

CHALLENGES IN SCHOOL ADAPTATION AMONG ADOPTED CHILDREN

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The essential, if not the dominant part of a child's life, takes place in the school environment as well as an adult's life is spent at work. Therefore, a good relationship at school community and academic achievements are important for a child's general psychological well-being. In addition, aspiration to estimate a child's success on its progress at school is traditional. Perhaps, the most popular questions a child is asked by adults are the ones like, "How are you doing at school?", "How is your study?", "What are your favorite subjects?", etc.

The comparative research of the adaptation process among Belarusian adoptive and biological families allowed us to obtain some information on how parents from both groups evaluate the academic performance of their children, to what extent they are concerned about this issue and how children's school adaptation actually proceeds. The main research group involved 64 adoptive mothers and 50 adoptive fathers. The control group consisted of 62 biological mothers and 49 biological fathers. All parents responded to the specially designed questionnaire.

The study has shown that the vast majority of adoptive fathers (81%) consider that their children are generally good (or even very good) at learning. Only 19% of them note that the children cope with their studies not too well (or even too bad). The same trend is observed in adoptive mothers' responses. However, they are generally more critical about their children's academic performance. Thus, while 73% of adoptive mothers believe in school successes of their children, 27% of them indicate that children are not too good (or even very bad) at learning.

The majority of parents also note that there are no problems with teachers at school. However, about one third of parents indicate that teachers rarely complain about their children's behavior. Only 8 % of the adoptive mothers and 4 % of the adoptive fathers mention frequent or even constant teachers' complaints.

After comparing these data with the survey results of parents from biological families it has been found that there is no significant difference between responses of the adoptive parents and the biological ones. It means that regardless of how the child appears in the family, parents evaluate its school success in a similar way. Likewise, significant differences between the biological and adoptive parents concerning their assessment of children's abilities and interests were not detected.

However, children's abilities, interests, achievements and obedience are only some aspects of their school life. A more indicative pattern has appeared after analyzing adoptive parents' responses concerning child's behavioral, emotional well-being and its relationships with peers at school. In general, the responses of fathers and mothers revealed similar trends. Women, however, were more active in sharing their opinion. Therefore, further results are taken from mothers' responses.

Comparative analysis of adoptive and biological mothers' responses has shown that there are some aspects of adopted children's behavior, their well-being and school relationships, which essentially are not different from that of the biological children. Thus, the common and well-shaped trends characterizing both adopted and biological children include the following: resistance to adults' requests and instructions (57% in both groups), school fears, in particular fear of failure, fear of answering in front of the class, fear of tests and exams (42% among adopted children and 48% among children from biological families), frequent complaints (35% and 37%, respectively), tantrums and flash irritability (35% and 30% respectively), mood swings (37% and 31%, respectively), reluctance to go to school (34% and 37%, respectively), multiple quarrels and conflicts with classmates (32% and 32% respectively).

However, there are some increasingly occurring problems among adoptive children. Some of these challenges are connected with the object world, that is, with the nature of a child's activity. Others are related to the world of people, that is, to the character of relationships with peers.

One of the most frequent "object" problems, which directly complicates the process of school learning, is difficulties in concentration of attention. As a result, children are restless, unable to concentrate on one thing and to do something carefully. While only about a third of biological mothers (31%) mention this problem, almost one in two adoptive mothers (48%) indicates that her child "hardly concentrates on anything for more than a few minutes". It seems that a higher prevalence of this problem among adoptive children could be explained by triggering a special defense mechanism formed in a child. This mechanism allows not to be fixed or dwelled on these or those circumstances of the surrounding world, and to be able easily to change the object of attention.

Another "object" problem is a deliberate breakage and damage of things (28% among adopted children versus 15% among children from biological families). This problem can be understood through the prism of children's difficult prior adoption experience including loss and destruction of everything that was dear and valuable in their lives. It should be noted that in general adopted children are characterized by a tendency to destruction. Sometimes it is expressed in self-aggression (aggression directed to itself), sometimes in aggression directed at other children, and sometimes in aggression directed at external objects. By the way, the latter is the healthiest.

It is also found that adopted children in comparison with biological ones are more inclined to such "relationship" problems as fights with other children (40% versus 26% respectively), aspiration to dominate rigidly, to subordinate and suppress other children (bullying) (23% versus 12% respectively), theft (13% versus 4%, respectively), deliberate lie (31% versus 17%, respectively).

In addition, when describing the general background of a child's mood, adoptive mothers often (39%) indicate such feature as "a lot of dreaming during the day, as it is in its own world", "on its own wave", "somewhere not here". Only 23% of biological mothers testify about a similar child's condition. Perhaps, such emotional detachment and withdrawal are reasoned by the unconscious (or inaccessible for parents) feelings, associated with a specific history of their origin, their childhood traumatic experience and acquired types of psychological defenses, which exist in the psychological reality of adopted children.

Thus, adoptive parents in comparison with biological ones indicate a larger number of behavioral, emotional and relationship problems in their children. It can be considered as an empirical confirmation of orphanhood experience influence on further child development. Therefore, it is no coincidence that adoption specialists prepare prospective adoptive parents to the fact that children's traumatic deprivation experience has a further impact on their behavior, emotions and relationships. But the mistrust position from future adoptive parents is still often expressed in the following thesis, "All children have these or those problems. The adopted children aren't an exception. Those problems, experts speak and write about, can occur in any child, and there is no sense to allocate the adopted children as group of an extra risk and attention".

The above-mentioned information suggests not only the importance of special psychological training of parents to the adoption, but also subsequent support of adoptive families. It will facilitate the development of adoptive parents' skills, abilities and competence to help traumatized children. Besides both parents and teachers should be aware that adoptive children have a need for a special approach and well-constructed system of their psychological support.

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