

[“Anything We Can’t Find, He Stole!” The “Why” and “What to Do” about Stealing – Part 2 \(of 4\)](#)

Welcome to part two of our four-part blog regarding stealing.

Tuesday we looked at “I use my behavior to communicate” , “My trauma interrupted my development” and “I want what my siblings and peers have” as factors that contribute to stealing.

Today, we’ll discuss “I think things make me feel better”, “I have no boundaries”, “Stealing kept me alive”, “My birth parents stole”, “I want other kids to like me”, and “I am having drug or alcohol problems.”

Next Tuesday and Thursday, I’ll put forth an array of solutions to rid the thieving from your home!

Think carefully about the content of part one and this post. Identifying the underlying cause (s) of your adopted son or daughter’s “sticky fingers” issue is important to the selection of solutions that will lead to success in ceasing this negative behavior.

Without further ado...

“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.

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 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! Come back on Tuesday and Thursday for a whole bunch of ways to restore honesty and trust to your home. You'll also be ensuring a far happier and productive future for your adopted son or daughter as well if you take their stealing away!