

Effects of Adoption on the Child's Social Adjustment

1. Self-Image Adjustment

Once adopted children reach five to seven years of age they begin to understand the difference in being adopted and many become more sensitive or ambivalent about the subject. Some avoid reminders of their adoption, or simply try not to think of it. By discussing the child's adoption story frequently and positively, parents will help their children become more accustomed to the idea. [Adoptive parents](#) can tell the story of the day the child joined the family, read books about adoption, and watch movies together with adoption-related events. It is highly recommended that adoptive parents always discuss the child's biological parents in a positive light so that the child does not feel that he/ she is a product of something "bad."¹⁾ Although boys sometimes have a greater difficulty in adjusting to this newly perceived reality, there are a number of precautionary steps for adoptive parents to take that will help their child acclimate more smoothly.²⁾

One study of [racial or ethnic differences](#) between adoptees and their adoptive families found that they had relatively little impact on the adoptees' socialization. Adoptive mothers report that most children whose ethnic origin or skin color is different from that of their adoptive families do not receive serious negative reactions from peers or adults. Though 30 percent of adopted children in the study received some negative reactions, only seven percent had received many.³⁾

2. Age at Adoption Matters

Age at adoption seems to be the biggest reason for adjustment differences between adopted and non-adopted adolescents. Illustrating again the importance of adoption during infancy, a study by Anu Sharma, of University of Colorado at Boulder, and colleagues concluded that "the most interesting result from this study was the remarkable lack of differences...between youth adopted at ages 2-5 years and those adopted at ages 6-10 years."⁴⁾

A study of teenage attachment problems shows the impact of age at adoption on the capacity for attachment. "If the child had arrived at 1 year of age or earlier and had been 6 months or less in an orphanage/foster home, only 6 percent showed attachment problems. In the group where the child had arrived after 1 year of age and had been in an orphanage/foster home for more than 6 months, 23 percent showed attachment problems."⁵⁾ In another study of 125 early adopted children, researchers discovered that both "early and later parental sensitive support are important for continuity of attachment across the first 14 years of life." The amount of sensitive support mothers displayed in early childhood accurately predicted a continuity of secure attachment from the child's first 14 years, whereas less maternal sensitivity in early childhood but more maternal sensitive support in adolescence predicted children's change from insecurity in infancy to security in adolescence.⁶⁾ Therefore, the earlier the child is adopted, the more his attachments thrive.

3. Social Behavior

Harold Grotevant, professor of family social science at the University of Minnesota, and his colleagues found that adopted children are no more likely to display aggressive antisocial behavior than non-adopted children (all other things held constant) but they were found to be at greater risk for expressing non-aggressive antisocial behavior. (Aggressive antisocial behavior was defined as “violent, aggressive behavior directed toward people or animals,” whereas “theft, property damage, serious rule violations, and the sale or possession of drugs, without violent behavior” were examples of non-aggressive antisocial behavior.) The closer the parents are to the adopted child and the more educated the adoptive mother is, the less likely are adopted children to engage in these aggressive behaviors.⁷⁾ However, other experiences do increase the likelihood of aggression.

The more maltreatment the child has suffered, the greater the aggression he or she will express.⁸⁾ However, the more easily the adoptive mother can access memories of her own childhood, and the more secure her own attachment capacity is, the less aggression her adopted, previously abused children will exhibit.⁹⁾ This illustrates yet again both the healing power of adoption and of the [benefits of the adoptive mother's](#) ease of attachment. On the other hand, an adoptive mother struggling with unresolved pain can further complicate a child's confused attachments,¹⁰⁾ and can even destroy the stability and parent-child closeness that helps to mitigate the child's tendency towards antisocial behavior.

Pursuing a related line of research, a Swedish longitudinal study followed four groups of children from gestation to 23 years of age. The subjects were organized into four groups: adopted children, children in long-term foster care, children originally registered for adoption by birth mothers who changed their minds, and children living with their biological parents. The study found no differences between adoptees and controls in criminal behavior or problems related to alcohol.¹¹⁾

Another study analyzed differences in problem behavior and pro-social behavior between adopted children and non-adopted children. The study gauged problem behaviors by asking parents about a child's temper and anxiety or fearfulness, and measured pro-social behavior by asking about a child's ability to get along with others, do what he is asked, fulfill his responsibilities, and behave cheerfully. Children were evaluated on these behaviors in age groups of zero to four years, five to 11 years, and 12 to 18 years. No significant differences were found between adopted and non-adopted children.¹²⁾

4. Social Adjustment in Adulthood

[Adoption's positive impact](#) continues to manifest itself in an adoptee's adult relationships. Adopted women enjoy much higher levels of social support from multiple sources, including friends and their parents, than women in a control group of their non-adopted birth peers.¹³⁾ They also tend to be emotionally stable and at lower risk of psychological distress.¹⁴⁾ Adopted men, by contrast with the general population and their non-adopted birth peers, were less likely to ask friends or family for help with problems and had higher rates of dependence and unemployment.¹⁵⁾

A 1998 study showed that, on average, adopted women began their first romantic relationship at 22.1 years of age, while their birth comparison group began at 20.5 years old, and the general population at 21.7 years. A related delay is seen in childbearing, with adopted women lagging two years behind

the general population and a more pronounced three years behind their birth comparison group.¹⁶⁾ None of these delays are cause for concern.

¹⁾ Adoption Information Center of Illinois, "Parenting an Adopted Child" (September, 2009); D.M. Brodzinsky, "Long-Term Outcomes in Adoption," *The Future of Children. Adoption* 3, no. 1 (1993): 153, 160.

²⁾ G.J. Stams, Femmie Juffer, J. Rispiens, R.A. Hoksbergen, "The Development and Adjustment of 7-year-old Children Adopted in Infancy," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 41, no. 8 (2000): 1025-1037.

D. Brooks and R. Barth, "Adult Transracial and Inracial Adoptees: Effects of Race, Gender, Adoptive Family Structure, and Placement History on Adjustment Outcomes," *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 69, no. 1 (1999): 92, 93, 96.

³⁾ Femmie Juffer, G. Stams and Marinus H. van IJzendoorn, "Adopted Children's Problem Behavior is Significantly Related to Their Ego Resiliency, Ego Control, and Sociometric Status," *Journal of Child Psychology & Psychiatry* 45, no. 4 (2004): 703.

⁴⁾ A.R. Sharma, M.K. McGue and P.L. Benson, "The Emotional and Behavioral Adjustment of United States Adopted Adolescents: Part II. Age at Adoption," *Children and Youth Services Review* 18, no. 1-2 (1996): 110.

⁵⁾ M. Cederblad, B. Höök, M. Irhammar and A.M. Mercke, "Mental Health in International Adoptees as Teenagers and Young Adults. An Epidemiological Study," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 40, no. 8 (1999): 1244.

⁶⁾ Mariëlle D. Beijersbergen, Femmie Juffer, Marian J. Bakermans-Kranenburg, Marinus H. van IJzendoorn, "Remaining or Becoming Secure: Parental Sensitive Support Predicts Attachment Continuity From Infancy to Adolescence in A Longitudinal Adoption Study," *Developmental Psychology* 48, no. 5 (2012): 1277-1282.

M. Cederblad, B. Höök, M. Irhammar and A.M. Mercke, "Mental Health in International Adoptees as Teenagers and Young Adults. An Epidemiological Study," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 40, no. 8 (1999): 1244.

⁷⁾ H.D. Grotevant, M.H. van Dulmen, N. Dunbar, J. Nelson-Christinedaughter, M. Christensen, X. Fan and B.C. Miller, "Antisocial Behavior of Adoptees and Nonadoptees: Prediction From Early History and Adolescent Relationships," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 16, (2006): 110, 122.

⁸⁾ H.D. Grotevant, M.H. van Dulmen, N. Dunbar, J. Nelson-Christinedaughter, M. Christensen, X. Fan and B.C. Miller, "Antisocial Behavior of Adoptees and Aonadoptees: Prediction From Early History and Adolescent Relationships," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 16, (2006): 109, 122.

⁹⁾ M. Steele, J. Hodges, J. Kaniuk, S. Hillman and K. Henderson, "Attachment Representations and Adoption: Associations Between Maternal States of Mind and Emotion Narratives in Previously Maltreated Children," *Journal of Child Psychotherapy* 29, no. 2 (2003): 193.

¹⁰⁾ M. Steele, J. Hodges, J. Kaniuk, S. Hillman and K. Henderson, "Attachment Representations and Adoption: Associations Between Maternal States of Mind and Emotion Narratives in Previously Maltreated Children," *Journal of Child Psychotherapy* 29, no. 2 (2003): 194.

¹¹⁾ D.E. Johnson, "Adoption and the Effect on Children's Development," *Early Human Development* 68, (2002): 49-50.

¹²⁾ D. Borders, L.K. Black and K. Pasley, "Are Adopted Children and Their Parents at Greater Risk for Negative Outcomes?" *Family Relations* 47, no. 3 (1998): 240.

¹³⁾ S. Collishaw, B. Maughan and A. Pickles, "Infant Adoption: Psychosocial Outcomes in Adulthood," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 33, no. 2 (1998): 63

¹⁴⁾ S. Collishaw, B. Maughan and A. Pickles, "Infant Adoption: Psychosocial Outcomes in Adulthood," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 33, no. 2 (1998): 61.

¹⁵⁾ S. Collishaw, B. Maughan and A. Pickles, "Infant Adoption: Psychosocial Outcomes in Adulthood," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 33, no. 2 (1998): 63-64.

¹⁶⁾ S. Collishaw, B. Maughan and A. Pickles, "Infant Adoption: Psychosocial Outcomes in Adulthood,"

Last update: 2017/05/22 12:57 effects_of_adoption_on_the_child_s_social_adjustment https://marripedia.org/effects_of_adoption_on_the_child_s_social_adjustment

Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology 33, no. 2 (1998): 61.

This entry draws heavily from [Adoption Works Well: A Synthesis of the Literature](#).

From:

<https://marripedia.org/> - **Marripedia**

Permanent link:

https://marripedia.org/effects_of_adoption_on_the_child_s_social_adjustment

Last update: **2017/05/22 12:57**

