



Preparing Children at Home for the Arrival of Fostered or Adopted Siblings

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Preparing children starts with parents preparing themselves!

- How does the family cope with stress?
 - Strength vs. Vulnerability
- How committed is each family member to the adoption?
 - Ex: How do you think you will react if you begin to see that your current children are suffering as a result of the behavior of the child who was adopted?

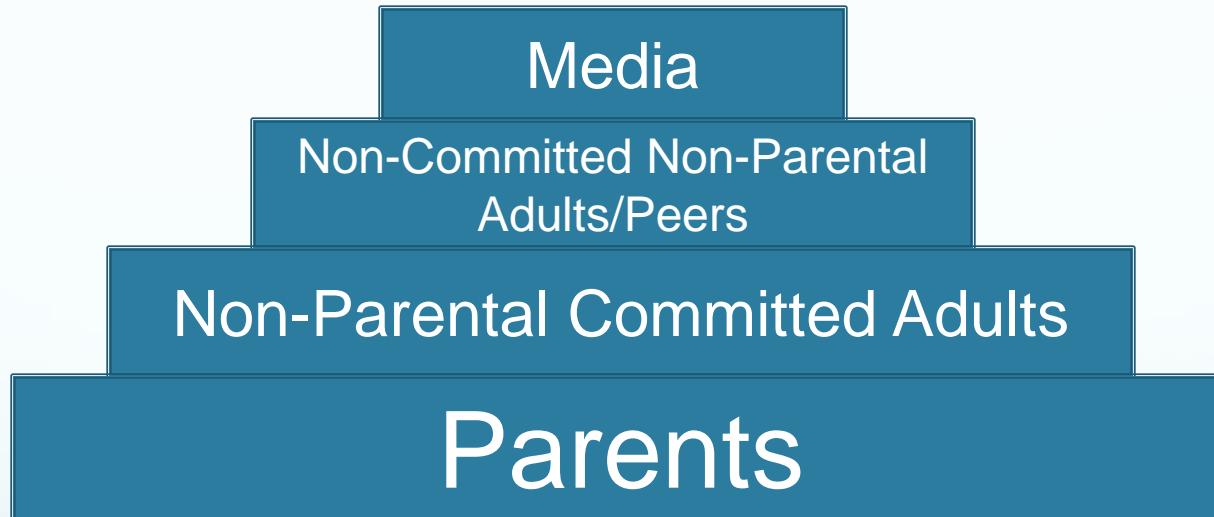
Strength vs. Vulnerability

“On the other hand, parents who have inner and external resources available to them operate from a strengths base, thereby providing security and stability for their birth/Previously adopted children and enhancing the potential for a positive adoption outcome for their child.”

Mullin & Johnson, 1999



4 Tiers of Developmental Influence



**(Clark, 2011)*

Committed Adults

- Increase the number of Committed Adults in your child's life:
 - Youth leaders, small group leaders, family members (aunts, uncles, grandparents, etc), church friends, coaches, teachers, scout leaders...
 - Who are they already close to?
 - Is there anyone they would like to have as a mentor?
 - Pick one or two people that to ask to commit to being in their child's life.



Understand Difficult Behavior



- Children may feel vulnerable due to:
 - Losses experienced
 - Lack of choice in the adoption
 - Problematic behaviors of new child
 - Confusion if reality is different than expectations

Possible Behaviors

- May lead to:
 - Sadness
 - Anger
 - Resentment
 - Depression
 - Withdrawal
 - Acting out
 - Embarrassment
 - Excessive clinging
- Needing more attention
- Regression to an earlier stage of development
- Aggression toward new sibling



Remember...

Studies have shown that disruptions are more likely to happen when the parents perceive that the children already in the home are at risk.



How Parents Can Respond

- Anticipate what might be difficult for each child
- Pay close attention to responses
- Do not be threatened by their children's responses
- Listen to and affirm feelings and behaviors
- Explain and normalize feelings and responses
- Model confidence
- Encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings
- Help them to develop realistic expectations

How Parents Can Respond

- Empathy is key!
 - “Sometimes it’s really hard to share Dad with a new brother.”
 - “Young kids can be a lot of hard work.”
 - “You seem really angry today. What’s up?”
 - These responses allow the children to see that parents recognize that these adjustments can be hard
- Spend extra time with children BEFORE adoption/placement

Social Workers' Role

- Social workers can help by:
 - Assessing the strengths and vulnerabilities of both the parents and children during the home study process, as well as the parents' sensitivity to children's needs
 - Help parents to anticipate what will be difficult for their children and build appropriate supports
 - Encourage parents to think about how their children already handle stress
 - Talk with parents about the impending changes in family dynamics
 - Encourage the parents to spend time strengthening their marriage
 - Educate about agency and community supports available

Be Honest

- Children in the home will already sense that something is changing. Be age appropriately open about the changes and consider how to involve the child.
- Begin by talking in general terms about a child possibly joining the family, then gradually introduce the idea of a sibling.
- Define time frames in a way that a child can understand. Ex: “after your next birthday,” etc.
- Ease fears regarding the social worker being in the home. Ex: “SW will help us to see if adoption is right for us.”

Involve Children from the Start

- Creative ways to include your kids:
 - Take them to get fingerprinted
 - Fundraising
 - Have them be the official “announcer”
 - Picking out clothes



- Decorating room
- Draw pictures
- Make a build-a-bear
- Prayer
- Set a place at the table

Handling Fear

- Legitimate fears and concerns may be stirred up during the adoption process concerning the permanency and stability of the family
- May surface in the form of questions or comments:
 - What will happen if parents cannot take care of them anymore?
 - Will the adopted child be removed from the family?
 - “Mommy will love the new child more than me.”



Reassure and Reaffirm

- Impress upon children that the new sibling is joining their “forever family”
- Constantly reaffirm the child’s place in the family
 - Set additional places at the table
 - Where will the new child sit in their car?
 - Where will they sleep?
- Helps child to see that they will share space, not be replaced

Encourage Discussion

- For Parents:
 - What does adoption mean?
 - What do you know about the adoption process?
 - Why is our family adopting?
 - What will be different after the adoption?
 - What might be the same?
 - What will be hard to talk about?
 - Who can you talk to when it's hard?
 - What can't you handle?
 - What will happen if you hate it?

Encourage Discussion

- For Professionals:
 - Ask the child to describe his/her fantasies about the new sibling(s)
 - Give the child a chance to voice their thoughts separate from the parents
 - Pay attention when the child's views do not match the parents
 - Be aware that parents and adults may need to adjust a child's fantasy about the sibling(s) about to be adopted, particularly if the child expects a “picture perfect” experience

Encourage Discussion

- For Professionals:
 - Note that children without other siblings seem to have more difficulty with the transition
 - Practice “future thinking” to help children project themselves into situations where they will be able to keep their identity apart from their new sibling(s)
 - Be aware that kids equate parental love with the amount of attention given to a child in the family – even if it is negative attention

Discussion Topics

- Changes that will occur in the home
- Medical needs of child
- Transracial differences
- Appropriate responses to others
- Negative/difficult behaviors
- The Adopted/foster child's birth family
- Changes in birth order, experienced by both bio and adopted/foster children



Role Playing



- Sharing things and attention
- Reactions to strong behaviors
- Language difference
- Teach child to give space
- Use puppets or stuffed animals

Read Books About Adoption

- A Sister for Matthew / A Story About Adoption by Pamela Kennedy
- Pinky and Rex and the New Baby by James Howe
- Ten Days and Nine Nights: An Adoption Story by Yumi Heo
- Emma's Yucky Brother by Jean Little
- My Mei Mei by Ed Young
- Waiting for May by Janet Morgan Stoeke
- Jin Woo by Eve Bunting



Transition

- When the time comes for the new child to come home:
 - Keep things consistent!
 - If traveling, consider bringing your children with you
 - When it isn't possible for them to travel, leave them with someone with whom they are comfortable
 - Use creative strategies to help them conceptualize the timeline



Post-Adoption

- Join adoption groups
 - Spending time with other adoptive families helps children to see that their family is just as normal as the next.
- Help siblings to bond



- Provide special experiences for each child in the home with the new sibling
- Be careful not to force it. It will come with time!

Sibling Conflicts

Know **when** to intervene and **when not** to intervene!

- Model and teach healthy communication and conflict resolution
- Teach tolerance, cooperation, and compassion
- It is not your job to settle conflicts for your children

Sibling Conflicts

- Consider secondary gains: as long as there is a payoff, the behavior will continue
- Assess for actual danger
- Recognize when the dispute is between the kids
- Stay out of it and communicate confidence that they will work it out
- It is okay to separate them from you, though not each other
- Don't enter the conflict or choose sides
- Stay calm

Most Importantly...

Parents need to:

- Stay Calm...
 - All of the children in the home will take their cue from their parents
- Listen to the child...
 - Whatever they want to say to parents in a respectful way is okay
 - Let them know that they can tell parents anything, even negative things concerning the adopted child
 - Give them full attention, being emotionally present and using active listening skills

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