



## **Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) Comes to Ventura County!**

Ventura County Children & Family Services has selected Kids & Families Together to provide kinship support services through the state funded Kinship Support Services Programs (KSSP). The KSSP provides community-based family support services to relative caregivers and the dependent children placed in their homes by the juvenile court and to those who are at risk of dependency or delinquency.

The increasing number and proportion of Ventura County children in out-of-home care and placed in the homes of relatives are among the most important child welfare trends of the decade. This is due to the declining pool of traditional foster families, along with recognition of the benefits of family care (Child Welfare League of America, January/February 1995).

### **What is kinship care?**

“Relative” means an adult who is related to the child by blood, adoption, or affinity within the fifth degree of kinship, including stepparents, stepsiblings, and all relatives whose status is preceded by the words “great,” “great-great,” or “grand,” or the spouse of any of these persons, even if the marriage was terminated by death or dissolution.

### **What is the Kinship Support Services Program?**

It’s a common practice: relatives step forward to offer their homes, their time, and their love to grandchildren, nieces, nephews and other kin whose parents can no longer care for them. It happens in all cultures and locales. Relatives taking care of their kin face numerous challenges: the relative may be a senior, in poor health, socially isolated



and/or emotionally unprepared to assume the responsibility for young children despite their best wishes. The children, often abused or neglected, may have physical or behavior problems that require professional help in addition to the nurturing attention of the relative caregiver. Our KSSP program is aimed at helping relatives do the best job they can in raising these children, so the family can remain together. Services for kinship families include support groups, respite, information and referral, mentoring, tutoring, provisions for clothing, food, transportation, and legal assistance.

## Lifebooks Are Forever\*

By Lynne Okun, MFT, Art Therapist

Many foster, kinship, and adopted children have secret thoughts about their history and reasons for separation from their birth families, believing that somehow they are responsible for certain situations. I have found that using Lifebooks to help these children create and keep a record of their unique lives can reduce this kind of magical thinking, as well as have a profound impact.

Lifebooks are a place where a child can express his/her dreams of the present and future, talents, favorite foods, hobbies, family history/ family tree, and develop a connection to their cultural heritage.

The “birthparent” page of a Lifebook is particularly important during the child’s adolescent years, when identity issues begin to peak. The more the child knows, the more that child will feel “real”.

Lifebooks give children some control over their own stories. Whenever they feel like it, they can pick up their Lifebook and look at it, and may choose to share it with

people they feel close to or would like to know them better. A child can look at it when the urge hits without having to ask.

Lifebooks free up a child to pay better attention in school or to be more available to focus on talents and interests. Better for a child to be out playing soccer or painting a picture than to be fantasizing about “what happened.”

Lifebooks are the ultimate teaching tool and they can save hours of therapy later in life. Small group

workshops and individual sessions are available depending on interest and availability. Medi-Cal is accepted. Groups are held in the Kids’ Arts studio located in downtown Ventura, behind the Kids & Families Together Center.

*For more information on Lifebooks and upcoming workshops, please contact Lynne Okun at 653-0817 or email LBOkun@earthlink.net. \*Some of the information on the value and purpose of Lifebooks has been shared by Beth O’ Malley, M.Ed.*



## Trauma, Brain, & Relationship: Helping Children Heal (2004)

Santa Barbara Graduate Institute

Reviewed By Dianne Nicholas, MFT Intern-K&FT Program Coordinator

Based on advances in brain research, Trauma, Brain, & Relationship: Helping Children Heal is an engaging 30-minute documentary that introduces new awareness about the many causes of trauma in children. Results indicate that seemingly harmless incidents can

cause significant traumatic responses in young children. Trauma can affect their ability to focus, calm themselves, and be aware of others. It is the source of chronic learning and attention problems, as well as emotional, social and physical problems. Through a series of

interviews, the documentary highlights the powerful way in which primary relationships can heal trauma in young children. This is a must-see for both caregivers and professionals working with foster, adoptive, or kinship families.

**This video is available for viewing at our K&FT Center. Please call to schedule an appointment.**

## Video Review

# Having Faith

By Faith Friedlander, MFT—K&FT Programs Director

*Dear Faith,*  
*Recently, my husband and I adopted two kids out of foster care. We want to be good parents and respond to our children lovingly and appropriately. We are learning through various classes about the importance of providing our children with structure, nurture, engagement and challenge to help them become securely attached to us and to help them heal from past trauma. We have been hearing that it is important for us to address our own attachment history in order to better understand ourselves and our children. Could you tell us more?*  
*Sincerely, Eager to Parent Well*

Most parents start out eager to be good parents, but are soon baffled when they find themselves feeling highly reactive to various behaviors of their children.

The secure attachment between child and caregiver happens in the context of a loving supportive relationship through on-going experiences of attunement. This refers to the frequent interactions between parent and infant in which both are sharing affect and focusing attention on each other in such a way that the child's enjoyable feelings are amplified and his/her stressful experiences are reduced and contained. This is done through eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and movements, voice tone, timing and touch. It is through this ongoing attunement that a child learns that he/she is loved and that his/her primary caregiver can meet his/her needs and can be trusted to keep him/her safe. Therefore, it's important for the caregiver to remain regulated and not allow his/her own history to interfere with the way he/she interacts with the child.

Children with disrupted attachments, especially due to neglect or abuse, have learned that the world is unsafe and that caregivers are often abusive, uncaring and not to be trusted. This is why when a child enters a new home with

this kind of history, often exhibits controlling and disruptive behavior in an attempt to cope with life. As difficult as some of these behaviors may be for the parents, a disruptive child needs attunement and empathy more than anything else from his/her new parents in order to be able to securely attach and ultimately turn to his/her caregiver for nurturing and genuine emotional support. Of course the acting out child needs structure and consequences within his/her life but in order to build the relationship between the parent and the child, consequences need to be given with an abundance of nurturing and a desire on the parents' part to understand the deeper meaning of the behaviors that their child is exhibiting.

For example, a parent confronted with an angry and out of control child, may suddenly find him/herself becoming dysregulated when an angry child says, "I hate you! I don't have to listen to you because you aren't my real parent." A dysregulated parent responds, "You're ungrateful and shouldn't say such horrible things!" Even though the parent may want to understand the deeper meaning of the child's behavior, he/she finds it difficult, in the moment, not to respond with rage. This internal rage signals

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## Counseling Orientations now available!

**Do you struggle in your relationship with your foster, adoptive, or kinship child?**

**Do you have trouble making sense of his/her behaviors?**

To find out more about our therapeutic services for foster, adoptive, and kinship children, caregivers and professionals are invited to join us for an informal Counseling Orientation which includes:

- An overview of Kids & Families Together's Clinical Programs
- An overview of K&FT's two therapeutic treatment models (Theraplay & Dyadic Developmental Psychotherapy)
- An Introduction to Attachment
- Recommended reading materials
- Tools and ideas to help facilitate a loving connection between you and your child

Available once a month. Call for dates and times.

## About Us

Kids & Families Together is a not-for-profit organization that offers a safe, supportive resource, education, and counseling center where families and the community can meet and share information regarding foster, kinship, and adoptive care.

OUR MISSION is to strengthen relationships and provide safe, supportive help and education that keeps families emotionally connected to one another.

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"Our Center"

## Having Faith *(continued from Page 3)*

that something from the caregiver's own unresolved childhood is likely being triggered.

On the other hand, a therapeutic, regulated parent may not like hearing his/her child express such anger, but is more likely to stay calm. The caregiver is able to understand that this rage is an expression of what is going on in the child's "inner world". Inside the child may say, "I am afraid to be close to you. I don't trust that you really care about me. I'm afraid that you'll eventually hurt me and abandon me just like my first parents. I want to push you away before you leave me like all the other important adults in my life."

Taking the time to explore your own history of growing up will help you to understand yourself and your triggers. Some of the questions that I would encourage you to begin to ask yourself include, What was my parents' philosophy of growing up? What did I like about my childhood? What didn't I like? What was my relationship like with my mother and with my father? How was it similar? How did it differ? Did I ever feel rejected or threatened by my parents? Did anyone significant in my life die when I was a child?

The above is just the beginning of significant questions to explore in order to better understand yourself and your relationship with your child. By looking into your past, you'll shed light on your relationship with your child now and open the door to being a better parent. I truly hope you accept this gift of understanding yourself and that you find the journey fulfilling! If you are interested in understanding how your personal attachment history affects your parenting, please join us for our Fostering Attachments Workshops. For more information, visit our website or call us at 805.643.1446.

### You Can Help!

Much of our support for items such as our "free" lending library and outreach to the community comes through the generosity of our donors. Kids & Families Together is a California not-for-profit organization tax exempt under IRC Sec. 501c(3). We appreciate any financial assistance that you may give us.

## Opportunities for Education, Understanding, and Support at Kids & Families Together

- Fostering Attachments Workshops
- Counseling Orientations & Therapeutic Services
- Legal Guardianship/Kinship Support
- Adoption Therapy & Support
- Support Education & Training for Foster & Kinship Caregivers
- Kinship & Foster Parent Mentors
- Permanent Connections for youth leaving the foster care system and emancipated youth.
- FOOD Share
- Lending Library
- Free art programs through "Kids' Arts"
- Free one-on-one tutoring through "Support for the Kids"
- Resource & Referral

**For more information, visit our New Website! [www.kidsandfamilies.org](http://www.kidsandfamilies.org)**  
**New features include a Latest News section, a Calendar of Events, and much more.**