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Preparing Siblings for an Older-Child Adoption

Our expert provides guidelines to ensure a smooth transition when integrating a newly adopted older child into your family.

by [Gregory C. Keck, Ph.D.](#)

TAGS: [Older Child Adoption](#), [Siblings](#), [Talking with Kids About Adoption](#)



When you adopt an older child, you are right to consider all the children in the family, not just the child being adopted. When a new child comes into a family, the life of every family member is changed. And, if the child being considered for adoption has [behavior problems](#) or serious medical issues, the lives of the other children in the family will be interrupted, possibly dramatically.

First of all, be certain that the decision to adopt an older child comes from the desire to parent another child, not to “fix” a perceived family problem. For example, adopting an older child because you think your only child needs a sibling, or adopting a girl because you have three boys and have always wanted a daughter, will make matters more difficult down the road. (For more information on the decision to adopt an older child, see adoptuskids.org.)

Preparation

Let’s assume the decision to adopt has been made, and now you have one more member to integrate into the family. Initially, your children will be excited about the idea of a [new sibling](#). They are looking

forward to having a sister to play house with or a brother to shoot hoops with. Instead, they may find that their new sibling doesn't like anything but playing video games — alone. How parents can help:

- Adopt together. Make sure that everyone in the family, including the children, participate in the decision to adopt, the homestudy process, and pre-adoption training. Involving your children from the start will give them time to think about the adoption and to prepare for how the new sibling might affect their lives.
- Explain everything in advance. If their new sibling is going to arrive with problems from her previous life, your children need to be prepared. If the new child has developmental or medical needs, give them straightforward, age-appropriate information regarding his condition. If the child has a history of theft or family violence, explain the behaviors associated with such a background. Discuss the steps that will be taken to help the new child, as well as to protect them, after the child's arrival. Depending on your children's ages and developmental levels, you might take precautionary measures, such as baby monitors, separate bedrooms, off-limits rules for bedrooms, and/or alarms on doors, so everyone can sleep soundly and safely. Most things will work out over time, but the first goal is to ensure everyone's safety.

Homecoming and Beyond

While your children have to be respectful to their new sibling, don't expect them to have the empathy for him that you do. They are not going to "get it" when the newbie breaks or takes a favorite toy. They may need time to adjust — so give it to them. Saying, "You have to understand, he's had a hard life," won't work for a child who's thinking, "That's not my problem," or "And now, my life sucks!" Instead, let them know that you understand their feelings.

Clearly explain family rules, expectations, chores, and manners to the newly adopted child. (The other kids may be helpful in explaining some of these things.) Encourage all your children to explore their feelings in whatever way works for them, perhaps by attending a support group with like-minded children or by writing in a journal.

Identify activities that the entire family can enjoy together, activities that all the children can take part in. At the same time, try to give each child one-on-one time, taking each child out for dinner (alone with a parent) every once in awhile. If the siblings feel that their world has not been dramatically altered, their acceptance of the new kid will come more easily.

Maintain your family's rituals, day-to-day activities, and patterns of working together. Giving chores that can be shared may help, not only in getting things done, but also by having kids working together and developing a relationship. Sticking to routines gives every child a realistic view of family life from the outset. Although adoption always changes the dynamics of a family, your children will soon learn to love and bond with each other, as they become one family.