

ON THE HORIZON

The latest news & information from Wide Horizons For Children

School Daze

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For most children, starting school for the first time or returning to school for another year is both exciting — "I hope I make new friends," and anxiety producing — "What if no one likes me?"

Parents too are excited and hopeful that their child will have a positive school experience, but worry about their child's social and academic success at the same time.

Academic success has a great deal to do with the fit between the child's abilities, appropriate grade placement, and teaching style. In addition, parents and educators alike know that social success is an important component of a child's school success and that social challenges can negatively impact academic success.

In most cases, social and academic success is about "fit" and that differences, no matter how small they may seem, may rattle some children causing temporary anxiety, depression, or aggression. For most children, these issues are minor and blow over relatively quickly, but that is not the case for all children.

The following articles address some of the most frequently asked questions that adoptive parents have about their child's academic and social fit. Among them are "How do I know if my child is in the correct grade placement?" and "Should I tell my child's teacher or other school personnel that my child was adopted?"

It will be helpful for you to consider these issues sooner rather than later. Appropriate grade placement in particular can be very complicated, especially for children placed at older ages. Many adopted children also face the challenges related to racial differences, being older than others in their class, or language related difficulties.

We hope that you will find these articles and resources useful and that you and your child will experience an enjoyable and productive school year ahead. As always, we invite you to contact us with your unique questions and concerns.

Wide Horizons Post Adopt Education and Support Team



PARENT EDUCATION: Back to School Basics

Tips to keep in your own personal backpack

By Deb Shrier, MSW, LICSW

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My child is beginning kindergarten this year. He was adopted domestically as an infant. Do I need to share this information with his teacher or the school?

This type of question frequently comes up when a child starts a new school or begins his/her elementary education. School opens up the world for your child to experience life outside their adopted family. The reason most parents tend to inform teachers about their child's journey to their family is to make sure the teacher is sensitive around issues that may come up in the classroom or playground. Some parents do not feel that teachers need to know private family issues (such as a child's adoption) for concern that it might lead to unnecessary labeling of the student. One recommendation is to check in with your child's teacher during a parent-teacher conference. Give the teacher a chance to get know your child first and listen to your son's impression of his teacher as well. Ask about upcoming school assignments and reading material. Is there anything that seems to be concerning to you? If so,

then discuss it with the teacher. Keep in mind that you are your child's biggest advocate. Consider yourself as a partner to your child's educational learning team.

My 6 year old wants to bring her photos of her family in for "show and tell" at school. She was adopted from Guatemala at 12 months and her family photo album includes pictures of her foster family. Is this too much personal information to give the other children in her class?

It is terrific that you have chosen to include your daughter's foster family with her album! Her decision to share her family photos says a lot about her sense of pride and respect for the important people in her life. You might ask her what she wants to say about her photos and what kind of questions her friends might have at school. Ask her if she needs any help in discussing the people in the album without focusing on anyone in particular. By doing so, you are helping her to normalize her adoption story.

My daughter is going into the second grade. She is very proud of her Filipino heritage and our family's connection to her birth country. One of the assignments in this grade is called "My Life." It is a timeline with pictures of a child's life from birth until now. We do not have early photos of her as a newborn or young child. This is not a fact that we dwell on, although her referral pictures from age 2 is what she considers her "baby" pictures. She knows she was born and then cared for in an orphanage in the Philippines until we adopted her.

At your daughter's developmental stage, most children would prefer to be "just like everyone else." It sounds like you are aware of this fact and are appropriately sensitive to this upcoming assignment. After the project has been assigned, ask your daughter how she would like to begin this project. She may very well be excited and have a zillion ideas of her own that she would like to share with her teacher and friends! You stated that she knows she was born and then cared for in an orphanage in the Philippines. That is truly where her life story begins. Although you might not have early pictures of your daughter, perhaps you have (or can find on the internet) photos from her birth country. If your daughter enjoys drawing, she might also want to include an illustration of an airplane as a way of depicting her flight to the U.S.

Keep in mind that this can be an exciting project for your daughter. It may also bring about additional conversations with you about her adoption story. Consider this another opportunity to share how exciting her arrival to your family has been!

Last spring, my two children (ages 7 and 9) refused to take the bus to school. They stated it was due to the long ride to our house and I ended up driving them for the last two months of school. Over the summer, I learned from my 7-year-old daughter that they were being taunted by other children on the bus about not "really" being brother and sister. (I did not mention this to my son.) They were also

asked many personal questions about their adoption which they did not want to answer. The new school year is approaching and I am not sure whether to let them take the bus.

Have your children expressed their own feelings about this yet? If not, you might consider talking with them about their reluctance to take the bus last year. Also, find a comfortable way of bringing up with both children what your daughter shared with you. It will give you an opportunity to explore this further as a family. One suggestion is to help them come up with appropriate responses. Role playing the scenario from the bus and exploring their feelings/reactions is useful as well.

A difficult bus ride each morning to school can add unnecessary stress before a child even enters the classroom. If it becomes a problem again this year, ask your children how you might be able to help. Consider talking with school personnel if the problem continues.

Our 10-year-old child has been diagnosed with learning disabilities. He understands that his brain works in a different way and that accommodations have been made to assist in his learning process. He recently asked me if this was the reason his birthmother could not raise him. I was surprised that he was making a connection between his learning issue and the reason for his adoption. My wife and I told him it was not, but I am not sure he has convinced.

A child sometimes feels that he or she might have been responsible for the decision to be placed for adoption. All children are very focused on themselves, their actions and their ability to cause whatever happens next. They do feel very powerful in so many ways. While it may appear that your son is making a leap from his learning disability to the reason he was placed for adoption, it sounds like your son is at a new stage in his understanding of his adoption. It is terrific that he has come to you with this question! Spend some time talking with your child about his story. You might consider talking, in general, about the various reasons children are placed for adoption. Children are typically not consulted about this important decision but then are faced with understanding it throughout their lives.

Does your son have a solid understanding of his learning issue? Talking with someone at school (such as a psychologist or social worker) with him about his learning disability may be reassuring to your son and allow him a greater understanding of his educational needs.

Talk openly with your son about how much you love, cherish and are proud of him each day. Be sure to recognize his strengths as a way to develop positive self-esteem. Continue to build on the foundation of support for your child, especially during his approach to adolescence.

ONLINE RESOURCE: The BG Center for Cognitive-Developmental Assessment and Remediation

The PASE team is hoping to provide all of our adoptive families with resources that will support and educate you about the often challenging decisions around school placement and readiness. It is with that intention that we introduce (or re-introduce as the case may be) the BG Center For Cognitive- Developmental Assessment and Remediation <http://www.bgcenter.com>. The chief psychologist at the center, Dr. Boris Gindis, and his staff provide a wide variety of psychological services to internationally adopted children and their families. A particular area of expertise the center offers is consultation, assessment and education for families struggling with the many questions and decisions in this often emotionally charged area. Their website offers numerous articles on many aspects of adoption and child development as well as an online school for parents and professionals that highlights the language, developmental and educational needs of internationally adopted children. We invite you to visit the BG Center website.

Is Your Internationally Adopted Child Ready for School?

SCHOOL READINESS & PLACEMENT

Have you found yourself wondering about the appropriate grade placement for your internationally adopted child? This question is common and at times not easily answered. Typical factors of chronological age, language and social and emotional development are further multiplied with an internationally adopted child. Birth country experiences and lack of exposure to formal education can impact the competencies expected in

the US education system. Even though international adoption has existed in the US for several decades, schools have not yet caught up with the specifics and may even have incorrect ideas. Navigating and advocating for your child will necessitate an awareness of options and the obligations your child's school must provide.

Recommended Reading

[School Readiness and School Placement of a Newly Adopted Post-institutionalized Child](#)

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

Families often times are amazed at how quickly their newly adopted child will pick up English. However, parents need to realize that language acquisition for these children is not the same as it is for children who emigrated from another country with their families. Children who were adopted internationally are losing their native language as quickly as they are learning English. This oftentimes leaves gaps in communication that can be frustrating for both the children as well as their parents. This can become even more complicated when children are placed into schools and cannot comprehend some of the tasks asked of them.

Recommended Reading

[Language Development in Internationally Adopted Children](#)

[Language Related Issues for International Adoptees and Adoptive Families](#)

Is Your School Ready for Your Internationally Adopted Child?

ESL/ELL IN SCHOOLS

Families often believe that schools have the resources necessary to aid their child in learning English because their child is enrolled in the English as a Second Language class, more commonly referred in schools today as English Language Learners (ELL). However, these classes were basically built upon the assumption that the children involved are recent immigrants not adoptees. The classes often postulate that the parents at home do not speak English, so homework is not given and families are not asked to do exercises with their children to help their language development. If the ELL teachers at the school are not familiar with children who are international adoptees and the way their language acquisition occurs, these classes may not be as helpful as a private tutor.

Recommended Reading

[Internationally adopted post-institutionalized students in an ESL class](#)

[English as a Second Language \(ESL\) Instructions and Internationally Adopted Children: Are they perfect together?](#)

[What should adoptive parents know about their children's language-based school difficulties](#)

SCHOOL RELATED ISSUES

Many children have issues in school, whether they are behavior issues or developmental issues. However, being an internationally adopted child can lend to different issues that may present in a typical fashion of behavior outbursts, problems with peers or not living up to the potential that teachers believe a child possesses. Children who were adopted may have underlying developmental delays due to institutionalization or they may not be able to comprehend the instructions given to them because their language acquisition is still lagging behind their peers. Children who are being schooled in orphanages in other countries are not usually held to the same standards that children in schools in America are held to. Often being given a written exam is something they have never encountered before and may not be prepared to take. It is important for adoptive parents to prepare their child's teacher for the fact their child may not be up to par with children of

the same age due to language development, developmental delays and educational gaps. Dr. Gindis and his colleagues have written several articles not only about issues that internationally adopted children face in school, but also about advocating for you child in school and also where research needs to be focused in the future.

Recommended Reading

[Cognitive, Language and Educational Issues of Children Adopted from Overseas Orphanages](#)

[Adapting Mathematical Instructions for Internationally Adopted Children](#)

[Test Accommodations for Internationally Adopted Children](#)

[Mistakes People Make in the Special Education Process](#)

FOR TEACHERS: Adoption Basics for Educators: How Adoption Impacts Children & How Educators Can Help

As educators enter the schools of the 21st century, they are encountering an increasingly diverse population of students. Students are not only coming from different ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds, but also from varied family situations, including adoptive families. Adoptive families can exhibit considerable diversity, including infant, international, older child, sibling group, kinship, and special needs. Regardless of the type of adoption, most adopted children deal with emotional issues surrounding adoption. Unless educators have a personal connection with adoption, they may not understand how these issues impact their students and affect students' school performances.

This booklet was developed to provide educators with basic information about adoption-related issues and the effect these issues might have on students, as well as suggestions on how educators can assist and advocate for students who are adopted.

Download the complete PDF at
<http://www.whfc.org/PDF/AdoptionBasicsForEducators.pdf>.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Lending Library](#) - Vermont Adoption Consortium

This lending library has a section for adoption and the schools, and provides a helpful narrative of several books/resources.

[Adoption and School](#) - Resources from Adoptive Families

Includes downloadable handouts and information for your child's teacher, inspiring ideas for adoption presentations, advice from experts about development and learning styles, and much more.

[ADOPTION IN THE SCHOOLS: A LOT TO LEARN Promoting Equality and Fairness for all Children and Their Families](#) - Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute

This Policy Perspective brief brings together research and years of broad experience on a range of issues that affect millions of boys and girls nationwide.

[Adoption and School Issues Factsheet for Families](#) - Child Welfare Information Gateway
Helpful suggestions to increase the sensitivity of school personnel to adoption issues.

[After You Adopt](#)

A CT-based post-adoption support group for parents.

[Safe at School - A Manual for Teachers, Educators & School Counselors](#) - Available for purchase from the Center for Adoption Support and Education

Provides proactive strategies for teachers to incorporate educational opportunities into their already existing program curricula.

[School Support Services](#) - The Center for Adoption Support and Education

A program to assist educators in understanding the unique challenges for children who are growing up adopted.

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