

How Conferences and Trainings Support Families

There are several conferences and trainings are offered throughout the year by PARC and other organizations. These events provide valuable information and important learning opportunities to help build parenting skills. Through keynote speakers, breakout sessions, and interactive trainings, parents have a chance to focus on specific topics that will help their families. Here are just a few of the topics that have been offered over the last year—

- Prenatal Exposure
- Core Issues of Adoption
- Therapeutic Parenting Skills
- Education, Schools, IEPs
- Human Trafficking
- Birth Parent Contact
- Skin, Hair and Self-Esteem
- Trauma
- Attachment
- Advocacy
- Mental Health
- Resources/Services
- Self-Care
- And many more.

Parents are encouraged to attend as often as they can. As children grow, they process their adoption stories differently and what might have not been a challenge in the past, might be difficult for them in the future. Many parents attend and listen closely to topics they haven't yet faced but want to be prepared to help their kids as they get older.

Another great benefit of attending conferences and trainings is the opportunity to spend time with other parents who are on a similar parenting journey and truly "get it". Parents can learn from each other, continue to build a support system and even meet a few new friends along the way.



An Attendee's Testimony— I cannot say enough about the benefits that attending conferences such as those presented by the Post Adoption Resource Center. One such conference held at Youth Haven in June of this year titled *Recharge* was especially impactful. As a guardian parent to an amazing 12 year old girl who has physical, emotional and mental health needs I seek out others who understood my families' journey. It was very clear that the parents and professionals who attended this conference understand that children who have been removed from their biological parents have experienced trauma and loss. Being in the presence of others who genuinely get it, is so important to my own mental health and my family's success.

The key note speaker at the Recharge conference, Kim Seidel, was simply amazing. She was very transparent about her life as an adopted child as well as her own journey of fostering and adopting children and the struggles she endured along the way. She encouraged participants to consider that traditional discipline is not always effective for children who have a trauma background.

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What have you learned today? I've changed my thinking from "what's wrong with my children?!?!" to "what could have happened to them?"

Reflections for the Journey by Carol Verville

Mike and Carol Verville were key-note speakers at a PARC conference in September. Here are some excerpts from their powerful message.

Don't take this journey alone!!!

At the time we adopted our oldest daughter, Rachel, we didn't know many people who had adopted. When I was growing up, my aunt and uncle were foster parents and three of her kids were adopted. But to me they were just my cousins and it was normal. And because I didn't think it was any different than anyone else starting a family, we did not reach out to others for help or support, especially in the hard times. I am not sure if we thought that no one would understand, or we didn't want to burden them with our issues because they might have some of their own, or if we thought we might be judged by others (like "you knew this could happen" or "this was your choice"). Through the years and working with many families as they go down the foster care or adoption road, we have heard many people who have seen their social circles shrink, friendships fade or disappear altogether and extended family relationships get strained because people don't understand why we might have to parent differently, or why our child isn't so social, or a myriad of other reasons. So we encourage you to find your 2 a.m. people. Who can you call when you are discouraged, or your child just had their fifth raging experience of the day, or you had to leave an event early because it was too overwhelming for your child. Is it family, a few close friends, another adoptive/ foster family who will truly "get it"?



Who is your
2 A.M.
person?

Say Yes! if someone offers to help you.

This was a hard one for me to learn. With a couple of our kids, I was offered to have meals brought to us. I felt guilty about saying yes, because I had not had the physical part of delivering a baby and needing to recover. So, I thought I shouldn't need help with basic things like meals. However, we still lose sleep when a new child comes into our home. We have to spend much more time with a new child to help them and the rest of the family adapt. So, it is okay to say yes for offers to help. If someone offers to hold your child so you can shower, say yes. Find someone who might not want to care for a child, but who is willing to help with laundry, or errands, or taking another child to their activity. If people offer-say yes. If they don't, it may be that they don't know what you need- so ask. I know if someone lets me know of a need they have, I will help if I can. And others will help you too.

We don't have to rescue or save our kids.

Our job is to love them. I am sure you have heard people ask you "how do you do it?" People will say they could never do what you are doing because it would be too hard. Of course, it is hard. Most things worth doing, are difficult in some way. With adoption there is the thrill of our new child, but there is the grief in knowing there is loss for others and most likely trauma for our child. Our job is to learn how to minimize the hard times and maximize the good ones. We find a balance of the good and the bad, the broken and the beautiful, the "this is what we hoped for" and "this isn't what we signed up for." We aren't rescuing or saving these kids. We are trying to give them hope by absorbing the difficult things and navigating them with these kids entrusted to us for a lifetime. We want to help these little people become who they are meant to be. We want to help them be the best version of themselves that they can be.

This is really a beautiful journey. But as you know, it is a journey.

Stay the Course

All Children Deserve Justice!

That even one child does not know the love of a family is a great injustice. That even one child faces abuse and neglect is an injustice. We have an opportunity of trying to do something about these injustices. When you have adopted, you will spend your lifetime trying to undo injustices that were done to your child. Social workers, attorneys, judges/referees, educators, therapists etc. will each try to help to undo the injustices. Will you be sad sometimes? Of course. Will you get angry as you hear some of the stories associated with the children in your care? Absolutely! But your role is to do the best you can utilizing the resources you have and finding support when you need it. Little by little, we can break down the walls these kids have built, we can work through issues with them. We look forward to what their future can look like while helping them work through their past. So, like I said before, don't do this alone. Reach out when you are discouraged and let others celebrate with you the victories. Find and connect with other families who have adopted. Say yes when someone offers to help. Remember we don't have to rescue these kids or solve every problem, just love them the best we can. If we can do these things, we can help bring justice to their world and their circumstances for their future.

This is really a beautiful journey. But as you know, it is a journey. I think of it like climbing a mountain. The view



is going to be spectacular, but it is a long, hard, exhausting hike to get up there. But once you see the view you are so glad you chose to stay the course and keep going.

Did you know?

PARC has a
Lending Library
of books, DVDs and audio
books available to
borrow.
Call (734)528-2043 to
borrow an item.



Chaos to Healing— Therapeutic Parenting 101 DVD now available at PARC's Lending Library

While many resources provide excellent theory on therapeutic parenting, many people still find themselves floundering day-to-day as they interact with their hurting children. Billy Kaplan, a clinical social worker, and Christine Moers, a therapeutic parent, sat down one day to talk about some very practical ways to implement therapeutic parenting every day. "Billy Kaplan and Christine Moers help us to understand the tremendous challenges that children face when they are given the chance to live in a safe home with caring and committed parents, after first having experienced neglect and abuse. They do not give us magical techniques or parenting cookbooks. They direct our minds to the basics: an attitude of playfulness, acceptance, curiosity, and empathy (PACE) along with the value of developing a home that provides these children with safety, supervision, structure, and support. They offer no quick fix: Christine speaks of the need to interact with your child, again, and again, and again. . . . However, they leave us with hope and renewed energy to provide these children with what they desperately need." - Dan Hughes, Ph.D.

I enjoyed all the presenters. I found so much useful information and made some new connections!



Region 5 Meetings and Support Groups

Build connections with and get support from others who truly understand!

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I had heard similar advice from therapists and at other conferences; however, Kim went a step further. Kim Seidel gave animated examples and showed discipline with a positive relationship building outcome for both the parent and the child. When doubting parents would challenge her, she would call willing participants to the front and discuss their challenges and then act out the situation, showing an approach with positive relationship outcomes for both the child and parent. Her message at its core was a positive relationship with your child is important. Another strong message was, don't let fear drive your parenting. Oops! I was guilty of that. I am so thankful to Kim for these powerful messages that required me to examine my parenting in a deeper way.

I am also thankful to the other parents at this conference for sharing their stories so I would not feel so alone and I could learn and grow from their examples. I appreciate the Post Adoption Resource Center for providing conferences and trainings that allow me to be reminded to show grace to my little girl who struggles in so many areas, that I am not perfect, that I am doing really hard work and that while love is not always enough, **relationship can be everything.**



Monthly Support Group— **Fabulous Foster and Adoptive Families**

For parents and youth! Teen and Pre-teens may join the PARC Youth Group or join in the activities provided for younger children.

When: First Monday of each month

Time: 6 - 8 p.m.

Location: 2/42 Community Center 648 S. Wagner Rd.
Ann Arbor MI 48103

Group starts with a potluck; please bring a dish to pass if you are able.

Upcoming trainings and conferences:

Trainings:

January 19, 2019— Ethnic Self-Esteem through Skin and Hair Care in Flint

February 23, 2019— Black Skin and Hair Care in Kalamazoo

June 29, 2019— IEP/ Special Education Advocacy in Kalamazoo

Conferences:

February 23, 2019 in Lenawee county

March 9, 2019 in Fenton (Genesee County)

August 3, 2019 in Rives Junction (Jackson County)

Video Simulcast:

April 5-6, 2019 Empowered to Connect in several locations TBD

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