

REACH

Resource · Education · Advocacy · Crisis Intervention · Hope

Aspiranet and Kern County Adoption Support Program



Welcome, 2025!

We have closed the books on 2024 and it's time to start fresh with a new year!

A new start is a great time to become mindful of the things around us. What does being mindful mean? It means becoming conscious or aware of something or focusing one's awareness on the present moment, especially as part of a therapeutic or meditative technique. In this fast-paced, crazy world, we often need reminders to take our time with things and slow down—not just for ourselves but for our family.

Some simple things we can do to be more mindful:

- **Focus on your breathing:** A simple thing you can do to be more mindful when life seems to be out of control.
- **Pay attention:** How to do this? Use all five senses to take in the environment around you and enjoy it.
- **Live in the moment:** Put your phone away and bring your attention to what is currently happening.
- **Accepting yourself:** Try treating yourself like you would a good friend, be kind to yourself, supportive, and forgiving.

Pick one mindful practice and see if you can implement it one time each day and add others as you gain comfort in this practice. Check out the rest of the REACH newsletter for more helpful hints and tools for being mindful in your life.

Don't forget about the Support Groups and Events page for services available to you. These are a great way to create mindfulness for yourself and family while sharing with other parents and learning new ways to approach parenting.

If you are interested in learning more about our REACH services call 661.323.1233.

The REACH Team

Kern County Winter 2025

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Helping Your Child with Transitions

By Tara Soria, MA

It is common for children to struggle with transitions, whether it's moving from one activity to another, going back to school, or even bedtime routines. Many children find transitions challenging because they are still developing the emotional and mental tools needed to manage change. As a parent or caregiver, supporting children through these moments with empathy and preparation can help ease transitions, and will help them to build resilience and flexibility. Here are some strategies for helping children transition smoothly:

1. Understand the Importance of Preparation

Preparation is key for easing transitions, especially for younger children or those of any age who struggle with change. When children know what to expect, it is more likely they will feel secure which will reduce the likelihood of resistance. Giving advance warnings such as, "In five minutes, we will clean up the toys and get ready for bed," will provide them with a sense of control and will help them prepare mentally to move on. Another way to help prepare for a transition is to give a brief overview of what is coming next and why it is important.

2. Create Routine and Consistency

Consistent routines provide children with a sense of security. Building predictable routines around key parts of their days, such as morning, bedtime, and mealtime, helps children to feel grounded and to reduce stress. For example, creating a bedtime routine is comprised of consistent steps, such as reading a storybook after brushing their teeth and putting on their pajamas, can help children feel more comfortable making the transition to bedtime.

3. Utilize Visual Schedules

For young children or children who are visual learners, a schedule with pictures or icons can be helpful. Visual schedules can outline the steps involved in their daily routines and show the sequence of activities throughout the day. If your child has a list or a picture schedule, allow them to check off each item as they complete it. This sense of accomplishment can motivate them to continue moving forward to the next part of their day.

4. Offer Choices to Give a Sense of Control

Transitions can feel disruptive to children, so offering choices can make the experience less overwhelming. Providing simple choices such as, "Would you like to wear your yellow shirt or your green shirt to school?" can help them to feel they have some control.

5. Praise Good Transitioning

It is important to recognize your child's efforts, even for small accomplishments. Providing them with positive reinforcement not only makes transitions easier, but it also boosts their confidence in managing change.

6. Teach Mindful Breathing Techniques

Sometimes a transition can be emotionally overwhelming, and children may need help regaining a sense of calm.

Teaching mindful breathing or other calming techniques can help them manage anxiety or frustration around transitions. One technique is to use deep breathing exercises with your child.

Take a Deep Breath

Smell the flower



Blow the pinwheel



A popular one that children find fun and understandable is guiding them through these instructions: Breathe in through your nose, imagining that you are smelling a rose as you do so. Breathe out through your mouth, pretending like you are blowing a pinwheel. Repeat as needed.

7. Acknowledge Their Feelings

Transitions can stir up many emotions for children, such as frustration, anxiety, or even excitement. Acknowledging these emotions without judgement lets your child feel understood and supported. This emotional validation can make a transition smoother and build their emotional resilience. Empathizing with their emotions can be saying something along the lines of, "I see that you're sad to leave the playground. Sometimes it's hard to move on when you're having fun."

8. Model Flexibility and Adaptability

Children often learn by observing the adults in their lives. Modeling a calm, adaptable approach to change can help them feel more secure and demonstrate that transitions do not have to be stressful. In addition, showing patience and a cheerful outlook when you face transitions in front of your children. Parents and caregivers can share age-appropriate stories of times they have handled transitions. This helps children understand that everyone, even adults, must navigate change.

9. Plan for Smooth Transitions During Big Changes

For significant life transitions, such as moving to a new home, welcoming a new sibling, or starting a new school, preparation is essential. One step that can be taken is to read books about change. There are many children's books that focus on common transitions. Reading these together can help open up discussions and make these transitions less intimidating. Another idea is to role play the new situation. For example, visit your child's new school ahead of time so they can see the layout and know a little of what to expect in their surroundings. Big transitions often come with mixed emotions, so allow time for adjustment. Keep the communication lines open and check in regularly with your child.

Through your guidance and support, children can learn that change, albeit challenging, can also bring opportunities for growth and discovery.

Source: childmind.org

Mindful Parenting

By Fernando Aquino, MSW

“At the root of every tantrum and power struggle are unmet needs.”

—Marshall Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication*

We hear the term “mindful parenting” often in the media, but do we know what it means? Child Mind Institute describes mindful parenting as a proactive activity that alleviates stress and aids in preventing depression and anxiety, through skillful tools like breathing exercises, guided meditations, and taking a step back from situations. The idea is that taking time for yourself helps to aid in appropriate responses to children's behaviors.

Perhaps we can recall a time your child got themselves into something they shouldn't have, made the morning or night routine more difficult, or maybe even hurt you. It is easy to focus on the child as needing to change their behavior, but their behavior is often a response to a need they cannot express. Mindfulness encourages parents to be more aware and present in the moment. For example, does your child want you to partake in the night routine with them or often struggle to get the task done? This may require scaffolding the tasks, working alongside one another to practice the steps, and ensuring your child is learning any unmet skills or meeting any unmet needs.

Some skills that parents will need to hone-in on are listening, emotional awareness, compassion, and self-regulation. Often, children can become dysregulated in public places, making parents feel embarrassed, ashamed, or other negative emotions. Take a breath, look at your environment, and acknowledge the behavior, but do not react. Consider what needs your child may be having—tiredness, thirst, hunger, etc. Being curious and practicing acceptance can help acknowledge your child's behavior while keeping in mind your child's behavior does not define who they are.

A child's dysregulated behaviors can be challenging to manage, however, understanding that children with trauma histories process things differently can help parents regulate their own responses to behaviors. Dr. Dan Siegal uses his hand as a model of the brain and is a simple and fun technique, developed to educate others on how the brain and limbic system work. The

article, *Our Reaction to Stress Explained: How to use 'the Hand Model of the Brain'* explains:

“Start with the palm that controls their basic body functions. The thumb represents big feelings like anger or stress and lives with the palm in the downstairs brain. The other fingers are the thinking brain, the upstairs brain. Show them how when they lift their fingers (“flip their lid”), their thinking brain is no longer connected to their feelings. That is when they throw a tantrum or cry uncontrollably. Which is nothing unusual or to be ashamed of, but what if there was another way? It's as simple as curling their fingers over their thumb. Now their upstairs and downstairs brain are connected! They are embracing their feelings and listening to what their brain has to say about them. This is how we build healthier, more emotionally intelligent brains!”



Image from *Flip Your Lid – Building Brains Together*

A workbook to help understand adoption-related behaviors is *The Seven Core Issues Workbook for Parents of Traumatized Children and Teens* by Allison Davis Maxon, described as a book to explore feelings and work through emotional challenges within the family system. The workbook outlines the seven core issues in adoption and permanency in a way that helps guide parents through their own challenges, as well as understanding grief, loss, and the impact on parenting.

Sources:

<https://childmind.org/article/mindful-parenting-2>

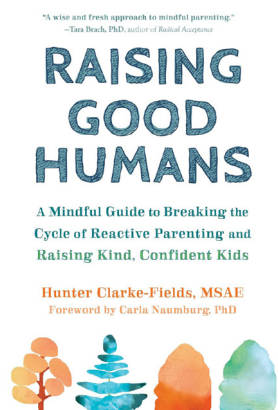
<https://buildingbetterbrains.com.au/hand-model-of-the-brain>

Raising Good Humans: A Mindful Guide to Breaking the Cycle of Reactive Parenting and Raising Kind, Confident Kids

Written by: Hunter Clarke-Fields MSAE (author), Carla Naumburg PhD (forward)

Book Review by: Griselda Santillan Mejia, MA

The purpose of the book, *Raising Good Humans: A Mindful Guide to Breaking the Cycle of Reactive Parenting and Raising Kind, Confident Kids* by Hunter Clarke-Fields, is to help give struggling parents tips and activities to improve their parenting. Specifically, it aims to help parents unlearn parenting skills that are not successful and learn new ones. It is written in a way that is easy to follow and strongly focuses on self-reflection. They are encouraged to dig deep, recognize their flaws, and understand why they have the parenting style they do. Parents who were raised by parents with poor parenting skills tend to follow the same example and will often parent the same way. The book puts a strong focus on kinder and more gentle parenting skills, to help parents break those poor parenting cycles so their children can be raised to be adults who are kind, caring, and compassionate. The



book not only gives strategies and teaches skills but also gives examples of exercises that parents can implement to practice the new skills they are learning. It will help parents learn how to respond to their children in a more mindful and less “reactive” way. In addition, it helps teach effective conflict-resolution and communication skills. Children tend to respond to parents in the same way that parents react to them. If parents react with respect and compassion, they tend to respond the same way. The author gives detailed reasoning behind her claims, along with evidence-based research.

Other readers recommending the book shared it was an easy read and very educational. They shared that the book helped them improve their relationship with their children. Others even wished they had read the book before becoming a parent but noted, “It’s better late than never.”

Mindfulness Activities: Ways to Slow Down

By Jade Vang, MSW

One of the toughest things about managing children’s behaviors can be remaining calm yourself. Mindful parenting is about having awareness, attention, and curiosity in your interactions with your children. It requires parents to slow down, listen, and reflect on your child’s behaviors, as well as your own reactions. Practicing mindfulness can help you gain a sense of calmness and control and move you from being reactive to responsive. Here are a few easy mindfulness activities that can help parents slow down:

4, 5, 6 Breathing

This is a deep, belly breathing exercise that focuses on breathing to restore calm.

1. Take a deep inhale down into your belly and a full exhale through the mouth.
2. Now breathe in through your nose for a count of 4.
3. Hold your breath for a count of 5.
4. Breathe out for a count of 6.
5. Repeat this deep breathing 3 times.

Five Senses

This exercise engages your senses to help focus on the present moment.

- Vision: Look around and name 5 things you can see
- Touch: Describe the texture of 4 things you can touch
- Sound: Name 3 sounds you hear in your environment
- Smell: Name 2 things you can smell
- Taste: Name 1 thing that you can taste right now

Body Scan

This exercise will help you feel attuned with your body in the present moment. As you focus on each part of the body, relax the muscles in areas that feel tense to help bring you back to calm.

1. Sit down or lay down and shut your eyes
2. Notice how your feet feel (i.e. temperatures, textures, pain, etc.)
3. Notice how your legs feel
4. Notice how your core feels
5. Notice how your shoulders feel
6. Notice how your head feels

Try one or more of these exercises and assess if they are beneficial in helping to restore a sense of calm for you!

REACH *Event*

H I G H L I G H T



By Katia Hawkins, BSW, MS

National Adoption Month Celebrations

Many Counties throughout California celebrate a version of National Adoption Month or National Adoption Day. REACH makes an effort to highlight the importance of this month as well, hosting events and partnering with Counties to celebrate adoptions.



Here is what one family had to say about the occasion:

“National Adoption Day is highly celebrated among the community. It is a special day when we, as adoptive families, come together to celebrate and welcome all the new adoptive families. It’s a great opportunity to bond with your family, and to meet other families.”



Support Groups and Events

January

- 14 Parent Café**
6:30pm – 8:00pm – ZOOM
- 22 Support Group in Spanish**
9:30am – 11:30am – ZOOM
- 28 Support Group**
6:00pm – 7:30pm – In person

February

- 11 Parent Café**
6:30pm – 8:00pm – ZOOM
- 25 Support Group**
6:00pm – 7:30pm – In person
- 26 Support Group in Spanish**
9:30am – 11:30am – ZOOM

March

- 11 Parent Café**
6:30 pm – 8:00 pm – ZOOM
- 25 Support Group**
6:00pm – 8:00pm – In person
- 26 Support Group in Spanish**
9:30am – 11:30am – ZOOM

Bakersfield College Foster & Kinship Care Program

Bakersfield College Foster and Kinship Care Program offers training of interest to foster and adoptive parents at no charge. For a complete list of classes, visit the FKCE website at <https://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/community/fkce/training-schedules.html>

Register for classes by calling the registration line 661.319.1836 or BC Program Manager at 661.395.4737

REACH Support Groups for Parents

REACH Parent Support Group 6:00pm – 7:30pm – In Person

Designed for adults thinking about adoption through foster care, families awaiting adoptive placement, new and experienced resource and adoptive parents. Training hours provided. Please join us to share your family's challenges and triumphs. To register, email Carrie Ontiveros at contiveros@aspiranet.org.

Parent Café 6:30pm – 8:00pm 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 on the second Tuesday of each month, 6:30pm – 8:00pm via Zoom. To register for Parent Café, email Carrie Ontiveros at contiveros@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 Carrie Ontiveros en contiveros@aspiranet.org y se le enviará 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.