ForeWord Reviews

Parenting Your Internationally Adopted Child
Patty Cogen
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Soon An falls asleep, Yi Sheng stares off into space, and little Demetri sets about charming every adult in the room with his wide grin and super-friendly behavior. Each of these reactions is a survival skill learned by children during the time between leaving their birth mothers and being adopted into their new families, and each represents a disconnect between the child and his or her new environment.

Cogen draws on her experience as an adoptive mother, child and family therapist, and child-development specialist to offer exercises and strategies for successfully meeting the unique challenges involved in raising internationally adopted children, from the moment they come home until their young adulthood. Some issues, such as independence, will need to be dealt with differently at different stages in a child's life.

When they join their "forever family," young children like Soon An, Yi Sheng, and Demetri must learn how to depend on their parents and integrate into the new environment. One of the exercises Cogen recommends for facilitating this is a game she calls "Squeeze Hands." Parents and children walk along holding hands, and when the child squeezes her parent's hand, they both look at each other, make eye contact, and smile, then continue walking. This small exchange helps with bonding, and also lets the children know the parent is there for them when they need them.

When that same child becomes a teenager, however, they need to learn to be independent again. The trick is to gain that independence without reverting to the disconnection they felt as babies and toddlers. For example, when Sonia began to spend too much time on the phone talking with her friends, her parents instituted a rule where she would have to spend an hour helping them with something for every hour she was on the phone.

This reference guide is an invaluable addition to the adoptive parent's library. It will also give counselors and therapists insight and concrete strategies for helping adopted clients and their families. As Cogen says, "A proactive approach, in which you are knowledgeable about your child's needs and are able to anticipate problems before they occur, keeps you ahead of, rather than behind, your child."

Christine Canfield