

From: Scott Corcoran [scott@afamilyforeverychild.org]
Sent: Thursday, July 18, 2013 3:53 PM
To: scott@afamilyforeverychild.org
Subject: Ten Tips for the First Year of Placement



Dear ,

The following are ten tips for the first year of placement from Deborah Gray, MSW, MPA.

- 1. Spend time participating in nurturing activities.* During your first year of your placement, it is important to create a trusting relationship with your child. Engaging in lots of nurturing will help you succeed in building your relationship. Limit the amount of time you have to spend away from your child. Avoid leaving your child to go on overnight trips during the first year, unless you are in need of respite care. Make sure all of their needs are met. Instead of making your child more dependent through this nurturing, you are actually helping them become more trusting. A secure, trusting child knows that he/she can try new things, but come back and rely on you when they need a safe place.
- 2. Teach children to play with you.* Many children in foster care have lost out on the opportunities to enjoy playtime, especially with their parents. Set aside at least a half hour everyday to play with your child. This shared activity will help you and your child bond, and create lasting memories. If your child has a hard time staying engaged or expresses fear, take it in small steps and participate in activities that both you and your child will enjoy.
- 3. Talk to your child.* Talk to your child using a bright, emotional tone. Explain what you are doing, or point out things on your drive or at the store. In doing so you are conveying information about the world around him/her. Use your fingers to point out important things.
- 4. When toddlers or older children have behavior problems, use your body to stop them.* Be gentle, consistent and predictable when you are stopping negative behaviors. Avoid using "over the shoulder" or "across the room" directives. Do not tolerate kicking, hitting, or biting. It's important to teach your child appropriate boundaries from the start.
- 5. Get enough sleep, good food, and exercise to stay in a good mood.* Practicing self-care is vital not only to your relationship with your child, but also with the rest of your family. You will feel more rested and engaged to help your child with their needs since you have taken care of your own.
- 6. Be part of an adoption support group.* Everyone needs someone to care for them and look out for them when they need it. Joining a local support group will provide invaluable support and advice from families who have experienced or are experiencing a lot of the same things you are. Having a strong network of family and friends is also important.
- 7. Keep a calm, but interesting home.* Children who come from homes of abuse and neglect are lacking in stimulation. The child's brain does not build the neurology to process lots of sensory stimulation, leaving a child feeling overwhelmed, anxious and frustrated. Keep a predictable and consistent plan whenever possible to help your child adjust to their new life and avoid becoming anxious about possible changes in routine at first.
- 8. Explain to children basics of your relationships as they gain language.* Tell your child that as their parent, it is your job to love and protect them. It may seem obvious to you, but your child may need some reassurance.
- 9. Do watch for signs of an exclusive attachment by the end of the first year.* But don't have this landmark set in stone. Be flexible. Just because your child is not completely bonded with you after their first year in your home doesn't mean that you have failed as a parent. Look for signs of exclusive attachment, such as seeking you out to play, for affection, and for attention. Your child should be excited to be with you, and want to spend time with you. If your child is exhibiting any of these signs, you are making progress! Remember that attachment is a process, not an event. Consider the first year as mile marker of you getting to know your child a little better.
- 10. Enter your little one's space—positively.* Get down on their level and make eye contact, be patient, and try hard. Do not use punishment to build relationships. Be strong, dependable, and available to your child.

For more information, visit [Ten Tips for the First Year of Placement](#) on Deborah Gray's site.

Deborah Gray specializes in the attachment, grief, and trauma issues of children in her practice, *Nurturing Attachments*. Her methods of working with children and families reflect her strong developmental and infant mental health perspective. Her passion is to help families develop close, satisfying relationships. She has worked 20 years in children's therapies.

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