when anyone neglects to take care of him or herself, they put stress on their mind and body. This stress

can lead to physical effects like a weaker immune system and high blood pressure, but it can also lead to emotional effects such as depression and anger management issues.

Think about what you do to care for your children every day. You feed, bathe, change diapers and play with them. If you have older children, you might enroll them in sports, help with homework, and read to them every night. These basic steps of care are the same when it comes to taking care of yourself. But as parents, we often dismiss even the most basic of tasks for ourselves.

Why Self Care is Important

We cannot give what we do not have. Airplane attendants share that in an emergency; you should put the oxygen mask on yourself first, and then assist the person next to you. When you don't pour time and energy into your own well-being, you cannot possibly be the best possible parent, spouse, friend, employee, or relative. If we don't

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practice self care, parenting can become an even greater challenge than it already is. When we're over-stressed and not taking care of ourselves, we can be irritable, exhausted or sad. But positive, proactive parenting takes patience, energy and optimism. These traits are hard to come by if we're not taking care of our physical and mental health. So on top of not taking care of ourselves, we cannot care for our children as we might otherwise be able to. This can lead to reactive parenting, with lots of yelling, missing opportunities to reward positive behavior and more.

You are your child's primary role model. If you do not value self-care, your child will learn that self-care shouldn't be prioritized. Not taking care of oneself becomes a way of life. When we do not care for ourselves, we model unhealthy behavior, teaching our kids that it's okay to neglect self care. This can teach them that things like healthy eating habits, relationships with partners or whatever it might be that we're neglecting in our own lives, is not important. Leading by example is one of the best ways to teach our children. Consider how you want your children to take care of themselves as adults. Are you showing them how an adult should respect and care for themselves?

It's not easy to change the way you prioritize yourself in your hectic life as a parent. Self care is not about neglecting your children's needs. And it's also not as simple as planning a weekend away at a spa. Instead, it's about showing yourself the respect and care you deserve on a consistent basis. There are various types of self care, and ideally we should focus on all areas in order to feel a better balance in our life.

Physical Self Care

- Eating regularly in healthy ways
- Getting enough exercise
- Receiving regular, preventive medical care
- Sleeping enough
- Getting time away from the phone, email, TV, etc.
- Spending time outdoors in fresh air and natural light

Emotional/Social/Psychological Self Care:

- Spending time with friends and family
- Staying in touch with other people in your life
- Expressing emotions, allowing yourself to cry and finding things that make you happy
- Reading
- Working on your marriage or other relationships
- Getting a massage or going to a spa
- Reducing stress
- Saying no to extra responsibilities

Artistic/Creative/Spiritual Self Care:

- Giving yourself quiet time for self-reflection
- Attending a local place of worship
- Writing in a journal
- Spending time out in nature
- Enjoying a hobby or trying something new

How can a person practically implement self-care? A good way to start is to choose one area of self care and focus on making a change. Perhaps you love to read but don't do it anymore because you feel like there's not enough time in the day. Make it a priority to enjoy 15-30 minutes with a good book every evening, even if it means skipping time on the computer or washing the last few dishes. Make a list of five to ten things that bring you renewal, joy, and relaxation. These do not need to be expensive or elaborate. The list can include a cup of hot tea, being outside in the sunshine, exercising, reading a favorite book, or meeting friends at a restaurant. Post your list somewhere visible, like on your bathroom mirror or on the dashboard of your car. And then do something on the list every day. Do something every day until it becomes a habit to care for yourself.

Sometimes practicing self care means asking other adults for help. So don't be afraid to ask your spouse to give you a break one night a week while you take a yoga class, or ask a neighbor or friend to take a walk with you each evening. Getting another adult to support you in self care can be a big help in making it a permanent part of your life.

By taking one small step toward better self care, you'll soon realize how beneficial it can be and what an impact even one little change can have on your physical and mental state. Once you've established one new self care routine, choose another one to work on.

The truth is that it's a constant battle as parents to care for both our children and ourselves. But just as there are certain things that we provide when caring for our children, there should also be things we should provide for ourselves as well. No matter how fast the world might be moving around us, it's critical that we pay attention to the kids in our lives. And that might mean taking time for ourselves, too. Take time out of your busy schedule to focus on being the best parent for your children, and know that it's okay to ask for help!

(Material adapted from: <https://www.adoption.net/a/parenting/blogs-parenting/why-adoptive-parents-need-to-make-self-care-a-priority/9851/> and https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/on-parenting/in-defense-of-a-parents-day-off/2017/01/23/270ffa6c-d8f2-11e6-b8b2-cb5164beba6b_story.html?utm_term=.97740d9020f2 and <https://adoption.com/how-to-recognize-adoption-burnout>)

Wounded Children Healing Homes

– Chapter 12, Taking Care of Yourself: The Parent’s Neglected Task

We’ve all heard that self care is important. It is especially important in the lives of foster and adoptive parents who are parenting children with demanding emotional and physical needs. But every parent knows that self care sometimes falls by the wayside when you are amidst the hustle and bustle of everyday life. In chapter 12 of Wounded Children Healing Homes, Betsy Keefer Smalley highlights several important points to remember in regards to taking care of yourself.

- Recall often that you are not the source of your child’s survival behaviors.
- Maintain a sense of humor.
- Connect with other foster and adoptive parents.
- Stop comparing yourself to other families.
- Find outlets for your own emotional, spiritual, and physical needs and design opportunities to enjoy those.
- Do a role check. Is one parent carrying most of the load?
- Choose your battles and win the war.
- Stop, drop, and roll. (Stop talking. Drop into your breathing. Roll back into your relationship with your child.)
- Identify who owns the problem.
- Take a break – find respite care.
- Remember the child’s progress will not always be consistent.
- Look for patterns in your child’s outbursts. If you understand his triggers, you may be able to prevent an explosion altogether, or lessen the intensity significantly.
- Use family meetings creatively.
- Find ways to have fun with your child – increase your positive interactions.
- Reframe your definition of success and celebrate small gains.



Self Care Quiz:

How good are you at taking care of yourself?

1. I take time for myself every day.
2. I make time for spirituality (in any form), mindfulness, or religious discipline.
3. I limit the amount of television I watch each day.
4. I limit the amount of Facebook/internet surfing I do each day.
5. I exercise at least 5 days a week for 30 minutes.
6. I drink 6-8 glasses of water each day.
7. I take care of my body:
 - a. I get 7-8 hours of sleep every night
 - b. I brush and floss my teeth and practice good hygiene
 - c. I eat approximately 5 fruits & veggies a day
 - d. I limit junk food/fast food consumption.
8. My hair, nails and appearance are good and I like most things in my wardrobe.
9. I generally wear clean clothes.
10. I get together with a friend at least once a month and enjoy hobbies regularly.
11. I have a relaxing routine before bed and a nurturing morning routine.
12. I usually know what I need and what I am feeling.
13. My organized environment supports my goals.
14. I take frequent breaks and have something to look forward to every evening.
15. I know what I am passionate about.

5=More True; 1=Less True

[5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

[5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

[5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

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[5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

[5] [4] [3] [2] [1]

Total Your Score:

Now look at your total score.....

72-90: Way to go! You are taking excellent care of yourself. Now you can delve further into things like getting massages, simplifying your life, and getting rid of as many stressors as you can.

54-71: You know how to take care of yourself. Now, do it consistently. Would it help to track your daily self-care? What can you do that would allow for some of these self-care habits to happen regularly?

36-53: You may value yourself, but can you prioritize self care a bit more? Set an evening just for you every week with no outside obligations. Examine your calendar to get rid of unimportant meetings, etc. Turn off the TV/Facebook/the internet after an hour of watching/surfing, etc. Put in a daily half hour for you in your appointment book. Let go of unrealistic standards of how much you can get done in a day. Cut your to do list for the day in half. Now use that time to work on one thing on the checklist above until you form a habit. Then move onto another one.

18-35: You feel guilty every time you take time for yourself. You need to realize that your family, friends, school and work don't want an empty vessel. They want a vibrant, authentic, energetic you. Talk with your family and friends about how you want to start taking better care of yourself. Is there a way you can use your friends and family to build in time for your self care? If they are supportive, see if they are open to having you be accountable to them. Which thing from the above checklist do you think would have the most impact on your energy and well-being? Work on that action until it becomes a habit.

0-17: Your actions don't seem to reflect that you prioritize taking care of yourself. What are you prioritizing instead? You need to realize that your family, friends, school and work don't want an empty vessel. They want a vibrant, authentic, energetic you. Talk with your family and friends about how you want to start taking better care of yourself. Remember, you are just as important as the other people in your life. Shine for them! Pick an easy, non-threatening action to start caring for yourself. Maybe you can drink one more glass of water or take 5 minutes alone. Start small and work your way up!

(Adapted from: <http://www.encouragingcoach.com/projects-selfcare-quiz.htm>)



SUPPORT GROUPS

(Please note that unforeseen last minute changes may occur with regards to a group's time/location. Please confirm when you RSVP)
Unless otherwise stated, groups are held at the Aspiranet Fresno Office, 1320 East Shaw Ave., Suite 140, Fresno, CA.

February 12th- 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm - Talking to Your Child About Adoption

March 19th- 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm - Minimizing Further Victimization for Our Children and Teens

SPECIAL TRAINING

January 10th- 5:30 pm – 7:30 pm - “Stuck Spots for Adopted Teens”





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ASPIRANET REACH Post-Adoption Support Services for Fresno County

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

Quarterly 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– A REACH library and directory are available for families.

Case Management – Ongoing Case Management is provided.

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