

Therapist's Quick Guide to Working with Children Who are Newly Adopted

Top 5 things that adoptive families need their OT/PT/ST to understand

1. We are still getting to know our new child.

How can you help? Be patient and help us in the process of getting to know our new child.

2. We want our child to like you, but not too much.

We are focused on learning to be a family. We need your help, but please respect our boundaries and roles as a parent.

How can you help? Having a consistent therapist is critical for the relationship with the family and child. Ask us what are our concerns are and how you can help respect our boundaries. Invite us to stay and participate in the therapy sessions.

3. We trust you and value your opinion, but our priorities might not be the same.

Adoptive families usually limit who interacts with their child when newly home, so know that if we are choosing to come to therapy, it is because we trust and value your services. We know that all the developmental goals you propose are important, but they may not be the top of our priority list.

How can you help? Give us the chance to tell you about our priorities.

4. Use a team approach, but keep it simple.

Many children who are adopted have many needs and would benefit from the expertise of many professionals (OT, PT, ST, etc). We want all the help that is available, but sometimes it is too much for our child.

How can you help? Can a child see just one therapist for awhile, while others consult? Can team members create a single home program?

5. Our lives at home may be chaos.

Bringing home a newly adopted child of any age is similar to bringing home a newborn. It can be emotionally and physically exhausting.

How can you help? Ask what our daily life looks like; ask if we are able to do any activities at home (the answer may be "no").

The basics of attachment:

Attachment is a bond between two people that usually develops between an infant and caregiver. For adoptive children, this process is often disrupted and families need to work to allow attachment to develop over time. A child first has to feel secure and safe with a new caregiver and family, then learn to explore his or her world from this secure foundation.

When children are newly adopted, most families place attachment as a priority. They take time when first home to "cocoon," meaning they limit contact with others, keeping close to home and focusing on their new child. During this phase, most families will allow a child to regress and focus on parents meeting all their child's needs to build attachment.

Please view more information and resources on attachment at www.paigehays.net/therapists-guide-to-working-with-children-who-are-adopted/



What Can I do to Help?

- *Keep it simple, children are still absorbing all the new things
- *Limit the number of people interacting with the child, consistency in therapist is key
- *Include parents in everything you do, ask parents to guide you in how you interact with the child
- *Allow a child to act much younger than his or her age, don't rush them on developmental goals
- *Discuss appropriate consequences and discipline with parents
- *Read up on attachment and adoption, ask parents for advice when you need to know more

This handout was created by Paige Hays, an occupational therapist who provides in-home, pediatric occupational therapy services in the Twin Cities, MN.

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