

SPOTLIGHT:

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## UCLA TIES for Adoption

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The mission of UCLA TIES (Training, Intervention, Education, and Services) for Adoption Program is to promote the successful adoption, growth, and development of children from birth to eighteen with special needs. These special needs include prenatal substance exposure, who are in foster care, when returning to their biological parents is not in the children's best interest.

A key feature of the UCLA TIES for Adoption Program is that services are offered as children are transitioned from foster care into adoptive homes, a vulnerable period for families that presents opportunities to promote attachment and prevent problems from escalating. UCLA TIES is a unique collaboration of the UCLA Center for Healthier Children Families and Communities; the UCLA Psychology Department; the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, Adoptions Division; the Los Angeles Department of Mental Health through the Early, Periodic, Screening, Diagnosis, and Treatment (EPSDT) Program; and private foundations.

Dr. Karen Saywitz described the UCLA TIES program in the Winter, 2007 issue of the American Psychological Association's *Children, Youth and Family News*. The program began in response to the needs of prospective parents considering adoption of children in foster care. Faced with vulnerable children, some with untreated mental health problems, inadequate and inaccessible services that were not adoption-specific, and a challenging period of adjustment, many families experienced disruption. Families felt betrayed because they did not understand the children's special needs in advance and the system failed to provide access to needed services in time.

According to Dr. Saywitz, key components of TIES for Adoption begin with preparation and education of the prospective adoptive parents prior to being matched with a child in foster care. Families voluntarily attend nine hours of training about the challenges and rewards of parenting and providing permanency to high-risk children, such as the effects of prenatal substance exposure, multiple placements and losses, and child maltreatment.

A second component of TIES for Adoption is the multidisciplinary evaluation of the child's needs with feedback to the prospective parents and social service workers. The child's health, educational status, learning strengths and weaknesses, psychological functioning, and temperament are all considered as well as genetic predispositions. Prospective parents consider all the information prior to deciding to meet the child with the goal of determining whether or not the child is a good match for them.

Finally, a comprehensive array of services (special education; legal services; health; mental health) is offered. Adoption counseling, parent skills training, home-visiting support, monthly support groups for both parent and child, short-term weekly therapy groups for children and teens, parent child interaction treatment, individual therapy, family therapy, an infant mental health program, behavioral management therapy at home and at school, pediatric services, consultation on legal issues and educational rights, parent peer mentoring, and psychiatric services are included. "We offer these services for up to a year," remarks Saywitz, "and the families can return later if new issues arise."

The Ties for Adoption program has assisted 1600 families with the preparation for adoption over the past 13 years. About 10% (1.554) have continued with the more intensive services. "Our families have about a 3% disruption rate," says Saywitz, "which is much lower than the usual rate of failed adoptions. That alone is very gratifying." Ties for Adoption also serves as a multidiscipline training center for graduate students and those enrolled in medical school and law programs.

More information is available from: [Karen Saywitz, Ph.D., Associate Director, UCLA Ties for Adoption](#),  
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