

ROOM at your TABLE



EXPLORING ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE

Week 4

Preparing for Your Child

A. Prepare Your Life for the Arrival of Your Child

1. Minimize responsibilities outside the home
 - a. Leave of absence from work
 - b. Volunteer commitments
 - c. Extracurricular activities
 - d. Major Life Transitions
2. Educate yourself on parenting kids from hard places. This includes:
 - a. Bonding and attachment
 - b. Impact of abuse and neglect
 - c. Sensory processing
3. Make sure you have the basics of your child's room, toys, etc. without over-preparing

B. Prepare Your Support System

1. Connect with other foster/adoptive families for support
2. Make connections to pediatricians, dentist, and other professionals that are trauma-informed
3. Seek out families from your church and social network of the same culture as your child to help ease the transition
4. Educate your family on adoption and what your child might need

Realistic Expectations

A. Deal with unrealistic expectations

1. Problems come when we have unrealistic expectations about how long the transition will take
 - People often think transitions like these take place in just a few weeks or even a few days
2. What are you imagining parenting will be like?
 - Peacefulness
 - Gratefulness
 - The child treasuring you as “mom” and “dad”
 - Their excitement to be a part of your family
 - “Fixing” their behaviors
 - Will they fit into your image of a solid “Christian family”
3. The priority the first few months your child is home is to make sure they feel safe and to facilitate attachment and bonding. It is **NOT** to...
 - Get the child to sleep through the night
 - Get them to eat the right foods
 - Get them caught up in school
 - Help them maximize their athletic potential
 - Fix imperfect behavior

B. Your New Normal

1. Recognize that this is a MAJOR life transition for you and your child. It will take a while to find your new normal. You and your child might feel like life is out of sync for a while (even up to a year) while you find that new normal.
2. Remember to reach out to others on those tough days. It is normal and it really helps to be with people who have been there.
 - Don't buy the lie: “I chose this so I should be able to handle this.”
3. Your child is adjusting and grieving. It will take them a while to find their new normal too. Just because you see a behavior now does not mean this is how it will always be. Behaviors such as crying, temper tantrums, and disrupted sleep can be normal at this stage.
4. Though your adoption is a blessing from God, there may be times when you will not see it as such. Continue to thank God for His blessing in the midst of those times.
5. Some families go through a “honeymoon” stage. They are surprised when the adjustment comes 6-12 months after getting the child.

6. Children already in the home are adjusting too. They need special time. They may act out as well. This is a great place for your support system to help!!

C. Other People Have Expectations Too

1. Not everybody will understand what your child has gone through. You may get a lot of parenting advice that works well for kids who have not been through trauma.
2. Sometimes people blame adoption for any behavioral issues the child may have. Adoption is the solution. Trauma is the problem.
3. You may be “blamed” for the behavior your child displays because they have come from a hard place.

Relationship with Biological Family

A. Recognize that your child’s connection to bio family is part of the package in adoption and foster care

1. If you love them, you have to respect that connection
2. Your decision about the type of adoption you do should not be rooted in the avoidance of bio family.
 - You have to be secure in your role regardless of your child’s journey and their feelings related to their biological family
 - Your job in adoption is not to create an alternate reality. Your job is to help your child navigate actual reality.
3. Open adoption is a spectrum of relationship with biological family
Members
 - It needs to be done with wisdom
 - What is best for the child must be first
 - Every open adoption is going to look different
 - There are many benefits to open adoption
 - Medical information
 - Minimize loss
 - Identity
 - Preservation of personal history
4. As followers of Christ we are to do all things out of love and NOT fear.

Parenting Children from Hard Places

A. Parenting a child from a hard place is different from parenting a child who has not experienced significant trauma.

1. Six primary risk factors that characterize children from hard places:
 - Prenatal stress and harm
 - Difficult labor or birth
 - Early medical trauma
 - Trauma
 - Neglect
 - Abuse
2. Impact of "Hard Places"
 - Alters brain development and neurochemistry
 - Impact on the ability to process sensory inputs
 - Ability to self-regulate in response to stressors
 - Lack of secure attachment
 - Altered belief systems
 - Heightened levels of stress and fear
3. Educate yourself on the special challenges your child may have as a result of their past.
4. Your child's past affects his/her future but it does not determine it.
5. Deal with your own past.
6. Adopted children will likely experience grief and loss.
7. Pursue community and get the right help quickly if you are struggling.

What to do now

A. Make a commitment to taking the next step

1. It can be things such as . . .
 - Marriage counseling
 - Grief counseling
 - Identifying an agency
 - Scheduling an appointment with one of the class leaders
 - Volunteering with the adoption and foster care ministry at One

B. Continue to explore God's word and pray