



10 ROADBLOCKS TO YOUR FOSTER OR ADOPTED CHILD'S WORLD

by Sherrie Eldridge

More than anything, as parents you want to draw close to that precious child of yours. You attachment, bonding, and all that good stuff, right?

There's a parental requirement. You must be emotionally available to walk with your child through some painful stuff. If you have not grieved your losses from childhood, marriage, miscarriages, etc., you will be scared and the door to your child's heart will close. You will be present, but "the welcoming lights" won't be on within you.

Without those welcoming lights of a freshly-grieved parent heart, you will run into roadblock after roadblock.

Here are a few of them. Take a look. If you have to claim "guilty" on several, look within and pray for guidance in dealing with your own stuff so that you can be there for your child. You can do it, parents!

1. AVOID THE TOPIC OF ADOPTION AS LONG AS POSSIBLE AND HOPE THAT THE CHILD NEVER ASKS ABOUT HIS OR HER PAST

Even if parents don't tell us about the loss of our first family, on a sensory level, we know it. I know of a woman who wasn't told until midlife that she was adopted. Even though extremely accomplished, she struggled with anxiety. Through counseling, no relief. However, when her aged father revealed the truth, she says, "It was like chains fell off me." The truth indeed does set us free.

2. DENY ANY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ADOPTEE AND THE ADOPTIVE FAMILY. TELL THE CHILD SHE FITS RIGHT IN BECAUSE SHE LOOKS LIKE YOU.

This is such a sore spot for adoptees and foster kids. "We have three of our own (bio) and we adopted Andy." Oh, no! "He looks just like you guys." Oh, no. We want to die inside.

3. CORRECT ANY EXPRESSION OF UNCOMFORTABLE EMOTIONS ABOUT ADOPTION BY "ACCENTUATING THE POSITIVE."

Count your blessings. Be thankful. This is prevalent in religious circles. "Well, we're all adopted." Uh, no we're not! Human and spiritual adoption are not the same. "Oh, I know you want to try to identify with me, but that is an immediate disconnect." When well-meaning folks say such things,

teach us to deflect it by asking, “Would you like to hear my story?”

4. PRETEND THE ADOPTEE’S LIFE BEGAN ON ADOPTION DAY. DON’T MENTION THE CHILD’S BIRTH OR BIRTH FAMILY.

We need to hear BOTH our adoption, foster care experience, and birth story. It is our narrative. The stork is out of style! Tell us our birth story. And, please don’t tell us that we were adopted because our birth mother loved us so much. We will think, “If that is love, I don’t want anything to do with it.” And, we will refuse your love as well.

5. ENFORCE THE UNSPOKEN “NO TALK RULE” THROUGH VARIOUS EXPRESSIONS OF BODY LANGUAGE. A QUIVERING LIP OR A SHAKY VOICE SPEAKS VOLUMES. STARING WITH HEAD DOWN IS ALSO EFFECTIVE.

We adopted and foster kids can read rejection a mile away. When you’ve experienced so much of it as we have, we can read the quivery lips, sighing, etc. All the things listed above spell rejection to us.

6. TAKE OFFENSE IF THE CHILD USES WORDS LIKE “REAL PARENTS.” INTERPRET THEM AS A SLAM.

Parents, dear parents, there is no competition in our hearts between you and our first parents. We love all of you, but in different ways. Please be secure in your calling as my parent. Please read Psalm 139:16 often...that my life, your life, and the lives of first parents were all planned by God before any one of them came to be. We will sense your security and confidence and love you for it.

7. FOSTER SILENT SHAME ABOUT THE ADOPTEE’S NEED TO CONSIDER SEARCHING FOR THEIR BIRTH FAMILY

“Why not let sleeping dogs lie? Let bygones be bygones.” “Why would you want to open that can of worms?” “What is past is past.” “She sent you away and that is that.”

8. JUST PRETEND YOU’RE REALLY LISTENING TO YOUR CHILD. “LIGHTS ON, BUT NOBODY’S HOME.”

Oh, how we need you here, parents. Real listening is the best gift you could ever give to us. Take some classes in learning so that we can connect. Pretending is rejecting to us.

9. AVOID DOING YOUR OWN EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALING WORK

We all need counseling at one time or another. “When I am searching for birth relatives, you may be able to say all the right things, but inside you may feel like you’ve been hit in the gut with a sledge hammer.” Getting counseling doesn’t mean you’re defective. It means you’re wise.

10. SEND YOUR CHILD AWAY TO ROOM DURING TEMPER TANTRUMS

Know what? We can't take this. We can't stand being sent away. It triggers the trauma of being sent away by our first family. Please listen to experts like the late Dr. Karyn Purvis about how to discipline me effectively.

Well, there are many new and fresh thoughts here that I've gained through the years. I hope they are beneficial to you.

(Adapted from *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Parents Knew* by Sherrie Eldridge (Random House, 1999))