

Caring for the Typical Children: A Baker's Dozen +

By Arleta James, PCC

Typical children are often the least involved throughout the adoption process. Few agencies provide them information about the brother or sister to come, or the changes the family may experience when adopting a child with a history of trauma. Parents tend to focus on issues like sharing a bedroom, creating rules for getting along, the excitement of having someone to play with, etc. Post-adoption, the resident children are usually excluded from therapy and from the traditional sources of educational information such as books, conferences and so on.



Resident sons and daughters are often shocked post-adoption when their expectation of a “fun playmate” isn’t met. The child who was abused or institutionalized is unfamiliar with board games, Lego’s or catching a ball. Long-term, the children already in the family lose parental time and attention; the adopted brother or sister requires many services and much assistance to function in an emotionally and socially healthier manner.

The purpose of this blog is to gather together some resources that can help the typical kids from pre-through post-adoption. This collection of articles, books, websites and workbooks, will help all of us in caring for the typical children in adoptive families! We want to keep them healthy while the family heals the traumatized arrival. *In fact, we all have a responsibility to these children. They deserve the best childhood possible too!*

1 Arleta James, PCC, ABC of Ohio, 440-230-1960, arletajames@gmail.com, www.arletajames.com, *Brothers and Sisters in Adoption: Helping Children Navigate Relationships when New Kids Join the Family* (Jessica-Kinsley Publishers - <http://www.jkp.com/>)

Workbooks

While labeled as workbooks for foster families, Barbara Jordan's *Preparing Foster Parent's Own Children for the Fostering Experience* and *Living with the Sexually Abused Child: A Handbook for Foster Parents* are more than appropriate for adoptive families before and after the adoption. The workbooks offer wonderful real-life examples of the types of behavioral difficulties a traumatized adoptee may bring with him or her into the family. The examples make for great discussion; parents and their appropriately-developing children learn to expect negative behavior and can have some solutions on hand. These workbooks are available at [American Foster Care Resources](#).

Articles

[From Only to Oldest: Preparing Your Child for a Sibling](#). This article offers wonderful points about getting "your child involved in the adoption process", being "ready for tough questions", preparing for the "questions and comments" of friends, neighbors and strangers" and much more.

[Preparing the Sibling in Waiting before Adoption Occurs](#): This article is helpful in addressing children's pre-adoption expectations—helping children expect both positive and negative interactions with their new brother and sister. This is a must read for those on their way to expanding their family via adoption.

[Is that Your Real Sister?](#) This article offers lots of ways to respond to questions about the cultural/racial composition of the adoptive family. There are also tips on dealing with racism as well as addressing the loss of privacy that transcultural and transracial families experience post-adoption. In public, strangers will stare! Adoptive parents, brothers and sisters must be prepared!

[The Blend Trend](#): Combined are issues for parents such as, "Will I love an adopted child as much as a birth child?", and the types of questions the children already in the family will ask, "If her birth mother was so poor, why don't we just send her money?" This writing is eye-opening to the types of thoughts the typical children will have throughout the adoption process.

[The Second Time Around](#): A good point made in this entry is adopting for the "right" reasons. That is, a child should be wanted, rather than viewed as a means of enhancing the lives of the children already in the family. There is also a thorough list of ideas to prepare children for the arrival of a new sibling, as well as a list of questions parents can ask themselves to help validate their decision to expand their family by adoption a second time.

[When Parents Adopt Out of Birth Order](#): The field of adoption has long been of the belief that disrupting birth order is a negative. This article disputes this traditional philosophy and makes clear that families can successfully integrate children older than their oldest. In reality, parents know their children best. As professionals we need to use parents' knowledge of their children as a guide in this issue.

[When Your Children's Abilities Differ](#): This short article makes an important point about managing the jealousies that can occur when one child is more gifted than another. This is a common issue in adoptive families in which the adoptee has mental health issues. The adoptee struggles with academics, peer relationships, etc. So, he is jealous of the sibling that he perceives as popular and smart. Jealousy breeds

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anger and conflict. The typical children grow to resent the parental time spent helping the adoptee complete homework. As stated above, time equals love. So, the typical kids let their grades slip as they vie for their parents' attention.

A Website Full of Helpful Articles

In addition to the articles above that focus on issues specifically related to adoption itself, the website www.kidshealth.org offers other helpful articles covering different facets of life in a family with a traumatized child. Kidshealth articles are written for children and teens. This website is award winning for its accuracy of information and the depth of topics covered:

- [Going to a Therapist](#): It is not uncommon for typical siblings to wonder, "Why does my brother go to a therapist?" or "What goes on in therapy?" This is a great article explaining the need for mental health services.
- [Getting Along with Brothers and Sisters](#): Sibling rivalry can be *extra* intense in adoptive families. This article offers parents a great way to introduce this topic to their children as well as solutions to alleviate the strong negative feelings that occur between all siblings: birth, step and adopted.
- [Talking about Your Feelings](#): Children will have an array of feelings about being a sibling. Viewing Mom and Dad as stressed by the care of their traumatized sibling, or believing they are expected to have a good attitude toward their adopted brother or sister, they keep their feelings to themselves. Unfortunately, this leads to a decline in their own functioning at some point in time. This article validates feelings, and helps kids understand that expressing feelings is necessary and positive.
- [Posttraumatic Stress Disorder](#), [Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder](#), [Bi-Polar Disorder](#) and any other mental health or medical condition are explained in "kid friendly" language via KidsHealth. You can help all of your children understand the mental health diagnoses their newly arrived brother or sister may receive post-adoption.

Overall, KidsHealth has 100's of articles about all topics facing today's young children, tweens and teens!

Books

Do you need advice about handling the dynamics created when the family becomes transcultural or transracial? Find the answers you need for yourself and your children in [Inside Transracial Adoption](#), [In Their Siblings' Voices: White Non-Adopted Siblings Talk about Their Experiences being Raised with Black and Bi-Racial Brothers and Sisters](#) and [Cross Cultural Adoption: How to Answer Questions from Family, Friends and Community](#).

Do you need solutions to sibling rivalry? Help awaits you in [Understanding Sibling Rivalry](#). This book gets an A+ from me because it includes a chapter about sibling issues in adoptive families!

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Perhaps you are looking for children's books to help open discussion? Listed below are some favorite children's books:

- [A Pocket Full of Kisses](#)
- [The Lapsnatcher](#)
- [Emma's Yucky Brother](#)
- [Don't Despair on Thursdays: A Children's Grief Management Workbook](#)
- [What to do When You Worry Too Much: A Kid's Guide to Overcoming Anxiety](#)
- [When I Feel Angry](#), [When I Feel Sad](#), [When I Feel Jealous](#)

Do you need more children's books? Visit [Magination Press](#) or [Tapestry Books](#).

Of course, you'll want to know the positive aspects of combining typical children with adopted children with histories of trauma. You'll find a bunch of positives in my article, "Yes", There are Positives for the Typical Kids!

Do you still need more information to help your typical children? There is always *Brothers and Sisters in Adoption* which provides a comprehensive look at brothers and sisters-to-be at each step of the adoptive process! In essence, the book is the family's journey through the adoption process. Each member of the adoptive family is highlighted, and solutions are provided in two big chapters to help each – parents, brothers, sisters and the adoptee – thrive and flourish!

If you still want more, take a look at other articles I've written,

Sibling Rivalry in Adoptive Families

Having Fun in Adoptive Families: Not an Oxymoron!

Psychological "Fit": A Place Where Parents, Brothers, Sisters and the Adoptee must come Together

Inside Transracial Adoption: White Siblings in Transracial Families

Promoting Sexual Safety in Adoptive Families

Where are the Support Groups for Typically-Developing Children?

Typical Children Afloat on a Sea of Grief

This is Not the Brother or Sister I Expected: The Need to Prepare the Typical Children