



Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections

FALL 2017

ISSUE 50

APAC is a collaborative effort between **Children's Aid Society of Alabama** and the **Alabama Department of Human Resources** to provide education and supportive services to strengthen and empower Alabama's adoptive families.

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TRAUMA-INFORMED PARENTING TOOLBOX

This fall, APAC's newsletter is focusing on building our skills for trauma-informed parenting. At APAC, we often use the term "parenting toolbox" to refer to the wide variety of parenting strategies and techniques that each of us employ with our children. Just like having a box of tools used for a home improvement project, the more tools we have at our disposal, the easier the job becomes. All too often, we receive calls from frustrated parents who have been hammering away at a problem, when really they just needed to use a saw or a screwdriver instead. They are working as hard as they can, but aren't seeing the results they wanted. In fact, sometimes the problem becomes worse despite their efforts.



Parenting adopted children, or any child who has experienced trauma in their past, calls for a LARGE toolbox with LOTS of different tools. Many of the basic tools that may have been used with us as children, such as time-out, lecturing, spanking, removing belongings, restricting privileges, or being sent to sulk alone in one's bedroom just don't have the same effect on traumatized children. Use of these tools isn't always helpful, because their traumatic life experiences have built their brains to experience relationships differently and to respond to authority differently. While these tools have been used for their non-traumatized peers, their paradigm for how to interact with adults and the world around them is also different. This requires their caregivers to shift their parenting paradigm too.

Let's walk through an example of a paradigm shift together:

Imagine that you are a child who was born into a situation that left you vulnerable to neglect. By age six, you are taken away from your family and everything you had ever known. Over the next ten years, you live with eight different foster families. In the beginning, you feel sad, scared and confused, but eventually you try to settle in, adjust to new people in your life, try to make friends, and start over. Just as soon as you have gotten settled in at a new home, something changes and another move takes place. Year after year, you feel angry, disappointed, afraid, and powerless. After the first few moves, you stop expecting anything to be permanent. To protect yourself from another disappointment, you tell

yourself that there's no point in settling in too much, or growing too fond of anything or anyone, because it's only going to mean another loss. By age sixteen, after moving eight times, a family tells you that you can stay there forever. After a lifetime of moving and disappointment, do you take that risk of believing them and risk another heartbreak? Would you even remember how to put down roots somewhere?

Now for the paradigm shift: Has this child developed a coping mechanism to protect himself from loss, or would you call it an "attachment problem?" Clinically, when we encounter children who have difficulty bonding, we have referred to this as a problem or disorder of attachment. On the other hand, for that child, this mindset is not a problem or disorder at all—it's the trait that helped them

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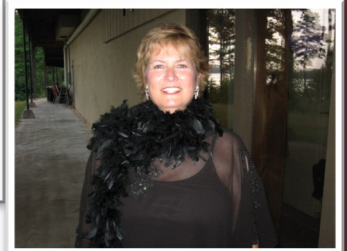
A special note from the Director



Parenting adopted children often presents unique challenges which require tools that are not included in the basic parenting toolbox. Today, adoption support services like those provided through Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections (APAC) work to help adoptive parents fill that gap, but this valuable resource has not always been available. As a response to the need verbalized by parents like you, APAC was “birthed” in 2001 through a project initiated between Children’s Aid Society and the Alabama Department of Human Resources. Sixteen years later, APAC is well known to most Alabama adoptive families, and also to foster families and professionals working with fostering and adoption. APAC is recognized as a major contributor in recruiting, training, and preparing families to adopt children in foster care who have no other identified adoptive resource. APAC is also known as a critical component of post adoption support, education, and empowerment for ALL Alabama adoptive families through a variety of services: adoptive family counseling; support groups; adoptive family mentors; family advocacy; adoption lending library; networking opportunities with other adoptive families; educational trainings, conferences, monthly webinars; and a weeklong summer camp for adopted youth.

I joined the CAS APAC team as Program Director in 2004, and have observed up close and personal how APAC responds to the needs of adoptive families and makes such a difference in their lives. I will now be moving into another phase of my life: retirement. Working with Children’s Aid Society of Alabama, APAC staff, and adoptive and foster families has been a highlight of my career. It has also been amazing to partner with passionate groups such as DHR Office of Adoption, Heart Gallery Alabama, Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, and Kids to Love, among a few. It has indeed been an honor and a privilege to work beside and on behalf of these groups. Thank you all for inspiring me in this work and your willingness to work together to best support adoptive families.

Until we meet again...
 Deb Henning, M.Ed., MSW, LICSW, PIP
 APAC Program Director



...continued from cover article:

survive a lifetime of loss. As parents and professionals, when we begin to shift our paradigm from viewing a child as “a bad kid” to “a kid who experienced bad things,” this creates a powerful shift in how we relate to our children. We become willing to teach a child a new way of thinking and how to live in a bonded relationship with others, rather than simply targeting the behaviors that result from difficulty forming attachment.

We must build up our toolboxes to include tools for a project that may be entirely new to us. Just as you need different tools for a brick laying project than you would for a painting a wall, we need different tools for building up a child who has experienced trauma and loss. It takes making a personal commitment to expanding our knowledge, so that we have the wisdom to select the right tool when it’s called for. The articles in this quarter’s newsletter will focus on ideas to expand your toolbox. Let’s celebrate National Adoption Month in November by using our wisdom and knowledge of our children to sharpen our skills and select the most effective parenting tools for the job.

- Emily Patterson, LMSW
 APAC Family Support Worker III



Toolbox Tool:

Look for special Toolbox Tools just like this one scattered throughout the newsletter to discover other great tools for parents!

CAMP APAC 2017!

A SUMMER EXPEDITION --



On June 13, 140 adopted children and their siblings joined together at Camp Chandler in Wetumpka for our annual Camp APAC!

Expedition on the High Seas was the theme, and throughout the week campers enjoyed voyages of canoeing, kayaking, sail boating, swimming, banana boating, horseback riding, archery, arts & crafts, and sports & games. Our 4 day camping fun began with a Carnival Night, full of team building games and carnival excitement! Other evenings involved an energy-packed Treasure Hunt and a talent-filled Variety Show. Amidst the hustle and bustle of activities and events, Camp APAC remained faithful to its mission of not only providing a fun and exciting camping adventure, but also providing a place for children with the commonality of adoption to simply be together. We delight in the fun that riding on the banana boat brings and the excitement of a camper experiencing camping activities for the very first time; however, it brings our mission full circle to hear a camper report, "It's nice to know that I'm not alone in being adopted," or that he feels a "deeper connection [to his fellow campers] than to people you meet in daily life due to similar backgrounds." This is truly the difference in Camp APAC and other camping experiences – meeting other campers "just like me." We here at APAC are truly honored to be able to provide this experience to the adopted children and families here in the state of Alabama.



- Carla Whitt, LMSW

APAC Northern Region/Camp Coordinator



Toolbox Tool:

Utilize Respite/Take Breaks!

Camp APAC provides an excellent opportunity to give yourself a four day break!



AWAY FROM THE CAMERA

Have you ever looked at someone's family portrait, like the one above, and asked the question, "I wonder what their family is like away from

the camera?" Maybe I am the only one. I also like to pretend that I know their names, personalities, mannerisms, and quirks. I make judgments of what type of parent or kid they really are. Whether I am right or wrong about them, I have a blast making up stories pertaining to them. Now don't judge me on this! I am just being truthful and honest because I know what my family life is like away from the camera.

We have taken some beautiful family photos in the past. Mainly because I have a BEAUTIFUL bride and two BEAUTIFUL bi-racial children, which we adopted a year and a half ago. They make me look good! In the time since our adoption, I have looked at different family pictures we have taken and immediately remembered what happened either right before, or even a few days before we took that picture and it wasn't a very "Kodak" moment. In fact, if the photographer was there in that moment before the picture was taken, they wouldn't capture a bunch of smiles. Instead they would capture facial expressions of fatigue, frustration, anger, depression, uncertainty, guilt, and the list could go on. Maybe you haven't had those moments before the family picture was taken but I sure have.

I would say those moments are some of the toughest parts of being an adoptive parent, or any parent for that matter. Before Tiffany (my wife) and I adopted, we were looking through all the pictures of waiting children on Heart Gallery and dreaming of having the "perfect" family. I grew up watching great family oriented TV Shows, so I imagined being a dad just like Dr. Huxtable (The Cosby Show), Danny Tanner (Full House), and Carl Winslow (Family Matters). But when I became a parent, instead of acting like those perfect TV dads all of the time, I found myself acting more like Al Bundy (Married with Children), Peter Griffin (Family Guy) and Frank Barone (Everybody Loves Raymond). Before we adopted, I put this pressure on myself and my wife to be the "perfect" parents. I thought that if we were "perfect"

parents, doing everything right and with all the right answers, then we would produce the "perfect" kids. Then we could portray the "perfect" family. Boy was I wrong! You see kids (my kids and your kids) aren't looking for the perfect parents. They are looking for available parents. They are looking for parents that will show up! Parents who will show up in the good times and who will show up in the bad times. Parents who will show up in the ugly times and will show up even when it doesn't fit their schedule. Our kids don't want or need perfect parents. To be the "perfect" parent, we just need to show up EVERYDAY no matter what.

As parents, we also need to know that it's okay not to be okay. It's just not okay to stay that way. We will fail as a parent. There will be times when we do not have all the answers. It's okay to not have it all together. We will have bad days. We will question if we made the right decision. It's okay to not know how to handle certain behavioral problems. Let me say it again. IT'S OKAY NOT TO BE OKAY! IT'S JUST NOT OKAY TO STAY THAT WAY! I believe we as parents have to get to the place that we aren't feeling guilty over past mistakes. We won't have all the answers to all the questions. There will be behaviors we don't know how to deal with, feelings of insecurity, and doubts about being parents. Many of us struggle with these things, but we are afraid to let anyone know because of fear of what others will say. There is a fear that others will know we DON'T have it all together, a fear of people saying that we are in over our heads, or a fear of being vulnerable. So we just put on our super hero costumes publically while we continue to struggle inwardly. Being the perfect parent, having all the answers, never making a mistake or any other of the things I previously listed, doesn't make you a superhero parent. You are a superhero because you opened up your heart, your life, and your home to a child or children that needed a home and a loving family. That's what makes you a superhero! To be honest, that's the main reason why we smile for a family picture after the bad moments. Because even though we may not be a perfect family, we are still A FAMILY!

- Ric and Tiffany Rodriquez
Adoptive Family



COMMUNICATION TOOLS

- By Katie Gilliland, MSW



Toolbox Tool:
Be an active
Listener!

Communication and acknowledging your child's birth family is a vital part of parenting adopted children. All children who have been in foster care or who have been adopted have experienced a significant loss. It's important to realize that just because adopted children may not talk about or question adoption, that they aren't thinking about their birth family. Many of the families that we come in contact with have questions relating to how they communicate about the topic of birth families. Here are some tools when talking or thinking about communicating about the birth family:

Acknowledging the birth family begins with giving your child permission to think and feel. Adopted children may fantasize about life with their birth family. As they walk through their own journey, often times fantasizing may be due to fitting the puzzle pieces of their story together. This comes with an understanding that loss is at the core of adoption and foster care. Often times adopted children may not discuss this sense of loss or discuss the wonder or questions they may have out of fear of hurting other's feelings.

So how can you provide your child with this "permission?" Acknowledging and granting permission for your child to think about their birth family can be carried out by initiating conversations with them. Some examples may include checking in with them during the holidays and birthdays by asking if they are thinking about their birth family and letting them know it's okay if they are. These are often dates that adoptive children may wonder about their birth family.

Having been adopted as a baby, my parents often told their version of my adoption story, making sure to use positive language. These words can include "placed for adoption," "chosen," etc. However, I had many questions regarding my birth family and as I continued into adolescence my questions were because I was learning about my own identity. I often wondered why my birth mother placed me and my brother for adoption. I wondered if I looked like her. I questioned if I had siblings that I didn't know about and if they wondered about me. As a teenager I told myself that my birth mother must have been too young to raise children and that must be why she placed us for adoption. Again, this is the aspect of fantasizing about my birth family.

When I asked my parents about my birth mother they continued to tell me it was something we could discuss in more detail when I became an adult. What I needed was to feel supported in my questions and to have validation of my feelings. When I began searching for my birth family at the age of 19 it was something that I hid from my parents because I felt as though they did not approve. You can help your child feel supported by letting them know it is okay to ask questions and to think about their birth family. Remember to be honest with your child and to validate their feelings. These tools are best used when your communication involves positive adoption language. Listed below are some examples of positive adoption language:

NEGATIVE LANGUAGE	POSITIVE LANGUAGE
REAL PARENT	BIRTHPARENT
NATURAL PARENT	BIOLOGICAL PARENT
OWN CHILD	BIRTH CHILD
ADOPTED CHILD	MY CHILD
GIVE UP	TERMINATE PARENTAL RIGHTS
GIVE AWAY	MAKE AN ADOPTION PLAN
TO KEEP	TO PARENT
ADOPTABLE CHILD, AVAILABLE CHILD	WAITING CHILD
REAL FATHER	BIOLOGICAL FATHER
ADOPTIVE PARENT	PARENT
AN UNWANTED CHILD	CHILD PLACED FOR ADOPTION
CHILD TAKEN AWAY	COURT TERMINATION

APAC Resource Library is now online!

Visit our website or drop by our APAC office in Birmingham to browse the vast collection of resources!

Request free online access!

For more details visit our website or contact our library:

childrensaid.org/apaclibrary

866-803-2722

Resources For Parents

The Boy Who Was Raised as a Dog, by Bruce Perry

From Fear to Love, by Bryan Post

The Connected Child, by Karyn Purvis

The Whole Brained Child, by Daniel Siegel

Adopting the Hurt Child, by Gregory Keck

Resources For Children

Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born
by Jamie Lee Curtis

Families Change:
A Book for Children Experiencing Termination
of Parental Rights
by Julie Nelson

Kids Need to Be Safe:
A Book for Children in Foster Care
by Julie Nelson

Recorded Webinars

The Impact of Trauma on Child Development
The Importance of Healthy Attachment
Lying, Cheating and Stealing
Family Violence and the Impact on Foster
and Adopted Children

For further details and registration information, go to
www.childrensaid.org/apac

exciting news!



The **APAC Recorded Webinars** will soon be available on-demand, with instant access to watch online and obtain a certificate of participation or professional credit hours. This exciting, new online location will be available this fall, making it even easier for parents and professionals to conveniently access our trainings. Check out our website for more information about this new training tool.

New
APAC Online Training
site available:
Fall 2017

Also, you can join in LIVE online monthly for our informational and educational APAC Webinars. Visit our website to save the date and reserve your spot for our next event!

childrensaid.org/apacwebinars



Toolbox Tool:

Expand your knowledge and expertise. APAC's webinars and library are filled with great info!

counselors corner

LET'S TALK TRAUMA...

Merriam Webster defines trauma as the following:

- a :** an injury (such as a wound) to living tissue caused by an extrinsic agent
- b :** a disordered psychic or behavioral state resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or physical injury
- c :** an emotional upset



Each and every child we see at APAC fits into at least one of those criteria. Typically all I know when presented with a new client is that some brokenness has occurred in their lives, some negative event - whatever that may be - has impeded their typical growth and development and they are likely struggling with the manifestation of that trauma.

Understanding definition and causation is definitively step one in the healing process. We have to know where we are before we can make a plan to know where we are going. That being said however, what I continually find fascinating is that the brain will almost always absorb that trauma and manifest itself in “typical” trauma behaviors. Over and over again I see the same outlying behaviors due to some type of early traumatic event. Those behaviors include:

- Lying
- Cheating
- Stealing
- Manipulation
- Need for Control
- Hoarding
- Violence & Aggression

The good news? Your child who has experienced trauma and has a proclivity toward one or more of these behaviors is normal relative to their past.

The better news? There are some evidenced based strategies and interventions that we can suggest to help mitigate those negative behaviors.

The hard news? It takes time.

Though we can discuss the challenges, though I can offer some tips and techniques to help heal your child’s brain, it definitively takes a willingness to adopt a new parental approach that differs greatly from the typical “Yes ma’am and Obey” linear parenting modality that we are all accustomed to. Clinically this approach is called the Therapeutic Parenting Model and it essentially turns customary parenting on its head. We simply cannot, cannot, cannot continue to ask our children to do things they are simply not capable of doing – we have to fully meet them where they are and come alongside to partner with them to achieve a better result. Therapeutic parenting calls for connecting while correcting, it demands an immense amount of patience and a willingness to empathize and meet the need behind the behavior. Hard to do? Yes. Worth it? Absolutely. Need support and direction to achieve it? We are here.

- Sonia Martin, MSW, LGSW
APAC Family Counselor



Toolbox Tool:

Reach out for help.

APAC’s counseling team is here to serve you at no cost.

WHAT BEST PREPARES FAMILIES FOR ADOPTION?

Prospective adoptive parents are usually excited about the completion of the ten week Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Performance (TIPS) course. They are ready to continue the process for the placement of a child in their home. They have gone over and over what the process looks like for their family. They have established their expectations for their growing family. Still many wonder, “Am I fully prepared to bring my child home?” We can all benefit from continuing to add new tools to our toolbox. In the list below, an adoptive parent recalls tools she would have benefitted from during her adoptive placement.

Things I wish I had known prior to my adoption placement:

1. ***That it would be so hard.*** I know they drill into us in TIPS that this is not for the faint of heart, but I don't think I adequately prepared for the emotional exhaustion that I could feel. I didn't know that trying to be connected in my responses would be so exhausting and that trying to stay keyed into your child can rear its ugly head in the form of physical exhaustion. It's extremely hard trying to stay connected or build connections with a child who has experienced so much.
2. ***That he/she would need me so much.*** We think older kids equal independence, but for the majority of our kids, they need more guidance and supervision than some elementary aged kids. Why? Because they missed out on so many of those life learning experiences and this is all new to them.
3. ***That when connection starts to develop he/she would need me even more...*** That I need to allow for some regression, because the child needs to know that I'm willing to help them. That I would have a shadow with me from the time I wake up until I go to bed because the child needs that bonding too.
4. ***That their actions and reactions may contradict each other,*** and that's ok.
5. ***That my child would struggle with the concept of family*** and that I would need to define and redefine it constantly to reassure them.
6. ***That I would need to read between the lines*** to truly get to the heart of my child.
7. ***That I wouldn't fall in love with my child immediately*** and that's ok too.
8. ***That I would feel overwhelmed and alone at times.***
9. ***That first hug, I mean that first genuine hug would melt my heart so much.***
10. ***That watching my child's shell crack even a teensy bit would bring me so much joy.***

A wise woman reminded me recently that adopting an older child is a lot like an arranged marriage. IT TAKES WORK TO MAKE IT WORK. Release expectations of what a family should look like and enjoy the relationships and experiences you make with your growing family.

And through it all, ITS SO WORTH IT. I see my child experience the world for the first time, it's like watching a baby take their first steps. I'm seeing smiles and joy and grace and understanding. I'm seeing trust ropes being latched on to. I'm seeing a child who tuned out the world so much that he could be sitting right next to you and would not hear a word you had to say, begin to listen and recognize in himself when he zones out. I'm watching what was a fading star begin to twinkle lightly. I honestly can't wait to see how bright my child's star becomes as he grows emotionally, and spiritually in my home.

I know it's going to be a long journey, the honeymoon is definitely over, but I am here and pumped for the ride. The Ups and the Downs.

When you **release**
expectations,
you are **free** to
enjoy things
for what they are
instead of what you
think they should be.
Mandy Hale

- Adoptive Parent

Adoptive Family Groups

APAC offers support groups that meet throughout the state, providing education and social interaction for adoptive parents and their children.



Baldwin County

2nd Thursday

6-7:30pm @ 3 Circle Church, Daphne

Etowah County

2nd Tuesday

6-7:30pm @ Christ Central Church, Rainbow City

Madison County

2nd Monday

6-7:30pm @ First United Methodist Church, Huntsville

Lee County

3rd Thursday

6-7:30pm @ Cornerstone Church, Auburn

Mobile County

4th Friday

6-7:30pm @ Christ Fellowship Baptist, Mobile

Morgan County

2nd Thursday

6-7:30pm @ Central Park Baptist Church, Decatur

River Region (Autauga, Elmore, Montgomery)

3rd Tuesday

6:00-7:30 Frazer United Methodist Church, Montgomery

Wiregrass Area (Geneva, Henry, Houston)

1st Monday

6:00-7:30 Calvary Baptist Church, Dothan



Toolbox Tool:

Toolbox Tool: Build a support network with other adoptive parents.

All groups have parent sessions, child groups, and childcare unless otherwise indicated.



November is National Adoption Month!

In honor of National Adoption Month APAC is hosting **FREE family photo events** for adoptive parents in Alabama on Sunday, November 5!

Photography sessions will be held in the following locations:

Mobile, Montgomery, Huntsville, Birmingham

For more information or to reserve your family photo session, contact your local APAC office (see contact info on page 12) or visit our website:

www.childrensaid.org/apac

Alabama's Waiting Children

Lauren, born August 2002, and enjoys attending outings and learning new things. Lauren loves listening to music, working on large puzzles (500 or more puzzle pieces) and loves to read Chapter books/series. She has some reservations about adoption. Her favorite color is Pink and she loves Hello Kitty. She also enjoys cooking and pays close attention to her appearance and hygiene. Lauren can benefit from a structured environment. She enjoys helping out with chores and yard work. She enjoys anything girly and loves her sneakers and jeans.



Tyrone is a polite, friendly young man who always has a smile on his face! He loves computers, games, and solving problems. He can often be found listening to music, dancing, or talking with his friends on the phone. He takes pride in his appearance and enjoys dressing nice and neat. His favorite food is fried chicken, and he enjoys going out to eat. Tyrone desires a family that is young and active so they can participate in a variety of fun activities.

Seylon (A.J.) is a very outgoing and funny young man who loves to make others laugh. He performs very well in school where he currently makes all A's and B's. He loves football, video games, and food. His favorite thing to eat is seafood! Although he loves football, he wants to be an NBA star when he's older because of all the fun they get to have. Seylon is in need of a family that will focus on helping him to continue to grow in his academics and sports, and show him lots of care.



Visit www.heartgalleryalabama.com to meet more kids waiting to be adopted or to inquire about any of the kids you see here.

Jalunnie, born December 2002, describes himself as a fun, cool kid who can be laid back at times. He loves sports, basketball and football in particular. He is a Cavaliers fan and loves Alabama football! Roll Tide! He feels like he wants to be either a professional sports player when he grows up or maybe a mechanic because he likes cars. He is into video games, computers and TV but is not much of a reader. His favorite subject is science and he loves pizza and cake! He is not a picky eater and will try anything. Others describe him as bubbly, loves attention, enjoys being a helper and a leader. He is friendly and likes to feel important. Jalunnie loves his siblings and hopes that a family will be found to take all three of them so they can live together again in the same home.



Mariah, born in November 2003, is a sweet and somewhat shy girl with a bright smile. She enjoys girly things, makeup and clothes. She still enjoys playing with baby dolls and her favorite color is pink. Mariah likes sports and describes herself as smart, nice and responsible. She is also an Alabama fan. Math and science are her favorite subjects in school but she is not sure what she wants to be when she grows up.

Jamarius, (not pictured) born in December 2004, is described as a charismatic, friendly boy with an infectious smile. He loves superheroes, specifically the Avengers, and WWE wrestling. His favorite Avenger is "The Hulk" and his favorite wrestler is Triple H. He enjoys putting puzzles together and drawing. He wants to be a Blue Angel Pilot or go into the military when he grows up. Jamarius likes attention and enjoys one on one time with his caregivers. Jamarius loves candy and snacks.

Cody, born July 2008, is an inquisitive, energetic boy who likes to explore. Cody prefers to play alone, however, he enjoys interacting with adults. He enjoys looking at planes and war memorabilia and also playing games at Chucky Cheese. He does have developmental delays, and interacts on a 4 to 5 year old level. He has an IEP in place to assist in the classroom setting with his reading, math, and behavioral needs. He also needs care and support with his emotional responses. He will need a family that is understanding and patient. Cody will best benefit in a two parent household with no other children or possibly a family with a much older child in the home.





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