

ADOPTIVE PARENT SUPPORT

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER



**NURTURING HEARTS, STRENGTHENING BONDS:
SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH ADOPTED SIBLINGS**



What's Inside ?

Watch



This video produced by Creating a Family offers a summary of a podcast on special considerations for siblings in families blended through adoption. The presenter speaks about how to prepare siblings for the addition of an adopted child.

Read



Adoptive parent Jane Brown discusses how parents can provide support for the impact of adoption on existing children. She also offers information on how becoming a multicultural family can be addressed with children in the home.

Listen



Gail Heaton and her daughter Molly discuss sibling dynamics in adoptive families. Molly shares her perspective as an adoptive older sister and Gail offers clinical suggestions for helping all siblings adjust to an adoption, as well as her perspective as an adoptive mom.

10 STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT SIBLINGS OF ADOPTED CHILDREN

- 1 Maintain open communication
- 2 Offer age appropriate information
- 3 Celebrate each child's uniqueness
- 4 Quality one-on-one time
- 5 Listen to and validate feelings
- 6 Support sibling bonding
- 7 Acknowledge jealousy & conflict
- 8 Model empathy & acceptance
- 9 Hold family meetings
- 10 Provide healthy emotional outlets

The Adoptive Sibling Experience

→ Peacemaking

Children often put themselves in a peacemaking role to ease tension and mediate in effort to decrease the stress in the family. Unfortunately, no matter how hard they try, the reality is that adoptive siblings are not capable of fixing their families all by themselves.

→ Secondary Trauma

Exposure to trauma or trauma behaviors can make adoptive siblings empathetic, compassionate, and emotionally mature. However, it can also cause them to internalize it as their own trauma. Their developing brains may struggle to make sense of all these new experiences.

→ Invisibility

We know adopted children can internalize and struggle with feelings of not being good enough, loveable, or valuable. Adoptive siblings can struggle with similar emotions. Adoptive siblings often feel invisible in their families, as if their parents do not even “see” them now that they are meeting the needs of the adopted child.

→ Parentification

Adoptive siblings can experience parentification by operating as an emotional support for their parents or acting as another parent to their siblings. While some siblings may enjoy this role, research shows that parentification can lead to mental health and relationship issues.

Credit: The Effects of Adoption on Biological Siblings



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I thought that all the years I spent pouring into my biological children had created a resilience in them that would be enough to withstand whatever pressures came on them for being siblings of these children that come from traumatic backgrounds. I did not know that they were going to need **a lot more resilience** than I thought.

– Gail Heaton, adoptive mom

The journey that makes a child available for adoption can profoundly shape them, influencing their dynamics within the new family. When you've welcomed an adopted child into your home alongside other children, it's essential to share insights with your existing children about the impact of these early experiences on their sibling. Having an understanding about the causes of emotions and behaviors as well as why their new sibling may not understand the concept of family is key to building harmony in your family system.



Weakened Attachment

Attachment difficulties can impede sibling relationships and this may be confusing to a child who is excited to build a bond with a new brother or sister. Help your child to not personalize when their new sibling is not yet ready to connect.



Constant State of Fear

Trauma responses are automatic and may be scary for a child who is new to the adoption experience. Teach your resident children about these fear responses and how they can offer support for their adopted sibling if this occurs in their presence. Offer coping skills to all children to assist in managing emotions.



Strong Survival Skills

Without early trust in caregivers, children may learn they must protect themselves which can result in challenging behaviors that do not fit into your family system. Assist your children in understanding the "why" behind the behaviors.



No Sense of Permanency

When an adopted child does not have faith that the placement is permanent, they may initially be unwilling to form relationships with siblings. Help your children to understand this concept and the behaviors that are connected to the fear.



Trauma Background

Regardless of the circumstances leading up to the loss of one's birth family, being placed in a new home can be traumatic. It is important for siblings to have at least a basic understanding of the impact trauma has on the brain, emotions, self-concept, and behavior.

5 ESSENTIAL INSIGHTS FOR CHILDREN REGARDING THEIR ADOPTED SIBLINGS

While every child's resilience to challenging experiences varies, each one is touched to some extent by these five key aspects. The goal is to build resiliency in each of your children, creating a communication environment where every child is comfortable speaking up for their true needs, making sure to take care of yourself, and finding support when needed.

HOW TO IMPROVE THE FAMILY SYSTEM

Ask Questions & Be Receptive

Children need to know their parents care about what is happening in their lives. We must also be receptive to what we are hearing and think about things from their perspective. We can show our children we care by asking open-ended questions and listening without judgement.

Practice Mindfulness

Mindfulness involves being aware of one's own mental and emotional states, triggers, and effective regulation strategies. It also involves being attuned to the mental and emotional states of your family. Once you can understand your child's needs, you can provide them with personalized support.

Model Openness

We cannot expect children to tell us what they are thinking or how they are feeling if we do not model this for them. If parents show their children it is normal, comfortable, and safe to talk about what they are thinking and feeling, they will likely start engaging in more open and honest conversation.

Affirm Preciousness

As children are receiving many false messages about their value and worth, they need to hear things like, "I love you," and "You're such an incredible kid." Parents can affirm their children verbally or in other ways. What matters is that the child feels seen, known, and loved in an intentional and genuine way.

Credit: The Effects of Adoption on Biological Siblings

Adoption & Sibling Relationships

Short Article

This article discusses how to handle sibling challenges in adoptive families and the specific impact on siblings when becoming a transracial family. [Read more...](#)



Combining Children by Birth and Adoption

7 minute video

Creating a Family presents a brief discussion of considerations for existing children when changing a family through adoption.

[Watch here...](#)



Preparing Children Already in the Home

64 Minute Podcast

TBRI practitioner and adoptive parent, Gail Heaton, and her daughter Molly discuss the often unspoken impacts of adoption on existing siblings. [Listen here...](#)



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