

TAGS: Special Needs; Challenging Behavior; Child Attachment

Parenting a Child with an Attachment Disorder

It's highly unlikely that you went into your adoption journey expecting to parent a child with significant attachment issues or even Reactive Attachment Disorder. Even if you were well-prepared for the adoption of an older child who experienced abuse or neglect, or a child from foster care, or a child from one of the many understaffed and underfunded orphanages throughout the world, you probably didn't think that your precious child would be one of the ones with to struggle from the long-term effects of that abuse, neglect or loss. You didn't expect the damage from a failure to bond.

This life you are now living is not at all what you expected. Every day is hard for your child, and that means every day is hard for you. The struggle is overwhelming.

No One Understands

Compounding your struggle as the parent of a child with an attachment disorder is the total lack of understanding from family, friends, teachers, and ministers. They often see a child that can be charming and wonderfully quirky. They think a little more firmness would do the trick... or maybe a little less firmness? They think your expectations are too high... or maybe they are too low?

It's important to recognize that you are not alone in parenting a child with attachment struggles. And if there are no friends in your community to understand you, a competent trauma-informed therapist certainly will understand, and can provide support for your family. There are some helpful stories out there, like this one by [NACAC, to help you understand how vital a good therapist](#) can be for your family's healing.

**Deep down they wonder if the problem is you.
You sometimes wonder too.**

Most older children who are adopted thrive in their new adoptive homes. They have been hurt and their attachment has been damaged, but they are able to slowly and surely start healing. Some children, however, continue to struggle and so will their parents. This is not the life either the parent or child expected. Again, seeking a therapeutic relationship with an adoption-competent counselor can really provide some healthy perspective for you and your child. [Creating a Family](#) has this list of [Interview Questions to Find an Adoption Therapist](#), to guide you in your search.

Explaining attachment issues to family, friends, and teachers

As the parent of a child with attachment issues, you often find yourself in the position of having to explain this "invisible" disability and damage to others. There are great resources specifically to help you with that by the [Attachment & Trauma Network](#). They also have [a letter to explain attachment issues](#) to educators that you can adapt and give to family and friends as needed.

There is tremendous benefit to joining a support group, either in-person or on-line, such as the one run by our partners at [Creating a Family on Facebook](#). You can also find good on-line training in [webinars](#),

[workshops, or conferences – check C.A.S.E.'s website](#) for some good examples. In addition to being reminded that you are not alone in the struggle to parent a child with an attachment disorder, you can equip yourself and normalize the hard conversations that often come up for you and your family or with others.

It's easy, and understandable, to feel misunderstood when your child is struggling with attachment issues. But you don't have to stay stuck in that place and there is hope and help for your family.