

# Facilitator's Guide

MODULE 2

# Equipped to Love

Supporting Adoptive  
*and Foster Families in the Church*



# “Why” and “How”

## MODULE 1

Why children need adoptive families or a temporary home through foster care

- Reasons why children need adoptive families
- Reasons a child may need a temporary home through foster care

How to support and encourage adoptive and foster families

- What you can do to help

## MODULE 2

Why interactions with these children need to look different

- What defines a child from a “hard place?”
- What are some potential effects of experiencing these hardships?

How to interact with children who have been adopted and children in care

- “Do’s and don’ts” in interacting with a child who has been adopted or a child in care—The “DON’TS”
- “Do’s and don’ts” in interacting with a child who has been adopted or a child in care—The “DO

## MODULE 3

Why these children act differently

- Understanding attachment (attachment cycle)  
Delays and differences

## MODULE 4

How to meet the unique needs of the children

- Defining and responding to needs

## MODULE 5

Why there is a need for overall sensitivity

- Sensitivity to emotional needs of adoptive and foster parents
- Sensitivity toward children

How to show sensitivity toward parents and children

- Language sensitivity
- Respecting boundaries

## MODULE 6

Why there is a need for parenting differently


- Understanding differences
- Attachment Parenting vs. Traditional Parenting

How to help families in Attachment Parenting

### Connect

#### **Facilitator:**

**Say:** Children who are in foster care or who have been adopted almost always come from histories of trauma, abuse, or neglect. These difficult, early life experiences can have long-term negative effects.

-  **DIVIDE THE LARGE GROUP INTO SMALLER GROUPS.** Give each group one of the two scenarios from Module 2, Handout 1. Ask them to answer the question at the end of the scenario and to be prepared to share their answer with the large group.

#### **Facilitator:**

-  **COME BACK TOGETHER AND SHARE SOME RESPONSES.**

**Say:** “Trauma in children’s pasts can sometimes be dramatic and at other times be very subtle. The results and reactions to that trauma can as well be dramatic or subtle. We want to take a deeper look into the effects of these types of circumstances on children. Stress, trauma, and neglect in the prenatal period or in the early childhood years of a child’s life will have lasting effects on the way that child perceives herself and the world around her, and these tragic experiences can deeply affect the way that child acts and reacts.”

Using the information below and Listening Guide provided (Module 2, Handout 2), present the information below in a mini-lecture/discussion format. Participants will learn about the potential effects of hardship and trauma.

### Explore

**What are some potential effects of experiencing these hardships and trauma?**

### **A child may have developmental delays.**

- Developmental delays include physical delays, speech delays, emotional delays, cognitive delays, and social delays.
- A general rule of thumb is that for every year a child has been in an orphanage, he or she will be emotionally delayed about 6 months.
- Repeated abuse and prolonged neglect affect the short-term and long-term development of a child's brain, as well as the child's ability to interact with the world around him.
- Keep in mind that the physical age of a child does not represent his emotional or developmental age (age in years ≠ age in maturity).

### **A child may exhibit challenging behaviors**

- Manipulation, control issues, aggression, attachment difficulties, sleep issues, food-related issues, grief, trust issues, sexually acting out, sensory issues, jealousy, overly demanding of the parent's attention, pushing the parent/caregiver away, etc.
- If a child does not know that he can have his needs met, he will stop asking (and seek to meet those needs on his own) or he will ask in inappropriate ways (using his behavior).
- Keep in mind that many of these behaviors are coping mechanisms or survival techniques that the child has developed over time. Train yourself to see these behaviors in that light instead of jumping to the conclusion that the child is simply being defiant.
- Be aware that every behavior has a purpose and that there is a need behind every behavior. Many times if you can meet the hidden need, the behavior goes away.  
For example, a child who is acting out because he needs attention – if you intentionally give the child attention, he may stop acting out in order to get it because he learns he can depend on you to provide it for him.

### **A child may have a limited capacity to give and receive nurture**

- Children sometimes struggle to forge emotional attachments to others, often because of serious disruption in their early relationships.

### **A child may be easily stressed**

- Most adopted children or children in care have a hyperactive stress response.
- These children cannot control how their brains respond to a threat, regardless of whether the threat is real or imagined. In response to being overwhelmed or overstimulated, or in response to a real or imaginary threat, a child will react in one of three ways: fight, flight, or freeze.
- Because of the trauma they have experienced, these children live in a heightened and continual state of stress or fear. Therefore, these children live in “fight, flight, or freeze” mode. Fear often drives a child to misbehave. When a child feels threatened or out of control, he feels the need to try to take control of his circumstances. He makes efforts to regain control by using negative behaviors, which is often perceived as disobedience or defiance. In reality, the child is likely only grasping at whatever he can to help him feel safe; he feels safe and less threatened when he feels like he is in control. The high levels of stress and fear found in these children’s brains affect how they see the world and respond to it.

### **A child may be easily stressed**

- When children cannot explain what has happened in their lives, they often blame themselves for their circumstances. Because children feel like what has happened to them is their fault, they are extra sensitive to shame.

### **A child may have strong negative beliefs**

- These children may believe things like, “I cannot trust anyone” or “The world is not a safe place” or “I cannot love anyone”.
- These are deep beliefs that do not change quickly... healing takes time!

**Say:** “Because we know that these children are different at a fundamental level both biologically and emotionally, we have to tailor our interactions to their unique needs. Here are some general guidelines for what to do and not to do as you relate to them.”

- ❏ DISTRIBUTE THE PARTICIPANT LISTENING GUIDE (MODULE 2, HANDOUT 3) AND
- ▶ PLAY VIDEO “HOW TO INTERACT WITH CHILDREN WHO HAVE BEEN ADOPTED AND CHILDREN WHO ARE IN CARE.”

## Apply

### **Facilitator:**

-  **DIVIDE THE LARGE GROUP INTO 6 SMALL GROUPS.** Give each group one of the following church program settings (Sunday School class/small group, All church Worship Service, Children’s Worship, Children’s weekday fellowship with games and food, Church preschool/nursery, and Recreation/Sports program).

**Say:** “Based upon what you have learned in this session, make a list of 3-4 modifications you can imagine might have to be made in your assigned setting to accommodate a child coming from a hard place. Be prepared to share your list with the group.

Once groups have completed their list, have each group share their suggested modifications and write them on the board.

### **Ask the following question for reflection:**

- Q What one modification do you feel equipped to start applying immediately in your interactions with these children? (Encourage the class not to be overwhelmed by the number of changes that they can envision. The key is committing to making one change at a time followed by another. A series of small changes made one at a time can add up to dramatic results that benefit children coming from the hard places and their families.)*

## Pray

- Pray that God will guide the group’s interactions with these children.
- Pray that the Lord would heal these children from the trauma they have experienced and that He would use their adoptive and foster families, as well as the Body of Christ in this church, to do that.
- Pray that He would give wisdom and discernment to individuals in the church to help them love and serve these children and families well – so that the relationships between these children and their families are strengthened and not harmed.

### Scenario 1

Imagine a mother who is trying to decide between abortion, parenting, and placing her child for adoption. She may feel ill-equipped to parent and unsure where the resources would come from that could enable her to parent her child. She may not have any family support or maybe her family is pressuring her to do something that she doesn't feel is right for her child. This mother would be living in a state of constant stress, which is harming her baby's development. Her child senses and is affected by the stress chemicals of his birth mother prenatally. This negatively impacts the child's development.

*Q What on-going effects can you imagine this scenario might result in for this child?*

### Scenario 2

Imagine a child living with his mother who is never home to care for him. His basic needs are not met and he often wanders the streets alone. When his mother does come home, she is tired, stressed, and often under the influence of alcohol. It is not uncommon for her to hit her son repeatedly. Although his mother hits him, the child loves his mother and wants to please her. Eventually, a neighbor calls the local police. A few days later, the police stop by the home, pick up the child, and take him to an orphanage. Not much is explained to the child about what is happening or why. The orphanage the child is taken to is overcrowded and understaffed. The child misses his mother and wonders if she is okay. No one gives him any information about her or lets him know when or if he will see her again. It is hard for the child to make friends at the orphanage because he has never really had friends and the other children all already know each other. He also has trouble adjusting to school because he has never regularly attended school before. Even though it is difficult at first, after time, living in the orphanage becomes the child's new normal. He likes going to his school and makes a couple of special friends. Although it is nothing fancy, he knows he will receive three meals each day and have a place to sleep at night. His life there is predictable and feels safe.

*Q What on-going effects can you imagine this scenario might result in for this child?*



## What are some potential effects of experiencing these hardships and trauma?

A child may have \_\_\_\_\_.

- Developmental delays include \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_.
- A general rule of thumb is that for every year a child has been \_\_\_\_\_, he or she will be emotionally delayed about \_\_\_\_\_.
- \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ affect the short-term and long-term development of a child's brain, as well as the child's ability to interact with the world around him.
- Keep in mind that the \_\_\_\_\_ of a child does not represent his \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ age (age in years ≠ age in maturity).

## A child may exhibit challenging behaviors

- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- If a child does not know that he can have his needs met, he will \_\_\_\_\_ (and seek to meet those needs on his own) or he will ask in \_\_\_\_\_ (using his behavior).
- Keep in mind that many of these behaviors are coping \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ that the child has developed over time. Train yourself to see these behaviors in that light instead of jumping to the conclusion that the child is simply being \_\_\_\_\_.
- Be aware that every behavior has a \_\_\_\_\_ and that there is a \_\_\_\_\_ behind every behavior. Many times if you can meet the hidden need, the behavior goes away.

For example, a child who is acting out because he needs attention – if you intentionally give the child attention, he may stop acting out in order to get it because he learns he can depend on you to provide it for him.

### **A child may have a limited capacity to give and receive nurture**

- \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **A child may be easily stressed**

- Most adopted children or children in care have a \_\_\_\_\_ stress response.
- These children cannot control how their brains respond to a threat, regardless of whether the threat is real or imagined. In response to being overwhelmed or overstimulated, or in response to a real or imaginary threat, a child will react in one of three ways: fight, flight, or freeze.
- Because of the trauma they have experienced, these children live in a heightened and continual state of stress or fear. Therefore, these children live in “\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, or \_\_\_\_\_” mode. Fear often drives a child to misbehave. When a child feels threatened or out of control, he feels the need to try to take control of his circumstances. He makes efforts to regain control by using negative behaviors, which is often perceived as disobedience or defiance. In reality, the child is likely only grasping at whatever he can to help him feel safe; he feels safe and less threatened when he feels like he is in control. The high levels of stress and fear found in these children’s brains affect how they see the world and respond to it.

### **A child may be sensitive to shame**

- When children cannot explain what has happened in their lives, they often blame themselves for their circumstances. Because children feel like what has happened to them is their fault, they are \_\_\_\_\_ to shame.

### **A child may have strong negative beliefs**

- These children may believe things like, “I cannot \_\_\_\_\_ anyone” or “The world is \_\_\_\_\_ a safe place” or “I cannot \_\_\_\_\_ anyone”.
- These are deep beliefs that do not change quickly... healing takes \_\_\_\_\_!

## The “don’ts and do’s” in interacting with a child who has been adopted or a child in care

### Don’ts

1. Don’t meet the needs or wants of the child.
  - a. Don’t shower the child with gifts.
2. Don’t ask questions about the child’s history.
3. Don’t lavish attention and affection on the new child initially.
4. Don’t encourage the child to come to you and leave his parents’ side.
5. Don’t forget about or ignore the other children in the family.

### Do’s

1. Do let the parents train and teach the child while you reinforce.
2. Do ask questions
3. Do initially keep your distance from the child.

4. Do redirect the child to the parents.

Note: For children in foster care, find out what they call their foster parents and use that name when talking about them.

5. Do take the parents or guidance on interacting.
6. Do allow the adoptive or foster parents to initially be only ones as authority figures, providers, encouragers, comforters, etc.

**7. Do be mindful that we do not know these children's background.**

Note: It is good to remember to ask permission to touch a child.

**8. Do make exceptions when necessary.**

**9. Do protect the child's story.**

**10. Do show patience and grace.**

## The “don’ts and do’s” in interacting with a child who has been adopted or a child in care

### Don’ts

1. Don’t meet the \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ of the child.
  - a. Don’t \_\_\_\_\_ the child with gifts.
2. Don’t ask \_\_\_\_\_ about the child’s \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Don’t lavish \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ on the new child initially.
4. Don’t encourage the child to \_\_\_\_\_ to you and \_\_\_\_\_ his parents’ side.
5. Don’t forget about or \_\_\_\_\_ the other children in the family.

### Do’s

1. Do let the parents \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ the child while you reinforce.
2. Do \_\_\_\_\_ questions
3. Do initially keep your \_\_\_\_\_ from the child.
4. Do \_\_\_\_\_ the child to the parents.

Note: For children in foster care, find out what they call their foster parents and use that name when talking about them.
5. Do take the parents or \_\_\_\_\_ on interacting.
6. Do \_\_\_\_\_ the adoptive or foster parents to initially be \_\_\_\_\_ as authority figures, providers, encouragers, comforters, etc.

**7. Do be mindful that we do not \_\_\_\_\_ these children's background.**

Note: It is good to remember to ask permission to touch a child.

**8. Do make \_\_\_\_\_ when necessary.**

**9. Do protect the child's \_\_\_\_\_.**

**10. Do show \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.**

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