

REACH

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis Intervention • Hope

Aspiranet and Kern County Adoption Support Program



As we transition from long summer days to the holiday months, more than just the temperature begins to change! We welcome the arrival of fall, with trees showcasing their vibrant colors, the change in weather, and schedules filling up with school and holiday activities.

These festive months give us the opportunity to engage in activities, such as harvest festivals, gatherings and meals with family, and friends, decorating for the season, enjoying holiday lights, and creating a festive atmosphere. Overall, this transition from summer to fall and then winter involves a combination of environmental changes and cultural practices that reflect the shift happening.

Much like the seasonal transitions, developmental parenting involves adapting parenting strategies to align with the evolving needs of children as they grow. In this issue of the REACH newsletter, we explore key concepts related to developmental parenting that can support you in nurturing your child's growth through various stages of development.

Please also check out the calendar page of this newsletter for trainings and support groups in the coming months.

If you have any questions or are in need of support, please get in touch with the REACH office.

Sincerely,

The REACH Team

Kern County Fall 2025

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Talking With Your Child About Adoption at Different Stages of Development

By: Tara Soria, MA

Adoptive parents often come to us with questions and concerns around talking to their child about adoption: where to start, what to say, what not to say, and how and when to share difficult information (to name a few). It can feel overwhelming! Below is a general guideline for what can be expected at different developmental stages. Each child is unique, so a good rule of thumb is to follow your child's lead. For further exploration on this topic, an in-depth resource is linked at the end of each stage.

Infants & Toddlers: A goal at this stage is to build a foundation for understanding adoption that grows with your child. This is an excellent opportunity for parents to get comfortable using adoption language. While an infant won't understand your words, they will understand your tone of voice and hear the love in your words. Young children love to be read to, and reading children's books about adoption helps positively introduce concepts and language.

<https://adoptionnetwork.com/adoptive-parents/parenting/talking-about-adoption/18-months-3-years>

Ages 3-5: Talking about adoption at this stage should be done using simple terms (i.e., "forever family," "safe," "love") while being honest and reassuring to your child. A common question asked by children at this age is, "Where do babies come from?" Children who joined their families through adoption need to know that they were born just like everyone else. An example could be: "You grew in your first mommy's tummy. She loved you, but she had grown-up problems and couldn't keep you safe. When we adopted you, it meant you would be in our family forever." At this age, children often ask the same questions over and over. Try to stick to truthful answers that are short and concrete, and reassure your child they are loved and wanted, and that you are there for them.

<https://www.adoptivefamilies.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Talking-to-your-3-5-year-old.pdf>

Ages 6-8: At this age, children are starting to think more logically and ask deeper questions on topics, including adoption and their birth family. It may be tempting to read more into what your child is asking and make an assumption as to what they may be thinking or feeling. Answer the specific question directly and honestly, while avoiding giving information they haven't asked for, even if you think it might be helpful. Keep in mind that these conversations are not a single event; they are an ongoing dialogue. You are creating a loving and honest environment for your child to explore the story of their adoption. This also helps to set the tone for other topics they may want to

bring to you as they continue to grow and develop.

<https://www.adoptivefamilies.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Talking-To-Your-6-8-Year-Old.pdf>

Ages 9-12: During this span of development, parents may notice their child is not asking as many questions as they once did. Their thoughts and feelings about adoption may become more complex, which may make them hesitant to share. As their individual identity begins to form, it is common for many children this age, adopted or not, to start comparing themselves to their peers and thinking about the ways they are different. Their emotions around adoption may become more complicated: sadness, anger, confusion, embarrassment, and so on. It is important to validate those feelings as normal and to invite honest feelings. It can be beneficial to help your child find ways to address peers who may ask unwanted, personal questions about their adoption. Role-playing the types of questions that may be asked, such as "Where are your real parents?" or "Why don't you look like your mom?", and coming up with responses, can build confidence in your child. A helpful workbook we have shared with parents is called W.I.S.E. UP. It is a great resource to help empower your child.

<https://www.adoptivefamilies.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Talking-To-Your-9-12-Year-Old.pdf>

<https://adoptionssupport.org/case-training-institute/w-i-s-e-up-program>

Adolescence: Hopefully, by this time, you have shared with your child the information you have about the circumstances leading to their adoption, birth family, and any other details you have learned about your child's history. This is a time of identity formation, and teenagers are often curious about their genetic history and birth family. They may want to seek out their birth parents. This is a normal part of their journey and doesn't mean they love you any less. When you share openly, it demonstrates to your child that it is safe to talk with you about hard things. According to adoption specialist Ellen Singer, LCSW, "Adoption-related issues can be some of the most emotionally loaded issues teens will ever face." They may not understand why they are feeling the way they do, which is confusing not only for the teen but for parents as well. It is more important than ever to keep communication open and seek additional support if needed.

<https://www.adoptivefamilies.com/parenting/adopted-adolescents-understanding-adoption/> • <https://wearefamiliesrising.org/resource/talking-with-your-adopted-teen>

Are you interested in learning more? Please contact your REACH social worker, and they will be happy to assist.

Sources:

<https://wearefamiliesrising.org> • <https://creatingfamily.org/>

Erickson's Developmental Stages

By: Fernando Aquino, MSW

Developmental parenting is guided by an understanding of each developmental stage. Erik Erikson, a psychoanalyst and developmental psychologist, developed a theory of psychosocial development that outlines eight stages that span an individual's lifespan, from infancy to elderly. Erickson's stages of development suggest that we as humans are impacted by our social experiences. Each stage has a conflict in which we either develop psychologically or fail. As we discuss Erickson's Developmental stages, take a moment to reflect on your child/children and their behavior during these stages. Did they behave similarly? Were you their caregiver during this time? Was there potential for personal growth? Did they experience a potential failure?

Infancy – Birth to 18 months

Children during this stage are at the will of their caregivers. Erickson suggests that Trust v. Mistrust is a guiding factor during this period. A child is dependent on an adult for "food, love, warmth, safety, and nurturing" (Cherry, Kendra), and if these tenets aren't provided, a child will develop mistrust and fear in others.

Early Childhood – 2 to 3 years old

Children in this stage are learning how to use their bodies. They can hold items and are building a sense of personal control. During this period, Autonomy v. Shame and Doubt are a guiding factor. Toilet training is a skill all children eventually learn; Erickson suggests that toilet training "builds a feeling of control and a sense of independence." Shaming a child over bowel movement accidents creates "feelings of shame and doubt."

Preschool – 3 to 5 years old

This stage focuses on Initiative v. Guilt. At this point, the child is in school; direct play and social interactions have increased. Children will attempt to assert their power over their peers. Balance formation is built as children who express too much power will experience disapproval from their peers, "resulting in a sense of guilt." A child with proper initiative will learn to work with others appropriately, taking turns and sharing.



School age – 6 to 11 years old

This psychosocial stage identifies Industry v. Inferiority as the focus for development. A child builds a sense of pride through their accomplishments and abilities. Children are now balancing "social and academic demands." Parental and educational support can either build their sense of self-esteem or diminish their confidence in their intelligence and abilities.

Adolescence – 12–18 years old

Identity v. Confusion is the fifth stage and can be a challenging one to navigate. As children become teens, they develop their own sense of identity, and their identity guides their behavior. Failure to remain true to their identity leads to a "weak sense of self," often resulting in feeling insecure.

Young Adulthood – 19 to 40 years old

Intimacy v. Isolation is the stage in which young adults form more intimate relationships with others. Erickson suggests skills built in the previous stage, Identity v. Confusion, are guiding steps to the type of relationships developed. The ability to create and navigate a loving relationship is a skill based on one's previous experiences. Young adults with a "poor sense of self" struggle with isolation, loneliness, and depression.

This is a brief overview of six of Erikson's eight stages, the ones in which parents may have the most involvement and influence with their children. As parents, being able to identify what healthy development looks like in children is important. Take some time to reflect on your own developmental stages. What were some defining moments in your life that led to personal growth?

<https://www.verywellmind.com/erik-eriksons-stages-of-psychosocial-development-2795740>

Activity

By: Katherine Frias, BA

Developmental parenting is about actively supporting a child's growth by being emotionally responsive, encouraging, and involved in their learning through everyday interactions. Engaging in hands-on activities like problem-solving games, movement challenges, and imaginative play helps strengthen key developmental areas. These activities are not just play; they are opportunities to model empathy, build trust, and support your child's emerging abilities in a way that feels fun and meaningful.

Social Skills & Collaboration

- **Cooking Together with Roles** - Have a child-friendly recipe and assign each of you roles. Switch roles next time. Promotes following steps, patience, and cooperation.
- **"Repair Time"** - After a disagreement or hard moment, build something together (Legos, block tower). The process symbolizes and practices "repair" and reconnecting.

Cognitive Development & Connection

- **Problem-Solving Challenges** - Set up a small obstacle

course or challenge (ex, "How can we build a bridge with these pillows and books?"). Work through it together. Support frustration tolerance and persistence.

- **"Why?" Walks** - Go on a walk and let your child ask as many "why" questions as they want. Don't worry about having all the answers. Model curiosity by saying, "Let's find out!" This strengthens cognitive skills and emotional safety.

Emotional Development & Regulation

- **Mood Movement Game** - Call out emotions and let your child act them out with their body. Then switch — you act, they guess. Helps with emotional identification and empathy.
- **Emotion Freeze Dance** - Play music. When it stops, say an emotion, and your child freezes with a matching face/body. You do it too! Laughter helps regulation.

Source: Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/>



The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind

by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., Tina Payne Bryson, PH.D.

Review by: Griselda Santillan-Mejia, MA

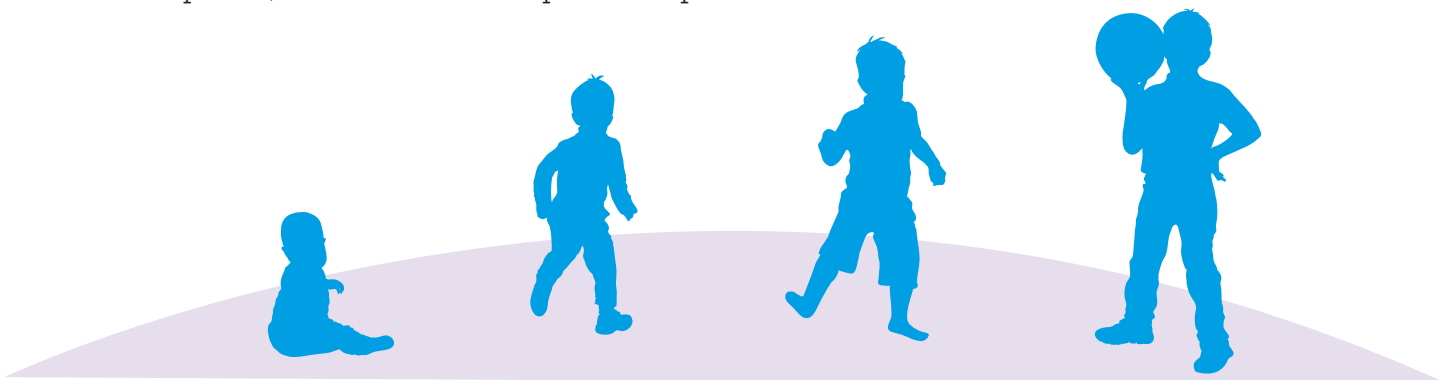
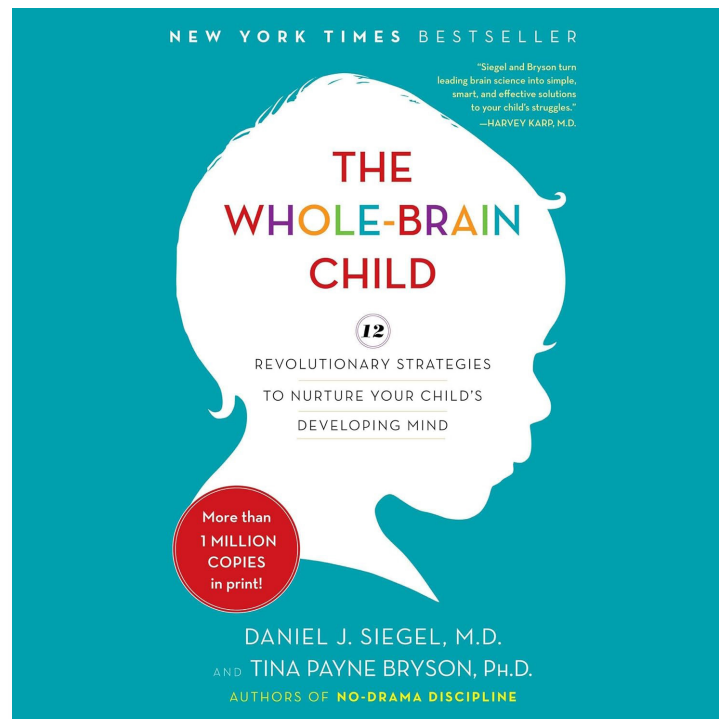
The authors of *The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind* collaborated to bring fresh and innovative parenting techniques to parents, using the latest neuroscience research. Author Daniel J. Siegel, M.D., is a graduate of Harvard Medical School and completed a postgraduate medical education at UCLA with a focus on pediatrics and child, adolescent, and adult psychology. He has 30 years of experience in learning about brain development from infancy to young adulthood. Tina Payne Bryson, PH.D., the co-author, is a pediatric and adolescent psychotherapist, parenting consultant, and director of parenting education and development for the Mindsight Institute. Together, they have created a book focusing on giving parents a revolutionary approach to discipline.

The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind helps parents learn how a child's brain develops and grows during the first few years of their life through the mid-twenties, when the brain is fully developed. The authors share strategies to promote healthy brain development, which leads to improved cop-

ing strategies and happier, resilient individuals. The book first focuses on teaching parents how a child's brain develops and works. For example, the "upstairs brain" helps us make appropriate decisions and balance our emotions. This part of the brain continues to develop until a person is in their mid-twenties.

In young children, the right side of the brain takes over the left side of the brain when their emotions rule over logic. This is why we often see tantrums, fighting, or difficult behaviors in young children, as they do not yet know how to regulate their emotions. By learning how the brain works and develops in the early years, parents can help their children learn how to understand and express their emotions in effective ways. Learning

to manage emotions plays an important role in early development. Learning to appropriately manage their emotions at a young age results in them being able to form healthy relationships, and they are more likely to be successful in life. To summarize, this book helps parents learn discipline skills that support healthy development based on how a child's brain works. This, in turn, will help their children become well-rounded adults.



REACH Event

H I G H L I G H T



By: Beth Hurlbert, MS

Adventure Park

Tulare REACH hosted an end of school year event for its families in June. The families were very excited to have time together and bond through games and activities. Families enjoyed playing miniature golf, racing each other on go

karts, and practicing their swings at the batting cages. Inside they played arcade games or ran the laser maze together. REACH also hosted a pizza buffet for the families to enjoy after all their hard play together.



Parents shared the event:

[Today] helped bring fun interactions and memories.

It gave us the opportunity to go out and enjoy time together.

We spent quality time together having fun.

It keeps my kids socialized, which feeds their confidence & maturity. I love hearing them talk about it all afterwards too.

Nice to do something with my kids outside of our home in a fun place.

It is sometimes hard to take all of the children out for fun family events so events like these really allow us to have fun and bond at the same time!

Support Groups and Events

October

- 6 Daytime Support Group**
10:00am – 11:30am – In person
- 14 Parent Café**
6:30pm – 8:00pm – ZOOM
- 21 COS Training with Carla Marie Felton**
6:00pm – 8:00pm – In person
- 15 Support Group in Spanish**
9:30am – 11:30am – ZOOM

November

- 3 Daytime Support Group**
10:00am – 11:30am – In person
- 3 FKCE: Toxic Stress**
6:00pm – 8:00pm – In person
- 11 Parent Café**
6:30pm – 8:00pm – ZOOM
- 18 Support Group**
6:00pm – 7:30pm – Hybrid
- 19 Support Group in Spanish**
9:30am – 11:30am – ZOOM

December

- 1 Daytime Support Group**
10:00am – 11:30am – In person
- 9 Parent Café**
6:30 pm – 8:00 pm – ZOOM
- 16 Support Group**
6:00pm – 7:30pm – Hybrid
- 17 Support Group in Spanish**
9:30am – 11:30am – ZOOM

College of Sequoias Foster & Kinship Education Program

The College of Sequoias Foster and Kinship Care Education Program offers training of interest to foster and adoptive parents, at no charge. For a complete list of classes visit www.cos.edu/fostercare. Register for classes with Nelly Yanez Gutierrez at nellyy@cos.edu. Classes are available in English and in Spanish. Please note childcare is not available.

REACH Support Groups for Parents In Person – Twice Per Month

In person REACH Parent Support Groups are offered twice per month and are designed for adults thinking about adoption through foster care, families awaiting adoptive placement, new and experienced adoptive parents, as well as child welfare legal guardians. Training hours provided. The daytime support group is offered the first Monday of the month, 10:00am – 11:30am, in person. The evening support group is offered on the third Tuesday of the month, 6:00pm – 7:30pm, in hybrid format (in person and via Zoom). Please join us to share your family's challenges and triumphs. To register, email Beth Hurlbert at bhurlbert@aspiranet.org.

Parent Café 6:30pm – 8:00pm via Zoom

Based on the Five Protective Factors, Parent Café provides an opportunity for parents to explore their strengths and learn from each other's experiences. Training hours provided. Parent Café is offered on the second Tuesday of each month, 6:30pm – 8:00pm via Zoom. To register for Parent Café, email Beth Hurlbert at bhurlbert@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 en faquino@aspiranet.org y se le enviara por correo electrónico un enlace a la reunión.

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REACH and Kern County Adoption Support Services

Resource: We provide 1) telephone support and referral to local services 2) referral to local adoption related community trainings 3) linkage to local therapists with experience working with adoptive families 4) lending library and website access 5) quarterly newsletter which includes book reviews, and relevant adoption related information.

Education: Educational support groups and meetings are regularly held and offer a variety of topics pertinent to adoption. In addition, access to the lending library and website offer many opportunities to learn more about adoption and the impact of adoption on all members of the **adoption constellation** (adoptive parents, adoptees, and birth family).

Advocacy: We are here to help navigate common issues facing adoptive families. We assist adoptive 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 adoption-related issues. Families are also eligible to receive in-home case management services as needed.

Hope: We utilize our agency values of Respect, Integrity, Courage and Hope (RICH) to guide our work with adoptive families. Our goal is to promote safe, healthy and stable adoptive families through access to our services.