



Post Adoption Press

Serving families formed by adoption in Sonoma,
Lake, Mendocino and Napa Counties

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SUBTLE SIGNS

by Arthur Becker-Weidman, Ph.D.

Adjusting to a new child in the family can be difficult, but what if the adjustment period seems to be taking longer than expected. As the months drag on you begin to question your decision to adopt and wonder how much more you can take. But, this difficult adjustment time may not be normal, your child may suffer from any number of mental, physical and emotional illnesses. Only by watching the subtle signs can you begin to understand the struggles of your new child.

Gail tells her 7-year-old daughter, Sally, to pick up the napkin Sally had dropped. As Sally crosses her arms a sad and angry pout darkens her face. Gail says, "Sally, I told you to pick up the napkin and throw it away." Sally stomps over to the napkin, picks it up, and throws it away. Crying and whining, Sally stands with her back to Gail. Sally, angry and unhappy is exhibiting one of the subtle signs of attachment sensitivity that nearly all children adopted at a young age demonstrate. An informal survey I conducted of children adopted from Asia between the ages of 4 months and 2 years of age revealed that more than half the children showed subtle signs.

Attachment is an interpersonal, interactive process that results in a child feeling safe, secure, and able to develop healthy, emotionally meaningful relationships. The process requires a sensitive, responsive parent who is capable of emotional engagement and participation in contingent collaborative communication (responsive communication) at nonverbal and verbal levels. The parent's ability to respond to the child's emotional state is what will prevent attachment sensitivities from becoming problems of a more severe nature.

What are the subtle signs?

1. Sensitivity to rejection and to disruptions in the normally attuned connection between mother and child.
2. Avoiding comfort when the child's feelings are hurt, although the child will turn to the parent for comfort when physically hurt.
3. Difficulty discussing angry or hurt feelings.
4. Over valuing looks, appearances and clothes.
5. Sleep disturbances. Not wanting to sleep alone.
6. Precocious independence — A level of independence that is more frequently seen in slightly older children.
7. Reticence and anxiety about changes.
8. Picking at scabs and sores.

Internationally adopted children experience at least two significant changes during the first few months of life that can have a profound impact on later development and security. Birthmother to orphanage or foster care, then orphanage to adoptive home are two transitions. We know from extensive research that prenatal, post-natal, and subsequent experiences create lasting impressions on a child. During the first few minutes, days and weeks of life, the infant clearly recognizes the birthmother's voice, smell and taste. Changes in caregivers are disruptive. The new caregivers look different, smell different, sound different, taste different. In the orphanage there are often many care givers but no one special caregiver. Adoption brings with it a whole new, strange and initially frightening world. These moves and disruptions have profound effects on a child's emotional, interpersonal, cognitive and behavioral development. The longer a child is in alternate care, the more these subtle signs become pervasive.

There are effective ways for a parent to help his or her child. Parents and the right parenting are vital to preventing subtle signs from becoming anything more than sensitivities. Parenting consistently with clear and firm limits is essential. Discipline should be enforced with an attitude of sensitive and responsive empathy, acceptance, curiosity, love and playfulness. This provides the most healing and protective way to correct a child.

As Sally walks away to pout, Gail comes up behind her, scoops her up and begins rocking her gently while crooning in Sally's ear. Gail sings songs and tells Sally she loves her and understands Sally is angry at being told what to do. Gail expresses sadness that Sally is so unhappy. At first Sally resists a bit, but she soon calms down and listens as Gail tells her how much she loves Sally. Sally is sensitive to feelings of rejection and abandonment that are evoked by her mother's displeasure, so Gail brings Sally closer to reassure Sally non-verbally. It is by experience that the subtle signs are addressed and managed. Nonverbal experience is more powerful than verbal experience since most of the subtle signs have their origin in nonverbal experience and nonverbal memory.

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What's Happening at Parents Place

SUPPORT AND SOCIALIZATION GROUPS

Parent Support Group meets on the **3rd Wednesday** of each month from **5:30 to 7:30 pm**. This monthly support group is open to all adoptive parents and offers childcare free of charge. First 30 minutes is family brown bag dinner. Facilitated by Liz Jimenez, MSW.

Petaluma Parent Support Group This group meets on the **1st Tuesday** of each month from **5:45 to 7:45 pm** at B'nai Israel Jewish Center, 740 Western Ave. Facilitated by Liz Jimenez, MSW.

Socialization Playgroup for Preschoolers (3-5) **Thursdays 9:30 to 11:00 am**. This group helps adopted preschoolers to strengthen social skills, build positive relationships, and learn to handle conflict and frustration. Facilitated by Amy McIntyre, MA with concurrent parent support group.

Socialization Group for Young Children (6-9): Help children in the early school years develop healthy social skills and practice "talking about" adoption. This small group will provide adopted children with a natural peer group of other adopted children and encourage them to develop positive peer relations and strengthen self-esteem. Tuesdays from 3:30 to 5 pm beginning in January. Facilitated by Amy McIntyre, MA.

RSVP required for all events.

To register or for more information call Liz Jimenez 707/303-1509

New Library Additions: Check 'em out

The Great Behavior Breakdown by Bryan Post. This book presents 27 of the most serious, problematic and challenging behaviors that parents face with step-by-step guidance on how to deal with them.

Therapeutic Parenting: A handbook for parents of children who have disorders of attachment. A manual created by ATTACH (Association for the Treatment and Training in the Attachment of Children).

A MESSAGE FROM THE LIBRARIAN: Several of our most popular "adoption" books have gone missing. If you happen to have any books from our Parents Place library laying around, please return them. No fines, no questions . . . Thanks

LIFEBOOKS

Call NOW to Register
303-1509

Lifebooks for Teens

This 10 session group begins in January! A small group of 5-6 teens along with their parent(s) come together to create their own Lifebook, in their own words, from their own perspective. Parent information meeting is January 25, 2010.

Creating a Lifebook for your child. Meets one Thursday morning per month. 9:30 to Noon.
11/12; 12/3; 1/14; 2/11; 3/11; 4/8; 5/6; 6/3.

For more information call Liz @303-1509



Join us for our annual
National Adoption Day Celebration

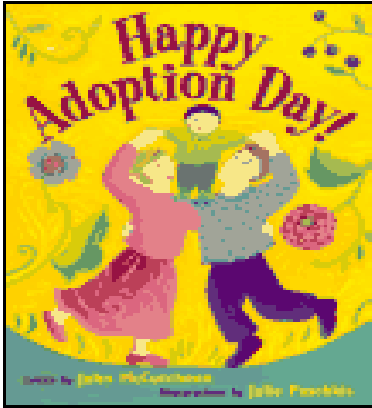
Sonoma County Museum On The Go Exhibits
Face Painting, Talent Show, Lunch and more!

Sunday November 22nd, 2009
Noon to 3pm

Location: CHOPS
509 Adams Street
Santa Rosa

RSVP by Nov. 9 707/303-1509

Community News and Events



**Wherever you came from, wherever you go,
This is the place that we start.
Whatever you learn, whatever you know,
You've still got a home in our heart."**

By John McCutcheon

Sebastopol Area Transracial Adoption Playgroup.

Ongoing play group
For children ages 0-5
1st and 3rd Thursday of each month
4:00-5:00 PM
Pioneer Park in Sebastopol.

Contact Sarah at sarahandnickabbott@gmail.com or
Kristy at kristy@boblitt.com for information

**ADVERTISE YOUR ADOPTION
RELATED COMMUNITY EVENT HERE
PLAY GROUPS, SUPPORT GROUPS,
SOCIAL GROUPS, CELEBRATIONS
CALL LIZ AT 707/303-1509**

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These sensitivities are not a mental illness or Reactive Attachment Disorder. They are subtle signs of attachment sensitivities. So, what can you do?

First, as Gail does with Sally, bringing the child in close is better than allowing the child to be alone or isolate him or her self.

Second, as Gail does with Sally, talk for the child. Putting words to what the child is feeling. This allows the child to feel understood by you, maintains a connection, and helps assuage the fear of rejection and abandonment.

Third, don't make food a battle. A child who steals food or hoards food usually has sound emotional reasons for this. Providing the child with food so that your child experiences you as provider is often the solution. Put a bowl of fruit in the child's room. (Be sure to keep it filled. It does no good if you provide and then leave an empty bowl!) In some instances, I've recommended that the parents provide the child with a fanny pack and keep it stocked with snacks. This usually quickly ends hoarding and stealing of food.

Fourth, for the child who is overly independent, doing for the child and not encouraging precocious independence is helpful. So, making a game of brushing your 6-year old's teeth, dressing your 7-year-old, or playing at feeding a 9-year-old, are all ways to demonstrate that you will care for the child. Keeping it playful and light, allows the child to experience what the child needs and helps eliminate hurtful battles.

In conclusion, subtle signs are important reminders that our children have ongoing sensitivities that as parents we must address in a responsive and sensitive manner. Responsive and sensitive communication is essential. Attachment is a function of reciprocal, sensitive and responsive communication; attachment does not reside in the child alone. It is important for the parent to manage and facilitate this attuned connection within a framework of clear limits and boundaries, natural consequences, and firm loving discipline.

For more information, contact Dr. Becker-Weidman of The Center For Family Development by writing to 5820 Main Street, Suite 406 • Williamsville, NY 14221, calling 716-810-0790, e-mailing Aweidman@Concentric.net or visiting the Web site at www.Center4FamilyDevelop.com. This article was reprinted with permission from the author.



WELCOME TO NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY

This year marks the 10th anniversary of National Adoption Day, a national day of celebration of adoptive families and an opportunity for courts to open their doors and finalize the adoptions of children from foster care. Since 2000, more than 25,000 children have had their adoptions finalized on National Adoption Day. This year on November 21, families, adoption advocates, policymakers, judges and volunteers will come together and celebrate adoption in communities large and small all across the nation.

For more information about National Adoption Day 2009 go to www.nationaladoptionday.org

Post Adoption Services @ Parents Place (PAS) offers a variety of services for families formed by adoption. From one-to-one crisis intervention and counseling to support groups for children and parents, we have something to support you and your children. We also provide parent and professional trainings on a variety of topics throughout the year to help build skills and knowledge regarding adoption related issues. Our goal is to be here as a resource for you and your family. We have a free lending library filled with informative books on a variety of parenting, adoption and attachment issues. Our staff and clinicians are knowledgeable and caring. Parenthood and adoption can be both a joy and a challenge. PAS Coordinator Liz Jimenez, MSW can be reached at 707/303-1509

Read “*The Post Adoption Press*” online at www.parentsplaceonline.org

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