

From foster-care to adoption: 10 Tips for creating a successful adoption

1. **If the child you are adopting has already been in foster care in your home then research has proven these adoptions are the most successful.**
2. **Emotional investment:** The child you are adopting often comes from a prior home environment that has caused the child to have an insecure attachment. (due to situations of loss, neglect, abuse and trauma) and so it is important for the adopting parent to understand that she/he has become the most important person for positively or negatively influencing the on-going developing brain and nervous system of the child. The earlier the age of the child when being adopted, the more opportunity there is to interrupt insecure attachment patterns. It is a big plus for the child, if the adopting parent has made friends with the excellent, the good, the bad and the ugly parts of himself or herself. All will be revealed in this relationship, in a way that you, the parent, have never experienced before!
3. **Don't take it personally!** When the child is reacting to you or a stressful situation.
4. **Know how to hold on to yourself and hold on to your child during the excitable times and the stressful times.**
5. **Be kind and empathic and understanding at your best and when you are not able to be at your best set firm limits for yourself and your child.** Know how you manage stress. Take a break when you need one and don't wait for the 'right time'.
6. **Know how your child manages stress and what helps sooth and calm emotional distress.** Initially, under stress your child knows nothing else but to react. By understanding and demonstrating how you manage stress, in healthy ways, you can resist being pulled into the reactivity of the child. The reactivity needs to be interrupted as early on, as possible, so that it does not become chronic. Know when you need help.
7. **Be open to learning a different style of parenting. Become informed about adoption and the impact of trauma.** Create an adoption story to tell your child. (This is the story about the beginning of the relationship with you and how your child came home)

8. **During the adjustment period, find opportunities to encourage healthy curiosity, wonder and exploration to learn something new about themselves and the world.** It is the un-metabolized experience of early loss and trauma that can make a child vulnerable to learning challenges. The bottom line is that we do not engage in healthy curiosity, and exploration and learn something new when we are under stress and feel insecure; uncertain and afraid.
9. **When you are officially the adoptive parent you are finally in charge.** What do you want to do as regards contact with the biological family and siblings etc? How do you clearly assess what is the right amount of contact, if any? Open or closed adoption?
10. **As you get to know your child, the cycle of the 'survival mode' acting out behavior and pushing away of the adult caregiver needs to be interrupted.**
Connect before you correct. Structure, empathy and follow through. Initially, any change or transition (even from one activity to another without due warning) will often activate the 'survival' behaviors in a child, which often means a dependence on themselves and what they know about surviving. Of course, not every loss experienced during the day is a situation of physical or psychological survival, but the brain and nervous system of many foster children does not recognize this fact. Unfortunately, their behaviors are often purposefully, alienating and challenging and confusing to deal with for a caregiver. Also, the more often the behavior is activated in the child the more the nervous system will register the need for the habitual negative reaction. The cycle of the survival mode acting out behavior and pushing away of the adult needs to be interrupted as often as possible.