



## Love and Belonging

By Rachel Kornilakis, PARC Family Worker and Adoptive Parent

In this series of articles, we've been looking at the hierarchy of needs and how it relates to families caring for children not living with their family of origin and children impacted by traumatic stress. Most of us can agree that human beings all have common needs. In the first two tiers of the hierarchy we took a closer look at physical needs and safety needs. Meeting those needs can be more challenging for our families due to the complex trauma and neglect the children we love have experienced. Caring for children who have experienced the world as a dangerous place where they must depend on themselves to meet their needs is far more complex and challenging than caring for secure children who see the world as a safe place where adults can be trusted. These challenges extend

into the third tier of needs, which are social needs. Social needs, including connectedness, love and belonging are essential to human development and fulfillment. Humans have a deep need to be connected to other people and long for acceptance, belonging and love.

However, due to the impact of complex trauma, many of our children blame themselves for the abuse, neglect and displacement they have endured and feel as though they are unwanted and unlovable.

Some of our children have trouble feeling comfortable in their adoptive families and communities and struggle with a sense of belonging. Other children struggle with relationships outside the home, including relationships with peers. Children who feel unlovable and disconnected may exhibit a wide range of unsociable behaviors designed to keep them safe and at a comfortable distance from people and a world that, based on past experiences, are unsafe and unreliable. It's our job to help our children find a secure place in this world and that job is not easy when your child is pushing you away.



## **RELATE!**

So how can families help children move towards relationship and connection? My best strategies can be summed up with **RELATE**:

To **RELATE** with my children I use **Ridiculousness** on a regular basis. In my home, nothing disarms or builds connection with a child more than strategic lightheartedness and a sense of humor. Some examples include, using silly voices, breaking out into a song of My Girl or You Are My Sunshine, yelling out the car window, I love (name of my child!) and impromptu dance parties. Not all kids react the same, but most of my children do really well when they are having big feelings and instead of my reacting in a negative way, Mom gets ridiculous.

**Enjoy life!** I work with families that have lost their sense of joy in the home. No parenting strategy, safety plan or intervention is going to work if everyone in the home is miserable. We have to find a way to keep it joyful with our children even when life is really hard. What are you doing to celebrate life? What are you doing to have fun and maintain recreation? What are you doing to renew and refresh? These things have to be a top priority.

**Look** for opportunities where your children can build relationships. If socialization doesn't come easy to your child, it might be to your benefit to become an active social recruiter and planner. In my house we are always looking for people who can connect with our kids and we go out of our way to encourage and nurture relationships with peers or supportive adults.

Social engagements are also important. You name it, and we have tried it: sports, classes, recreation, church, community groups and camps. You might have to seek out a variety of options to find something that works for your kids. This is especially true with sports, some of our kids can't tolerate team sports so individual sports work better for them.

**Allow mistakes.** Mistakes are a natural progression of learning. Kids who are already disdainful of failure really struggle with negative feedback. Helping a child cope with a mistake and learn from it instead of coming down on them as they are expecting, can go a long way when trying to build attachment. When my children break something by mistake or get a bad grade, I always say to them, I love you more than (whatever happened). You are more important to me than anything that is breakable or temporary. I know this message has really meant a lot to my kids over the years. A couple times I've even heard them saying it to their friends. On the flip side of allowing mistakes is praising the successes. Make sure to offer praise when things are going right.

**Take time with your kids.** Kids heal through relationships and their relationship with you will be the foundation for every other relationship they have. Besides, your kids are amazing people! Take the time now to really get to know and enjoy them, because they will be grown quicker than you realize. So carve out some special time with them each day. Evidence shows, just ten minutes of undivided time a couple times a day can go a long way in building connection and attachment.



Raising these kids takes a tremendous amount of **Empathy**. You are going to have more success if you can see things from their point of view. So keep looking at them through that trauma lens and remember to be a feelings detective when feelings and behaviors are getting big. Also, remember not to take it personally when they push you away.

# Re-Charge Your Parenting “Toolbox”



## 2nd Annual Re-Charge Conference

On Friday August 2nd, 2019, PARC hosted the second annual Re-Charge Conference at Youth Haven Ranch in Rives Junction, MI (Jackson County). This year's event highlighted keynote speaker Dr. Stephanie Grant. Dr. Grant is trained as a developmental psychologist and is licensed as a professional counselor. She has master's degrees in Marriage and Family Therapy and Psychology and a PhD in Lifespan Developmental Psychology. Her clinical and research interests focus on working with infants and children with attachment concerns and trauma histories, specifically those who have adoption or foster care backgrounds. She is also a foster and adoptive parent herself.

Dr. Grant's keynote presentation, as well as the Recharge conference overall, was well received by the attendees. If you ever have the chance to hear Dr. Grant speak, or attend a PARC conference, it is highly recommended to do so. The information below is from the slides presented by Dr. Grant.

Dr. Grant's training provided an explanation of neurodevelopmental trauma and the importance of a safe adult to help the child through the effects of the trauma. For a child with a trauma history, the stress response system in the brain is programmed to stay in the “on” position and children often can't use the thinking parts of their brains. Kids often struggle to stay calm and once

escalated, they struggle to get calm again. Dr. Grant explained in general, traumas that happen to infants and young children in particular are processed by the child as if they are at fault, that they caused it or deserved it. This often leads to a sense of worthlessness or overall “badness”.

Then the children often try to “prove” they are bad. Additionally, early trauma can result in differences in responses to stress, abilities to regulate and focus, perspectives of threats, beliefs about the world, impulse control, frustration tolerance, use of aggression and the need to control. With these differences, our children's brains are best prepared to try to survive against the odds in an unsafe world. They are not neurologically prepared to thrive in a safe environment.

However, there are several effective strategies for supporting children affected by trauma. Here are a few

- Acknowledge that your child is not having behavioral problems, these are neurological difficulties. He/She is struggling to feel safe and calm.
- Change from consequences to what can be taught to regulate stress and feel safe.
- Create and keep firm boundaries for safety.
- Create consistency and be predictable
- Meet physical/sensory needs in an appropriate way (jump, dance, arm wrestle, hug tightly, chew gum, massage).
- Connect with your child, respond quickly, respond don't react, be intentional.
- Be dependable. Children need to learn to be effectively dependent before they can be effectively independent.
- Change your approach. Watch your posture and demeanor. Get lower than the child's eyes. Watch facial expressions and keep your voice calm.
- Co-regulate. You are how they will remain calm and how they will calm down when escalated.
- Be playful. Use humor. Be silly. Teach through play.

# Region 5 Events

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

## 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.

RSVP to [Jane\\_argiero@judsoncenter.org](mailto:Jane_argiero@judsoncenter.org)  
or call 517-937-7580



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>



## Coffee and Connection

**September 9, 2019**-Calhoun

**September 9, 2019**- Washtenaw

**September 15, 2019**-Livingston

## Trainings

**September 13, 2019**– Mike Berry, Foster and Adoptive Parent and Author– Monroe

**October 10, 2019**– Black Hair and Skin Care– Barry County

## Conferences

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



### **Region 5 Office**

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