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**FINALLY HOME**  
**Six Steps To Easing the Transition**

**By**

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**All parents want to succeed in raising emotionally healthy children. Parents who adopt have already invested greatly in the life of a child even before they see or hold him. Although most parents are aware that children who arrive later in infancy or childhood require more careful parenting not all know how to do this. Parenting the adopted child requires not only skills of nurturing to build healthy relationships but also skills to decrease any upset of losses or mistreatment that the child might have experienced. Research shows that being intentional in our parenting can significantly ease the transition of change in an adopted child's life.**

**What is most important for the parent to focus on during that first year of transition? They don't want to be so overly focused on potential problems that they are unable to enjoy their little one. Parents can help make the first year a great one by following these six steps.**

**1. Begin to build a trusting relationship by extra nurturing.**

**Purposely nurture your precious little one. Limit your time away from your child. Meet your child's needs consistently in a sensitive manner. Respond quickly to his needs and allow your child to regress. Bottle feeding, rocking to sleep and being carried can all contribute to building a trusting relationship. Let your child experience you as a safe person who is meeting his needs. Eye contact and focused attention are also important. Playing games like peek-a-boo and pony rides etc, will promote healthy bonding. Your child will begin to discover that he is safe with you.**

**2. Play with your child.**

Many children who are adopted later in infancy or childhood have missed the joys of play. So intentionally set aside at least 20 minutes a day just to play with your child. If your child can already play keep playing. Play cements relationships. Having fun as a family builds self-esteem. If your child is reluctant to play gradually stretch him by taking little steps.

**3. Talk together.**

Parents often use an exaggerated voice tone to emphasize important concepts with babies. Continue to cheerlead your newly adopted child using this brighter emotional tone as he works to understand your shared world. Patiently explain things to him. Freely use fingers and gestures to point out important things. Allow yourself to describe things as you would to an infant. Talk. Talk. Talk about everything.

**4. Gently but firmly deal with negative behavior.**

It is best to stay within arm's reach of your newly adopted child intentionally directing their arms, hands, bodies, etc. to where you want them to go. Firmly stop hitting, kicking or hurting. Teach them boundaries of respect from the beginning.

**5. Practice good self-care.**

Make sure that you get enough sleep, good food and exercise. Little ones who have been moved and/or neglected tend to be irritable, fussy, and hard to soothe. Parents use their own patience to regulate their moods to help calm their child. Your own emotional stability will help to stabilize your child's moods. A parent who is tired, anxious or depressed cannot give a child an adequate source of emotional regulation. If you see your moods slipping even with good self care, get some counseling and/or use an antidepressant. It is too hard to do this nurturing parenting while being depressed. Take time for sleep, good meals and exercise. Increase your spiritual resources through prayers and Bible study.

**6. Get support.**

**Find an adoption coach. Someone who is positive and trained in meeting the developmental needs of adopted children. The coaching relationship will provide not only that sense of nurture for the parent but also skills and information at different stages of the adoption journey. Parents need someone who will care for them. Join a support group. Meet with other adopted parents in your church.**

**By the end of the first year your adopted child should be seeking out his/her parents for affection and play. They should prefer being with their parents. They should show excitement about their time together. In secure attachment a hurting child will calm with the parent and accept soothing. All too often trauma and grief hinders attachment and the child will display signs of trauma such as night terrors, extreme mood swings, biting, freezing, etc. If you notice these signs seek out a mental health counselor who is familiar with issues of attachment to help your child.**