



## Building Resilient Families Conference Review

On Saturday, March 2, Judson Center PARC had a great turn out at our conference, Building Resilient Families. Adoptive, Kinship, Guardianship and Foster Parents and Professionals spent a full day learning ways to support children and families. The keynote speaker was Lauren Peabody, LMSW. She is an experienced therapist specializing in family therapy, play therapy, internal family systems and attachment therapy.

The response from all who attended was overwhelming positive about Ms. Peabody's presentation. It went right to the heart of what we need to know in order to build resilience in families and help children heal from the trauma of a disrupted attachment in their past. The presentation covered the effects of trauma on brain development, and how to understand behavior. She taught that the parent can control the environment, but not the child. Part of that is for the parent to use strategies to stay regulated themselves. Ms. Peabody encouraged parents to keep a journal, practice mindfulness and utilize empathy in order to support children in becoming calm and regulated.

She addressed common behaviors related to trauma, such as lying, defiance, stealing and aggression, and why consequences are often shame producing and ineffective. She provided strategies for building connection, creating felt safety and using discipline as teaching to improve the behavior and build resilience.

The information provided a new way of viewing challenging behaviors, as well as practical strategies to support children in healing.

Participants enjoyed a delicious lunch together, and had the opportunity to connect with other parents and professionals. Afterward, there were a variety of breakout sessions from experienced presenters on topics such as Therapeutic Parenting, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Adverse Childhood Experiences and several others. The conference was a great day for caregivers to connect, learn, and recharge, before returning to the important work of building resilience in families.

PARC hosts several conferences and trainings throughout the year. These conferences are always free of charge and geared to provide helpful information for adoptive and guardian families. Your attendance is highly encouraged.



“So much good information that pertained to the children I adopted !” conference attendee

# What is “felt safety”?



## Does My Child Feel Safe?

By Rachel Kornilakis, PARC Family Worker and Adoptive Parent

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is the cornerstone of modern day social science and our Post Adoption Resource Center has been concentrating their 2019 newsletter series on a resource family style hierarchy of needs. Our last newsletter highlighted information to help families address children's physical needs which is the baseline level in the hierarchy. Once physical needs have been met, the next level in the hierarchy is security needs. Helping children who have experienced trauma and loss find “felt safety is one of the fundamental concepts of trauma informed care.”<sup>1</sup>

Before coming home to our family, my children lived in neighborhoods and houses where break-ins and gun violence were real problems. Our neighborhood is a relatively safe place with low rates of crime, so the kids were safe at our house, but our kids didn't truly feel safe for several years. My children's brains had been conditioned by their traumatic experiences to be on high alert for danger even when in their own home. Young people usually don't have the self awareness or the words to tell adults that they don't have felt safety so, the fear often times manifests in hard to interpret behaviors and actions.

One of my kids never seemed to feel safe outside and that was very challenging for us because we love to be outdoors.

There were many times when we were extremely frustrated.

It wasn't until several years later that our child was able to tell us about a shooting they had witnessed outside their home, where a member of the community was killed. My child didn't seem to remember this event before that day when the memory was triggered and it all came out. When recalling the story, my child had a severe trauma reaction. This event had obviously shaken my child to their core. It was a heartbreaking revelation that connected a lot of dots for us. If we had known about this experience and how traumatic it was for our child, we may have done some things differently and would have perhaps had more compassion during our most difficult times. It left us wondering how many other untold traumas were impacting our children's daily lives.

Our families use a lot of different strategies to help our kids build felt safety, such as<sup>2</sup>:

- Having a bedtime routine that includes locking up the house.
- Creating predictable routines and schedules.
- Keeping their world small and introducing children to new environments and people slowly.
- Helping kids identify safe people and places outside the home.
- Consistent care from a calm adult.
- Enrolling kids in self defense or martial arts classes.

**Felt safety is one of the fundamental concepts of trauma informed care.**

## Talk to your kids about Protective Factors.

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For our kids, we spent time talking about the protective factors of our home. We live on a busy corner and we are good friends with many of our neighbors so we know that our neighborhood is always looking out for us. We have two dogs who love to bark at anything that moves and we know they will alert and protect if needed.

“This” Mom and Dad are good at keeping kids safe. These types of reassurances seemed to help our kids but really time was the essential element. It takes a lot of time in a safe, stable home for kids to feel safe again.

One of our kids had a hard time feeling safe at school as well, so we tried some strategies. We noticed our child always seemed to feel anxious when someone was behind them whether that be in the car, on a bike or in a line. It was a common concern for them. So our first school strategies included making sure their seat always faced the door and having them stand at the end of any line. Another strategy we used was to identify a “safe” person in the building who they could go to if they were having anxiety.

Those simple strategies helped improve behaviors at school tenfold by increasing felt safety.



### Opportunity Awaits.....

By Somer Vickery, PARC Family Worker

As we go through the business of life we realize that life goes by quickly. One minute our children are babies and then in the blink of an eye they are graduating high school and heading off to college.

Over the years, as they became settled in our home and at school, our children’s safety needs dramatically decreased. However, there are times when trauma triggers bring the issue of “felt safety” back to the forefront. Last year, there were several lock downs at one of my child’s school because of bomb or gun threats. Those lock downs were very triggering to my child and we could see previous behaviors coming back. We had to go back to our intervention planning and reassurances to help him/ her through another difficult time. He/she was able to stabilize more quickly than he/she would have in our first years of family life together. This was a welcome sign of the progress we have made. Progress with our child feeling safe and having built up their resilience and progress with us as parents knowing how and when to intervene.

- 1 Bath, H. (2008) The Three Pillars of Trauma Informed Care.
- 2 Purvis, K., Cross, D., Sunshine, W., (2007) The Connected Child.



We all go through life in our own way. I just wanted to take a moment to reflect that we all can take a minute and slow down to be able to spend a special moment with our loved ones. As our children grow, they need in us in different ways. As infants their needs are different when they are adults. As parents we need to take time with them and make memories when we have the opportunity. To us as parents it may seem small but to the child it could mean everything.

Taking time with your children to play a board game, play catch, paint their nails, do their hair, draw a picture, make slime, eat dinner and have movie nights could mean the world to them. We have water parks, amusement parks, drive in theatres, campgrounds, apple orchards, 4<sup>th</sup> of July fireworks, escape rooms, the great Lakes and many more! Please take time with your loved ones to make a memory this summer.

**Spend some special moments with your loved ones!**

# Region 6 Events

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

## Monthly Support Group:

### **Family Connections Meeting– Flint**

Adoptive and guardian families are invited to receive support and build connections with others who share a similar story.

When: First Thursday of each month

Time: 6 - 8 p.m.

Location: South Baptist Church G-4091 Van Slyke Rd.  
Flint, MI

Group starts with a potluck; please bring a dish to pass if you are able. Childcare provided for children 5 and over with RSVP

RSVP to Luginia\_Srygley@judsoncenter.org or call 734-528-2004.

### **Adoptive, Guardian, Kinship and Foster Families– Lapeer**

When: Second Wednesday of each month

Time: 6:30– 8:30 p.m.

Location: St. Paul Lutheran Church 90 Millville Rd.  
Lapeer, MI

Come connect with families that share the same experiences.

RSVP to Somer\_Vickery@judsoncenter.org or call 810-732-8510.

## Trainings:

**June 29, 2019** – IEP/ Special Education Advocacy in Kalamazoo

**July 27, 2019** - Independence Lake Family Picnic

**August 1, 2019** -Human Trafficking in Flint (Youth Edition)

**August 10, 2019** – Inter-racial adoption and Self Esteem in Kalamazoo

**Looking for a specific training topic or a way to connect to other adoptive/guardian families? -**  
Contact PARC and we'll schedule something in your area.

## Conferences:

**September 14, 2019** – Mike Berry, Foster and Adoptive Parent and Author.– Port Huron

**August 2, 2019** in Rives Junction (Jackson County) At Youth Haven with Keynote speaker Stephanie Grant, PhD.



**For a complete list of events, visit the calendar page on our website. Additional activities and resources are listed there as well!**

<http://www.parc-judson.org/calendar>



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