

A Family For Every Child Matching Assistance



*"We should not be asking who this child belongs to,
but who belongs to this child."*

Common Placement Pitfalls & How to Avoid Them

It is estimated that about 25% of adoptions disrupt every year. There are many causes of disruption, including lack of preparedness, the child's needs, and lack of support, to name a few. Adoption disruptions are hard on both the child and family, so being mindful of and avoiding these common pitfalls will ensure your adoption is a successful one.



Pitfall #1: Trusting Too Soon

The first pitfall families may encounter is in regards to trust. It may be tempting to give your child no restrictions in an attempt to get them to "like" you. Having no sense of structure, however, can be detrimental to a child in foster care. You may think you know everything about your child from their case file, but that is just a small snapshot of who they are. You don't know how they will transition into your home and what behaviors will crop up while they settle in. Take your time getting to know each other, and monitor your child as closely as possible to reduce the risk of misbehavior. Once they start learning the rules of the home and you are familiar with their behaviors, you can start to relax a little.



Pitfall #2: Everything New, All At Once

Your child may come into your home with very few possessions, let alone toys and clothes that are brand new. To welcome a child into their home parents often want to shower them with brand new everything. However, until you know your child will take good care of his/her things you may not want to give them all new toys or clothes all at once. Start off slowly, while teaching your child how to value their property. There's a good chance they were never taught how to take good care of their possessions, so you will have to teach them.



Pitfall #3: Being Unprepared for Regression

When children are stressed or anxious, they may show a regression in their behaviors. Bedwetting, tantrums, immaturity, or inability to verbalize feelings are common regression behaviors amongst foster youth. Your child may be showing behaviors that he/she did not exhibit in their previous foster home, and it is likely because they are stressed about acclimating to a new family and everything that comes with it: new routines, home, parents, school, etc. With love, support, professional services and commitment, however, your child should bounce back quickly.



Pitfall #4: Labels and Meds

A child's diagnoses and medications may change frequently during their time in foster care. As the child gets older and is able to work through their past traumas, mental health professionals may learn new information about a child which causes them to change their mind on a child's etiology. In addition, each mental health professional may have their own opinions on what your child's mental health needs are and how best to treat them. Expect your child's diagnoses to change once you start going to a new mental health practitioner.

Children in foster care are also medicated at a very high rate - higher than peers their age who are not in the system. It is not uncommon for a child in foster care to come into your home on several different medicine "cocktails". In other cases, children may be under-medicated. Some parents do not want their children on psychotropic medications, period. When deciding to take your child off some or all of their medications, keep in mind the number of changes your child is going through right now. It might be better to let your child adjust first before you change or remove their meds. Talk with your child's social worker and therapist to get their opinions before you make any changes.



Pitfall #5: Forgoing Therapy

Your child is placed, and things are going great. You are wondering what all the fuss was about from your adoption worker that you get your child into therapy as soon as possible. They don't need it; they've blended with your family seamlessly. Right? Wrong.

Adoptive families may experience what is known as the "honeymoon phase" where everything is going well with their child. In this phase, your child is trying to be on their absolute best behavior to impress you in hopes that you will not give them up. It's very easy to fall into this pitfall of believing your child (or even your family) doesn't need therapy. Many times families don't recognize the need for therapy until it's too late and their child is out of control. It can take several weeks for you to get your child set up with therapeutic services, so if possible, start contacting therapists in your area that specialize in trauma and adoption before your child is placed. If you do it post-placement, do it immediately after your child is placed in your home and don't wait. There is absolutely no shame in asking for help and support from others; it's not a reflection on your parenting skills at all! Therapy is a great

outlet for children to express their feelings and work through their past in a safe space. When your child is ready, consider participating in family therapy to show them that you care and want to help them heal. Family therapy can also build trust between a child and parent. You can learn more about the different types of therapy available [here](#).



Pitfall #6: Not Keeping Up on Your Training

It may be helpful to keep educating yourself through webinars, trainings, and reading books and other educational materials. When you first went through the pre-service training process, you were in a different place. You were gathering information on absolutely everything you could find. Now that you have a child placed in your home, the information you read will take on different meaning. You will be able to focus your efforts on finding and re-reading materials that are more applicable to your child's behaviors and needs.

In addition, you may find it helpful to keep a daily log of your child's behaviors from day 1 of placement. Keep track of the highs and lows, and write down the events that occurred before and after a behavioral or emotional meltdown. Look for key patterns and possible triggers; this will help you understand your child better and be able to pre-empt future problems.



Pitfall #7: Assuming Your Children Will Bond Instantly

If you have other children in your home (bio or adopted) that are excited about the prospect of you adopting, you may believe that they will remain excited post-placement and everyone will get along from the start. Blending families is tricky, especially if you adopt a child with high needs who requires a lot of your attention. Be mindful not to neglect your other children, and try and spend one-on-one time with your kids once a week. Keeping traditions with your other children is just as important as making new ones with all your kids. Pre-placement, discuss with your other children what changes will be coming to your family, and listen to any fears or concerns they may have. Children want to feel like they have a say in the process too, and that they are heard. For more information and tips on blending families, visit *Adoptive Families* [Siblings and Adoption](#) page.



Pitfall #8: Not Reaching Out for Help

This one is a huge pitfall. Parents may feel they will be judged if they reach out for help either from their adoption worker or a child's social worker, or worse, they will be deemed "unfit" and have their child removed from their home. This is not the case at all! Your adoption worker and a child's social worker are here to help you, and so are the myriad of other adoption professionals in your community. Raising a child who spent time in foster care is no easy task, and you are not alone in the struggles you are going through. Reach out to a local support group, or connect with family and friends who have adopted. Surround yourself with people who are familiar with adoption or will provide non-judgmental support. Seek out

respite care as you need it. This will not only help you, but it will also help your child. Your child will benefit if you take care of yourself and are well-supported.

[Source](#)



Additional Information & Resources

Adoption Learning Partners - [Online Trainings and Webinars](#)

A Family for Every Child - [Post-Adoption Resources](#)

A Family for Every Child - [Reading List Suggestions](#)

Arleta James - [Adoption Articles](#)

Child Welfare Information Gateway - [Finding & Using Post-Adoption Services](#)

Denver Post - [New thinking on brain-science therapies could help foster kids](#)

Foster Parent College - [Online Trainings for Caregivers and Educators](#)

GACRS - [Free Webinars](#)

Online Parent Advisor - [Ways to Prepare Your Child for an Adopted Sibling](#)

