

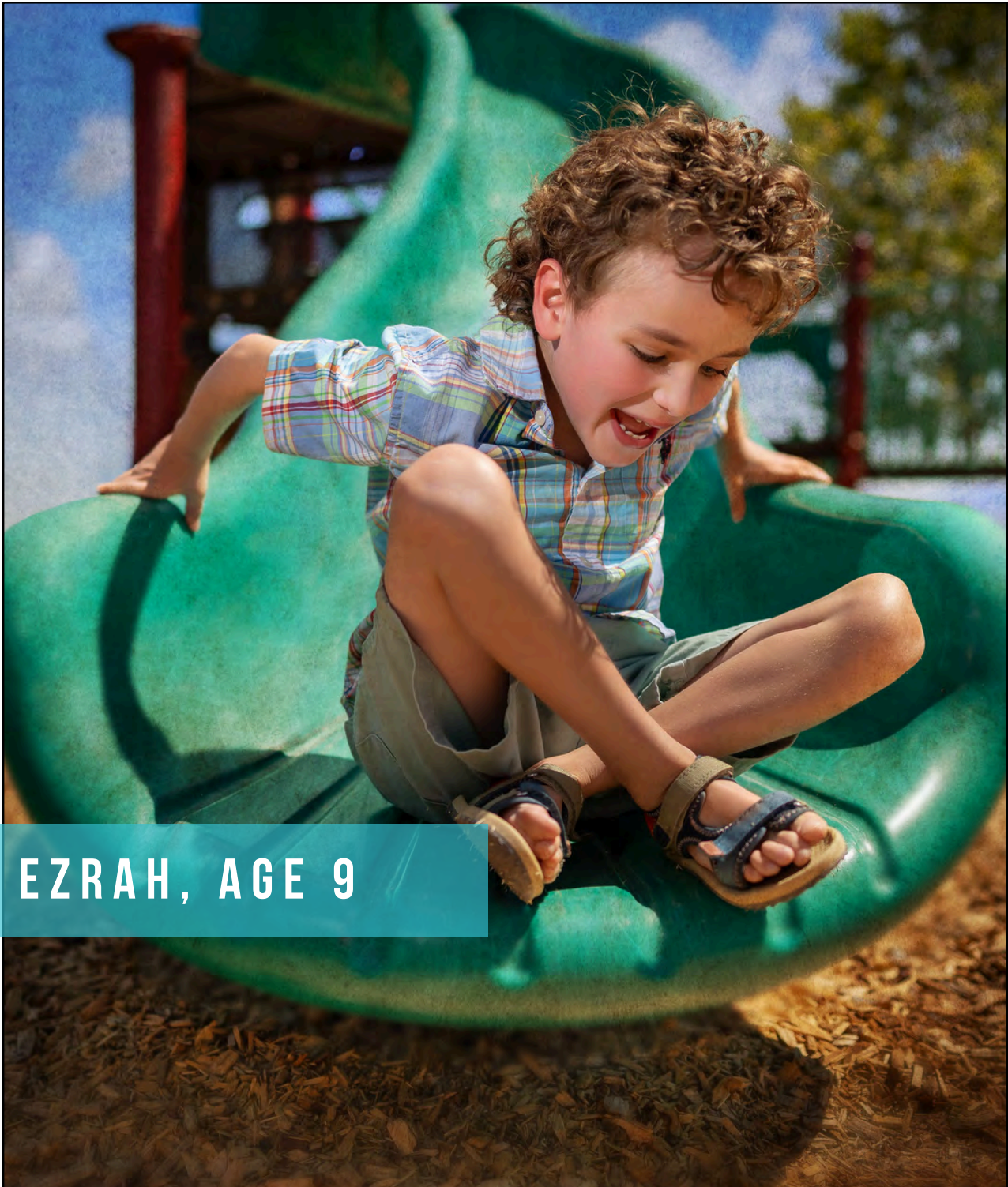


UTAH'S
*CHILD & FAMILY
SERVICES*

ADOPTION CONNECTION

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH RAISE THE FUTURE

NOVEMBER 2025 EDITION



EZRAH, AGE 9

Photo by: Michael Schoenfeld

A portrait of a young Black woman with long, dark braids, wearing large gold hoop earrings and a nose ring. She is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a gentle smile. The background is a dark, textured wall.

VERONICA
PHOTOGRAPHED BY AMBER SCHIAVONE

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UTAH'S
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**ADOPTION
CONNECTION**
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SEARCH AND REUNION

The "Search and Reunion" page from Utah Adoption Connection guides adult adoptees and birth families on how to access adoption records and reconnect.

Key Points:

- Adult adoptees in Utah can request non-identifying genetic and social histories of their birth families through the Utah Office of Vital Records & Statistics.
- Adoptive parents receive forms at adoption finalization that can later be used to access this information.
- Utah's Mutual-Consent Voluntary Adoption Registry (for adoptees 21+, birth parents, and siblings) allows the exchange of identifying information if both parties register and consent.

Helpful Tips:

- Request records from your adoption agency or vital records office.
- Review adoption laws for the state of birth or adoption.
- Register with both Utah's registry and the International Soundex Reunion Registry (ISRR).
- Talk with adoptive parents for any additional information they may hold.
- Join adoption-related support or reunion groups online.

Resources Linked:

- [Utah Vital Records - Adoption Registry](#)
- [ISRR - International Soundex Reunion Registry](#)
- [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)
- [Utah State Legislature - Adoption Law](#)
- [CDC - Vital Records by State](#)

Visit <https://www.utahadopt.org/support-resources/adoptive-family-resource-library/search-and-reunion> to learn more.



ON THE COVER: EZRAH

Ezrah is an absolute joy! This affectionate and happy third grader loves spending time outdoors, surrounded by trees and blue skies. Whether he's jumping on his mini trampoline or playing with toys that make fun vibrations, Ezrah brings excitement and laughter to any day.

Music is one of his favorite things, especially when he can tap along to the beat. His easygoing nature and bright smile make him a wonderful companion to be around.

Ezrah would thrive with a patient, loving family who can celebrate his unique personality and share in the simple joys he finds every day.

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Brandie Naylor, Editor

Lilian Lopez, Design Director

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I Spy Helpful Help: How to Find an Adoption-Competent Therapist

BY: SHAMELE HILL, MSW

Adoption Advocate No. 177 - Have you been in search of a therapist to support your foster, adoptive, or kinship family, but stopped looking because you didn't know what qualifications to look for, what questions to ask, or how to know if they would be a good fit for your family? Are you currently working with a therapist, but feel like you're not making a connection, or they don't seem to understand your needs or challenges? Do you know someone else who is struggling to find a helpful therapist? If you answered yes, this article is for you!

Lifelong Impacts of Foster Care, Kinship Care, and Adoption

Foster care, kinship care, and adoption are significant experiences with lifelong impacts. The American Psychological Association (APA) has identified mental health challenges as one of the greatest unmet needs of children in the foster care system. Foster and adoptive families seek mental health services at a rate of **three to five times higher** than the general population.^[1]

Harm experienced by children in the context of early adverse experiences will need to be healed in nurturing, caregiving relationships. Research has shown that traditional parenting and discipline techniques are often not successful in achieving this. Working with an adoption-competent therapist can assist parents in developing therapeutic parenting strategies to address emotional and developmental challenges. Additionally, it helps parents understand the reasons behind their children's behavior, enabling the development of realistic expectations and effective support for their children. As parents gain a better understanding of their child's needs, they will be able to utilize different parenting strategies that reframe discipline as teaching, and support better coping and self-regulation skills.^[2]

Trauma and Attachment

Trauma and attachment are two interconnected concepts that play significant roles in psychological and emotional development. Early attachment experiences can significantly impact how an individual responds to and copes with traumatic events throughout their lifetime. Trauma, including inadequate nurturance and maltreatment, can also impact attachment patterns, disrupt the formation of healthy attachments, and lead to difficulties with trust, emotional regulation, and forming healthy relationships. But trauma is more than inadequate nurture and maltreatment; it includes experiences of discrimination. Whether it is related to race, adoption, or other aspects of one's identity, ongoing discrimination is a type of trauma that impacts a youth's mental health.

“Early attachment experiences can significantly impact how an individual responds to and copes with traumatic events throughout their lifetime.”

According to the U.S. Census about one-third of all adopted children are of a different race or ethnicity than their parents.¹⁴¹ In many cases, parents parenting children of different races and cultures are not aware of the prejudices and discrimination their children experience. Additionally, LGBTQ youth experience more placement instability, harassment, rejection, and violence than other youth in foster care. Experiencing high levels of family rejection increases their vulnerability to suicide attempts, depression, drug abuse, and high-risk sexual behaviors. To understand the psychological impact of trauma, it is important to understand the meaning of the event to the child. What are the child's beliefs about why bad things happened? What caused it? How does it affect his or her beliefs about self and others? Considering the concept of traumatic or traumagenic states can help explore the psychological impact and provide a framework to understand the profound psychological effects, unraveling the intricate ways in which these experiences influence the child's mental well-being and emotional resilience.¹⁴² It's important to note that some youth may not disclose traumas until years later when they finally feel safe, so it is important to assess for trauma over time.



Attachment can be viewed as an ongoing relational connection between two people that develops over time through interactions that satisfy needs and bring pleasure. Secure attachment is the foundational building block for all healthy development in children and promotes felt safety; self-regulation; brain development; positive sense of self-worth; and physical, cognitive, and language development. Secure attachment is essential to the development of empathy and a conscience.^[4] However, many children and youth experiencing foster care, kinship care, and adoption have experienced trauma in addition to mental health challenges that interfere with the development of healthy attachment, especially in the first three years of life.

It's important to note that some youth may not disclose traumas until years later when they finally feel safe, so it is important to assess for trauma over time.

Attachment difficulties can include a range of behaviors including difficulty seeking comfort and reassurance from caregivers when distressed, refusal to accept the authority of caregivers to set limits and rules, controlling behavior, lack of cause-and-effect thinking, poor emotional regulation, indiscriminate affection with strangers, lying and stealing, lack of conscience, and cruelty to animals or people.^[4] Adoption-competent therapists can help address challenges with trauma and attachment.

Guiding Principles of Adoption Competency

Are you still wondering what adoption competency means? Let's get to it! Adoption competency refers to providing mental health services tailored to the unique needs of children who are experiencing adoption or guardianship by adhering to key principles and competencies. The principles of adoption competency encompass a deep understanding of adoption's complexities, including its various forms and the lifelong impact on adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents.

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An adoption-competent approach prioritizes the well-being and emotional needs of the child, acknowledging the unique challenges related to identity, attachment, and loss that adoption or guardianship can bring. More recently, the term adoption competence has been broadened to encompass experiences of foster care and kinship care in addition to adoption.

Therapists who have adoption competency understand that the nuanced needs and challenges experienced by families formed by adoption are different from those experienced by families formed by birth. Adoption-competent practice includes the following five key principles identified in The National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative:^[4]

1. Secure attachment: Attachment challenges often arise for children and youth who have experienced foster care, kinship care, or adoption, resulting in a variety of attachment styles. The good news is that attachments are flexible and can be built and rebuilt. Integrating healthy attachments to birth families, adoptive families, and other supportive individuals is essential, with a particular emphasis on sibling relationships to mitigate the impact of separation.

Adoption-competent practices involve assessing a child's attachment history and developing treatment plans to address attachment-related needs. Attachment-based therapy interventions can help children and youth explore their past attachment experiences and build new, secure attachments through trusting relationships. Effective parenting strategies should support attachment to birth and foster families, address behaviors within the context of attachment history, and promote secure attachments while respecting cultural identities.

2. Supporting grief and loss: Acknowledging that loss is at the heart of every adoption, foster care, and kinship care experience is fundamental to adoption competency. Often, the focus is on the gains, without acknowledging and honoring the inherent losses for children and parents. Ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief are prevalent in adoption and kinship care situations. These types of grief and loss make the process of resolution more challenging, as the individuals lost are often alive, making it hard to accept the finality of the loss. An adoption-competent therapist plays a vital role in validating and supporting the child's grief, ensuring that it is acknowledged and addressed.

Furthermore, the therapist's role extends to working with adoptive parents and guardians, helping them comprehend their motivations, assess any unresolved grief, and recognize that their own emotions can be triggered by a child's behavior, even if they believe they have resolved their grief. It's essential for caregivers to undergo their own healing process to provide a nurturing environment for their children.

Additionally, the therapist can facilitate understanding and empathy between birth parents and adoptive parents, acknowledging the grief, loss, and feelings of defeat that birth parents may experience. Encouraging respectful and sensitive interactions between these two parties is crucial in supporting the overall well-being of the child and families involved.

3. Understanding the impact of trauma on brain development and behavior: The impact of trauma and early adverse experiences on brain development and behavior is profound, disrupting healthy neurodevelopment and leading to various emotional and behavioral responses in children. Effective interventions for children with trauma histories must be developmentally appropriate, considering both historic trauma and intergenerational trauma. Therapeutic parenting strategies, along with daily routines, are fundamental to building trust and promoting healing. It's essential to view behaviors through a trauma lens and emphasize "what happened to a child?" rather than "what's wrong with the child?"

Caregivers are key agents in the healing process, and their understanding of attachment, trauma, and loss histories is vital when parenting a child with trauma experiences. Adoption-competent therapeutic strategies focus on building coping and regulatory skills in children and providing support for caregivers, including structure, routines, age-appropriate behavior management, nurturing activities, and emotional support.

It's essential to view behaviors through a trauma lens and emphasize "what happened to a child?" rather than "what's wrong with the child?"



4. Promoting positive identity development: Identity development among youth in adoptive, foster care, and kinship care families is a complex process, particularly during adolescence, and is further complicated by factors such as complex trauma, ambiguous losses, and unresolved grief. Adolescents often grapple with questions about their origins and sense of self, which can be challenging when they lack a complete understanding of their own story. The degree of openness in adoption or guardianship significantly influences identity formation, with greater openness typically contributing to a more positive self-identity.

Adoption-competent interventions are valuable in helping youth explore their identity dimensions, integrate their histories from birth and adoptive families, manage divided loyalties and difficult emotions, and navigate the search and reunion process when desired. It is crucial to educate parents about the complexities of adoption's impact on identity formation and how to provide support throughout this journey into adulthood.

5. Evaluating the impact of race, culture, and diversity: Race, ethnicity, culture, class, and sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE), all play unique and crucial roles in adoption and guardianship practices and in the identity development of children and youth. Adoption competency involves developing an awareness of how these factors influence assessments and treatment goals. The ability to address discrimination, historical trauma, self-esteem, and identity development—in the context of adoption or guardianship—relies on being adoption-competent.

Adoption-competent therapists must be willing to engage in difficult conversations and encourage caregivers to do the same. When children have a different racial or ethnic background, culture, or SOGIE than their parents, it is essential for parents to respect and honor these aspects of their child's identity and provide socialization experiences that promote their overall well-being.

The guiding principles of adoption competency help create a supportive and informed environment for all individuals touched by adoption and guardianship, ensuring the child's best interests are paramount while addressing the unique aspects of adoption.^{[8] [9] [10]}

Qualities of an Adoption-Competent Therapist

The challenges of adoptive and guardianship families seeking mental health services are often embedded in a multilayered context, with involvement of multiple systems. In addition to having the knowledge, expertise, and skills relating to trauma, attachment, identity, and loss, the therapist needs to collaborate and advocate with the family and multiple helping professionals, such as child welfare workers, crisis intervention workers, psychiatrists, school social workers, or psychologists. Communication and collaboration among them are essential.^[11]

An adoption-competent therapist will value the participation of adoptive parents. Traditional family therapists who are unfamiliar with adoption-related or trauma-based issues may view the child's problems as a manifestation of overall family dysfunction. They may not consider the child's historical trauma or experiences in other care settings and may view adoptive parents more as a part of the problem than the solution.

An adoption-competent therapist will value the participation of adoptive parents.

Adoption-competent therapists believe that children can heal within the context of new family relationships and with parents who have the skills to support children who come from traumatic beginnings. The therapist you choose must recognize the importance of including parents (and possibly other family members or supports) in the treatment process. If you seek treatment from a therapist who attempts to exclude you as a parent, you may want to reconsider whether that therapist is appropriate for you and your family. Finding the right therapist and managing the right therapy for your child takes effort and commitment. For therapy to be successful, open communication between you, your child, and your therapist is a must.



“Try before you buy” – Interviewing Therapists Before Making a Commitment

Finding the right therapist means searching for one who has adoption-related experience and has been trained in adoption competency. Take time to interview therapists by phone or in-person to find the one with whom you feel most comfortable and who is the best qualified to help your child and family with issues related to adoption trauma, identity development, and more. Here’s some information to gather and questions to discuss during your initial interview/meeting in addition to the general questions about their years of experience, licenses, and certifications:[121](#), [131](#), [141](#)

1. What is your experience with adoption and adoption challenges?
2. How many adoptive families have you worked with? (Be specific about the adoption challenges that affect your family, such as open adoption, transracial adoption, LGBTQ adoption, searching for birth relatives, children who have experienced abuse or institutionalization, or children with attachment difficulties.)
3. Do you include parents and other family members in the therapeutic process?
4. Do you include natural supports, such as teachers, coaches, clergy, and other community members in the youth’s life in the therapeutic process?
5. Have you taken any courses/trainings in adoption competency (i.e., The National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI) or Training for Adoption Competency (TAC)? (See information about NTI and TAC)
6. What approach to therapy do you use?
7. In your work with transracial and transcultural families, what are some of the challenges they have presented with?

Consider requesting a progress update with the therapist six to eight weeks after treatment begins and regular updates thereafter. These will help all parties assess the progress of treatment. If you feel that the therapist is not meeting your child’s or family’s needs, take action. You may need to find a new therapist, even though that may seem like a daunting task. Too many families have shared stories of ineffective therapists and psychiatrists who have done more harm than good. It is ok to make a change when needed.

Helpful Help Is Obtainable

An adoption-competent therapist approaches their work with a family-centered, strengths-based, attachment-focused, and evidence-informed perspective, considering the historical context and evolving best practices in adoption and guardianship. They are well-versed in the mental health challenges arising from neglect, abuse, trauma, and loss, with an understanding of how early adverse experiences impact later development. Their skill set includes proficiency in evidence-based mental health interventions.

They highly value their role in fostering healing relationships, addressing loss and grief, and facilitating connections among diverse families while respecting cultural and racial identities. They excel at collaborating within interdisciplinary teams and support adoptive and guardianship families in establishing robust support networks. Additionally, they assist parents in implementing therapeutic parenting strategies, promote connection and communication between adoptive/kinship families and birth family members, and ensure caregiver involvement in the treatment process. Their holistic approach encompasses support before and after achieving permanency.

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Tantrums, Meltdowns & Whining, Oh, My! How to Parent Challenging Behaviors

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We can all identify what it looks like to raise a harder-to-parent child. After all, many of us live daily with short fuses, extra sensory sensitivities, tantrums, clinginess, whining, high-running engines, and constant bids for attention. Sound familiar? How do you parent your child through these challenging behaviors?

What Factors Contribute to These Challenging Behaviors?

Before we dig into how to parent our kids through some of these challenging behaviors, it's helpful to understand the root causes of why our kids feel harder to parent.

As with many parenting issues we discuss here, you won't be surprised to learn that sometimes a harder-to-parent kid is challenging because of our own "stuff." Several issues impact how we experience our child: our innate temperament, parenting style, attachment history, sensory profile, and how we "fit" with this child.

On the child's side of this dynamic, their temperament, trauma history, sensitivity to stress, attachment challenges, and how the child "fits" with our current style will all contribute to their behaviors. For kids who join the family at older ages, many instinctive responses to struggle, transition, or internal needs have already been "grooved" into their brains. Their challenging behaviors are often survival skills – learned in the unhealthiest of conditions. Our harder-to-parent kids can be difficult because their behaviors feel so extreme and intense – to them and us.

Parenting Challenging Behaviors Requires Us to Change First

It's vital that we parents understand how to attend to the need-based factors contributing to our children's challenging behaviors for several reasons:

Wounds Created in Relationship Will Heal in Relationship

When we are parenting children wounded by traumatic experiences in previous relationships, healing can only come in the context of safe, nurturing relationships. In these safe relationships, they can relearn new ways of coping and behaving. They must learn that they no longer need the survival skills they developed earlier in life. They need to repeatedly experience the pleasure of a relationship and the safety of a loving attachment with you to open themselves to learning new behaviors.

We Are Raising Future Adults

Modeling responsiveness and healthy relationship skills, including self-work and openness to learning, gives our children life skills. Changing our child's behaviors should target life beyond the immediate annoyance or challenge of their behaviors. Our children need us to take the long view to parent them through these difficult moments. The bigger goal is to help them grow into great adults who experience a need and have healthy ways to express or meet that need.

For example, shutting down repeated whines for more screen time might bring peace at that moment. However, it doesn't change the underlying need your child is trying to express. Ask yourself: what is my child asking for underneath that whine? How can I positively respond in a way that builds connection and communicates the child's value? Can I meet his need in a way that layers healthy life skills for self-advocacy?

Our Coping Tools Become Their Coping Tools

Our children's challenging behaviors are stressful and sometimes even embarrassing. However, how we react – or respond – in those moments can either break the cycle of challenging behaviors or further entrench it. Not only should we be practicing responsiveness to their needs, but we should also be modeling how to express those needs differently. If our reactions in challenging moments don't match the words that we tell our kids in their challenging moments, take a guess which "lesson" speaks louder to them? The expression "more is caught than taught" springs to mind because it's so true.

How to Parent Challenging Behaviors

Now that you know where your child's challenging behaviors come from and why you need to do the hard work of leading the way to change, it's time to get practical. We've put together suggestions for parenting your child's challenging behaviors, paired with real-life examples to help you get started. Your goal is to build repeated positive and pleasurable experiences between you and your child. You will reinforce the messages that you value your child and support her as she tries to grow beyond her challenging behaviors.



Draw Your Child into Relationship

Our kids who struggle with challenging behaviors often look for connections with you, albeit poorly. Their histories of difficult relationship experiences lend themselves to unhealthy or annoying bids for that attention. So even when your child's behaviors repeatedly stress your capacity to connect, consider how to target time with that child proactively.

The goal is to build up repeated experiences of predictable, safe, and nurturing relationships. Give the child a voice and choice in how to build up that pleasure of being with you. Keep doing it as you see what works and how your child softens toward your bids for connection.

The Real-Life Example

Your child has begun to talk back and ignore your attempts to connect with her. She is prickly and grudgingly engages in conversation with one-word answers. The next time you pick her up from practice, stop for her favorite fast food and have dinner alone together. While you are driving, ask her to pick some music. Ask her why she likes this song or band, and pick out one or two things you enjoy about her choice.

Keep the conversation easy and light but thank her for hanging out with you and ask if you can take her out again next week. Slowly build on the first few encounters by focusing on being safe and predictable and making a pleasant space to connect.

Fill Their Tank Before They Get Empty

Consider the preceding events that might contribute to their tantrums for kids who exhibit short fuses, hair-trigger tempers, or quick flashpoints for frustration. Is she well-rested? Has he eaten lately, or is he crashing? Are you asking her to transition too quickly from one activity to another? Ask yourself all these questions and consider how to fill your child's gas tank pre-emptively.

There is a real need to preventively meet our children's physical needs for healthy food, water, and sufficient rest. When we are diligent in keeping our kids well-fueled, their brains are more able to receive the correction and re-direction necessary to ward off meltdowns. Another fueling we can offer is a tank full of language to express what they feel or what they need. We keep their tanks filled by offering breaks in activity or challenges to rehearse how to talk about what they are feeling.

The Real-Life Example

Johnny is repeatedly late to pre-school because he can't break away from his blocks without a major tantrum. Tonight, help him pack a snack and water bottle for pre-school and plan out his breakfast for the morning. You can even walk him through setting the bowls, plates, and spoons out to prepare. Talk through the steps of getting ready in the morning before you put him to bed.

In the morning, after his healthy breakfast, allow him to set a timer on the smart speaker for 15 minutes of block-building play. When the first timer goes off, he gets to ask for another 10-minute reminder. At that second alarm, it's now time to clean up. Ask him to direct the smart speaker to play a fun "clean-up" song.

When he has successfully cleaned up, you can head out the door to pre-school and enjoy his pre-packed snack and drink on the way. Repeat this routine every day, offering praise and high-fives for any progress he makes.

Put Coins in the Meter

When our child is in a cycle of challenging behaviors, they often don't even know that they have internal alarms that trigger their behaviors. A child struggling to feel connected or secure in a relationship with a parent might become extraordinarily clingy or whiny and not even realize that it comes from a fear of disconnect or abandonment. Her anxiety increases, and her behavior devolves.

You can "put coins in her meter" by spending short spurts of time focused solely on connecting activities with this child. Your attention is entirely on her in these moments, reinforcing connection and increasing her sense of safety. You are depositing into her meter with attachment, confidence, and security coins. When you must turn away to attend to other things, her meter starts ticking again. Her internal meter will sound alarms when it gets low – and her behaviors will ramp back up. The goal is to turn back to her with full attention before the meter runs out and a meltdown occurs.



The Real-Life Example

You've identified that your child's whiniest, clingiest behaviors occur when you are preparing dinner every evening. Before she gets home from school, prep whatever you can for tonight's dinner. Once she is home and has had a snack and drink (remember, fill her tank with healthy fuel!), sit with her and talk about her day or read a book together. Find whatever activity you enjoy together (drawing her into the relationship) and fully invest in that time focused on her (depositing coins in her meter). Before you move to dinner preparations, give her fair warning that you have to start dinner.

When you do get up to make dinner, watch closely to determine how long that meter lasts before her behaviors start to devolve. Find a stopping point in your activity to draw her attention back to you before she struggles. Then add some more coins to her meter. Maybe ask her to wash the vegetables while you spin the salad. Or help her set the table, engaging in a joke-telling contest while you work together. You can release her to play after a few more coins are in that little meter of hers. The bonus is that you get to finish dinner prep in relative peace.

Make Life Simple, Predictable, and Repeatable.

Dr. Ross Greene says, "Kids do well if they can." When we come to our kids' challenging behaviors from this mindset, it prompts us to ask ourselves some key questions:

What am I doing to help my child do well with these challenges? What skills does this child need to face this challenge better moving forward?

You can give yourselves more time and space to work on your child's skills to overcome challenging behavior in two practical ways.

Simplify your life.

Boiling the calendar down to the essentials for a season gives you space to navigate new skill-learning and daily practice. You will also find that you gain mental and emotional energy to manage the big emotions of your child's challenging behaviors and learn new tools to change.

Make your routines predictable and repeatable.

Predictability of routine allows you to observe what triggers your child. You can focus on teaching him new ways to respond to the internal triggers that cause his behaviors and then repeat them often across your routines. If your family doesn't already have a structured and predictable routine, make it a priority to develop one.

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<https://www.empoweringparents.com/article/5-of-the-hardest-things-parents-face-how-to-handle-the-mo...>



Understanding How Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) Help Kids Thrive

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The Four Building Blocks of Positive Childhood Experiences

Researchers have identified four key areas that support children's emotional healing and development. These building blocks provide the foundation for children to thrive, especially those with a history of trauma.

1. Supportive Relationships

Every child, regardless of age, needs consistent and loving relationships. From the moment a relationship begins, caregivers can help build trust through simple, everyday interactions: eye contact, warm smiles, kind words, and physical closeness.

Over time, you can deepen this bond by adding shared experiences, such as laughing over silly cartoons, building LEGO sets, cooking meals together, or teaching them how to ride a bike. These moments send the message that the child is seen, valued, and loved.

As children grow toward young adulthood, relationships with peers and other adults become increasingly important to them. Encourage your kids to build safe connections with teachers, coaches, mentors, or trusted neighbors. These outside relationships offer guidance, foster social skills, and give kids a broader sense of belonging.

Children with trauma histories often carry relationship wounds, but you can help them navigate these with care. For instance, if a child struggles with feelings about a birth parent, avoid joining in their criticism of that birth parent. Instead, help them express their emotions and explore healthy ways to process their feelings about their parent. Your support allows them establish new patterns for safe and trusting relationships.

2. A Safe and Supportive Environment

Safety extends beyond locks on the doors. It also encompasses emotional, mental, and physical well-being. Children need homes where they feel secure, free from constant chaos or fear.

For young children, safety means both protection and the freedom to explore. Create a home where toddlers can touch and learn without needing constant correction. This may involve temporarily storing breakable or valuable items and creating inviting spaces for hands-on play.

For tweens and teens, a "safe space" encompasses both emotional safety and a sense of ownership. Let them have a say about decorating their room, respect their need for some privacy (within reason), and involve them in family decisions when appropriate. Inviting them into these conversations helps them feel seen and respected.

Your family's traditions, routines, and shared memories are equally important at all ages. These help kids feel stable and connected, especially after experiencing disruptive or traumatic events earlier in their lives.

- Reliable routines—like Sunday breakfasts, after-school check-ins, or bedtime rituals—provide predictability.
- Family traditions—like holiday baking, silly songs, or decorating the house—build a sense of identity and belonging.
- Memory-making moments—like spontaneous dance parties, camping in the backyard, or laughing around board games—help form positive emotional bonds.

These types of rituals and rhythms anchor our children into a sense of normalcy, connection, and home.



3. Engagement and Contribution

People of all ages want to feel useful and valued — our kids are no different. Feeling like they matter builds confidence and self-worth. This building block of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) is easily implemented when you consider your family’s daily routines and household tasks.

Even young children can contribute meaningfully. Give them responsibilities that match their age *and* ability:

- Toddlers (2–4 years): Put toys away, help feed the pet, wipe small spills.
- Young kids (5–7 years): Make their bed, set the table, put away laundry.
- Tweens (8–12 years): Sweep floors, help with dinner, fold clothes, walk the dog.
- Teens (13+): Cook simple meals, babysit younger siblings, mow the lawn, and assist with grocery shopping.

Encourage your older children to help their neighbors or participate in community service. Being dependable builds pride and a sense of responsibility.

You can also encourage them to get involved outside the home, through clubs, sports, theater, youth groups, or volunteering. These experiences foster independence and help them build connections and life skills. When a team or group misses them, it reinforces that they are valued.

Your kids will rise to the occasion when you set reasonable, and maybe even slightly challenging, expectations for them. Focus your praise on their efforts and persistence, not just outcomes. Show them that you believe in their capability.

4. Emotional Growth and Resilience

You can’t sign your child up for an “emotional growth class,” but you can create a home where emotional development is a daily practice.

Let your young person work through everyday problems without jumping in too quickly. Arguments with siblings or misunderstandings with friends are essential learning opportunities. They teach children how to share, compromise, express their feelings, and work through conflicts.

When you give them space to handle things on their own, it builds trust and emotional strength. Be prepared to step in when needed, but avoid rushing to their rescue. Celebrate their attempts to solve problems, even when an outcome isn’t perfect.



For example, imagine your tween feels rejected because they weren't invited to a group outing. Sit with your child instead of confronting the other parents or trying to fix it. Listen to their feelings and say things like, "That must've been hard," or "I can see why you'd be upset." Later, when they are feeling regulated, gently help them reflect: "What do you want to do next?" or "Has something like this happened before? How did you deal with it then?"

Not every lesson our kids learn should come with a speech. Sometimes, our quiet presence is exactly what they need. When they're ready, your perspective can help them make sense of the situation and grow stronger for the next one. Offer them your respect by asking permission to share your thoughts first. This is an excellent tool for building trust and confidence.

The Brain Can Heal and You Can Help

Trauma can leave deep marks, but the good news is that our brains are adaptable and capable of healing, especially during periods of rapid growth, such as early childhood and adolescence. By intentionally creating Positive Childhood Experiences, you help shape healthier patterns of thinking, relating, and behaving.

As motivational speaker and foster alumni [Josh Shipp](#) says, "Every kid is one caring adult away from being a success story." Whether you've adopted this child, are fostering for a short season, or are raising a relative's child for an undetermined time frame, your influence is powerful and lasting.

Incorporating the four building blocks of Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) — supportive relationships, safe environments, meaningful engagement, and emotional growth — enables children to transition from surviving to thriving.

You don't have to be perfect. Just keep showing up. Your steady presence, patience, and love can change the course of this child's life.

Check out [Creating a Family's podcasts](#) — ranked #2 in Foster Care, Adoption, and Child Welfare, and #12 in Parenting podcasts! [Subscribe](#) wherever you listen to podcasts.

<https://www.empoweringparents.com/article/5-of-the-hardest-things-parents-face-how-to-handle-the-mo...>

HOPE. HEALING. CONNECTION

CLINICAL SERVICES AT RAISE THE FUTURE



RAISE *the*
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Why Choose Us?

Who We Serve

- Children and youth currently in foster care.
- Families fostering or adopting or who have adopted from the foster care system.
- Older youth transitioning from foster care to adoptive homes.
- Children, youth, and adults with a history of trauma, neglect, or disrupted attachments.

What We Offer

- **Individual Therapy** - Addressing trauma, attachment, and emotional regulation
- **Family Therapy** - Strengthening relationships, communication, and problem-solving
- **Group Therapy** - Peer support, skill-building, and psychoeducation for youth and caregivers

Our Clinical Approach

We utilize **Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI®)** a trauma-informed, evidence-based model rooted in principles of *Connecting, Empowering, and Correcting*. This model addresses the complex needs of individuals who have experienced trauma and early adversity.

All of our clinicians will be trained in **Training for Adoption Competency (TAC)**, ensuring our services remain sensitive to the unique experiences within adoption and permanency planning. We integrate additional therapeutic modalities, including:

- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)
- IFS (Internal Family Systems)
- ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy)
- CCPT (Child-Centered Play Therapy)
- TF-CBT (Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy)

All services are provided by licensed or supervised clinicians and are coordinated to ensure an integrated, client-centered approach.

Contracted with the Utah Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) to provide therapy for children and families utilizing their agencies. Medicaid pays for these services. We accept Post-Adopt Medicaid and DCFS Medicaid.



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Utah Department of
Health & Human Services
Child and Family Services

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TBRI® TIDBIT:

**“You cannot correct or
change behavior unless
you are connected.”**

-Dr. Karyn Purvis

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