

Needs of Adopted/Foster Children

Article Two of Three: Needs of Adopted Children

This is the second of three articles and will focus on how families can 1) prepare, 2) provide, and 3) persist when it comes to meeting the needs of adoptive children. Preparation is helpful and important when you decide to do anything. Bringing a child into your home is a life-altering decision that needs to begin in prayer. (*Psalm 127:1, "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: ..."*) Adoption, when it is the Lord's work, is a wonderful opportunity to minister to the fatherless. When the Lord provides direction and opportunity to adopt a child into your family know that there are many adjustments ahead. Two factors that will dramatically affect adjustments that occur are: 1) your family situation and 2) the adopted child. Consider the following about your family: Do you already have children? How old are your children? Are you married or single? What do you expect your role as an adoptive parent to be? And what roles will others play in the child's life? The adopted child's age, cultural background, ethnicity, history, and experiences will also greatly influence adjustments that will need to be made within your family unit.

Prepare:

To prepare for these adjustments, many family discussions are needed so that everyone knows the plan as well as the expectations for each family member when adoption occurs. Time and energy spent prior to adoption in prayer, discussion, and learning is time well spent. Children already in your home should be aware of how God has directed you, the parent(s), towards adoption and what adoption means for your family. Make an effort to learn and teach what the bible says about adoption as this understanding will help your children understand your purpose in adding another person to the family. You also need to learn about the culture, ethnicity, and background of your prospective adoptive child. If you already have children, become aware of their feelings regarding the planned adoption as well as their perception of how their role in the family may change or be diminished. What you learn in these areas will help you provide a loving, supportive, and comfortable environment for the child you adopt. As an adoptive parent, you will also need to educate yourself about the situation your adopted child is coming from.

Provide:

One way to look at stepping into the role of adoptive parents is through the lens of stewardship. Psalm 127:3 tells us, "*Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.*" Children are a precious gift from God which He has entrusted to parents. Being a steward of this gift is an important part of parenting. It is vital that you understand, validate, and embrace the person God has created your child to be which includes, but is not limited to, their ethnicity, culture, talents, weaknesses, and experiences. Your adopted child has been "*fearfully and wonderfully made*" by God. Embrace the unique identity and personality of the adopted child while you train him to serve the Lord.

Your relationship with your child is extremely important as it is the foundation of your training, instructing and leading. One of the most important ways to provide for your adoptive child is through building a healthy relationship. Love, trust, and safety are three essential ingredients of establishing a strong connection with your child. It may help to think of your relationship with your child as an attachment. Developing a healthy attachment with your adoptive child is done through experiences where you show

love and care for him. Specific ways to do this are hugs, kisses, holding, singing, rocking, and other healthy ways to physically and emotionally nurture a child. For more information on attachment you can read “Understanding Attachment: A Fundamental Parenting Principle” which is posted on ACCFS’s website under parenting.

Loss and not having a sense of belonging are two things that can make attachment difficult for adoptive children. Think of a time when someone let you down. When this occurs, you are less trusting of that person the next time you interact with him. Attachment is built on trust, and an adopted child will need time and positive experiences with you to build that trust. Work to build trust by providing consistency founded on biblical principles, honesty (Matthew 5:37), discipline (Hebrews 12:7), and unconditional love (Romans 5:8). Provide your adoptive child with a clear sense and understanding that he is a member of the family. There should be no division between biological and adopted children in your home. In Galatians 3:26-4:7, Paul paints a beautiful picture of God’s adoptive love by indicating that those who have faith in Jesus Christ are adopted into God’s family, and there is no distinction between members of the body. This passage speaks to a spiritual adoption but the principle can be a powerful one in helping your adopted child become a family member and not just an addition. This will be an ongoing journey which will take a great deal of perseverance on your part and on the part of any previous children.

Persist:

Persevering in such a way that will help the child become known and seen by you and himself as one of your children is an important need to meet. An adopted child’s perspective of his situation will change as he moves through the developmental stages of childhood. As children develop, they begin to ask questions about whom they are and where they belong. Parents need to be prepared to answer these questions. As a general rule, children who have been adopted should be informed about their adoption around age 3-4. Keep in mind that all children need to know that they are gifts from God (Ps. 127:3), that He loves them (1 Jn. 4:16), has a plan for them (Je. 29:11), and that they need Him (Rom. 6:23).

Understand that as an adopted child grows and matures, he will change his views on “adoption.” As his view of adoption changes, his questions about adoption and the meaning he gives adoption will change. Your child needs you to persevere with him through the storms he will experience. The more time and energy spent during the early phases of adoption, building a strong relationship, will help you and your family endure through challenges that will occur. May God bless His work.