

Ensuring the Attachment of Newly Arrived Infants – Part Two

[Part One](#) of this blog discussed the critical process of attachment. Attachment provides our blueprint for all subsequent relationships. It allows a growing child to internalize self-worth. It leads to trust in adults, and it puts in motion all development—physiological, social, emotional, physical and cognitive.

Infants whose development has been compromised due to pre-natal drug and alcohol exposure, neglect, institutionalization, abuse and abandonment are at risk for [attachment difficulties](#). Special care is needed to ensure an attachment between a traumatized infant and his caregiver, especially within larger families and/or families whose composition includes children with mental health issues.

So, following is a menu of thoughts about these youngest arrivals—domestic and international—and the children already residing in the family. Parents and professionals may select those best applicable to a particular family composition:

Pre-Adoption

- An abrupt move that separates the young child from everything familiar is injurious to his well-being. Infants are very sensory. The familiar smells, sounds and “feels” of their environment are their way of knowing their world. Social workers and parents are encouraged to make their best effort to move the infant’s belongings along with the infant. If it is not possible to keep some clothing and linens from your child’s orphanage or foster home, investigate sending ahead, or bringing with you a transitional object—a blanket, a stuffed animal or a small toy. When possible:
 - Ask about detergents and softeners, and soaps and lotions used. Consider using them for a few days or weeks as your child transitions.
 - Look around at the lighting of the child’s bedroom/sleeping area. Is it brightly colored or rather plain? Consider using similar lighting and colors.
 - Does the foster mother sing a particular lullaby? Are there particular background sounds? A recording of the foster mother, orphanage caregiver or the background noise may be comforting to the infant post-placement.
- A number of children’s books exist to help present the changes incurred when a family adds a younger sibling. Three excellent titles are [A Pocket Full of Kisses](#), [Emma’s Yucky Brother](#) and [The Lapsnatcher](#). All portray the positive and negative aspects of a young child joining the family from the perspective of an older sibling. Preparation is a key to post-placement adjustment.

Preparation is the key!

- Consider that moving may be particularly overwhelming for the young arrival. For example, the intercountry adoptee experiences the noise of the airport, the popping of their ears on the plane, new people, riding in a car, etc. Certainly, extended family and friends may be excited to meet the new addition to the family. Urge relatives to wait to meet their new grandchild, niece or nephew. You can actually schedule these meetings prior to placement, which will help these important people understand both that everyone will be getting a turn to come and see your new son or daughter (so their needs will be satisfied), and why it is important that things be done slowly (so that the child’s needs are met.) This protects the infant from further sensory overload.

- Do not be afraid to ask for what you need from friends and family members. If you know that your friends or family are planning a shower or it's your birthday, speak up! Let them know that gift cards to restaurants that deliver or a cleaning service would be of great benefit. Alleviating yourself of duties that others can carry out and making arrangements to take as lengthy an absence from work—or providing a stay-at-home parent—will allow time to get acquainted with your new son or daughter as well as time to keep connected to the kids already in the family.

Post-Adoption

- Plan to spend some time at home and gradually introduce the child to his surroundings. Put off a trip to the mall for a few weeks or a welcome home party. Limit toys, trips to the park and restaurants.
- The infant benefits when routines are maintained immediately post-placement. Even if her routine does not flow with your family's schedule initially upon her arrival, it is important to make the changes necessary to accommodate the schedule to which the child is accustomed. Allow the baby to gradually adjust to your family's everyday's life, with its own unique routine and sensory stimulants.
- Keep in mind that attachment first needs to form between the parents and the new child. Then, it forms with siblings, extended family and the rest of the world. This is not to imply that siblings cannot interact with their new brother or sister. **However, this is to say that parents need to carry out all primary care giving over the first six to twelve months.** Parents need to feed the child or provide the food, parents need to change the baby, bathe the newcomer and be the ones there when the child awakens and goes to sleep.
- Parents need to provide comfort. Parents need to rock the child or teach the child about giving and receiving affection. Parents need to be the ones holding the baby most of the time. In fact, a sling is strongly recommended. Wearing your newcomer is a great way to enhance attachment. It will certainly be tempting to let your older children assume many care giving tasks, however this would delay the attachment between you and your adoptee. This will inhibit developmental growth.
- Adolescents, especially females, often rush to carry out the care giving. Parents must find ways to curtail this eagerness. This can be accomplished through a discussion of attachment and how it forms. After that conversation, you can sit with your children and list ways that they can be helpful. Your resident children can heat up bottles, get diapers, carry the diaper bag, change the sheets, sing lullabies or nursery rhymes along with you and so on. The children you already parent may be especially helpful with the language development of the new child and reinforcing rules. In fact, there are most likely a hundred ways they could help you without directly providing the care to the new child. It could be fun to make a list of these 100 things! Overall, we certainly want to encourage strong sibling relationships. However, there are times when we must direct the manner in which the siblings interact with the adoptee.
- If the family includes previously adopted children with mental health issues, monitor their play. Interrupt play that is aggressive or inappropriate. This may mean supervising at a higher level than anticipated or altering your own planned activities.
- Read a good book or browse a website on "normal" child development—[Your Baby and Child: From Birth to Age Five](#) or [Ages and Stages: A Parent's Guide to Normal Child Development](#), www.zerotothree.org or www.childdevelopmentinfo.com. Be alert for developmental delays. **Seek professional assistance if need be—do so early. Waiting usually only causes problems to worsen.**
- After arrival and as the child matures, provide opportunities to play with typically developing peers. Arrange regular play dates or use a day-care center a few hours per

week (keep minimal.) Also be informed that while peers influence development, parents are the primary influence on a child's growth—physical, emotional, social and cognitive. A few dust bunnies under the bed may be a small sacrifice to facilitate the well-being of all of your children. Play with your new arrival and the resident children often!