From the Director's Desk - "All Types of Blended Families" - by Suzanne Bowers

According to the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute, adopted children make up roughly 2% of the total child population under the age of 18. Post-adoption services are important to all types of adoption, whether foster care adoption, international adoption, or domestic infant adoption. The Virginia Department of Social Services reports that currently, there are over 4,000 children in Virginia's foster care system.

Are you an adoptive or foster care family in Virginia? PEATC has some great training opportunities coming up for parents and professionals of Foster-Adoptive-Kinship families.

The first opportunity is a webinar on “The Intersection of ADHD with Foster-Adoptive-Kinship Families: How can caregivers help?” presented by Catherine Adams of C. Adams Consulting and Kelly Henderson, PhD, and Executive Director of Formed Families Forward, on Tuesday, May 5, 2015. To register, go to: https://cc.readytalk.com/cc/s/registrations/new?cid=njfxj16uapr

The second is an all-expense paid three day “Parents as Collaborative Leaders” training on August 19-21 at Tides Inn, 480 King Carter Drive, Irvington, VA 22480. This training is geared specifically for Foster Care and Kinship families. For more information and to register, go to: http://www.peatc.org/newsmanager/news_article.cgi?news_id=676&no_popup=0

In addition, do you know about Northern Virginia’s Community Parent Resource Center (CPRC)? Formed Families Forward provides consultation and support to families and agency personnel to help them meet the special education needs of their children and youth. Short-term phone and direct consultations are available at no cost to adoptive, foster and kinship families and to child welfare and education professions in northern Virginia. Formed Families Forward offers special education resources designed specifically for foster, adoptive and kinship families.

They make linkages to other agencies and organizations, and offer access to direct group counseling services for families in need. FFF’s website offers factsheets, trainings, a resource directory, and a monthly newsletter. Although their target is only northern Virginia, there are numerous valuable resources available to all families. Visit their website at http://formedfamiliesforward.org/.
In May we celebrate Blended Families

Latino Corner by Arianna Sweeney

Adopción de "Necesidades Especiales": ¿Qué Significa?

Muchas personas piensan que “necesidades especiales” son discapacidades médicas, físicas o emocionales. Pero dentro del sistema de cuidado temporal y de bienestar infantil, un niño o joven con necesidades especiales tiene un factor o condición (singularmente definido por cada Estado) que puede involucrar cualquiera de los siguientes:

• Antecedentes étnicos o raciales
• Edad
• Pertenencia a un grupo de hermanos
• Discapacidades médicas, físicas o emocionales • Riesgo de discapacidad médica, física o emocional con base en la historia de la familia biológica
• Cualquier condición que hace que sea más difícil encontrar una familia adoptiva.

Estas definiciones más amplias de “necesidades especiales” se pueden usar para determinar la elegibilidad para recibir ayuda financiera Federal para la adopción de niños y jóvenes del sistema de cuidado temporal de los Estados Unidos. No existen reglas específicas o requisitos legales para padres o familias que quieren adoptar a un niño o joven con necesidades especiales.

Usualmente, los padres son los que toman su propia decisión de criar y adoptar a un niño o joven con discapacidades con la ayuda de su trabajador, agencia de adopción o simplemente hablando con otros padres adoptivos experimentados. Estas son una de las formas más eficaces para determinar si la familia interesada tendrá la capacidad apropiada para poder criar a un niño o joven con necesidades especiales. A la misma la familia se dará cuenta o decidirá si adoptar a un niño o joven del sistema de cuidado es la decisión correcta para su familia. Son muchas las cosas que los padres y familias necesitan pensar y aprender antes de tomar la decisión de adoptar y criar a un niño o joven con necesidades especiales. Ha habido muchos casos de niños o jóvenes con necesidades especiales que han sido removidos de sus familias adoptivas a causa de abuso o abandono.

Hoy en día existen muchos grupos de apoyo para padres y familias adoptivas para antes y después de la adopción de un niño o joven con necesidades especiales, que pueden ser de mucha ayuda.


Special Needs Adoption: What Does It Mean?

Many people think “special needs” are medical, physical, or emotional disabilities. But within the foster care and child welfare systems, a child or youth with special needs has a factor or condition (uniquely defined by each State) that may involve any of the following:

• Ethnic or racial background
• Age
• Membership in a sibling group
• Medical, physical, or emotional disabilities
• Risk of physical, mental, or emotional disability based on birth family history
• Any condition that makes it more difficult to find an adoptive family.

These broader definitions of “special needs” may be used to determine eligibility for Federal financial assistance for adoption of children and youth from the U.S. foster care system. There are no specific rules or legal requirements for parents or families that want to adopt a child or youth with special needs.

Usually, parents are the ones that make the decision about adopting a child or youth with special needs with the help of their adoption worker, agency or simply by talking to other experienced adoptive parents. These are some of the best ways to determine whether or not this family will have the capacity to parent a child with special needs and at the same time it will help you determine if adopting a child from foster care is the right choice for you and your family. Families have a lot to think and learn before they make the decision of adopting and raising a child or youth with special needs. There have been several cases in which the special needs child or youth had to be removed from their adoptive families due to abuse or neglect.

Nowadays, there are many foster-adoptive parent support groups or postadoption services that can help you deal or resolve a range of issues.

Mental Health Corner by Caroline Gentleman - "Let’s Focus on the Blended Family"

What do relationships (spousal, child, parent, sibling, friend, coworker, and neighbor), running a household, and employment all have in common? They are all, collectively and separately, stressful, necessary, and wonderful. They are what make life. It is constant juggling that we all try to master and learn as we go. Blissful may be a word we would like to use to describe our family life but few people have that be their first thought. At its best and smoothest, managing it all will put a drain on anyone mentally. How do we keep all our bases covered and see that everyone in our household is getting what he needs?

If added to this is a child who has some special concerns, the demand on the parent increases. Now, what happens when the family structure in the home is not the traditionally viewed pyramid? This would be anything but the two parents who share equal connection to each of the children. Statistics of the number of stepparent/blended families show what most of us know. Process for a moment, 1/3 of marriages in America creates a stepfamily. That translates to 13% of adults being a stepparent. 42% of adults have some type of step relationship in their life.

Now that we’ve acknowledged prevalence, what can be done to encourage success of this unit?
• Children need time to work through the loyalty issue. “If I like him, it will be disloyal to dad.” The older the child, the more difficult his may be. A teen will grasp the sense of loyalty more than a five year old.
• It takes about two years for the step couples to function as a family unit.
• Realize for the adults a new partner is thrilling. For the child, it can create the feeling of loss and change.
• Have realistic expectations. It is realistic to expect civility; not realistic to expect love...at least for a while.
• Honest communication about the personalities and needs of the child to the stepparent is crucial and necessary. Someone coming into a parent role must be aware what he is signing on to do. It does no one any favor to downplay or omit needs of the child.
• Communicate, again, as far as structure and demands of day to day life with the child.
• Avoid the “my child is better than your child”. This damages everyone. The attack/defend mechanism will activate. It may take time for the stepparent to see what the original parent knows is there. Remember, each child is perfect in his own way.
• Keep time to build you two as a couple. Children will take their cue from you both, even if it seems they aren’t watching.

When Do You Know You Need Extra Support?

Family therapy would never be a bad idea when assembling a new household. A little preparation can give a solid foundation and give the parents a unified sense. Some universal flags for when a child and his family is facing a struggle apply here.
• Although some shift in mood may be expected with a new living arrangement, when a specific change has exceeded several weeks to two months and is NOT improving.
• If there is aggressive behavior not before present, seek help immediately.
• If the original parent finds himself “hiding” things from the stepparent.
• If the child shows a drastically different personality to the stepparent than what the original parent sees or knows to be natural.
• If there is new friction among the children; be they the full siblings or stepsiblings. It could just be “settling territory” but you should not let it become the norm.
• If the child is offering derogatory, accusatory or degrading comments to others about the stepparent. This is one to address immediately. Hopefully there is no validity to these commentaries but don’t let the child suffer from his anger or fear. This can cause enormous damage very quickly.
• If the original parent notices the step parent becoming tenser and agitated around the child. There should be a gradual increase in the comfort level for the stepparent around the child.

Happily Ever After

If only it were that simple. It will take work. The divorce rate for second and third marriages is higher than for first marriages. Each addition of stress factors can rock the chances even more. On that sobering thought, let’s end on a better note. You married that person because he or she makes you happy. We want our children to see us as a happy person. We are social creatures by nature and our lives are notably happier when we share it.

Think of what you are showing your child. Life can change and it can be good. Sometimes we have to adapt to new situations. You are showing your child how to learn to trust someone and build a life. You may have overcome personal obstacles to commit to this person. You are showing your child that love can come into your world and you are capable of different kinds of love.

Your new partner should be that, a partner. This person can help you carry your load. It does mean sharing the work, the fears and challenges. It also means sharing the milestones, laughter at the dinner table and a good report from school. It means sharing in the life of a child.

FURTHER READING
- https://www.aamft.org/IMIS15/AAMFT/Content/Consumer_Updates/Stepfamilies.aspx
Early Childhood Corner by Lakeshia Yancey - "Blended Families in Early Childhood"

The early years of childhood are considered a very crucial time in regards to development. This is also a time that children are faced with several transitions. Children are moving from crawling to walking, babbling to using words, crying to get all of their needs met to learning to verbally express them. This is also a time when children go through many transitions in their social lives. They may go from the security of being cared for at home to learning to adapt in a child care facility. Just like adults all children handle change differently. This rings even more true when considering a young child having to adjust to becoming a member of a blended family.

When a parent decides to remarry or enter a relationship with a new person they should take in to account the effect this may have on their little one. Some children are very resilient and will acclimate to the change easily, others not so much. Parents have to remember that not only is the child going to miss the lesser present parent, but they have to familiarize themselves with a stranger. If possible, reassure the child that their parent did not “leave” them and that they are always going to be important and loved. It is also a good idea to inform your child’s other care givers (i.e. daycare providers, babysitters, therapists) of the new changes in the child’s family dynamic so that can have an understanding of any possible behavior changes.

Some “red flags” to look out for would be changes in behavior, feeding/diet, and regression. Not all behavior changes are easily recognized, some children express themselves by lashing out, and others may internalize their feelings. A child who is usually a good eater, may start eating less if they are feeling sad or unhappy. Another possibility is regression. A 4 year old who can easily dress and feed themselves, may suddenly act as if they are no longer able to manage this task alone. It may be a way of gaining attention, especially if the blended family includes new children who are now getting attention from their parent.

Tips to ease the transition:

• Communicate to the child in an age appropriate manner the new changes in family
• Do not force them to accept all the changes at once
• Reassure them that they are loved by all parties involved
• Look for cues that your child is not handling the change well

Children’s books:

*Was it the Chocolate Pudding?: A Story for Little Kids about Divorce*
By: Sandra Levins, Bryan Langdo

*I Have a New Family Now: Understanding Blended Families* (Comforting Little Hearts)
By: Robin Prince Monroe

*My Blended Family*
By: Emma Lee Picone, Amy Oberg, Tina Harrel
PEATC Workshops and Events - May 2015

**Saturday, May 2, 2015** - 3rd Annual Family and Youth Leadership Summit, The John Marshall Ballrooms, 101 North 5th St., Richmond, VA 23219. Registration Information: http://events.r20.constantcontact.com/register/event?oeidk=a07eam8wif6aa4f5a8&llr=9jhgocab. The Summit is the only event of its kind which is focused on the issues that matter to families who have children and youth with mental health needs.

**Saturday, May 2, 2015** - QuePasa Festival, 11:00 am-7:00 pm, Canal Walk, Richmond, VA 23219. PEATC will be an exhibitor at the ¡Qué Pasa? Festival to celebrate “Cinco de Mayo” and the Latin American community of greater Richmond. The event features boat rides, live music, performances, food, beverages, and arts and crafts. http://quepasafestival.com/

**Tuesday, May 5, 2015** - "The Intersection of ADHD with Foster-Adoptive-Kinship Families: How can caregivers help?" webinar, 11:00 am EST. In honor of National Foster Care Month in May, we focus on the unique needs of children and youth with disabilities raised in foster, adoptive and kinship homes. Please register HERE: https://cc.readytalk.com/cc/s/registrations/new?cid=njfxj16uaqr.


**Thursday, May 7, 2015** - "Who, What, and When of Early Intervention" workshop, 11:00 am-12:00 pm, The Improvement Association, 1750 East Atlantic Ave., Emporia, VA. Please RSVP to PEATC at 800-869-6782 (toll free) or partners@peatc.org.

**Saturday, May 9, 2015** - PEATC Play Date, a Play Group for children Birth to 5 years old, 1:00 pm-2:30 pm, 100 N. Washington St. Ste. 234, Falls Church, VA. Space is limited; register at 703-923-0010 or partners@peatc.org.

**Tuesday, May 12, 2015** - "AIM Virginia 101" Webinar, 11:00 am-12:00 pm, AIM-VA is a free program sponsored by the Virginia Department of Education that creates free accessible instructional materials for qualified students in Virginia to promote meaningful and equitable access to the general curriculum. Please register HERE: https://cc.readytalk.com/cc/s/registrations/new?cid=622jn4ybgt

**Wednesday, May 13, 2015** - SEAC Region 5 Training, PEATC and VDOE are co-sponsoring a training for all Virginia SEAC chairs, members, and advisors at the DoubleTree by Hilton Charlottesville, 990 Hilton Heights Rd., Charlottesville, VA 22901. REGISTRATION REQUIRED: http://www.peatc.org/newsmanager/news_article.cgi?news_id=665&no_popup=0.

**Thursday, May 14, 2015** - "Successful Transition Planning and the IEP: All You Need to Know" workshop, 10:00 am-12:00 pm, at 6300 East Virginia Beach Boulevard, 2nd floor, Norfolk, VA 23502. Register early by contacting JoAnna Bryant at joanna.bryant@chkd.org or 668-9565. Workshop space is limited to 40 maximum and registration is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Registration deadline is May 8, 2015. Cost is FREE (light refreshments and workshop materials will be provided).

**Tuesday, May 19, 2015** - SEAC Region 2 Training, PEATC and VDOE are co-sponsoring a training for all Virginia SEAC chairs, members, and advisors at the Hilton Garden Inn Chesapeake/Suffolk, 5921 Harbour View Blvd., Suffolk, VA 23435. REGISTRATION REQUIRED: http://www.peatc.org/newsmanager/news_article.cgi?news_id=665&no_popup=0.

**Wednesday, May 27, 2015** - SEAC Region Training, PEATC and VDOE are co-sponsoring a training for all Virginia SEAC chairs, members, and advisors at the Hampton Inn, 898 Wiggins Rd., Emporia, VA 23847. REGISTRATION REQUIRED: http://www.peatc.org/newsmanager/news_article.cgi?news_id=665&no_popup=0.
Family Engagement Corner by Tina Norris - "Blended families teach us valuable lessons"

If we were asked to define a blended family, the task alone would be complex and the responses would vary. A blended family is most often described as a family made of two parents and their children from previous marriages. Children from blended families are privileged to have the love and guidance from their new extended family members, however the adjustment may not always be easy. While changes to family structure may require adjustment time for everyone involved, with support and guidance from parents, children of blended families can work out their issues and live together successfully.

If a blended family also includes children with disabilities, it adds another dynamic to the mix. According to HelpGuide.org, some suggestions for helping children through the transition include the following:

• Too many changes at once can unsettle children. Blended families have the highest success rate if the couple waits two years or more after a divorce to remarry, instead of piling one drastic family change onto another.
• Don't expect to fall in love with your partner’s children overnight. Get to know them. Love and affection take time to develop.
• Find ways to experience “real life” together. Taking both sets of kids to a theme park every time you get together is a lot of fun, but it isn’t reflective of everyday life. Try to get the kids used to your partner and his or her children in daily life situations.
• Make parenting changes before you marry. Agree with your new partner how you intend to parent together, and then make any necessary adjustments to your parenting styles before you remarry. It’ll make for a smoother transition and your kids won’t become angry at your new spouse for initiating changes.
• Don’t allow ultimatums. Your kids or new partner may put you in a situation where you feel you have to choose between them. Remind them that you want both sets of people in your life.
• Insist on respect. You can’t insist people like each other but you can insist that they treat one another with respect.
• Limit your expectations. You may give a lot of time, energy, love, and affection to your new partner’s kids that will not be returned immediately. Think of it as making small investments that may one day yield a lot of interest.

When two families are lucky enough to be able to find love again and join their families, the love just multiplies with the additional family members. Embrace the changes and enjoy one another!

PEATC On Demand and In the Spotlight by Leslie Edwards - “Supporting the Special Needs of Children in Foster Care, Adoptive & Kinship Families”

Every child deserves to be a part of a loving, nurturing home. Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Care grant many children this exact opportunity. During the month of May we recognize and celebrate these families. This recognition is inclusive of Children with Special Needs in Foster Care, Adoptive, and Kinship families.

Special Needs children in the aforementioned family settings have a unique set of educational needs. PEATC would like to invite you to explore some of these educational needs through the Webinar titled “Supporting the Special Needs of Children in Foster Care, Adoptive & Kinship Families” by Kelly Henderson, Ph.D. of Formed Families Forward.

This webinar reviews the special education basics that impact foster, adoptive & kinship families. Topics include: education stability, the Fostering Connections Act, identifying behavioral supports, and strategies for communicating with the school.

You can watch this Webinar by clicking here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qsPLy8qh1Fk