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for Adoptive Families



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The PARC newsletter is published quarterly. Please direct questions and comments to parcnewsletter@bethany.org

Bethany Christian Services is a nonprofit, private social services agency with more than 115 offices located in 36 states. In addition, Bethany offers social services to children and families in 15 countries.



www.bethany.org

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Trauma-Informed Parenting

by Kim Waldie, BSW, Post-Adoption Resource Center, Region 2 Supervisor

Most of us make the decision to adopt children because we want to help. We start this adoptive parent journey with dreams of love, connection, and beautiful, happy children who will love us back. Somewhere along the way, reality sets in, and you may find yourself making some adjustments to those dreams.

Not every adoptive story is difficult, and not every adopted child will struggle behaviorally. But for many adoptive families, trauma and loss has left a mark on the hearts of our children, and it causes significant parenting and attachment challenges.

If you are going to help your child heal emotionally, one of the first things to realize is that the tools in the traditional parenting toolbox need adjusting. It took my husband and me about a year to realize that if we kept parenting according to the standards of traditional parenting, we were going to be in trouble. At that time, 14 years ago, there was very little in the post-adoption world to help us understand the invisible suitcase our children were carrying into our home.

Today, adoptive parents are fortunate to have more information and understanding into how trauma impacts the heart, mind, and behaviors of children, but it does require a significant parenting paradigm shift and a willingness to push up your sleeves. It will get messy and sometimes feel as though nothing is working with your child. Rather than simply creating a list of rules, you will need to coach and come alongside your child and help them heal—and maybe deal with your own emotional baggage in the process. In this issue, we want to provide you with more practical tips, tools, and resources to help you lay a good foundation for the “trauma-parenting” process.

Is it easy? No.

Is it messy? Yes.

Will it be worth it? Absolutely.



We hear a lot about trauma these days. Working in the post-adoption world, that personally makes me very happy! It means we are making progress educating families, professionals, and communities to better understand what trauma and loss can do to the brain and how it impacts children long term.

However, adoptive parents may discover a disconnect between the information and the defiant, attachment-challenged child they are staring down at. In those moments, it can be difficult to discern how to apply trauma education to the practical situation in front of you.

Your child-parent situation is unique, so you'll have to build a bridge between all that education and your practical parenting tools and style. Here are a few basic principles to start:

CONNECT

It's all about relationship! Whatever parenting approach you choose to use, it may be helpful to ask, *"Did I leave this interaction with my connection to my child intact?"*

If you win the battle but damage the relationship, both you and your child lose. The good news is that it's not too late to fix things if you mess this up! Owning your mistakes can work wonders for improving a connection with a skeptical child. When dealing with attachment issues, it often feels like you are

working backwards by building a connection and bond before expecting a child to follow all the rules. This doesn't mean chaos or a lack of boundaries! It's important to keep healthy boundaries in place that keep your child (and your family) safe, but it's relationship over task when it comes to parenting kids from trauma. Staying connected while teaching or modeling the desired behaviors will help sustain long-term changes. A simple example may be a "time-in" rather than a "time-out." When the child needs help regulating, bring them close to you rather than sending them away from you with another lecture.

Also, don't miss out on the power of play when it comes to building connection! Laughter and playful activities help diffuse anger (theirs and yours) and connect us to the people we laugh with. It's easy to get so caught up in the negative behaviors or too busy that we forget this important aspect of connecting.

REGULATE

If you've endured a child screaming for hours, you understand (and appreciate) the importance of good regulation! Let's face it, many of our children, either through abuse or neglect, have missed the much-needed development that facilitates self-regulation. When parenting your child, they will need your brain and your coaching to help them externally regulate until they slowly, but surely, develop their own ability to do so. It helps to research fun ways to "practice" self-regulation, but work hard not to give them more than they can handle. A few questions to ask: What works best to calm your child? Are you fueling or calming their dysregulation with your response? Find ways that cool your child down, rather than escalating things!

"The tragedy of trauma is that it creates disconnected children—starved to make connections but with no idea how to do that. To the uninformed eye, disrupted development looks like bad behavior."

—"Children from Hard Places and the Brain," TCU DVD

The Invisible Suitcase

Children who have experienced trauma often carry an invisible suitcase full of negative beliefs and expectations about themselves, caregivers, and the world based on their past experiences.

These negative beliefs and expectations often lead to challenging behaviors, including reenactment behaviors.

Caregivers can repack the suitcase by providing disconfirming experiences with positive replacement messages, consistency, and calm responses.

Caregivers also need support.

Courtesy of The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, CWTTT, (www.NCTSN.org)

DEMONSTRATE SAFETY

A child who doesn't feel safe (relationally, emotionally, or physically) will be unable to regulate enough to change their behavior. Safety is talked about over and over in trauma education. A few good questions: What danger does your child perceive that could be behind the behavior? What fears do they have about you, as their caregiver, that may be influencing behavior? If your child has been through multiple placements, they may have many.

MEET THEIR NEEDS

This is where parental patience and detective work meet! You'll need many hours of observing your child's behavior and patterns to do this well. What need is their negative behavior meeting? (E.g., food hoarding = safety.) How can you reassure your child that you will meet their needs consistently? Finding ways to proactively meet their needs before the behavior starts goes a long way. Say "yes" as often as you can. We forget how often we say "no," and it keeps us cycling through unnecessary battles.

UNPACK THEIR SUITCASE

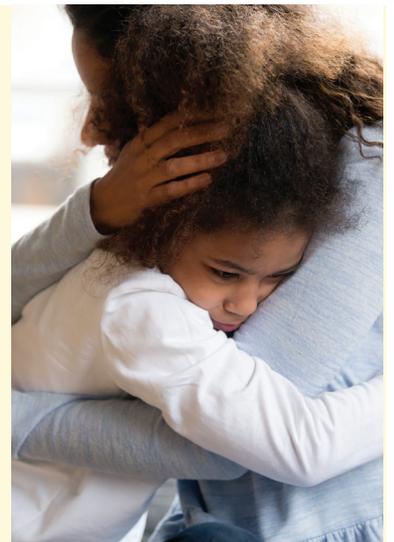
More than just unpacking their physical suitcase when they arrive, you'll need to spend a long time helping them unpack their emotional suitcase. (See inset.) This is the key to long-term healing versus simply controlling behaviors. Talk openly with them about their emotions, and make space for them to process how the past trauma impacts them today. Remind them that it won't always be this way! I tell my children often, "I'm your biggest fan because I believe in you!"

This is just a start. Whatever you do, don't give up! Even when it feels terribly personal and hard, your child is valuable, and the work you do will last a lifetime. We are cheering you on in the process!

Tips for Being a Fabulous Trauma-Informed Parent

1. Be nurturing.
2. Be consistent.
3. Establish a dialog. Stop, sit, and listen.
4. Play.
5. Teach feelings.
6. Model and teach appropriate behaviors.
7. Help the child to self-regulate.
8. Understand the behavior before imposing punishment or consequences.
9. Use emotions as a parenting tool. Go for a 6:1 ratio of praise to correction.
10. Have realistic expectations.
11. Take care of yourself.

Courtesy of The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, CWTTT, (www.NCTSN.org)



Local Events, Training & Family Activities

All three Post-Adoption Resource Centers have many family fun events planned, as well as support groups and trainings. Please check your Post Adoption Resource Center region's Facebook page, watch for monthly calendars, or give us a call to find out what is available near you.

REGION 2:
Northern Michigan
231-421-6500
parctc@bethany.org

www.facebook.com/PostAdoptionResourceCenterOfNorthernMI

REGION 3:
Central Michigan
231-924-3390
parcfr@bethany.org

www.facebook.com/PostAdoptionResourceCenterCentralMichigan

REGION 4:
Western Michigan
616-224-7565
parcgr@bethany.org

www.facebook.com/PARCRegion4



Our families enjoyed a surrey ride through Crystal Mountain Resort in Benzie County!!



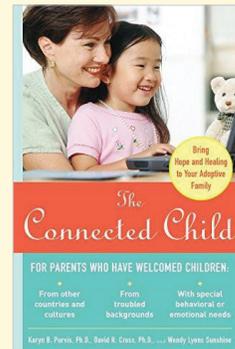
Tubing fun at Hanson Hills in Grayling, MI



It was a great Adoptive Parent Retreat weekend at the Kettunen Center in Tustin, MI, at the end of March for all three of our regions, with our special speaker, Mandy Taylor!

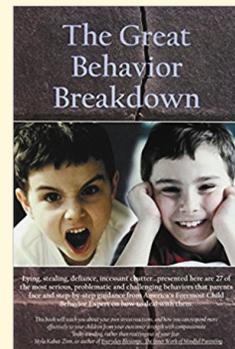


Trauma-Informed Parenting Resources



The Connected Child

Karyn B. Purvis, Ph.D., & David R. Cross, Ph.D.



The Great Behavior Breakdown

B. Bryan Post

"When a child is feeling stressed or overwhelmed, they can't calm themselves, hear you, respond logically, or find a place of safety."

—B. Bryan Post, "The Great Behavior Breakdown"



Bethany is committed to supporting adoptive families through the lifelong, rewarding journey of adoption.

REGION 2
Bethany Christian Services
1055 Carriage Hill Dr, Ste 2
Traverse City, MI 49686
231-995-0870
www.bethany.org/traversecity

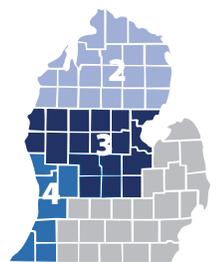
Charlevoix, Emmett, Cheboygan, Presque Isle, Antrim, Otsego, Montmorency, Alpena, Leelanau, Benzie, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Crawford, Oscoda, Alcona, Manistee, Wexford, Missaukee, Roscommon, Ogemaw, and Iosco counties

REGION 3
Bethany Christian Services
6995 West 48th St
Fremont, MI 49412
231-924-3390
www.bethany.org/fremont

Mason, Lake, Osceola, Clare, Gladwin, Arenac, Oceana, Newaygo, Mecosta, Isabella, Midland, Bay, Montcalm, Gratiot, Saginaw, Ionia, Clinton, and Shiawassee counties

REGION 4
Bethany Christian Services
901 Eastern Ave NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49503
616-224-7565
www.bethany.org/grandrapids

Allegan, Berrien, Cass, Kent, Muskegon, Ottawa, and Van Buren counties



postadoptionrc.org

other suggested websites: www.adoptivefamilies.com www.adoptioninstitute.org