



10 TIPS FOR ENTERING THE WORLD OF YOUR FOSTER OR ADOPTED CHILD

by Sherrie Eldridge

Most adoptive and foster parents haven't been told that their children see life and adoption differently than them. Parents need to learn how to gain entrance into their child's world, which is what you want more than anything.

Let me be your guide in drawing close to your child. I've traveled the journey many years and would love walking together with you.

1. ACKNOWLEDGE THE REALITY OF ADOPTION FROM DAY ONE

With newborns, foster kids, adoptees, talk realities! Yes, even with a newborn, whisper the realities. "Hi little one. I love you so much. I know you are sad because you lost your first mommy and daddy. I am sad with you. But know that I will never leave you. I will always be here for you and keep you safe."

2. INITIATE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT THE CHILD'S PRE-ADOPTION PERCEPTIONS

There are so many ways to initiate conversations. "I wonder if you got your beautiful red hair from your birth mother." "I wonder if your birth father had pimples like you when he was a teenager." We won't bring up adoption talk! We need parental initiation. Remember, parents, that we are like the huge turtles in the zoo. We stay in our shells and only pop our heads out when we know we are safe.

3. VALIDATE THE ADOPTEE'S IDENTITY BY NEVER SPEAKING ILL OF THE BIRTH FAMILY

Even if your child has horrific, negative birth family history, refrain from speaking ill of them. Why? Because we came from them. We have their DNA and even though they may have been abusive to us or abused themselves while we were in the womb, we have an loyalty to them. Once there was a toddler that was fried by her mom in hot oil. When hospitalized and mom came to visit, guess what the baby did? She held up her arms and said, "Mama!"

4. CREATE A SAFE, NON-JUDGEMENTAL PLACE WHERE THE ADOPTEE CAN FREELY EXPRESS ANY THOUGHT OR EMOTION

"I hate her."

We need to get all the pain out and we must feel free to say nasty, naughty, shocking words about people, places, and experiences. Validate our emotions even though they seem crazy. We need that validation like crazy. “I would feel just like you, honey.”

5. CELEBRATE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ADOPTIVE AND BIRTH FAMILIES THAT YOU SEE IN YOUR CHILD

Even though we feel like a brown egg in a carton of white eggs, and that we don't belong (which is a normal part of the adoptee journey that we need to learn to accept), please celebrate our differences and be sure to add what a blessings my unique gifting is to the family. “What would it be like here not to have the beautiful paintings you create for us? We can barely make a stick man!”

6. BE SENSITIVE TO THE CHILD'S UNSPOKEN NEED FOR A SENSE OF CONNECTION TO HIS/HER PAST

Someone once said that an adoptee's or foster child's need for connection is like a starving man looking for food. We are desperate to connect with you but we don't have a clue how to do it, and we are scared to death of it. Find creative ways to connect with me, like movie-going, painting a canvas, writing my story.

7. RESPECT YOUR CHILD'S NEED TO CONSIDER SEARCHING FOR BIRTH RELATIVES, OR IN AN OPEN ADOPTION, FOR A “DATE” WITH BIRTH MOM OR DAD

For the majority of adoptees and foster kids, there is an insatiable curiosity about our first families. “Do I look like them? What are the health issues? Would they welcome me or throw me out again?” Help them sign up for [ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com) or 23 and Me DNA testing. Even if there is no history, it gives much encouragement to see one's roots.

8. BE EMOTIONALLY PRESENT

This is a vital necessity! We don't want to talk with someone who is afraid of our pain or who is preoccupied with their own lives. You can't take someone where you haven't already been yourself. “Deal with your stuff, and then grab my hand for the journey.”

9. BECOME AN EXPERT IN HELPING YOUR CHILD LEARN HOW TO REGULATE EMOTIONS. TELL HER YOU WANT TO STAY AND CONNECT WITH HER WHEN SHE IS HURTING.

Parents, please become an expert in this for your kiddos. “I know that you are doing what you need to right now. You may be remembering a painful, awful time from your past. I am so sorry that happened to you. But, right now, it is different. I am here with you and will keep you safe. I won't leave you alone in your pain. I will hold you if you'll let me. If not, that's okay. I just want to walk with you through this.”

10. LEARN HOW TO PLAY!

Drop all facades, get on your jeans and sweatshirt, sit on the floor with me and pretend. We will have so much fun when you enter my world and if you do, I might even be willing to talk about adoption.

Parents, we will oh, so love it when you enter our worlds. We can be even closer than bio families, for we grew in your hearts, probably long before we were ever conceived or born. It is not a mistake that I am yours.

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