

Enhancing Attachment & Bonding Your Child ^{with}

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“What can I do to help my child attach?” is a question I am frequently asked by prospective adoptive parents.

Thus, I decided that compiling a list of activities which other adoptive parents and I have used successfully to enhance our children’s adjustment after they arrived home would be beneficial to new adoptive families as they begin their journey of parenting an adopted child.

As you read the following suggestions, please keep in mind your child’s age and/or developmental stages, his life before

he came into your home, his personality, and his temperament.

Your temperament and your expectations of him will also influence the attachment process between you and your child.

For all children during the first three months after arrival in your home:

1. As soon as the child arrives, take a family picture, enlarge it and place the framed picture where all can see. This will show your child and your family that you belong together.

2. Follow a daily routine and have a set bedtime ritual. Children feel more secure when they know what is going to happen next.

3. Limit the number of visitors in the home. Your child will attach quicker to individual family members if only the immediate family is at home. Regular visitors may hinder attachment. It is OK to invite friends and family to the airport when your child arrives. Everyday, there are many people at the airport so either way, your child will be seeing a large crowd at the airport.

4. For infants, leave your child for short period of time beginning with a few minutes in another room. When you return your child will learn that a parent leaves, but they will come back. For an older child, begin with leaving for a 15-minute period. Leave the child in your home with a responsible adult that child knows.

5. Keep the personal items, such as clothes, shoes or a toy, which came with your child. Make these items available to your child.

6. Frequently use your child’s name. If you have changed the child’s name, he has to learn his new name. Once he knows his name, he will respond by looking at you.

Eye contact is a key way to increase attachment.

7. If possible, have familiar sounds and smells from where the child came. One mother cooked soy sauce and garlic so her home would have the “Asian” scents the baby was used to smelling.

8. Tell your child you belong to each other. “I am yours and you are mine.”

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Attachment Suggestions For A Younger Child:

1. The games such as "Peek-a-Boo" and "This Little Piggy" encourage touching and eye contact with infants, toddlers, and young children which then facilitates attachment.
2. Touch your child's face and count facial features.
3. Spend daily quiet time rocking your child in a rocking chair.
4. When your child is upset or angry, hold him until he calms down.
5. Extend bathing time and massage your child's scalp during shampoo time.
6. Lotion and massage your child's body.
7. Sing and dance with your child.
8. Comb and brush her hair for a longer time than usual.
9. Maintain eye contact when feeding your child.
10. Purchase a cloth baby carrier that holds your child facing toward you.

Attachment Suggestions For an Older Child:

1. If your child appears awkward with your touch, begin by placing lots of lotion on each others' arms. Then draw pictures in the lotion, rub the lotion smooth and start drawing pictures over.
2. Make a big deal out of scrapes and hurts. Be the nurturing parent.
3. Throughout the day, pat the child on the shoulder or give him a quick hug.
4. Dress in similar clothing. Wearing the same type of T-shirt and jeans is a visual affirmation that you belong to each other.
5. Put a sticker on your face and wait until your child comments about it.
6. As you play games, add the new rule that eye contact is needed before each turn.
7. Do things together: bake cookies, sort laundry, yard work, walk for exercise, and sit together to watch a video. Your child may

not have been exposed to television or movies, so it important to watch the child's reactions to what he sees.

8. Eye-Contact Game: Turn off the lights and play with flashlights. Whenever a beam falls on you or your child, both of you look at each other and count to five. Then move and catch each other again.
9. Put matching washable tattoos on each other.
10. Spend extended time brushing or combing hair your child's hair.
11. Give butterfly kisses until child is comfortable giving or receiving a kiss.
12. Play "London Bridge," "Tower of Hands," and other hand-holding games with your child.
13. Play the game "Who can make the funniest face?" Maintain good eye contact.
14. Sleep in same room for an initial time period. All family members can sleep in sleeping bags on the floor.

15. Play with dolls by acting out your family life. Have dolls nurture and care for each other.

16. Keep a joy journal to share with your child as he develops language.
17. Write these ideas on small note cards or **Post-It** notes and place the notes throughout your home to remind you.
18. Smile at your child.
19. Laugh together.
20. If your child goes to day care or school, give your child a small laminated family picture he can keep it with him all day long as a reminder of you and other family members.

Additional Resources:

At times you may be concerned that there are attachment problems in your family. Feel free to share your apprehensions with your adoption social worker or a Dillon International case manager. We are here to help make your adoption journey a blessing to you and your child!

A special thanks to the all the families from the Dillon International Adoption Forums who contributed their ideas and suggestions for the development of this article.