Bonding With Your Child

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Your child has been placed in your home, and you've started the paperwork to finalize the adoption. But why doesn't it feel like you're a family? Many adoptive parents are shocked and a little concerned when their child is finally placed in their home, yet they don't feel an instant connection. In fact, it may even feel like your child doesn't even want to be there. So how do you go about playing "catch up" and bonding with a child who was placed with you as a toddler, young adult or teenager? It's not easy, but it is definitely not impossible. With some patience, consistency and creativity, you and your child will slowly create that connection you both desire.

Defining Attachment

Attachment is defined as a close, lifelong relationship between two people. Children form attachments with their caregivers when they feel safe and all of their needs are being met. Children in foster care, however, may not have the opportunity to develop these attachments

Reactive Attachment Disorder

Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) is a complex diagnoses that is characterized by serious problems in creating emotional attachments with others. Children who are products of the foster care system may have been so abused, abandoned or neglected by their caregivers or other significant relations in their life, that their trust in others is severely disrupted.

due to chaotic upbringings, multiple foster placements, and/or disrupted adoptions. It may take a child adopted from foster care longer to form an attachment with you. You will have to slowly gain their trust and show them that you care for them and will meet all of their needs.

Forming a Bond

Forming a bond between you and your adopted child will take time. Don't expect you and your child to be instantly bonded the second they walk through your door. It's also important to not set a goal for when you want this bond to form; let it happen naturally. It make take 6 months, or it make take 2 years. It really depends on the child's attachment style, their history, and the efforts you make to help them feel comfortable, loved and safe.

The following are some ways you can help bond with your child:

Create routines - Children coming from foster care crave structure and routines. It helps give them a sense of control and allows them to develop trust. Having set bedtime rituals for a younger child, or a weekly family movie night for an older child are great ways to establish a connection with your child.

Provide privacy - Having privacy may be something a child lacked in his/her foster home. Allowing a child to have their own space and privacy is important, especially for an older child or teen. By giving them some space to call their own, this will allow them to become comfortable in your home, and eventually let their guard down.

Play - Children love to play, whether they are an infant or a teenager. Not only does it help their development skills, but it also builds their social skills. Playtime is not always something a foster child had the luxury of enjoying. Spending some time every day playing with your child can help create a connection and build your relationship. Whether it's playing a simple game of blocks with a younger child or

Children diagnosed with RAD will need an individualized treatment plan to address their past and needs. Contact your child's therapist or a local therapist specializing in attachment and adoption to create a therapy plan to help your child work through their emotional issues.

For more information on RAD, please visit the Association for Treatment and Training in the Attachment of Children (ATTACh).

Resources

Adoption Learning Partners - The Journey of Attachment webinar

Please note: AFFEC has not watched ALP's webinar "The Journey of Attachment" but we are dedicated to providing families with any training opportunities, to further their education, both before and after

a board game with an older child, taking your time to engage with them in a fun activity will help build your attachment.

Family photo - Having a picture of you and your child near their bed will help reaffirm every night when they go to sleep and every morning when they wake up that they are part of your family now.

Do activities together - Teach the child how to do something you love: cooking, gardening, fishing, a favorite sport. They may end up enjoying the activity, creating a shared interest! In turn, engage in an activity that the child enjoys. This will show them that you are interested in what they like, and want to be part of their life.

Surprise messages - Leave surprise notes for your child in their lunch, their backpack, and other places around the house. These messages will reaffirm that you love your child, even when you are out of his/her sight.

Help them seek out parenting - Encourage your child to be just that: a child. Let them know that they don't have to take care of themselves, and that you are there to care for them. Encourage them to seek help from you when they need it.

Establish permanency - Your child may have a fear that if they misbehave, you will no longer love them. Reiterate to your child that you still love them, even when you are in a bad mood or if they have misbehaved in some way. My parents used to tell my sister and I "we love you, we just don't like your behavior right now". Sending these kinds of messages to your child let them know that you will love them no matter what, allowing them to heal and attach.

placement.

Chicago Now - Five Ways To Help Bond with an Adopted or Foster Child

Deborah D. Gray - Nurturing Attachments

Focus on the Family - Attachment and Bonding

Foster Cares - Transition Guidelines

Herald Mail - There is hope for children with RAD

Parenting.com - Attachment Parenting an Adopted Child

The Boarder A movie about a child diagnosed with RAD.