

REACH

Resource • Education • Advocacy • Crisis Intervention • Hope

Adoption Support Services for Fresno County



Hello REACH families!

Spring is gathering speed as flowers bloom and the warmth of Summer approaches. April brings us Child Abuse Prevention Month, May is National Foster Care Awareness Month, and June celebrates National Pride Month.

The REACH program has a few more sessions of our virtual nine-week Adoption Preparation Training in April and May. Be sure to take advantage of these trainings to learn about working with birth families, stuck spots, and self-care! Also, please take a moment to read the current issue of our newsletter, which tackles the topic of loss related to adoption. There is no adoption without loss.

As we move into the warmth of Spring and Summer, please remember the importance of building a community of love and support to wrap around your family. Nothing helps us through the hard times, exhaustion, and challenges of parenting like a family and a community that can come alongside us. We all need this “village” to help us celebrate our accomplishments – big and small – and to note the milestones in our family’s life! You can find a community in your REACH program. Come to a support group, training, or event and meet other families in your area who are experiencing similar things to what you and your family are experiencing. We hope you take time to enjoy this season with your family – get outside, plant a garden, take a walk, have a barbecue, play in a park, and take some deep breaths of spring air. Let’s celebrate you being a part of REACH’s dynamic adoption community!

Sincerely,

The REACH Team

Fresno County Spring 2026

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Understanding Loss Through the Seven Core Issues of Adoption

By: Maira Anguiano, MSW

When we talk about adoption and foster care, we often focus on safety, love, and new beginnings. While all of this matters deeply, it's also important to recognize an essential truth: every foster or adoptive story begins with loss.

Loss is the foundation of the Seven Core Issues of Adoption. It refers to the separation from birth parents, siblings, extended family, culture, and often a child's original sense of belonging. Even infants experience loss through disrupted attachment and changes in familiar sights, sounds, and smells.

For children in foster care, loss may happen repeatedly - homes, caregivers, schools, routines, and relationships. These experiences shape how children view safety and connection.

Why Loss Is Often Missed

Adoption-related loss is frequently unseen or minimized. Phrases like "You're so lucky" or "At least they're in a better place" can unintentionally silence a child's grief. When loss isn't acknowledged, children may struggle to express sadness, anger, or confusion and instead show it through behavior.

When loss goes unspoken, children may believe their feelings are wrong or unsafe to share. Many worry that expressing sadness about their birth family might hurt their foster or adoptive parents.

By gently naming loss, you send a powerful message: All of your feelings are allowed here.

How Loss Can Show Up

Loss may look different at different ages:

- Younger children may show clinginess or separation anxiety
- School-age children may ask questions about their story

- Teens may express anger, grief, or identity confusion
- Adults may revisit loss during major life moments
- This is normal. Loss doesn't disappear-it evolves.
- How You Can Support Healing
- You don't need to have all the answers to help a child heal from loss. What matters most is validation and openness.
- You can support your child by:
 - Naming loss in age-appropriate ways
 - Allowing mixed feelings about birth family and adoption
 - Avoiding "silver lining" statements that minimize pain
 - Keeping conversations open over time
 - Seeking trauma-informed, adoption-competent support when needed

Most importantly, children need to know that their grief is safe to share and that it won't threaten the love you have for them.

Holding Both Loss and Love

Acknowledging loss does not take away from the joy or connection in your family. In fact, it strengthens trust. When children see that all parts of their story are welcome, they feel safer bringing their whole selves into relationships.

By honoring loss, we help children build resilience, identity, and deeper connections rooted in truth and compassion.

Sources: adoption.org, Silverstein & Kaplan, *Lifelong Issues in Adoption*



Seven Core Issues – Four Types of Losses

By: Fernando Aquino, MSW

Allison Davis Maxon and Sharon Kaplan Roszia, authors of the *Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanency*, identify four types of loss that occur in adoption.

Core Losses – Core losses are “traumatic events that strike the center of the person’s being” (Kaplan Roszia and Davis Maxon). These original losses show up in the foster care, kinship, and adoption process, impacting all those involved. Core losses are also felt by adoptive parents, who not only support their adoptee in navigating loss but must also come to terms with the loss they’ve endured. Has infertility occurred? How do you feel about raising a child without a biological connection to you? How has this loss affected your connection to your partner? Your family? Your friend groups? Has this loss altered your perception of yourself?

Secondary Loss – These losses bring us back to the memory of the original core losses. For example, a birth father may feel the loss of his child on Father’s Day. Secondary losses are triggered by “sensory memories” or reminders of what was lost (Kaplan Roszia and Davis Maxon). This can look like a birth parent being asked, “Is he your child too?” or an adoptee being asked, “Why were you adopted?” Understanding what evokes these emotions and addressing them as a family or with a professional can decrease the effects of secondary loss.

Vicarious Loss – Vicarious loss stems from traumatic events and memories that are “embedded into one’s senses and are outside explicit, conscious memory” (Kaplan Roszia and Davis Maxon). This type of loss is often felt by caregivers who experience grief and emotional distress due to someone else’s trauma or suffering. Adoptive parents

may experience vicarious loss due to their child’s history. Children with vicarious trauma have challenges with emotional dysregulation. Adoptive families must work through helping a child regulate their emotions and make sense of their past, while also trying to connect with them. This can exacerbate vicarious loss in parents who carry their own life experiences (i.e., family history of mental illness and substance abuse), which can trigger an emotional response that you may have thought no longer affected you.

Ambiguous Loss – Ambiguous loss “is an injury that occurs without closure” (Kaplan Roszia and Davis Maxon). This loss often leaves a person with questions surrounding their loss and delays the grieving process. In short, this loss can be identified as losing a connection, leaving one uncertain of what happened to them. For example, an adopted child may have been part of a large sibling set where siblings were separated or placed with different families. If there is no connection, this can leave a child uncertain of their siblings’ whereabouts and well-being. Children are often left wondering, “Where are they now? How do they look?”

Loss is experienced by everyone involved in an adoption: the adoptee, the birth parents, the adoptive parents, and extended family members. Kaplan Roszia and Davis Maxon provide several tools to address loss, from practicing compassion and forgiveness to using outlets that provide comfort to therapy. It is important that the loss be addressed or it will continue to build over time.

Source: *Seven Core Issues in Adoption and Permanency* by Allison Davis Maxon and Sharon Kaplan Roszia, 2019



Activity: Creating a Lifebook

By: Tara Soria, MA

Creating a Lifebook with your child can help them work through complex feelings of grief and loss. Lifebooks are an irreplaceable gift to children, providing them with a vital link to their history before joining your adoptive (or foster) family. Think back to the “storytellers” in your own life. Lifebooks capture those storytelling voices for children who have been adopted or are in foster care. They often contain photographs, important documents and letters, artwork, mementos, and a narrative that records your child’s life journey. Lifebooks help children make sense of their experiences and to separate facts from fantasy. Lifebooks also integrate children’s past, present, and future, promoting healthy self-esteem and identity development. In addition, Lifebooks enhance attachment between parents and children, as parents enter the child’s world and experience. They facilitate the expression of grief for the loss of the birth family, siblings, foster families, familiar surroundings and items, and traumatic experiences.

Filling in the Gaps:

If you have little factual information about your child’s beginnings, this is an opportunity to do some detective work. Talk with people who knew your child. Examples may include case workers, foster parents, or birth family members who are available to share information with you. Look on social media for photographs you can print, as well as information about the birth family. You can also try to revisit important places in your child’s life to capture photographs and descriptions. If gaps still remain after your research- and they likely will- that’s okay. There is value in your efforts and documenting what you are able to access.

Some Ideas of What to Include in a Lifebook (as available):

- Photographs of people who have been in the child’s life
- Photographs of places the child visited, lived, and where they were born- get creative!
- Documents, including vital records, pertaining to the child (i.e., medical records)
- Letters and cards (i.e., received from birth family, caregivers, etc.)
- Footprints and/or fingerprints, child’s height and weight at birth, time of birth
- Developmental milestones, chart of height/weight
- Physical description of birth parents
- Genogram information
- Child’s early likes/dislikes
- How and why your child came to live with your family
- Stories about your child’s early days and years from people in their life at that time
- A list of schools your child has attended and yearly school pictures of the child
- Special awards from school, clubs, sports, IEP records, report cards
- Chronological listing of previous foster homes, pictures of the family members and pets from those homes
- Documentation of child’s religious milestones (ex. Baptism, First Communion, etc.), cultural practices, and traditions
- Other items of significance to the child

Things to Consider:

- Be forthcoming if you don’t know a piece of information

or answer to a question, or don't have photographs of your child before they came to your family.

- Prepare yourself in advance to explore truthful information with your child, both the positive and the painful. Working on the Lifebook is likely to stir up many feelings, both in your child and in you. Your child will only be comfortable sharing crucial parts of who they are if they sense you can handle it.
- As much as possible, according to age and development, co-create the Lifebook with your child. Even pre-school age children are able to help in creating their Lifebook.
- Be honest but respectful of birth parents.
- Be age-appropriate but leave space to add to the story as your child grows in understanding and has new thoughts, questions, or reflections.
- Make it easy to revise and still keep in chronological order. A 3-ring binder with sheet protectors works well.

- Include information about the future as well as the past. School-aged children may want to talk about what they want to be when they grow up; teenagers may want to include more details about their hopes, dreams, and goals.
- Teenagers may be especially interested in incorporating more artwork into their Lifebook, including collages, poetry, short stories, journals, etc.
- Don't try to complete the entire book in one sitting. You will need time to talk and process the stories and information as you go.

When creating a Lifebook, the biggest step is just getting started! A Lifebook truly is a "living document," that is intended to be created over time. For free, printable Lifebook pages in English and Spanish, please visit ifapa.org.

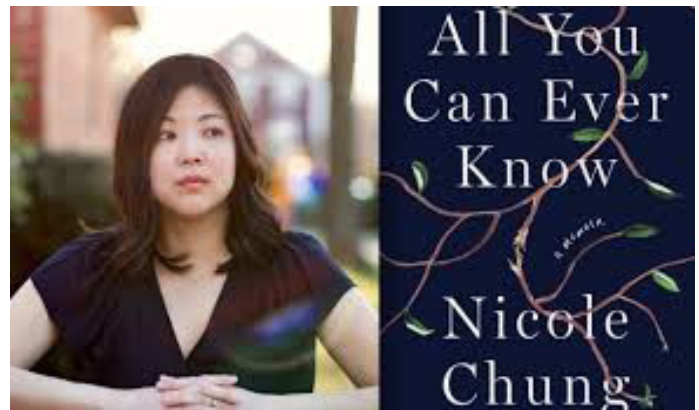
Sources: ifapa.org, belongingnetwork.com

All You Can Ever Know

By Nicole Chung

Review by Griselda Santillan Mejia, MS

Loss, in the context of the Seven Core Issues of Adoption, may include loss of family members, one's biological family tree (which includes history, culture, lineage, genetics, and historical information), a relationship with one's birth parents, social status, and power over one's own life circumstances. The memoir written by Nicole Chung, *All You Can Ever Know*, aims to explore what it means to lose one's roots. She was placed for adoption by her Korean parents and raised by a white family in a small town in Oregon. Nicole was the only person who looked like she did and was never introduced to her culture; she never truly felt like she belonged. Although her parents were loving and caring and were always very open about her story, Nicole struggled to "fit in." She grew up trying to find her identity as an Asian American adoptee. It was not until she left for college that Nicole felt she was free to discover who she was. She met other Asian American individuals, learned about her culture, and experienced a sense of belonging. She also embarked on a journey to learn more about her past and what she thought would be



the real story about why she was adopted, all while being pregnant for the first time. She also shares her insight into what it was like for her to have her daughter, her first known biological connection to another human being.

Those who have read this book describe Nicole's story as heartbreaking, enlightening, and told with warmth. Her story describes her desire to fit in and belong and gives readers a better understanding of the loss adoptees experience. Nicole's ability to be honest and share her story has been appreciated by many as it tells of the struggles adoptees may face, many of which are not openly discussed.

REACH *Event*

H I G H L I G H T



By Jade Vang, MSW

Holiday Celebration

The Winter holidays are a special time for children and their families. Aspiranet programs go above and beyond to partner with the community in collecting gifts and hosting a holiday celebration.

This year, an Aspiranet office had its annual holiday party at John's Incredible Pizza and were able to support over 17 families! Here is what families had to say about the event:



“This event was wonderful because they always treat us with kindness and appreciation and thank you for bringing smiles to our children’s faces.”

“I had the opportunity to meet other people and talk about how wonderful it has been to be an adoptive mother.”

“My children were able to talk and connect with other foster/adopt kids.”

“We enjoy seeing the children happily playing.”

“[This event] allowed for an outing with other parents that share same/similar experience.”

Support Groups, Trainings & Events

April

- 6 Adoption Preparation Training**
Module 7: Birth Family
6:00 - 8:00 pm (Zoom)
- 14 Parent Café**
6:30 - 8:00 pm (Zoom)
- 15 Support Group in Spanish**
9:30 - 11:30 am (Zoom)
- 20 Adoption Preparation Training**
Module 8: Normative Adoption
Issues/Stuck Spots
6:00 - 8:00 pm (Zoom)
- 28 Support Group in English**
6:00 - 7:30 pm (In-Person)

May

- 4 Adoption Preparation Training**
Module 9: Self-care and Supports
6:00 - 8:00 pm (Zoom)
- 8 Outdoor Movie Night**
Doors open at 6:30 pm
(Moravia Event Venue)
- 12 Parent Café**
6:30 - 8:00 pm (Zoom)
- 20 Support Group in Spanish**
9:30 - 11:30 am (Zoom)
- 26 Support Group in English**
6:00 - 7:30 pm (In-Person)

June

- 9 Parent Café**
6:30 - 8:00 pm (Zoom)
- 17 Support Group in Spanish**
9:30 - 11:30 am (Zoom)
- 23 Support Group in English**
6:00 - 7:30 pm (In-Person)

REACH Support Groups for Parents In-Person

Designed for adults thinking about adoption through foster care, families awaiting adoptive placement, and new and experienced resource and adoptive parents. Training hours provided. The REACH Parent Support Group is offered 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 Fernando Aquino at faquino@aspiranet.org.

Parent Café 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. Training hours provided. Parent Café is offered on the second Tuesday of each month, 6:30-8:00pm.via Zoom. To register for Parent Café, email Fernando Aquino at faquino@aspiranet.org and a link to the meeting will be emailed to you.

REACH Parent Support Group in Spanish Zoom

Este grupo está diseñado para adultos que piensan en la adopción, padres que esperan colocación adoptiva, y padres de niños adoptados. Horas de entrenamiento impartidas. Los enlaces de Zoom y los recordatorios se enviarán mensualmente. El Grupo de Apoyo para Padres de REACH en Español se ven en el tercer miércoles del mes. Para registrarse, comuníquese con Fernando Aquino llamanda al numero 559.222.4969 y preguntar por REACH o mandando email a faquino@aspiranet.org y se le envirara por correo electrónico un enlace a la reunión.

Adoption Preparation Training 6:00 – 8:00 pm via Zoom

Aspiranet's REACH programs offer Adoption Preparation Trainings, a free online training series to strengthen families built through foster, kinship care, and adoption, and for the professionals who support them. The series of nine modules will begin in January and end in May. Participants are free to attend sessions that are most relevant to their interests. Sessions are held every other Monday from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.



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Aspiranet REACH Adoption Support Services for Fresno County

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

REACH Newsletter – Quarterly newsletters filled with adoption articles, local trainings, book reviews, on-line resources and more.

Educational Workshops and Trainings – A variety of workshops and trainings will be made available.

Lending Library/Resource Directory– The REACH lending library is open and available for book review and check outs for families. A resource directory of local providers is also available to families.

Case Management – Ongoing case management is provided. REACH clients are provided with information, resource referral or other assistance as needed.

Crisis Counseling – Crisis intervention is available. Please contact our REACH staff for this support.