

When You *Don't* Disrupt an Adoption

By Torin Scott

I have been involved in adoption for over fifteen years now. I have watched in sadness as families of friends fell apart. I believe disruption is much worse than divorce although I have experienced neither. Add overwhelming guilt. Adoptive parents dealing with impending disruption often feel victimized and isolated. Instead of support from friends, they hear, "I told you so." If they were single to begin with, add, "What were you thinking?" If they were married, the marriage often has lost its luster under the constant stress. If a disruption occurs, well-meaning people callously comment, "Well, I'll bet you are glad that's over with. Now you can get back to normal!"

The problem is that the parents were not the ones with the attachment disorder. They have broken hearts.

As the single parent of five children, I have dealt with attachment disorder (two kids), ADHD (two kids), mental illness, communication disorder, depression (two kids), neurological problems (two kids), borderline IQ (one child for sure and a couple of maybes). I have dealt with violence, hospitalizations, and property destruction. I have dealt with screaming teachers and principals as well as screaming children.

Having watched families fall apart with children often no more impaired than my own and sometimes far less so, I have wondered, "How is it that we have stayed together and succeeded where others have been less fortunate?" I have no research or statistics to share with you, but I can provide some guidelines based on years of experience in the field, at home, and sharing with other adoptive families.

1. Accept each child for who she (or he) is. She is not who she might have been without the abuse and neglect before and after birth. She is not who she might have been with a stable family who loved her from day one. She is who she is. Grieve over who she might have been and let it go.

2. Your child may not be able to return love or show it in the way you might expect. Accept that we are all doing the best we can. If necessary, get your own needs met elsewhere.

3. The child did not agree to adopt you. It was your plan. It is not fair to blame the child if s/he doesn't agree with it (this could be a non-verbal message). Take responsibility for the plan.

4. Love unconditionally. Love fiercely enough for the both of you.

5. Know that love is not enough. It takes commitment, endurance, and acceptance.

6. You can't fix everything and neither can anyone else. Refuse to accept blame for things that are beyond your control.

7. If the school (or the baby-sitter, etc.) is driving you crazy, it's the school that needs to go. Don't blame the child for the school's inability to cope.

8. If you have other children, be sure their needs are being met.

9. Keep physically and mentally healthy yourself. You can't help your child if you are not in good shape yourself.

10. Supervise, supervise, supervise! Install an intercom system. It's worth every penny.

11. Don't expect neighbors, family, or friends to always understand. They can't. They haven't lived it. Don't blame them, just accept that you have developed some expertise in