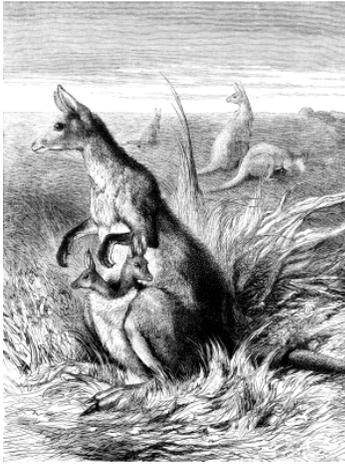


Cocooning™ With Your Newly Adopted Child

By Patti M. Zordich, Ph.D.



Developing trust and security is the first building block in children's social-emotional development. Children with this foundation have more positive relationships with their parents, learn more easily, get along better with peers, and manage conflict better than children without this foundation.

Take a minute and imagine leaving everyone and everything you have ever known to live with strangers in a strange place, then having to do it all over again but now you are with strangers in a foreign country with a language you don't understand. This describes the minimum of an adopted orphaned child's early experience. What emotions do you imagine you would feel in her shoes? Fear, anger, sadness, loneliness and hopelessness? Yes, these emotions are typical. It is important to remember that your child *has* lived with these emotions for most of her life, *is* living with them right now and *will* be living with them to some degree for a long time.

Cocooning™ is one of the most important things you can do to develop a secure, trusting, strong relationship between you and your newly adopted child. Cocooning also helps you become familiar with your new child, her temperament, abilities and challenges. Cocooning helps newly adopted children adjust to a new home and family members. Ultimately, Cocooning helps parents provide a safe haven for their new child.

The following are 5 steps for Cocooning. These steps apply to day-to-day life with your newly adopted child for 0 months to 1 year following homecoming.

- 1. Keep your child with you and stay close to home.** Be sure to keep your newly adopted child with one parent and stay home as much as possible. This is difficult for most people, especially when you have other children. There are things that must be taken care of outside of the home, such as taking siblings to and from their activities, doctor's appointments, shopping. It's important, however, to make every effort to keep these outings *with* your newly adopted child to a minimum for a while and it's essential that one parent keep the child close by most of the time. Try to find help from friends, family and/or church to help you with these outside activities. I've found that it's helpful for the family to assemble a "respite team" of people who want to help orphans but don't feel called to adopt.
- 2. Keep new toys and music simple.** Early developmental play is essential for healthy emotional & cognitive development. Children adopted out of orphan care or foster care often missed out on this type of play. Choose toys that are appropriate for 0 - 1 year of age, no matter the age of your child. Keep the number of toys to a minimum. Toys such as shape sorters, pull toys and blocks provide versatility, durability, attractiveness, and ease of use, limits sensory over-stimulation and help

give the child a sense of self. These toys are not intended to be educational. Yes, it will help brain development, but the purpose of these toys is to help your child develop a secure attachment with you and to begin to heal her emotional wounds. Your sensitivity and responsiveness and the pleasurable, relaxed encounters cuddling and playing with these toys will make this possible.

Avoid electronic toys, videos, television and other electronic devices such as iPads during this time.

3. **Be present with your child.** Watch, listen, be quiet. Being present in the moment is an unknown experience for many Americans. More typically we are distracted by our "to do list," worries or expectations - *anything* but the present moment. To be present in the moment take a few slow, gentle breaths in through your nose, filling your abdomen and out quietly through our mouth. Do this once for every letter of your name. Notice the sights, sounds, and physical sensations you're experiencing in the moment. When you're truly *present* with your child, you are allowing her to be just as she is right in this moment. You let go of expectations for your child or yourself. You marvel at your child and at yourself.
4. **Look beyond negative behavior.** Instead of viewing negative behavior as manipulation and defiance, try to see your child's unmet early developmental needs being expressed: fear of abandonment, anger at being abandoned shame of rejection.

Tommy, a four year old boy who was 13 months old on his Gotcha! Day, was feeling scared and anxious about because his mother had just left for an overnight trip. Not understanding these emotions *and* being unable to express these emotions, he became distractible, overactive and defiant. Kneeling down beside his son, his father stated, "You have some big feelings inside." Tommy put his hand on dad's knee and leaned against him. His father added, "I wonder if you might have some feelings about Mommy going away." Tommy said meekly, "She won't come back." Dad then proceeded to reassure Tommy that mommy would return, told him that he also missed her and put a her framed photo in a spot Tommy could see frequently. He also stayed closer to Tommy and spent a little more time playing and reading with him until mother returned.

Just like this father, when your child is acting out, consider what needs might be underlying this negative behavior. Provide her a sense of safety by comforting and nurturing her *while* teaching limits in a kind manner.

5. **Keep Cocooning time simple and frequent, but not continuous.** Both you and your child need a break from each other.

Cocooning is simple, but how easy it is depends on the individual adult. If you are comfortable with being in the moment, at ease with your child and patient, then

Cocooning will come easily. If you have high expectations for yourself and your child, find it difficult to be still and playing with children is a little out of your comfort zone, then Cocooning will be more challenging for you. However, follow these simple steps and read *Gotcha! Welcoming Your Adopted Child Home*, and you *can* be a natural!

Both *Gotcha! Welcoming Your Adopted Child Home*, by Patti M. Zordich, Ph.D. and newadoptionresources.com provide more detailed guidance about Cocooning. Check them out today! Dr. Patti M. Zordich is available to speak to your group or for consultations. Just call 919.380.1000 or email her at office@trypsych.com

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