



Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections

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ISSUE 32

APAC is a collaborative effort between Children's Aid Society 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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Resilience: Make the Difference

Resiliency refers to an individual's ability to cope with stress and adversity, resulting in a return to a previous state of healthy functioning, or having no evidence of being negatively affected. It is not a realistic expectation for a traumatized child to bounce back to a state of normal functioning as though they have not been impacted by their life events. Building resiliency is an intentional process that occurs over time and provides individuals with the skills and supports to be able to heal and move forward.

The Search Institute has done extensive research on asset development and protective factors. These characteristics help mitigate the impact of trauma in the lives of children and contribute to higher levels of resiliency. Protective factors include internal personality traits such as motivation, educational goals, empathy for others, positive self-esteem, assertiveness, decision-making skills and a positive view of personal future. External assets that reinforce and fortify an individual's resiliency include family support, positive relationship with adults others than their parents, parental involvement, positive peer relationships, extra-curricular school activities, community involvement, and involvement in religious activities.

Children who have been abused and neglected frequently have not had the guidance needed to develop these internal attributes. Also, they may have not had the opportunity to build an adequate support system that can serve as a powerful protective factor. For this reason, it is critical their caregivers acknowledge and understand building resiliency is best understood as a process requiring the involvement of parents, families, therapists, and other members of a child's support system. *"A child's ability to develop assets and protective factors is directly related to their connection and attachment to and from others."* (Atwool 2006). A parental figure is a

secure base to which the child can attach. Through this secure attachment, children learn they are worthy, valuable, and loved. These feelings are internalized and reflected in their attitudes about themselves and others.

Additionally, a secure attachment provides the foundation upon which a stable support system can be constructed. When children grow roots within a family and community system, they become a part of a much larger ecosystem that works together to promote solidarity and stability. Through this collaborative effort, we can help our children successfully navigate difficult, and sometimes painful, circumstances. As adoptive and foster parents, it is essential we focus on building protective factors they will need to become happy and successful adults.

There are many ways to support the development of assets and protective factors in your children. Focusing on the child's strengths, whether it is drawing, music, athletics or academics is one way to help them develop motivation and involvement in extra-curricular activities. When parents show their support by attending these activities, framing their picture, or expressing pride in their child's effort, children's self esteem improves. By helping children become involved in various activities, you can expand their experiences with various types of relationships. Ultimately, this can increase their exposure to positive role models and give them additional opportunities to gain support. This may also help them to have a positive view of their future. Engaging in family religious activities and volunteer work can also give them a sense of importance, build a foundation of being a part of their community, expand their relationships and build empathy.

If you do not take time, who will?

Debra Fredenburg, LCSW and Lindsey Gurley, LGSW
Attachment and Resilience: Implications for Children in Care, Nicola Atwool 2006. Child Care in Practice, October 2006

Note from the Director

Embracing Change

"The only thing that never changes is change itself." This is a statement most of us are familiar with and which we understand so clearly when multiple changes occur. This year has been one of exceptional change for the APAC program and in the broader context of Children's Aid Society as well. Our main Birmingham office moved from Homewood to southside Birmingham (*hence our new Birmingham address of 2141 14th Avenue South!*)

Another change this year has been the expansion of APAC counseling services. APAC now has 4 full time adoption family counselors who can provide both in-office and in-home adoption adjustment/crisis counseling. These counselors are based in Birmingham, Huntsville, Montgomery, and Mobile, but provide counseling for adoptive families throughout the state.

Many of our other adoption support services also have been enhanced! Our unique adoption lending library continues to be available for free loan of adoption related books and other printed materials along with DVDs and CDs, and can now also be accessed through our website! Check it out - www.childrensaid.org/apaclibrary!

Our adoption support groups are still a strong and popular support for many families across the state and now adoptive families can also benefit from having a volunteer adoptive parent Mentor connected with them for individual support. If you want an adoption mentor or want to locate an adoptive family group closest to you, check with your local APAC staff, call us toll-free at (866)803-2727, or email us at cas@childrensaid.org.

Also, the APAC program has now developed monthly, webinar informational/educational support trainings routinely provided to adoptive and foster parents as well as professionals across the state. Some are held at noon during the typical lunch hour and some are held at night, which is popular with both parents and adoption professionals! A computer with high speed internet is necessary to access the webinars, but they are free to all, with 1.0 CEUs available. Check out the webinar schedule on our website and plan to join in soon!

Of course all of these APAC changes should be positive changes for our client population. But many changes in life are NOT easy! This newsletter includes articles specifically about change and the capacity for resilience. It also includes a variety of other articles and information. If you have particular needs or requests for future newsletter content, please let us know!

*Debra Hawk Finley, LCSW, PIP
APAC Program Director*



We Meet You Where You Are!

No need to leave your home or office!
If you have internet access, you can join our live webinars and receive Social Work, Counseling, and Foster Parent continuing education credits!



- April: Lying, Cheating, and Stealing
- May: Preparing and Adjusting To Adoption, Part I
- June: Preparing and Adjusting to Adoption, Part II

*View our
webinars
on your
smartphone
or tablet!*

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

Open Your Heart.
Open Your Home.

Change a Life Through Adoption

Alabama is home to approximately 250 children who are free for adoption and waiting for a forever family.

APAC will host Group Preparation and Selection (GPS) Classes starting the following months:

- May: Marengo County
- June: Birmingham
- July: Mobile

If you or someone you know would like to learn more about adoption and attend classes to be approved as an adoptive family for Alabama's Waiting children, please call 866-4-AL-KIDS.

Child of My Labor

You are not the child of my flesh
But you are the daughter of my labor.

The pains have come from
Contractions of my heart
Squeezed by your tiny hands

The pain of your loss
Cannot be understood
No mother's milk for you
To soothe, to settle
To still your stomach and soul.

No sweet mother's voice
To hush and lullaby your fears

But now, you are born to me
On the wings of angels
And our labor begins

And I shall nurse you
With my mother's heart
I shall soothe, settle, and still your soul
With my lullaby

Hushaby Baby, you are the child of my labor.

*Rachel Gonia
Alabama Adoptive Parent*

Statewide conference for social workers and professionals who serve foster/adopted children and their families.

Building on the Foundation of Permanency

7th Annual Permanency Conference
July 16-18
Birmingham Sheraton Hotel

Conference Registration Fee: \$159*
Includes all meals, conference materials,
and CEUs for social workers and counselors.

**Fee waived for those attending in DHR county office slots.*



Visit www.childrensaid.org
for more information.





Birth Order: What It Means For Your Family

There has been debate in the adoption community as to whether families should adopt out of birth order. Some experts suggest families should not. Others suggest it can be successful if families are educated around the potential effects it may have on the family structure and the child's personality.

Birth Order is defined as a person's chronological rank among his or her siblings. Research has found that it impacts a person's personality. The decision to add a child to a family through adoption can impact birth order in families who have birth children, as well as in families who have children from prior adoptions.

Birth order not only affects your personality but also how you relate to others. This is very important for families to be aware of as they make the decision to add to their family. In the book, *The Birth Order Effect*, the authors group children into five categories:

- **Only Children:** organized, emotional worriers, reactionary, dependable, feel pressured, need time alone
- **First Born:** goal oriented, need to know what others think, feel guilty, worry about being offensive, try to impress people, crave approval
- **Second Born:** suppress feelings, look for flaws, hard to give praise, feel inferior, pay attention to details
- **Third Born:** underdogs, lots of ideas, like to help others, emotionally strong, like to keep busy, try not to let anything bother them
- **Fourth Born:** feel excluded, feel immature, hard-working, secretive, harbor anger, analytical

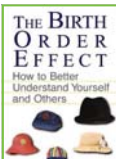
Knowing which category the members in a family fall into could help us understand our relationship with each other better. This knowledge also helps a family function better as whole.

An additional layer is added when a child is adopted without all or some of his or her birth siblings. If the child you are adopting has biological siblings who are not able to be placed in your home, you will want to know the placement history of that child. An example: the child may have been the first born in their biological family but when they are placed in your home that order is switched and they become the second born. Depending on how many placements the child has had, there could have been many other times the rank for that child has changed. This information would be helpful for the adoptive parent to know and correlate with how this may impact that child's personality.

Another dynamic for families to consider is a child's emotional age versus their chronological age. Chronological age is the age of the child from birth. Emotional age is harder to define because it is more fragmented due to abuse, neglect and trauma in that child's life, but it relates to emotional maturity. This being said, you want to parent and base your expectations on the child based on their emotional age rather than chronological age.

Research is mixed when it comes to birth order and adoption. It is important for families to consider several things when deciding on the age of the child to be placed in their homes. First, know your family and your children. Next, remember a child from foster care may have a different birth order personality depending on placement history and birth family structure. Finally, parent your child based on ability not chronological age.

*Jill Sexton, M.Ed, ALC
APAC Family Counselor*



To learn more about this important issue, check out *Birth Order Effect* by Cliff Isaacson which is a revolutionary system for understanding birth order. Isaacson shows us how to find our true place in the family structure, and how to use this important information in creating better relationships with those around us.

9 Tips for Successfully Adopting Out of Birth Order

1. Pay particular attention to the displacement of the eldest child.
2. There is less disruption if the eldest children, who will be displaced, is under the age of 3 since they haven't settled into the power of being #1.
3. The feeling of displacement is less if the new eldest child is a different gender than the previous eldest child. Your son will still be the eldest boy, even though he now has an older sister.
4. Large families (4+ kids) experience the disruption of birth order less. So many different relationships are already in play that this change is less noticeable. This does not apply if you change the order of the eldest child.
5. Success depends on the personality of the child being displaced and the new child joining the family.
6. Success depends on the parent's ability to emotionally support each child in the family.
7. Success depends on the parent's willingness to get help early and often after the adoption is finalized.
8. Success depends on the parent's preparation and education prior to adoption on the potential issues for adopting an older child.
9. Success depends on whether all family members have bought into the decision to adopt.

Adapted from *Rules for Successfully Adopting out of Birth Order* from the nonprofit, Creating a Family.

Adoptive Family Groups

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

Northern Region

Calhoun County-2nd Thursday

6:30-8pm @ Greenbrier Church of Christ, Anniston

DeKalb County-4th Tuesday

6-7:30pm @ Fellowship Christian Center, Rainsville

Etowah County-3rd Monday

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

Jefferson County East-1st Thursday

6-7:30pm @ Huffman United Methodist, Birmingham

Jefferson County Multi-Cultural-2nd Tuesday

6:30-8pm @ Bluff Park United Methodist Church, Birmingham

Jefferson County West-4th Thursday

6:30-8pm @ First United Methodist, Hueytown

Lauderdale County-1st Tuesday

6-7:30pm @ Cross Pointe COC (ED Bldg), Florence

Madison County-2nd Monday

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

Marion County-2nd Monday

6-7:30pm @ First United Methodist, Winfield

Morgan County-2nd Tuesday

6-7:30pm @ Calvary Assembly Church, Decatur

Shelby County-1st Tuesday

6:30-8pm @ First United Methodist, Alabaster

Southern Region

Autauga/Elmore County-4th Tuesday

6-7:30pm @ Glynwood Baptist Church, Prattville

Barbour County-3rd Monday

5:30-7pm @ First United Methodist Church, Eufaula

Henry County-1st Tuesday

6-7:30pm @ Headland First Baptist, Headland

Houston County-3rd Friday

6:30-8:00 @ Dothan Christian Fellowship, Dothan

Geneva County-2nd Monday

6:30-8pm @ Trinity Baptist, Geneva

Lee County-1st Thursday

6-7:30pm @ The Big House Foundation, Opelika, AL

Montgomery County-3rd Thursday

6-7:30pm @ Frazer United Methodist Church, Montgomery

Baldwin County-3rd Thursday

6-7:30pm @ Eastern Shore Church of Christ, Daphne

Mobile County-4th Friday

6-7:30pm @ Regency Church of Christ, Mobile

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



The Challenges of Kinship Adoption

Loss is at the core of the adoption process. With loss, comes change - change in where a child lives, change in rules and structure, change in beliefs and change in family dynamics. The change in family dynamics can be a huge transition for many families, especially in relation to sibling groups. Another of the articles in this newsletter discusses one such change; change in birth order. Changes in birth order can displace a child, which can cause feelings of abandonment, insignificance and being replaceable. However, there is yet another dynamic to consider - the change in the family system when there is a kinship adoption.



Kinship adoption is the process in which a child is adopted by a relative, someone related to the child by family ties or through a prior relationship connection. According to the U.S. 2010 Census, 13% of all children under the age of 18 in Alabama live in homes where the householders are grandparents or other relatives (*GrandFacts Sheet*). In the United States, about 1 in 12 children are living in households headed by grandparents or other relatives. So what happens when a cousin becomes a sibling or when an aunt becomes "mom?" The options are limitless, but the implications are the same - more loss, more change and more intricate family dynamics.

One family reported how it felt when a cousin became a sibling. At first things were fine but as the years came and went, the birth child felt the cousin, who was now a brother, got more attention than she did; that she had been replaced. When this birth child had children, she felt that even the grandchildren didn't get as much attention as this adopted relative and his children. But what about the cousin who was adopted? Adopted as an infant, he never knew he was adopted until a neighbor disclosed it during pre-pubescent. Once he found out, he was irate, angry and distanced himself from the family for a long time. Although, still with family, those feelings of abandonment, anger and resentment- towards birth mother and relative, were still present.



Another family detailed a particular instance in which a biological cousin was adopted and became a sibling. The cousin knew he was adopted and identified himself as an "uncle" to a birth cousin, who was older than him, yet the birth cousin did not concur. As you can see, these familial changes can become very confusing. A cousin, who used to be a great friend and playmate, now becomes a rival. Grandmother, who is known for being the refuge from those "mean ole parents" and the one who spoils her grandchildren, becomes the disciplinarian. There also tend to be feelings of confusion about what to call the parent/guardian now. Is this your aunt or your mother? Is this your brother or cousin?

Understand that we are not opponents of kinship adoptions, but bringing to your awareness the need for families to know their family and recognize the potential for shifts in family dynamics, even with kinship adoptions. Families remain the first line of care for children when displaced from birth parents! As with birth order, the research regarding the dynamics of kinship adoption is still being developed. In accordance with the "*Rules for Successfully Adopting out of Birth Order*," we advise parents in kinship adoptions to pay attention to the same areas of concerns detailed: be aware of each child's feelings; discuss the transition with all family members before, during and after the process; and spend time with each child independently as well as having set family time together.

Kai Mumpfield, LCSW
APAC Regional Coordinator

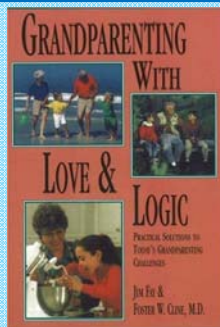
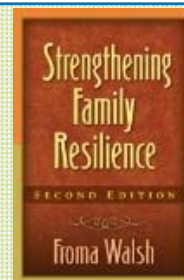
APAC Library

Our Library is Online!

You can view a complete list of your local resources, search by topic or keyword, and easily reserve your favorite items through our new convenient website!

For more details, visit www.childrensaid.org/apaclibrary

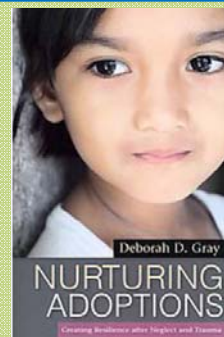
***Strengthening Family Resilience* by Froma Walsh:** This informative clinical resource and text presents Froma Walsh's family resilience framework for intervention and prevention with clients dealing with adversity. Drawing on extensive research and clinical experience, the author describes key processes in resilience for practitioners to target and facilitate. Useful guidelines and case illustrations address a wide range of challenges - sudden crisis, trauma, and loss; disruptive transitions, such as job loss, divorce, and migration; persistent multi-stress conditions of serious illness or poverty; and barriers to success for at-risk youth.



***Grand Parenting with Love and Logic* by Jim Fay and Foster Cline:** Today's grandparents are active and involved- in everything from careers to fitness to dating. They are thirty-something to one hundred plus- and every age in between. Grandparent roles have also changed, as have many of their situations. While some may

be grand parenting within a "traditional" family, others may be facing new challenges such as: acting as a stabilizing force during times of family upheaval, providing day care for a grandchild, furnishing temporary living arrangements for an adult child and grandchild, filling the role of "Mom" and "Dad" for a grandchild, blending step grandchildren with biological grandchildren. Whatever the unique situation, parenting experts Jim Fay and Foster Cline, M.D., show grandparents how to develop enjoyable, fulfilling relationships with their adult children- while helping grandchildren grow into responsible, caring young people.

***Nurturing Adoptions* by Deborah Gray:** Children who have been adopted who have suffered trauma and neglect have structural brain change, as well as specific developmental and emotional needs. They need particular care to build attachment and overcome trauma. This book outlines how to help adoptive families build positive relationships and help children heal. It explains how neglect, trauma and prenatal exposure to drugs or alcohol affect brain and emotional development, and explains how to recognize these effects and attachment issues in children. It also provides ways to help children settle into new families and home and school approaches that encourage children to flourish. This book will be an invaluable resource for professionals working with adoptive families and will support them in nurturing positive family relationships and resilient, happy children. It is ideal as a child welfare text or reference book and will also be of interest to parents.



***Relatives Raising Children* by Joseph Crumbley and Robert Little:** This book provides the reader with excellent descriptions of the many issues found in the growing phenomena of family members raising their grandchildren or other relative children. Although written for the professional, the format is easy to follow and very thorough. The authors present the many possible perspectives of the child, the relative caregiver and the parent in this difficult situation. They also provide intervention techniques for the professional. This book provides a base of knowledge and will provide professionals and caretakers with insight on what next steps to take while raising relatives.

Alabama's Waiting Children



Amy, born June 2001, is a loving child who tries hard to please. She is learning to read and do math. She plays games on the computer, which help reinforce her learning. She loves to play with baby dolls and Barbie dolls. She is creative, having set up a special play area where she talks and pretends with her dollies for hours. She also likes playing outside: swinging, climbing and running. She likes to play board games, but is known to skip counting the squares so she can move ahead to win!

Amy receives special education services at school. One of her teachers is a special friend who takes her on trips, shopping and other new experiences. She loves this special attention.

Amy is looking for a family to provide her the guidance and love who will help her grow.

Endae, born September 2007, is a fun and energetic little boy. He enjoys coloring and playing with his toys. Endae enjoys being around other children but has to be reminded to play nicely.

This child has serious medical and behavioral needs and will need lifelong care. He is frequently hospitalized and has to attend numerous medical appointments.

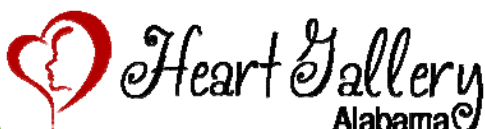
The perfect family for Endae would be a two-parent family with someone having experience in the medical field. This family will need to be structured but flexible and understanding of this child's many needs. Endae is a very special child with special needs who deserves to have a forever family.



Amber, born August 1997, is turning into quite the young lady. She likes to put puzzles together and will work on difficult ones especially with encouragement. She will also help clean but needs guidance and is anxious to learn to cook.

She is adjusting to a new home and school. She is tall and thin. She likes wearing high heels, and the current craze - boots. She is beginning to explore make-up and dancing. She will play games on the computer for hours. She receives help at school with interpretation of the material she's given while being main streamed into a regular classroom.

Amber needs a family that can provide her love and guidance as she becomes a young lady. She wants to have a mother and a family to love and care for her plus teach her daily living skills she will need in order to be independent and productive as an adult.



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

Caitlin, born January 2003, is a friendly, playful, and pleasant child with a gigantic heart. She loves playing with her friends. She enjoys cheerleading and dress-up. She also enjoys riding her bike and watching movies.

Caitlin needs a single female family with no other children. She needs a parent that can help her with honesty and respect of other people. She also needs someone who will be patient and understanding of her behavioral and mood problems.

Caitlin is very excited about the possibility of being adopted, and she welcomes the idea of meeting new people and having a safe, stable, and nurturing home.



Alex, born March 1999, is an energetic boy who is looking for an equally active forever family. He likes music, video games, art, and reading, and he would enjoy being involved in sports activities too. He especially likes football. Alex has a winning smile and twinkling eyes that make him a favorite among all the adults in his life. He likes to laugh and he has a good sense of humor.

Alex continues to deal with issues from his past and he has made progress in therapy. He needs a family that can help him continue to process and deal with losses and trauma from his past. His medication helps him focus. Alex is a loving child who responds well in a calm and loving environment that can also provide structure and consistency. This gives him a sense of security and he does not like conflict.

In school, Alex's strength is reading. He receives special services to help him in the area of math. He usually receives A's and B's in conduct at school. Although

Alex likes school he doesn't care much for homework.

Shadrach and Shedricka (Diamond) are siblings strongly attached to one another. They have been in foster care for several years and are currently in a therapeutic foster home. They have an older brother to whom they are attached, who is currently in an adoptive placement. They have been able to maintain contact with him and it would be beneficial if they could continue to have contact, even if it is only by letters and/or phone calls.

Shedricka, born May 2002, is the middle child. She has big, expressive eyes and a beautiful smile. She enjoys art projects of all types but especially drawing. Shedricka doesn't like school but her grades are usually good and she is very bright. She struggles with authority but she can also be very sweet and loving and lots of fun. She is in a therapeutic foster home and both her therapeutic worker and her foster parent have been working with Shedricka to improve her behaviors and she seems to be making progress.

Shadrach, born October 2005, is very bright. He really loves video games. He craves attention and enjoys having someone read to him and play with him. Shadrach is very attached to his sister but they do sometimes have arguments like most siblings. Shadrach needs to participate in extracurricular activities that will have him playing outdoors.

This sibling group would benefit from a two-parent home with parents who would encourage and support the children's participation in sports and other activities.





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