

a
RESOURCE
GUIDE
for
RELATIVES &
FRIENDS
HOW YOU CAN HELP
ADOPTIVE
FAMILIES



Dear Friend,



first, we want to personally take this opportunity to thank you for considering how you can support friends or family who are pursuing adoption. We know from God's Word that adoption is close to the heart of God. In fact, we know from Scripture that all of us who have placed our faith in Christ have been adopted!

(ROMANS 8:15; EPHESIANS 1:5)

Throughout Scripture, God clearly calls us to care for vulnerable children and to welcome them in His name. A child whose physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs are met will make amazing progress, even in the face of the most daunting challenges. Many of these children come from hard places but are desperate to be loved. We want to help find families for these kids because we believe that every child is a precious gift from God.

Adoption redeems brokenness. Adoption gives a child the chance to belong.

It is our prayer that you will be an instrument of God's love to families who have made the commitment to parent through adoption or foster care. They need your support to succeed and thrive! We are grateful that you are willing to learn about their needs and step in, whether through large or small acts of love, to make their journey a bit easier. They appreciate you, and so do we! We would love to hear about joys you have in this calling; tell us your story by emailing us at letters@fotf.ca.

This resource guide is a compilation of educational articles for those who want to do all they can to support adoptive families. The material has been reproduced from Focus on the Family Canada's adoption care website at Waitingtobelong.ca. Visit this website for additional information, plus similar guides for adoptive families and for pastors.

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DOS AND DON'TS FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS



But when
the set time
had fully come,
God sent His Son,
born of a woman,
born under the law,
to redeem those under the law,
that we might receive

adoption to sonship.

Because you are His sons,
God sent the Spirit of His Son
into our hearts,
the Spirit who calls out,
“Abba, Father.”

GALATIANS 4:4-6

01

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WRAPPING AROUND ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

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Wrapping around adoptive families



HOW TO PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THOSE CALLED TO ADOPT

We have good news for you. You can play a role in the adoption journey. You can help a child. You can support a family. You can make an enormous difference, and here's how.

Adoption – God's idea For Christians, adoption is much more than simply providing a home for a waiting child. The Bible tells us that even before the creation of the world, God predestined us to be adopted as His sons and daughters (EPHESIANS 1:5). The spirit of adoption permeates Scripture, and God's heart for the orphan pours forth from His Word.

Adoption has been described by Pastor John Piper as the visible gospel. It is proclaimed to a watching world that desperately needs to know the love of the heavenly Father.

We know from Scripture that God loves orphans and that His Word commands His followers to care for these precious children (JAMES 1:27). There are many different ways to minister to God's orphan children and to the adoptive families who have welcomed these children home.

Life's harsh reality for many adopted children and their parents Tragically, many of the world's children are born into

families unable or unwilling to provide the secure and stable home they need to grow and develop as healthy children. Many of these children have experienced some form of early trauma from abuse or neglect. Whether they lived in foster homes or in an orphanage overseas, previously neglected or abused children who fail to receive all God intends for them may develop special needs or difficult behaviours.

For these children and the families who choose to adopt them, the road to healthy family living may be a rocky one, and it may take longer than they had hoped. Yet, in spite of the challenges, many families are making lifelong commitments to children who need opportunities to heal.

Adoptive families need your help Due to these challenges, many adoptive families desperately need support from their church families. As is often the case in other areas of life, however, asking for help can be difficult to do.

Many adoptive families may interpret their struggles as failure, question their calling to adopt or, worst of all, feel abandoned by the God who called them to the journey of adoption. But He who called them is faithful. There is hope for the future!

Be strong and courageous. . . for the Lord your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. (DEUTERONOMY 31:6)

What's my role? Struggling adoptive families need their church families to wrap around and support them during times of trials. When churches do this, they mirror our heavenly Father, who wraps His arms around us during times of joy as well as times of trial.

While the suggestions here may not apply to all situations, they represent a general “cry of the heart” of adoptive families who welcomed home an emotionally wounded or struggling child. The goal is to provide practical guidance for churches seeking to support adoptive families.

First things first Before trying to provide support to a family in need, it is vitally important for pastors and church members to understand that children who experienced previous trauma may have a difficult time adjusting to their new adoptive family – no matter how committed and loving the family may be. Understanding this is vital for effective ministry.

Healing for these children doesn't usually happen overnight, and adoptive families need their church families to walk with them through their struggles. Churches can no longer think that typical parental expressions of love alone will “cure” the child. For many of these children, their souls are scarred and their hearts are hurt. As a result, time, understanding and unconditional commitment are essential to the child's healing process.

... children who experienced previous trauma may have a difficult time adjusting to their new adoptive family – no matter how committed and loving the family may be.

It's also wise to remember that the last thing adoptive parents need is simplistic answers from people who understand nothing of their unique calling and struggle. These parents do not need admonitions that they are either too hard on little cutie-pie or not firm enough with that strong-willed child. This approach will alienate the already struggling family.

The emphasis for all involved cannot be on a quick fix for the children. Rather, with time and God's grace, we can slowly help these children heal.

How do we wrap around our adoptive families? Families struggling in these situations need compassionate, nonjudgmental brothers and sisters in Christ to walk beside them to help bear their burdens.

Each helps the other and says to his brother, “Be strong!” (ISAIAH 41:6)

Adoptive families need others to WRAP around them with prayer and practical help. Here’s an easy way to remember their needs:

W.R.A.P.

Wrestle in prayer
Respice care
Acts of service
Promises of God

Wrestle in prayer The Bible says the Enemy comes to steal, kill and destroy. For previously wounded orphan children, the Enemy stole their childhoods, killed their dreams and destroyed their futures. But that’s not the end of their stories. Christ has come that these children may have life and have it to the full (JOHN 10:10). God wants to restore and redeem their beginnings. He has a plan and a future for these children. Remember, He

“sets the lonely [ones] in families” (PSALM 68:5-6).

So when a Christian family welcomes a little child in Jesus’ name (LUKE 9:48); provides a loving home; and introduces her to the One who made, loves, heals and delivers her, the Enemy does not stand idly by. The spiritual warfare involved in rescuing orphans is very real and often overlooked. Adoptive families need you to wrestle in prayer on their behalf.

Pray for:

- Strength and patience.
- Grace and mercy.
- God’s truth to be revealed to the families amid the schemes and lies of the Enemy.
- Spiritual eyes to see the truth behind their struggle and strength to exercise their faith and trust in their mighty God.
- Ears attuned to the living God, who will walk them through their trials.

Also pray specifically for the child:

- That God would heal wounds of rejection, abandonment, fear and mistrust.
- That God's love, which never fails, will cover him in all he does.
- To know and believe that there is hope in Christ.
- To trust in and receive her new family's love and desire to help her heal.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. (JAMES 1:22)

Take action:

- Seek out a group of believers who will commit to pray regularly.
- Communicate to the family that there is a

prayer team that would count it a privilege to intercede on their behalf. *The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.* (JAMES 5:16)

- Know that your enthusiasm and initiative will help the family trust that they aren't "bothering you" with a seemingly endless list of struggles and will allow them to have confidence in your prayer partnership.
- Ask the family for specific prayer requests and assure them those requests will be held in the strictest confidence. It is crucial for the family to be able to be transparent with their specific needs.
- PRAY . . . FERVENTLY and OFTEN.
- Let the family know you're praying for them regularly. For the struggling adoptive family, prayer will help move them toward wholeness and healing in Christ.

Respite care No matter how wonderful, committed and loving adoptive parents are, they need a break from the demands of caring for their children. Respite care is defined as "short-term

or temporary care . . . to provide relief to the regular caregiver” (Dictionary.com).

For adoptive parents who struggle with challenging children, respite care is crucial to the well-being of the family. Times of respite allow parents to focus on their marriage, take time to regroup, and enjoy much-needed peace, quiet and rest.

This is easy, you might think. Like babysitting, right? Well, not exactly. There are several unique aspects to respite care:

- Respite should not begin until the child has been in the home for several months. Make a note on your calendar to begin to offer respite at or after the fourth month.
- You must get to know the children beforehand and spend time with them along with mom and dad. Being a consistent presence in their lives communicates a genuine concern for them and their wellbeing. This can include birthdays, graduations and milestones as well as during illness, challenging behaviours and school changes or difficulties. Building this foundation of trust is crucial.

- The respite must be significant (long) enough to be worth the trouble of preparing for it. Keep in mind that transition periods are often challenging to these children.
- Respite time shouldn't be a “vacation” for the children where they are free from the rules of daily life. Effective respite should not induce a longing in the children to go live with the respite providers. Children must still do chores, homework and follow the same general rules.
- All decisions and communication from the respite provider should affirm the adoptive parents to the child. Parents must clearly present boundaries and limits so respite providers can offer consistent care.
- If possible, provide respite in the children's home in order to maintain as much of the structure and schedule as possible. There are times, however, when parents and other siblings may need quiet time at home; if so, the respite can happen away from home.

Take action:

- Take the time to get to know the children. Talk with them and pay attention to their interests.
- Ask the parents if you could have the privilege of partnering with them in ministering to their children by providing them a time of respite.
- Suggest specific full days or weekends.
- If a family is brave enough to ask for help, respond enthusiastically. If you can't provide respite when they ask, suggest a specific counter date so they know you are serious about your offer to help.

Acts of service One of the keys to effective acts of service is that they are offered enthusiastically, in a spirit of love and are specifically designed to meet the needs of the family. Being aware of the dynamics of adoptive families and children will aid in identifying needs that can most easily be met.

Another key to effective acts of service is to make the offer as low maintenance as possible for the adoptive parents. However kindly intended, if the offer creates additional stress or work for the parents, it will be counterproductive. Watch for cues and try to determine if what you've asked the family to do creates unintended consequences.

This list of ideas will help get you started.

- **Meals.** Find a team of people to take meals the first few weeks the child is in the home. Selecting one person to coordinate and communicate with the family is important. Ask for the family's food preferences and what time they usually eat.
- **Errands and shopping.** Don't say, "Let me know if you need anything," because you'll likely never be asked. Instead, tell them you're going to the store that week and ask if they have time to give you a list. If they can't right away, be flexible. Or keep a running list of their regular items such as detergent, toothpaste and so on. Ask them for the brand names they use – this type of attention to detail communicates great love and concern for their needs.

- **Laundry.** Pick up the laundry, take it home or to a laundromat, and return it folded.
- **Yard work.** If the family has several children, organize a yard cleanup party and supervise the children as they work. Pizza is a great reward.
- **Cleaning.** Housework can take away a good deal of the family's bonding time. Identify a time when the family will be out of the house and offer to vacuum, clean bathrooms, or wash linens and remake beds. This may be difficult for a family to accept at first, so give them the opportunity to decline the offer without feeling pressured.
- **Financial assistance.** Financial difficulty can accompany a family who chose adoption. If families have adopted internationally, the process can be extremely expensive. Providing a monetary gift to help offset expenses can be a huge blessing to a family and a great way to play a significant role in the adoption.
- **Gifts for the homecoming celebration.** We think of baby showers for families expanding by birth, but

gifts are also appropriate when a family expands through adoption. Gifts are a fun way to involve the church community and celebrate God's gift of adoption. For families adopting an older child, gift cards are a great way to support and bless that child.

Take action:

- Make it a point to really consider the many ways you might bless an adoptive family. The options are limitless!
- Again, paying attention to the family's needs is important. When serving the family, be sensitive to the amount of time you stay to visit. Typically, it isn't wise to stay too long past the pleasantries, as the stress level will be high and a new child shouldn't be overwhelmed with too many new people. The new child needs calm and quiet time to bond with mom, dad and any siblings.

To read the remainder of the booklet *Wrapping Around Adoptive Families*, visit *Focus on the Family Canada's* adoption care website at Waitingtobelong.ca.

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For the Lord your God
is God of gods and Lord of lords,
the great God,
mighty and awesome,
who shows no partiality
and accepts no bribes.

*He defends the cause
of the fatherless*

and the widow, and loves
the foreigner residing among you,
giving them food and clothing.

And you are to love those
who are foreigners,
for you yourselves were
foreigners in Egypt.

02

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BECOMING A FAMILY

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Becoming a family



TIPS TO HELP YOU AND YOUR ADOPTED CHILD BOND AS A FAMILY

Although this article was written for parents of a newly-adopted child, we encourage you to read this article too. It will help you understand some of the steps parents of newly adopted children need to take in order to help their child bond with their new family. We also encourage you to read some of the articles on attachment and bonding available at Waitingtobelong.ca.

For most of us, being part of a family is something we seldom reflect on. Our role in our family is so familiar and comfortable that we take many aspects of family life for granted. Children who have spent time in multiple foster homes or in orphanages, however, do not have a clear sense of what it means to live in a family.

Every family has its own “style” or “flavour.” Traditions, rituals, expectations and

routines vary from family to family. Each new family member, including your adopted child, will inevitably alter your pattern somewhat. When your adopted child arrives, you will need time to adjust to one another. Some refer to this process as “cocooning,” and it is just as essential with an older child as it is with a newborn.

The most successful adoptive families I have observed are those who took their need to cocoon very seriously, investing in both quality and quantity of time together. Here are a few tips from these families that will help you as you welcome your adopted child into your home:

1. Take advantage of government-sponsored parental leave from work – for dad as well as mom.
2. Don't leave adopted kids in someone else's care.

... successful adoptive families ... [take] their need to cocoon very seriously, investing in both quality and quantity of time together.

3. Minimize visitors to the home for a few weeks to months.
4. Consider home schooling school-age children while your family is still adjusting to one another.
5. Cut back on “extracurricular” activities for a period of time. Say no to volunteer work, trips and other opportunities that do not include the family.
6. Talk about how your family does things. Your explanation can be as simple as, “In our family, we eat supper together every night,” or “In our family, we say hello and goodbye with hugs.”

7. Do things together as a family: meals, chores, games, walks, worship etc.
8. By all means take your child to church, but be aware that they may need to stay with you in the service for a while instead of participating in the children’s program.
9. Expect some clinginess and anxiety when you leave and a need for reassurance that you will return. Don’t be surprised or alarmed if this carries on longer than you anticipated.
10. Remember that, if you have other children, their position in the family is being adjusted as well. Take time

for each child and listen to their thoughts on how the adjustment is going.

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Sing to God,
sing in praise of His name,
extol Him who rides on the clouds;
rejoice before Him –
His name is the Lord.
A father to the fatherless,
a defender of widows,
is God in His holy dwelling.

*God sets the lonely
in families,*

He leads out the prisoners
with singing;
but the rebellious live in a
sun-scorched land.

03

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**A NEW DEFINITION
OF ATTACHMENT/REGULATION**

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A new definition of attachment/regulation



HOW EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS HELP CHILDREN LEARN TO MODERATE THEIR BEHAVIOUR

by Debi A. Grebenik, PhD

Psychoanalyst John Bowlby, drawing on concepts from ethology, cybernetics, information processing, developmental psychology and psychoanalysis, formulated the basic tenets of attachment theory. He defined attachment as the affectional tie between two people. It begins with the bond between the infant and mother. This bond then represents how the child's life relationships will be formed.

Bowlby stated, "The initial relationship between self and others serves as a blueprint for all future relationships."¹ In other words, it is at this beginning stage that a baby learns how to relate to others. Initially, his or her world is very small and focused only on the parents or primary caretakers. Their response to the baby will determine the baby's ability to attach.

In attachment interactions between baby and mother, the secure mother regulates (calms) the baby's shifting arousal levels, which affects the baby's emotional states.² If, during

stressful events, a sustained calm stage can be reached due to parental soothing, the child develops self-regulation skills. The child begins to learn how to self-soothe, and these skills form the building blocks of healthy and significant future relationships. The ability to self-regulate and be regulated is a prerequisite to the ability to form healthy attachments.³

This process is easy to observe when a mother rocks, holds or bounces her child, perhaps coupled with a shushing sound while the baby calms. Some babies settle down just at the touch, smell or sound of their mothers.

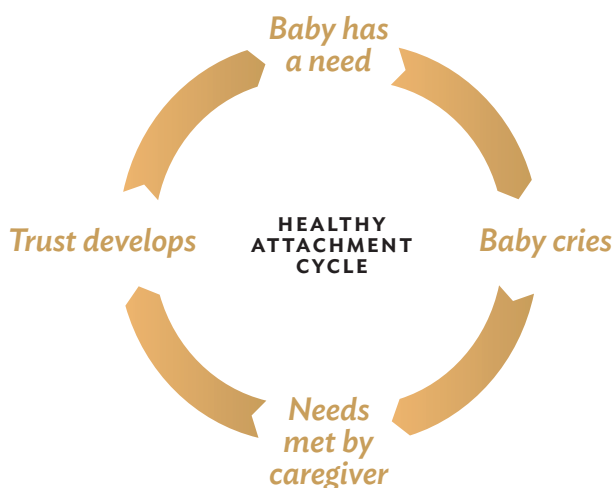
Babies, children and youth who did not experience this soothing process find it difficult to calm down in moments of stress. These are the individuals who may react with only a minor provocation. An adolescent who begins yelling, cursing or crying when asked to complete a task or chore provides an example of someone who is not able to self-soothe. Attachment can thus be defined as the dyadic regulation of emotion.⁴

Bonding involves a set of behaviours that lead to an emotional connection, (which is also known as attachment).⁵ Understanding this process is key to helping a child with attachment disorder.

THE POSITIVE INTERACTION (NEEDS-AROUSAL) CYCLE

As we've mentioned, attachment occurs when the caregivers, primarily parents, provide stable and consistent responses to the child's distress. Distress occurs when a baby or child experiences hunger, fatigue, illness or any other type of discomfort.

An emotionally healthy adult delights in taking care of his or her baby or child. The mother and father respond to their child with eye contact, cooing sounds, physical snuggling and rocking movements. In turn, the child responds with smiling, gurgling, clinging, sucking and playing. This reciprocal interaction creates the basis for attachment. See the diagram below.⁶



The safety and security that a strong attachment builds creates healthy cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual development for the child as he matures.

Children (biological or adopted) who do not get their needs met as babies and small children typically do not form a strong attachment with their parents. Even when adopting a baby, it is important to consider that the removal of a child from his or her biological mother creates a traumatic event in the life of the child.

One experienced mother, Amber Bartell, discovered this when she took little Amy into her home. As an infant, Amy had been passed from friend to friend by her mother. So when Amy was placed with Amber's family, bonding was anything but natural. In fact, Amy constantly pulled away from Amber. Whenever Amber tried to lay Amy on her shoulder, for instance, Amy held her body rigidly away from Amber. This continued until Amy was 11 months old.

So keep in mind that attachment with the new parents may not be automatic. Knowing this, parents need to understand not only the truth that establishing an attached, loving and committed relationship with their child is key, but also the fact that this may take some considerable time and effort. The adoptive parents' investment in fostering attachment can

mitigate the trauma experienced by the child in the removal from her biological mother.

It is also important to note that adopted children (who suffer from attachment problems) may experience difficulties during certain developmental phases such as adolescence. These difficulties occur because of the youth's inability to meet her own needs. Out of her frustration, she might express her anger by yelling, hitting, vandalizing, threatening or withdrawing.

As well, the parent of an adopted child may have missed out on some significant aspects of attachment in his or her own upbringing. The adoption process thus may trigger unresolved emotions for the parents. It is important for parents to be self-aware, understanding the challenges and blessings of their own childhoods. When beginning the process to adopt a child, parents often prepare financially, physically and spiritually, without considering what effect the adoption will have emotionally.

Remember the family mentioned in the article entitled *Attachment and bonding?* By the time I saw them in family therapy, the situation had escalated and they were almost ready to dissolve the adoption. As we plowed through what was going on in their lives, we were able to discover the real issues. Throughout the mother's life, people at every stage

Bonding involves a set of behaviours that lead to an emotional connection Understanding this process is key to helping a child with attachment disorder.

had given up on her and cast her aside. That's all she knew in relationships – rejection.

Instead of responding as the parent when things became difficult with her son, she became that little girl and felt rejected once again. As the mother understood and expressed her pain and hurts, her heart began to mend, and her ability to feel and express love to her son began to swell. She experienced her son for who he was – a little child who needed her calm presence, realistic expectations, unconditional love and unlimited

patience. She could now respond to his broken and wounded soul as his mother instead of as another broken child.

Through the power of prayer, processing pain with another person, and the presence of the Holy Spirit, healing can occur – both for the parent and the child. That is the quiet beauty of parenting hand in hand with God. This is also what gives hope; you can make a difference in the life of a child and, at the same time, you can become more of the parent God intends for you to be.

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1. John Bowlby, *Attachment and Loss*. Vol. 1: Attachment (New York: Basic Books, 1969).
2. Allan Schore, "The Effects of a Secure Attachment Relationship on Right Brain Development, Affect Regulation and Infant Mental Health," *Infant Journal of Mental Health*, 2001, 22: 7–66.
3. B. Bryan Post, *The Great Behavior Breakdown*, audio CD recording (Oklahoma City, OK: Post Institute for Family Centered Therapy, 2004). Postinstitute.com.
4. L. Alan Sroufe, *Emotional Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
5. Bruce Perry, MD, *Bonding and Attachment in Maltreated Children* (Childtrauma.org), 2001.
6. Adapted from a simpler diagram by Foster W. Cline, MD, *Understanding and Treating the Severely Disturbed Child* (Evergreen, CO: Evergreen Consultants in Behavior, 1979), 28.

Excerpted from The Handbook on Thriving as an Adoptive Family, a Focus on the Family book published by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., © 2008 by Sanford Communications, Inc. Used with permission.

For those who are led
by the Spirit of God
are the children of God.
The Spirit you received
does not make you slaves,
so that you live in fear again;
rather, the Spirit you received
brought about your
adoption to sonship.
And by Him we cry,

“Abba, Father.”

The Spirit Himself testifies
with our spirit
that we are God’s children.

04

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**UNIQUE CHALLENGES IN DISCIPLINING
ADOPTED CHILDREN**

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Unique challenges in disciplining adopted children



THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING YOUR EMOTIONAL CONNECTION WITH YOUR CHILD

by Sandra Lundberg

The techniques commonly used to discipline biological children can be detrimental to adopted children. Although this article is directed at adoptive parents, it offers important insights into this topic. For further reading on this issue, visit Waitingtobelong.ca.

Disciplining a child who has been adopted presents a number of unique challenges.

You may feel that others are evaluating you as a person and as a parent as you establish your own family rules and expectations. Many parents find it difficult negotiating this balance between themselves and are even more frustrated trying to explain their decisions to family and friends.

Another challenge is the fact that children with multiple broken attachments and abuse often do not respond well to traditional methods of discipline, such as "time outs," corporal punishment, grounding or a demand to make eye contact and immediately obey their parents. In fact, these methods may actually escalate conflict with the child.

And still another challenge to parents in disciplining their adopted child is that the child may bring pain from his past into the new family. The new family then experiences pain they neither caused nor expected. Many parents become discouraged and confused when this happens.

Before adoption, and early in the adoption process, many parents believe the love they provide their child will heal any early wounds and the adopted child will respond to them like other securely attached children. However, if and when this does not happen, the parents may

feel hurt and rejected. They may become angry at this unfair situation and find it difficult to respond to their new son or daughter with compassion. They may even become angry at God and with each other. And all the while their new child and any other children in the home need them to be a team – to be secure, loving and compassionate toward each other and their family.

WHY SOME TRADITIONAL METHODS DON'T WORK

Traditional methods of discipline can work well for children adopted at birth or without complicated attachment histories. In these situations, the parents have provided the love and nurture the children need in order to accept discipline as the loving training it is designed to be. On the other hand, children who are adopted when they are older or who have more complicated histories are not likely to respond well to some traditional methods.

Why is this? For one reason, an adopted child with a history of multiple placements and abuse often feels threatened by giving control to parents. This creates an impasse for both the parents and the child. Despite the child's fear and resistance, he needs to allow the parents to be in control. He needs to experience his parents' control as safe and allow them to meet his needs. These experiences help his heart heal. For this reason, parents need to nurture the child at all times – when she behaves and when she misbehaves. Building trust and attachment must take precedence over "fixing" the child's present behaviour.

"Time outs," behaviour charts, love withdrawal, deprivation, grounding and reacting in anger do not work with many adopted children because they often have trouble thinking consequentially, and because isolation feels safe to them (i.e., they fear relationships even though they yearn for relationship).

Remember, this is the bigger picture to keep in mind when you are frustrated by your child's behaviour. Rather than fixing the behaviour or understanding your child's underlying problems based on his history, you need to create safety and security so that she can experience emotional connectedness and healing.

Let's take a closer look at what can go wrong when using traditional discipline methods and some possible alternatives:

Time outs. "Time outs" are ineffective because adopted children need "time ins." They need ongoing interaction with the people who love them. Sending a child to be alone with instructions to calm down, think about what she has done and not come back until she's ready to behave makes no sense. A securely attached child responds to a time out from a position of wanting to please his parents and be in their presence. An adopted child with attachment issues may not yet even have

Building trust and attachment must take precedence over "fixing" the child's present behaviour.

this desire. And she often cannot calm herself without help. Before she came to your family, she may never have received the parental comforting she needed that would enable her to internalize that model and calm herself. Time with the parent when she is misbehaving can teach her to calm down and also to engage with people appropriately.

So if your adopted preschooler pokes your dog in the eye, do not send him to another room for a time out. Gently, but firmly, take his hand in yours, possibly look him in the face or have him sit in your lap, and say, "Gentle touches. We don't use hands to hurt." Then help him form an appropriate behaviour. For example, if you feel confident he is mad at you for not letting him watch more TV and the dog was safe and easy to hurt, you may tell him, "Say, 'Mom, I'm mad at you,'" with an appropriate scowl on your face. He may react inappropriately again, but he will learn in time that it will not result in you not loving him anymore or sending him away from you. Instead, he'll get increased physical contact with you and emotional connectedness – the very things he needs though he likely does not want.

When might time apart be appropriate? Consider another example. If your teenage son curses at you and slaps you across the face, do not respond in kind.

It may feel correct to slap him back, send him to his room and ground him for life. However, any of these responses will likely provoke further verbal and physical aggression. (Depending on the severity of the situation, recruiting outside help may be necessary.)

In this type of circumstance, it is wise to first remove yourself from the situation until you have both calmed down or you are calm enough to help him calm down. This is most easily done by walking out of the room and not saying any last words. If your child follows you, still trying to provoke you, then you may need to go into a room and lock the door. Although you are not staying with him through the physical and emotional arousal, he will likely calm down with a bit of isolation. Remember, he wants that distance.

When you are ready to re-engage, don't try to immediately talk through what just happened; instead, if possible, do an activity together. He knows what he did

was wrong. A lecture won't help at that moment. Later, you can tell him what the consequence of his action will be. (Make sure it is something that requires more time together.)

Behaviour charts. Behaviour charts are problematic for adopted children for two reasons. The first is that it seems nonsensical to be rewarded for behaviours that are not exceptional. For example, making the bed, not having a tantrum in a store, taking out the trash – these are behaviours that are reasonable to expect. They are not behaviours that require rewards.

The second reason behaviour charts do not typically work with these children is that they often have a poor ability to understand time. A goal of earning points all week may seem impossible. The adopted child may perceive this as an expectation of him to be perfect forever. Because this is too much pressure, he will intentionally not earn the reward.

If your elementary-aged child does not throw a tantrum in the store, you can tell his stuffed animals, "Andy did well not yelling in the store." The praise is appropriate to the behaviour, not overdone, and given indirectly so the child can overhear the praise without having to "do something" with it. This is the path of least resistance for a child who needs to undermine his achievements or disagree with Mom and Dad. If the child has no problem accepting positive feedback then, of course, address the child directly. Again, keep it low key and appropriate to the behaviour. Not yelling may be excellent progress for Andy; however, it is within normal expectations.

Love withdrawal. Love withdrawal occurs when parents withdraw emotionally and physically to change a child's behaviour. This rarely works well as a form of discipline even with well-attached children. It will not work as a form of discipline for adopted children.

The adopted child has already experienced the greatest loss possible when she lost her biological parents. Trying to wait until she demonstrates loving behaviour toward you before you show love to her will not work. Because of her previous loss, she can certainly hold out longer than you can. Worse yet, withholding expressions of love only reinforces her belief that she is not lovable, that she cannot be loved and that love is painful. In the meantime, no healing is taking place and she is not getting any closer to claiming you as her parent.

All children need to know that their parents' love for them is unconditional. This may not always be easy, but unconditional love modelled by the parents then provides a path to understanding God's unconditional love for us.

Deprivation. Depriving a child of things may be a popular way to change

behaviour but it does not reach the heart. As you can well imagine, the child may begin to work the system. For example, he may begin to think, *If I feed the dog then I get my computer back.* In this instance, we would want the child to begin to experience some empathy for the hungry dog and possibly desire to please Mom and Dad. However, this is only going to happen over time as the child allows himself to attach to the dog and the parents. In the short term, it's all about the child's wants.

Depriving a child of things seldom works with a previously abused child because the child rarely truly needs whatever is being taken away. He will tell you he didn't want it anyway. In fact, he would rather have control than things any day. Your child needs time interacting with his parents, not with things.

So if your adolescent makes a mess in the family room, don't just tell him, "No more Xbox® till you've put everything

else away," and expect him to clean up by himself. Instead, say, "I see there is a mess in the family room. Let's clean up together, and then we can have some game time together." The joint effort enhances connection and takes the power struggle out of the interaction.

Grounding. Parents who use grounding as a method of discipline are also working at a disadvantage. The child may be used to doing whatever he wants without getting permission. If he's not grounded he assumes he can still do anything that hasn't been specifically ruled out. Instead, parents need to be the ones who give permission because the child needs limits to be safe. Thus, parents need to be asked on a regular basis for permission to participate in activities. This control may need to last longer for some children than others. For example, a child who has experienced trauma will need to experience the safety of his parents' control in his life, and establishing this sense of safety will take time.

Corporal punishment. This article series on nurture and discipline would not be complete without a discussion of spanking. Parents who have ongoing relationships with the adoption agency or social services will need to abide by the agency rules when it comes to spanking. If you have the freedom to make this decision without agency dictates, the following are issues you need to consider when deciding the appropriateness of spanking your adopted child: your primary goal in parenting, your definition of spanking, your guidelines for when to spank and when not to spank, and how your adopted child's age and individual history inform this decision.

Remember, your primary goal is to establish an environment that will encourage attachment and trust. Therefore, consider what your definition of a spanking is and when you believe it is appropriate. For the sake of this discussion, a spank will be defined as a swat with an open palm to the fleshy

part of a clothed bottom. A spanking of one to three swats should sting just enough to get the child's attention in order to redirect the child. Spanking should occur infrequently after the age of five and be phased out by 10 years old in favour of other disciplinary skills.¹ A spank is to be used only to shape predetermined behaviours that pose immediate danger to the child or to someone else, or when the child directly, willfully disobeys you.

In light of this, parents should never spank an infant (age range 0-18 months). It is the parents' responsibility to keep the baby safe by maintaining a safe environment. An infant is not being defiant by squirming when having diapers changed or making a mess when being fed. An infant is exploring his environment. Provide distraction while changing diapers so you can get the job done. And plan on cleaning up the kitchen too many times to count.

The decision to spank or not must also be specific to the parents and child. Spanking can escalate or exacerbate the conflict rather than correct a behaviour. It must take into account the child's history (abuse, neglect, reactive attachment disorder, etc.). Most experts agree that it is never appropriate to spank a child who has been abused.

You must never spank out of anger. It must only be in response to a predetermined set of behaviours. Traditionally, this has been when the child is putting himself at risk or is being intentionally defiant. Therefore, it is not appropriate to spank if you find yourself reacting to your child pushing your buttons. In this situation, it is not fostering connection and long-term health. You have just lost control and, in so doing, lost your ability to provide safety and security.

Responding to an adopted child in anger or disciplining him while you are

angry will not result in the healing and change of behaviour that you desire. Indeed, previously abused children are comfortable with you becoming angry. Anger keeps the emotional distance between you.

If the child was adopted as an infant, then the child may respond to a spanking as another well-attached child would. However, keep in mind that even an adopted infant will grieve his birthmother's voice and heartbeat and can struggle with attachment issues later. The older the child is at the time of adoption and the more complicated his history, however, the more likely he should never be spanked. You may feel that the older child may be the child who could most benefit from spanking; however, that is least likely to be the case and points to anger that is unresolved in you. (If you find yourself struggling in this area, seek professional help from a licensed therapist specializing in adoption issues. If you need a referral

to a Christian therapist, call Focus at 1.800.661.9800.)

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1. Paul Reisser, MD, *Focus on the Family Complete Guide to Baby & Child Care* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2007), 274.

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I will not leave you
as orphans;
I will come to you.

JOHN 14:18

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**DOS AND DON'TS FOR FAMILY
AND FRIENDS**

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Dos and don'ts for family and friends



THE CHILD EVERYONE HAS BEEN WAITING FOR IS FINALLY HOME!

The adoptive parents are ecstatic, and so are you. You've prayed for the family faithfully, and done your best to encourage them throughout the long wait for their child.

But now, the family is entering into a new phase: a critical time for blending and adjusting to one another. For you, the game play has changed. You want to continue to show your love and support in practical ways, but just how can you do that effectively?

A4everFamily.org has published a list of suggestions that will help you offer the best support of all – support that will help the adoptive child and their parents make a great start together as a family.

We encourage you to visit this website and view the suggestions. Here's an example of some of the important tips you will find here:

As hard as it may be for you, abide by the requests of the parents. Even if the baby looks like he really wants to be with Grandma, for example, he needs to have a strong attachment to his parents first. Something as simple as passing the baby from one person to another or allowing others, even grandparents, to hold a baby who is not "attached" can make the attachment process that much longer and harder. Some parents have had to refrain from seeing certain family members or friends because they did not respect the parents' requests.

Check out more important advice at *Dos and don'ts for family and friends* at A4everFamily.org.

Religion that
God our Father
accepts as
pure and faultless

is this:

to look after orphans
and widows in their distress
and to keep oneself from
being polluted by the world.

JAMES 1:27