

Values Exploration

SUPPORT FOR CHAPTER TWO:
“THE SECRETS OF SUCCESSFUL ADOPTIVE PARENTING”

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Values Exploration

As mentioned in Chapter Two of my book “The Secrets of Successful Adoptive Parenting” one of the areas in which you may be able to prepare more fully for adoption is to better understand yourself and what may cause you stress and frustration when your child moves in.

There will be much to celebrate and much joy to be experienced in response to your child moving in, but some adopters also experience some negative feelings, including feelings of stress and frustration. If you can anticipate this, then these feelings will not catch you unawares, and you will be better placed to manage them.

One cause of stress and/or frustration may be your child unintentionally or even intentionally acting or behaving in ways that offend your values. The more you can understand yourself and anticipate what your feelings might be in response to certain triggers, the better you will be able to understand situations that may cause you frustration if your values are offended.

It is common to experience impatience and frustration with others if they act in a way that disregard or offend your values. You may also experience a feeling of shame or frustration with yourself if you behave in ways that go against your own values.

We can start to understand our values by considering different questions and reflecting on different memories, or situations real or imagined to recall or anticipate how we felt or might feel. It is through thinking behind these emotional reactions to situations that we become aware of those values that are most important to us, and as a result we can be better positioned to anticipate and prepare for situations that may cause us feelings of frustration.

Thinking through your values will also help make you more aware of when your child’s behaviours are in line with your values, and will help increase your sense that they are like you and that they ‘belong’.

These self-coaching questions will help you develop a basic understanding of your values and of what may become really important to you as you parent your adopted child. Depending on how far you would like to explore this area there are many resources on the internet that you can consult, some of which are suggested at the end of this document.



Preparing for your Exploration

It is important that you ponder the following questions. You may prefer to find somewhere quiet and think through each question in turn, noting down your responses as they arise. Or, you may prefer to read over the questions and then mull on them as you go about your daily activities. However, you prefer to do it is fine, as long as you do it!

Reflect on the following questions in your own way until you feel you get a better sense of what is important to you from a parenting perspective and what situations or behaviours may cause you frustration if you experienced them frequently.

Starting your Exploration

Some people find it easy to come up with what values are important to them by being prompted with positive questions relating to when their values are being honoured; other people find it easier when prompted with questions which relate directly to situations in which their values are being challenged or offended.

You will find different sets of questions below. Use any or all to help you elicit some values that you feel represent what is important to you about family life.



A. Discovering values through situations that may delight you

In each of the following situations ask yourself the following questions:

- In this situation what behaviours are you observing that make you feel this way?
 - What about those behaviours is important to you?
 - What values are being honoured with these behaviours?
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1. Imagine a situation in which you are introducing your child to your close friends and family. You are feeling proud of your child and their behaviour. They are interacting well with you and those close to you.
 2. You take your child out food shopping in a large supermarket. Your child's behaviour is exemplary and you are very proud of them as you complete your shopping trip.
 3. Think of a time when you have observed some 'well behaved' children.
 4. Think of a time when you have observed what you consider to be 'good parenting'.
 5. How do you like to be treated by others, particularly children?
 6. Imagine a situation when you are away from home. Family life continues without you. What is it about these typical home situations that you miss and yearn to be a part of when you return.
 7. Think of a situation where you really feel proud of your new child and your newly formed family.



B. Discovering values through situations which may cause frustration

In each of the following situations ask yourself the following questions:

- In this situation what behaviours are you observing that make you feel this way?
 - What about those behaviours is causing a negative reaction in you?
 - Which of your values are being offended by these behaviours?
1. Imagine a situation in which you are introducing your child to your close friends and family. They act in a way that makes you feel that you need to excuse their behaviour. You start to feel embarrassed by what they are doing, how they are acting and interacting with those closest to you.
 2. You take your child out food shopping in a large supermarket. You haven't been out long when your child starts misbehaving in ways that really start to irritate you. You may have seen this type of behaviour in other children, but now you are experiencing it in your own child you can start to feel the frustration rising as they will just not do as they are told and behave in the way you want!
 3. Think of a time when you have observed a 'poorly behaved' child and thought that their behaviour was not appropriate.
 4. Think of a time when you have observed what you consider to be 'poor parenting'.
 5. What treatment of you by others, particularly children would offend you?
 6. When you have been away from your family, what situation awaiting you inside would make you dread going back home?
 7. Think of a situation where you may feel ashamed of your new child and your newly formed family. *(this may seem a harsh question – but many of the adoptive parents I spoke to had experienced such situations – if they had anticipated them in advance may have been better prepared to handle themselves and their reactions)*



C. Discovering values through your own life experiences

1. Think back to how you were parented as a child and the key people who influenced you as you grew up.

- What rules/boundaries governed how you were parented?
- How did you feel in response to those rules/boundaries?
- What values do you feel were instilled in you directly or indirectly by these rules/boundaries?
- Reflecting on them now, which of these values/rules/boundaries are important to you as you prepare to become a parent?

2. Think back to a significant life event that impacted you. (please repeat this question for as many significant life events as you can recall)

- What was it about this life event that impacted you?
- What realisations did you have as a result of this event?
- On reflection what can you learn about your values and about what is important to you in life?

D. Discovering values through suggestion

In my experience, those values that are derived through reflection on real or imagined situations will be more meaningful than those that are selected from a list. However, if you would like to look at lists of values that may resonate with you have a look at the following web pages:

- <http://www.emotionalcompetency.com/values.htm>
- http://www.humanbasics.org/Basic_human_values/basic_human_values.html
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Outline_of_self#Virtues



Using your values to prepare

Once you have a list of values, put them in some order of priority. The ones that you feel you need observed above all else, put towards the top of your list.

Once you have your loosely prioritised list, discuss your list with anyone that is sharing the parenting role with you. Talk about what is important to you; listen to what is important for the other person. Anticipate possible scenarios that might result in your values being offended and talk about the feelings of frustration you may feel, and what may push those feelings to the limit. Discuss how you may be able to support each other in handling situations as they arise. It is important to come up with a common parenting approach which honours each of your top values, so that your child is being parented with consistency.

A word of caution

This is by no means a full proof approach to ensure you will experience no frustration in response to your adopted child. However, if you do become more aware of your values and of what may cause you frustration, you will be better prepared if and when these situations arise.

Remember it will be your child's behaviours, and situations in which you find yourself that may cause you frustration – not the child themselves. The more you can prepare for how to handle your emotions and situations, the more you leave yourself free to build a positive relationship based on empathy, understanding and compassion with your child.

If you need further support

If you feel you need further support, please contact me directly via email on

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I offer bespoke coaching programmes, and if there is sufficient interest, could offer small group coaching or training courses.