

Before You Go: The "Top Ten" Tips for Internationally Adopting Families

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1. Adoption, whether the child has few or many issues is a life altering task. Be sure your partner is on board. Check out your support system, family leave policy, insurance coverage, baby sitter. You will have little spare time. Freeze extra dinners, clean the house, pay off the charge cards, start eating at home more, save money, exercise and get in good shape. You will be carrying around a heavy child.
2. Read, read, and read. Go on the web. Attend classes sponsored by your agency, public agencies, and domestic special needs agencies. Join some adoption organizations. Call local agencies such as early childhood development, therapists, medical doctors who specialize in adoption or international medicine. Collect a file of phone numbers and information. Believe it or not you have more time now than when you get back.
3. Read about childhood development. What do children of this age eat? How much do they sleep? Do they talk? What toys do they like? Then assume the child will be behind. It is difficult to be developmentally on target in an institution.

TIPS FOR WHILE YOU ARE THERE

1. Remember you are your child's historian. It is important to keep a journal. Take pictures of the orphanages, the people in the orphanage, the place of abandonment, the courthouse, the neighborhood, the child, and the other children. It may be the only chance of getting this for the child. Take a camera, a disposable, extra batteries and film, a tape recorder (see if the caretakers will sing songs or talk) a video camera. Find out what they eat.
2. Buy some local gifts for the child. A picture frame or scrapbook from their country, toy, older child and adult artifacts, clothing items, of various sizes, so that the child has some cultural possessions.
3. Try to swap new sheets, bottles, and outfits for the orphanage ones. Do not wash. What smells less than perfect to you may smell comforting to the child.

TIPS FOR WHEN YOU RETURN

1. As tired, jet lagged, and overwhelmed you are the child is more so. Try to limit visitors, have fewer toys and less stimulation, meet the child's needs. Carry, hold the child, and touch their skin often. Stay home from work as long as possible.
2. Be patient. Everything—TV, carpeting, pets, food, smells, fabric, sounds, and you are new. You went to get a son or daughter and be the parent(s). The child has no idea what a mom, dad and family are. There will be times when you think this is the absolute best thing you ever did. There will be times you think this was a big mistake. Both feelings are normal and OK.
3. Although you will never have your old life back, you can have a life. Don't forget your spouse and marriage. Take some time for you. Do some things that make you happy.

4. If you are depressed, the child seems to not be progressing rapidly or your marriage is in trouble. Get help quickly. Adjustment if it happens on its own will happen with a few months. If you need help and forgot to do your homework start calling your agency, other adoption agencies (even if domestic) and ask for referrals. Parenting is not easy and you can ask for help.

Remember the child's past, enjoy the present and help your family move into a happy future. That is what families are for.