



ADOPTION EDUCATION, LLC

DISCIPLINING THE ADOPTED CHILD

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DISCIPLINING THE ADOPTED CHILD

Anger and Control Issues - Using Empathy to Reduce Anger Helps Parent and Child

By Christopher J. Alexander, PhD

Children who are adopted certainly don't have a monopoly on anger as an emotion. It is quite common, though, for this group of children to manifest anger in ways that can appear excessive, confusing, and threatening. While most children will protest if they are bothered or angered by something they don't like, it sometimes seems as if the anger expressed by adopted children is in excess of what we believe is called for at the time. This can include having an explosive outburst to seemingly minor things, such as not getting one's way, a parent arriving late, a casual remark, or an innocent touch.

Adoption specialists point out that adoptees often feel anger in response to being given away by birth parents, feeling like second class citizens, and feeling unworthy of having anything good happen to them. We must also stay mindful of the fact that many adoptees come from backgrounds where there is a family history of poor impulse control, psychiatric disorders, substance abuse, or other factors that can contribute to a poor modulation of emotions. Thus, when the child is angry, he may have little recognition or control over how intense his response is. Also, children who grew up in violent or chaotic environments had aggression and rage modeled for them and they quickly learn that it is an effective way of getting attention and perhaps even getting one's needs met.

As parents, we must always strike a balance between understanding possible causes of our children's rage, while taking care not to enter into power struggles or do things to harm or shame the child. This is incredibly difficult, as children are highly skilled at being able to identify and push our buttons! It is inevitable that children will make us angry.

Particularly if you are adopting an older child, he or she may come from a background where there weren't adequate limits set. The child feels entitled to doing or getting what he wants and resents it when the adoptive parents try to bring order and an alternative reality to the situation. Issues of trust are paramount with adopted children and many of these kids will resist trusting the adults who adopt them. While we recognize that our efforts to bring boundaries, safety, supervision, and guidance to children are in their best interest, they may perceive it as a threat to the foundation of their being. Many parents are surprised to find themselves in huge power struggles with very young children over basic requests such as telling a child to get ready for bed or to wash hands before dinner.

For many people, anger is expressed when they feel out of control. What I find with a lot of adoptees, though, is that they use anger to feel in control. This is why the child may react with anger or rage after a period of calm or when he has shared intimacy with a parent. This may trigger feelings of vulnerability in him, which he defends against by getting mad and physically or psychologically pushing you away. The anger is used to help him feel safe. When parents respond with anger, it confirms to the child that people can't be trusted and that the world is a threatening place.

But what if we respond to the child in the opposite way? When you're angry with a friend or partner, do you want them to battle back with you? Probably not. That just leaves you feeling discouraged and wondering why he or she doesn't understand you. What if, on the other hand, the person we were angry with said something like, "I can see how mad that makes you," or "You're really mad at me," or "That really hurt you?" Even if we are being irrational with our words and behaviors, there is a quality to that level of response that helps to diffuse the situation. Maybe a more balanced discussion of the issues can be had at a different time. But when

someone responds to our anger with compassion, we feel less defensive and we pull back from our attack.

In every presentation I do on raising adopted children, I emphasize the role that empathy has for these kids. All of us – children and adults—want to feel that someone understands our needs, confusion, and hurt. Given the isolation and alienation that so many adoptees feel inside, the importance of receiving empathic responses takes on heightened importance. Empathy communicates “I can see how you feel”. It doesn’t offer answers or solutions for painful feelings or events, but it communicates to the child that we can see into their hearts and minds and recognize the impact that things have on them. When parents offer empathy for a child’s anger, he often feels closer to them, as the parents convey that the relationship is strong enough to withstand his rage. Parents also communicate that the relationship they share with the child is more important than any conflict that is going on.

It is a good bet that your child knows what makes you angry, how to get you even more fired up, and in what ways you are likely to react. For a young being who feels so little control in life, imagine how powerful that must make him or her feel, knowing they can bring you to the boiling point without much effort on their part. Next, be aware of what your typical response to being angry is: are you the kind of person who says or does things to make other people feel bad when you’re angry? Are you likely to throw or kick things? Do you feel the need to discuss the event in minute detail at the time you and the other person are angry? Do you need to be alone, away from others when you are angry?

What is important about becoming aware of your own response to anger (in yourself or others) is your knowledge of what you are modeling or communicating to your child. If you want others to hurt inside when you are mad, what will the effect be on your child? If you want others to hurt inside when you are mad, what will the effect be on your child if you make comments that cause him to feel bad about himself? If you need to be alone when you are mad, how will you handle this need if you are raising a young child and it is just the two of you?

Other strategies that I find helpful in dealing with anger and power struggles include:

Try lowering your voice instead of raising it. Imagine the impact on the child of hearing the parent gently say, “If the trash is not taken out in the next five minutes, I will put the video games in storage for a week.” If a parent yells this, it sounds threatening. If, on the other hand, it is said in a matter-of-fact tone, the child receives the message, “Do as you will. I’m not going to battle with you. I trust you know the consequence for not complying.”

Recognize when you are most vulnerable. If you are likely to be rushed, tired, or on edge on certain days or at certain times, this increases the chance you will get angry and reactive at those moments. What can you do to add a buffer during these times? How can [you] reduce the stress? Will it help to wake up earlier, avoid cooking on certain nights, or tell your partner you need more of their help? Will you need to set limits in advance with your child, such as saying, ‘No TV’ or ‘No friends at the house’ during those times?

Don’t forget to breathe. When I’m angry, I hate hearing that one. But it really does work. Taking one second to breathe deeply or counting to five shifts the brain from ‘fight or flight’, to ‘focus’ (thinking of more rational responses). Remind yourself to breathe, focus attention, and to carefully think through what your reaction to stress/conflict will be.

Anticipate your child’s triggers. Oftentimes, it is possible to predict when your child will get angry. This might be on Monday morning when they have to shift away from weekend mode, on anniversaries or holidays due to the memories they raise, at bedtime, at mealtime, or when they have to do homework. When you can anticipate these events, you are in a better position to think

of how to defuse conflict before it arises. This might include giving the child advanced notice, such as, "I know tomorrow is your brother's birthday and it seems like that is always a rough day for you. What can we do in advance, to help make it a better day for all of us?"

Follow through afterward. Whether the conflict, power struggle, or rage episode with your child was major or minor, and whether it was expected (He always fights with me at bedtime) or unexpected, it is important to talk with your child about what happened. But do it after the tension has settled. For example, while bathing your child, tucking her in, or folding clothes together you can say, "You were really mad at me earlier when I said you couldn't have ice cream." Permit your child to share their thoughts or feelings, but try to educate him or her about the impact their words or actions have on others: "When you throw things like you did, it scares the dog and that's why he doesn't want to sleep in your bed." "It hurt my feelings when you called me that name. Clearly, you wanted me to feel bad and you succeeded." "That ice cream was your father's and he had been waiting all night to have it. It's important that we share in this family. Tomorrow, we'll go out and buy treats that we can all have." "I'm sorry I called you a brat. I don't think badly of you. Your behavior makes me crazy at times, but I still think you're the best kid in the world."

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Discipline with an Adoption Twist

By Deborah Moore

Based on the work of Doris Landry, MS with permission

How many times have you been in the check out line at your local grocer, calmly flipping through your favorite magazine, when the shrieking wail of a tantruming four-year-old echoes through the aisles? "I want candy NOW," he bellows, his face purple with rage, lying flat out on the floor, kicking and banging his legs into the linoleum. His mother, bending down on her knees, pleads with him to get up and 'be a good boy'. Near tears, she fights her own rage at her son's behavior, and feels humiliated and embarrassed. Finally, out of desperation and with gritted teeth, she tells him to get his candy fast, so they can get out of the store.

Before I had children, I self-righteously vowed that no child of mine would ever act that way, especially in public. I would never have children who were so demanding or who acted so inappropriately, and I would never give candy to my children just to get them to stop screaming. My children would be sweet, kind, and quiet, and would immediately obey every word from my mouth. It's amazing what a few years and two children later will do to change a person's perspective!

Now when I witness a child melting down in the candy aisle at the grocery store, I look with tremendous sympathy to the poor mother. I want to go up to her, put my arm around her shoulder, and tell her I know exactly how she feels. I want to offer her candy from the stash I keep in my purse for my own kids at all times!

Raising children is more difficult than it looks. Like it or not, our kids need boundaries, and it's our job to set them, and our job to enforce them. For me the area of discipline has proven to be one of the most challenging areas of adoption-parenting.

While waiting for our first referral, I read all the latest parenting books and thoroughly researched the most popular disciplinary techniques. I felt well prepared and ready to parent and assumed I would know exactly what to do with my oldest daughter when she came home from China at fifteen months old. I would know how to feed her when she was hungry, change her when she was wet, rock her to sleep when she was tired, and comfort her when she was hurt or sad. And for the most part, that was true. What I didn't expect, and didn't know how to deal with, was her intense need to be in control at all times. My baby wanted to be the boss!

How could such a tiny, beautiful child cause such havoc with her demands? Out came all the parenting books, and as our daughter grew older, we tried all of the discipline techniques we had read about: time-out, taking away toys and privileges, scolding and even spanking.

But our daughter didn't respond to the discipline methods at all like the 'experts' said she would. When we placed her in time-outs, she became terrified and clung to me as if I were her life line; when we scolded her, her eyes became empty and she hung her head in heart wrenching shame. Our loving disciplinary methods were not producing the results we had been 'promised' in all the books! Our methods only seemed to exacerbate our daughter's feelings of shame and loss, without correcting any of the bad behaviors that had prompted the correction in the first place. It was then that we realized that our daughter, like many adopted, post-institutionalized children, had some unique needs when it came to discipline.

Doris A. Landry, MS, LLP, a child psychologist who specializes in adoption issues in internationally adopted children, recognized the ineffectiveness of mainstream parenting books on post-institutionalized children. Doris created a new modality for adoptive parents, and called it Discipline with an Adoption Twist. There are many different types of disciplinary techniques, but all methods can be tweaked or 'twisted' to be most helpful for the adopted child.

Landry believes that the word discipline often brings to mind punishment for some offense or misbehaviors. But what discipline is really about is socialization and behavior regulation. Correct discipline, lovingly applied will build a life-long alliance between the parent and the child. Parents sometimes mistakenly view spanking or isolation of the child as appropriate discipline techniques, yet these methods fuel a child's feeling of anger toward the parents, and leaves the adopted child feeling tremendous shame.

Shame is not feeling that what I did was bad, but rather, that I am bad. Shame is a significant issue with adopted children. Shame/guilt is recognized as one of the seven core (lifelong) issues of adoption for all members of the triad: the adoptee, the birthmother and the adoptive parent. For the adopted child, shame is the sense that they deserve rejection, because there must be something wrong with them or what they did, for the loss of birth parents to occur. Deborah N. Silverstein and Sharon Kaplan Roszia, state in their article *Lifelong Issues in Adoption* that, "Adoptees suggest that something about their very being caused the adoption".

A child's sense of shame can inhibit attunement (the feeling of being 'at one') with his adoptive parents. If a child feels as though there is something intrinsically wrong with him-the 'real' reason why his birth parents left him-then why would his adoptive parents feel or do any differently?

Daniel A. Hughes, PhD, author of the acclaimed book, *Building the Bonds of Attachment, Awakening Love in Deeply Troubled Children* states, "When infants have experienced a lack of attunement and pervasive shame through neglect, they cannot be reassured that they have worth. For these poorly attached children, discipline is experienced as rejection and contempt."

One evening the behavior of my youngest daughter (adopted from China at ten months of age) prompted me to give her a 'time-out' on my bed, while I was folding laundry. At age five, she was fully aware of why she was being disciplined, yet she was wailing loudly and letting me know that she did not like being confined or corrected. After five minutes, I stopped folding laundry, sat on the bed and took her into my arms. Before I could utter a word, she laid her head on my shoulder, and cried "Mom, I must have done something really bad for her to leave me."

Where did that come from? We hadn't been talking about her birth parents, her adoption, or anything even closely related. But there it was, from her heart and thoughts, into words, shame coloring her countenance. We sat for [a] long time that evening, discussing her birth parents and the feelings she has about them and the reasons why they left her. Had I spanked her or isolated her in her bedroom for a time-out, I can only imagine what thoughts her sense of shame would have heaped on her small shoulders. Instead, because I was close by and stayed in tune with her during her 'time-out', I was privileged to be allowed inside her pain and confusion so I could help her understand the feeling for what it was. Being totally accepting of her and the feelings thoughts and behaviors are in harmony. That evening, I know my daughter felt total acceptance from me, and felt intrinsically that she was loved.

Doris Landry states that appropriate adoption-discipline tools allow parents to:

- State behavior expectations
- Stop a child's bad behavior
- Correct a child without shame
- Re-attune with a child

Our children are acutely aware of our non-verbal cues when we are disciplining them. They not only hear our words, they experience our facial expressions, the tone of our voice, and the hand gestures that we use. We mustn't forget that our children are more tuned into what we do and how we present ourselves, then by what we say. They need to sense our total commitment and empathy towards them during each episode of discipline, in order to obtain attunement.

There are times that our children need us to match their emotional experience. They need to see us involved with their feelings and pain, anger or disappointment that they are feeling. One way we can do this, is to match the intensity of their expressions. One day, when my daughter was screaming and out of control, I raised my voice, took on her feeling of frustration and yelled, *"I know you are so angry with mom right now. I feel your anger!"*

The pitch of my voice and the intensity I was exhibiting took her totally by surprise. She stopped screaming, and started talking with me instead. My sense was that she felt understood by me; that I felt the extent of her anger. This, of course, is not going to be appropriate every time you discipline your child. But it is helpful to keep this in your 'toolbox' of discipline techniques.

Different Kids, Different Tools

I need different tool-boxes for each of my children. Both of them spent an extensive part of their first year in an orphanage and that's about where the similarities of their needs end. A non-adoptive parent said to me a few months ago that she re-parents every single day. She has a 13 year-old and said what worked yesterday doesn't mean it will work today. A very simple statement, but one very comforting to me.

Keeping up with my ever-changing six year old has put more than a few gray hairs on this head. It seems as if I am constantly refilling my toolbox with new and different things to meet her needs. My second child is officially special needs (hearing impaired) but I don't need nearly so many techniques with her as with my first child. No one thing works for us every single time.
.....*Mary, mom of two from Eastern Europe*

The Extra Layer

On top of whatever method of discipline you choose, Landry suggests adding these three basic tools to dramatically increase its effectiveness. Successfully disciplining an adopted child takes the extra layer of adoption into consideration.

Understand. It is important for us parents to help our children understand the meaning of their actions. For instance, children who were hit, slapped, kicked or restrained in their orphanage may replicate those behaviors under duress, without understanding why. When a child misbehaves, and you can recognize where the behaviors comes from, it can be helpful to explain the relationship between his actions and his past.

Express empathy. With your empathy you can help a child see that while his behavior is bad, he is not bad. When you take him into your arms and engage in meaningful dialog about the 'why' of what happened, you are not condoning his misbehavior, but rather helping him understand the origin and the meaning of his behavior.

The Empathy Tool: Healing and Hugging

I've found that my kids react in a more positive way when I am seriously understanding of how really bad or ashamed they feel, deep down, when they do something wrong. My daughters more often have tears and need comforting when I go right to their feelings: "Oh, look at what happened; you must be feeling pretty bad about this."

I might continue to help my daughters understand the seriousness of whatever happened in a non-judgmental way, while addressing the sad/mad/scared inside feelings the child has over what they did. I do calmly/sadly/seriously express my own feelings if something of mine has been involved, or if they have hurt someone's feelings. When I use empathy, they feel worse about stuff on their own, than I would ever want to make them feel! They also like that I maintain control (it feels safe), and that I can help give them both emotional and concrete ways to go forward and self-regulate. They are then open to healing and hugging.

.....*Jean MacLeod*

Re-attune. The child's understanding and the parent's empathy together lead to a re-attunement between parent and child, allowing for the child to express sorrow for hurting the other person. He is then able to learn and change and to openly accept your guidance and correction.

Our children will try our patience and push us to our limits. They need to be corrected and disciplined like all other children. But because they were adopted, our children have needs and issues unique to them. The added layer of adoption, along with perhaps the added layer of being a post-institutionalized adoptee, adds some complexity to our discipline models. Before my daughters came home, I had planned to discipline straight from the book, with a one-size-fits-all approach. But once my kids arrived, I quickly realized that that was not going to work. Their need for correction and discipline was the same as every other child's, but the way I handled it needed to be different.

Their past experiences necessitated that I consider different models. Some of the best advice I ever received about disciplining my children, was to have a 'toolbox' of techniques. Landry, in her "Discipline with an Adoption Twist" workshop, outlines seven different discipline 'tools'. These are all basic, well-known methods, but with an explanatory adoption 'twist' for our children's extra layers.

Mommy or Daddy Time Outs

If your child's behavior has pushed every angry hot button you own, save your sanity and stop yourself from doing something you might regret. Give yourself a mommy (or daddy) time out and remove yourself from interaction with your child for a few important moments. Words to us: "I love you but I am very angry with your behavior. I need to go to my room and calm down for 10 minutes. After that, we will talk!"

The Toolbox

1-2-3 Magic. This book, written by Thomas W. Phelan, PhD, asserts that parents often treat children as little adults, and often spend way too much time trying to persuade our children that we are right. Parents talk too much and with too much emotion, which actually provokes the child. This can lead to yelling and even eventually to hitting. The 1-2-3 Magic philosophy:

- 1) A parent gives one explanation only.
- 2) A parent's authority is not negotiable.

After giving the one explanation, the parent then begins to count. If the misbehavior doesn't stop as a result of the explanation, the parent warns, "That's one". If the misbehavior continues, the parent says "That's two." If the child is still misbehaving the parent says, "That's three" and gives the child a time-out. The parent is not to argue with the child, or lecture the child. After the time-out, the child re-joins the family.

The Adoption Twist: Parents should not send the child off to another room as suggested in 1-2-3 Magic. Rather, by keeping them close and modeling calm, controlled behavior you help the child regulate by not allowing him to escalate. This method takes the emotion out of the discipline, which will help the child re-attune with the parent.

How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk. This popular book written by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish gives parents four techniques for successful listening, (a key piece of communication and attunement):

Listen with full attention. When you only half listen, children just give up even trying to talk with their parents. But when you give them your full attention, they feel special and want to talk with you even more.

Show a caring attitude. Children don't always want you to fix their problems. They may just need to know that you care about them and what they're feeling. You can often communicate your caring with just a word, such as "Oh" or "I see", or "Mmmm..." The child will know he was heard.

Deal with feelings, both the parents' and child's. How often do we as parents try to deny what our children are feeling? Our child will try to express emotion, and we quickly jump in telling him not to feel that way. Instead we need to help them deal with their feelings by naming those feelings. Statements such as "you are sad", "what a shock that was for you", or "you really cared about your friend" will help your child feel that you understand him.

You don't need to fix it. Don't try to solve the problem. Parents often try to explain things with adult reasoning. Telling a 2-year-old that you don't have any Toastie Crunchies in the house doesn't mean anything to him. All he knows is that he wants them now! Instead, give into the child's wishes and fantasy. How much easier it is for a child to go along with you when you fantasize right along with him about how wonderful a box of Toastie Crunchies would be. When mom wants it as much as he does, how can he argue?

Faber and Mazlish also offer help in gaining cooperation from our children. Parents can talk to their kids in such a way that the kids will naturally listen.

Describe the Problem. Simply stating the problem as you see it is much better than blaming, yelling, or coercing. The point is made without blame and without emotion. It does not put the child on the defensive. Instead of "*You haven't taken the dog out all day. You don't deserve to have a pet.*", try "*I see Rover pacing up and down near the door.*"

Use one word. Instead of yelling at your child again for walking out without her lunch, simply say 'lunch'. Again you don't express blame or accusation toward your child.

Talk about your feelings. Instead of yelling at your child for pulling on your sleeve, tell him calmly, "I don't like having my sleeve pulled". It is more difficult for a child to argue with how his behavior makes you feel.

The Adoption Twist: The goal of the Faber/Mazlish method is to help children change unacceptable behavior without making them feel threatened, attacked or rejected, and also to help parents learn to listen so our children feel genuinely heard. This is particularly important for the adopted child, who may have a heightened sensitivity to not being heard or understood. The parents need to be mindful of not falling into the adoptive parent discipline trap, and should avoid:

- Giving in to the child's demands out of fear that the child won't love them.
- Being overly dismissive of the feelings that an adoptive child is trying to express (not really listening).

Behavior Modification. This relies on rewarding positive behavior in order to increase the frequency of such behavior. Any behavior will increase if followed by something pleasant. The reward can be either material, verbal or time spent together. Parents need to be careful when using this approach, and consider whether not reaching a reward will wrongly affect their child's self-esteem, and if the system is reinforcing the correct behavior.

One way to use the behavior modification technique is with the use of a reward chart. Once the problem behavior has been identified and agreed upon by the parents, it then needs to be discussed and agreed upon by the child. Allowing your children to help select the rewards and help in designing the chart is usually greeted with great enthusiasm. It's important to set a start date, and commit to a consistent time of filling out the chart. For some kids, behavior modification doesn't work. If, after implementing this technique, you see that it is not working for your child,

then you need to question why. Perhaps it is because your child has significant control issues, or doesn't truly trust his parents to know what's best for him, both of which are not uncommon in adopted children. Parents may need to seek professional help.

The Adoption Twist: An important thing to remember about this discipline technique is that the rewards should be only positive, such as more time spent together, or choosing dessert for that night, or playing a favorite game together. Behavior Modification is really just a helpful indicator to measure if your child can be amenable to change ... or if the problems run deeper. If a simple additional story at bedtime is motivation for a reward you are well on your way to a healthy relationship. If nothing motivates the child, then there is cause for concern; children normally are motivated by positive incentives.

Time-Out. Time-out is a common discipline technique that often needs modification in order to be appropriate for a child who:

- Has been recently adopted
- Has not fully attached to his parents
- Struggles with anxiety related to separation from his parents

Time-out involves separation of the child and parent by sending the child to a designated room away from the family. But a child who has attachment issues, or who is just learning to trust his new family, should never be forced away from the parents. Using time-out, but with the adoption 'twist', the parent still disciplines the child, but places them in a location close by.

Another adaptation of Time-Out takes place with the child sitting in the parent's lap to calm down and "think". A tantruming child can be kept safe in a parent's arms and lap while mom or dad is sitting on the floor. An out of control child may scream to get away, but desperately needs the calm, safe physical security of his parent.

For my daughter, a time-out away from me was torture. She would become overwhelmed with shame, and often would be unable to give me any eye contact. I could tell, by her body language and facial expressions, that she was not feeling healthy guilt, but rather a degrading shame, which rendered her unable to accept my love and forgiveness. I saw a huge difference when I began doing close-quarter timeouts with my daughter. I place her on a chair just outside the room I am in, but close enough that she can always see me. I explain once why she is being sent to time-out, that I will be very close by, and that she will not be alone. I set the timer, and go about my work. I don't speak to her or answer her call, but she can always see me. When the buzzer rings, I go immediately to her side, gain eye contact and express my love for her, while still explaining that the bad behavior will not be tolerated. I noticed right away that this type of time-out helped alleviate her tendency to go immediately into shame. We are able to quickly re-attune and she was better able to understand why she was being disciplined, and apologize, because emotionally she was intact.

The Adoption Twist: Time out minimizes the shame response that adopted children are so easily prone to. This type of time-out is a positive example of disciplining a bad behavior, while always helping the child feel emotionally and physically secure.

Time-In. Time-in is a variation of the time-out technique mentioned above. According to Landry, the goal of time-in is for a chronically misbehaving child to experience a successful day. When a child repeatedly misbehaves and does not respond to other disciplinary methods, a time-in may be appropriate. The parent explains to the child that she is going to help him have a good day by keeping him near by, and helping him make good decisions throughout their time together. The child is kept physically close to the parent, usually within arms length, for as long as the parent thinks necessary. As the parent goes about her day with her child beside her, they are able to talk together about his misbehavior and the feelings that caused it. The parent is also able to correct any subsequent misbehavior or bad attitude, because she can address the issues

immediately, as they surface. The key to the success of this technique is for the parent to be very loving and empathetic toward the child, as the parent helps the child make good choices.

The Adoption Twist: The physical closeness of the parent and the time spent together give the parent and child an opportunity to process the child's feelings and surfacing behaviors. The parent must present a time in as a help to the child, not as a punishment. The idea is to promote a "we are going to do this together" team feeling. Time In is a wonderful opportunity to practice and strengthen attunement between parent and child.

Love and Logic. Love and logic parenting, created by Foster Cline and Jim Fay, is an approach to raising children that puts parents in control and teaches responsibility to children. This is accomplished by parents setting firm limits in a loving way, and making sure the child knows in advance exactly what is expected of him. The child then experiences natural consequences for his actions, both good and bad, and is held accountable for his actions and for solving his own problems. The parent expresses empathy toward the child for making a bad choice, but does not bail the child out of the problem or try to solve it for him. The Love and Logic approach is normally a very positive technique, yet for the post-institutionalized child, or the child that has been neglected, abused, or shuffled from family to family, the "natural consequence" may not be known to him. Time is needed for the parent to teach and train the child, and to establish a basis of trust. If trust has not been established, then natural consequences can be shaming rather than instructive.

The Adoption Twist: Coaching the child may be a necessary adjunct to implementing Love and Logic as some of life's lessons may have been missed (especially if the child was adopted from an orphanage or from foster care). Coaching focuses on teaching the child appropriate behavior. Instead of just telling a child to stop a behavior the parent teaches the child societal expectations and what appropriate behavior looks like. This builds an alliance between the child and his parent.

Dealing With Control

Living with a child-sized control freak can be frustrating. Battling a child's tenacious will over endless inconsequential interactions is wearying work. Giving the child many choices over his or her daily life doesn't seem to end the ongoing problem, either. How can a parent help a child deal with a need for control that has invaded home, school, and the child's friendships?

Remove Yourself. It's not about the parent finding a way to eradicate the problem, it's about the child. A child's continued need for control is indicative of his feeling intrinsically out-of-control, and has nothing to do with what you might have attempted to do to help your child change.

Ask Your Child. Create a dialog with your child to really find out what is fueling the undesirable control-behavior. How does the child feel inside when he has the need to take control? What is going on within the child that needs to be addressed? A child who is helped to recognize the fear or anger his need for control is masking, can take steps toward awareness and consciously work at letting go the need for control. A securely attached child cares about what his parents think and feel, and wants to please them. Parents who understand the true issue of control can deal with the issue at its core, and not waste time and effort on the resulting symptoms. Needing control is a tough behavior to break, but a child who knows that his present negative behavior is based on feelings and experiences in his past, will be able to work on a new pattern with the guidance of his family.

.....Doris Landry, MS, LLP

60-Second Scolding. A 60-second scolding is another highly effective discipline technique. When the child misbehaves, the parent comes close to the child and makes eye contact, even

gently holding his face if necessary. The parent tells the child, firmly but without shouting, how the child's actions affected the parent. The parent then softens her voice hugs the child and tells him how much he is loved and assures him it is the parent's job to take care of the child, and together they will work through the problem.

The Adoption Twist: The 60-second scolding is intense and honest, provides immediate intervention and ends on a nurturing note, affirming the parents love and commitment toward the child. Most parents scold, walk away and proceed with life as though nothing has happened. The adopted child is profoundly affected by disciplinary action, so the re-attunement "twist" is vital. This technique is powerful in its simplicity and works well for the adopted child, as it fosters a quick re-attunement between parent and child.

Re-attunement. It's the emotional reconnection with your child after you've disciplined. This is really important in our family because our daughter can easily get mixed up between bad behavior and bad girl. She needs me to pull her close emotionally and remind her that she's never a bad girl, that I'll always love her no matter what she's done.

Re-attunement is not an optional thing; it must happen at the end of the discipline cycle. It helps keep kids from spiraling into shame and emotional disconnect.
.....Debbie Carr-Taylor, adoptive mom

A wonderful word to remember, because we often forget to do this, is praise! We must never forget to praise our children. Sometimes a well-timed word of praise and encouragement can head off bad behavior before it even begins. Our kids covet our praise for hard-earned accomplishments, for behavior that is pleasing and appropriate, and for behavior that was not as bad as it could have been. No matter which tool we use from our adoption-parenting toolbox, our children who were adopted need our loving discipline. We must convey that nothing the child does will ever push us away, and that we love them enough to correct their behavior when it is wrong, with no strings attached. And even if they fail, they need to know our love stands strong.

.....By Deborah Moore, adoptive mom of two daughters from China. Based on the work of Doris Landry, MS, LLP

Guilt, Shame, and the Adopted Child

One is a healthy reaction to wrongdoing, one is toxic.

By Jean MacLeod

Shame is similar to guilt, except guilt is externalized (“I did something bad”) and shame is internalized (“I am bad”). Shame in adopted kids can be traced in part to our children being abandoned or relinquished, and their resulting feeling of worthlessness:

- I must have been a very bad baby to make my mother give me away.
- I am so bad inside, that my own mother didn’t love me.
- Everyone will know I am bad inside when they find out I am adopted.
- What do I say when kids ask “Why didn’t your real mother keep you?”.
- I was a bad baby so I’m a bad kid and I am powerless to become good.
- My adoptive parents don’t understand how bad, how worthless, I really am.

Kids get stuck in shame because it becomes a vicious cycle: the child feels she is a bad person at her inner core, so why attempt goodness (or repair a mistake) when there is no hope to ‘be’ good? Shame feeds shame, and keeps the child frozen in place, unable to break the cycle. Shame needs to be addressed as an adoption issue, as a by-product of losing birthparents, abandonment and institutionalization. Kids need reinforcement and coping skills when learning to deal with feeling shame, and a parent’s ‘attuning’ disciplinary choices are a key element of the learning process.

Coping Skills

Separate the behavior from the child. Help a child see the difference between “making a bad choice” and “I am bad so my choices are bad” by talking about the two. Everyone makes mistakes! A child who needs to be ‘perfect’ may be thinking that being less-than perfect equals being worthless. Reassure the individual, while reprimanding the behavior:

“You are a smart kid, but that was not a good choice.”

“I love you, but I can’t talk to you about the cat when I am on the phone.”

“You are always so generous; can you think of a better way to share with your sister?”

A reprimand that feeds shame: *You little brat! How many times have I told you not to hit your brother! Why are you so nasty?! When will you learn?*

A reprimand ending in re-attunement: *I am really mad at your behavior. Hitting is never appropriate! You must have been very angry at your brother but you need to apologize and I will come with you (gently and firmly take child by hand to make an apology; follow with a big hug and “I’m proud of you” after the child apologizes).*

Some adopted children need help in understanding the steps of reparation when they have made another person feel bad, or have accidentally hurt them. The child may have deep remorse for his words or action, but may be so frozen in shame that he is unable to see past his own self-focused feelings. Guilt is a healthy reaction; it urges people to make amends. Parents expecting a ‘normal’ guilt reaction from their child are puzzled by the child’s apparent inability to care about the injured party – they don’t understand that the offending child feels worse than they could ever imagine.

The parent needs to teach the child the social steps out of shame: a sincere apology for a misbehavior makes the hurt individual feel better and forgive, and makes the apologizing child who is feeling shame, forgive himself.

A Different Approach

Parenting a child with special behaviors requires special skill

Those of us whose adopted children have attachment issues, sensory issues, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), high anxiety, autism, or other special needs, often face considerable public censure for our supposed contributions to our children's annoying behaviors. We may doubt ourselves and our abilities as parents. "You need to be more flexible," some experts might counsel, while others will insist that we ought to be more firm. Over time and with trial and error, we may in fact learn that we have to adopt a different parenting approach than the one that comes most naturally to us. But while we can definitely improve our children's chances by paying attention to the approaches that work best for them, our parenting is not fundamentally to blame.

Like all parents, we can (and do!) model appropriate forms of reacting and behaving, but our children's brain chemistry is out of kilter, and all the modeling in the world won't make an impact for our kids in the absence of more explicit teaching, repeated experiences of 'containment,' and sometimes other measures as well, such as dietary changes or medications.

To offer containment through a more structured environment to a child who needs it is not 'coercive' or disrespectful, any more than it would be 'coercive' or disrespectful to pull a toddler's hand away from a flame. But it is hard work to create that structure. And it is especially hard work to do it while maintaining a sense of humor and showing the child that she is always valued for who she is.

Ultimately, in terms of discipline, neither 'permissiveness' nor 'authoritarianism' cause our children's problems with self-regulation. People who are not parenting kids like ours might like to congratulate themselves that they are doing a better job, but frankly, they don't understand that we are parenting children who are 'different', and who need a completely different approach.

.....By Susan Olding

Being with Your Child in Public Places

Change Your Perspective on Tantrums and Change Your Child's Behavior

By Patty Wipfler, founder of Parents Leadership Institute (PLI)

We live in a society that has a demanding and judgmental attitude toward parents and young children. Often, the attitude toward children in public is that they should be seen and not heard, that the parent should be 'in control' of the child's behavior and that children who are having feelings in public are a nuisance. In short, children are not really welcome. Their freshness, curiosity, and frank expressions of feelings are not seen as a gift.

In addition, the child rearing tradition that has been handed down to most of us sets us against our children when their behavior isn't convenient for adults. In the eyes of others, we are expected to criticize, grow cold, use harsh words and gestures, punish, isolate, shame, threaten, or physically attack a child who is 'misbehaving'. No parent really wants to act like an adversary to the child they love. We treat our beloved children in these ways when we can't think of anything else to do, or when we fear the disapproval of others.

There are certain situations in which young children often become emotionally charged. These situations include:

- Being with several people-with the whole family at dinner, at a family gathering a meeting, a birthday party, the grocery store, church, or temple.
- Moving from one activity to another-leaving home for day care, leaving day care for home, stopping play for dinner, going to bed.
- Being with a parent who is under stress-you can supply your own examples!
- At the end of any especially close or fun-filled time-after a trip to the park, after a good friend leaves, after wrestling and chasing and laughing with Mom or Dad.

When children become emotionally charged, they can't think.

They simply can't function normally. They become rigid and unreasonable in what they want, and are unsatisfied with your attempts to give them what they want. They can't listen, and the slightest thing brings them to tears or tantrums. Their minds are full of upset, and they can't get out of that state without help from you.

The help your child needs at this time is to have you set kind, sensible limits, and then for you to listen while he bursts out with the intense feelings he has. This spilling of feelings, together with your kind attention and patience, is the most effective way to speed your child's return to his sensible, loving self. A good, vigorous tantrum or a hearty, deeply felt cry will clear your child's mind of the emotion that was driving him 'off track' and will enable him to relax again and make the best of the situation he is in.

How are we parents supposed to listen to a screaming, flailing child in the middle of the supermarket? Several adjustments of our expectations are necessary before we can allow ourselves to be on our children's side as they do what they need to do in a public place.

Every good child falls apart, often in public places. This is, for some reason, the way children are built!

Our society has trained people to disapprove of children doing what is healthy and natural. People disapprove of horse-play, of noise, of exuberance, of too much laughter, of tantrums, of crying, of children asking for the attention they need.

As parents, it's our job to treat our child well. When other adults criticize him, it makes sense to do what we can to be on our child's side.

Being parents means that we will have to advocate for our children in many settings. We need to advocate when we are with doctors and nurses, with teachers, with relatives, and with strangers.

Acknowledge that children legitimately need far more attention than it is comfortable to give. Adults who gave less attention to their own children, or who got little attention themselves as children, will be upset when they see you giving undivided attention to your child. We can expect these upsets, but we don't have to be ruled by them.

Help Your Child Ward Off a Mad Attack

Things for Parents to Say

- "Stop and think. Make a good choice."
- "Remember to breathe when your tummy gets tight. Breathe. Let's breathe together."
- "Use your words, not your fists. People are not for hurting."
- "You can do it. I know you can get your mads under control."
- "I understand, right now you are feeling mad. Still, you can't hurt people, things or yourself."
- "You are the kind of kid who can take care of his own bad feelings."
- "Go to a safe place and draw out your mads."
- "You have a choice: Talk out your feelings or go to time out and get your mads under control."
- "Well, I'm feeling mad right now myself. I'm going to go cool off, then we'll talk."
- "I know how you feel. Sometimes I get mad myself. Then I tell myself, that it is OK to be mad if you are nice about it."
- "Thanks for sharing your angry feelings. Good choice in using your words!"
- "We are learning to be a 'Speak your feelings' kind of family. No more "Mad Family" for us."
- "I believe in you. Sometimes it's tough, isn't it?"
- "You are one terrific kid!"

Excerpted from *The Mad Family Gets Their Mads Out* by Lynne Namka, EdD. Used with Permission www.angrisout.com

What do I do when my child falls apart in the supermarket aisle, or at the grandparents' house?

Spend one-on-one time with your child before you take him to a public place. Ensure that you and he are connected with each other before heading into a challenging situation. Then, stay connected. Use eye contact, touch, your voice, and short touches of your attention to stay with your child. This contact is deeply reassuring, and can sometimes defuse situations that your child often finds difficult.

When you see an upset beginning, immediately make real contact. See if you can find a way to play, so that your child can laugh. Laughter relieves children's tensions, and allows them to feel more and more connected. If, when you make contact, your child begins to cry or tantrum, do what you can to allow him to continue. His upset will heal if the feelings are allowed to drain.

Slow down the action, and listen. If getting into the car seat has triggered tears, then stay there, seat belt not yet done, and let the tears flow. Listen until he is done. Because of this cry, your whole day, and his, will improve.

If necessary, move to a more socially acceptable place. Go to the back bedroom, or move your grocery cart out the exit to the sidewalk. Do this as calmly as you can. Your child isn't doing anything wrong. It's sort of like a car alarm going off accidentally-loud, but not harmful to anyone. These things happen!

Plan what you will say to people who express their opinions or concern. It's hard to come up with a comment that says, "We're OK-don't worry!" in the middle of wild things happening, so think ahead. You can adopt some phrase like, "We seem to be having technical difficulties," or, "My daughter really knows how to rip!" or, "It's that kind of a day!" or, "After he's finished, it's my turn!" or simply "We're OK. I don't think this will last all day." A comment like this reassures others, and gives the message that you are in charge.

As one parent I know put it, "I've finally figured out that it's my job to set a limit when he's going 'nuts', and it's his job to get the bad feelings out. As I listen to him, people might not be able to tell that I'm doing my job and he's doing his, but at least I know that's what's going on."

`` By Patty Wipfler, founder of Parents Leadership Institute (PLI) and Parenting by Connection. Parenting by Connection is the PLI approach to fostering close, responsive relationships between parents and children (www.parentleaders.org).

A Playful Solution to Anger and Aggression

"Feelings" Faces. Make paper plate faces attached to popsicle sticks. Have each child make faces for every feeling you can think of. Make sure the project is done with lots of laughs and exaggerated faces. Keep the faces handy and use them all day, every day. The minute someone acts up (don't forget to include yourself!) grab a plate face. Ask the children to pick a plate face to show how they feel. Some might be scared, mad, shy, or bug-eyed. Why? Because we all react in our own way to the same situation. Then ask everyone to pick another face to help make everyone feel better, especially the child who started the situation. *Do this every day.*

.....Jane K.

Out of Control Parents

And How to Help Yourself get Back into Control

I figured out when my daughter was a toddler that I was fully responsible for most of her breakdowns! Not directly, but because I wasn't listening to her toddler cues. I was usually hell-bent on doing something I wanted to do and had dragged her along past nap-time. Or I hadn't properly prepared us to get somewhere on time, and I was irritable and trying to rush her. It all came back to mom. Making choices that were good for her was also a good plan for me. I learned to be a step ahead, to understand my daughter's dynamics, and to respect my hot-buttons.

It's okay to get mad. You get to model the 'dark side' to your kids, too, and teaching them how to safely cycle through anger might be the most important element in demonstrating the healthy rhythm of home and self-regulation.

I have worked really hard on my patience over the years. My family has not perfected tranquility by any means; I think what we have learned to do better is cycle our anger down non-destructively:

- I force myself to calmly verbalize my irritation to my kids a few steps before I lose it (and give them opportunities to quickly find a solution or to rectify a bad situation if they are to blame). Verbal de-escalation is one of the big steps in my self-regulation, and I force myself to 'talk' before I need to yell.
- I use a 'special phrase' before needing to go to anger; this warns my kids that they have pushed me to my limit ("I have a really bad headache moving in" is my red flag!)
- We talk about our feelings a lot; I have found that using empathy on an angry child is a major de-fuser and huge parent tool.
- If one of my kids has a melt-down, we analyze what went wrong afterwards and come up with better solutions to express mad without being out of control (sometimes we even role-play). This is a good follow-up to a child's tantrum, along with required hugs. If I have a tantrum, I apologize, and hug them even more!

Hearing your own 'monster mom' words screaming from your children's mouths is never a proud moment. But at least you know they're listening! Use those as an example of how not to handle anger, and explain how you will work to make your 'mad' constructive.

Addressing the issues that interfere with the rhythm of the home doesn't mean brushing conflict under the rug. A parent keeps the family whole and in sync by catching negative escalation, dealing with it in a non-shaming manner, developing a behavioral structure for each child, and by modeling the behavior you want your child to internalize. Awareness is half the battle to taking back control of the home, and a calm, happy environment is easier to attain if family members are in harmony.

.....*By Jean MacLeod*