

We appreciate that you care about our family. We cannot thank you enough for wanting to learn more about supporting and understanding the adoptive family and for helping make this transition as smooth as possible for all of us! Please note that most of these are suggestions from blogs, books, and have been found helpful from numerous adoptive families.

If you'd like to offer support (meal, help with house cleaning, etc) when an adopted child joins the family, please do it even if we don't reach out & ask.

Many of us won't specifically ask for help or tell you what we need. However, I don't know a single adoptive mom who would turn down an offer to have a group of friends tidy/clean her house during those first few weeks at home with a new child. How wonderful would a meal be when the kids are crazy from 3 days of doctor visits? Likewise, cookies and ice cream are most always welcome and might be exactly what a new adoptive mom needs to get through those challenging times of adjustment!

Please don't try to get our children to like you the most.

Attachment and bonding are challenging enough without having friends and family slip our children candy, shower them with gifts, offer seconds at meals or encourage bending and stretching of family rules. We're already working our tails off to get them to like us! With consistency and time they will learn to like you too, we promise.

Attachment takes time and work.

It doesn't happen overnight. Even if it appears that our kids are securely attached to us it may take many months or years and every child and every family bonds differently. Many times we're faking it until we make it but one day we will wake up and realize that we're not faking it anymore and that our love is deep and real. We have not woken up to this yet, so please just remember we are trying to get them to love and trust us and it stinks to love someone so much and know they don't fully love you back YET.

Parenting an adopted child is hard work and we struggle.

We may tell you that we're okay when we're really falling apart. We're worried that if we are honest about how difficult it is that you won't understand and that you'll think we're nuts. Adding children who may or may not have anything in common with us socially, culturally, biologically or even personality-wise is challenging. Though undoubtedly beautiful and worth all of the struggles, adoption certainly isn't always easy or pretty.

We may discourage too much physical contact with our child for the first couple months that they are home or until we feel like they are securely attached to us.

Please do not insist on holding them too much, hugging them too much or having them sit on your lap. In many places, it is cultural for them to hug and kiss everyone they see. We want to teach them that they only hug and kiss family and friends that we trust. We need your help in breaking this habit with them. Even though all of you are family and close friends they do not know you well yet and we want to teach them they need to really know someone to offer that affection to them. Many children who have lived in orphanages and institutions learn to fight for adult attention. Often they can put on quite the show and act like the friendliest, cute, charming child to draw attention to themselves.

Please do not disappear.

If we thought the waiting stage was hard, it does not even hold the barest candle to what comes after we meet them. Not. The. Barest. Candle. Never have I felt so isolated and petrified. Never have I been so overwhelmed and exhausted. We need you after the airport way more than we ever needed you before. I know you're scared of us, but please find ways to stick around. Call. Email. Check in. Post on our Facebook walls. Send us funny cards. Keep this behavior up for longer than six days. Parents who have recently added a child through adoption need support, friendship, love and encouragement. Even if we're somewhat withdrawn and spending a lot of time at home with our new additions, we value our friendships.

If you were in our life before we still want you in our life and in the lives of our children!

Please don't feed the kids if we are around and available to instead.

We want them to learn to love us, before they bond with extended family, neighbors and friends. Since we were not there to meet their early needs (breast or bottle feeding, comforting them when they were sick, changing diapers, kissing boo boos) we need to make up for it by meeting as many of their physical and emotional needs as possible now. We also are trying to make sure they know rules about food and we like to know how much and what they are eating so we can judge behaviors etc.

Sometimes adopted children need to be parented differently than biological children.

We are not spoiling them. We aren't making excuses for poor behavior. Rather, we are parenting a child whose background may be very dissimilar to anything we've experienced. A child who has been abandoned and who has a fear of abandonment shouldn't be sent to time out alone in another room, we try to sit with them, as annoying as it is. The types of consequences that work for other children might not work for a child who doesn't have the same sense of value of their possessions and who doesn't understand what it means to have privileges. As parents, we must be flexible to help meet the individual needs of our children even if it means that we do things a little differently sometimes. We also are un-doing years of bad habits and ways we would NOT have parented.

If you would like to give a gift to our new children, please consider something small that the whole family can enjoy together.

A few ideas are a frozen meal, a gift card to the movies, buying clothes that save us money or art supplies for all of the kids to share. We know that you want to welcome our new additions but gifts can be overwhelming for children who have had few material possessions. Also, we want our children to learn to love you for who you are, not for the fact that they hope they'll get another gift the next time they see you again.

It takes time to help children start to heal from a difficult past.

Just because they have been with us for a certain amount of time does not mean that they are "fixed". On the other hand, just because children are adopted does not necessarily mean that they will be any more difficult, defiant, less successful or anything else as teenagers or adults. Even the happiest of adoptions are a result of challenging or difficult circumstances.

Though we like to think of adoption as a "happy ending", birth parents may have made difficult decisions, children may have faced losses and many lives were forever changed.

Though most adopted children grow to be happy, well-adjusted adults and though most adoptive families are beautiful and full of love, it is important not to romanticize adoption.

If we've adopted older kids, please do not ask them if they "love America/ their new home or family so much"

It's this simple: adoption is born from horrible loss. In an ideal world, there would be no adoption, because our children would be with their birth families, the way God intended. Adoption is one possible answer to a very real tragedy. There is genuine grief and sorrow when your biological family is disrupted by death, poverty, poor choices, etc and our kids have endured a lot. Please don't make them smile and lie to you about how happy they are to be here.

Thank you for getting excited with us over our little victories.

When you encourage us over our incremental progress, it helps. You remind us that we ARE moving forward and these little moments are worth celebrating. If we come to you spazzing out, please remind us where we were a month ago. Force us to acknowledge their gains. Be a cheerleader for the healing process.

Come over one night after our kids are asleep and sit with us on our porch.

Let me tell you: we are all lonely in those early weeks. We are home, home, home, home, home. Good-bye, date nights. Good-bye, spontaneous anything. Good-bye, big public outings. Good-bye, community group. Good-bye, nightlife. We know it's not forever but it feels like it at the moment. So please bring some community to our doorstep. Bring friendship back into our lives. Bring adult conversation and laughter. And bring a really good football game!

Here's one last thing:

As you watch us struggle and celebrate and cry and flail, we also want you to know that adoption is beautiful, and a hundred times we've looked at each other and said, "What if we would've said no?" God invited us into something monumental and lovely, and we would've missed endless moments of glory had we walked away. We need you during these difficult months of transitioning, but we also hope you see that we serve a faithful God who heals and actually sets the lonely in families, just like He said He would. And even through the tears and tantrums (ours), we look at our children and marvel that God counted us worthy to raise them. We are humbled. We've been gifted with a very holy task, and when you help us rise to the occasion, you have an inheritance in their story; your name will be counted in their legacy.

Also please remember no one is perfect.

If you slip and ask "how much did they cost" or if you've already asked "What happened to their mother?" we won't hold a grudge. We know that our family is different. We understand that it is impossible to be sensitive and politically correct in every situation all the time. And we don't expect you to be. We sure don't have all this figured out yet either!

Thank you for being the village that will help us raise these kids. You are so important to us.

By: Jennifer and Nick Sanjines