

How family and friends can help support new adopters

As family or friends of adoptive parents we know you'll be looking forward to spending time with the new family. Here are some important things you can do to help them.

Remember that adopted children take time to settle in

Most children adopted in this country are not tiny babies. They may have had unhappy or traumatic experiences with their birth families followed by one or more foster homes before being placed for adoption. This history of disruption and uncertainty means that it can take a long time for them to settle into their new families and really believe they are there to stay.

Show the new parents you understand how hard they're working

As you can imagine, moving from the familiar home of the foster carers to their new family can be difficult for adopted children. This transition is very hard work for adoptive parents and it can be very helpful if family and friends acknowledge what a challenging task they are managing.

Don't expect adopted children to behave like other kids

Adopted children may have lost trust in adults and cope with this in a variety of ways.

Some react by being much more grown up than their age. This can cause them to pretend they don't need adults to look after them. They may be overly friendly with strangers yet reject their new parents. Many children regress to baby behaviour unable to complete tasks expected of others their age. You may find yourself experiencing one or more of these scenarios first hand. Remember that these behaviours mask a fear of becoming too close to their new family and the risk of losing someone close all over again. Your sympathetic understanding of those behaviours will help the new parents as they get to know their children.

Try to see beyond challenging behaviour

Adopted children who show difficult behaviour are not being purposefully naughty – they are showing that they are very distressed. They have to learn all over again the real meaning of belonging to a family. Ordinary things that you can take for granted and your children may understand will not be understood by adopted children without being explained, often many times over.

Back up adoptive Mums and Dads

Many children living in adoptive homes will need time and encouragement to learn how to trust their new Mums and/or Dads.

The adoptive parents' task is to encourage their children to become dependent on them to meet their needs. You can help the new family establish itself by reinforcing the idea that Mummy and/or Daddy are in charge of what happens to them even in small ways. E.g. If a child asks you for a drink or a biscuit, it's important to say "let's ask Mummy/Daddy if it's okay for you to have this now". If the child comes to stand or sit with you, it is helpful if you say, "we'd better tell Mummy/Daddy you're here". It is also important that you do not pick up children or sit them on your knee without checking that their parents feel okay with this. Interventions that support their new parents are so important in the early months and will be greatly valued.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. In the years to come you'll play an important part in this child's life.

Enjoy it!

