

TAGS: Transitioning Home; Surviving & Thriving the First Year

Finding Balance in “Cocooning” a Newly Adopted Kid

“Cocooning” or “nesting” in adoption is considered by many to be an important first step to building attachment in the new adoption relationship between child and parents. The idea is to simplify life, settle into a routine, and limit the care of the newly adopted child to primarily the Mom and Dad. This is especially important when adopting a child who is past the newborn stage – in other words, when adopting from foster care or internationally. In the process of an adoption, the baby/child’s life has been turned topsy-turvy.

How Does One “Cocoon” with a Newly Adopted Kid?

The general idea of “cocooning” or “nesting” is to hang close to home for a while: again, simply life, reduce the number of toys, streamline the family calendar, cut back on trips away from home, and set up a predictable routine for the child. Generally, parents are carving out time and space to get to know each other, and to allow the child to learn to trust and rely on her parents. This approach of nesting as a newly formed family is intended to help firmly cement in the child’s mind who are his mom and dad. It is the first step in establishing attachment. Cocooning is a great idea and can be very valuable to building healthy dynamics in a new adoptive family. BUT as with all things in life **moderation is the key**.

Human Nature Leans to the Extremes

The ideas of cocooning have been regularly partnered up with the general movement of attachment parenting and in our human propensity to lean to extremes, this pairing has now created a version of adoption-specific attachment parenting “on steroids” as the saying goes. The kind of parenting where Mom never leaves the house and absolutely no one touches the child other than Mom and maybe Dad - if he’s on board with the attachment strategies.

However, it’s important to know that, as with most movements that have gone to extremes, this approach to cocooning is not necessary. In fact, it can actually be harmful for everyone, including the child.

Here are a few examples of what some families are doing in the name of cocooning. You can imagine, sustaining this level of extreme focus on the idea of cocooning can certainly cause problems for those involved.

- Parents wouldn’t allow grandparents to hold or feed the child for the first six months.
- Parents wouldn’t allow great grandmother to hold the toddler in the obligatory four-generation photo - even though the family had posed every grandchild the exact same way for this photo for generations.
- One mom whose major stress management was going to the gym, but she stopped going for six months because she didn’t want anyone else to care for the children for even an hour.
- Families who stop going to church for nine months, even though it was their major social and spiritual support, because they didn’t want their 4-year-old child to be exposed to the extra stimulation or to have people other than them interact with him.

The Number One Thing Parents Can Do For Their Child

Obviously, adoption is stressful for the child. But it is also stressful for the parents. It's not only the child's life that has been turned upside down. **The number one thing you can do for your child is to take care of yourself and take care of your marriage** (if married) or primary support relationships (if single).

Yes, it is important to settle in for a while so your child understands the new routines of his life and learns to confidently predict them. Yes, it is easy to over-stimulate newly adopted kids. But it is also true that you need to do things during this newly adopted period that support you, that give you pleasure, and that allow you to blow off steam. You also need to allow time for just you and your partner to remember why you married each other in the first place and to make each other feel important and cared for outside of your role as Mom or Dad.

Role of Grandparents

In many ways the biggest distortion of adoption cocooning or nesting is the hard-line drawing of the family circle to exclude grandparents. Yes, the primary caregivers need to be Mom and Dad, but that doesn't mean that Grandmom and Granddad can't have a role as well.

Attachment is a two-way street. Children attach to adults by being cared for by them, and adults attach to children by doing the caring. This is true for parents, but it is also true for grandparents. Most families desire to foster a deep attachment and it's important to remember that attachment is formed with grandparents the exact same way it is formed with parents – through caring, nurturing and snuggling.

Obviously, if there are difficulties in the relationship between you all, it's wise to create healthy boundaries for yourselves and to allow your family time to cement the primary relationship before venturing out into more challenging family dynamics. Use your best judgement and consider how best to let them in. An occasional bottle, diaper, or bath by Grandma can be good for all concerned. An occasional Date Night out while the grandparent babysit might even be better.

Balance

The key is balance. For sure, parents need to be the *primary* caregivers, but not necessarily be the *sole* caregivers. Parents need to simplify life and reduce outside commitments, but they also need to continue with the activities that make them feel whole, even if it means they are not with their little cherub 24/7.

In the above case of the Mom who stopped going to the gym, she was struggling because she felt overwhelmed and depressed. Her exercise routine, and specifically going to the gym, was her main form of stress relief and was a big part of her identity. She had adopted two children and wanted to do everything in her power to help them attach since they had had a rough start in life. She gave up the gym because she didn't want to leave them in the gym childcare. She couldn't afford a babysitter during their naptime, and Dad was working long hours.

This poor mom was miserable and close to a breaking point. In this scenario, the number one thing she could do *for* her kids was to get to the gym at least four times a week. Making it work required some compromising and adjusting of the family's schedule, her work-outs, and her expectations. Allowing herself to take advantage of the gym daycare program was an important part of that process. Turns out

the kids loved getting out of the house and amongst other people as much as she did. She was happier, they were happier, and that's just good for all of them.

Start Slow and Then Decide

At the beginning when your child is first home, go ahead and simplify your daily life. Limit childcare to just the family for a season. Welcome grandparents into the fold, but don't let them take over. Pay attention to your child; pay attention to yourself. Take stock of your progress and adjust your course slowly, depending on how everyone seems to be doing. Cocooning is a great tool for building attachment. Just don't go overboard and allow yourselves to build healthy relationship and enjoy the early days as a newly formed family.

For parents who have adopted older children and are working through the grief and loss that their child has experienced, our partners at [NACAC](#) offer this parenting support resource: [Retrace Developmental Stages to Help Older Children Heal](#). Creating a Family also has these [9 "Easy" Tips for Surviving 1st 6 Months with Newly Adopted Kids](#) to help create healthy relationship with your child.