Welcome to REACH

Winter 2012

Happy New Year! 2012 feels like its going to be an exciting year. This year REACH's goal is to touch the lives of as many Contra Costa County adoptive families as possible. We are looking forward to forging new relationships with community partners and establishing the program as the "go to" resource for families open to continued support. As the REACH Coordinator, I anticipate introducing valuable information for adoptive families, effective tools and resources for supporting children who have experienced complicated histories, and opportunities for families to come together for support, shared learning and camaraderie.

We ended 2011 with a holiday party at The Jungle in Concord, which proved to be a good time for our families. Special thanks to Janice Bowman for her dedicated hard work in organizing the holiday party! It was a great success. I also had the pleasure of meeting with a group of adoptive parents who shared their concerns and the challenges they have faced when attempting to obtain needed resources particularly in the area of mental health services. It was an insightful dialogue that provided great ideas for future trainings focused on mental health services and also confirmed the need to improve resource linkages and mental health resources for adoptive families.

We have a few events coming up this quarter and they include a teen event as well as an educational workshop. REACH is for the community and I am extremely interested in hearing about what type of trainings and events "you" are looking for. Let me know! Lastly, we want to hear from

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you. This newsletter is created especially with our families in mind so if you have a personal adoption story you would like to share, please send it to me so it can be included in our next newsletter. Since we would like to get as many articles as space permits, please limit your stories to 1,000 words. I hope you enjoy this issue's article, "Proactive Parenting for Adoptive Families: How to Recognize Issues and When to Seek Help," by Dee A. Paddock. Happy Reading!

Best Wishes, Alexis Pope, M.A. **REACH Coordinator** (925) 753-2156 extension 3836 • apope@aspiranet.org

Book Reviews

A Spark in the Dark

Author: Richard Tichnor and Jenny

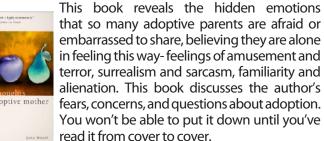
Smith Cost: \$6.95

This book is a universal creation story that incorporates themes from cultures and religions around the world. The message that we hope to pass along in the book is that every child is special and here on earth for a purpose. While each child is unique, they all share something similar; a light in their hearts.

Secret Thoughts of an Adoptive Mother

Author: Jana Wolff

Cost: \$12.95





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Proactive Parenting for Adoptive Families: How to Recognize Issues and When to Seek Help

by Dee A. Paddock

When I went first through infertility treatments and then through the applications, home studies and other steps of adoption, I was trained, like a well-behaved golden retriever, to respond to whatever others asked, demanded and expected of me. It was a very reactive and powerless process and, and it was in this reactive posture that I began as an adoptive parent. What I know now from parenting three adopted children, and from my work as a therapist in adoption, is that adoptive parents need to be proactive and to anticipate the issues their children may face. We need to try to prepare for our children's adoption challenges and to plan ahead about how we will help as parents. We shouldn't let normal and predictable issues in adoptive family life surprise us or cause us to overreact. In many things adoptive families will face, a competent therapist can provide helpful support.

The number one myth about adoption which can lead to surprises is the expectation that adoption is a wonderful, incredible, admirable, unbelievably magical experience. Certainly I have had moments of that magic in my life as an adoptive mother. But I also know that before adoption becomes a win/win relationship for birth parents, we need to know more about the issues of loss in our families, so our adoption can be more real, normal and less idealized for us and for our children. Adoption can become more normalized when we, as adoptive parents, accept that there are predictable issues and developmental bumps in the road for our children because they are adopted. Adopting children is different from creating children by birth.

So what are the issues? One of the most common issues I encounter in my therapy practice is adopted children who are angry. We don't often

acknowledge that while adoption can be a wonderful way to build families, kids don't always like it. They can be angry that adoption happened to them because they want to be like all the other kids, and most children in our communities are not adopted. They can get angry that their birth family felt unable to parent them, and they may fear that they themselves are to blame for that decision. We're raising children who, from time to time, really wish their lives had turned out differently. Reactive parents panic with angry children and struggle to "fix" that anger. Proactive parents need to know that adopted children naturally get angry about adoption. Proactive parents tell their children that these feelings are okay and that anger is a normal developmental issue in adoption.

But how do you know when anger has become a problem, rather that a normal phase, for your child? When anger is affecting your child's emotional growth, or if it's preventing him or her from building and maintaining relationships with family and friends, it may be time to be more proactive and find an adoption therapist for your family, one who will focus treatment on helping your child find positive and appropriate ways to express adoption anger. My clients tell me that they often hear, "Oh you're in counseling, I'm sorry to hear that." Reactive parents feel judged and guilty, but proactive adoptive parents respond, "No, we're in counseling because that's a normal supportive resource for many families, including adoptive families."

Another important adoption issue for proactive parents is attachment. Today's popular attachment theories view children as either instantly attached or completely unattached, and adoptive parents as attached and unwavering. We need to consider

our own attachment to our children as well as their attachment to us. I believe



adoptive relationships are ambivalent relationships - "naturally" ambivalent, because they are created out of loss. If we can let our children express some of their ambivalence about being adopted, if we can share with them some of our own mixed feelings about parenting or other issues in our lives, we can strengthen the attachments between us. Maybe I can say to my son, "You know what, it's taking me time to fall in love with you, too." He might then believe that his own struggle to accept and embrace his new parents is okay, that love and trust between us (or anyone) doesn't have to be instant, according to any timetable, or "all or nothing." Neither of us is bad or weird for having questions or wanting to step back from time to time. In short, if you and your child are sometimes ambivalent about your relationship, vou're normal.

But what about when attachment really isn't growing between parent and child and its absence may be causing delays in emotional development, negative relationships and trouble with self-esteem? What symptoms will proactive parents see? You will experience a pattern of rejecting behavior from your child. The closer you try to move in, the more rejecting the behavior becomes: lying, stealing, hoarding, gorging food, aggression, poor eye contact, indiscriminate affection with strangers. Attachment therapy must focus on the family and on the reciprocal nature of healthy attachment, not just on the adopted child. A good adoption therapist can help families strengthen attachments

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REACH Meetings

Please RSVP with Alexis if you plan to attend any of the events below by calling (925) 753-2156 or by email at apope@aspiranet.org

PARENT WORKSHOP

Thursday, February 9th 10:30am-12:00pm Location TBA 13201 San Pablo Av. Ste #207, San Pablo, CA 94806

REACH TEEN SOCIAL

Thursday, March 22nd 5:00pm-7:00pm 13201 San Pablo Av. Ste #207, San Pablo, CA 94806

SUPPORT GROUPS

Please call Alexis Pope for information regarding dates, times and locations of support groups 3727 Sunset Lane Ste #210,
Antioch, CA 94509



How to talk with kids about adoption: **parenthood.com**

North American Council on Adoptable Children: www.nacac.org

(refer to website for tax credit information)

Adoption Tax Credit Info: irs.gov/taxtopics/tc607.html

The Center for Adoption Support and Education, Inc.

adoptionsupport.org

Adoptive Families Today www.adoptinfo.net

Proactive Parenting for Adoptive Families continued...

through behavior modification, negotiating and coping skills and family support.

Depression and anxiety are other normal issues for adopted children. Just as anger is an appropriate response to an adopted child's grief, we can also anticipate that our children will experience depression as an appropriate response at one or more points in their development. Our children will show us that they're depressed through their behavior. We may see children having temper tantrums, eating and sleeping problems, substance abuse, academic under-achievement, running away, or demonstrating unusual hyperactivity, disobedience, or delinquency. Anxiety may be a response to the powerlessness and helplessness that children experience as the unwitting victims of adoption plans. Through clinging and demanding behaviors, by being difficult to comfort or satisfy, and by showing tremendous anxiety about, and difficulty with, transitions, anxious children can show you how worried and unsafe they feel. When depression and anxiety don't seem to improve, therapy and medication can be very helpful.

What should you look for in an adoption therapist? You need a therapist who is knowledgeable and experienced in working with the adoption circle-birth parents, adoptive parents and adopted children - and who plans treatments that include all circle members, in spirit if not in person. Effective therapists acknowledge the impact of adoption on families while honoring the reality that we can't focus on adoption as the only defining aspect of our family. Effective therapists help us to normalize the adoption issues we face as adoptive parents and support our need for alternative approaches to improving attachment and enhancing our children's development. Parents striving to be proactive seek to create new norms of healthy, adoptive family life and will need therapists who are well trained to support and promote these norms. Most importantly, adoption therapy must address the on-going issues of grief and loss in adoptive families over the life span. Adoptive family therapy often works best when the family and the therapist create a relationship that can be picked up and put down when adoption needs arise and as the family experiences the calm times and the crisis times of everyday life.

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Children & Family Services Bureau 40 Douglas Drive Martinez, CA 94553 www.co.contra-costa.ca.us



REACH Contra Costa Pre/Post-Adoption Support Services

REACH Contra Costa offers services in Contra Costa County

Monthly Education/Support Groups: Monthly meetings where families are able to receive education/training and meet other adoptive families in the community.

Quarterly REACH Newsletter: Quarterly newsletters filled with adoption articles, local trainings, book reviews, online resources and more.

Local Resource Directory: The REACH Directories provide information about local services available in Contra Costa County.

Education: Educational meetings and workshops are held quarterly and offer a variety of topics pertaining to adoption.

REACH Library: The REACH Library is open and available for book review and checkouts during education and support groups and on request.

Case Management: Upon request, REACH clients can receive case management services.

Crisis Intervention Services: Our REACH staff includes a master's level clinician, trained and experienced in crisis intervention skills. Families and children needing these services will receive coaching on crisis intervention, stress reduction and will receive resources necessary to stabilize during crisis.