

Why Love Isn't Enough: Part Two - Neglect

This is the second article in the eight-part series, *Why Love Isn't Enough: The Potential Risks Involved in Adopted from Home or Far Away*.

By Arleta James, PCC

This is another in a series of posts on related challenging topics. You may want to print this post or others in the series. There are eight topics total. Review the resources that are embedded within the articles. Keep them handy! They will make valuable references post-adoption. As you educate yourself, ask, "What does this information mean for me as the parent?" "What will this mean for the children I already parent?" "What does this mean for the child I am adopting?"

Neglect affects both the domestic and the inter-country adoptee. As I wrote in my article, *Neglect: There is No Such Thing as "a Little"*, (see "Articles" on my website) we really need to understand that the impact of this trauma has serious consequences that don't always vanish when the child is moved to a loving, healthy home!

Neglect comes from a lack of experience. In fact, neglect means that the child lives in a chronic state of hunger, filth, and loneliness. The neglected child is not provided the food, clothing and shelter needed. Furthermore, neglect may involve simply ignoring the child; failing to respond to his pleas; leaving him to his own devices; failing to stimulate his senses by talking to him, carrying him about, encouraging his exploration of his world. Neglect may also include lack of medical care and/or mental health services as well as providing poor supervision, no supervision, or leaving the child in the care of someone who is not capable. For example, a ratio of 1 orphanage staff to 5 or more infants or toddlers is not sufficient and creates a neglectful situation. This would be like having quintuplets—only your mother, mother-in-law, sisters, aunts, friends, etc. aren't available to help out!

As an international example,

Brittney arrived in America after thirteen months in a Chinese orphanage. She uttered no sounds. She was unable to crawl or walk. She did not reciprocate facial expressions or smiles. She rarely cried as a means of informing her adoptive parents of her needs. She was used to a life of lying in a crib; waiting for a bottle, waiting for potty time, waiting to fall asleep, etc. She was accustomed to a change in caregivers with each eight hours that passed. She was not used to having two loving caregivers who would respond to her cues. She was certainly not familiar with adults who desired to play with her and nurture her.

Study the photos below provided courtesy of adoptive families whose children are from China, Russia and Kazakhstan. What do these children see from their cribs? Who is talking to them? Who is holding them? Do they have adequate toys to facilitate development? Do they have adequate opportunity and space to move—to develop muscle tone, and to achieve milestones (i.e., rolling over, walking, babbling, talking, reaching, grasping, etc.)? What do they hear? How often are they allowed out of their cribs? Do adults facilitate any type of learning or play? How do the children look? What do you think their perceptions are of adults? What type of intervention will you need post-adoption to help a child who has been institutionalized?





As a domestic example,

*The police removed 4-year-old **Robert** and his birth brother from their birthparents due to reports of physical abuse. Upon entering the home, police saw cockroaches scatter. There were piles of dirty clothing, which served as the beds for Robert and his siblings. The cupboards were empty. There was no running water. A bucket, located behind the house, was being used as a toilet.*

Robert was removed from a living situation similar to the one below. Again, the photos are courtesy of an adoptive family. What do kids like Robert learn in such a home?



Neglect causes children to lack trust in caregivers. It damages their sense of self. Neglect may also involve malnutrition and failure to thrive. It can lead to developmental delays in all domains of development—cognitive, social, emotional and physical. These children need immediate stimulation—nurture—upon being adopted or placed into foster care. ***We need to go back with deliberateness and provide the neglected child with the experiences missed—no matter what the child's age at time of placement with a healthy adoptive family.*** We cannot expect that he or she will "grow out of it." See my article, *Nurture: The Ring that Holds the Keys* for ways to stimulate the child who experienced pre-adoptive deprivation.

Prospective adoptive parents are encouraged to read [Parenting the Adopted Child](#) and [Attaching in Adoption](#) or [Brothers and Sisters in Adoption](#) to comprehend the long-term effects of neglect on their son or daughter-to-be.

Further, neglect and pre-natal substance exposure are believed to be the main culprits in the development of Sensory Processing Disorder (SI.) SI is caused by the brain's inability to accurately process information coming in through the senses—eyes, ears, skin and nose. Humans need accurate sensory data to function. The child with SI is overwhelmed easily, aversive to touch, hears sounds too loudly, lacks depth and field perception, etc. Trips to the store, parties, the school playground, and so on are difficult for the SI child to navigate. The child's fun and family outings are interrupted by this disorder. Check out the [Sensory Processing Disorder Foundation](#) or [Sensational Kids: Hope and Help for Kids with Sensory Processing Disorder](#) before you new son or daughter arrives.

In conclusion, the neglected child will arrive much "younger" than his or her chronological age. This has implications for every facet of adoptive family life—birth order, sibling relationships, expectations, education, social skills, daily living tasks, behavior, and so on! The adoptive family must be prepared to access an array of services to bring this child into

accord with his actual age. The neglected child will also arrive with significant control issues—even if adopted at a young age. In his mind, he survived on his own. He may not know how to relate to or appreciate a loving Mom, Dad, brother or sister. Acquiring new parenting tools will be essential to managing the day-to-day control battles. Love will not be enough to earn the trust of the child deprived beyond what any child should ever experience!

References:

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2001.) *Understanding the effects of maltreatment on early brain development: A bulletin for professionals.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/focus/earlybrain/earlybrain.pdf>

Cook, Alexander, Margaret Blaustein, Joseph Spinazzola and Bessell van der Kolk, Bessell. (Eds.) (2003.) *"Complex trauma in children and adolescents."* National Child Traumatic Stress Network. <http://www.NCTSNet.org>

Gray, Deborah. (2007.) [Nurturing Adoptions: Creating Resilience After Neglect and Trauma.](#) London: Jessica-Kingsley Publishers

Karr-Morse, R. & M.S Wiley,. (1997). [Ghosts from the nursery. Tracing the roots of violence.](#) New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press.

Shonkoff, J.P. & D.A. Phillips, (2000). [From neurons to neighborhoods. The science of early childhood development.](#) Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press

Siegel, Daniel. (2001.) [The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape Who We Are.](#) Guilford Press.