

of the family is likewise a source of harm to self-concept (Emler, online.)

Clearly, the child who experiences rejection lacks the foundation for self-esteem. Abuse and neglect compound the damage. For children with negative self-concept, challenges become a major source of frustration and anxiety, they have a hard time finding solutions to problems and they are plagued with negative self-thoughts—"I am stupid," "I can't do anything right" or "I don't deserve a family." Faced with a new and immediate challenge, their immediate response is "I can't." They frequently become passive, withdrawn or depressed. Poor self-perceptions are also linked to teenage pregnancy, eating disorders, suicide attempts and suicidal thoughts.

So, one step in the direction of healing the traumatized child is to improve his ability to communicate with his eyes. There are all types of nonintrusive ways to help the adoptee risk the intimacy of looking at those around him. Some of the suggestions listed some involve direct eye contact and others are about looking together:

- Look at each other and name the ways you are alike. Explore each other's features.
- Play peek-a-boo with young and older children—remember the child adopted at age 4, 6, 10 or 12 most likely didn't have this experience
- Let your child put eye shadow on you
- Have all the kids participate in staring contests
- See which child can make the funniest face
- Ask your child to look at you whenever you hand him a cookie, a laundry basket, etc.
- Cease conversations from separate rooms. Have the child come to you and speak with you.
- Have a candy-kiss hunt. Hide the kisses. For each one the child finds, he must look in your eyes for five seconds, get a kiss from you, then eat the candy kiss.
- Paint faces
- Pick daffodils and put them in water with food coloring—watch what happens overnight
- Turn off the lights and play flashlights. When you beam on the child, he has to look at your eyes for two seconds.
- Build a model plane. Pause for some brief eye contact and conversations while the glue is drying.

Don't these ideas sound fun? And, laughter, giggles and happy eyes forge strong connections among all members of adoptive families!

Interested in more ways to look at or with your child? "See" *Parenting the Hurt Child* by Gregory C. Keck and Regina Kupecky or *Brothers and Sisters in Adoption: Helping Children Navigate Relationships when New Kids Join the Family* by Arleta James.