

Adoption:

Adoption is the legal process by which a person becomes a lawful member of a family different from their birth family. Adoption is a permanent lifelong commitment to a child. Becoming a parent is a life changing event. Provide for children's safety at all times

- Create an environment where children can thrive
- Encourage and develop each child's unique interests and curiosity
- Help the children discover their own unique gifts & talents

Attachment & Bonding

In adoption, the primary goal is to establish a solid foundation between parents and children, upon which their relationship will be built. These relationships are built and/or established through interactions. In matched adoptions, parents and children are introduced over a period of a few days or weeks, with the purpose of developing attachments. This establishes a solid foundation from which the relationship will be built. When they nurture and show sensitivity to needs, parents invite children into a supportive relationship. When parents provide an affectionate, nurturing and patient relationship with their adoptive children, children thrive. When parents take the time and purposeful effort to build a solid foundation for their relationship with their adoptive children they will form strong attachments and bonds to one another.

Key Factors

Graduated Format

The adoptive parents' relationship with their new children is the key to making adoption rich and fulfilling. Introductions and visitations are planned in a graduated format. The initial visits are shorter and occur at locations in which the child is comfortable.

As the visitation progresses the adoptive parent will bring the child to their home for a day visit and then for an overnight visit. **The graduated format is purposefully designed to allow children and parents the opportunity to build a foundation for their emotional relationship with one another.**

During the pre-placement visits children will be forming their opinions of how life will be in your home. Plan some family activities such as trips to museums and parks. Work in some down time. Pre-placements should not look like a vacation. Children will feel emotionally vulnerable when meeting new parents and moving into a new home. By providing an opportunity for the attachment activities listed below parents will facilitate the bonding and the child's integration into the family. The goal of adoptive parents is to begin to form a meaningful and connected relationship with their children. Early on parents will focus on relationship building rather than implementing changes in behavior. Change will come when children feel safe and secure. Use the first month to establish a loving and strong emotional connection with the children.

Journey, Bridge & Destination

It is important for parents to understand where the child is coming from and be able to empathize with them on a daily basis. Parents should understand and find value in the fact that they are not replacing their children's birth family. They are the child's adoptive family, the family

that will protect, encourage and nurture them. Adoptive parents are the family that provides structure and support to help children cope with the challenges they have faced in their young lives. They will love and comfort them. They will help them recover from life's challenges to go on to reach their full potential.

When adoptive parents find positive attributes and or resources in the child's family of origin and embrace that with their children, these children thrive. Adoptive parents should prevent an environment that pushes children to choose between their adoptive family and their birth family. This also allows parents to help the child organize their past. **Adoption is a journey a destination and a bridge between the two families.** Parents help children organize and understand their history. This is a healthy and normal ongoing process in their life.

Rewards & Consequences

How parents utilize discipline can have a great impact on children. Parents are able to shape a child's behaviors with interaction, feedback, rewards and consequences. Parents are most effective when they are proactive rather than reactive. Parents should be involved and engaged in the child's daily activities. They can provide structure and opportunity for success. Children should have regular and frequent opportunities to build their self-esteem. This will help insure their commitment to their own success. When children lose hope they are not motivated and invested in their own success or in the success of the family. Sound parenting strategies will center on keeping the child engaged and invested. Look for the opportunity hiding in the more challenging times.

How parents respond to a child's behavior will greatly impact the likelihood of its reoccurrence. First, parents should encourage and reward healthy behaviors. Then, parents should provide feedback and redirection on the child's developmental level, comfort level, and emotional level. There may be times when an opportunity for a "teaching moment" out weights the necessity of a consequence. When parents respond emotionally to undesired or unsafe behavior children will know what behaviors get a lot of traction. If they find parent's buttons one can expect the child to use them.

Embracing Opportunities

Attachment/bonding opportunities may come when least expected. It may come at the end of a long hard day at work or an especially difficult parenting day. It may be in the still, small moments or in the middle of a soccer game. Whenever your child is reaching out to you to share or explore, embrace the opportunity. **Children are much more receptive when they are the initiator.** Parents will need to be mindful to seize the opportunities as they present themselves.

Guidelines

- Go at Child's Pace
- Utilize Activities to Bond
- Value Child's History
- Allow Child to Talk about Past
- Clearly Communicate Boundaries
- Model Appropriate Behavior
- Be Affectionate & Kind

Activities to Foster Attachment & Bonding

1. Family Photo Album

Go through the family photo album that the children have received before the first pre-placement visit. Talk with them about family members that they will meet in the future. For example, parents can say to the child, "This is Aunt Sue and you will be meeting her soon." This helps the children feel that they are truly a part of the family and your family is part their new family. As parents go through the family photo album ask the child if they have a life book. If they do parents can let them know that they would like to see it when the child is ready to share it with them. Do not pressure children into sharing their life story. They will open up to when they feel that they can trust you.

2. New Family Portrait

Take new family portrait and place the portrait where the adoptive children will see it on a regular basis. When children see themselves as a part of the family unit through a photograph it helps their self esteem and lets them know that they are part of the family.

3. Family Nights

Pick one night a week and make it family night. Figure out what the children like to do and do it. If you cannot figure out what your child likes to do give them several options and try them out. For example, the family can play video games together, play a board game, watch a movie, and go out for a sporting activity such as miniature golf, bowling or the batting cages.

4. One on One Time

Make individual one on one time for the children. Each parent will find an activity to do with each child so that they can have bonding moments together. For example, play a board game, do arts and crafts, read a book together, and play basketball or another sport together. Children will also enjoy doing regular daily activities with you such as meal planning, shopping for that meal, and cooking the meal. Children have an interest in food, so cooking is a great way to have quality time with a child as well as helping to develop their life skills. Some children would prefer helping you in the yard or washing the car with you. Make sure to include them in these daily tasks and use them as bonding moments with your children.

5. Sensory Integration

Sensory integration refers to how people use the information provided by all the sensations coming from within the body and from the external environment. We usually think of the senses as separate channels of information, but they actually work together to give us a reliable picture of the world and our place in it. Your senses integrate to form a complete understanding of who you are, where you are, and what is happening around you. Because your brain uses information about sights, sounds, textures, smells, tastes, and movement in an organized way, you assign meaning to your sensory experiences, and you know how to respond and behave accordingly. Enhance the time with your children by utilizing activities involving several senses such as when you read to them while they sit in you lap, build sand castles, play sports, ect.

6. House Rules & Boundaries

Discuss house rules early on with the children. You can begin doing this during the pre-placement visits at your home. Let the children know what is expected of them and remember to be realistic with the expectations that you put on the children. Children in care may not have learned how to do the things that you consider to be age-appropriate (i.e.: making a bed, brushing their teeth). Look at each child on an individual basis to determine what will work best for the family unit. Figure out what is important to the children soon after they are placed so that rewards and consequences can be established. Some families have found that making a Rewards or Star Chart works well, even with older children. If children have something to look

forward to they are much more willing to follow the rules of the home. As time goes on you will be able to determine what areas your children need to work on and the extra support you need to extend to them to help them improve. You can make individual charts for each child with things that they need to work on such as boundaries, accepting no, bath time, bed time, etc. When they do these tasks each day they may earn a sticker or points that will add up over time to earn a prize or a privilege. When discussing house rules it is also important to talk with the children about safe touch. As a parent you need to let the children know what an appropriate touch is and what is not. Assure them that you will only touch them in safe healthy ways. Ask the children if they would rather have a high five or a hug. Also, ask if they would rather a pat on the back or a hand shake as a form of personal touch.

7. Daily Schedule

Put together a daily schedule for the children. During the presentation staffing, the foster parents of the adoptive children will let you know the children's' schedules. If you are able to implement the same type of schedule it will be beneficial to the children when they are placed. Familiarity seems to help the children transition easier. There will be some changes in the daily routine, but if you talk to the children about the daily schedule it will help them with the transition into their new routine.

8. Offer Choices

Offer the children choices when it comes to chore assignments to choose from. When implemented correctly chores also help to raise a child's self esteem. Remember that how you ask a child to do something is very important. For example, you might want to ask a child to do something by expressing it this way, "Can you do me a favor? or Can you do this important job for me? I know you can handle it." By using these words, the child will feel that they are needed, appreciated and trusted to do a chore. Helping them with the chore the first few times, will help them value doing the activity well.

Things to Consider

Commitment

Commitment is one of the key factors in adoptive placement. When the children know and feel that you are going to love them for who they are, they will begin to blossom in their placement. They will see and feel your commitment to help them bond and attach in your family. On the other hand, if they sense that there are reservations on the part of the parents concerning the adoption they will begin to act out and test boundaries. Children thrive and make progress as they feel safe and secure in the family.

Time IN

Use Time-In rather than time out. If the child prefers some time alone to calm down that's fine but soon after the event, when the child is calm, talk to them about the event in an encouraging manner. Tell them you love them and as their parent and that your goal is to help them stay safe and be successful.

Patience

Please do not panic when you find out your child is behind in school or failing a class. Remember this first month is about your relationship with the children. It would not be helpful to spend several hours each night fighting a homework battle. If they can't finish the school work in an hour or so talk to their teacher see if they can make adjustments and/or suggestions. Do it with them, keep it positive, if they become easily frustrated with the tasks divide it up in shorter sections. Do a little before dinner then do the rest before bedtime snack.

Peaks & Valleys

Most parents find themselves severely challenged by the demands of parenting. This is normal; you will be challenged and at times harshly challenged. The parenting experience is one of peaks and valleys. Parents hold on through the valleys knowing there will be peaks to come. They do not get to the valley and bail out. Why would they? It guarantees they will not see the next peak or all the peaks of a life time as a parent. When challenged, call it what it is and remember "problems are opportunities to shape positive change" and "how parents respond to them will greatly impact the likelihood of reoccurrence". It's a two fold process that includes active involvement in a child's daily activities and encouraging the healthy-positive while reducing the unhealthy-negative.

Testing

Expect children to test the parents' commitment to them. Oftentimes children have lived in several placements. They want to be sure it is safe for them to bond and attach before making themselves emotionally vulnerable. When children test parents, try not to react emotionally. Call the event what it is "their normal testing to see if you really are committed to them". How parents respond to testing will greatly impact the likelihood of it being repeated. If parents make it a big event they are likely to repeat it.

All matched adoptive placements will be referred for family therapy. Family therapy will provide additional assistance to facilitate bonding/attachment and the overall adjustments to adoptive placements.

Helpful Hints & Reminders

- Healing and change take time. Children will not change overnight.
- Children may not verbalize their appreciation of being adopted
- Connect with and utilize the resources in the community, use family counseling, experienced adoptive parents and support groups.
- Do not set conditions on children regarding their adoption or communicate "you cannot be here and do that".
- Avoid parenting with anger. Children from abusive and neglectful backgrounds do not respond positively to anger. Fear is overrated and outdated.

As the old saying goes, "chance favors the well prepared". Parents should be prepared to act on their opportunities to build healthy relationships with children and shape their futures with positive interactions.