

REACH

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis • Intervention • Hope

Post-Adoption Support Services for Fresno County



Happy Fall!

"Autumn shows us how beautiful it is to let things go."



Fall is a season of change. It reminds us that our bodies, minds, and surroundings are always developing. Each day presents us with new mysteries and unknowns. Nowhere is the transformation of Fall more evident than the deep colorful changes in trees. This is a time

to slow down and take a moment to enjoy the beauty of the new season.

As many of you know, the former REACH Supervisor, Kathy Steele, recently retired. She spent many years as a part of the Aspiranet team and will be greatly missed. As I transition into her role, I look forward to the opportunity to meet each of you. I've been working in the field of foster care and adoptions for about 20 years. I am also an adoptive parent and am very committed to the services we offer our post-adoptive families. I am excited to be a part of the Fresno REACH team!

This past year our newsletter has been focusing on the 7 Core Issues in Adoption. In our final newsletter of the year, we are focusing on the issues of Identity, Intimacy, and Mastery/Control. We hope that you enjoy our thoughts on these topics. We've also done a short review of a new book that was just published on the topic. One of the authors is Allison Davis Maxon. She is a wonderful speaker, trainer, therapist and child welfare advocate. The book is by far the most comprehensive publishing on this topic. I highly recommend it!

Best,

JulieAnn

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Fresno County
Fall 2019

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Identity

By Carrie Ontiveros, M.A.

Adoption impacts everyone in what is known as the “adoption constellation:” the adopted person, the first/birth parent, the adoptive parent and others involved, such as extended family. No matter the circumstances of an adoption, it affects the identity of those involved. A first/birth parent may wonder “am I really a parent if I am not parenting my child?” An adoptive parent may wonder “am I a ‘real’ parent if I did not give birth to my child?” and an adoptee may wonder “who am I like, where do I fit in?”

For children who have been adopted, adolescence is a time when identity exploration can be most noticeable. However, it may begin earlier or later, depending on each individual and their development. Adolescence in general is a time of identity formation, when a teen begins to think about becoming independent and what contributions they will make in the world. They begin to turn to their peers for support and depend less on their family. Teens who have been adopted may question who they are differently than those who were not adopted as they have two families to consider when forming their identity. Complicating things further is that a teen who was adopted may have limited information about their first/birth family and determining how they are similar to this family, or how they are different, can be an additional challenge. According to the Center for Adoption Support and Education, this is why “it is critical for adoptive parents to provide teens with all of the information they have and- in the process- bring to light reality vs. fantasy and honesty vs. secrecy. In essence, adolescence is the life stage during which parents must provide their teens with any ‘missing pieces of the puzzle.’” Based on research by David M. Brodzinsky, access to information about first/birth family, the circumstances leading to the adoption and contact with first/birth family can help facilitate positive adoptive identity development. For teens whose race or ethnicity is different than their adoptive family, meeting first/birth family or spending time with others of a similar race or ethnic background may have additional importance.

The Child Welfare and Information Gateway provides the following ideas in helping your child develop a positive identity that encompasses their adoption history:

- **Talk to your teenager about his or her birth parents.** Be open and willing to explain what you know about his or her birth family. This can help keep teens from forming unrealistic fantasies, lessen anxiety about their history, and build trust with you (keeping in mind your child’s individual circumstances, developmental level, and ability to take in the information).
- **Develop a lifebook.** If your son or daughter does not already have a lifebook or similar tool that records

personal history, key events, and important people in his or her life, now is the time to create one.

- **Support youth in building a deeper understanding of their heritage.** Connect youth to cultural, ethnic, and spiritual activities.
- **Provide opportunities to interact with other adopted teens and young adults.** This helps make the adoptive experience and identity seem normal.
- **Point out the similarities between yourself and your adopted children.** Feeling that they are like their adoptive parents in some ways may help strengthen teens’ attachment to their families.
- **Talk openly about intimacy and sexuality with your teenager.** Communicate your values on dating, sex, and relationships. Talk about what it takes to develop and maintain healthy relationships.
- **Support and affirm LGBTQ youth in expressing who they are.** Promote healthy development and self-esteem.

In order to build a positive identity that includes the role of adoption in one’s life, constellation members should address each of the seven core issues and resolve feelings of loss, rejection, guilt, shame/grief, identity, mastery/control and intimacy. Please contact your REACH team for support in this area, if you feel that you or your child is struggling with identity or any issues related to adoption. We would also love to share some books in our lending library on this topic with you, such as [Beneath the Mask: Understanding Your Adopted Teens](#), [Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self](#) and [The Family of Adoption](#).

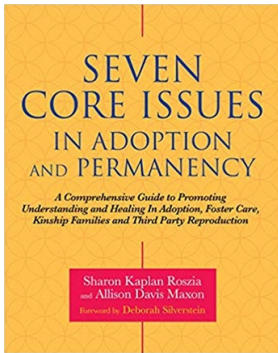
Additional information on this topic and many other topics relating to adoption can be found at the Child Welfare Information Gateway website at www.childwelfare.gov/ or through the REACH website at www.aspiranetreachfresnocounty.org

Book Review “Seven Core Issues In Adoption and Permanency”

by Sharon Kaplan Roszia and Allison Davis Maxon

Based on a hugely successful U.S. model, the Seven Core Issues in Adoption is the first conceptual framework of its kind to offer a unifying lens that was inclusive of all individuals touched by the adoption experience.

The Seven Core Issues are Loss, Rejection, Shame/Guilt, Grief, Identity, Intimacy, and Mastery/Control. The book expands the model to be inclusive of adoption and all forms of permanency: adoption, foster care, kinship care, donor insemination and surrogacy. Attachment and trauma are integrated with the Seven Core Issues model to address and



normalize the additional tasks individuals and families will encounter.

The book views the Seven Core Issues from a range of perspectives including: multi-racial, LGBTQ, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, African-American, International, openness, search and reunion, and others. This essential guide

introduces each Core Issue, its impact on individuals, offering techniques for growth and healing. Roszia and Davis Maxon are critical thought leaders in the child welfare arena, and do a beautiful job touching on the experiences and needs of all individuals who have been touched by adoption and other forms of permanency.

Helping an Adoptee Gain Mastery and Control

By: Jade Yang, MSW

"The adoptee often feels as though he/she has had no control over the events of his/her life. Decisions surrounding relinquishment, choice of adoptive family, and information to be shared with them were all made by other people. The adoptee feels helpless and frustrated that life seems to be a series of uncontrollable events. As a result, the adoptee's need to be in control of "something" often becomes a problem." (Judy Bemig and Betsy Keefer)

With loss at the heart of adoption, all members of the adoption triad have had to give up control of their life in some way. Birth parents did not grow up with romantic images of becoming accidentally pregnant or losing their children to the foster care system. Some adoptive parents never envisioned infertility in their future and having to consider adoption as a way to start their family. As adoptees make their way into adolescence, they become more aware of their lack of involvement in the decision that led to their adoption and their control over the loss of a birth family. They begin to realize how many important life decisions were made for them leading them to overemphasize on things they can control now. Their attempt to gain mastery and control over their life again can often come out as defiant behaviors such as engaging in power struggles with authority figures, lack of self-control and responsibility, and having passive/aggressive attitudes.

Gaining mastery of oneself and control of one's life is an ongoing task for all human beings. For adoptees, the task of having full knowledge of oneself and control of one's future is challenged by early traumatic losses. Mastery requires self-awareness by focusing "on the inner self; it is an inward journey; it is finding one's core self, going into the past and searching for the underlying patterns that have driven an individual to how they presently live their

life. Finding yourself is actually returning to who you were before the world got its hands on you" (Roszia and Maxon). An adoptee's journey to mastery is rooted in knowing and understanding their complete story. They must reflect on the difficult truths, missing information, and take into consideration their fantasies of themselves and ambiguous relationships. They must overcome the aspects of their life that they could not control in order to lead a life of self-actualization and self-control.

Adoptive parents have the complex task of not only working to re-gain mastery and control over the losses in their own lives but also helping their adopted child do the same. They are truly the healing agent for their child and although the task can be daunting, the message their child needs in order to move forward is to feel that they matter. Authors, Roszia and Maxon, recently published *Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanency: A Comprehensive Guide to Promoting Understanding and Healing in Adoption, Foster Care, Kinship Families and Third Party Reproduction*, where they provided tools for parents to help their children gain mastery:

- Focus on your child's strengths, talents and attributes
- Consistently send the message that the child "matters" even with discipline or possible disruptions
- Remember that parents' non-verbal communications are powerful (touch, smile, laughter, play, rituals, etc.)
- Use words of empowerment and praise ("good choice," "well done," "much better")
- Acknowledge and support your child's deep emotional feelings
- Empower your child by sharing power and giving them choices
- Replace parental anger with empathy
- Create a family tree, lifebook, lifebox, or family collage to represent parts of their story and to open discussions about their past or future

References:

Connecting With Our Children: 7 Core Issues in Adoption
By Jean MacLeod

Lifelong Issues in Adoption: A lifelong choice means lifelong consequences
By www.adoption.com / Credits Deborah N. Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan

Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanency: A Comprehensive Guide to Promoting Understanding and healing in Adoption, Foster Care, Kinship Families and Third Party Reproduction
By Sharon Kaplan Roszia and Allison Davis Maxon

Building Intimacy

By: P. Franco, MSW

Intimacy is very important for the adoptee and family to build and develop. Intimacy is one of the seven core issues in adoption and permanency. It is key for parents to build strong relationships with their adopted children, giving them the capacity to build future relationships. Families can begin to build trust by sharing feelings and developing important memories. Denise Witmer has written an article on connecting with your family and building trust, entitled “How to Strengthen Family Bonds: Bring Your Family Closer and Build a Firm Foundation.” If you are wondering where to start, families can begin to connect by using her suggested tools. The full article can be found using the link at the bottom.

“Spending time together is one of the greatest gifts families can give to one another. Not only does quality time strengthen and build family bonds, but it also provides a sense of belonging and security for everyone in the family. In fact, research has shown that when families enjoy activities together, children not only learn important [social skills](#) but also have higher [self-esteem](#). Strong family bonds also encourage better behavior in children, improve academic performance, strengthen parent-child communication, and teach your child how to be a good friend.

As a parent, you play a key role in cultivating and protecting these family bonds. But, building strong family connections doesn't always happen naturally. In our hectic day-to-day lives, it can take a concerted effort to carve out time for your family.”

If you want to make this firm foundation a reality in your family, commit to these essential practices:

1. Schedule Family Time

Whether you have school-age children or teens, it takes planning to set aside family time. Look at everyone's schedule to see if there are any blocks of time that can be designated family time. Try to select a regular night, maybe once a week, when the entire family gets together for a fun activity. By keeping this night on a regular schedule, everyone will know that they need to keep that night clear for family time. You can also use this time to create family traditions. For example, some families attend the same festival every year together.

2. Eat Meals Together

Studies have shown that eating meals together helps reinforce communication and strengthen family bonds. Choose a few nights during the week when you expect everyone to gather around the dinner table. Don't allow phones or other electronics. Just eat a meal and have a conversation together. If you're unable to get together for dinner as a family because of busy schedules, try breakfast. The key is that you come together and enjoy a meal free of distractions.

3. Do Chores as a Family

Doing chores together will foster a sense of teamwork, especially if someone gets done early and is willing to help another family member complete their tasks. To make doing chores more rewarding, plan a small reward for when the work is done like getting ice cream together, watching a movie, or playing a board game.

4. Create a Mission Statement

A family mission statement also can remind everyone about your family's core values or what you love most about each other. It is simple and fun to develop as a family. In fact, it is a great project for family night. Once completed, display your mission statement in a predominant place in your home. Read it, refer to it, and talk about it often. It helps solidify what is important to your family.

5. Have Family Meetings

Family meetings are a good time for everyone to check in with each other, air grievances, or discuss future plans. For instance, a family meeting is a good time to talk about an upcoming day trip, family vacation, or how you to plan to complete the chores next weekend.

6. Encourage Support

To create a sense of support, encourage everyone to learn what things are important to their family members and to do their best to support each other through the good and the bad times. Everyone in the family should feel empowered to share their good news as well as share their bad news.

7. Volunteer Together

Research has shown that the more we give, the [happier](#) and more grateful we feel in our own lives. What's more, giving your time and energy to make someone else's life better is always a powerful learning experience. When your family shares in these learning experiences together, it will strengthen your relationships. For instance, spending a day at the local food bank or taking a weekend to build a home for charity are valuable experiences you can share throughout your life.

8. Get Involved in Your Child's Interests

If your child is passionate about NBA basketball, watch a game together. Or, if your child loves reading Harry Potter, read the series and then talk about it. If your child is in sports, band, Scouts, or another school activity, provide support in some way.

9. Join Other Families

We are all part of a community, so be sure your family is building relationships with other families. Whether this is within your neighborhood, your school system, your church, or some other avenue, it is important that you spend time with other families as well. Doing things together, with other families, will strengthen your own family bonds and help you see how your family members interact with others.

Denise Witmer, www.verywellfamily.com/how-to-strengthen-your-family-bond-ten-tips-2609591

Support Groups & Events

October

- 1** Teen Support Group: What is Trauma?
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm
- 17** Parent Support Group: Benefits of Play
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

November

- 5** Teen Support Group: Healthy Relationships
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm
- 21** Parent Support Group: Celebrating Adoption
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm

December

- 3** Teen Support Group: Mindfulness
5:30 pm – 7:30 pm
- 19** Parent Support Group: Mindfulness
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.