

REACH

Resource · Education · Advocacy · Crisis Intervention · Hope

Aspiranet and Kern County Adoption Support Program



Happy 2022, REACH Families!

The REACH team wishes all REACH families a happy and healthy year. We hope that you achieve all the goals you've set yourself. In case any of those goals are to gain additional parenting support, we hope you'll find that support in REACH services.

The New Year is traditionally the time of new beginnings and a time to refresh our goals and hopes for the future. It is also a time to reflect on past accomplishments. In 2021 REACH hosted free trainings for new and former foster and adoptive parents. The Adoption Preparation Training was something new in our program and we were glad to see families were able to attend the sessions. We were happy to see families coming together to learn something new! The REACH program also started a time-limited group for teen girls between the ages of 13 and 17 and an adoption support group for Spanish-speaking families. We hope our groups keep growing and that we can continue to provide the participants with the information and resources they need.

In the spirit of new beginnings, we're excited to announce a bountiful new resource opportunity for families and youth! Aspiranet is proud of our long history of providing a wide variety of quality support services to families and youth touched by adoption. However, we understand that the past two years tainted by the COVID-19 pandemic led countless families to struggle with challenges. As a result, Aspiranet is pleased to offer linkages to resources that may not have been previously accessible. Please visit www.aspiranet.org/aspsp to apply and see how Aspiranet can help strengthen and support your family!

Over the past four newsletters, we have focused on The Five Protective Factors and how the implementation of these factors can strengthen families. To date, we have provided an overview of the Five Protective Factors and focused on the protective factors of Parental Resiliency, Social Connections, and Concrete Supports. For this newsletter, we are continuing the protective factors series and are focusing on Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development. We hope you enjoy learning about ways that your family can continue to thrive.

Sincerely,

The REACH team

Kern County Winter 2022

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Flexibility in Adoptive Parenting

By Jade Yang, MSW

What makes a successful adoptive parent? One key characteristic is flexibility, which is defined as “bending easily without breaking” or “willingness to change or compromise.” Flexibility in parenting is the ability to acknowledge when something isn’t working and having the willingness to try a different approach. This could be in regards to behavioral expectations or the rules put in place for your child, as well as how you communicate and teach your child new skills. Regardless of how long you have been a parent, every child is different and will require parenting specifically tailored to them. But to get there, mistakes will happen and adjustments will need to be made.



Parenting a child with a trauma history will require flexibility to understand your child and help them thrive. Unfortunately, children do not come with “how-to” manuals and no parent knows everything about children. The “perfect parent” is simply someone who tries. A parent’s knowledge of parenting and child development will likely develop from their personal experiences (the way they were raised

or raising their children), from other family members, friends, or sometimes their community. Being flexible might mean stepping away from those traditional routes to better enhance parenting skills and understanding your child. This may include:

- Seeking out professional expertise on your child’s physical, mental, emotional, or social health
- Participating in parenting classes, trainings, or workshops
- Finding support in friends who are in similar situations or joining local support groups
- Reading books or online articles on parenting or child development

Parenting is an ever-evolving journey that will require flexibility as children grow and enter different developmental stages. If you find yourself wondering if you could be doing more in your parenting, take some time to reflect on these questions: Do I use age-appropriate parenting skills in my expectations, discipline, and communication with my child? Does my child respond positively to my approaches? Do I have a reliable source of parenting information if an issue were to arise? To learn more about parenting education offered in your community, contact your local REACH office for guidance.

Impact of Trauma on Child Development

by Marsha Baker, MSW

One of the hardest jobs in the world is parenting. Unfortunately, it does not come with an instruction manual. Yes, some things may come to you naturally, but most of it is on-the-job training. In your parenting journey, it is so important to have knowledge and understanding of child development, which is one of the Five Protective Factors in creating a strong family.

Increasing your knowledge of the physical, cognitive, language, and social and emotional development of children can help you understand what to expect during each developmental stage. There is a strong link between what parents know about child development, and how they behave with their children. The stronger the knowledge, the more likely parents will engage in positive parental behaviors. Parents with limited knowledge are more likely to use

parenting techniques that yield more negative outcomes or behavior in their children.

Let’s take a look at four areas of functioning that may be impacted by trauma and early adverse experiences:

- **Capacity of Relationship**

Our ability to develop close relationships, such as giving and receiving affection, is the foundation of other developmental capacities. These include language, self-regulation, positive identity, as well as cognitive and social abilities. Well-nurtured children are emotionally connected, however, those who experience early trauma usually have a fear of trusting others and this fear can lead to anger, numbing emotions, and withdrawal.

- **Felt Safety & Control**

Children who have been wounded and unable to protect themselves have a difficult time feeling safe, even when they are no longer in an unsafe environment. They often feel powerless and have a strong need to control their environment.

- **Self-Regulation**

The ability to regulate emotions is an outcome of a secure attachment between the parent/caregiver and the child. Children who have been poorly nurtured may have impairments in their brain that control impulses and facilitate reasoning.

- **Identity/Sense of Self**

It is common for children who have experienced maltreatment to see themselves as unlovable. They often struggle with their history and feel rejected and feel a sense of shame. This leads to an inability to make sense of who they are and form a positive self-identity.

It is important to understand the impact that trauma has on child development. Although you may already know a lot about good parenting, you can never have enough knowledge. In many cases, the way we parent is usually a direct reflection of how we were parented. For this reason, some parents can become rigid and inflexible in their parenting techniques. However, we all know that

every child is different, especially those children who have complex early traumatic histories. Remember, those early developmental milestones can only be achieved with the right nurturing and environment. To mitigate the negative impact of trauma on the areas of functioning listed above, parents will need to continue to seek out knowledge on child development and stay attuned to their children's needs and behaviors.

Sources:

Center for Adoption Support & Education (C.A.S.E.) NTI (National Adoption Competency Training Initiative)

Center for Family Strengthening <https://cfssl.org/five-protective-factors/>

Center for the Study of Social Policy <https://cssp.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/HO-2.1c-CW-Knowledge-of-Parenting-and-Child-Development.pdf>



Book Review

FASD: Trying Differently Rather Than Trying Harder

By Diane Malbin

Although this work was written with FASD, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders, in mind, the principles apply in working with any brain-based condition, or broadly referred to as FANB, Fetal Alcohol/Neurobehavioral conditions. Most of you may not realize that such a child may already live in your home. Research has revealed that one in every 20 children in the general population has been impacted by prenatal exposure to alcohol but the percentage of children in foster care/adoption impacted by this is 80%. When we consider that prenatal exposure to other drugs, chronic maternal stress during pregnancy and other adverse childhood experiences (such as a difficult birth, abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, etc.) have detrimental effects upon brain development, we realize that the approach laid out for us in this booklet can benefit ALL of us parenting our children.

Those of you who have delved into TBRI, Trust-Based Relational Interventions, have likely learned from Dr. Karyn Purvis that trauma changes a child's brain. But the next question to consider is, how? This booklet, Trying Differently

Rather Than Trying Harder, though written more narrowly for the effects of alcohol exposure, points us in the right direction. This booklet is often referred to by parents of those on the FANB spectrum as their parenting Bible. The booklet has several charts, graphs, and diagrams that aid our understanding.

Section One talks about the FASD diagnosis, the effects of alcohol on the developing brain, how identifying differs from labeling, and the link between brain-based differences and behavior. It lays a framework for how to recognize when your child's (or loved one's, because this is not something that can be "outgrown") behavior might be due to a brain difference.

Section Two helps us reframe our child's behavior from "won't" to "can't." It helps us understand which behaviors are a direct reflection of a brain-based difference, and which behaviors are a reflection of the child feeling misunderstood, unheard, or frustrated by the poor fit between what they are capable of and the expectations placed upon him/her in various settings.

It explains dysmaturity or the gap between the social/emotional age of a child and his/her chronological age. Unlike immaturity, where a child is capable of “acting their age,” with dysmaturity, the child has a slower developmental pace, which is brain-based. The section also walks us through the tendency for a child to “collect diagnoses” having failed to improve behaviors despite numerous interventions offered by well-meaning professionals who simply have not learned to assess brain function in the clients they serve. This section then speaks of “disorders” commonly diagnosed in those who are on the FANB spectrum.

Section Three discusses traditional behavioral interventions, and why they so often fail... and why they can even make things worse by addressing behaviors without assessing what has caused those behaviors – a brain that works differently. It helps us to identify strengths and talents, and how to build upon these in creating a better fit for our child, between how their brain works and what others, who don't understand them, expect. When there is a better fit, there are fewer “negative” behaviors, identified as secondary and tertiary behavioral symptoms – these are the behaviors that trigger reactions from parents, teachers, and many other professionals – the behaviors which lead a child into therapy in the first place. This section helps us to look more closely at our child's environment, from cues that are detected through our senses, as well as invisible elements, such as biases

Family Activity By Tara Soria, M.A.

Exposure to music is immensely beneficial to children in countless ways, from supporting their cognitive development to providing an outlet for their creativity and emotions. There are plenty of different aspects to explore, including movement, singing, rhythm, sounds, learning about instruments, and making instruments. As we move into the winter months and spend more time indoors, here are some fun ideas for homemade musical instruments to inspire your child's musical growth:

Rainsticks- Push some thumbtacks into a long, thick cardboard tube, fill the tube with dried beans, buttons, popcorn kernels, rice, or other filler, and then seal both ends. Once the ends are sealed, cover it with paper or foil, and decorate.

Bell bracelets- Thread some craft bells onto pipe cleaners so the children can wear them as jingly bracelets.

Paper plate tambourines- Decorate some sturdy paper plates, make holes all around the edges, and tie craft bells onto them.

Drums- You'll need some balloons with their ends cut off, some tins or tubs, some tape or rubber bands, and materials to decorate. Stretch the balloons over the tins/tubs and secure them with tape or rubber bands. Use wooden spoons for drumsticks.

Xylophone- Fill an assortment of glasses or jugs (or both) with varying levels of water. Line them up in order from least to most

and traditionally held values. This section closes with a discussion of how powerful shifts can occur when we, as parents, teachers, and professionals, learn to look at behavior through a brain-based lens.

Section Four walks us through several examples of primary characteristics of FANB, as well as examples of accommodations that can be made to create a better fit. Examples that Ms. Malbin provides include memory problems, processing pace, difficulty generalizing learning from one setting to another, rigid and inflexible thinking, speech and language, difficulties with transitions, being overly sensitive to various sensory cues, dysmaturity, and others.

Ms. Malbin concludes by addressing frequently asked questions, and she provides the reader with the solid foundation of research upon which she has based her work, as well as a bibliography of suggested reading, for those who want to dig deeper.

Ms. Malbin created an organization, FASCETS.org, to raise awareness of FANB and to train others in how to better serve those who have been impacted by prenatal exposure to drugs, alcohol, toxic stress, and other causes of these brain-based differences. We hope that you will find this book helpful, and that it will empower you to lessen the stress parenting your child, for you and your whole family.

full. Give your child a mallet (a wooden spoon works well) and have them experiment with different sounds by gently tapping on the rims of the glasses.

Guitar- To make a homemade guitar, simply stretch several large elastic bands around a cardboard box with an open top. A tissue box with a hole in the center also works well. Choose elastic bands that vary in width to ensure that all of the “guitar strings” will produce different tones and sounds when they're plucked by little fingers.

Cymbals- Loop a strip of fabric through the hole of an old CD and tie it off at a point where the fabric strap will slide snugly around three or four fingers of your child's hand. While your CDs don't make the resounding crash that real cymbals do, they certainly produce a fun and satisfying “clack”- and they are shiny like real cymbals!

Want to get your child up and moving but you don't have time to make any instruments? Have a Streamer Dance! Give them ribbons or scarves and put on some music for them to dance to with their streamers (try this activity using music of varying types and speeds).

Sources: First Discoverers

<https://www.firstdiscoverers.co.uk/music-activi>

Support Groups & Events

January

- 20 REACH Parent Café**
10:00 - 11:30 am • ZOOM
- 25 Parent Support Group**
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm • ZOOM
- 26 Parent Support Group
in Spanish**
9:30 am – 11:30 am • ZOOM

February

- 17 REACH Parent Café**
10:00 - 11:30 am • ZOOM
- 22 Parent Support Group**
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm • ZOOM
- 23 Parent Support Group
in Spanish**
9:30 am – 11:30 am • ZOOM

March

- 17 REACH Parent Café**
10:00 - 11:30 am • ZOOM
- 22 Parent Support Group**
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm • ZOOM
- 23 Parent Support Group
in Spanish**
9:30 am – 11:30 am • ZOOM

Due to the impact of COVID-19, REACH Kern County continues to identify creative ways of bringing services to REACH families. We will continue to keep you informed of our services and provide information on trainings and events.

REACH Adoption Support Groups for Parents

REACH Adoption Support Group

6:00pm-7:30pm via Zoom

Designed for adults thinking about adoption through foster care, families awaiting adoptive placement, and new and experienced resource and adoptive parents. The Adoption Support Group is offered via Zoom on the fourth Tuesday of each month, 6:00-7:30pm. Please join us to share your family's challenges and triumphs. To register, email Yaneth Arceo at yarceo@aspiranet.org and a link to the meeting will be emailed to you.

Parent Café

10:00-11:30am 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. Parent Café is offered via Zoom on the third Thursday of each month, 10:00-11:30am. To register for Parent Café, email Yaneth Arceo at yarceo@aspiranet.org and a link to the meeting will be emailed to you. We hope to see you there!

REACH Parent Support Group in Spanish

9:30am-11:30am via Zoom

This group is designed for adults thinking about adoption, parents awaiting adoptive placement, parents of adopted children, and guardianship parents. Training hours provided. ZOOM links and reminders will be sent monthly. The REACH Parent Support Group in Spanish is on the 4th Wednesday of the month. To register, contact Yaneth Arceo at yarceo@aspiranet.org and a link to the meeting will be emailed to you.

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/FKCE/schedules#rfat>

Register for classes by calling the registration line

661-319-1836 or BC Program Manager at 661.395.4737

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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.