APAC

Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections

2025 | ISSUES 80 - 83

Newsletter Archive



Children's Aid Society of Alabama

APAC, YOUR PARTNERS ON THE ADOPTION JOURNEY

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Children's Aid Society of Alabama

ALABAMA PRE/POST ADOPTION CONNECTIONS

Children's Aid Society of Alabama is honored to collaborate with the Alabama Department of Human Services to provide APAC education and supportive services to strengthen and empower Alabama's adoptive families.

SPRING 2025 | ISSUE 80

CULTIVATING CONNECTIONS

"If people did not love one another, I really don't see what use there would be in having any spring."

— *Victor Hugo*

Technology and Adoption: Navigating Social Media with Adopted Teens



Charnita Ponder, MSW
APAC Adoption Navigator

Technology has always been seen as either a bright opportunity or a daunting challenge, throughout every generation. It has accelerated access to information and communication, yet it can also be difficult to manage, especially for foster and adoptive parents trying to guide their children through the complexities of social media.

According to APAC family therapist Rakeisha Hampton, LMSW, one of the biggest concerns for foster and adoptive parents is the lack of control over who their child communicates with online.

> ***Many families worry about children reconnecting with biological family members through social media. This can lead to misinformation, false promises, and emotional challenges, especially for teenagers.***

Some children actively search for their biological families online, and for older youth, there are often few ways to prevent it.

Tony Hynes explains that there are many benefits to helping adoptees connect with biological family. He explains this in great depth during his APAC Trained Therapist Network (TTN) presentation, **Connections Matter**. You do want to manage this interaction safely, and the reality is that technology complicates things.

A recent study published in Fostering Families Today highlights just how consuming social media is in the lives of teens. The article **Navigating Social Media with Foster and Adopted Teens** (Renick, 2023) reports that 94% of teens are online daily, with an average usage of nine hours per day. Additionally:

- **55% have shared personal information with someone they didn't know.**
- **29% have been contacted by a stranger.**
- **43% change their behavior when a parent is watching.**
- **67% know how to hide their online activity from parents.**

Please know that despite these risks, social media is not entirely negative. When navigated thoughtfully, it can provide healthy connections, emotional support, and a sense of belonging. Of course, it is important to monitor what is posted on a child's social media profile to ensure that signs are not being missed in their quest to discover who they are. Yet, the key is to approach it as an ally rather than an adversary, guiding teens toward safe and responsible online interactions. Monitoring their social media presence, setting clear boundaries, and fostering open communication can help parents support their child's digital well-being without being viewed as the enemy determined to put an end to their fun.

For further guidance on managing social media use in foster and adoptive families, visit our CAS training website and view **Tackling Technology** with Barb Clark. Jamie Golden's **Smart and Safe Social Media** training is also a great watch that will help you navigate this tricky tech world with your child. Our webinars and resources provide valuable strategies to help parents and professionals create a safer online experience for youth in care.





Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth in Adoptive Families

Rakeisha Hampton, LMSW
APAC Counselor

Adoption itself can be a challenging process for youth. Adding other factors related to existing as an LGBTQ+ youth, could make things all the more taxing. Even with LGBTQ+ youth being represented in the foster/adoption population, about 30% of youth in foster care identify as LGBTQ+; they still face obstacles. This article will discuss challenges and tips to create a welcoming and home environment for youth.

Challenges:

1. **Discrimination and Rejection: LGBTQ+ youth will likely face discrimination and rejection from biological families, which could possibly lead to their placement in foster care or adoption systems, (Youth may be neglected, run away from home, etc. due to being rejected). This history can result in trauma and a lack of trust in potential caregivers.**

2. **Mental Health Concerns: Due to stigma from society and discrimination, LGBTQ+ youth are at a higher risk to experience mental health issues, including depression and anxiety. Adoptive families must be prepared to provide appropriate mental health support.**

3. **Lack of Affirming Care: Many adoptive families may not be equipped to support LGBTQ+ youth, lacking knowledge about sexual orientation and gender identity. This gap can also lead to feelings of isolation and neglect for the youth.**

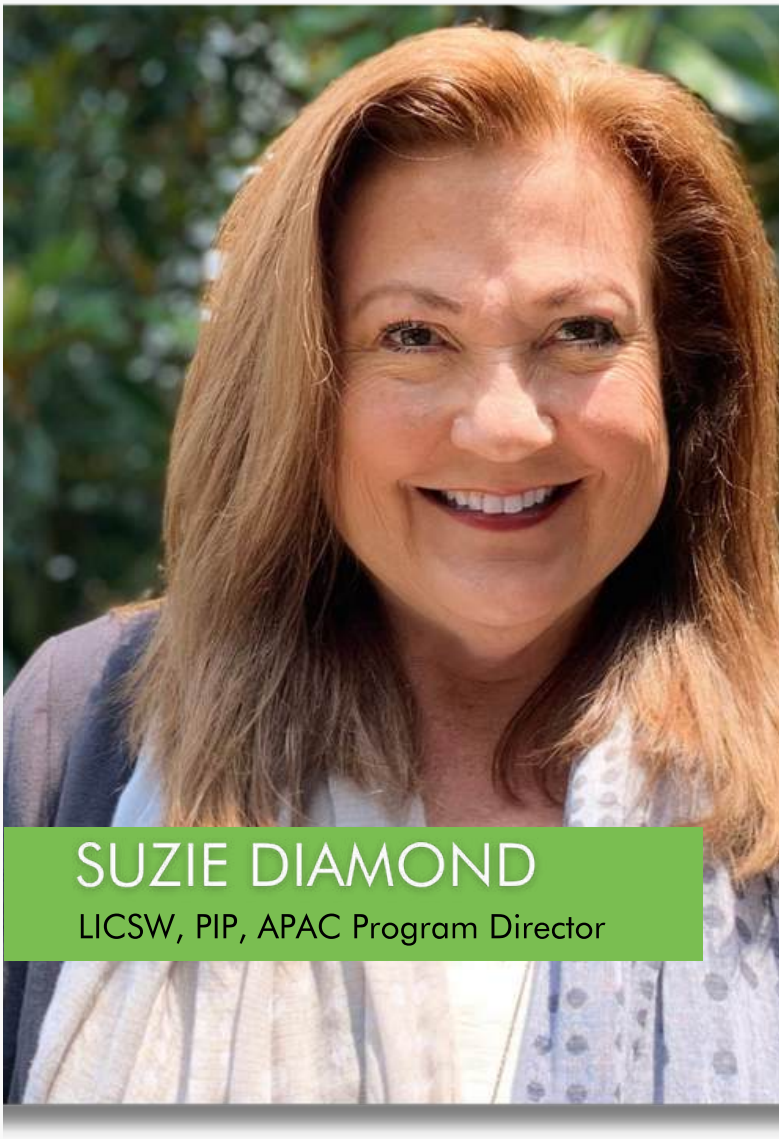
Now that we know of some of the challenges youth face, let's discuss a few ways to help them feel accepted/supported, safe and welcomed.

Creating Affirming Environments: Adoptive families can and should try to create safe and supportive spaces by educating themselves about LGBTQ+ issues, using inclusive language, and advocating for the child's rights.

Access to Support Networks: Organizations like APAC offer **resources** to help families support LGBTQ+ youth. Resources include webinars, a private Facebook group and monthly AFG meetings to be connected with other adoptive families. Also, take steps to reach out and see what resources are available in your community.

Promoting Resilience and Identity Development: The main goal is supporting the child's identity development. With the right support, LGBTQ+ youth can develop strong identities and resilience, leading to positive outcomes in adulthood. The National Institutes of Health states that identity development aids youth's mental well being, self-esteem and social functioning, which is essential for them to thrive. In the end, that's what we hope all children will achieve, feeling that they have a place in this world where they are valued and loved.

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Please join us as we welcome Spring 2025 with a new edition of our APAC e-newsletter. Daylight hours are longer; children's laughter fills the breeze. Spring signifies a time of renewal as nature awakens from her winter's slumber. Daffodils emerge as if to say, reach for the sunshine and warmth, it's time to come outside and play.

Spring encourages us to nurture our connections with others, our family, neighbors and communities. Spring offers hope for a brighter future. I encourage you to explore new ways of spending time together; unplug from devices and dive into nature.

Novelist, Anne Lamont, offers her reflection for the season, "I am going to try to pay attention to the Spring. I am going to look around at all the flowers, and look up at the hectic trees. I am going to close my eyes and listen." Perhaps we can all focus on hearing the sounds of the season and one another**.**

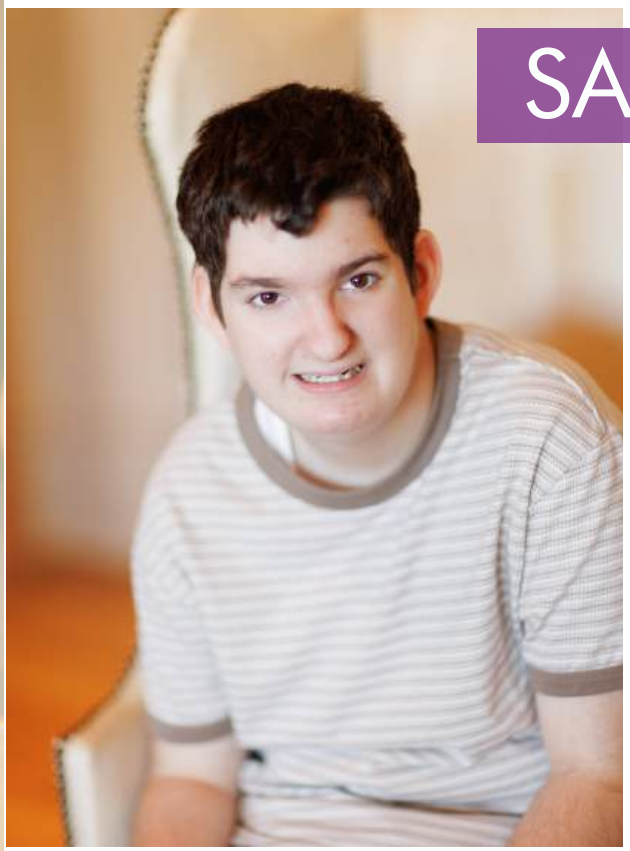
We extend our gratitude to our partners: the **Alabama Department of Human Resources Office of Adoption, Heart Gallery of Alabama,** and the **Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (AFAPA).** We also thank the 67 county DHR offices we have the honor of working with as we serve the children of Alabama.

Help us find forever families for Alabama's waiting children. If you or someone you know is considering adoption or needs brochures to share, contact us at **apac@childrensaid.org** or call **866-803-2722.** APAC operates statewide, and has offices in **Birmingham, Huntsville, Montgomery and Mobile.**
Like and follow us on social media to support our efforts in helping children find permanency.

Happy Spring!

ALABAMA'S WAITING CHILDREN

There are currently over 220 children across the state of Alabama waiting to join their Forever Family. Please visit heartgalleryalabama.com to meet more kids waiting to be adopted or to inquire about any of the children pictured here.



SAMUAL

July 2008

Samual, *is a free-spirited child with a bright personality. He needs assistance with all daily living activities. Despite this, he is very expressive, loving, energetic, and kind. Samual loves to look at himself in the mirror, dance, play with small animals, and eat. One of his favorite foods are salt and vinegar chips.*

JERRISHA

August 2009



Jerrisha, *is a lively and spirited girl who loves playing basketball, video games, and spending time on social media. She is known for her remarkable strength, courage, and determination, qualities that shine through in everything she does.*



JAMARYON

October 2008

Jamaryon, *is a kind and helpful person who loves playing video games with friends, as well as football and basketball. He also enjoys drawing and has a gentle nature. Jamaryon dreams of becoming a veterinarian when he grows up.*



HAYLEE

October 2009

Haylee *is a vibrant and outgoing young girl who lights up any room she enters. She loves spending her time watching TV, playing on her phone, and enjoying the great outdoors. Haylee's loving nature and friendly personality make it easy for her to connect with others and form lasting friendships. Her enthusiasm for life and warm spirit are infectious, leaving a positive impact on everyone she meets.*

KAMDEN & KAMERON

APRIL 2008



Kamden & Kameron *are twins who long to be placed together.* ***Kamden*** *loves basketball. He also enjoys playing sports and video games. He is thoughtful and funny.*

Kameron*, loves to play sports and video games. He enjoys being around animals, especially feeding ducks at the pond.*



CHRIS

March 2009

Chris *is a kind and intelligent young man with a knack for creativity and problem-solving. He enjoys reading books, drawing, and designing and building toys, showcasing his inventive spirit and sharp mind. A diligent student, Chris does very well in school and takes pride in his accomplishments. Chris thrives in calm and quiet environments, preferring to avoid loud noises or large crowds.*

Heart Gallery ALABAMA
MENTOR · FOSTER · ADOPT



One for the Road

Buddy Renahan, MSW, LICSW-S
APAC Clinical Coordinator

Have you ever been driving along, looked down at the road in front of you, and wondered, "Now how did that get there?" Probably not, unless you are me. But nonetheless, roads don't happen accidentally.

This analogy helps illustrate how children's behaviors develop over time and, more importantly, how new pathways to healthier behaviors can be built. Roads are carefully planned, mapped out, and constructed. The ground is cleared, a solid foundation is laid, and materials are placed intentionally—foot by foot, mile by mile. Each foot of that road must connect to the one before and after it to ensure a smooth ride.

Similarly, the brain forms thoughts and behaviors by connecting one synapse to the next in a long and complex series of neurological pathways. Trauma can disrupt this process, creating deep neural pathways that may take days, weeks, months, or even years to rewire. The process of healing requires repeated efforts, and progress can sometimes feel like one step forward, two steps back. The good news? Healing is possible. The bad news? It takes time, patience, and a lot of energy—but the effort is worth it.

Neuroplasticity and the Power of Connection

The brain is wired for connection, and sometimes those connections need to be rewired. This process is possible due to neuroplasticity, the brain's ability to reorganize and form new neural pathways in response to experiences. Consider this: When was the last time you had to completely change the way you think? How difficult was it? How much effort did it take? Did you even want to do it?

Now imagine these questions thrust upon a child who has experienced trauma, loss, or instability. These challenges become the very center of an adoptive family's life as children struggle to navigate and heal from past experiences. They need strong, consistent connections with caregivers who can help them rewire their thought patterns, emotional responses, and behaviors.



Resources to Support Healing

To support adoptive families on this journey, Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections (APAC) offers valuable training webinars to help parents and professionals establish healthy connections and promote healing through relational safety:

- **Creating Felt Safety – Robyn Gobbel**
- **Parenting After Trauma: Brain-Body-Sensory Strategies That REALLY Work – Robyn Gobbel**
- **Disrupting Disruption – John Sobraske**
- **Through the Lens of Loss: Understanding and Healing Grief in Adoption, Foster Care, and Guardianship – John Sobraske & Lisa Maynard**

These webinars, available at APAC's training website, provide practical strategies for helping children develop healthier emotional and behavioral patterns.

You Are Not Alone

Make no mistake, it takes more effort to repair than it does to build. The road ahead may feel long, and the destination may often seem out of sight. But you don't have to travel this road alone.

APAC offers a strong support system, including:

- **Knowledgeable staff**
- **Adoption-competent counselors**
- **Webinars and training resources**
- **Library materials**
- **Adoptive family support groups**



We are on this journey with you, walking alongside you and your family every step of the way.

Be well, and safe travels.

UPCOMING EVENTS:





TURNING ISOLATION INTO COLLABORATION: QPR TRAINING

LEARN HOW TO SAVE A LIFE WITH QPR (QUESTION, PERSUADE, REFER), A PRACTICAL AND EVIDENCE-BASED SUICIDE PREVENTION METHOD. IN THIS INTERACTIVE TRAINING, PARTICIPANTS WILL GAIN THE SKILLS TO RECOGNIZE WARNING SIGNS OF SUICIDE, CONFIDENTLY ENGAGE IN COMPASSIONATE CONVERSATIONS, AND CONNECT INDIVIDUALS IN CRISIS WITH PROFESSIONAL HELP. QPR EMPOWERS EVERYDAY PEOPLE TO ACT AS GATEKEEPERS, BREAKING THE STIGMA AROUND MENTAL HEALTH AND FOSTERING A CULTURE OF SUPPORT AND AWARENESS. WHETHER YOU'RE A FRIEND, FAMILY MEMBER, TEACHER, OR COWORKER, THIS TRAINING EQUIPS YOU WITH THE TOOLS NEEDED TO INTERVENE EFFECTIVELY AND MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE IN SOMEONE'S LIFE. TOGETHER, WE CAN PREVENT SUICIDE AND PROMOTE MENTAL WELLNESS IN OUR COMMUNITIES.

XAVIAN TATE, STACIA TATE,
DEVIN GOODWIN & DANIEL WASHINGTON

LIVE WEBINAR
MAY 22, 2025
11:00 AM - 12:30 PM CST

FREE WEBINAR

1.5 CEU Credit hours available. a $15 fee is applied for CEU certification, fee is WAIVED for all Alabama DHR participants.

Children's Aid Society of Alabama



THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY

THIS PRESENTATION WILL EXPLORE SOME OF THE FUNDAMENTAL BENEFITS OF PLAY IN GENERAL AND WHEN IT COMES TO FOSTERING HEALTHY CONNECTIONS. IT WILL ALSO HIGHLIGHT SOME EFFECTIVE THERAPEUTIC GAMES AND DISCUSS WAYS THAT NON THERAPEUTIC GAMES CAN BE USED TO ASSESS AND BUILD IMPORTANT SOCIAL AND RELATIONAL SKILLS.

TIFFANY YAWN, MSW, LMSW
APAC FAMILY THERAPIST

LIVE WEBINAR
JUNE 17, 2025
11:30 AM - 1:00 PM CST

FREE WEBINAR

1.5 CEU Credit hours available. a $15 fee is applied for CEU certification, fee is WAIVED for all Alabama DHR participants.

Children's Aid Society of Alabama



APAC IS HIRING

Our team members make a difference in the lives of Alabama's children & families each day. Be a part of meaningful change in our communities statewide!

- APAC Adoptive Family Recruiter - Birmingham, AL
- APAC is always looking for contract workers to provide various services in counties across the state of Alabama.

www.childrensaid.org/about_us/careers/

JOIN US · JOIN US ·

Celebrating Over 100 Years of Dedicated Service

Children's Aid Society of Alabama

GOOGLE reviews help spread awareness about APAC in our surrounding communities. Please share a review of your nearest APAC office and let Alabama know how the APAC team helped you! Did you attend an excellent conference, training event, or webinar? Did you have expert help with adoption? Was the counseling team there for your family in a meaningful way? Did your child have an amazing time at Camp APAC? Please leave a review!









MONTHLY SUPPORT

ADOPTIVE FAMILY GROUPS

APAC offers in-person support groups, as well as a virtual option for your convenience. Our AFG meetings provide education & social interaction for adoptive parents and their children.

Birmingham & Surrounding Cities
2nd Monday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
6:00 - 7:30 pm
RSVP to Allison Ambler
aambler@childrensaid.org

Madison & Surrounding Counties
2nd Tuesday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
6:00 - 7:30 pm
RSVP to Kendra Alley
kalley@childrensaid.org

Baldwin & Surrounding Counties
3rd Tuesday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
6:00 - 7:30 pm
RSVP to Elaysha Foxx
efoxx@childrensaid.org

Lee & Surrounding Counties
2nd Thursday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
6:00 - 7:30 pm
RSVP to Charnita Ponder
cponder@childrensaid.org

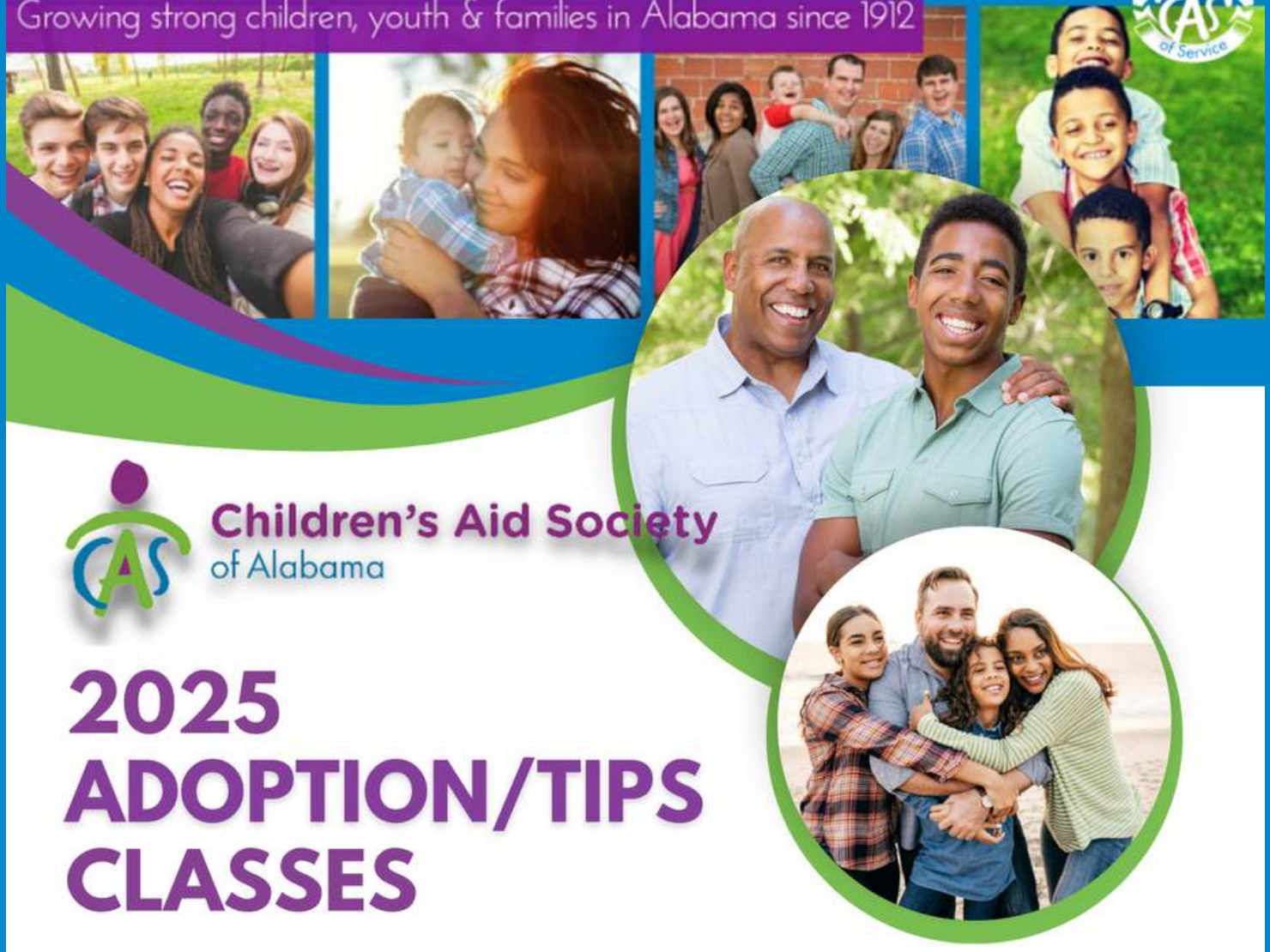
Virtual AFG
3rd Thursday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
8:00 - 9:00 pm
RSVP to Buddy Renahan
brenahan@childrensaid.org

All AFG's offer parent sessions, child groups, and FREE childcare unless otherwise indicated.

We're Accepting Enrollments for TIPS
in Birmingham, Huntsville, Montgomery & Mobile!

www.childrensaid.org

Growing strong children, youth & families in Alabama since 1912



Children's Aid Society
of Alabama

2025 ADOPTION/TIPS CLASSES

Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety & Permanence **(TIPS) group classes** will begin in **Birmingham, Huntsville, Montgomery** and **Mobile** soon. Please contact us for details!

All individuals & families must take this **FREE** course in order to adopt.

Call **APAC SUPPORT: 866-803-2722** or email **bpopham@childrensaid.org** with any questions. Scan the QR code to fill out the intake form, a specialist will contact you with more information. We're excited to meet YOU!

REGISTER NOW

Children's Aid Society of Alabama

ALABAMA PRE/POST ADOPTION CONNECTIONS

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SUMMER 2025 | ISSUE 81

EMPOWERING OUR YOUTH THROUGH ONGOING EDUCATION

That's Right, Summer School is in Session!

Helping Adoptive Families Start the School Year Strong: 5 Supportive Tips



Elaysha Foxx
APAC Adoption Navigator

Summer activities are ramping up, but we all know that back-to-school season is a time of excitement and possibility that can also bring stress and anxiety, especially for children navigating new environments, expectations, or transitions. For adoptive families, this time of year may come with unique challenges. That's why preparation, structure, and emotional support are key, so let's get a head start! Here are five simple but effective ways adoptive parents can help children get a strong and supported start to the school year ahead.

Discuss & Set Clear Expectations Together

1

Before the school year begins, sit down with your child to discuss what the year might look like. Talk about classroom behavior, homework routines, and social goals, but most importantly, make it a two-way conversation.

Creating a written list of shared expectations and goals helps children feel included and heard. This is especially helpful if your child has an IEP plan. Whether it's earning good grades (what is the goal?), making new friends, or trying a new activity, having clear, achievable objectives provides structure and motivation.

2 Establish a Predictable Routine

Children, especially those who've experienced disruptions in caregiving, often thrive with structure. Start building a consistent daily routine now, well before school begins. Involve your child in creating the schedule so they feel a sense of ownership. Include time for homework, chores, relaxation, and a regular bedtime. Predictable routines promote a sense of safety and help reduce anxiety as the school year begins.

3 Address Feelings of Isolation or Anxiety

Starting a new school, or simply entering a new grade can trigger feelings of fear, loneliness, or uncertainty. These emotions are common and not to be ashamed of. To begin the conversation, start in a safe and comfy space. Make certain to reassure your child that it is normal to feel nervous or scared about the school year. Encourage them to be open and honest about their feelings, so together you can both create techniques to deal with the pressure of making this school transition. It is also helpful to discuss joining extracurricular activities. When students join clubs, teams, and other organizations it helps them build friendships, and create a sense of belonging.

4 Engage in *Some* Educational Activities Over the Summer

Keep your child's mind active with fun, educational activities throughout the summer. This could include reading books and establishing rewards for each book read. Parents with younger children can incorporate fun learning apps like ABC mouse or ABCYA. Older youth can begin to explore material that will be taught during the upcoming school year and also freshen their memory on key concepts learned in their previous grade.

5 Make Time for Self-Care

Although it is important to get a head start and be productive, it is also important to schedule time for self-care to recharge and to keep children from feeling overwhelmed. Self-care may include watching their favorite show, eating a snack, listening to music, napping, etc. Self-care helps reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, build self-esteem, improve focus and productivity, and improve overall emotional and mental well-being. What an important value to reinforce before the busy school year begins!

At Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections (APAC), we know that parenting through adoption comes with unique experiences for students and we're here to help. We have compiled a free Back to School Guide that is shared on our resources page. You can download it today. Enjoy the rest of your summer!



Finding Your Tribe – The Importance of Support

Kendra L. Alley, MS, LPC
APAC Adoption Navigator

What do Celebrate Recovery, GriefShare, and NAMI have in common? Each organization facilitates a group where people going through similar experiences can come together and get support. Having a strong support system can help a parent in several ways:

- Support networks can allow for the sharing of experiences as well as brainstorming solutions to common challenges.
- They can deepen one's ties to the community.
- Support networks can encourage, empower, and uplift parents when they experience challenges or become discouraged.

As a foster or adoptive parent, have you ever tried to talk to another parent *(that has not fostered or adopted)* about a situation with your child? While they are well-meaning, you feel this advice just wouldn't work for your child who has a history of significant trauma. This is why APAC offers in-person **Adoptive Family Groups in Madison, Jefferson, Lee, and Baldwin counties**. These groups are unique because we divide them into smaller groups, one for the parents and the other is just for children, tailored to meet their individual needs. Parents can find comfort in knowing that what they share remains confidential and the children are not in the room to hear the information being discussed. Youth experience quality time with their peers and get to have fun. We also provide childcare and activities for younger children. Licensed therapists lead each group. The best part? They are completely free and a meal is provided for you and your family.

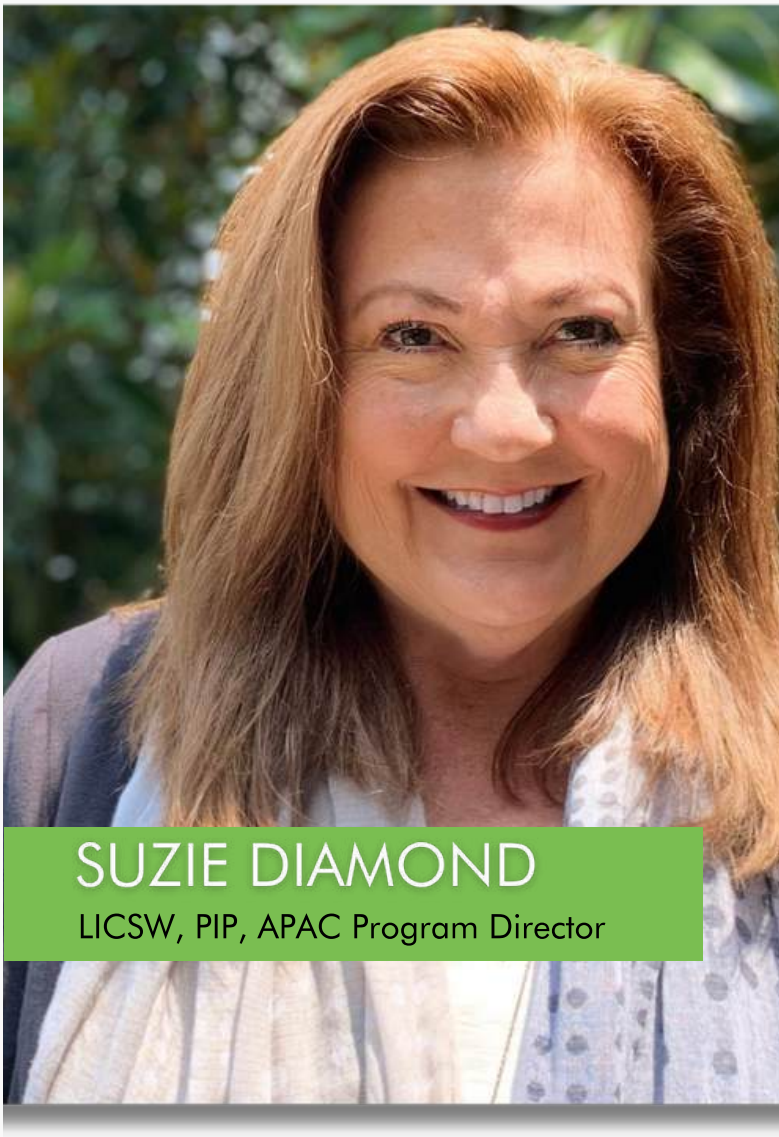
APAC also understands that many families have busy lives and may not be able to make it to an in-person support group. Therefore, we created a virtual support group for parents as well. In this group, you may find parents located in other parts of the state that are going through similar circumstances. Don't feel like speaking in front of others? We've got a group for you too! APAC has a **private Facebook group, The Adoption Adventure**, designated specifically for adoptive parents in Alabama.

While I have primarily touched on support for adoptive parents, APAC recognizes the immense need for adopted children to feel connection and belonging. Every summer, for one week, we host **Camp APAC for children adopted through the Alabama foster care system, as well as their foster and biological siblings**. The children participate in fun activities throughout the day. Through their interactions, they meet other children "like them" and many leave with long-lasting friendships and connections. While the camp experience does not focus on the child's adoption story, many children start to feel comfortable sharing and find solace in the fact that other children have had similar experiences. Registration for camp opens in January and closes in February. Camp APAC slots fill quickly. Please follow us on **Facebook** or **Instagram** so you don't miss important announcements. Did I mention that this camp is also free, and offers a time of respite for parents?

Has your family utilized any of these APAC services? We welcome you to share your testimony or share this information with other families that you feel may benefit. APAC is also rolling out a new concept, Family Ambassadors, to help others become connected. If you feel this is a role you'd like to learn more about, **please contact us for details**.

As a TIPS leader, I always stress to my class the importance of support. You don't have to feel alone in parenting and children don't have to be alone in their identity as adoptees. Reach out, let APAC help you get connected. Let us be part of your tribe.

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



Summer 2025 is officially upon us! This edition of our quarterly e-newsletter is filled with important tips on how to enjoy summer and life together as part of a larger adoption community. APAC is here to help children and families navigate their adoption journey. We encourage adoptive and foster parents, kinship families, and the professionals supporting them to utilize our services. Our team is committed to meeting you where you are.

We hope you find time to revel in fun family gatherings and activities. Summer offers a slower pace to rejuvenate as we prepare for a new school year and what lies ahead. As Albert Einstein so eloquently said, *"Look deep into nature, and then you will understand everything better."* Spending time in nature is restorative and can be added to any self-care plan. Perhaps we can all "unplug" from our devices, even if just for a little while, to enjoy the outdoors.

We are all so excited about Camp APAC 2025 at Camp Chandler! Camp staff will arrive on July 21st to prepare for campers on July 22nd. There is still some time to apply and spend some time with us as summer camp staff. Many thanks to everyone who has already signed on to join our Camp APAC adventure; we could not make this incredible week happen without you!

We extend our gratitude to our partners: the **Alabama Department of Human Resources Office of Adoption, Heart Gallery of Alabama,** and the **Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (AFAPA).** We also thank the 67 county DHR offices we have the honor of working with as we serve the children of Alabama.

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SUMMER

ALABAMA'S WAITING CHILDREN

There are currently over 220 children across the state of Alabama waiting to join their Forever Family. Please visit heartgalleryalabama.com to meet more kids waiting to be adopted or to inquire about any of the children pictured here.



AYDEN

July 2015

Ayden, *is an energetic and fun-loving kid with a passion for sports and the outdoors. He shines on the basketball court and soccer field, showing off his skills and love for teamwork. When he's not playing sports, Ayden enjoys riding his bike, jumping on the trampoline, and spending time outside. Creative and curious, Ayden also loves coloring, working through activity books, and listening to music. He's a big fan of watching fun and educational videos on YouTube during his downtime.*



HAYDEN

March 2009

Hayden*, is a friendly and fun-loving young man who can be a bit shy when meeting new people but quickly warms up to show his amazing personality. With a natural gift for humor, Hayden knows just how to make others laugh and smile, spreading joy wherever he goes.*



RAYVEN

November 2015

Rayven, *is a bright and imaginative girl with a natural flair for leadership. She shows a remarkable ability to guide and inspire; whether she's teaching in her imaginary classroom or leading a game with friends. She loves playing with Barbie dolls, often creating detailed stories that showcase her creativity and intelligence. She thrives during one-on-one time, where her thoughtful nature and quick mind truly shine.*



JAMES & JEFFERY

***James**, is a thoughtful and kind-hearted young man with a gentle spirit. He's known for his patience and caring nature, always looking out for those around him. James loves building with Legos and playing on his Nintendo Switch, but if he could plan the perfect day, he'd head straight to the park to soak up the fresh air and sunshine.*

***Jeffery,** is just as sweet and caring. With an adventurous heart, he enjoys trips to the park, and his favorite activity is searching for bugs and exploring nature. Like James, he's a big fan of Legos. When it comes to school, Jeffery's favorite part is lunchtime, he gets to relax and socialize with friends. James and Jeffery share a strong bond and bring out the best in each other. They are looking for a loving, patient, and committed family that will support them, nurture their unique personalities, and help them grow into the amazing young men they are meant to be.*

July 2009

September 2013



DAKOTA

May 2008

***Dakota,** who prefers to go by **Koda**—is a sports-loving teen with a big smile and an even bigger heart. Whether he's dominating in Madden or out on the field playing football, soccer, or shooting hoops on the basketball court, Koda's energy and enthusiasm shine through.*



MONIQUE

May 2008

***Monique** is a social butterfly. She likes basketball, playing outside, and watching TV. Monique also loves to create slime, paint, and color. She does well in school and loves being a teacher's helper, assisting in the classroom. She has a contagious positivity and desire to help in any way.*

Heart Gallery ALABAMA
MENTOR · FOSTER · ADOPT



Navigating Modern Dating: Guidance for Parents of Youth with Complex Histories

John Douglass, III, M.A., L.P.C.
APAC Family Counselor

I still remember the butterflies of having my first "girlfriend" in the sixth grade. Of course, the elementary years presented opportunities for passing notes at school and talking on the family landline in the evenings; often sitting in silence after we'd run out of things to say. Sixth grade was monumental, we weren't inclined to hold the phone long into the night, but we were happy to spend time together in school. We shared the same values, went to the same church, and our parents even sat together in Sunday school; we were a good fit. I went on my first official date when we attended our school's Christmas Dance, we also exchanged gifts…a hardback Charlie Brown book with Charles Schultz comics for me, and my gift to her was a book about horses as she and I shared a love for horseback riding.

Looking back, dating in the 1980s felt simple. Relationships were rooted in real-world proximity and often guided by community, family, and familiarity. Working with adolescents now and having two boys of my own, ages 21 and 23, I have watched first-hand how dramatically dating has changed. There is very little labeling, you'll rarely hear young people call someone "my boyfriend" or "my girlfriend" or even clearly stating, "I am in a relationship." As I continue to watch the ever-changing dating world of our young people, I'm baffled by how unfamiliar their experience is when compared to my own.

Social media and apps like Tinder have become default spaces for connection, especially after the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Gone are the days when you'd primarily meet a potential partner through school or church, or even a trip to the local mall. Teens now meet people from across the country, often before ever meeting someone face-to-face.

For youth who have experienced foster care or adoption, dating and relationships often bring an added layer of complexity. These young people may not have had the chance to observe healthy, respectful romantic relationships growing up. In many cases, their early experiences may have included domestic violence, sexual abuse, or neglect. As a result, their understanding of boundaries, trust, and communication might be limited or shaped by trauma. Add the vast landscape of the internet and well…it's chaotic out there, navigating the dating terrain is tough.





This is where parents and caregivers play a vital role.

You don't need to have all the answers, but it is imperative for parents to model what a healthy relationship can look like. Good communication skills, as I learned in my residency, are the foundation that leads to healthy, intimate relationships. Youth need to understand how to be assertive. Being able to say what you think and feel to get what you want is paramount. This begins with simply using "I" statements and NOT "You", statements. Here is a great example for parents, *"I really appreciate the way the den was cleaned after the party"*, NOT, *"I wish YOU would pick up after yourself when you get ready for bed."* If you can begin to talk in this way with your child, they will pick up on that language and thus be able to use it in their conversations. Further, once you've set up the flow of open conversation, you can begin to discuss intimate relationships with them. It's a process, as with any other subject, tricky but necessary.

Now here's the issue that causes the greatest angst among parents adopting children and young people from hard places. The idea that we may have to talk about sex and sexuality is scary for many, but don't dodge the topic! Remember, our children may have been sexually abused or witnessed sexual violence. They need a safe, affirming adult to help reframe their understanding of intimacy and consent. This is your chance to teach them about the gift of sex and sexuality, how to honor themselves in relationships and respect their chosen partner. If you feel unsure of how to start, you're not alone. APAC offers resources, adoption-competent counselors like me, and training to help caregivers initiate these talks in a supportive way. One of my co-workers, Jem Lamb once said, *"What is the root word for discipline? It's disciple—to teach."* That's our calling as caregivers; not just to protect our kids, but to guide and teach them.

As stated earlier, many of the teens I counsel today aren't even sure what to call their romantic connections. *"It's complicated"* isn't just a Facebook status, it's often their reality. *"We're talking," "we're vibing,"* or *"it's a situationship"* are some dating terms you might hear, and they reflect the ambiguity of a generation raised in digital spaces.

While these labels may seem frustratingly vague to us as caregivers, they represent a deeper truth: today's youth are still figuring out what connection means. Our job isn't to judge how they connect, but to help them understand why connection matters, how meaningful and rewarding it can be, and what healthy connection looks like.

If you're parenting a child who's experienced foster care or adoption, and they're beginning to explore romantic relationships in a way that is challenging your peace of mind, know this: You're not behind. You're not failing. You're not supposed to do it all perfectly.
You just have to show up, keep the door open, and lean on the resources around you. APAC is here with online training, a free resource library, licensed counselors, and support groups designed specifically for you.

So, talk about dating. Talk about feelings. Talk about safety. Talk about connection.
Because whether your teens are passing notes or swiping right, they're looking for the same thing you were in your youth; someone to connect with, someone to walk beside them as they figure it all out. We can't be their everything, but we can always be there.

A Few Notes:

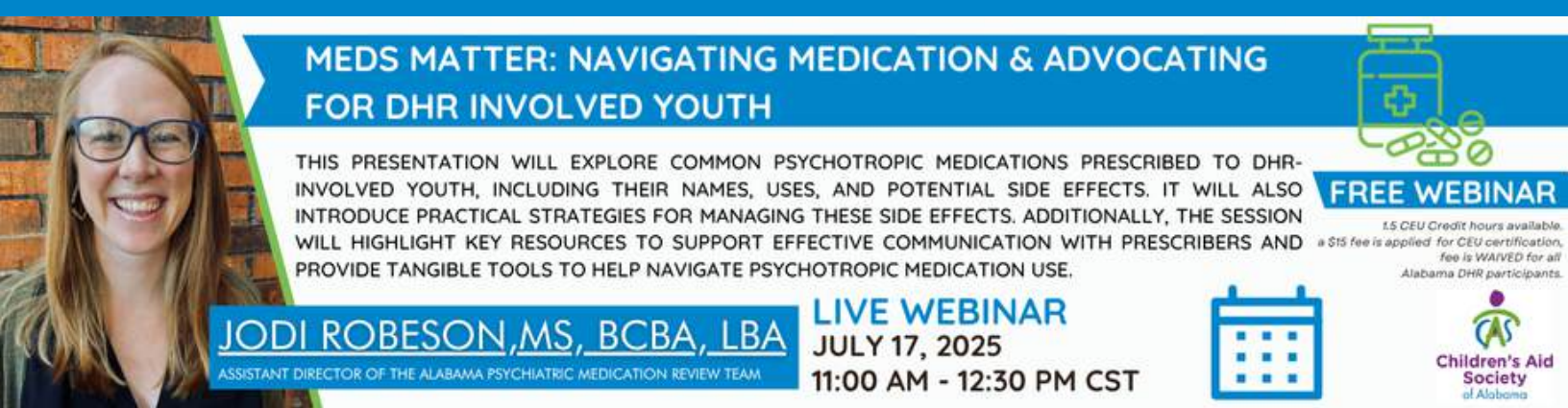






UPCOMING EVENTS:







ETHICS IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

THIS WILL BE A BROAD LOOK AT ETHICS IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE TO INCLUDE: NASW CODE OF ETHICS REVIEW, ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS WITH DOCUMENTATION AND BEST PRACTICES, TECHNOLOGY AND ETHICS IN THE AGE OF AI, AND COMMON ETHICAL DILEMMAS AND HOW TO HANDLE THEM.

***THIS TRAINING IS EXCLUSIVELY FOR MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS AND SOCIAL WORKERS. YOU WILL EARN 3 ETHICS OR CLINCAL HOURS FOR THIS NBCC APPROVED TRAINING.

WEBINAR

3 CEU Credit hours available. a $20 fee is applied for CEU certification, fee is WAIVED for all Alabama DHR participants.

CARON SANDEFUR, LICSW-S PIP
CAS CLINICAL DIRECTOR

LIVE WEBINAR
AUGUST 7, 2025
9:00 AM - 12:00 PM CST

Children's Aid Society of Alabama

APAC IS HIRING

Our team members make a difference in the lives of Alabama's children & families each day. Be a part of meaningful change in our communities statewide! We are seeking contractors for the following:

- Therapists & Childcare Workers for monthly AFG meetings - Huntsville, Baldwin County, Lee County
- Home Study Contractors - Huntsville, Montgomery, Mobile (MUST HAVE PIP)
- Deciding Together (DT Trainers) - Huntsville, Montgomery, Mobile (MUST HAVE PIP)
- Adoptive Parent TIPS Co-Leads - Huntsville, Montgomery, Mobile

www.childrensaid.org/about_us/careers/

JOIN US · JOIN US

Celebrating Over 100 Years
Children's Aid Society of Alabama
of Dedicated Service

GOOGLE reviews help spread awareness about APAC in our surrounding communities. Please share a review of your nearest APAC office and let Alabama know how the APAC team helped you! Did you attend an excellent conference, training event, or webinar? Did you have expert help with adoption? Was the counseling team there for your family in a meaningful way? Did your child have an amazing time at Camp APAC? Please leave a review!

BIRMINGHAM REVIEW US!

HUNTSVILLE REVIEW US!

MONTGOMERY REVIEW US!

MOBILE REVIEW US!

MONTHLY SUPPORT

ADOPTIVE FAMILY GROUPS

APAC offers in-person support groups, as well as a virtual option for your convenience. Our AFG meetings provide education & social interaction for adoptive parents and their children.

Birmingham & Surrounding Cities
2nd Monday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
6:00 - 7:30 pm
RSVP to Allison Ambler
aambler@childrensaid.org

Madison & Surrounding Counties
2nd Tuesday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
6:00 - 7:30 pm
RSVP to Kendra Alley
kalley@childrensaid.org

Baldwin & Surrounding Counties
3rd Tuesday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
6:00 - 7:30 pm
RSVP to Elaysha Foxx
efoxx@childrensaid.org

Lee & Surrounding Counties
2nd Thursday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
6:00 - 7:30 pm
RSVP to Tiffany Perkins
tperkins@childrensaid.org

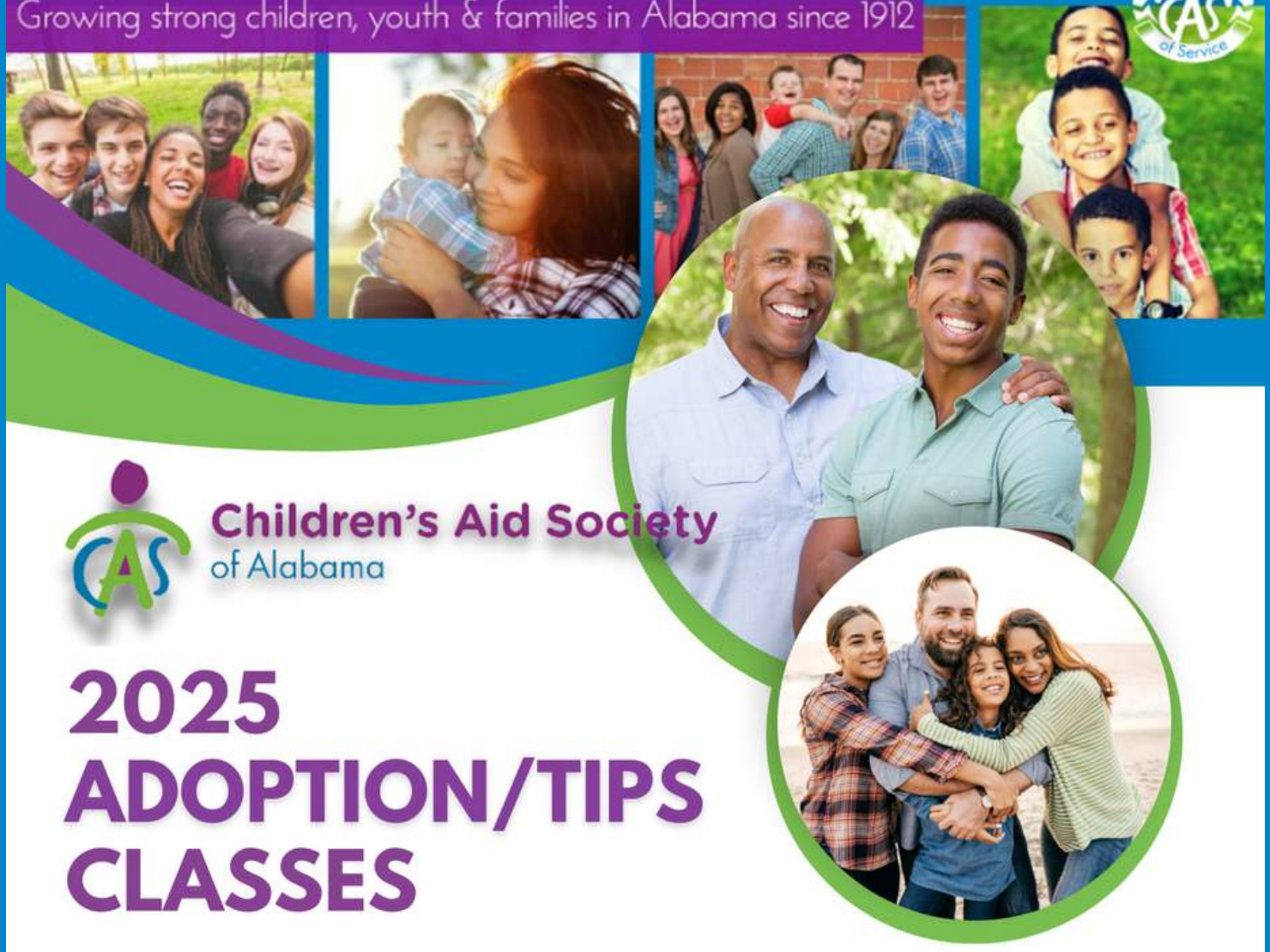
Virtual AFG
3rd Thursday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
8:00 - 9:00 pm
RSVP to Buddy Renahan
brenahan@childrensaid.org

All AFG's offer parent sessions, child groups, and FREE childcare unless otherwise indicated.

We're Accepting Enrollments for TIPS
in Birmingham, Huntsville, Montgomery & Mobile!

www.childrensaid.org

Growing strong children, youth & families in Alabama since 1912



Children's Aid Society
of Alabama

2025 ADOPTION/TIPS CLASSES

Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety & Permanence **(TIPS) group classes** will begin in **Birmingham, Huntsville, Montgomery** and **Mobile** soon. Please contact us for details!

All individuals & families must take this **FREE** course in order to adopt.

Call **APAC SUPPORT: 866-803-2722** or email **bpopham@childrensaid.org** with any questions. Scan the QR code to fill out the intake form, a specialist will contact you with more information. We're excited to meet YOU!

REGISTER NOW

Children's Aid Society of Alabama

ALABAMA PRE/POST ADOPTION CONNECTIONS

Children's Aid Society of Alabama is honored to collaborate with the Alabama Department of Human Services to provide APAC education and supportive services to strengthen and empower Alabama's adoptive families.

FALL 2025 | ISSUE 82



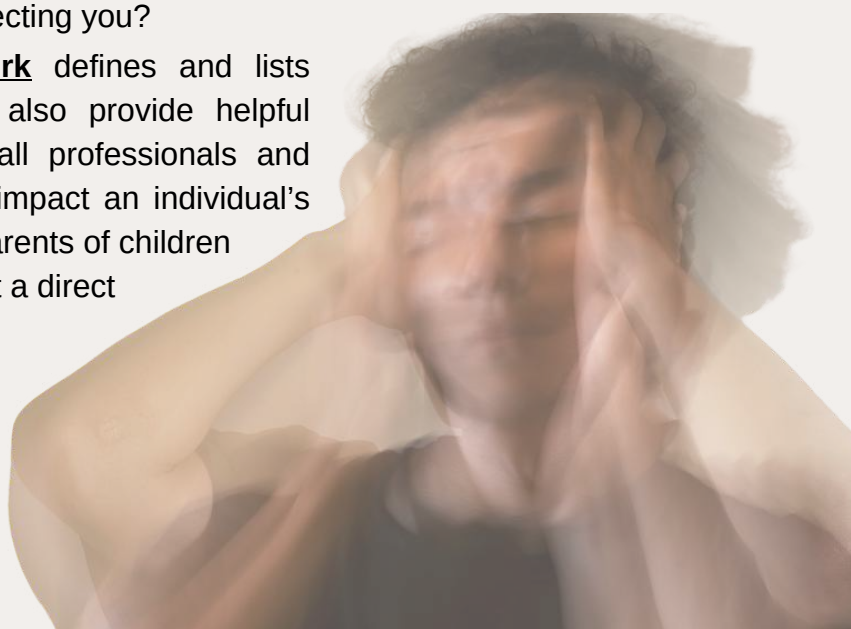
Understanding & Managing Secondary Trauma

Debra Fredenburg, LCSW
APAC Family Therapist

Secondary trauma, often called vicarious trauma or compassion fatigue, is a complex emotional and psychological phenomenon that occurs when individuals indirectly experience the distress and suffering of others who have undergone traumatic events. This condition is commonly observed among professionals in caregiving roles, as well as friends and family members providing emotional support to trauma survivors. Secondary trauma happens through a process of empathetic engagement with the experiences of primary trauma survivors. When individuals closely interact with or listen deeply to the stories of those who have endured traumatic events, they may involuntarily internalize the emotional and psychological distress of the survivors. This feeling of distress can be magnified when our children have experienced trauma.

So how will you know if secondary trauma is affecting you?

The **National Child Traumatic Stress Network** defines and lists various signs and symptoms of trauma; they also provide helpful strategies for prevention and intervention that all professionals and caregivers should know. Secondary trauma can impact an individual's daily functioning and overall quality of life. Many parents of children who have experienced neglect and/or abuse report a direct impact on their own personal feelings, especially feelings of joy and happiness.



Parents of children who have experienced neglect or abuse often report:

- **Feeling overwhelmed, impatient, irritable, or exhausted**
- **Struggles with joy and happiness**
- **Lingering anger, inadequacy, or doubt (*"I can never do enough"*)**
- **Decreased confidence and self-esteem**
- **Relationship strain and isolation due to feeling misunderstood**

Over time, this can lead to frustration, hopelessness, and the belief that life will never feel "normal" again.

Children who have survived abuse and neglect have their own lifelong challenges. They may be triggered by their past, leading to anxiety and hypervigilance. Because of their experiences, many have developed survival skills to protect themselves from future pain, rejection, and abandonment. Their attachment challenges can make it difficult for them to trust adults enough to accept parenting. As Donna Jackson Nakazawa explains in Childhood Disrupted:

"The past can tick away inside us for decades like a silent time bomb, until it sets off a cellular message that lets us know the body does not forget the past."

What may seem like an unwarranted explosion of feelings to a parent is often an expression of fear and doubt from a child searching for connection. It's a cycle of give and take for parent and child that can be confusing. That's why **APAC's free counseling services are available to help parents and children understand one another and feel less isolated in their experience**.

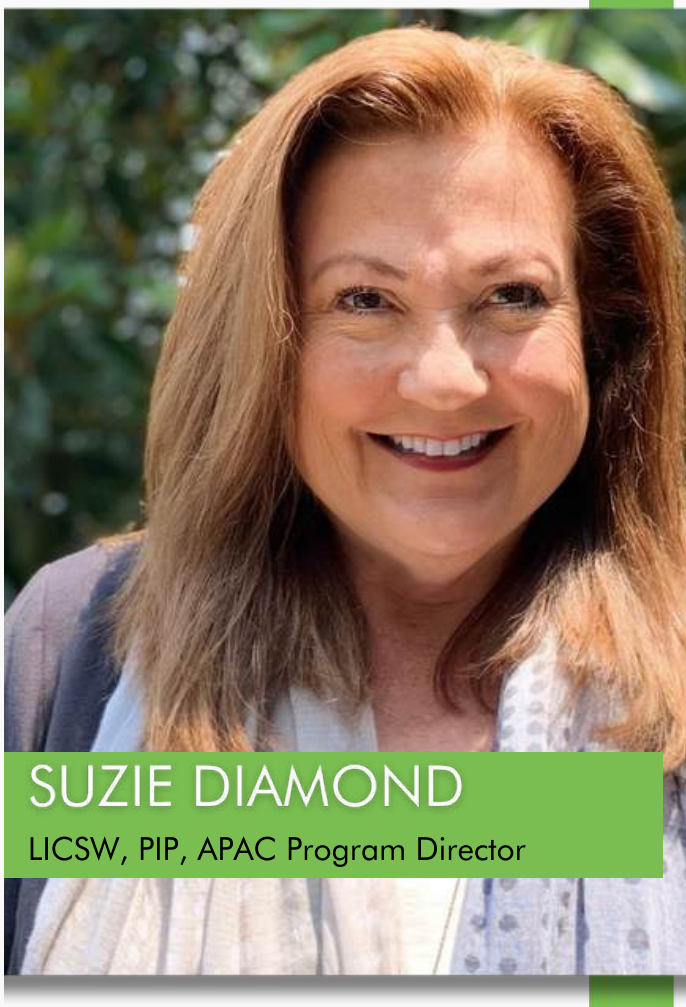
Managing stress effectively is a skill, and parents are role models for showing children healthy coping strategies. As the Cleveland Clinic notes, **stress is a natural reaction to change or challenge, producing physical, emotional, and behavioral responses**. How we manage that stress impacts relationships, health, and our capacity to show up for children. One valuable resource is Sue Badeau's training, available on-demand on the APAC training site, **"Thriving Through Self and Community Care"**, a 1.5-hour session that equips caregivers and professionals with meaningful strategies to address secondary trauma and the primary trauma youth experience.

The airplane safety guidelines remind us: secure your own mask before assisting your child, it's true. Children look to adults to show them healthy ways to solve problems, grow, and thrive. Increasing self-care and self-empathy is essential. Developing a self-care plan can reduce stress and build resilience. The best plans address physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual health needs, while staying flexible to adjust to individual stressors and goals. **Various examples of free self-care plans are available online, and you can also begin with APAC's**.

Support is a crucial aspect of any plan whether through connections with others who understand parenting traumatized children, relationships with adoptive **family support groups**, or access to a trained therapist. The training **"Beyond Trauma: Restoring Hope for Youth and Families"** is also available on the APAC training website and provides practical strategies for fostering healing.

Secondary trauma is real, but you are not alone. With awareness, community, and the right tools, both parents and professionals can build resilience while supporting children on their path to healing.
You can do this. Let us help you.

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



SUZIE DIAMOND

LICSW, PIP, APAC Program Director

Despite the warm weather, Fall is upon us! We hope your summer was filled with joy and laughter. As I reflect on summer, I am overwhelmed with all we accomplished together. Camp APAC 2025 was a huge success. We served 89 campers in a fun-filled week at Camp Chandler. Additionally, our APAC team supported eight children and their families as their adoptions were finalized! APAC is here to help children and families navigate their adoption journey; from training, home study, the matching process, finalization, counseling, support groups and special events.

This edition of our quarterly e-newsletter highlights many of our upcoming training events and services across the state. Our contributing authors have imparted their knowledge and wisdom with us on very important topics: managing secondary trauma; self-care and the importance of an adoption-competent therapist.

As we embrace the change of season, I hope you can carve some time out for yourself. Nedra Tawwab suggests that, *"doing nothing (resting) is self-care."* Committing to a self-care plan can give you the energy to meet the demands of life with a renewed sense of purpose and determination.

We extend our gratitude to our partners: the Alabama Department of Human Resources Office of Adoption, Heart Gallery of Alabama, and the Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (AFAPA). We also thank the 67 county DHR offices we have the honor of working with as we serve the children of Alabama.

Help us find forever families for Alabama's waiting children. If you or someone you know is considering adoption or needs brochures to share, contact us at apac@childrensaid.org or call 866-803-2722, we need your help. APAC operates statewide, and has offices in Birmingham, Huntsville, Montgomery and Mobile. Like and follow us on social media to support our efforts in helping children find permanency.

Welcome Fall

The Importance of "Adoption-Competent" Family Counseling

The national Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.), reports 33% of children in private domestic adoptions, 55% of children in international adoptions, and 46% of children adopted from State custody after foster care receive mental health services, as opposed to 10% of children over age five in the general population. Given the prevalence of adoptive families seeking mental health services, it follows that therapists who hope to provide adequate services should be prepared to address adoption issues; but the reality is that many are not. Many adoptive families who seek help grow frustrated with what amounts to a lack of understanding of their unique needs. So, what makes an "adoption-competent" counselor, and why is it important for adoptive families to find one when mental health services are required?

The short answer: an adoption-competent therapist is one who understands that core issues around adoption often underlie the presenting emotional or behavioral issues families bring to their counseling office. It is important for the therapist to have this awareness and the skills to address adoption-specific issues because that enables them to provide more effective family treatment and support.

Further, an adoption-competent counselor is one who has been formally trained in assessing and addressing mental health issues that are well-known to impact all members of the adoption "constellation," including the adoptee, the adoptive parents, and birth relatives – whether that's birth parents or other relatives who adopt or remain connected with the child. Just some of the issues that may impact members of the adoption constellation in ways different from other families are:

- **The experience of infertility**
- **Grief and loss**
- **Attachment struggles**
- **Missing background information**
- **Identity formation**
- **Transracial or transcultural factors**
- **Degree of openness with birth relatives**
- **Potential search and reunion**
- **The need for *"therapeutic parenting,"* or healing ways to raise a child whose development was disrupted by early trauma**



Jem Lamb, LICSW/PIP, APAC Pre-Adoption Trainer

Many therapists do not even ask questions about adoption in their intake process, which means they are likely to miss the influence of all these issues on whatever brings the family to them for counseling initially. In those cases, families may continue to struggle with unmet emotional needs or disruptive dynamics that an adoption-competent therapist could have identified, because they know adoption issues are often important factors for individual and family functioning, and they know how to help families deal with them effectively. To this end, C.A.S.E. provides an **Adoption Competence National Directory**.

In closing, APAC is proud to partner with C.A.S.E. in addressing the need for adoption-competent family counseling by offering their accredited **Training for Adoption Competency (TAC) course to mental health providers here in Alabama**. By raising professionals' awareness of adoption issues, and providing them with clinical tools for addressing adoption issues during family counseling, APAC is helping to build a network of adoption-competent therapists across the state. TAC-trained therapists report that this curriculum improves their confidence and ability to effectively treat all members of the adoption constellation. **All APAC family counselors are TAC trained,** and their services are available for free to any adoptive family in the state of Alabama. If you know of any master's level mental health provider who wishes to earn a TAC certificate, please help APAC spread the word about our nationally accredited training for professional therapists.



ALABAMA'S WAITING CHILDREN

There are currently over 220 children across the state of Alabama waiting to join their Forever Family. Please visit heartgalleryalabama.com to meet more kids waiting to be adopted or to inquire about any of the children pictured here.



IZEBELLA

June 2011

Izebella, *enjoys riding her bike, reading books, singing, and making crafts. She likes to make up creative stories and play board games.*



TREVOR

May 2008



Trevor, *is a charismatic and outgoing teen with a passion for video games, sports, and music. Known for his easygoing personality and ability to make friends wherever he goes, he brings energy and enthusiasm to everything he does. Trevor's a huge fan of The Flash and can talk for hours about the show's plot twists, characters, and his favorite episodes. Whether he's gaming, jamming out to his favorite tunes, or hitting the field, Trevor lives life at full speed—just like his favorite superhero!*

DA'MIR

September 2007

Da'Mir, *is a great kid who is working to learn more about himself and how to nurture his self-confidence. Da'mir is very smart, he also gets along with people well and makes friends easily. He is a great person, always willing to learn how to better his situation. He plans to attend college and further his education after high school.*

ANGEL

July 2011



Angel, *is a sweet and loving young girl who brings joy to everyone around her. She loves spending her time playing with dolls, drawing colorful pictures, and riding her bike. A true animal lover, Angel has a special adoration for cats and treats all creatures with care and kindness.*



DOMINIQUE

February 2010

Dominique*, is a vibrant and creative spirit with a passion for singing, dancing, cooking, and journaling. She finds joy in expressing herself through music and movement, whether she's belting out her favorite songs or choreographing her own dance routines. When she's not immersed in the arts, Dominique loves spending time in the kitchen, trying out new recipes and perfecting her cooking skills. Journaling is her way of reflecting and capturing her thoughts, dreams, and ideas.*

AMBERLYN & DAVID

August 2012

October 2013



Amberlyn*, and her younger brother* ***David****, are a sweet and loving sibling duo who are eager to find a forever family together. Amberlyn is a social and thoughtful girl who makes friends easily and genuinely enjoys helping others. She especially loves creating cards and drawings as gifts—her way of showing love and care. Billy, who prefers to go by David, is a kind and dedicated boy with a big heart and a strong work ethic. David loves hands-on activities like building with LEGO and working on puzzles. He's focused and loves the satisfaction of completing a challenge.*

Heart Gallery ALABAMA
MENTOR · FOSTER · ADOPT

UPCOMING EVENTS:



APPLICATIONS OF MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING IS A COLLABORATIVE & EMPOWERING CONVERSATION STYLE TO SUPPORT CLIENTS IN BEHAVIOR CHANGE. IT CAN BE INTEGRATED WITH OTHER INTERVENTIONS, OR USED AS A STAND-ALONE INTERVENTION. THE GOAL OF MI IS TO SUPPORT THE RESOLUTION OF AMBIVALENCE, AND IS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN TRADITIONAL ADVICE OR INFORMATION GIVING. MI IS AN EVIDENCED BASED TREATMENT WITH OVER 2400 CLINICAL TRIALS THAT SUPPORT ITS EFFICACY. MI CAN BE USED TO SUPPORT CLIENTS IN WORKING TOWARD BEHAVIOR CHANGE, ENGAGEMENT IN SERVICES, CRISIS INTERVENTION, IN BRIEF ENCOUNTERS AND OTHER AREAS. MI IMPLEMENTS CLIENT-CENTERED COMMUNICATION SKILLS AND DIRECTIVE STRATEGIES TO WORK COLLABORATIVELY WITH CLIENTS ON PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS.

HILLARY LOGAN, MSW, LCSW, LCAS
FOUNDER OF THE MI CENTER FOR CHANGE

WEBINAR

1.0 CEU Credit hour available. a $15 fee is applied for CEU certification, fee is WAIVED for all Parents & Alabama DHR participants.

LIVE WEBINAR
OCTOBER 16, 2025
11:00 AM - 12:00 PM CST

Children's Aid Society of Alabama

TTN Trained Therapist Network

Earn 5.5 NBCC Approved CEUs

Register Today!





Presented by: Robyn Gobbel, MSW



FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS

PRENATAL EXPOSURE TO ALCOHOL, DRUGS, AND HIGH LEVELS OF STRESS CAN SIGNIFICANTLY ALTER BRAIN DEVELOPMENT, LEAVING LASTING IMPACTS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN. FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS (FASD), WHICH ARE MORE COMMON THAN AUTISM, OFTEN REMAIN OVERLOOKED, MISDIAGNOSED, OR MISUNDERSTOOD. INDIVIDUALS WITH FASD LIVE WITH INVISIBLE BRAIN INJURIES THAT AFFECT MEMORY, IMPULSE CONTROL, EMOTIONAL REGULATION, AND LEARNING. AS A RESULT, TRADITIONAL BEHAVIORAL, EDUCATIONAL, AND THERAPEUTIC STRATEGIES OFTEN FAIL TO MEET THEIR NEEDS AND CAN UNINTENTIONALLY CAUSE MORE HARM THAN GOOD.

BARB CLARK, BIS
AUTHOR, TRAINER

WEBINAR

1.5 CEU Credit hours available. a $15 fee is applied for CEU certification, fee is WAIVED for all Parents & Alabama DHR participants.

LIVE WEBINAR
DECEMBER 11, 2025
11:00AM - 12:30PM CST

Children's Aid Society of Alabama

JOIN US

Don't be a sandbagger, let's hit the course for a great cause!

ROCK CREEK

NOVEMBER 7th 2025

5th Annual

BCH

Golf Classic

Opportunity to Win

$5,000

& More Fun Prizes!

November is National Adoption Awareness Month. The 5th Annual BCH Tournament helps support Children's Aid Society of Alabama's Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections (APAC) services.



Calling adult adoptees, counselors, therapists, psychologists, and social workers with impactful training content. We're looking for YOU!

Our training team is seeking proposals for upcoming webinars and live training events. We deliver quality training to parents (adoptive, foster, kinship), and the professionals who serve children and families. This is an open call for proposals, as such, you do not need to reside in Alabama to submit your proposal.

Tap this image to apply.

GOOGLE reviews help spread awareness about APAC in our surrounding communities. Please share a review of your nearest APAC office and let Alabama know how the APAC team helped you! Did you attend an excellent conference, training event, or webinar? Did you have expert help with adoption? Was the counseling team there for your family in a meaningful way? Did your child have an amazing time at Camp APAC? Please leave a review!









MONTHLY SUPPORT



ADOPTIVE FAMILY GROUPS

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Our AFG meetings provide education & social interaction for adoptive parents and their children.

Birmingham & Surrounding Cities
2nd Monday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
6:00 - 7:30 pm
RSVP to Alana Davis
adavis@childrensaid.org

Madison & Surrounding Counties
2nd Tuesday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
6:00 - 7:30 pm
RSVP to Kendra Alley
kalley@childrensaid.org

Baldwin & Surrounding Counties
3rd Tuesday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
6:00 - 7:30 pm
RSVP to Elaysha Foxx
efoxx@childrensaid.org

Lee & Surrounding Counties
2nd Thursday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
6:00 - 7:30 pm
RSVP to Tiffany Perkins
tperkins@childrensaid.org

Virtual AFG
3rd Thursday of each month. There may be other updates to the schedule.
8:00 - 9:00 pm
RSVP to Buddy Renahan
brenahan@childrensaid.org

All AFG's offer parent sessions, child groups, and FREE childcare unless otherwise indicated.

Children's Aid Society of Alabama

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WINTER 2024 | ISSUE 79



FACING A COLD WORLD WITH A WARM EMBRACE

"Winter is a season of recovery and preparation."

— Paul Theroux

Still Unfolding Shani and MJ's Adoption Story

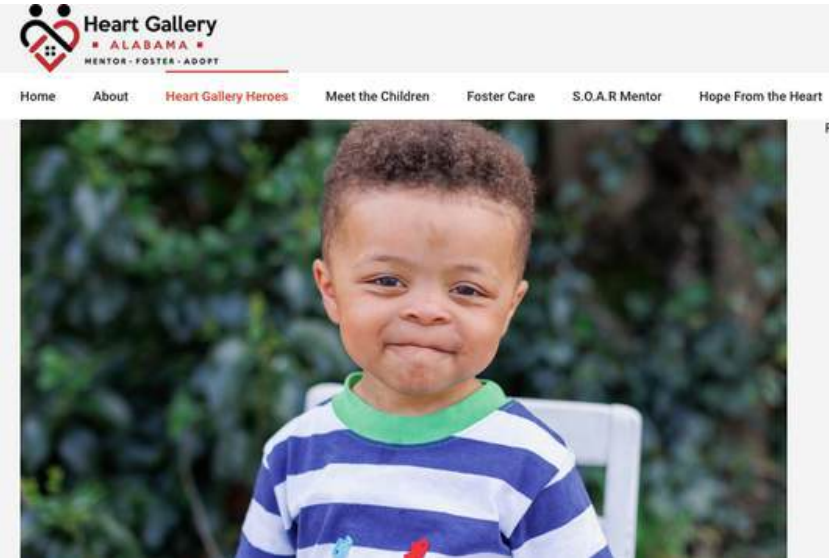


Kendra Alley, MS, LPC
APAC
Adoption Navigator

Adoption is worth celebrating every day, but November—National Adoption Month—provides a special opportunity to highlight its significance in families' lives. As an Adoption Navigator, I have the privilege of hearing unique adoption stories and being part of these journeys. To celebrate National Adoption Month, I want to share an interview with Shani, an adoptive mother, about her journey with her son, MJ. Shani's words convey their story better than I ever could.

What Motivated You to Consider Adoption?

"I first learned about adoption as a young child, and since then, I always knew I wanted to adopt one day. I distinctly remember learning about orphaned children without families, which sparked my desire to create a family that included adopted children."



How Did You Know MJ Was the Child for You?

"I am naturally curious and spent years researching and reading profiles of children available for adoption. In 2022, I began exploring the adoption process in Alabama and discovered the Heart Gallery of Alabama. MJ's profile immediately captured me—his eyes spoke to me in a way that's indescribable. I saw spunk, curiosity, and sweetness. It was love at first sight."

What Have You Learned About MJ Through the Process?

"From the beginning, I knew MJ was so much more than his background report. While such assessments provide insight, they are only a baseline—a one-dimensional snapshot. I've learned to see him as a multidimensional person with both incredible potential and layers of trauma.
"Our family motto is: ***'We don't give up on each other.'*** We tell each other this often, especially when feelings of insecurity or fear arise. This belief binds us together, fostering love and forgiveness."

Are There Other Important Lessons You Have Learned Along Your Adoption Journey You'd Like to Share?

I was prepared physically *(bedroom decorated, clothes purchased, grocery shopping done, toys were in abundance)* but no one can prepare you for the emotional challenges that come with parenting. You can read all the books and say all the prayers, and though there is wisdom in preparation, it will still be a journey of humility because parenting another human being is not just a role you have, it is a calling.



What Is Your Biggest Piece of Advice for Others Considering Adoption?

"If you are considering adoption, engage with the adoption community early. The process involves many steps before finalization, and even if adoption doesn't feel right for your family, you can still support the foster and adoption community in other ways." APAC can help.



What Are Your Favorite Memories with MJ Thus Far?

"We love to travel! Whether we are navigating our way through an airport or taking a road trip, we are a dynamic duo with a splash of Tom and Jerry, a sprinkle of Thelma and Louise, and a good helping of Frick and Frack. I love seeing the world through his eyes. MJ has taught me to slow down and enjoy the things that as an adult I was missing because my goal was to get from point A to B as quickly as possible. He has opened my eyes to creating memories out of seemingly mundane things.

The holidays we've spent together have also been very sweet, melding our ideas and making up new holiday traditions. He doesn't protest yet about us wearing matching outfits, so every holiday I take full advantage."

Parenting is a Challenge. What are Some of the Challenges You've Faced?

"Balancing being a single parent with career and community involvement, while staying present, is vitally important to my son. I love hearing him say, **'***I'm glad we are home momma, so you can sit and snuggle with me.***'**
Secondly figuring out what to make for dinner, and keeping the refrigerator/pantry stocked. Seriously, my son is always ready to eat and legitimately so. He is going through a major growth spurt. In less than a year he has grown 5 inches taller and gained 12 pounds!"

What is the Importance of Being Your Child's Biggest Advocate?

"Each child that finds themselves in the foster care system deserves caregivers who will see them through the eyes of restoration, because it is possible for each and every child! MJ and every child needs parents to see them rightfully - they are survivors of trauma who need stability, consistency, love and encouragement. Each child deserves a parent that will advocate for them and make room for them to discover that their past does not have to predict their future."

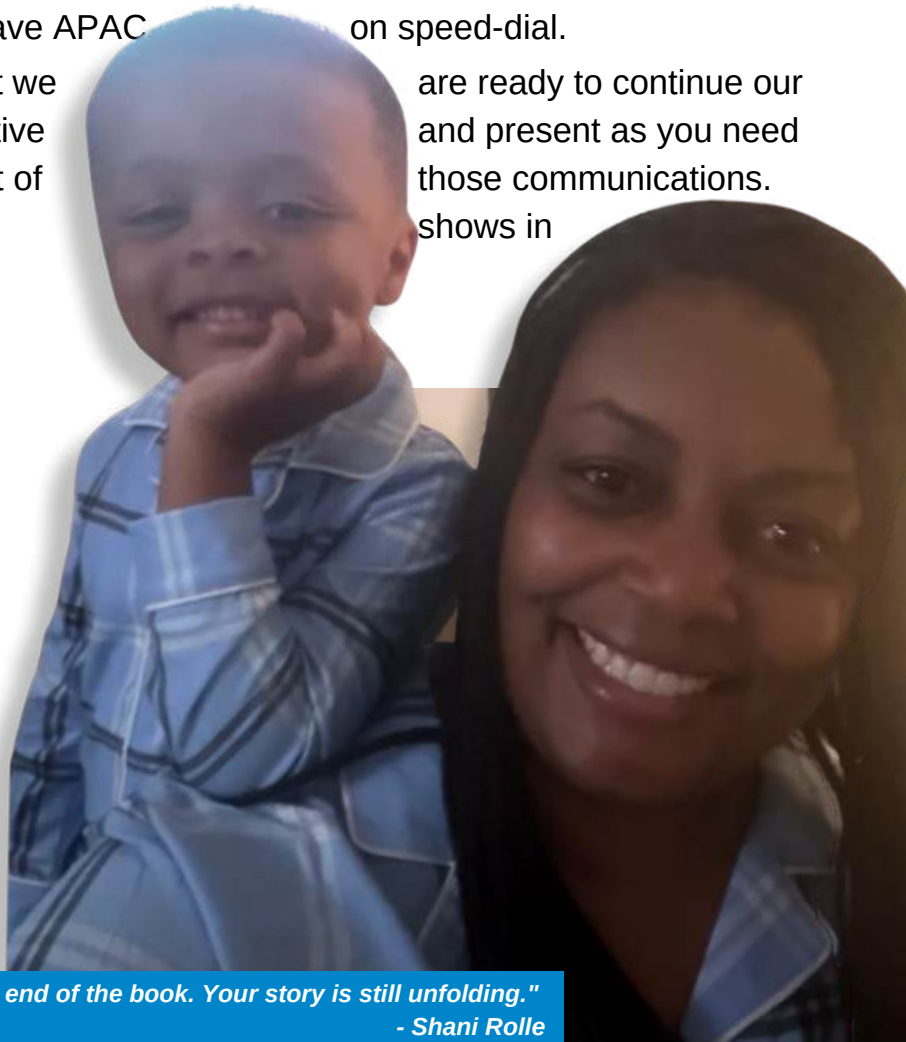
How Important is Support, and Where Have You Found the Support You Both Need?

"I am grateful that our journey was challenging from the beginning, because it became clear that we needed community. From DHR caseworkers, APAC staff, therapists, medical doctors, family, friends, and strangers, I knew that each village partner would play an integral part. I spent hours researching, making connections, sharing my thoughts, vulnerabilities, fears, and ultimately joy with each person I came in contact with. It is the village that is making our family possible.
APAC's support has been priceless. I still have APAC on speed-dial.
APAC provides the resources to ensure that we are ready to continue our journey as a family unit. APAC is as supportive and present as you need them to be, while you are in the driver's seat of those communications. APAC is truly committed to families, and it shows in the programming that is available and their dedicated, passionate staff.

Looking Back, Would You Have Done Anything Differently?

"I wouldn't change a thing. The journey shaped me into the parent I am today, built my commitment to MJ, and strengthened my appreciation for my own parents.

The challenges paved the way for the supportive community we have today and connected me with lifelong friends and family."



"If your story doesn't yet describe victory, you're not at the end of the book. Your story is still unfolding."
- Shani Rolle



What Happens When Holidays Aren't Happy?

Jem Lamb (she/her), LICSW/PIP
APAC Pre-Adoption Trainer



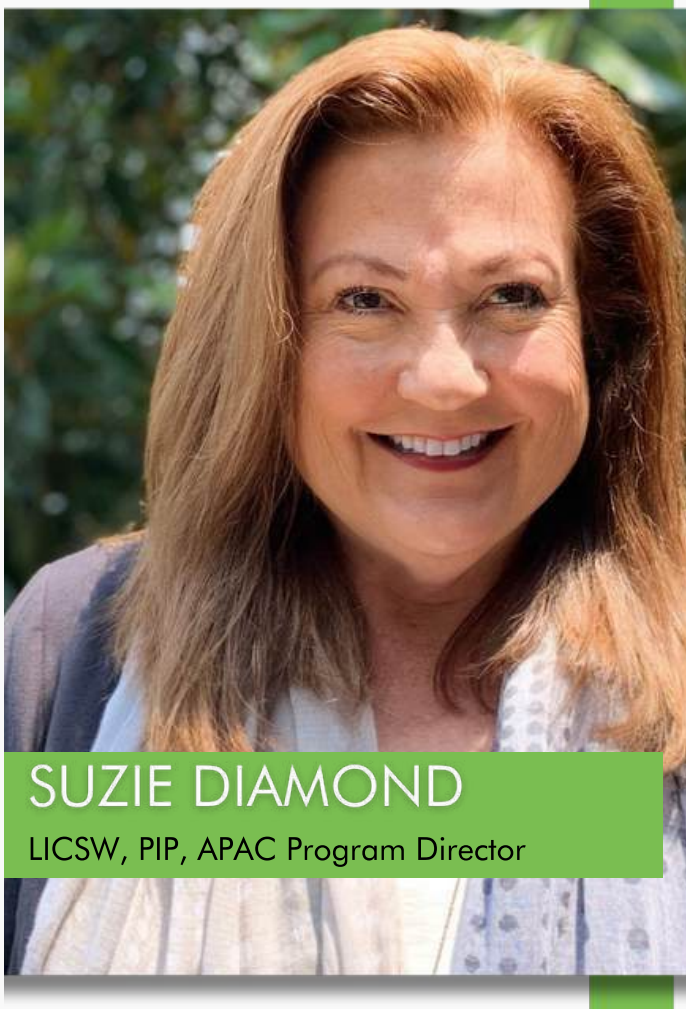
Most adoptive parents are familiar with the term "developmental grieving", and all children who've been adopted experience this very specific type of grief. It's the feeling triggered by reminders of past losses, particularly those associated with significant events (positive or negative) that occur as a child develops. It's important for adoptive parents to remember that, while celebrations and milestones may include the joy and fulfillment every child deserves to experience, they may also trigger sadness, and even mourning over what a child has lost. Triggers of developmental grieving are often unexpected, and could include anything from graduation, to *"adoption day"*, to having their own birth child. Given the cultural assumption that everyone enjoys the holiday season, it can be confusing when adoptees experience developmental grieving around this time. Regardless of whether holidays with birth family were happy, painful, or non-existent, the current reality of holidays without birth family or previous beloved caregivers can be a significant emotional trigger. Some suggestions for how to help children manage developmental grief around holidays are:

1. **ANTICIPATE: Think ahead about what a child might need; keep mementos of birth family or other important caregivers accessible to them when you think your child might be reminded of them.**
2. **ACKNOWLEDGE: Children need an adult to pro-actively open conversations about grief reminders, explain these feelings are normal, and make clear it's helpful to talk about them.**
3. **ANCHOR IN THE PRESENT: Help the child understand their losses have been as important as their gains in making them who they are today, yet grief does not limit who they can become.**

One powerful way to do all these things around holidays is to engage your child in blending traditions that are meaningful to each of you, and create new ones together. Ask which traditions your child enjoyed in the past, then offer to incorporate those into your annual family plans *(ex: watching a favorite Christmas movie)*. Share with your child why a family tradition is important to you *(ex: bonding with your siblings over decorating gingerbread houses)*, and invite them to try it with you. Finally, add a tradition that's NEW to both parent and child, but meaningful to you as an adoptive family *(ex: learn how to celebrate Kwanzaa if one of you is African American, or make your own Christmas cards for former caregivers)*. Of course, mixing favorite traditional dishes with new recipes always makes for memorable holiday meals! Through blending our pasts with the present, we show children that good can always be enjoyed, even when we carry pain. We show them that as we mourn, it's OK to look forward to what's to come. We demonstrate that, in the same way holiday traditions can co-exist, it's possible for grief to exist with joy, and perhaps shine an even brighter light on all we have to celebrate together.

View our APAC Training Webinar: Spending Holidays with Our Foster & Adopted Children

A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR



SUZIE DIAMOND

LICSW, PIP, APAC Program Director

The holiday season is upon us! All of us at Children's Aid Society of Alabama wish you and your family a happy holiday season. We wish you health and happiness in 2025!

The hustle and bustle of the season can bring joy to many; however, others may experience grief and sadness, as they navigate the holidays without family nearby. Our contributing authors offer palliative insights on navigating the season with compassion and grace.

I don't know about you, but my heart is full of joy after reading Shani and MJ's adoption story! Shani's words are uplifting and genuine. We appreciate Shani sharing their journey to inspire and support other adoptive families. APAC is honored to work with adoptive families across the state.

Save the date for Camp APAC 2025! We will be at Camp Chandler in Wetumpka, from July 21st to the 25th. Camper registration will go live in early January. Camp APAC is a wonderful opportunity for children who have been adopted to come together to build lasting memories and friendships.

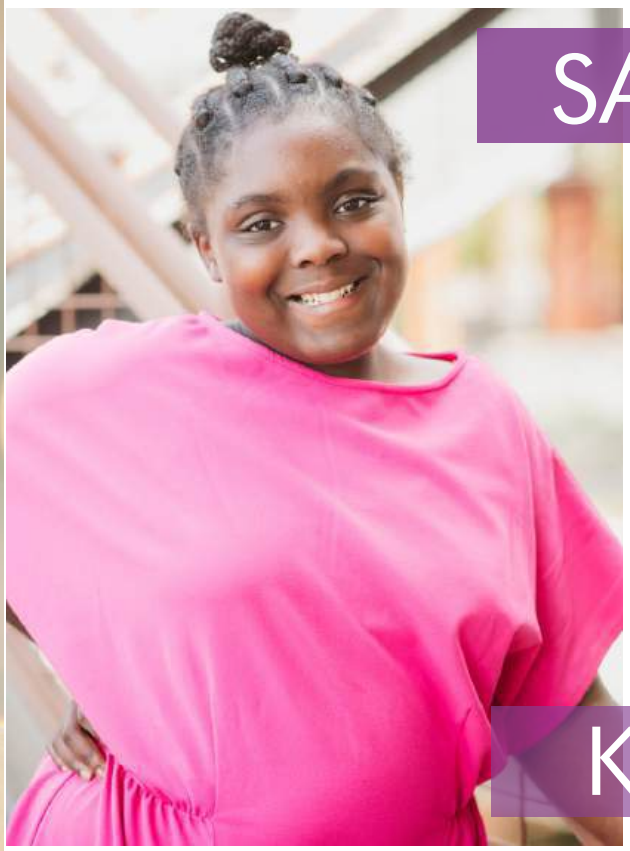
We extend our gratitude to our partners: the Alabama Department of Human Resources Office of Adoption, Heart Gallery of Alabama, and the Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (AFAPA). We also thank the 67 county DHR offices we have the honor of working with as we serve the children of Alabama.

Help us find forever families for Alabama's waiting children. If you or someone you know is considering adoption or needs brochures to share, contact us at apac@childrensaid.org or call 866-803-2722. APAC operates statewide, and has offices in Birmingham, Huntsville, Montgomery and Mobile. Like and follow us on social media to support our efforts in helping children find permanency.

happy holidays

ALABAMA'S WAITING CHILDREN

There are currently over 220 children across the state of Alabama waiting to join their Forever Family. Please visit heartgalleryalabama.com to meet more kids waiting to be adopted or to inquire about any of the children pictured here.



SADIA

December 2011

Sadia, *is a creative and caring young girl who loves to draw and paint. She enjoys helping and spending time with her friends at school. Sadia prefers indoor activities like watching TV and YouTube videos, and she's a big fan of the "Diary of a Wimpy Kid" books. She plays the flute in her school band and dreams of visiting Lego Land one day. Though she's not fond of outdoor activities, her love for learning and creativity shines!*



KIERRA

February 2011

Kierra, *is a sassy and fun-loving girl who enjoys hanging out with her friends, eating chicken, and getting plenty of sleep. She has a talent for playing the harp, a skill she picked up from YouTube! A devoted follower of Jesus, Kierra looks to Him for inspiration in her daily life. Known for her loud and funny personality, she loves celebrating Valentine's Day since it's close to her birthday. Kiera dreams of becoming a nurse when she grows up. She is also working on being more patient and deeply values when others acknowledge her efforts or do kind things for her. Kierra hopes to find a family that will be patient and understanding.*



DERRICK

January 2012

Derrick, *enjoys video games, Spider-Man, and other superheroes. He loves to draw and tell stories. Derrick also loves to eat and watch Spider-Man movies.*



JOHN J.

December 2015

John, *is a joyful and active child who thrives on outdoor play and staying busy. With a great sense of humor and a contagious laugh, he enjoys making others smile and brings a playful energy to every interaction. His affectionate nature shines through in his love for giving and receiving hugs. Adding to his charm, John has a fun habit of quoting Peppa Pig by snorting repeatedly, bringing delight to those around him. Creative and hands-on, he enjoys drawing, playing games on his tablet, and building with Legos, Play-Doh, and sensory toys. A true water lover, John especially enjoys swimming in the summer. He excels in a structured environment, flourishes with one-on-one attention, and loves being the center of focus during activities.*

TOM & TREY

June 2010, October 2013



Tom *enjoys being chased outside and loves sensory items, especially being tickled. One of his favorite shows is Sesame Street. His favorite foods are pizza, ice cream, and Oreos. Tom's perfect day would include watching YouTube on his tablet, playing outside with sticks, and snacking on hot Cheetos. Tom is non-verbal and communicates through an app on his iPad.*

Treyvonate "Trey's" *perfect day would include playing with sensory items, building with blocks, racing cars and snacking on Oreos. Trey also enjoys chicken nuggets and hot chips. He loves the outdoors, running around with his peers. Observant by nature, Trey often mimics the actions of his caregivers.*



Trey is also nonverbal and communicates by using an app on his iPad. Trey and Tom need a family that will provide patience, understanding, and unconditional love.

HANNAH

May 2008

Hannah*, likes to draw, sing, and dance. She also excels in school. Another one of Hannah's hobbies is putting together outfits. She enjoys printing photos of clothes, jewelry, and shoes to put together outfits. Hannah is an outgoing, sweet, and positive young lady.*

Heart Gallery ALABAMA
MENTOR · FOSTER · ADOPT

From Reflection to Connection: Strengthening Families in the New Year

Debra B. Fredenburg, LICSW
APAC Family Therapist

Moving into the new year is a time of reflection. It is not about being perfect but about showing up, being present, and being intentional. Reflecting on the past year provides an opportunity to determine what you would change if you could turn back the clock to be the best you can be. Connections increase a person's resiliency. Acknowledging your growth and celebrating victories—no matter how small—can encourage positive efforts and strengthen your path forward as a family. Here are a few points to keep in mind as you look back on 2024 and forge your way through 2025.

Break Challenges Into Manageable Steps

Moving forward involves looking at current and future challenges. Breaking down challenges into smaller, manageable pieces makes them more doable, decreases stress, and increases the likelihood of success. For families, modeling a teamwork approach promotes attachment and bonding. This method not only strengthens relationships but also builds a child's or teen's confidence by enhancing their skill set and showing them they can be successful. Focusing on each family member's strengths and positives fosters resiliency.

Family Activities and Shared Experiences

Spending time together in ways that honor each family member's interests supports shared ownership of activities. Allowing family members to take the lead, with support, can foster attachment and bonding. Activities such as board games, video games, hiking, cooking, puzzles, or sporting events create shared experiences and build connections. To encourage participation, consider creating a family activity list with ideas for things to do, learn, or teach one another. Post this list in a visible place and aim to complete at least one activity monthly.



Teamwork



The Importance of Play and Teamwork

Children who have experienced difficult circumstances may not have received positive adult attention. Playing with them can build connections, strengthen bonds, and create moments of shared joy. Sharing the workload of household projects also allows every family member to contribute. Finding ways for children to participate—no matter their age—helps them feel valued and promotes teamwork. This shared effort demonstrates that family achievements are accomplished together.

Creating Structure and Building Trust

Building bonds and connections strengthens relationships, particularly when parents need to have difficult conversations with their children. Weekly family meetings can help plan activities, set schedules, and increase predictability. Children often respond better when they know what to expect.

Starting the new year with intentional efforts to connect, plan, and support one another creates a strong foundation for family growth. It is not about perfection but about being present and intentional. The care, support, and love you show can make all the difference in the lives of your children and family. You are actively making it work, thank you for all that you do!

UPCOMING EVENTS:



TACKLING TECHNOLOGY

WHO WISHES WE WERE STILL IN THE DARK AGES WHEN IT COMES TO OUR KIDS AND TECHNOLOGY? TECHNOLOGY SAFETY IS A CHALLENGE FOR ALL PARENTS, BUT WHEN WE ARE PARENTING KIDS WITH TRAUMA HISTORIES AND NEURO-DIVERSITY, THE CHALLENGE IS EXPONENTIALLY MAGNIFIED. IN THIS SESSION, WE WILL TALK ABOUT WHY THIS IS MORE OF A CHALLENGE FOR OUR KIDS, AND SEVERAL EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO TRY TO KEEP THEM SAFE.

FREE WEBINAR

1.5 CEU Credit hours available. a $10 fee is applied for CEU certification, fee is WAIVED for all Alabama DHR participants.

BARB CLARK, BIS

DIRECTOR OF TRAINING AT FAMILIES RISING (FKA NACAC)

LIVE WEBINAR
DECEMBER 12, 2024
11:30 AM - 1:00 PM CST

Children's Aid Society of Alabama



EDUCATION SUPPORT FOR STRUGGLING LEARNERS

EDUCATION CAN BE CHALLENGING FOR LEARNERS WITH DIVERSE ABILITIES. THIS PRESENTATION WILL PROVIDE AN OVERVIEW OF VARIOUS EDUCATION SUPPORTS AND OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO ASSIST STUDENTS IN INCLUSIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS ENSURING THEIR EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS. PARTICIPANTS WILL UNDERSTAND VARIOUS CONDITIONS AND THEIR IMPACT UPON A STUDENTS LEARNING, BE AWARE OF SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO ALL STUDENTS IN PRE-K TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS, AND UNDERSTAND SPECIAL SUPPORTS AND ACCESSIBILITY RIGHTS OF STUDENTS WITH QUALIFYING CONDITIONS AND DISABILITIES.

FREE WEBINAR

1.5 CEU Credit hours available. a $10 fee is applied for CEU certification, fee is WAIVED for all Alabama DHR participants.

JEANA WINTER

BS REHABILITATION, MS COUNSELING

LIVE WEBINAR
JANUARY 16, 2025
11:30 AM - 1:00 PM CST

Children's Aid Society of Alabama



INTERVENTIONS FOR PSB IN YOUTH

THE NATURE OF GRIEF HAS BEEN MISCHARACTERIZED IN OUR SOCIETY. THIS HAS CAUSED GRIEVING PEOPLE'S GRIEF EXPERIENCES TO BE MARGINALIZED AND OFTEN DISMISSED. THIS PRESENTATION WILL DISPEL SOCIETAL MYTHS RELATED TO GRIEF AND OFFER A CONSTRUCT FOR UNDERSTANDING GRIEF THAT MORE ACCURATELY REFLECTS THE EXPERIENCE OF GRIEVING PEOPLE. WE WILL FOCUS ON THE EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS IN FOSTER CARE. WE WILL LOOK AT HOW GRIEF MANIFESTS IN THEIR LIVES AND HOW TO RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS THAT A CHILD OR TEENAGER IS GRIEVING.

FREE WEBINAR

1.5 CEU Credit hours available. a $10 fee is applied for CEU certification, fee is WAIVED for all Alabama DHR participants.

JERMAINE WALL, LICSW-S

AUTHOR , ADVISOR & CEO OF THE SATORI GROUP, LLC

LIVE WEBINAR
MARCH 13, 2025
11:30 AM - 1:00 PM CST

Children's Aid Society of Alabama

ENROLL NOW

DECEMBER 20

DEADLINE

Children's Aid Society of Alabama

2024 - 2025 TRAINING FOR ADOPTION COMPETENCY (TAC)



TAC is a specialized course for professionals, offered in partnership with the Center for Adoption Support and Education (C.A.S.E.). This research-based curriculum is designed to enhance clinicians' ability to meet the unique mental health needs of all members of the adoption constellation. TAC is the only adoption competency certificate program accredited by the Institute for Credentialing Excellence, and APAC is the ONLY TAC training site for clinicians in Alabama.

Key Benefits:

- Earn 66 Social Work or Counseling Classroom Contact Hours (Clinical & Ethics)
- Inclusion in C.A.S.E.'s National Directory of Adoption Competent Professionals
- Membership in a national professional support network of adoption competent clinicians
- Increased competence and confidence meeting the clinical needs of all members of the adoption kinship network
- Ongoing access to accredited, up to date resource materials for use with clients
- electronic TAC badge for marketing upon passing the final assessment

TRAINERS



Jem Finley Lamb, LICSW/PIP
APAC Pre Adoption Trainer



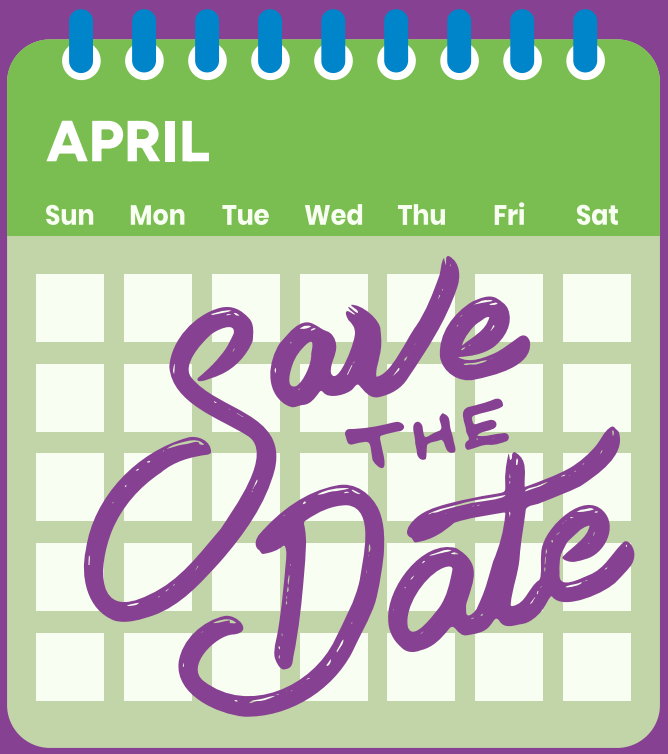
Buddy Renahan, MSW, LICSW
APAC Clinical Coordinator

jlamb@childrensaid.org https://bit.ly/3BqVDtd

19th ANNUAL PERMANENCY CONFERENCE

APRIL 23rd - 25th
Marriott Birmingham

View 2024 Highlight Reel



GOOGLE reviews help spread awareness about APAC in our surrounding communities. Please share a review of your nearest APAC office and let Alabama know how the APAC team helped you! Did you attend an excellent conference, training event, or webinar? Did you have expert help with adoption? Was the counseling team there for your family in a meaningful way? Did your child have an amazing time at Camp APAC? Please leave a review!









MONTHLY SUPPORT



READY FOR 2025!
We're Accepting Enrollments for TIPS

www.childrensaid.org

Growing strong children, youth & families in Alabama since 1912








Children's Aid Society
of Alabama

2025 ADOPTION/TIPS CLASSES

Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety & Permanence **(TIPS) group classes** will begin in **Birmingham, Huntsville, Montgomery** and **Mobile** soon. Please contact us for details!

All individuals & families must take this **FREE** course in order to adopt.

Call **APAC SUPPORT: 866-803-2722** or email **bpopham@childrensaid.org** with any questions. Scan the QR code to fill out the intake form, a specialist will contact you with more information. We're excited to meet YOU!

REGISTER NOW

APAC, YOUR PARTNERS ON THE

ADOPTION JOURNEY

Sign-up to receive APAC's free quarterly newsletter, delivered directly to your inbox. Don't miss an issue!

Sign up

Are you thinking of starting your own adoption journey? Take the first step with our free adoption prep. classes. Sign-up, and one of our adoption recruiters will reach out to you.

Sign up

APAC

Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections

