

UTAH'S ADOPTION

AUGUST 2015



UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

QUARTERLY DCFS NEWSLETTER



Tommy, age 15, waiting
Photo by: Ted York

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We've got a new look!

Utah's Adoption Connection

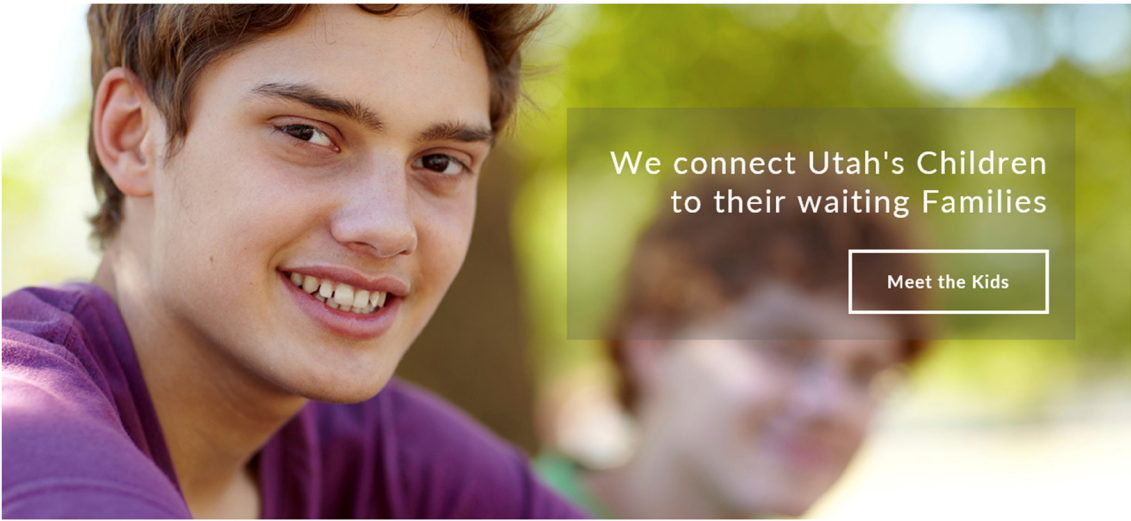
UTAH'S ADOPTION CONNECTION
CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES
In partnership with The Adoption Exchange

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Considering Adoption?
BEFORE YOU START

Building Your Family
DURING THE PROCESS

Support & Resources
POST-ADOPTION



utahadopt.org

Please check out the new and improved web site. We have added new content and hope that you will find it helpful.

- Larger Child Photos
- Easier Navigation
- Informational Videos
- Additional Content for Caseworkers

On the Cover *Jasmine. 17,*



Jasmine is a bright young woman who will constantly keep you laughing! A charming, social and engaging child, she loves spending time with others. Jasmine enjoys drawing and coloring, singing, reading, and working on jigsaw puzzles. A girly-girl at heart, she has fun shopping, dressing up and having her hair done. Her ultimate dream is to have a family to call her own.

As a twelfth grader, Jasmine does well in school and loves to learn. She benefits from counseling, which will need to continue after placement. She would like to attend college in the future and become a nurse.

Jasmine is in need of a home that will prove to be a stable and supportive environment, and that will allow her to maintain contact with her sister. If you feel you could provide a loving, secure environment for Jasmine, we urge you to inquire. Financial assistance may be available for adoption-related services.

For Utah children, only homestudied families from all states are encouraged to inquire.

Photo by: Ryan Cummings

If you are interested in any of the children featured in this publication, please contact The Adoption Exchange at 801-265-0444 or visit www.utahadopt.org.



Manipulation Madness

By: Heather T. Forbes, LCSW

As with all negative behaviors, I believe manipulation is a communication for connection with the parent. Paradoxically, when our children demonstrate this behavior, it does quite the opposite to us. It creates an uneasy feeling within us, constricts us, and in many cases, repulses us away from our child.



Let's step back and look at early childhood interactions between the parent and the infant. It is there that we will find the roots of manipulative behavior and will be able to create a new understanding.

The very first relationship an infant is designed to experience is the relationship with the mother. This relationship begins in the womb and is designed to continue at a high level of intensity for at least the next three years of life, along with the father/child relationship. It is in these first three years that amazing development and connection happens due to the parents' attention, attunement, and devotion.

“Playing with her and being with her can repair the missing pieces from her early history, at a physiological and emotional level.”

According to Dr. Allan Shore, the "King" of affect regulation, these parent/child interactions occur primarily in the right brain. The right brain holds the capacity for emotional and non-verbal information processing while the left-brain holds the capacity for language and logical processing. For the infant and young child, with no or limited language skills, communication happens primarily in the right brain. These experiences occur at the emotional level, not at the cognitive or "thinking" level.

Thus, the communication between the parent and child happens at a non-verbal level. When the child gives signals to the parent, the child experiences the parent as predictable and manipulatable. Infants and young children have this amazing ability to "manipulate" their

caretakers. For example, the baby smiles at the parent, the parent smiles back. The baby has created this mirroring response from the parent. The parent will even talk a crazy language like, "Goo-goo-gaa-gaa" to the baby. No one else on this planet can get this parent to do such things.

The baby can also cry and become hyper-aroused, "manipulating" the caregiver to come over and pick her up. Babies even have this manipulation technique down so well that they can get their parents up from a dead sleep in the middle of the night to feed them. Money and bribes wouldn't even get many of us out of bed in the middle of the night!

Even more impressive, babies can get grown men, CEO's of mega-corporations, dressed in red power ties, to bend over and make silly noises and change their tone of voice to that of a little kid. The high-powered, influential board of directors of such a CEO doesn't even have that kind of power.

You've experienced this yourself. How many times have you walked by a baby, felt this force pulling you over to her, and then dropped everything you were doing to connect with the baby?

All kidding aside, this ability to "manipulate" is an important part of any child's development. It is in this attachment system between the parent and the child that is helping the child regulate her states of stress and fear. The parent who attends to the child's negative states is helping the child shift back into a positive state. This is known as "affect synchrony." Affect synchrony is the regulatory means for developing and maintaining positive emotional states within the relationship of emotional communication. Positive states are amplified and maximized for the child

while negative states are minimized and neutralized for the child.

If your child missed early experiences of affect synchrony with you or with another caretaker, she will seek to have these experiences, even at an older age. Manipulation is simply an inherent way for her to achieve this goal. If you shift from seeing this as a negative and irritating behavior to a request for connection and healing, you will be able to meet her needs in a positive and loving way.

When you interact with her, see her through the lens of a child who is desperate to know connection and who needs to know what unconditional love is. She needs to know that she is important enough to be able to move you, just like when the baby smiles and the parent smiles back. This gives her a sense of worth and "all-rightness."

And don't forget to spend time with her, simply playing with her. Playing with her and being with her can repair the missing pieces from her early history, at a physiological and emotional level. You will also be creating the essential ingredient of life: Joy! By amplifying the positive experiences in her life and by giving her a sense of safety and security in her relationship with you, even if temporary, the need to be manipulative will disappear.

About the Author:

Heather Forbes is the author of Parent and Beyond Consequences, Logic & Control: Volume 1 & Volume 2, Dare to Love, and Help for Billy.

Check out Utah's Adoption Connection Lending library at utahadopt.org for these and other titles.

For more practical ways of parenting out of love while maintaining boundaries and teaching more effective ways to ask for help and connection, visit Heather's web site at www.beyondconsequences.com.

Back To School Tips for Success (for kids & parents)



The following health and safety tips are from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

MAKING THE FIRST DAY EASIER

- Remind your child that there are probably a lot of students who are uneasy about the first day of school. This may be at any age. Teachers know that students are nervous and will make an extra effort to make sure everyone feels as comfortable as possible.
- Point out the positive aspects of starting school. She'll see old friends and meet new ones. Refresh her positive memories about previous years, when she may have returned home after the first day with high spirits because she had a good time.
- Find another child in the neighborhood with whom your student can walk to school or ride on the bus.
- If it is a new school for your child, attend any available orientations and take an opportunity to tour the school before the first day.

- If you feel it is needed, drive your child (or walk with her) to school and pick her up on the first day.

BACKPACK SAFETY

- Choose a backpack with wide, padded shoulder straps and a padded back.
- Pack light. Organize the backpack to use all of its compartments. Pack heavier items closest to the center of the back. The backpack should never weigh more than 10 to 20 percent of your child's body weight.
- Always use both shoulder straps. Slung a backpack over one shoulder can strain muscles.
- If your school allows, consider a rolling backpack. This type of backpack may be a good choice for students who must tote a heavy load. Remember that rolling backpacks still must be carried up stairs, they may be difficult to roll in snow, and they may not fit in some lockers.

TRAVELING TO AND FROM SCHOOL

SCHOOL BUS

- Children should always board and exit the bus at locations that provide safe access to the bus or to the school building.
- Remind your child to wait for the bus to stop before approaching it from the curb.
- Make sure your child walks where she can see the bus driver (which means the driver will be able to see her, too).
- Remind your student to look both ways to see that no other traffic is coming before crossing the street, just in case traffic does not stop as required.
- Your child should not move around on the bus.
- If your child's school bus has lap/shoulder seat belts, make sure your child uses one at all times when in

the bus. (If your child's school bus does not have lap/shoulder belts, encourage the school system to buy or lease buses with lap/shoulder belts.)

CAR

- All passengers should wear a seat belt and/or an age- and size-appropriate car safety seat or booster seat.

- Your child should ride in a car safety seat with a harness as long as possible and then ride in a belt-positioning booster seat. Your child is ready for a booster seat when she has reached the top weight or height allowed for her seat, her shoulders are above the top harness slots, or her ears have reached the top of the seat.

- Your child should ride in a belt-positioning booster seat until the vehicle's seat belt fits properly (usually when the child reaches about 4' 9" in height and is between 8 to 12 years of age). This means that the child is tall enough to sit against the vehicle seat back with her legs bent at the knees and feet hanging down and the shoulder belt lies across the middle of the chest and shoulder, not the neck or throat; the lap belt is low and snug across the thighs, and not the stomach.

- All children younger than 13 years of age should ride in the rear seat of vehicles. If you must drive more children than can fit in the rear seat (when carpooling, for example), move the front-seat passenger's seat as far back as possible and have the child ride in a booster seat if the seat belts do not fit properly without it.

- Remember that many crashes occur while novice teen drivers are going to and from school. You should require seat belt use, limit the number of teen passengers, and do not allow eating, drinking, cell phone conversations, texting or other mobile device use to prevent driver distraction.

Limit nighttime driving and driving in inclement weather. Familiarize yourself with your state's graduated driver's license law and consider the use of a parent-teen driver agreement to facilitate the early driving learning process. For a sample parent-teen driver agreement, see www.healthychildren.org/teendriver

BIKE

- Always wear a bicycle helmet, no matter how short or long the ride.

- Ride on the right, in the same direction as auto traffic.

- Use appropriate hand signals.

- Respect traffic lights and stop signs.

- Wear bright-colored clothing to increase visibility. White or light-colored clothing and reflective gear is especially important after dark.

- Know the "rules of the road."

WALKING TO SCHOOL

- Make sure your child's walk to school is a safe route with well-trained adult crossing guards at every intersection.

- Identify other children in the neighborhood with whom your child can walk to school. In neighborhoods with higher levels of traffic, consider organizing a "walking school bus," in which an adult accompanies a group of neighborhood children walking to school.

- Be realistic about your child's pedestrian skills. Because small children are impulsive and less cautious around traffic, carefully consider whether or not your child is ready to walk to school without adult supervision.

- If your children are young or are walking to a new school, walk with

them the first week or until you are sure they know the route and can do it safely.

- Bright-colored clothing will make your child more visible to drivers.

EATING DURING THE SCHOOL DAY

- Most schools regularly send schedules of cafeteria menus home and/or have them posted on the school's website. With this advance information, you can plan on packing lunch on the days when the main course is one your child prefers not to eat.

- Look into what is offered in school vending machines. Vending machines should stock healthy choices such as fresh fruit, low-fat dairy products, water and 100 percent fruit juice. Learn about your child's school wellness policy and get involved in school groups to put it into effect.

- Each 12-ounce soft drink contains approximately 10 teaspoons of sugar and 150 calories. Drinking just one can of soda a day increases a child's risk of obesity by 60%. Choose healthier options to send in your child's lunch.

BULLYING

Bullying or cyberbullying is when one child picks on another child repeatedly. Bullying can be physical, verbal, or social. It can happen at school, on the playground, on the school bus, in the neighborhood, over the Internet, or through mobile devices like cell phones.

When Your Child Is Bullied

- Help your child learn how to respond by teaching your child how to:

1. Look the bully in the eye.
2. Stay calm in a difficult situation.
3. Walk away.

- Teach your child how to say in a firm voice.

1. "I don't like what you are doing."

2. "Please do NOT talk to me like that."

3. "Why would you say that?"

- Teach your child when and how to ask a trusted adult for help.

- Encourage your child to make friends with other children.

- Support activities that interest your child.

- Alert school officials to the problems and work with them on solutions.

- Make sure an adult who knows about the bullying can watch out for your child's safety and well-being when you cannot be there.

- Monitor your child's social media or texting interactions so you can identify problems before they get out of hand.

When Your Child Is the Bully

- Be sure your child knows that bullying is never OK.

- Set firm and consistent limits on your child's aggressive behavior.

- Be a positive role model. Show children they can get what they want without teasing, threatening or hurting someone.

- Use effective, non-physical discipline, such as loss of privileges.

- Develop practical solutions with the school principal, teachers, counselors, and parents of the children your child has bullied.

When Your Child Is a Bystander

- Tell your child not to cheer on or even quietly watch bullying.

- Encourage your child to tell a trusted adult about the bullying.

- Help your child support other children who may be bullied. Encourage your child to include these children in activities.

- Encourage your child to join with others in telling bullies to stop.

BEFORE AND AFTER SCHOOL CHILD CARE

- During early and middle childhood, youngsters need supervision. A responsible adult should be available to get them ready and off to school in the morning and supervise them after school until you return home from work.

- If a family member will care for your child, communicate the need to follow consistent rules set by the parent regarding discipline and homework.

- Children approaching adolescence (11- and 12-year-olds) should not come home to an empty house in the afternoon unless they show unusual maturity for their age.

- If alternate adult supervision is not available, parents should make special efforts to supervise their children from a distance. Children should have a set time when they are expected to arrive at home and should check in with a neighbor or with a parent by telephone.

- If you choose a commercial after-school program, inquire about the training of the staff. There should be

a high staff-to-child ratio, and the rooms and the playground should be safe.

DEVELOPING GOOD HOMEWORK AND STUDY HABITS

- Create an environment that is conducive to doing homework. Children need a consistent work space in their bedroom or another part of the home that is quiet, without distractions, and promotes study.

- Schedule ample time for homework.

- Establish a household rule that the TV and other electronic distractions stay off during homework time.

- Supervise computer and Internet use.

- Be available to answer questions and offer assistance, but never do a child's homework for her.

- Take steps to help alleviate eye fatigue, neck fatigue and brain fatigue while studying. It may be helpful to close the books for a few minutes, stretch, and take a break periodically when it will not be too disruptive.

- If your child is struggling with a particular subject, and you aren't able to help her yourself, a tutor can be a good solution. Talk it over with your child's teacher first.

- Some children need help organizing their homework. Checklists, timers, and parental supervision can help overcome homework problems.

- If your child is having difficulty focusing on or completing homework, discuss this with your child's teacher, school counselor, or health care provider.

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Introducing:
FOSTER FAMILIES OF UTAH
formerly known as

UFAFA
Utah Foster Adoptive Families Association

We are so excited to introduce the new presidency, vision, and name of your foster parent/adoptive parent advocacy group, Foster Families of Utah, formerly known as UFAFA or Utah Foster Adoptive Families Association.

We represent the voice of foster and foster/adoptive parents and families in every setting; with the legislature, with community partners, and with the media. We have four focus areas: Legislative Advocacy, Public Relations, Parent Voice, and Resource Development.

We need your help! We would love to have you join us and help us change Utah into a foster/adoptive-friendlier world. If you are willing and able to volunteer, we can and will use you!



Laurieann Thorpe, President
Lisa Cummings, Vice President
Ruth Ann Shaw, Secretary
Kyra Sutton, Treasurer

Please contact us on our hotline (801) 252-5395
or email us at fosterfamiliesofutah@gmail.com and
follow us on Facebook at UFAFA.



Grandfamilies, a support, advocacy, and informational service of Children's Service Society, is the only program of its kind in Utah to assist with the varied issues that arise in kinship care.

We provide a variety of services including:

Grandfamilies Information and Support Group:

This ten week educational and support group for kinship caregivers covers a wide range of topics such as family dynamics, legal issues, parenting ideas, caregivers and substance abuse issues. It also provides kinship participants with the opportunity to network and develop friendships with others who are in the same situation, dealing with the same issues. Classes are held at various locations in Salt Lake, Davis, Wasatch, Weber and Cache Counties and they are free of charge with a free dinner.

Friend 2 Friend Monthly Social Activities:

These are monthly gatherings that provide workshops, informational speakers, entertainment, and resources such as clothing, toys and school supplies give-aways as well as 4 yearly celebrations: Easter Egg Hunt, Summer Barbecue, Halloween Festivity at Wheeler's Farm and Christmas Function. These opportunities enhance networking and social participation for relatives and their children that may feel isolated due to their circumstances.

Children's Groups:

Groups for children ages 4 to 11 years are held at the same time as the adult classes and support groups. The children's groups are facilitated by qualified licensed social workers with substance abuse prevention training.

Advocacy, Assistance with Court Matters, Case Management, Crisis Intervention, and Counseling:

Grandfamilies staff are able to assist with and/or link participants to resources, to help them resolve the many issues of kinship caregiving, either over the telephone or in person.

If you are interested in the services Grandfamilies provides please contact our office at:

Children's Service Society
655 East 4500 South, SLC 84107 Suite 200
D: 801.326.4409 | T: 801.355.7444 |
F: 801.355.7453
www.cssutah.org



The Adoption Exchange

The Adoption Exchange **ADOPTION** ART CONTEST



The Adoption Exchange (TAE) is seeking to acquire adoption-themed art in order to develop custom TAE stationary cards featuring the artist's work and a brief description of their picture. The cards will be utilized for hand-written notes to donors, industry professionals and volunteers.

PRIZE:

Five contest winners will receive a hand-held tablet device!

Winners will be announced on or before Oct. 31, 2015. Only winning contestants will be contacted.

POTENTIAL THEMES

- »»» Draw a picture of what a permanent, loving family looks and feels like to you.
- »»» Draw a picture of what your adoption day looked and felt like. If you are still waiting, draw a picture of what you hope that day will be like for you.
- »»» Draw a picture that tells others how it looks and feels to wait for a permanent family.
- »»» Draw a picture that shows what it feels like to be loved and supported by your adoptive family.

CONTEST RULES:

Artwork must be created on an 8.5" x 11" art quality paper (landscape format).

Artwork must have the following written information enclosed:

- ✓ A brief description of your picture (25 words or less)
- ✓ Full name and age (only first name will be used)
- ✓ Full contact information (for follow up and return purposes)

Five pictures will be selected as "winners" and their art and information will be used for the TAE stationary cards.



Please send your artwork, description and contact information to:

The Adoption Exchange
Attn: Dan Lawrence
14232 E. Evans Avenue
Aurora, CO 80014

Artwork will become the property of TAE for any and all purposes it deems appropriate.

Entry Period: Wednesday, July 15, 2015 - Monday, August 17, 2015

EIGHT WAYS to make a *Not-So-Good-Day* BETTER



By: Rachel Macy Stafford
Reprinted with Permission

1. Use the phrase, “I’ll wait for you,” or “We have time.” Such offerings only cost a few minutes but have the potential to bring instant peace to any situation.

2. Accept one invitation that will make someone else happier: Yes, you can throw a penny in the fountain. Yes, we can read one more book. Yes, you can push the button. Then notice the joy that YES brings; that joy is yours for the taking.

3. Decline one request that will make you happier: No, that doesn’t work for me right now. I wish I could, but I can’t. It’s no for today, but please ask me another time. Feel the relief that NO brings. Commend yourself for guarding your time and energy.

4. When a loved one is struggling or you are in conflict with each another, ask: “How can I help?” This question acknowledges his or her struggle while keeping defensive-

ness, judgment, and accusation out of the equation. It puts you on the same team.

5. Be a Silver-Lining Spotter. In the midst of a challenging moment, find the bright side: Well, at least we didn’t miss the whole thing. Well, it could be raining too. Well, at least we had a few minutes to talk while we waited for the doctor.

Added bonus: This teaches your loved ones to be Silver-Lining Spotters too.

6. If feeling overwhelmed by the tasks ahead of you, remind yourself that you do not have to do them all at once, just one. Just start with one.

7. When critical thoughts become critical words that hurt loved ones or yourself, silence them with the phrase: “Only love today.” Constant criticism creates a toxic environment where no one wants to be. Love

creates a home that people want to come back to—even when they are grown.

8. Remind yourself of this significant (but often unappreciated) fact: Someone is counting on me to be here and I am. I am here. If that is all you do today, that is worthy of celebration.

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About the Author:

Rachel is a certified special education teacher and New York Times bestselling author of *Hands Free Mama*. Through truthful storytelling and simple strategies, Rachel helps people overcome distraction and perfection to live better and love more at handsfreemama.com. Rachel’s second book, *Hands Free Life*, debuts on September 8. Rachel’s work has been featured on CNN, Good Morning America, Global News, TIME.com, and The Huffington Post. Rachel loves being outdoors, baking, and doing acts of kindness for those in need with her husband and two daughters who inspire her daily.



Creating Permanency after a Disrupted Placement

By Janice Goldwater, LCSW-C, and Elyana Goldwater

Janice

Expecting a child who has lived through a disrupted adoption to believe in the permanency of a new parental commitment is a very tall order. Think about it: How many adults get hurt in a relationship and then walk confidently into the next one with an open heart and mind? Each time we are hurt, we develop strategies to protect ourselves so it does not happen again. The same thing happens to children.

Human beings are biologically wired for survival, born with a brain that will adapt to the external environment to keep us alive. Attachment theory teaches us about how early relationships are crucial in setting the blueprint of how we relate to others. Children whose needs are consistently met learn the world is a safe place and their needs matter. They learn about healthy reciprocity in relationships and, if they have the capacity, cause-and-effect thinking and emotion regulation.

So what happens when a child's needs are not met? When there is no reliable adult to respond to cries for hunger, touch, and comfort? Experiencing abuse or neglect in the early chapters of life changes brain development. Negative interactions with adults become the map by which the child functions. Children learn that their needs don't matter, adults are not safe, and they are not worthy of care.

Given this foundation, imagine what happens when children experience a disrupted adoption. These children are rejected by the caretakers who made an intentional commitment to love and care for them. They may have been told that these new parents would be there for them, accepting them despite their difficult beginnings. These children are extremely vulnerable and often develop a tough, self-protecting exterior.

Disruption reinforces the negative relationship map formed during the child's early years, and in fact may deepen the wound. Remember, the brain's job is to keep us alive and take each experience

and use it to survive. Children who have experienced a disrupted adoption will be even more skeptical about the possibility of a loving, forever family and less able to trust. It makes sense that a child may be terrified of closeness and be unable to believe she will ever be wanted. Disruption breeds disruption.

When parents are caring for a child who has experienced a disrupted adoption, they must first understand how difficult it will be for the child to establish a healthy relationship. The parents have to be particularly intentional about how they care for the child, giving her time to heal and learn to trust. Below are some specific strategies to help:

1. Create a consistent and predictable environment. This means having a predictable schedule and letting the child know what to anticipate each day. The more concrete a parent can be, the better. Children who have had unstable beginnings have had many painful surprises so their bodies are extremely sensitive to change. A child can be physiologically triggered by small changes, but parents can help them understand and manage the feelings that emerge. Structure keeps us safe because there are fewer surprises.

2. Assume your child is doing the best he can based on his experience. When you see negative behavior, look behind it—think about how this behavior may have helped him survive in another setting. Respond with empathy and curiosity—even when behavior makes no sense.

3. Be aware of eye contact, voice tone, touch, and movement to ensure you are communicating safety and acceptance. Children who have been hurt will be extremely sensitive to the environment and may become agitated or uncomfortable with loud voices, fast movements, and dramatic communications. If your child has trouble with eye contact, don't force it. Parents have to modify their communication styles to build a safe relationship foundation.

4. Make time to play and enjoy one another. Find something you have in common and both enjoy (art, sports, pets, food, music, games, etc.) and spend a few minutes at these activities each day. (You can build duration over time.) Feeling happy in the context of relationship is very therapeutic for the parts of the brain that need strengthening.

5. Focus on the process of what is going on rather than making assumptions based on beliefs of right and wrong. For example, a child might take food and hide it, then lie about what he's done. When asked if he took the food, he has a tantrum. It would be easy to be angry because he "stole" the food then "lied" about it and then deflected the blame by having a tantrum. This scenario is fairly typical and well-trained parents learn to stay calm, not react to the content, and focus on calming the emotions.

6. Don't take the child's words personally. Hurt children terrified of closeness may use nasty, hurtful language to push you away and protect themselves. Some may use language as a weapon to try and make you feel as bad about yourself as they do about themselves.

7. Be aware that your child may reject you before you can reject her. Remember, she has learned that adults are not reliable and they hurt children. The parents' job is to recognize this protective behavior for what it is and not fall prey to the negative cycle.

8. Make life as simple as possible. Limit the number of transitions, activities, and people the child must negotiate relationships with on a daily basis.

9. Celebrate small successes and apologize when you make mistakes. Learning to apologize with ease will help you feel more comfortable being self-reflective and observing what you are doing. Developing a relationship with a hurt child is very difficult and you will make mistakes. Learning to forgive yourself when you make a mistake is critical to committing

for the long run. Make sure you take time to acknowledge small successes. They matter!

10. Use language to describe emotional states and model how to repair when things don't go well. For example, you might say, "Mommy was tired today and when the plate broke I had a big angry feeling and yelled awfully loud. I am sorry if I scared you. Next time when I am tired and start to feel angry, I will try to use my breath to calm myself down so I don't yell. I think I am going to start practicing keeping myself calm with breathing. I am going to practice breathing in, holding my breath and counting to four, and then blowing it out like a bubble while counting to four again. That really helps me stay calm."

11. Expect the child to be developmentally younger than his age. Create an appropriate environment for the child's developmental age rather than chronological age.

12. Provide an opportunity for your child to express grief about the loss of the former family and let her know how- ever she feels is okay. A parent may have ambivalent feelings about the former family, but it is important to give the child the space to have her own feelings.

As professionals placing children who have experienced an adoption disruption, our challenge is to ensure that parents have the tools and support to manage this difficult journey. We are asking parents to be strong enough to manage immense day-to-day challenges that often force them to confront the most vulnerable parts of themselves. Parenting a child who has learned to survive in adverse conditions is hard and takes tremendous commitment, focus, and effort.

Professionals need to make sure that the family has the preparation and support needed to be successful. Pre-adoption training should provide a thorough understanding of attachment, trauma, the brain, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, grief and loss, identity, and the corresponding parenting strategies. Learning how overall development (cognitive, psychological, and neurological) is affected is also important. Parents must be open to doing their own therapeutic work because their vulnerabilities will be exposed during this type of parenting.

Peer support from other adoptive families can help parents normalize what they and their children are experiencing and give hope for the future. There is nothing like another parent who understands. Professional guidance can help parents understand the reasons children may

struggle and learn the best techniques for building trust. Together this support can enable parents to stay in a positive relationship with the child.

Unless we're all careful, disruption can breed disruption. Children who have been displaced one or more times become expert at survival. But they are rarely experts at living happily and successfully in a healthy family. To heal, these children must be placed with well-prepared, well-supported adults who can stay committed even on the darkest days. The new parents must be self-reflective, open to exploring their own historical issues, and learn new ways of responding and managing their own emotions and ideas about parenting. It is incumbent upon the professional community to ensure that parents have the tools and support to succeed. No one can do this alone!

Elyana

Learning to trust was, and still is, one of the hardest things I have had to do in my 23 years. When I was five, I was taken from my first family and placed in a children's home. Life there was really hard. Just before my ninth birthday, I was adopted by a family in New York. Ten months later I was shocked to hear that they were thinking about getting divorced and wanted to find me a new family. I did not know that could even happen. It did.

Being a child who was never safe was really hard. Because I never knew what to expect as a child, I lost the ability to tell safe from terrifying. My stomach would experience a nauseating flip with just a simple change in my routine or environment. To me, it felt as if a life or death choice was approaching. My body could not tell the difference between being told to wait a minute for something and truly being threatened if I did not get something at that very moment. When a child grows up with the confusion of what is safe and what is dangerous—who is safe and who would hurt them—it really changes how the entire world looks.

As a young child, I was hurt by a raised hand. As I got older, one of the hardest lessons I learned was that people—people who gave me their word that I would have safety and a permanent, loving environment—could hurt me 10 times worse with their words and actions.

Growing up, the words love and trust were only air-filled words. Adults saying anything about love or trust or anything remotely along those lines meant nothing to me. I had no idea what they meant. It was just the same story I'd already heard

from a different person.

When my now-permanent, loving family first came to adopt me, nothing had changed. I was still scared of the words love and trust. I was prepared to push before being pushed. It didn't matter if they did things very differently from the two families and other adults who had cared for me. I just knew they had no idea what I had been through, and they never really would.

It took consistency from them to change things. I needed them to show me over and over and over again that they love me, that they care for me, and that they aren't going anywhere. I needed them to be patient with me. It took almost 10 years for me to lose all trust with grown ups, and it wasn't going to take a couple of weeks or months for me to turn that around.

I can only imagine how hard it must have been for my parents and family. They were taught that in a relationship you give and take. For me, all I could do is receive, push away, and not give back. In the beginning, everything was one-sided. They gave and gave, and I didn't give in return. I know they had to put in more effort than they had ever imagined.

It helped me when my parents put their frustration, sadness, and their motivation to help us get through this into therapy. It also helped when they put in a lot of time to research how to better understand this thing we were going through. That's all anyone can do—try to get information and support, and try to work on what they've kept inside and never worked through.

Your child doesn't want to see you as a "perfect parent" every moment, a grown up who only has the power to set consequences and the power to say no. For your children to better relate with you, let them see you feel the emotions of sad, goofy, upset, and ecstatic and try to show them a different way, a healthier way of expressing themselves. Be there on the good days and on the hard ones. It's worth it! I promise.

About the Author:

Janice Goldwater is the founder and executive director of Adoptions Together, a Maryland, D.C., and Virginia-based agency that uses a family success model of service. Founded 25 years ago, Adoptions Together has created permanency for and enriched the lives of more than 4,000 children. With a child- and family-centered approach, the agency provides a holistic base of attachment-focused, trauma-informed support and education to families and the professionals who serve them. Janice and her husband, Harry, adopted their youngest daughter Elyana in 2002 when she was 10. You can reach Janice and Elyana at jjgoldwater@adoptionstogether.org.



"What We Wish We Had Known"

A mother and daughter share lessons they learned when adopting an older child.

By Judy Myerson and Sara Myerson
(reprinted with permission from Adoptalk)

She was the one whose picture we kept going back to, the one whom we couldn't turn away from of the hundreds of waiting child pictures we studied for months. She looked out at us, unsmiling eyes shadowed by heavy bangs.

My son, Daniel, then 11, called her "the sad one" and said, "Take her, Mom, please." I said, "But she's older than we planned. She'll be eight or nine by the time she comes home." He replied, "Take her." So we did. Adopting an older child, one who comes "ready-made" with a distinct history and personality, is a decision that ultimately comes from the heart. The journey of adopting an older child sight-unseen is a leap of faith on the part of the family and of enormous courage on the part of the child. It is also a journey we entered into, like many well-meaning parents, somewhat naively.

Prior to Sara's adoption, we were a family with two parents and two children — 12-year-old Daniel (biological) and two-year-old Mia (adopted from China as an infant). Now, four years, one marital dissolution and a lot of turmoil, tenacity, reading, professional help, hard work, and heart-opening later, we are a family of five, with a different configuration.

Sara is my very own daughter and I am, as she recently told me, her "real, not pretend" mother. Of all my children, she is the one who has caused me to stop, look, and stretch myself the most. I would not take back any of our last four years; however, there are things that

we both wish we had known before her adoption, things that might have made the journey easier.

I needed help!

Not only did I need help, but there was nothing wrong with me because I did. Parents are often ashamed to let others know that they might be having trouble in a family arrangement that they wanted so badly.

I did not call my agency or social worker when I began to realize we were in "uproar." As a clinical social worker with expertise in working with adolescents and eight years experience in a psychiatric hospital, I should have known what to do. Finally I sought help, and, thank goodness, it wasn't too late.

I did not really have a chance to say 'yes.'

When they told me there was a family from America who wanted to adopt me and asked if I wanted to be adopted, of course I said yes. When they gave me photos of my new house, family and friends, everything looked so nice. I felt special; everyone treated me differently and paid attention to me.

When my new family came, I was excited and scared. As soon as I met them, I left with them and was adopted. Other children had gotten to visit with their new family, then the family left and came back again the next day.

I thought that was going to happen to me too. But I never had a chance to go back, think, and talk to my friends about it. I never really got to know this family, to say no or yes to this adoption. I would have said yes, but I would have liked to have been able to choose.

Children in placement and in orphanages are kids whom things happen to. They have been abandoned, neglected, and mistreated. They've been removed from families, sent off with new ones, placed in orphanages and group homes by adults, usually without explanation, preparation, or warning. They do not get to choose much of what happens to them, often growing up feeling powerless.

To Sara, her adoption was merely one more thing that happened to her. We should have insisted that Sara have several visits with us prior to adopting her. At the very least, we could and should have allowed Sara the opportunity to say yes (or possibly no!) to us.

Initial bonding with an older child is extremely important.

Any child who was in an orphanage or foster care will have had major interruptions and disruptions with primary caregivers, and at worst, never had an adult with whom to bond.

We were lucky. Sara came to us with a memory of strong primary attachments to both her birth mother and birth

father. She also came with the history of having been abandoned by those parents, with no explanation of why she had to go or why she was the one so chosen. In her four years at the orphanage, she did not find one adult who took care of more than her physical needs.

She was not about to trust that we would truly be there and remain. She had also perfected a number of survival skills — a defensive prickliness and pushing-away behaviors — that could make it hard for someone to want to bond with her.

When I watch Sara's adoption video now, several things jump out at me. The first is how often I allowed Sara to walk with, hold hands with, be given things, and be comforted by our guide, rather than me or her father. The second realization is how my energy was focused on caring for two-year-old Mia, not Sara.

We should have been doing all the caretaking. I should have been holding Sara's hand, not a shopping bag. Mia could have been cared for by her brother. Those first moments, when Sara was most afraid and vulnerable, were golden opportunities to establish us as the ones she could turn to, and to establish me as her mom.

I wish Mom had known how much I needed her.

Even though I was nine and had taken care of myself, I wanted Mom to do things for me, like pick out my clothes. Instead of getting annoyed when I got mad and said, "No, you pick," she should have understood that there were too many choices. I'd taken care of myself too much.

School-age children can show a confusing mixture of over-independence and neediness. Their "age-inappropriate" requests can be signals of their emotional state. Responding to their emotional needs decreases their anxiety, makes them feel secure, and facilitates attachment.

The more opportunities, the better. This includes rocking, singing lullabies, drinking from a sippy cup and sometimes even bottle-feeding. Parents are often fearful that if they allow or encourage regressive behavior, their children will stay young forever. But I've found that providing children with what they need allows them to move through that place, not get stuck there.

I should have set clearer rules and expectations.

In Sara's first few months with us, I did not address certain negative behaviors I knew came from her past experiences or current fears. For example, I did not establish clearly the idea of "mine" and "shared" property, and I allowed Sara not to share because I knew that she needed to have things that were hers alone. This exacerbated 12-year-old Daniel's feelings of anger, displacement, and territoriality.

Once bad behavior had been allowed ("You never said or did anything about that before!"), it was harder to address later. I was the bad guy and Sara the victim. Just clarifying rules and expectations for your child will help him meet those expectations and fit into your family structure. This will help increase your child's sense of security, and will keep you, the parent, from losing your mind.

I wish Mom realized that I never had slept alone.

I was given a bed in a room all by myself. I had never slept in a bed without someone else in it, much less a room. I was used to the lights and sounds of the city. Now I was alone in a big quiet room in the dark. I kept all the lights on, but I was scared.

Children from other countries often sleep with their parents and, as they become older, with their siblings. In many orphanages children sleep two to a bed, head to feet, in a room filled with children.

Children in placement seldom have a room to themselves. Sleeping near or with a parent creates a sense of safety and encourages trust and bonding. I believe that, of all the things that I did, allowing Sara to sleep in my bed brought about a major shift in her sense of security.

The hard times are the most important ones.

Parenting a child with a history of loss, trauma, and neglect is not smooth sailing. Such children test and push limits to see if these parents will also send them away. Sara came with abandonment and trauma issues, and she acted out in ways that I did not like or initially understand.

She pushed buttons that I didn't know I had, and tapped feelings in me that I thought unthinkable. What helped me

was realizing that when I experienced anger or helplessness, this was what Sara was feeling as well. This helped me to connect with her rather than simply reacting to her behavior.

Attachment is about more than bonding. It takes place best when a parent stays with their child through the hard moments and remains there afterwards. For Sara, those moments were when she began to integrate her emotions, past experience, and present actions.

By helping her name, express and understand her feelings over time, she no longer feels as controlled by them or that they or she are "bad." By coming back, talking, laughing, and sometimes apologizing when I have been angry, Sara has learned that neither her anger, nor mine, means she will ever be abandoned again.

Sara, at nine years old, came to us with a clear, strong sense of individuality. Our temperaments were not a natural "match," and my own patience and objectivity were, I'm sure, hampered by illness and marital stress. Sara was and is gentle, loving, giving, and forgiving. She is bright, talented, creative, funny, and insightful.

Her strength, will and holding power have taught me what it means to stay in a relationship without sacrificing truth. Her way of letting feelings go once they have passed has been a lesson for me. Most of all, Sara has shown me my own capacity for commitment and love. While there are many things I wish I had known before Sara's adoption, the one thing I never could have possibly known is how much I could love her and hold her in my heart.

10 Ways to Bond With an Older Child

Bonding with an older child is somewhat similar to bonding with a baby. It involves attunement, touch, eye contact, food, and affection. Most importantly, it means that you must initiate contact as well. Many older children resist physical affection at first. If your child is resistant to hugs or comfort from you, try one of these ways to facilitate bonding:

1. Touch her quickly and frequently.
2. Smile in the car mirror
3. Give her lots of attention and band-aids for injuries.
4. Feed him sweets, from your hand to his mouth.
5. Sing lullabies and funny songs to and with her.
6. Swing on park swings.
7. Brush her hair, polish her nails.
8. Hold and rock him while reading.
9. Play games in which she follows your lead ("Mother May I"; "Red Light, Green Light"; "Simon Says").
10. Dance around the house together. Laugh.

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