

# REACH

*Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis • Intervention • Hope*

*Aspiranet and Kern County Adoption Support Program*



## Hello REACH families!

During this time of uncertainty, we hope that you and your loved ones are safe and healthy. As our normal routines are being challenged, we would like to remind you that your REACH team is available to provide your family with continued support.

We would also like to remind you that REACH offers a monthly support group. The support group continues to be held on the third Tuesday of each month, 6:30-8:00pm, and is currently offered as an online group. A virtual platform has allowed our team to stay connected with the families that we serve, and it is our intention to continue to provide support. We hope that our support groups can continue to grow and look forward to providing parents with ongoing support. At this time, we are uncertain when we will return to in-person support groups but please know that we will keep you updated. Please refer to page 5 for further information on registering for our support groups.

Summer is going to look a lot different this year. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, families are seeing their summer plans change. After long weeks of being quarantined, families may be looking forward to some summer fun, but what can families do with limited options caused by social distancing restrictions? In this edition of our newsletter, we will place focus on TBRI Connecting Principles. Connecting Principles focus on the nurturing interactions between caretaker and child. Interactions such as behavior matching, playful engagement, eye contact, and safe touch, are all interactions that families can engage in, in the safety and comfort of their home.

As we continue to modify our services to meet your needs while abiding by the social distancing restrictions, our scheduled REACH trainings will be held virtually. Stay tuned for information on our summer family event. We will continue to monitor the COVID-19 shelter in place restrictions and will provide information on future events as the dates get closer.

Have a wonderful summer and continue to stay safe!

Sincerely,

The REACH team

## Kern County Summer 2020

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## Connecting Principles- Behavior Matching and Playful Engagement

By: Ana Morales, MS

Trust-Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI) is an attachment-based, trauma informed intervention that consists of Empowering Principles, Connecting Principles, and Correcting Principles.

Applying new parenting approaches can be overwhelming and even intimidating, however engaging in Connecting Principles can be uncomplicated and fun. Connecting Principles, as used by Trust-Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI), refers to the interaction between child and parent. Connecting Principles, when applied, can promote healthy attachment and aid in building social competence. Felt safety, which refers to reducing a child's fear and increasing their safety, can also be attained through the application of Connecting Principles.

Engagement Strategies within the TBRI Connecting Principles include behavior matching and playful engagement, both of which can promote a healthy and fun environment.

**Behavior Matching** – Behavior matching refers to mirroring a child's behavior. This means the caretaker will respond to the child in a way that allows the child to feel acknowledged. The body language, facial expressions, and words that a caretaker uses, can help a child regulate and feel safe. Through behavior matching, the child and caretaker can connect and build trust as behavior matching creates attunement. Children thrive when they have responsive caretakers, as this shows the child that their needs matter and will be met.

**Playful Engagement** – Playtime is not only fun but also important to a child's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development and skill building. Playful engagement between child and caretaker is essential to building trust and healthy attachment. Playtime allows for caretakers to fully engage with children and through that engagement, caretakers can nurture a child's socio-emotional learning. The interactions between children and caretaker during playtime communicate to them that they are being paid attention to and thus can disarm their fear.

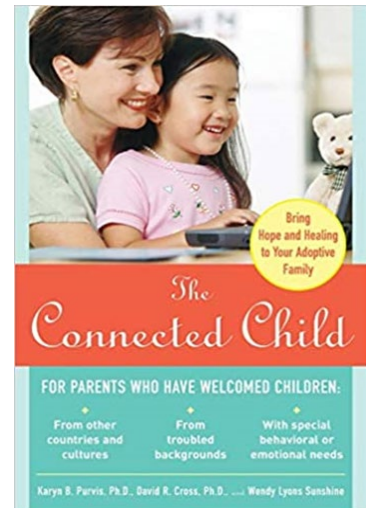
Behavior matching and playful engagement not only communicates to the children that they matter but also that their needs matter. Children from hard places can

find comfort and healing in responsive, inviting, and playful environments. Play and have fun, it is a simple gesture with profound meaning.

## Book Review: “The Connected Child”

By Patti Kasper, MA

Karyn Purvis, Ph.D., David Cross, Ph.D. and Wendy Lyons Sunshine collaborated on this gem of a book in 2007, which has been the heart and soul of TBRI, or Trust-Based Relational Intervention®. TBRI is a trauma-informed approach that focuses on practical, how-to skills that will enhance your child's healing, resiliency and likelihood of reaching his/her potential. *The Connected Child* is a very practical book that delves into topics such as Hope and Healing, Where Your Child Began, Solving the Puzzle of Difficult Behavior, Disarming the



Fear Response with Felt Safety, Teaching Life Values, You are the Boss, Dealing with Defiance, Nurturing at Every Opportunity, Proactive Strategies to Make Life Easier, Supporting Healthy Brain Chemistry, Handling Setbacks and Healing Yourself to Heal Your Child. The authors consistently bring to the forefront the research used to underpin their strategies, as well as believable and relatable examples that their readers can resonate with. The authors make it safe for the reader to admit to struggles without feeling judged, as they come along side the reader in a warm and supportive way. Naturally, it would not be the basis of TBRI without explaining and focusing on the three pillars of Empowering, Connecting and Correcting Principals. This book is a helpful tool in shifting our parenting paradigm from reacting and punishing misbehavior to understanding and meeting the underlying needs that belie the behaviors. When seen in this context, it is far easier to not take our children's behavior as a personal affront, which in turn enables us to actually meet their need rather than merely alleviate our own frustration. This book is a must-have for parents whose children have come from “hard places.”

Also, be on the lookout for the sequel – available now for pre-order, on July 7th, *The Connected Parent* will

be released. This is the final work of the late Dr. Karyn Purvis, co-authored with Lisa Quall, who is an adoptive parent of children from “hard places.” Dr. Purvis again benefits her readers with her decades of research and experience, and her co-author, Lisa Qualls, brings these approaches to life with vignettes from her family’s application of TBRI principles. Recipients of rave editorial reviews, *The Connected Parent* will also be an invaluable addition to both the REACH library, and to yours.

## Connecting with Your Adolescent Who Has a History of Trauma

Marva Bourne, DMFT, LMFT

Some behaviors that appear to suddenly manifest in teens who were adopted at birth or at a very young age may be very puzzling for their parents. Children who once seemed to be adjusting well to their new environments begin to become withdrawn, angry, easily frustrated, or oppositional around late childhood or early adolescence. Parents may have felt that they had a close connection with their child, and now they almost do not recognize this stranger in their home. Before we look at how to help parents reconnect with their teens, we probably should discuss some possible causes for the disconnect.

The leap from childhood to adolescence can be fraught with many challenges. According to Riley and Meeks in *Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens* (2004), the adolescent has to accomplish several psychological tasks in the years between childhood and adulthood. They claim that these adjustments may be accomplished without excessive emotional upset beyond the normal anxiety. However, these adjustments involve changes in self-image, personal responsibility, and adolescent’s relationship to the central people in his or her life and can be very demanding. As you look at the tasks for adolescence outlined by the authors, think of the added distress attempting to scale these hurdles may have on the adopted adolescent. Below are some of the tasks of adolescence:

1. To move toward greater independence and self-sufficiency.
2. To develop his or her own feelings about right and wrong.
3. To adjust to the increases in sexual and aggressive impulses that occur at puberty.

4. To develop a sense of identity.

Teens with a history of trauma, neglect, abuse or loss may have had the lack of a trusting relationship with a consistent caregiver during the first years of life when the foundational neurological pathways of the brain were being formed. A brain that is organized in trauma may result in sensory processing issues, hypervigilance, oppositional defiant behaviors, and lack of basic social skills, to name a few. Imagine the frustration and even despair an adolescent with any of these deficits may experience when attempting to achieve the tasks of adolescence outlined above. Speak with a professional experienced in adoption and trauma who could assist you in understanding what’s causing your emotionally-intense teen to act out so you can calm his challenging behavior. Meeting with other parents with similar issues in a support group setting, either physically or virtually, could also be beneficial. Below are some practical suggestions for how you can connect with your teens and assist them in accomplishing the tasks of adolescence.

Helping My Teen Jump the Hurdles:

1. Try to put yourself in the shoes of your child. Think of things like abandonment, abuse, loss of parents (incarceration, death, drugs), siblings living elsewhere. Would you be afraid to let your parents know some of the thoughts you were thinking if you felt it would cause them to think you were ungrateful or did not love them? Looking at things through your child’s lenses may help you to be more empathic and emotionally accessible for her.
2. Be truthful with your teen. By late childhood or early adolescence, children begin asking more probing questions as to the reasons behind their adoption. As much as possible this information should be shared, even if it is painful or difficult.
3. Set aside time when just you and your child can be together. Some suggestions are: taking a walk together, bowling, ice cream or dessert, museum, craft or hobby store, driving, beach, or picnic. During this time, you should be listening to what your teen is saying, asking about his likes and dislikes, and sharing some of yours.
4. Read books or stories about adoption with your child. You may take turns in choosing the books



or videos. Make a worksheet with questions about the experiences of the characters in the books or videos to discuss with him at the end.

5. Read and discuss poems written by teens for teens. This can be very easily accessed on the internet and cover a wide variety of topics in areas where your child may be struggling. Poetry, like music, bypasses the cerebral cortex and goes directly into the emotional center of the brain. This helps you to connect on a deeply emotional level with your child.
6. Use music to bypass the center of logic and reason in the brain and go directly to the seat of your adolescent's emotions. Ask your child to share his favorite songs with you. Develop a playlist of songs that tell a story and listen to them with your child.
7. If your adoption is a transracial one, you could do things like choose books written by an author who is the same race or ethnicity of your teen. You could read poems about transracial issues or listen to music written or sung by artists of your teen's race or ethnicity. You could expose your child to dance or other cultural events that portray your child's race or ethnicity in a positive manner.

It must be a very frustrating experience watching your adolescent struggle as he goes through these rites of passage and at the same time distance himself from the very ones who care the most and can help him the most. The most effective way to help your adolescent scale these hurdles is to reconnect with him. Show him that you understand, you care, and that you are safe and trustworthy. When you can connect with him at an emotional level, only then will he allow you to be a guiding and stabilizing force in his journey.

Reference:

Riley, Debbie & John Meeks (2006). *Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens*. United Graphics, Inc., U.S.A.

## At Home Connecting Activities

By: Tara Soria, MA

***"When you connect to the heart of a child, everything is possible."***

***-Karyn Purvis***

Here are some fun ways you can connect with your child and make memories together:

1. Take turns creating silly hairstyles on one another- make sure to take pictures to put in their Life Book!
2. Make a playlist of favorite songs and have a dance party. You can integrate opportunities for playful touch by twirling one another, doing the do-si-do, dipping your child- just be silly and have fun!
3. Give your child a manicure and pedicure, complete with a relaxing soak for their hands and feet, and a nice smelling lotion
4. Make up a secret handshake
5. Wear matching temporary tattoos- maybe even coordinate your outfits!
6. Do some art and crafts together, or take on a home improvement project where your child can work alongside you and learn some new skills.
7. Make a mailbox with your child, to hang outside their bedroom. Every now and then, leave a little love note or a surprise for them to find.
8. Plant a garden together. Your child will have fun digging in the soil, and tending to plants and watching them grow. If your family is new to gardening, tomatoes, squash, and peppers are usually easy to grow- and kid-friendly.
9. Get comfy next to one another on the sofa, find a virtual roller coaster ride on YouTube, and pretend you're really there through all the twists and turns. Squeal together and hang on for a fun and thrilling ride! Here is a link to an article that features 30 rides: <https://www.countryliving.com/life/g32121995/virtual-disneyland-rides-tours/>
10. Take turns "drawing" letters on each other's backs and guessing the letter.
11. Make a family portrait together using "pebble art". There are great examples online like these.



Looking for more ideas that can be done at home? Visit this site for 125 other activities you can do as a family: <https://parade.com/1009774/stephanieosmanski/things-to-do-with-kids-during-coronavirus-quarantine/>



# Support Groups & Events

## July

21 Connecting Principle: The Power of Nurturing

## August

18 Connecting Principle: Behavior Matching

## September

15 Connecting Principle: Non-verbal Communication and Felt Safety

Due to the unprecedented and fluid nature of the impact of COVID-19, REACH Kern County continues to identify creative ways of bringing services to our member families. We will keep you posted through emails of how this year's plans shape up, and information on trainings and events will be forthcoming as the time draws near. Similarly, we will continue to pass along interesting free or low cost resources that you may be interested in, as we have been doing in recent months.

### REACH Adoption Support Group for Parents

REACH Parent Support Groups are designed for adults thinking about adoption, families awaiting adoptive placement, and new and experienced foster parents. Please join us to share your family's challenges and triumphs. Suggestions for topics are welcome. During our State and County Shelter in Place restrictions, support group will be held virtually.

**To register for the virtual support groups**, email Patti at [pkasper@aspiranet.org](mailto:pkasper@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.