

Ten Tips for the First Year of Placement*
By Deborah Gray

Here are my top-ten hits for a great start to your relationship with your baby or child.

1. *Spend ample time in nurturing activities.*

Intentional and ample nurturing creates a trust relationship. Restrict your hours away from the little one. Meet his or her needs in an especially sensitive manner. Allow the toddler or child to regress, bottle-feeding, rocking to sleep, etc. The child who has learned a healthy dependence is more secure in trying new things and venturing out.

2. *Teach children to play with you.*

Many little ones have missed the joys of play, which restricts their association of exploration and play with pleasure. Set aside *at least* thirty minutes a day for play with your children. Take things in steps if children are wary.

3. *Talk to your child.*

Parents of infants use exaggerated voice tones to emphasize important concepts. After children move into the preschool age, some of this “cheerleader” amplification diminishes. Continue to use this brighter emotional tone with your child as she understands your shared world—even if she is not an infant.

3. *When toddlers or older children have behavior problems, use your body to stop them.*

Be gentle, but consistently and predictably competent in stopping negative behaviors. Do not use over-the-shoulder commands or across-the-room reminders. Stay within arm’s reach of the child, moving their hands, bodies, and feet, to where you want them to go. Never tolerate hitting, kicking, or hurting. Teach boundaries of respect from the beginning.

4. *Get enough sleep, good food, and exercise to stay in a good mood.*

Little ones who have been moved and/or neglected tend to be irritable, fussy and hard to soothe. Parents use their own positive, well-regulated moods to help calm and engage these little ones. The parent who is tired, eating junk food and inert by day’s end does not give a child a competent source of emotional regulation.

5. *Be part of an adoption support group.*

The relationships between families can be emotional lifelines on hard days. If possible, find a mentor who is positive, and who likes you and your child. A mentor who can provide that sense of nurture for the parent helps the parent to be a good nurturer.

6. *Keep a calm, but interesting home.*

Match the amount of stimulation in the home to the amount that's within the child's ability to tolerate. Due to neglect, many children have been massively understimulated. After adoption, their worlds can be suddenly overwhelming. Slow things down, buffering your baby or child so he or she can process the information coming their way.

7. *Explain to children the basics of your relationships as they gain language.*

For example, "A mother's job is to love you. I will always come back home to you when I leave in the car to go shopping. I will not let anybody hurt you." One mother told me of her daughter's melting smile when the mother said that her job was to love her child. "I just assumed she knew that. But she didn't. She looked at my face much more after that."

8. *Do watch for signs of an exclusive attachment by the end of the first year.*

Children should be seeking out their parents for affection and play, and prefer being with the parent. In a secure attachment, the child will calm with the parent and accept soothing. Trauma and traumatic grief are the common culprits when children are remaining wary, fearful and controlling. Parents who see symptoms such as regular night terrors, dissociation and extreme moods should seek out a mental-health counselor to help their child.

10. *Enter your little one's space—positively.*

This often means getting low and looking up for eye contact. You are the one who has the responsibility of engaging your child positively. Do not use punitive techniques to try to build relationships. Instead, be strong, dependable, available and **kind**. That process takes time, but isn't this the *type of parenting that caused you to want to be a parent in the first place?*

*To read the full text of this article, please visit chsfs.org, and click on _____. Both versions are reprinted with permission of the author, Deborah Gray, who wrote *Attaching in Adoption, 2002*. Her new book, *Nurturing Adoptions: Creating Resilience after Neglect and Trauma*, will be published this spring, also by Perspectives Press.