

The Michigan Adoption Resource Exchange is a program of Judson Center and is funded by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. To learn about foster care adoption and view photolistings and videos of children, visit our website at www.mare.org.



Tips to help with behavior issues



NOTE: This edited story from the Adoptive Families website describes the reasons behind the behaviors of some older adopted youth and offers tips to help mitigate them. To see the entire story, visit www.adoptivefamilies.com/adoption-bonding-home/the-testing-phase/

When an older child joins a family through adoption, parents need to consider what the child is experiencing.

It may be one of the happiest days of your life, but for the child you're adopting, it's a day of loss. He may feel as though he is losing every person and surrounding he has ever known.

The post-adoption transition can be broken into the honeymoon, when children arrive and are on their best behavior, and the testing phase, which may begin when the children realize they're not immediately moving again.

That testing phase is when your new child begins to display all the behaviors you heard about. He might lie, steal, misbehave at school or directly defy you.

This behavior is a reflection of what happened to the child before he came to you – he's grieving and healing from trauma and broken attachments – the behaviors are not a reflection of your parenting skills. Kids test their new parents because they are afraid that, if they attach, you will decide to send them away.

The key is to remember that although children can behave in ways that make you angry, anger doesn't get your family closer to the goal of attachment. Some people who adopt older kids expect too much too soon.

Demonstrating unconditional love and having fun together are what will move children toward bonding.

Let's look at what's behind these common behaviors and what parents can do to help get their families through them.

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Tacos, tennis, hoops and horses make him smile

A taco a day keeps the hunger pangs away, or at least in Christopher's case it satisfies the craving for his favorite food.

Once he's fueled up, Christopher is ready to shoot some hoops or kick around a soccer ball. He might even grab a racket and play tennis with you. Christopher also enjoys riding bikes.

If tacos aren't available at the movie theater, Christopher would munch on popcorn while watching his favorite action films such as "Black Panther." Christopher likes playing video games – especially the action-packed ones – and he loves going to laser tag facilities.

He likes watching different types of cartoons, and he enjoys listening to music, particularly rap. His favorite holidays are Christmas and Halloween because he gets to dress up and go to parties.

Christopher says he likes horses and the color gray. When he gets older, Christopher wants to become a paramedic so he can help others.

He says he's looking for a forever family who has dogs, and he hopes they are patient and nice.



Christopher C08321



Sativa C08614

She wants to cook, travel and have fun with family

Someday, Sativa wants to travel to Tokyo to shop at its 2.7-million-square-foot mall.

While she's there, she'd likely visit one of the city's seafood restaurants since sushi is Sativa's favorite food. Sativa says she loves food and enjoys cooking it as much as eating it. She loves photography and enjoys making DIY videos. She enjoys riding her bike to the library.

When she gets back home, she might settle into her comfort zone of watching TV and movies and spending time with friends. Sativa likes playing fashion show and doing makeup with her friends.

When she's ready for quieter times, Sativa likes playing board, card and video games, especially Minecraft. Sativa says she loves celebrating Christmas, Easter and her birthday by being with her friends and family.

If she had three wishes, Sativa would want "to end world hunger and poverty, to have a family to love and to be successful." She hopes to go on to become a pediatric neurosurgeon and a photographic journalist.

But first there's a matter of family. She wants one who enjoys cooking, traveling, going to the library and having fun together.

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Lying

Why kids do it: Lying is developmentally appropriate for two- to three-year-olds, but sometimes much older kids in foster care are developmentally and emotionally stuck around ages two to three. You have to remember to think about their developmental age, not just their physical age. Many adopted children also feel they have been lied to all of their lives. So, when a child feels like he has been lied to by everybody his whole life, he may also begin to lie as well.

What parents can do: When you know your child lies, the best advice is to quit asking questions you know the answer to. If the principal has already called and told you that your child has in-school suspension because he hit Pete, don't ask, "What happened at school today?" as soon as he gets off the bus. You already know what happened. Instead, say, "The principal called, and I understand you had an in-school suspension."

Another tactic is simply agreeing with them when you know their lie doesn't matter – is it really important to know if they ate their whole snack? – or it's a clearly outrageous lie.

Losing or breaking items

Why kids do it: Children in foster care have already lost everything – their entire family, everything they've ever known – and that's why they don't value possessions. And when children move through multiple foster homes, they don't learn to value belongings because they don't see the real cost; they move to a new home, and there are new things. They leave a home in the middle of the night and don't have time to take their clothes, then their caseworker puts in a clothing order and they get new clothing.

What parents can do: When you know your child is destructive, stop buying expensive items. Shop at the thrift store. You can't follow kids around and make sure they keep track of their belongings, but there are some things you can fix. If a youth breaks a toy, don't automatically buy a new one. If they want another one, make them earn money by doing chores, and replace it themselves.

Anger

Why kids do it: When youth are mean, and push parents away, it's because they are afraid to attach



again. They push your buttons, and try to make you angry to test if your love is real. Sometimes children act out because they are emotionally stuck and are still throwing tantrums characteristic of a much younger age.

What parents can do: When you feel like you want to dole out consequences, remember what your child has already lost, and remember that there's no way you can be punitive enough on that scale. If your child has been in 11 different homes, losing TV time when he doesn't do homework is no big deal. Punishments just create anger, which keeps kids hurt and distant and prevents attachment. Instead, in moments like these, remind yourself that attachment is your goal and that being angry doesn't help move that forward.

If he is pushing you away by calling you names, you can say, "I'm not going to listen to that," then go outside. You can't make him stop yelling, but you can take charge of the situation by choosing not to hear it.

It's important to wait until everyone is calm to try to talk about your child's anger. If your daughter is screaming and carrying on and you try to reason with her, that will just escalate everything. Later on, you can say, "That was quite a performance. I didn't like what you called me. Then say, "Nice try pushing me away, but I'm still your mom," and give her a hug.

After the trials, trust

The testing phase is hard, but it's a very human process. Parents need to find alternative ways to deal with the frustration of a lying, stealing, destructive, angry youth. Think of his misbehavior as a way of asking, "What's going to happen? Are you going to hit me? Are you going to get rid of me?" and respond to those questions, rather than react in anger. Remember the emotional age of your kid, and think about what kind of behaviors are normal in that phase.



Pictured from top left are Kim Ross, Jessica Franks, Judy McNaughton, Kelli Ostrosky.

Shown from bottom left are Kim Wolowski, Amber Tiemeyer, Aimee Louden and Kimberly Grover.

Navigators stand by ready to help

We've added new faces to our familiar lineup of MARE adoption navigators, so we thought we'd give you a look at them and remind you – or let you know – what they do. Adoption navigators are experienced adoptive parents who are available to help guide you through the adoption process and answer your

questions. If you are interested in being connected to a navigator you can reach them at 800-589-6273 or complete a general inquiry form on our website at www.mare.org/For-Families/General-Adoption-Information-Inquiry and a navigator will reach out to you.

Calendar of Events

Saturday, May 15
MARE Meet & Greet
(All Meet & Greets are held virtually)
10:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Thursday, May 27
MARE Meet & Greet
5:45.-7:30 p.m.

Saturday, June 12
MARE Meet & Greet
10:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Thursday, June 24
MARE Meet & Greet
5:45.-7:30 p.m.

Saturday, July 10
MARE Meet & Greet
10:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

For more information regarding these events contact Jessica Thompson, MARE Recruitment Specialist: jessica_thompson@judsoncenter.org

MARE contact information

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