

Handout

Part I – Understanding your child

“Religion that God our Father accepts as *pure and faultless* is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress ...” (James 1:27 NIV)

God takes note and accepts what you have embraced and you are experiencing.

- Orphan not physically, but emotionally
- Can a three month old walk or a toddler speak their native language fluently?
- Effective discipline – understand their *emotional development*

LENS #1

Singapore John and Karen Louis’ material on *Good Enough Parenting* about importance of meeting emotional needs. One of the Core Emotional Needs identified in their book is **Connection and Acceptance**, which is the most important Core Emotional Need in adopted children.

“Real connection with our children is when the sharing of emotions takes place in both directions; parents to children and children to parents, such that a healthy affectionate bond and an empathetic understanding develop between the two sides and they both feel positive at an emotional level.”¹

“Meeting this core emotional need cannot be done if parents insist on staying in rational or logical mode. If we are going to connect with our children and help them feel accepted, we must interact with them on an emotional level.”²

One author calls “emotion coaching” led him to conclude that the more a child is emotionally connected with his parents, the more likely the child is to accept his parent’s values.³ When the level of connection is high, the ability of the parents to influence them is also high.

Lifetraps from not meeting this core emotional need:

1. Mistrust / Abuse – I cannot expect others to treat me in a fair, considerate or just manner. I should expect to be hurt (emotionally or even physically), lied to, taken advantage of, and manipulated. Others always have their own agenda.
2. Defectiveness / Shame – I am not good enough. I am inherently flawed. Anyone who truly knows me could not love me.
3. Emotional Deprivation – I cannot expect others to be supportive of me and care about what I need.
4. Social Isolation / Alienation – I am different from other people and don’t fit it.
5. Emotional Inhibition – I should not express myself or show my emotions. I should always be in control.
6. Failure – I am fundamentally incompetent and have failed, am failing, and will fail again in the future. I am less talented and successful than other people.

BENEFIT FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE? I must connect...

¹ Louis, John, & Louis, Karen (2012) *Good Enough Parenting*, p 66. Louis Counseling & Training Services Pte. Ltd

² Louis, p 66

³ Gottman, J., & DeClaire, J. (1998) *Raising an emotionally intelligent child – The heart of parenting*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

LENS #2

Psychology and Psychiatry define it as RAD – *Reactive Attachment Disorder* and bonding is difficult⁴

Causes (particularly with international adoptions, little or no knowledge of these factors):

- A baby cries and no one responds or offers comfort.
- A baby is hungry or wet, and they aren't attended to for hours.
- No one looks at, talks to, or smiles at the baby, so the baby feels alone.
- A young child gets attention only by acting out or displaying other extreme behaviors.
- A young child or baby is mistreated or abused.
- Sometimes the child's needs are met and sometimes they aren't. The child never knows what to expect.
- The infant or young child is hospitalized or separated from his or her parents.
- A baby or young child is moved from one caregiver to another (can be the result of adoption, foster care, or the loss of a parent).
- The parent is emotionally unavailable because of depression, an illness, or a substance abuse problem.

As the examples show, sometimes the circumstances that cause the attachment problems are unavoidable, but the child is too young to understand what has happened and why. To a young child, it just feels like no one cares and they lose trust in others and the world becomes an unsafe place.

Signs in an infant:

- Avoids eye contact
- Doesn't smile
- Doesn't reach out to be picked up
- Rejects your efforts to calm, soothe, and connect
- Doesn't seem to notice or care when you leave them alone
- Cries inconsolably
- Doesn't coo or make sounds
- Doesn't follow you with his or her eyes
- Isn't interested in playing interactive games or playing with toys
- Spend a lot of time rocking or comforting themselves

Common signs and symptoms:

- **An aversion to touch and physical affection.** Children with reactive attachment disorder often flinch, laugh, or even say "Ouch" when touched. Rather than producing positive feelings, touch and affection are perceived as a threat.

⁴ Material from www.helpguide.org, Trusted guided to mental & emotional health

- **Control issues.** Most children go to great lengths to remain in control and avoid feeling helpless. They are often disobedient, defiant, and argumentative. Lying and manipulation are common tools to maintain control.
- **Anger problems.** Anger may be expressed directly, in tantrums or acting out, or through manipulative, passive-aggressive behavior. Children may hide their anger in socially acceptable actions, like giving a high five that hurts or hugging someone too hard.
- **Difficulty showing genuine care and affection.** For example, children may act inappropriately affectionate with strangers while displaying little or no affection towards their parents.
- **An underdeveloped conscience.** Children may act like they don't have a conscience and fail to show guilt, regret, or remorse after behaving badly.
- **Poor social skills and difficulty in school.** Children may have poor cause and effect reasoning; poor problem solving skills; learning disabilities; impulsivity and high levels of stress hormone Cortisol (i.e. they are more easily stressed).

There's no standard treatment for reactive attachment disorder, but it should involve both the child and parents or primary caregivers⁵. Goals of treatment are to help ensure that the child has a safe and stable living situation and develops positive interactions and strengthens the attachment with parents and caregivers

Treatment strategies include:

- Encouraging the child's development by being nurturing, responsive and caring
- Providing consistent caregivers to encourage a stable attachment for the child
- Providing a positive, stimulating and interactive environment for the child
- Addressing the child's medical, safety and housing needs, as appropriate

Other services that may benefit the child and the family include:

- Individual and family psychological counseling
- Education of parents and caregivers about the condition
- Parenting skills classes

Their emotional state seen as survival skills during and through trauma – shut off emotions, take care of yourself, and don't trust anyone. Characteristics seen in 15-20 adoptive families. The older the child is at adoption, the more these characteristics are displayed.

BENEFIT FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE? Their emotions, triggers and reactions are often stronger than their bond with you. Understanding it helps to not take it personally and respond with more compassion and patience.

LENS #3

TRAUMA

Book about the effects of trauma on the brain in layman's terms, *The Connected Child* by Karyn Purvis. The following links are good resources for the effects of trauma on the child and parents with potential helpful techniques to manage it:

⁵ Material from www.mayoclinic.org

<http://emergingmama.com/4-reasons-parenting-trauma-is-incredibly-difficult/>

<http://childtrauma.org/>

https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Training/Trauma_Informed_Care/page32.asp

BENEFIT FOR EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE? Lots of research and approaches in the social work/Family Protection Services area that show promise

Part II – Discipline specifics

Without the natural, trusting, biological bond with adoptive parents:

1. Child has more lying, anger and manipulation.
2. Traditional parenting methods often do not work.
3. Consequences have no lasting impact.
4. Reward and punishment systems do not encourage positive behavior.
5. Child lacks cause-and-effect thinking in the moment, and just reacts.

Because many adopted children struggle with lying, anger and control issues, their behavior may become disrespectful, obnoxious, hurtful and abusive (i.e. bullying). Sometimes the issue is power and control. The following techniques may offer better tools and options⁶:

- Identify the trigger. When a child is triggered, their problem solving skills begin to deteriorate and it's hard for them to access and remember what they need to do, so they simply react. When the emotions have subsided, logically help them see what they are doing.

Such as “So, when you don't have enough money to go to the dance, the rules about not stealing don't apply to you anymore?” or “When you can't stay out with your friends, the boundary of not talking disrespectfully to your parents should be disregarded?” or “How come when I tell you that you can't do something, it's okay for you to call me names?”

The purpose is to help the child begin processing his own thinking and reactions so that he can solve his problem and other people don't get hurt.

- Use direct statements and disconnect – This means to cutoff communication once the child begins to be disrespectful, obnoxious or abusive. Tell a child exactly how you want him/her to behave, then turn and walk away. For example, “Don't talk to me that way I don't like it”, then turn and walk away. Don't need speeches or long, drawn-out justifications, simply say, “I'm not talking about that, which is my decision”, and walk away.

Continuing the conversation, asking for an explanation or giving a lecture just gives him power. If you don't disconnect, then you are accepting part of the blame for the conflict, but that is not an excuse for his behavior towards you as a parent. Disconnecting forces the child to deal with the problem and the discomfort of his behavior, rather than dragging you into it.

If the child argues behind your back, it is critical that you don't respond. If it is a disrespectful comment, still walk away because that leaves the child powerless. With simple, honest and direct statements, address the behavior, not the emotions or attitude.

⁶ From James Lehman's material *Total Transformation*

- Use consequences to get honesty – Don't give lying more power by making it a moral issue that requires a lengthy discussion. Keep it simple, "You lied, so here is the consequence."
- Choose your battles – Parents don't have to attend every argument that they are invited to by declining or walking away. For the arguments you choose, you should have a position that's explainable, but it doesn't have to be an elaborate reason. Create positions that support your interests such as safety. The child feels the most calm, in control and powerful when he/she is arguing with you.
- Stop the Show – If you are in the car, then pull over to a safe area and stop the car. Tell him to either stop what he's doing or we are not going anywhere or that we are going home. If you are in a store or public area, take him outside or away from the event and repeat the same message. If an older, adolescent boy refuses, then tell him you are going home in 3 minutes. If he doesn't come out, then go home. You could decide to wait in the car, but you have to stop the blackmail and manipulation by taking away his *perceived* or *artificial power*.
- Communication – a child gets about 50-60% of the communication from the look on your face, 30-40% from your tone and the other 10% from your words. Be self-aware of how the conversation is affecting your face and tone.

Quick survey from other adoptive families:

1. Importance of unity between spouses – essential in parenting biological children, but even more so because issues can be more intense, which causes our emotions to escalate.
2. Use corporal punishment (i.e. spanking) with caution because of their wound. Other options include natural consequences (i.e. what would be the outcome if an adult did not intervene?) or physical labor.
3. Predictably, consistently and patiently meeting their physical and emotional needs.
4. Action needs to be tied to the child's *emotional age*, rather than their physical age.

These techniques help to remove the child's sense of power and control, and force him/her to wrestle with their emotions and problem solving skills. However, it doesn't meet the core emotional need that must be addressed after the emotions have subsided and the conflict resolved.