

# *"Anything We Can't Find, He Stole!" The "Why" and "What to Do" about Stealing in Adoptive Families*

By Arleta James, PCC

The title of this article is actually a statement made by a typical child. His complete comment was, "Anything we can't find he stole! Why are you asking me where your ring is? He stole it! Go ask him!" This resident child lives in a family comprised of four birth children, ages 12-18, and an adopted son. The adopted young man arrived in the family, at age 11, with a history of abuse and neglect as well as multiple-foster care placements. However, it isn't uncommon to adopt a very young child—international or domestic—only to have the child grow into stealing—a behavior that can continue long-term.



Stealing wreaks havoc in adoptive families! Parents notice money missing, food wrappers stuffed under a couch, pantry items in a state of disarray or cell phones gone from the charger! Pens, pencils, string, paper and so on vanish! The teacher calls about books missing from a book fair, disappearing classroom supplies, or snacks being taken from classmates' lunches! The typical siblings, once again, can't find their iPods, DS, DS games, jewelry, makeup, favorite sweater, etc. The entire family is negatively affected by stealing as well as the adoptee's future is jeopardized.

Parents are informed by friends, family members, and professionals that, "all kids steal." While there is truth to this statement, most children learn that stealing is wrong—thievery usually ceases after a few thefts coupled with appropriate consequences. Yet, in the case of the adoptee that has experienced trauma, pilfering continues—day after day, month after month and year after year!

The purpose of this article is to answer two questions:

- *Why do traumatized children steal?*
- *What can be done to help a child stop stealing?*

Without further delay...

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## *Why Do Traumatized Children Steal?*

There are a number of root causes that lead a child with a history of neglect, abuse and abandonment to steal:

- "I communicate through behavior."
- "Trauma interrupted my development."
- "I want what my siblings and peers have."
- "I think things make me feel better."
- "I think things make me feel better."
- "Stealing kept me alive."
- "My birth parents stole."
- "I want other kids to like me"
- "I am having drug or alcohol problems."

Let's examine the first three bullet points— underlying causes of thieving—today and the remainder on Thursday.

"I communicate through behavior." We must come to understand that traumatized children communicate their emotions via their negative behaviors. There are many reasons for this. For example, the child who has been beaten, raped, abandoned, institutionalized, separated from siblings and/or moved from foster home to foster home has internalized intense feelings as a result of these traumas. Inside, she feels rage, sorrow, hopelessness, helplessness, profound sadness, frustration, loneliness and lost. Who wouldn't? Yet, he has little opportunity to talk about these experiences and resolve the emotions. As adults, we prefer to wait for the child to tell us what happened to him. Or, we are waiting until she is "old" enough to process the trauma. Or, we expect that children will simply "get over it." Somehow, on their own, they will process being physically abused or neglected, or why their birth parents' chose substance abuse as a way of life. We seriously need to re-think all of these adult misperceptions. In reality, many traumas occur when children are young. They have very little or no language development. So, they don't have the words to express what has happened to them. Instead they attempt to show us with their behaviors. Their hope is that we will recognize their messages and provide the example—role-model—to talk about feelings and profoundly overwhelming experiences.

Applying the above to stealing, the stealing is a way to communicate, "I feel stolen." If we stop and think about this a moment, this makes some sense. Many children are going about their daily routine in an orphanage when, a family arrives—total strangers. In very short order, the child leaves the institutional setting, boards a plane and lands in a new country! Who wouldn't feel stolen? American children are abruptly removed from their birth parents in a similar manner. Social workers pull in and gather the children. A few hours later, the children are dropped off at a foster home. Little explanation is provided about such moves in either domestic or international adoption.

***"Trauma interrupted my development."*** All human development occurs by a series of stages. A baby learns to roll over, sit up, crawl, pull to a stand, walk, run, jump and skip in an order.



Moral development is also a series of stages. In the first year of life, sequencing is absorbed by the brain. Sequencing is followed by the development of cause-and-effect thinking a about 18-months of age. Then, conscience development is initiated. This is a process which involves acquiring and assimilating the rules about what people should do in their interactions with other people. This process consists of three stages. In ***pre-conventional reasoning***, the stage of pre-schoolers, moral thinking is based on rewards and self-interest. Children obey when they want to and when they think it is in their best interest to obey. What is right is what feels good and what is rewarding. ***Conventional reasoning***, the moral development of grade school age children, sees children adopting their parents' moral standards, seeking to be thought of by their parents as a "good girl or boy." ***Post-conventional reasoning*** is the highest stage at which the person recognizes alternative moral courses, explores the options and then decides on a personal moral code (Santrock, 1995).

It is common when children enter foster care or arrive home from a foreign orphanage that parents must obtain physical and/or occupational therapy to enhance the child's ability to get walking or hold a fork, knife or spoon. We all seem to accept these types of delays which result from the neglect of the child's pre-adoptive environment.

Yet, when it comes to moral development, we again believe this will all fall into place with a "good home" and "enough love." These are misperceptions that must be shed as well. Actually, adoptive parents may find that the adopted child displays pre-conventional reasoning well into adolescence or beyond. Helping cause-and-effect thinking fall into place and facilitating a healthy respect for rules and authority can take years!

In the meantime, the child who is chronologically one age, and morally a much "younger" child steals. She does not possess the development to move to conventional reasoning in which she values parental trust, or being viewed as a "good" girl by parents, teachers, coaches, the Girl Scout leader, etc.

***"I want what my siblings and peers have."*** Certainly, we all remember wanting to have the possessions and clothing that all the kids—especially the "cool" kids—had when we were in junior high and high school. Well, troubled kids are no different in this respect. But, because of their behaviors and developmental delays, they haven't "earned" trust, or exhibited the maturity to handle the privileges associated with their age. Angry about being denied amenities or desperate to "fit in", they take the cell phone or latest CD. They sneak out of the house to go to the mall or movie. As stated above, their lack of cause-and-effect thinking

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renders them unable to understand that such actions only serve to compound their ability to obtain desired freedoms and possessions.



***“I think things make me feel better.”*** Likely, you all have a friend or neighbor who must have every latest gadget or electronic device. Or, you know someone who shops so much their credit card debt is exorbitant. Many children that have experienced trauma have attachment difficulties or [Reactive Attachment Disorder](#). Such children lack intimate relationships. Their pre-adoptive experiences have led them to believe that adults can't be trusted or that they are so bad they aren't likeable to anyone. Frequently, these children attempt to stock up on things as if having things will fill up the emotional hole created by abuse, neglect or abandonment. Lacking the finances to support this habit, they steal.

***“I have no boundaries.”*** Sexual abuse and physical abuse are boundary violations of the utmost degree. The child loses all control and any sense of “privacy” or “personal” when being invaded in these atrocious ways. Once placed in an adoptive home, these boundary issues fade very gradually. In the meantime, entering anyone's bedroom, going through Mom's purse, taking a classmate's new and pretty pen all seem acceptable to the child previously abused.

***“Stealing kept me alive.”***

*Carrie lived with her birth mother until she was six-years-old. Frequently, the birth mother would leave Carrie and her two younger sisters home alone. Days would pass before she returned. Hungry, Carrie would leave the apartment and rummage through the garbage for food. She also learned the mini-mart, on the corner, displayed fruit on shelves outside the store. She became astute at waiting for the clerk to become occupied with a customer. She then grabbed some apples or bananas and rushed home. She shared her feast with her sisters.*

Carrie and her sisters entered foster care because she was eventually caught stealing some oranges. But, once in care, this stealing behavior continued. Carrie simply could not believe that she wouldn't be without food again. So, nightly, she rummaged through the cupboards—her bedroom was replete with empty yogurt containers, pop cans, candy wrappers, apple cores, chip bags, etc. Carrie believed that “stealing” was the way to stay alive.

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International children are not immune to this factor. One youngster said in therapy, "The kids are like cats and mice in the orphanage. The mice kids try to hide when they eat or keep their plate close to their mouth so the cat kids don't take it."



***"My birth parents stole."***

*Paul's birth father had been arrested numerous times for the theft of small electronics. Paul has vague memories of cameras, hand held games and phones being stuffed in his diaper or underwear between his birth father's period of incarceration. Paul also remembers being with his birth father when he "fenced" these items. Paul can clearly recall the exchange of money.*

Paul, now an adopted adolescent, is following in his birth father's footsteps. Most recently he was arrested in a popular chain store for—you guessed it—taking small electronic items.

You know, we all repeat the patterns of our family. I'm sure you remember, at some point in your life, vowing, "When I have children, I'll never say that to my own kids?" Then one day you shout,

"No dessert until you clean your plate!"

"Turn off the lights. Money doesn't grow on trees!"

"Close the door! Were you raised in a barn?"

You think, "Oh my goodness, I have become my mother!" or "I sound just like my father!" Traumatized children are no different except the patterns they learned, in their families of origin, are often illegal or unsafe.

Changing a learned pattern of behavior is no easier for a child than an adult.

***"I want other kids to like me."*** In my previous post, [The "Eyes" Have It](#), I pointed out the difficulty children with a history of complex trauma—international or domestic—have with self-concept. In essence, they feel "bad", "unlovable", "dumb", "stupid" or "defective." These poor self thoughts are because they have

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mistakenly blamed their traumatic experiences on themselves—"My birth mom gave me away because she didn't like me." "I couldn't stop my birth father from sexually abusing my sister. I should have been able to stop it." "If I were a better kid, someone in my county (of origin) would have adopted me."

This self-concept carries over to peer relationships. Adopted sons and daughters think the way to make friends is to provide class or teammates trinkets or money. Jewelry, pocket change, candy and so on disappear from the home only to appear in the hands of neighbors, youth groups members, karate partners, etc.

***"I am having drug and alcohol problems."*** Sadly, factors such as abuse, coming from a family history of addictions, etc. makes it more likely to go on to develop a drug and/or alcohol problem. For example, sexually abused adolescents are eighteen to twenty-one times more likely to become substance abusers.



Stealing is a common way to finance a drug problem. Parents need to be aware of the signs and symptoms of drug addiction to benefit ALL of their children:

- Changes in mood—anxiety, anger or depression
- Weight loss or gain
- Withdrawal or keeping secrets from family or friends
- Loss of interest in activities that used to be important
- Problems with schoolwork, such as slipping grades or absences
- Changes in friendships, such as hanging out only with friends who use drugs
- Spending a lot of time figuring out how to get drugs
- Stealing or selling belongings to be able to afford drugs
- Failed attempts to stop taking drugs or drinking
- Changes in sleep habits
- Feeling shaky or sick when trying to stop
- Needing to take more of the substance to get the same effect

Now that we have looked at the reasons for stealing, we'll turn our attention to the solutions!



Solutions! Solutions! Solutions!

So far, we looked at a number of the reasons that cause children with a history of abuse, neglect, institutionalization and abandonment to steal. We also discussed that these children don't simply "grow out" of this behavior. Stealing can go on for years! This behavior generates conflicts among all members of the adoptive family. The emotional climate of a once happy and peaceful family, changes to an environment of anger and suspicion. Angst sets in as parents ask, "What will happen to our daughter if she doesn't stop stealing?" "How we can instill morals and values in our other children?" The typical children wonder, "Why can't my parents make him stop stealing?" and they comment with resentment, "I would never get away with that!"



### *A Menu of Solutions*

Regarding solutions, we must always keep in mind that making behavioral changes takes time. If you think about trying to diet or add regular exercise to your daily routine this point becomes obvious. Changing

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stealing will be a similar process for both parents and the adopted child—there will be steps forward, then regression and then eventually permanent changes.

### *The Menu of Solutions...*

Our menu selections correspond with the underlying factors causing stealing as identified in this article...

*"I communicate through behavior"* was one factor described in part 1 as perpetuating stealing. In fact, I have worked with many children who think they were stolen. Let's use Alice as an example:

*Alice is age 9. She was adopted when age 4. One evening, at age 1½, social workers arrived at her birth home and removed her. Her birthmother did not participate in reunification efforts and so she never saw her birthmother again. Her perception of her removal is that she was "stolen." This is certainly understandable. What else would a toddler think when women come into your home, take you, and then give you to another family? Alice has stolen on a regular basis since coming to reside with her adoptive family. Jewelry, video games, pens and pencils disappear routinely despite consequences much to Alice's dissatisfaction. The only way Alice feels able to demonstrate her confusion, anger and sadness for the loss of her birthmother is to reenact the event of stealing.*

In order to assist Alice, we first created a narrative, a "story", to help her correct her irrational perceptions. **The narrative is truthful and factual.** Alice's "story" contains statements like,

*"You lived with your birth mother, Tara, in an apartment building. A neighbor heard you crying for a long time. The neighbor also realized that she hadn't seen Tara for several days. Concerned, she called the police. They came and found you alone. Your clothes were dirty and you were hungry. The police called the social workers. They came and took you to Mom and Dad's house. First, Mom and Dad were your "foster parents." Foster parents take care of you until you return to your birth family or until you get adopted. In your case, Tara, decided she couldn't be a Mom. So, Mom and Dad became your adoptive family—they will be your family until you are all grown up! You will live with them when you are 10, 11, 12 and so on. Even when you are an adult with a family of your own, Mom and Dad will still be your parents."*



This narrative is part of Alice's [lifebook](#). She made drawings to go along with her story. After many repetitions/reviews of the lifebook, Alice's stealing ceased. She finally realized that she wasn't stolen. She was able to learn to verbalize her feelings of anger and sadness for Tara's actions. She no longer needed to use a behavior to let her Mom and Dad know what she thought and how she felt. She learned that Mom and Dad did not keep her from Tara. There was no reason to be angry with Mom and Dad.

The narrative can also be utilized to cease *“My birth parents stole”* as well. The “story” can have as its goal a ***past-present connection*** to negative behavior. Betty, age 12, stole chronically. She was adopted at age 2 after both birth parents were incarcerated for robbing and then selling the stolen goods. Throughout the process of making her narrative, it was calmly presented, “You have the choice to act like Mom and Dad or your birth parents. Which choice seems better?” Again, with repetition, Betty began to take on the morals and values of her family. She recognized that Mom and dad had the better life.

The narrative, especially as part of a life book, is a powerful tool in healing the traumatized child. If you would like to help your child understand his past, [Lifebooks: Creating a Treasure for the Adopted Child](#) by Beth O’Malley is a wonderful resource. In my book, [Brothers and Sisters in Adoption](#), I describe the narrative in detail and offer two sample narratives—see chapter 9.

Some may be uncomfortable sharing painful information with a traumatized child. It can be difficult. So, you may want to seek professional help. A therapist that is both adoption-competent and trauma-informed is often needed to do this work appropriately—with understanding of the unique needs of adopted families. [The Association for Treatment & Training in the Attachment of Children \(ATTACH\)](#) offers a state by state listing of just such mental health professionals. Even if this means a drive, the end result will be worth the distance.

***“I am having drug and alcohol problems.”*** It is heartbreaking to think that your child may be experimenting with or addicted to drugs. Unfortunately, as Part 1 pointed out, children that have experienced abuse are 5 times more likely to go down this path. As parents, early education is one key. Starting young, ages 4 and 5 or the day your older adoptee is placed with you, leave articles and pamphlets in plain sight. Talk to your all of your kids! Seek out community or church related deterrent programs. Monitor their Internet activities and block whatever is necessary. Invite their friends over regularly. In essence, know “who is” and “what is going on” in your child’s life to the best of your ability.



Also, educate yourself to the [signs and symptoms of drug and alcohol use and abuse](#). Early detection means early intervention! Seek professional help quickly.

Again, the narrative with its ability to connect the past and the present is another way to help your child think about whether or not he wants to go down the same road as his birth parents.

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*“Trauma interrupted my development”* can again be gleaned using Alice as an example. Alice lacks basic cause and effect thinking. She repeats the same behavior over and over. She does not learn from her mistakes or from consequences. Adoptive parents will often find that traditional parenting techniques are rendered ineffective by the child like Alice. Time-out, removal of privileges, grounding, reward systems, etc. require that the child have cause-and-effect thinking in order to be effective. As explained in Part 1, cause-and-effect thinking is necessary for children to achieve moral development. Thus, parents need tools that facilitate development. That is, parenting strategies must build cause-and-effect thinking and lead to internalization of the moral system of the family.

Natural and logical consequences will solve many behavioral problems while simultaneously moving arrested development forward. Parents want to read [Parenting with Love and Logic](#) by Cline and Faye (also available as DVD or CD). Once acquiring the knack of implementing natural and logical consequences, parents will find that parenting becomes more enjoyable again! Here are some natural and logical consequences for stealing:

- The thief may pay for the item stolen. Payment can be money or chores. If chores are problematic, the next time you are in the store you can be sad for the child as you say, “Well, I’d like to buy you that shirt. However, I’m putting that money toward the CD player you took from your sister.” Once home, hand the child who has stolen the CD player the money and have him give it to his sister. He needs to “see” the exchange of money.
- The next time you are out to dinner, order the child with a stealing problem a less expensive menu item or a water instead of a pop. Calmly state, we will be putting that \$1.50 in a “missing” fund. That way, when something is missing, we’ll have the money to replace it.” Once home, write a \$1.50 on a slip of paper and place it in a jar (paper likely won’t disappear from the jar as would actual money!). Traumatized children need to “see” and “hear” information.
- The child with “sticky fingers” needs to return the stolen item—to the family member, store, teacher, etc. This includes making an apology which has two parts. The “I am sorry” and then, “How can I make this up to you?” Keep the latter part simple for your own sake. Yet, do carry it out. This is “restitution” and it is a critical component of achieving moral development. The stealing child must learn to repair relationships when he has violated another or hurt their feelings.
- The car may not need to move. A parent who has invested time in locating their cell phone may just be too tired to drive to the mall or soccer practice. If you feel guilty about the impact on teammates, think again. Stealing can lead to court intervention in the adolescent years.

Once you have carried out the natural and logical consequence, move on! Don’t say, “See, how do you like it?” “How does that feel?” This is anger talking and anger renders the natural and logical consequence ineffective.

Also, keep in mind, it takes nature about 18 months to create cause-and-effect thinking in a human being. Likely, you will need to implement natural and logical consequences at least this long to accomplish the same. Learning and utilizing this parenting tool will be for the long-term.

Lastly, under this topic of “trauma interrupted my development”, please know that grief delays development. So, combining the narrative *and* natural and logical consequences is the Batman and Robin or the “dynamic duo” in healing your traumatized adopted child.



The narrative provides the rationale to correct faulty thinking, and to facilitate grief. Once the grief flows, the skills instilled with the Love and Logic will take hold and the child will sail ahead with gains in cognitive, social and emotional development!



*"I want what my siblings and peers have."* I think this is one of the most difficult areas in adoptive parenting. Privileges are typically doled out in accordance with the child's age. However, as we discussed in Part 1 and 3, adopted children with a history of trauma, are immature. So, often, they don't have the level of responsibility for the privileges they see others their age getting and using.

Many battles center around, iPods, cell phones, going to school dances—especially formal events—and so on. Let's provide an example.

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Brady, is now 14. He was adopted 5 years ago. Over time, he has stolen from every member of the family! Most recently, he has taken to stealing his Mom's and his sister's, Pam (age 14) cell phone. It disappears from their purses and the chargers. He feels, as the older brother, that he is entitled to a phone. Mom, Dad and Brady have had frequent, heated battles over the phone. They prefer Brady "earn" his phone. While this is reasonable parental thinking, it is unlikely this will happen. [Brady has never worked for rewards](#). It is improbable he will ever actually earn a phone.



This family must make a decision. They could continue the conflicts or they can solve the problem in a manner that is not as palatable, yet in a way that would restore peace to the home. Frequently, parents need to weigh issues in this manner—is the phone worth the battle?

In this case (and in many others I have worked), parents opted to purchase an inexpensive, pre-paid phone. With the capacity to review the call history and monitor how much "talking" time can be utilized, this often solves the problem. Actually, Brady, like many other adoptees, I have worked with, just wanted a phone so he could "look like" all the other kids. He had few friends and so, had few calls to make. But, having a phone made him feel more "normal."

Yes, I am suggesting that when safety issues don't dominate, you can "give in" in order to "win." You "win" peace to your home. ***I am not suggesting we accommodate the every wish of any child. But, I am suggesting that, at times, the battle over an electronic device just isn't worth the price to the entire family!***

Speaking of price, eBay makes it easy to purchase iPods, Gameboys and just about anything else for much less than the cost of new. Nicely gift wrapped, the item is accepted. Purchasing for less can be the solution for the child who "loses" or "breaks" everything she is given. Refer back to Part 3, "I communicate through my behavior." I, too, would feel lost if I was abruptly moved to America from a foreign country, or moved through a series of foster homes. I, too, would feel broken if my body was beaten or used for sexual purposes. To repeat—behavior is a way that children who have experienced trauma let us know the past issues that remain painful and confusing.

Compromising is also a way to avoid the "battle." When Katie, age 16, wanted to go to the prom, her parents were concerned. Katie, adopted at age 3, was very much like an 8-year-old. Her Mom and Dad worried that Katie could get involved with drugs or be sexual in such a situation. Their "compromise" was to allow Katie

the privilege **and** to be there as chaperons. In this manner, Katie could safely experience this “normal” 16-year-old event.

Notice, I use the word “normal” quite a bit. Traumatized children can’t learn to “act their age” unless they see “their age in action.” Overall, I believe parents are the primary source of development for any child. However, all children also need to have enough “normal” peer interaction to “see” what it is they should be striving to attain.

***“I have no boundaries.”***

“Mom, he’s been in my bedroom again!” “Dad, he’s in the bathroom with the door open!” Understanding the right to personal privacy of self and others is a long time coming for the child used to the group living of the orphanage or the child who resided in an abusive birth family.

While I am certainly not a strong proponent of families living with locks, there are homes in which lock boxes solve many issues when one or more children have “sticky fingers.”

*Donna and Bob parent 9 adopted children. Two pilfer on a regular basis. The arguments over where a favorite necklace, sweater, book, pair of shoes and so on were daily—this situation was time consuming and overwhelming! Each child was provided a lock box and given appropriate instructions—place anything truly valuable to you in your lock box. From that point on, Donna and Bob could simply reply, “Oh, it must not have been in your lock box.” Soon, the fights diminished significantly! The children learned that Mom and Dad were no longer going to engage in this problem. Mom and Dad had put the problem on the children to handle.*

***Shifting the responsibility for the problem onto those with the problem is a wonderful parenting tool. As parents, you don’t have to take on every battle. Let the kids learn to generate their own solutions or use the tools you have already given them.***

*Matt and Margo handled the stealing among their 6 children differently. The 4 children who were not thieves were given a list of the missing items. Next to each item was a dollar amount. This was the amount paid to the child who found the item. This made the stealing problem into a fun “scavenger hunt.”*

***We must realize that emotional distance is safe.*** That is, parental and sibling anger feel safe to the child who has had one failed relationship after another. Really, does anyone like to be “dumped” by a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband or wife? The child with a history of [complex trauma](#) has been dumped time and time again. Anger, to this son or daughter, creates distance in familial relationships. Anger inhibits attachment. Thus, the traumatized child thinks, “If I don’t get to close, it won’t hurt so much when you dump me.” Stealing almost always guarantees an argument. So, stealing is a sure fire way to protect an already broken heart. The scavenger hunt was a change in the emotional response of the parents, brothers and sisters to the pilfering children. Rather than a conflict, the family played a game! A calm or fun response increases the level of parent-child attachment. And, attachment, in turn, is the context in which all development occurs. Enhanced attachment facilitates the developmental growth necessary for the child to pass from the robbing phase to the honesty stage!

Go ahead, have some fun with difficult behaviors and see what happens!



*“Stealing kept me alive.”*

Stealing, under this category, often involves food. Oh my, the food issues abound in adoption! Undereating, overeating, eating slow, binging, being picky and hoarding! Hoarding is usually a sign of food deprivation early in life. These kids are just not going to be without food again! Many kids are up in the middle of the night raiding the refrigerator. Others' bedrooms are littered with wrappers, empty pop cans, empty containers, half-eaten sandwiches and more! I have worked cases where the odor of rotting food permeates the home! What is a parent to do?

I find the most effective intervention is again to “join in” and have some fun with this behavior.

*Chris and Tara adopted Danny at age 18-months. He arrived from a foreign orphanage in which he received less than he needed to eat. He continues to hoard food today at age 9! Tara and Danny have tired everything to cease this behavior! Finally, they tried “joining in.” They filled 50 or so baggies with snacks—five M & M's in one bag, five goldfish crackers in another, five cheerios in a bag, etc. The bags would be placed in a basket and Chris could help himself to snacks anytime he feels he needs a snack (Keck & Kupecky, 2002). Chris “sees” a lot of food, but each bag actually holds little, and many of the bags have been filled with nutritious items. Yes, Chris may eat many bags over the first few weeks—perhaps as long as 10 to 12 weeks—as will the other children in the home. However, a few weeks later all the kids, including Chris, will taper off. Chris will realize there is always food in the home. The other kids will have learned their parents were right—too many snacks ruin dinner!*

As another and different example,



*Lisa, age 11, was adopted from the foster care system age 3. She was removed from her birthparents as a result of severe neglect. She has always "collected" household items. As a pre-schooler, this included shoe boxes, little pieces of fabric and bottle caps. Once she entered kindergarten, pencils became her object of choice. She would arrive home with 5, 6 or more pencils. Fellow students were always looking for their pencils! This has continued through each grade. Her fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Baily, a wise woman, purchased an array of pencils after a consultation with Lisa's mom. Each day, she gave Lisa several pencils throughout the day. The pencils were different colors, some were fat, some were skinny, some had animal shaped erasers and some had writing on them like, "great job." Lisa loved these pencils! She looked forward to getting to school to see what pencils she would receive from Mrs. Baily. This very economical solution ceased the disappearance of class mates' pencils. After several months, Lisa, on her own, said, "No thanks, Mrs. Baily. I think I have enough pencils now."*

You can "join in" with lots of behaviors! Doesn't this seem more fun than arguing and doling out consequences? The whole family benefits when the home climate is saturated with giggles and fun

Also, many of you are wondering where the solutions are to "I want other kids to like me" and "I think things will make me feel better." These are in the article "Nurture: The Ring that Holds All the Keys" available on my website, [www.arletajames.com](http://www.arletajames.com), under the articles button.