

Adoption Issues to Be Aware Of

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You may have heard the news story not long ago – an adoptive family in Tennessee put their 7-year-old Russian-born boy on an unaccompanied one-way flight back to Russia, explaining that he had terrorized their family since coming to live with them. Now, the world is in an uproar over their seemingly heartless and careless act.

This family's decision to abandon their child is totally unacceptable, I know. But I also know that adoptions can go haywire. Adopted kids may or may not have any more problems than any other group of kids, but I think they often present a different "mix" of problems. And those problems can often be more severe, with behavior escalating to the point where a child is out of control and dangerous to himself and others around him or her.

There's no question that typical adolescent issues like belonging, fitting-in, rejection, connection, acceptance, and peer-relationships can become particularly prominent for some adopted kids. But there are other factors that can cause just as many problems for the child and the adoptive parents.

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If the adopted child was born out of a high-risk pregnancy, there is higher probability that they were prenatally exposed to alcohol, tobacco and other harmful drugs. These impediments aren't always unmanageable, nor are they untreatable. But just knowing that there might be issues down the road as a result of that exposure might prepare you for dealing with it later on. Many kids given up for adoption have come from high-risk pregnancies, exposing them to potential for developmental delays, impulsive choices, poor choices, attention deficit, hyperactivity, learning disabilities, and emotional disorders. There may be a higher risk as well for issues such as Reactive Attachment Disorder, other attachment issues, learning disabilities, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), logic sequence problems, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, or Attention Deficit/Hyperactive Disorder.

Adoptive parents may also have to deal with anger and rages in their adopted child, just as the Tennessee parents have claimed. As a result, adopted kids might have to attend a special school, have special teachers, or need tutoring. All of this can be expensive and may go on for years. To make matters worse, an adopted child may not hug you or express love or appreciation the way you want.

But There's Hope in Every Adoption

Am I an expert on adoption? No, not me. But I enter the world of adoption "from the other side" because I know and have helped more than 700 adopted teens who have come to live in our Heartlight residential counseling program, and I have listened to the 10,000 questions they brought with them. My search for answers to those 10,000 questions has led me to my own conclusions about problems that can come up with adopted kids. Sometimes their struggles may be the result of prenatal issues, but mostly it's because we're all people who carry some personal baggage, and we bring our wounded hearts into our relationships. We all are sinners in need of a Savior ... and in need of help. I am convinced that no problem is too great for God to resolve, and no relationship too damaged for Him to repair.

I believe that God in His sovereignty places orphaned or abandoned children with families on purpose. And what I have discovered is that conflicts that arise from adoption issues, whether on the side of parents or of the adopted child, can be overcome. God has a way of taking conflict and using it for our own good, and for deepening the relationship between parent and child. God doesn't give up on us, nor does He send us back to where we came from. There are times that I believe that working through the conflict helps everyone involved move toward wholeness, and to deeper relationships.

It is good to understand the issues that surround adoption, for understanding brings a family to a different response, a calmer approach to handling conflict, and a platform to learn new ways for engaging with a child.

So, Why Adopt?

I want people to adopt. In fact, I sit on the board of an international adoption agency. But I want adoptive parents to know full well the issues that might come up, invade, or enter the relationship with their child. Perhaps if the parents in Tennessee had known more about the potential pitfalls, perhaps they would have been better prepared for the potential for struggle.

If you plan to adopt, just remember this; there is more to the portrait of your adopted child's life than you will be able to see. You'll play a very important role in that portrait, and the presence of conflict, disillusionment, or hardship won't negate the purpose of the portrait. I believe that most change in a person's life come through conflict, difficulty, and hardship. I also believe it is worth the struggle so that kids can live in families.

God bless those who choose to give a child a new home and a new family. If you are an adoptive family, may your home be a haven of hope for a child who needs you; may God's beautiful provision for orphans reach down to you as well, and may He give you the strength to work through any future struggles or difficulties. And, as always, if I can help, please don't hesitate to call.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mark Gregston is an author, speaker, radio host, and the founder and director of Heartlight, located in Hallsville, Texas. For more information and helpful resources for moms and dads, check out our website. It's filled with ideas and tools to help you become a more effective parent. Go to www.heartlightministries.org. Or read other helpful articles by Mark, at www.markgregston.com. You can also call Heartlight directly at (903) 668-2173. Hear the Parenting Today's Teens broadcast on a radio station near you, or download the podcast at www.parentingtodaysteens.org.