International Adoption: Help Your New Child Feel at Home

Question: We just recently adopted our daughter from China. Do you have any tips on helping her adjust to our family and being in a new country?

Answer: If you are adopting or have adopted a child from another part of the world, these tips may help her adjust to a new family in a new country:

- Talk to your child—all the time. Sprinkle your running conversation with songs and rhymes. Besides knowing little or no English, many international children are behind on language skills in general.
- Limit visitors so that your child isn’t overwhelmed. And remember that your attention and love are far more exciting to her than any toy.
- Serve food at regular times every day, so that your child learns there’s always a next meal. Many international adoptees come from environments where food is scarce.
- Establish a daily routine for your child, such as a consistent bedtime. This helps to develop trust and comforts your child.
- If your child came from a group home or orphanage where she shared the room with other children, you may want to sleep in her bedroom with her for her first few nights at your home. This is also an opportunity for older siblings to get involved; they could temporarily share the room with their new baby sister as well. Bare in mind that this tip depends on the age of your child; the younger she is, the more necessary you may find this tip to be.
- Learn about the culture that your child comes from to understand the differences between that culture and your own. Depending on how much exposure your child has had to her native culture, she may have already developed some cultural expectations. Ease her into new customs and habits to reduce culture shock.
- Don’t be discouraged if your child seems to adjust well in the beginning and then all of a sudden seems to regress. Initial adjustment reactions are oftentimes delayed, and strong relationships take time to develop. Stay patient with your child as the bond between you forms.

Doug Swanson, MD
Medical Director, International Adoption Clinic, Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, and Associate Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine.

Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics offers a bimonthly International Adoption Clinic with preadoptive and postadoptive services. For more information, please call (816) 234-1699.

Do you have a question for the pediatric experts at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics? Submit your question by sending an e-mail to thassen@cmh.edu or writing the editor: Telisa Hassen, Community Relations, Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics, 2401 Gillham Road, Kansas City, MO 64108. We will answer as many inquiries as possible.
Ever wonder why we tend to talk to babies completely differently than we address older children or other adults? It’s almost instinctive to coo “Whoooose the babeeeee?” into the tiny face of a newborn.

In fact, many cultures all over the world use this kind of communication with babies. It’s known among language experts as motherese, parentese, or infant-directed speech—the term most researchers prefer. And babies love it.

**How Parentese May Work in Developing Your Baby’s Speech**

In studying the way mothers talk to their babies and the way babies respond, experts have found that, from birth, babies prefer baby talk. Conversation with higher pitch, exaggerated up-and-down pitches, and elongated vowels captures their attention better and holds it longer than regular speech.

Other characteristics of parentese include longer pauses between short, simple phrases, clearly voiced consonants, and repetition. Plus, we tend to move in close to talk to babies and use exaggerated facial expressions and lip movements. All of this together may be a way of helping infants learn to use sounds and eventually form speech.

New research suggests that parentese seems to help babies learn language in ways we don’t yet understand. Scientists note that infants begin communicating long before they can use words. Newborns make eye contact to interact, and as young as 2 months of age, babies begin to make cooing noises. And by responding to their “speech,” we provide incentive to keep it up.

**Talk to Your Baby Frequently**

Babies learn to recognize the natural rhythm of speech and learn the give-and-take of conversation when people talk to them and then pause for a response. For example, adults speaking to a baby often use a rising intonation at the end of the sentence. This signals to the baby that the sentence is coming to an end, so it will be baby’s turn to respond.

Experts say the more you talk to a baby, the better. Studies show children who hear more spoken language earlier tend to use more words sooner.

The good news is that babies don’t need speech lessons. They simply learn from our conversation with them. So, describe what you’re doing, ask questions, chat, sing, play games, and read to your baby from the get-go and she’ll get the message.
The Internet has become a source of unending knowledge, entertainment, and socialization for children. According to a www.parenthood.com article, roughly 87 percent of U.S. teenagers between the ages of 12 and 18 use the Internet on a regular basis. Chances are your teen is one of them. Whether you personally know your way around the Internet or not, it is a good idea to stay informed about what your children can—and are—accessing on the Internet and how to keep them safe.

What Is Available Online for Children?
Children have the world at their fingertips when they log on to the Internet. In general, Web sites aimed at children can be broken down into three basic categories:

- **Education.** One reason that children access the Internet is to complete homework assignments and research for school papers and projects. Edward Christophersen, PhD, clinical psychologist at Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics and Professor of Pediatrics at the UMKC School of Medicine, says that many schools put schedules, grades, and homework assignments on the Internet. Children can immediately begin researching their homework online or reserving books at the local public library with the click of a mouse.

  If your children aren’t accessing information for their current education, they may be researching for their future. The Internet is an ideal way to start looking at colleges, not to mention prepare for college-level entrance exams.

  - **Entertainment.** The Internet offers a multitude of free games that children can easily access. These games allow children to challenge themselves, “the computer,” or other players at anything from checkers or card games to video games modified into computer programs. However, most games that require subscription or payment require credit card information.

  Outside of games, children can access other Web pages that are designed to entertain. Many Web sites list jokes, offer short comedic videos, and provide information to enhance children’s skills at their other hobbies. Many magazines have online versions for Internet users to peruse as well.

- **Socialization/Networking.** This area of the Internet is growing the fastest. Included in this category are Weblogs, chat rooms, instant messaging, e-mail, and more.

  “You Lost Me at Weblogs . . . ”—

  **Three Networking Services Defined**

  Though you may have a general idea about the networking services offered by the Internet, a short definition of each couldn’t hurt:

  - **Weblog:** a type of Web site, often called “blog” for short, where site owners and operators make entries, usually in the form of a journal or a diary. The entries then appear in reverse chronological order, recording the daily thoughts of the “blogger.” A blogger can be anyone from a political commentator to your child recording daily events and activities. According to www.wikipedia.com, Weblogs often integrate text, photographs, video, and audio elements, as well as links to other Web sites.

  - **Chat room:** an online site where people can “chat” online. According to www.wikipedia.com, chat rooms work by broadcasting messages to people on the same site in real time. All your children have to do is type their thoughts and hit enter to communicate with someone around the block—or around the world.

  - **Instant messaging (IM):** IM is also real-time communication, but it is specifically designed for chat between people who know each other. Even though users must verify that they know all of their contacts, which are people who they instant message with, this process is not foolproof. In addition, all major IM services allow users to create a personal profile detailing their name, gender, age, home address, phone number, e-mail address, interests, and more.

Dangers on the Internet
Chat Room and Instant Messaging Lingo

Chat rooms and instant messaging services have developed their own shorthand lingo to use on the Internet. One downside to this is that parents oftentimes cannot tell what their children are saying. To help you out, here is a sampling of the lingo children use on the Internet:

- **BB**—Bathroom Break
- **BRB**—Be Right Back
- **cUL8r**—See you Later
- **G2G**—Got To Go
- **JK**—Just Kidding
- **Kotc**—Kiss on the cheek
- **LoL**—Laugh out Loud
- **LyL**—Love you Lots
- **Nm**—Never mind
- **PoS**—Parent over Shoulder
- **TMI**—Too Much Information
- **TTYL**—Talk To you Later
- **SNC**—Screen Name
- **BF**—Boyfriend
- **GF**—Girlfriend

While children are in chat rooms and instant messaging, there is a possibility that they could fall into one of many dangers on the Internet. In addition, there are some Web sites that children are able to access that they shouldn’t because they are inappropriate. Brenda Pfannenstiel, Coordinator of the Kreamer Family Resource Center at Children’s Mercy, warns of the following dangers to look out for on the Internet:

- Predators and pedophiles who stalk children’s personal profiles
- Pornography and explicit sexual content
- Online gambling—can be accessed through some gaming sites
- Scams, misinformation, fraud, and identity theft
- Viruses and worms that have the potential to harm your computer
- Access to information on drugs, alcohol, tobacco, unhealthy weight loss techniques, hatred, racism, violence, and other means of unhealthy behavior

**How Can I Keep My Child Safe?**

The first step to keeping your children safe on the Internet is learning about it yourself. Simply knowing what’s out there and what the dangers are is the first step, and the good news is, you’re there.

Parents should monitor their children’s usage of the Internet. Dr. Christophersen recommends the computer be placed in common areas, such as a family room or kitchen area. This allows parents to keep an eye on their children without seeming invasive.

“There are commercially available tracking programs that will list every Web site that has been accessed so parents can check to see what their children have been viewing over the Internet,” Dr. Christophersen adds.

Many Internet service providers, such as AOL, EarthLink, and Road Runner, offer filtering software that can be programmed to block access to entire classes of Web sites that parents do not want their children to view. “It is far easier to prevent access to a questionable Web site than it is to explain what the children were viewing after the fact,” Dr. Christophersen says.

Similarly, Pfannenstiel urges parents to communicate with their children about the validity of information available on the Internet. “We must all be skeptical about the accuracy, authority, credibility, and bias of information we receive on the Internet and elsewhere,” Pfannenstiel says.

By keeping up-to-date with advances on the Internet, trying your best to keep an eye on your children, and communicating with them about their values, you will be able to guide your children online in a positive way.
Q&A:

Preventing and Managing HPV

The human papilloma virus (HPV) is one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases in the United States. Knowing the facts about HPV can help your daughter avoid infection and seek treatment, if necessary.

Q. What are the symptoms of HPV?

A. A common symptom is genital warts. HPV warts are usually flesh-colored and have a cauliflower-like appearance. They don’t often cause pain, but may cause itching. Warts inside the vagina or cervix may not cause any symptoms.

Q. How is it transmitted?

A. HPV is usually transmitted through sexual intercourse. It’s impossible to tell if a person has genital HPV, because warts may not be visible. Also, a person may not know she has HPV because there may be no symptoms.

Q. How can I prevent my daughter from contracting HPV?

A. In June 2006, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the first vaccine against HPV for females ages 9 to 26. The vaccine, Gardasil, protects against types 16 and 18, which cause about 70 percent of cervical cancers, and against types 6 and 11, which cause about 90 percent of genital warts. This vaccine will not protect a teen or adult woman who is already infected with certain strains of HPV, so your daughter should be vaccinated before she becomes sexually active. It also will not protect against other HPV infection, so regular Pap tests are still important, the FDA says.

Talk with your daughter’s doctor to find out when she should receive the vaccine.

Care for Your Adolescent

The Children’s Mercy Hospital Section of Adolescent Medicine offers the Teen Clinic which provides specialty and primary care for youth ages 12 to 21. The Teen Clinic is staffed by specialists in pediatrics and adolescent medicine and has an OB/GYN on staff. For more information, call 816-234-3050.
Planning ahead is one of the best things we can do to protect the health of our family. We carefully choose the right doctors, keep routine appointments, and teach our kids about safety. But despite our efforts, emergencies can and do happen. Are you prepared for the unexpected?

Knowing where to go when your child has a health emergency is key to getting the best treatment possible. And it isn’t always the Emergency Room. Urgent care centers are walk-in clinics designed to treat minor injuries and illness when you can’t wait to get to the doctor. You don’t need an appointment and many times can get treated faster—and at a lower cost—than in the ER.

Children’s Mercy offers pediatric emergency care at Children’s Mercy Hospital near downtown Kansas City and urgent care services at Children’s Mercy South, Children’s Mercy Northland, as well as at Children’s Mercy Hospital. The following are tips that can help you decide what type of care your child may need.

When to Go to the ER
The ER is open around the clock to treat serious, life-and-death problems. Get to the ER right away if your child has sudden symptoms that need emergency care, including:
- chest pain
- trouble breathing
- uncontrolled bleeding
- vomiting
- loss of consciousness
- choking
- poisoning
- sudden slurred speech
- seizures
- severe burns
- head or back injuries.

When an Urgent Care Center Is a Better Choice
Our urgent care centers offer many of the same services as the ER, such as X-rays and blood testing. But they don’t treat life-threatening conditions. If you need treatment right away for a less serious problem, the urgent care center is your best bet. Check the hours to the right for the Children’s Mercy Urgent Care Center nearest you to get help for:
- sinus or ear infections
- urinary tract infections
- minor cuts and burns
- sprains or broken bones
- fever and sore throat.

What if I Just Have a Question About My Child’s Illness?
The Children’s Mercy Health Information Line is available after hours to help with questions about minor illnesses or if you’re not sure whether a trip to the Urgent Care Center or ER is necessary. The Information Line is staffed by registered nurses trained in pediatric triage so they are available to help with questions about such situations as:
- hives
- stomachaches
- fever
- sore throat
- and many more minor illnesses.

As always, if you are in doubt and believe your child needs immediate medical attention, call 911.
Video Games Bad for Kids?

Video and computer-based games score some healthy points. For example, they may boost your child’s computer skills and ability to respond and react to visual images. But there’s a flip side to all the fun. Time spent in sedentary activities, such as playing video games, contributes to childhood weight problems. Just as troubling: Experts worry about the effect of video game violence on young minds.

Set Some Ground Rules
As a parent, you can fight back against video game violence by choosing games wisely. Use ratings and warning labels as a guide—not the final word. Games suitable for kids age 6 and older are labeled “E” for everyone. However, an “E”-rated game isn’t necessarily violence-free. In one report, two out of three “E”-rated games involved some type of violence.

Some Video Games Reward Violence

The violence in video games can have a major impact on young people. Too much can desensitize kids to violence, make them aggressive, cause nightmares, and make them wary of the world around them.

Some experts believe the violence in video games may have a greater impact on kids than violence on television. That’s because video games allow children to take part in virtual violence. They also “reward” kids for aggressive behavior.

Here are some more safe gaming tips:

- Limit your child’s media time—including TV, computer games, and video games—to one to two hours per day. Some parents use a timer to keep track of the hour or two.
- Keep video games out of kids’ rooms to cut down playing time.
- Try to pick games that don’t use human or living targets or award points for killing.
- Balance video game time with more active or educational pursuits.

We value your input. Please send your comments to:

Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics
Community Relations
2401 Gillham Road
Kansas City, MO 64108

Phone: (816) 346-1370
Fax: (816) 346-1375
E-mail: safeandsound@cmh.edu

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