

LIFE AFTER PLACEMENT

SIMPLIFY LIFE: The Restore Network is committed to equipping you to provide a healing environment for the children placed in your home. Whether your children come to you as newborns, 6 year olds or 16 year olds, the first weeks and months are the most critical for laying the foundation for children to heal. The guidelines that follow will help you get started, but in order to do them, you will first need to simplify life in your home. Ask yourself: What can I let go of for this season? What can I delegate to someone else? What task could I invite a friend or family to do for awhile? What can be put off until the child is in bed each evening? As you slow life down and make space for these new rhythms, you will create an environment where your child can thrive and heal. It won't be like this forever, but it does need to be like this for a season.

DISARM FEAR WITH PREDICTABILITY

Before your children came to you, their lives were often chaotic and unpredictable. Because of this, your children likely come to you in a state of chronic fear and anxiety which will be displayed as a host of dysregulating behaviors that previously helped them gain some control. The best thing you can offer your child now is a predictable day. Talk about the day's schedule in the morning and review the day at bedtime. When you have older children, include your child in this process. You know the non-negotiables but offer choices and compromises when you can. This allows you to give voice to your child. Put the daily routine on a poster in your kitchen, or give it to your child written out on an index card. Show your child that you have a plan, and when you say something will happen, it happens. As life in your home proves to be predictable, you will disarm your child's fear so they can begin to thrive.



EARN TRUST AS THE "GOOD BOSS"

The adults in your children's lives before they came to you have likely been untrustworthy. Your child may have been neglected and had to be their own "boss" to survive, or they may have experienced an abusive adult who exercised authority in a way that was harmful. Either way, your child needs to know that you can be trusted to be the "Good Boss." So – stay home for awhile and get to know one another. Limit visitors, avoid placing the child in the care of another adult. Consider: Can you keep the child out of daycare for a bit? Skip children's church for awhile? For working parents who use childcare, it's okay! Help the child understand how your role is different and make the most of the time you have each day. For older children who go to school, could one parent stay home the first week as your child transitions into school? Put extracurriculars on hold for everyone. Make the most of the time you have together.

BECOME A DETECTIVE OF YOUR NEW CHILD

Just like a newborn baby whose different cries communicate different needs, our children will express their needs through behaviors because they do not know how to communicate their needs through words (yet). You need to become an expert on your child. So – grab a notebook and write down the patterns you see in your child's behavior. Consider: What is the need behind this behavior? Is my child hungry, tired, scared? Do meltdowns always happen at a certain time? If you pay close attention to your child's behavior, you will be able to discern what your child needs to heal. Keep your child close for this season so you can really get to know them and observe!



LOWER YOUR EXPECTATIONS

A child from a hard place cannot enter your home and fit seamlessly into your family rhythms. So – be realistic from day 1! The primary things you should be concerned with when a new child is placed with you is helping the child feel safe and connecting with the child. If you spend your time on these two things, you will get what every parent wants: appropriate behaviors. If you instead spend your time focusing on changing behaviors, setting up rules establishing chores, and enforcing homework, you will begin a power and control battle that you will ultimately lose. It will be extremely frustrating for both you and the child! Instead, help the child experience felt safety and nurture by meeting his needs, setting simple family rules, and helping the child adjust slowly over time. This may be painful for you to hear, but homework and chores can wait!

PLAY, PLAY, PLAY

Play is the language of children. It is how they learn, how they feel connected to others, and will be how they begin to heal from relational trauma. You can engage in playful moments throughout the day with your child but may need to structure intentional play time as well. While you play, give your children eye contact which says, "I see you." Give them healthy forms of touch which builds connection and calms down the body. Watch the tone of your voice and try to speak playfully, even with low level behavioral challenges-this can often disarm the tension of the moment and quickly turn it around. Consider building play time into your family routines: plan a popcorn and movie night, host a family game night, make a Saturday morning run for donuts, dance in the kitchen while you put away the dishes. Play is the language of our children and it's worth it, it's doable, and you'd be surprised at what you learn during that time.

