

Why Love Isn't Enough: The Potential Risks Involved in Adopting From Home or Far Away – Introduction

This is the Introduction to a series of posts on related challenging topics (Part One, Part Two, Part Three, Part Four, Part Five, Part Six, Part Seven, Part Eight.) The purpose of this series is to make clear that today's waiting children—international and domestic—infants and older children—are a traumatized population. As will become clear over the next two weeks, the effects of trauma do not fade with love alone! Such myths as—“Love will be enough”, “Kids will be fine once in a good family”, “A young child won't have problems”—are just that: myths!

This series is written in response to an array of recent news stories—the murder of a Chinese adoptee (the most recent in a growing list of children who have died at the hands of their adoptive parents), a young boy returned unaccompanied to a Russian orphanage, and increasing tales of adoption dissolutions—devastating to all involved! This series is also a result of clinical experience with traumatized adoptees and their families. Daily, I hear parents state, “We weren't told about all the problems we would have!” “Our agency should have done more to prepare us!” “Our agency lied to us!” “We adopted so young! We had no idea a young child would have any problems!” All of these tragedies can be offset!

Today we know that children who have experienced institutionalization, neglect, abuse, abandonment, the pre-natal insult of drug and/or alcohol exposure, and so on, can—and often do—arrive in the adoptive family with a myriad of issues. Knowledge of these traumas is the key to your post-placement ability to cope and adapt.

We also know that you—prospective adoptive families—come to the adoption process along many avenues. Yet, in common, is an optimism and excitement for the child who is to arrive in the family! There is a desire to offer an abundance of love to a boy or girl in need. There is an enthusiasm about the opportunity to shape a child's entire future. Likely, without such exuberance there would be fewer adoptions! In this series, we are asking you to temper these feelings with factual information. Consider the topics being put forth, and then educate yourselves accordingly! You must augment your agency's adoption education program. Pre-adoption classes are only a beginning! Depth of understanding the journey you are about to embark on can only come from additional reading, attending ongoing trainings and networking with veteran adoptive parents!

We'll be providing lots of resources throughout the series to help you delve more deeply into the challenges you could face after your son or daughter joins your family! Recently formed adoptive families, and veteran families built by adoption will also find this information useful. As we proceed, keep the following in mind.

As you educate yourself, ask, “What does this information mean for me as the parent?” “What will this mean for the children I already parent?” “What does this mean for the child I am adopting?”

Why Love Isn't Enough: Part Two – Neglect

This is another in a series of posts on related challenging topics. You may want to print this post or others in the series – Introduction, Part One, Part Three, Part Four, Part Five, Part Six, Part Seven, Part Eight. Study them, returning to them over time. Review the resources that are embedded within the articles. Keep them handy! They will make valuable references post-adoption. As you educate yourself, ask, “What does this information mean for me as the parent?” “What will this mean for the children I already parent?” “What does this mean for the child I am adopting?”

Neglect affects both the domestic and the inter-country adoptee. As I wrote in the earlier post Neglect: There is No Such Thing as “a Little”, we really need to understand that the impact of this trauma has serious consequences that don't always vanish when the child is moved to a loving, healthy home!

Neglect comes from a lack of experience. In fact, neglect means that the child lives in a chronic state of hunger, filth, and loneliness. The neglected child is not provided the food, clothing and shelter needed. Furthermore, neglect may involve simply ignoring the child; failing to respond to his pleas; leaving him to his own devices; failing to stimulate his senses by talking to him, carrying him about, encouraging his exploration of his world. Neglect may also include lack of medical care and/or mental health services as well as providing poor supervision, no supervision, or leaving the child in the care of someone who is not capable. For example, a ratio of 1 orphanage staff to 5 or more infants or toddlers is not sufficient and creates a neglectful situation. This would be like having quintuplets—only your mother, mother-in-law, sisters, aunts, friends, etc. aren't available to help out!

As an international example,

Brittney arrived in America after thirteen months in a Chinese orphanage. She uttered no sounds. She was unable to crawl or walk. She did not reciprocate facial expressions or smiles. She rarely cried as a means of informing her adoptive parents of her needs. She was used to a life of lying in a crib; waiting for a bottle, waiting for potty time, waiting to fall asleep, etc. She was accustomed to a change in caregivers with each eight hours that passed. She was not used to having two loving caregivers who would respond to her cues. She was certainly not familiar with adults who desired to play with her and nurture her.

Study the photos below provided courtesy of adoptive families whose children are from China, Russia and Kazakhstan. What do these children see from their cribs? Who is talking to them? Who is holding them? Do they have adequate toys to facilitate development? Do they have adequate opportunity and space to move—to develop muscle tone, and to achieve milestones (i.e., rolling over, walking, babbling, talking, reaching, grasping, etc.)? What do they hear? How often are they allowed out of their cribs? Do adults facilitate any type of learning or play? How do the children look? What do you think their perceptions are of adults? What type of intervention will you need post-adoption to help a child who has been institutionalized?

As a domestic example,

The police removed 4-year-old Robert and his birth brother from their birthparents due to reports of physical abuse. Upon entering the home, police saw cockroaches scatter. There were piles of dirty clothing, which served as the beds for Robert and his siblings. The cupboards were empty. There was no running water. A bucket, located behind the house, was being used as a toilet.

Robert was removed from a living situation similar to the one below. Again, the photos are courtesy of an adoptive family. What do kids like Robert learn in such a home?

Neglect causes children to lack trust in caregivers. It damages their sense of self. Neglect may also involve malnutrition and failure to thrive. It can lead to developmental delays in all domains of development—cognitive, social, emotional and physical. These children need immediate stimulation—nurture—upon being adopted or placed into foster care. We need to go back with deliberateness and provide the neglected child with the experiences missed—no matter what the child's age at time of placement with a healthy adoptive family. We cannot expect that he or she will “grow out of it.” See our article, *Nurture: The Ring that Holds the Keys* for ways to stimulate the child who experienced pre-adoptive deprivation – Part One and Part Two.

Prospective adoptive parents are encouraged to read *Nurturing Adoptions: Creating Resilience after Neglect and Trauma*, and *Attaching in Adoption: Practical Tools for Today's Parents or Brothers and Sisters in Adoption* to comprehend the long-term effects of neglect on their son or daughter-to-be.

Further, neglect and pre-natal substance exposure are believed to be the main culprits in the development of Sensory Processing Disorder (SI.) SI is caused by the brain's inability to accurately process information coming in through the senses—eyes, ears, skin and nose. Humans need accurate sensory data to function. The child with SI is overwhelmed easily, aversive to touch, hears sounds too loudly, lacks depth and field perception, etc. Trips to the store, parties, the school playground, and so on are difficult for the SI child to navigate. The child's fun and family outings are interrupted by this disorder. Check out the Sensory Processing Disorder Resource Center or *Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Children with Sensory Processing Disorder* before you new son or daughter arrives.

In conclusion, the neglected child will arrive much “younger” than his or her chronological age. This has implications for every facet of adoptive family life—birth order, sibling relationships, expectations, education, social skills, daily living tasks, behavior, and so on! The adoptive family must be prepared to access an array of services to bring this child into accord with his actual age. The neglected child will also arrive with significant control issues—even if adopted at a young age. In his mind, he survived on his own. He may not know how to relate to or appreciate a loving Mom, Dad, brother or sister. Acquiring new parenting tools will be essential to managing the day-to-day control battles. Love will not be enough to earn the trust of the child deprived beyond what any child should ever experience!

You may want to print this post or others in the series. Put them in a binder. Study them, returning to them over time. Review the resources that are embedded within the articles. Keep them handy! They will make valuable references post-adoption. Please know that the purpose of this series is education. It is not meant to discourage any family from adopting. But, it is meant to help families think hard prior to adopting. Our earlier post “While Families Wait: Ongoing Adoption Education for Prospective Adoptive Families” offers concrete steps parents can take to line up post-adoption support and services before the new son or daughter arrives. Early intervention is the key to solving problems once identified and acknowledged!