

# Top Ten List of Things Not to Expect From Your Newly Adopted Child:

A N A D O P T I O N E D U C A T I O N  
P U B L I C A T I O N



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**The** following ten tips will help the adoptive parent and child adjust during the initial transition period following the child's arrival in the home.

- ✂ **SLEEP:** Do not expect them to sleep well at night just because they slept through the night in their birth country with the foster parents or in the orphanage, and/or they are no longer infants and you think they "should" sleep through the night. Some (but few) infants/children sleep well after joining their forever families, while others have a very hard time sleeping through the night. Some children will only be calm and secure sleeping in their parents' beds. In some countries like Guatemala many infants sleep with their mothers, and young children often sleep with other siblings in the same bed. Being put alone in a bed in a quiet bedroom in a new house can be terrifying. Sound machines are recommended for children used to sleeping in the same room as others.
- ✂ **PASS THE POTATO:** Do not expect your child to enjoy well meaning visitors/relatives who insist on holding and feeding them. They are confused enough as it is; make sure to explain to your visitors – even overly eager and well-meaning grandparents -- that being fed by strangers is not good for your child at this point. You owe that to your child.

- ☞ **HAPPY CAMPERS:** Do not expect your child to be a “happy camper” if you go back to work very soon after bringing him/her home. Attachment and bonding are a long process; having to adjust to a new home, new parents and also to a daycare and a daycare provider is a lot to ask. Try to arrange to have a substantial amount of time off if you work outside the home; experts recommend a minimum of two to three months. Remember that bringing an adopted child home is not the same as bringing home a newborn infant from the hospital. Even the youngest of babies have memories of their birth mother’s voice and smell, the language they have heard around them and had spoken to them, the people who have fostered them, and the world that has surrounded them since birth.
- ☞ **DEVELOPING ON TARGET:** Whose target are you comparing to? Do not expect your infant or young toddler to be at the same developmental stage as children his/her age here in the US. Not unlike many cultures caregivers see putting infants on the floor as cold and uncaring. Therefore, many babies have had no “tummy time” until they arrive in the US, thus they usually start crawling and walking later.
- ☞ **EDUCATION:** Do not expect older children to be enthusiastic and eager to attend school soon after they arrive. Rarely do they speak any English, and in some cases have never attended school at all. Imagine yourself going to a new school where few if any children speak your language. You are the “new kid on the block” and everyone is staring and pointing at you. You have no friends and you can’t talk to anyone. It would be pretty scary, wouldn’t it? If you have the opportunity to home school for the first few months to give your child time to adjust, you will be doing them a huge favor, and also be helping them learn English (or any language for that matter) and meet other kids their age the natural way: first by hearing it, then by speaking it, and only after that, learning to read and write it. Put into school immediately, they are so stressed that very little learning goes on anyway.
- ☞ **BATH TIME:** Do not expect them to love bathing from the get go. Bath time in orphanages or foster homes it typically hurried and done with cold water. It is no use scaring them to death by forcing them into a bathtub or shower. In addition, older children may be very shy about getting undressed in a strange house. Sponge baths work well with younger and even older children until they are more comfortable.
- ☞ **PARENTING SKILLS:** Do not expect parenting to come “natural” if you are a first time parent. Take parenting classes; spend time with other people’s children, and read, read, read. There are many outstanding books on parenting and adoption in libraries and bookstores, and you can use them for reference later on. You certainly have more time to do this before they come home. Also, make sure you have a good pediatrician lined up, and ask your agency if they will be able to give you guidance and support when you come home.
- ☞ **GRATITUDE:** Don’t expect an older child to be impressed and grateful just because you have brought him to a “better life.” These children have suffered the greatest loss of all: the loss of birth parents, language, the orphanage “home” and country of birth. Expect them to grieve and perhaps rebel. They are not ungrateful, just going through shock.
- ☞ **ATTACHMENT:** Don’t expect you child to attach equally to both parents in two parent families. It is not uncommon for a child to be very attached to one parent over the other until they are more secure.
- ☞ **DON’T “EXPECT” ANYTHING. PERIOD.** Embrace, love, observe, console and cherish this often confused and frightened new member of your family. When you “expect” things and they don’t materialize, frustration and disappointment follow closely behind. No need to burden your already traumatized child with more “baggage.” Just let your child “be” until they adjust to their new home.

If this list has you worrying, that is not the intent. Rare are the children who have difficulties with all the things listed, but you need to be prepared.

**Websites with excellent information:**

**Attaching and bonding:** <http://library.adoption.com/information/Attachment-and-Bonding/450/1.html>

**Medical Issues in Internationally adopted children :** <http://international.adoption.com/foreign/medical-issues-in-internationally-adopted-children.html>

**When Toddlers Reject Parents;** <http://library.adoption.com/Toddlers/When-Adopted-Toddlers-Reject-Their-Parents/article/581/1.html>

**International Adoption and Language Development :** <http://library.adoption.com/Language/International-Adoption-and-Language-Development/article/6166/1.html>

**Grief and Loss Issues for Adopted Children :** [http://www.adopting.org/DeePaddock/html/grief\\_and\\_loss\\_.html](http://www.adopting.org/DeePaddock/html/grief_and_loss_.html)

**Recommended Reading: (and there are many more):**

“Attaching in Adoption” by Deborah Gray

“Rising Adopted Children” by Lois Ruskai Melina

“Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Their Parents Knew” by Sherrie Eldridge

[“Toddler Adoption, The Weaver’s Craft”](#)