

## [“Family Talks” About the Brother or Sister Joining the Family](#)

This post is designed to dovetail off Tuesday’s blog\_ in which it was suggested that while families wait for their child to arrive, they can educate themselves and the children already in the family about the types of challenges the new son, daughter, brother or sister may present. If you have already adopted your child, you can accomplish this post-adoption as well.

This need to educate the birth and/or previously adopted siblings is based on knowing that how professionals and parents handle the dissemination of information about a sibling’s special needs will greatly influence the adjustment of the children already in the family (Meyer & Vadasy, 1994). This, in turn, affects the adoptee’s emotional well-being, and parent’s state of mind. When we prepare brothers and sisters, we ensure adoptions that take into account the best interest of each member of the adoptive family.

The purpose of this blog is to provide an example of how to talk to typical children about difficult topics. We’ll use mental health diagnoses as an example. We’ll offer resources to support this “family talk” as well.

Those adopting a child domestically via the foster care system will be offered written information about their new son or daughter. This background summary often includes the child’s mental health diagnoses. These are often abbreviated as PTSD, ODD, RAD, BPD, AD/HD, etc. Parents want to make sure they know the full name of the diagnosis. Our previous blog post, [What is All this Alphabet Soup?: Understanding Children’s Mental Health Diagnoses](#) offers additional advice in this area. Parents adopting a young child or an older international adoptee may not know their adopted son or daughter’s mental health situation until the child matures or is evaluated post-placement.

Once you have an idea of the diagnoses, search the Internet and find age-appropriate information for your children regarding their new sibling’s mental health issues. If you have adolescents who are bi-lingual—English and computer—have them assist you in finding information regarding the potential adoptee’s mental health disorders. Two particularly helpful resources are,

### [Channing Bete](#)

This company makes booklets about mental health disorders (and medical illnesses.) They are written in a style great for kids and adults. You can use the keyword search to find specific conditions. The cost of Channing Bete materials varies, but most topics are available for \$1.00 to \$4.00.

### [KidsHealth](#)

This is an amazing website with portions for kids, teens and parents. The articles for teens and kids are written in age-appropriate language. A keyword search generates such articles as,

- [Bi-Polar Disorder \(teens version\)](#)
- [What is Hyperactivity? \(kids version\)](#)
- [AD/HD Medicines \(kids version\)](#)
- [Posttraumatic Stress Disorder \(teens version\)](#)
- [What’s Adoption? \(kids version\)](#)

- [Going to a Psychologist, Psychiatrist or Therapist \(kids version\)](#)
- [Anxiety Disorders \(teen version\)](#)

Family meetings will go smoother with KidsHealth articles – there are 100's! Visit KidsHealth today and help your typical children and your adopted son or daughter understand the mental health challenges associated with specific diagnoses.

Once you have gathered information, you could have the following conversation with your existing sons and daughters. Keep in mind that children ages 4 and up can most likely equate a mental health disorder with a medical problem,

*“Do you remember when you were sick and we took you to the doctor? He gave you some medicine. You stayed home for a few days and felt better. Well, your new sister has some mental health problems. Her birthparents hurt her and so she doesn't feel very good about herself. She is all mixed up about parents and living in a family. She needs medicine to help her think better. We will be going to therapy with her. She will talk with the therapist and this will help her realize that we are a good family who won't hurt her. This is going to take time. Let's see, you are 9 now. She may be better when you are 10 or 11. It may even be longer.*

*“The actual names of her problems are Bi-polar Disorder and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder – AD/HD for short. These are some of the ways she may act. She may get really sad and then really happy. Sometimes she will be cranky. She may forget things. She may sleep a lot. Sometimes, she won't want to play with you. This has nothing to do with you. She may also have a hard time sitting still. She may not be very good at sharing or taking her turn. This may make watching a movie, getting homework done or playing a game difficult.*

*“We are reading, and we are going to a support group for parents who have children with AD/HD. So, we will be learning ways to handle this. We will be passing on what we learned to you.” “Do you have any questions? What do you think? If you think of any other questions, let us know. Let's talk about this again in a couple of days after you have had time to think about this.”*

Once in therapy, ask the therapist to meet with your birth and/or previously adopted children. I often schedule appointments to help these typical siblings understand the behavior of their adopted brother or sister. Frequently, I offer strategies to help these appropriately-developing children deal with the negative behaviors(of the adopted sibling) as well. I review the treatment goals and offer realistic advice about the progress that can be expected. I like to check back with these kids as well to see what else I can offer. I believe that therapy with adoptive families should include each member of the family. I wrote about this in my book, and in a previous blog post titled, The Plant: A Perspective for Professionals. A school guidance counselor could also help brothers and sisters understand the needs of their adoptee as well.

Of course, we all know my mantra is read, read, read! There are children's books on just about every topic one can think of! Visit Amazon today and find a title that goes along with your need. For example,

- [Learning to Slow Down and Pay Attention](#)
- [Can I Tell You about Asperger Syndrome: A Guide for Friends and Family](#)
- [Views from Our Shoes: Growing Up with a Brother or Sister with Special Needs](#)
- [Brotherly Feelings: Me, My Emotions and My Brother with Asperger's Syndrome](#)
- [Bipolar Bubbles](#)

- [Turbo Max: A Story for Siblings and Friends of Children with Bipolar Disorder](#)

In conclusion children and teens fair better when there is open communication in the family. In *Brothers and Sisters in Adoption*, I offer guidelines for family talks with kids of all ages, and actual wording to talk with the typical kids about special education issues, the brother or sister arriving from the orphanage, transcultural adoption, negative behaviors and family fun.