



ADOPTING AN OLDER CHILD - A JOYOUS WAY TO PARENT.

We would like to share our experience of adopting an 8 year old girl from China.

We made the decision to adopt an older child after reading about the many successful older child adoptions in America on the Yahoo chat room - AOK-China-2

We already had two children, with a six year age gap between them. We did not want to do the very young child adoption thing again, but wanted more children. We figured that adopting an older child would be hard work but then so are very young children!

Actually in some ways it was not so very different, but it is scarier when you have an 8 year old behaving like a two year old, even when all the books tell you that this will happen - fortunately that time passed.

We also thought it would be helpful that the child attended school part time, so we would get a break, and establish school as part of the routine.

I cannot put into words how wonderful it was to meet our new daughter for the first time. I suppose it is that caring instinct that kicks in when we meet vulnerable children. That was certainly a small part of it; we loved her completely from that very first moment. She has always felt like our child even though I have missed so many years with her.

THE CHALLENGES - This is a brief summary of the main challenges that we faced.

Sibling rivalry- I think that because we had been so focused on how were we going to attach to our new daughter and how could she would learn to attach to us, we didn't do sufficient home work on sibling rivalry, and therefore did not handle situations as well as perhaps we might. Having been so excited and looking forward to a new big sister our younger daughter decided within two days that she did not want a big sister, and that she would have to go back. It took many months for them to build a loving sister bond.

Our new daughter was delightful until she had to do something that she did not want to do. I.e. clean teeth, go to bed etc. She wanted to be in total control of everything, and had no patience; if she wanted something it had to be done now, this minute, and she was very, very persistent. We think that this behaviour was learnt because in the SWI there were lots of children to not many helpers, so if something didn't get done now it would be forgotten and never happen.

Meals were difficult as she has found English food difficult to swallow, I found cooking all the extra Chinese food hard, as I am not a good cook.

The language barrier was actually ok and no major problem. She only spoke four words of English, and our Chinese is of a similar standard. This actually helped attachment, in that we had to look at each other and to use sign language; pretty soon we could understand her better than anyone else and that was good for her integration into the family. Within about 5 months of her arrival she could understand everyday English and 9 months later we could have deep conversations about how she was feeling.

There were many little things that we did to help her settle in to the family and cope with the massive and extremely rapid changes she had to cope with.

Food- I cooked lots of food that was as near as we could get to the food she had eaten in China, but also had to take into account the needs of the other children.

- Re-babied her using bottle, dummies, nappies, rocked, swaddled, smell lotion on hands and feet.
- Put her to sleep in our bed, because the parent smells are there. We spent at least one hour every night in bed together playing games reading and talking.
- Lots of family fun times, playing games, walks, beach, cycle rides
- We tried not to panic - time is a great healer; she had a lot to adjust to.
- We had many stand-offs which were hard, as it would appear to stop attachment and break bonds that were beginning to form, but we felt that it was necessary that she learnt the rules and became well mannered so that we could have happy family times and therefore in the end, have a good attachment.

Now the girls get on well, they chat, play and are generally supportive of each other, save sweets cake etc for each other.

Our daughter is obedient, happy loving, caring, funny.

To sum-up we are blessed with three gorgeous children one bio, one adopted at under one year of age, and one adopted at 8 years old. Each has been a different experience but equally **amazing**.

To see our older child adoptee thrive settle and enjoy life and all the beautiful things around her is wildly rewarding. She loves being part of a family.

Please think carefully about older child adoption. After an initial difficult settling in period these girls do very well.

Older child adoption is a joyous way to parent.