



Their Anger Will Not Become My Anger

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Their anger will not become my anger~

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Adoption, and foster care, is a labor of love. Sometimes it is an easy labor of love and all goes well! Other times there are struggles that not one of us could have anticipated at the time we decided to foster/adopt. Understanding the foster/adopted child is imperative to our ability to successfully parent them and remain sane. There simply is a difference between parenting our foster/ adopted children and our biological children. Period.

Like many new and enthusiastic adoptive parents, I simply could not see how parenting a foster or adopted child would be any different than parenting my four biological children. I was doing that rather well and felt I had what I needed to bring more children into our family. My belief was that love would conquer all! What I have learned along the way is that it is so much easier for me to give love than for many of my children to accept it.

To accept love, there must be trust and safety. Many of our children live with the truth that abandonment by a parent is an absolute possibility~and therefore struggle to trust and feel safe with the adoptive parents. The anxiety of living in a relationship where there is not complete trust throws the mind/body system into a constant state of low level anxiety. This constant anxiety impacts one's ability to modulate their social, emotional and behavioral life. We see children acting out, socially immature and emotionally regressed.

I work with many well intended, loving, generous, giving families with a foster/adopted child who appears angry, hostile, isolative, disrespectful and unattached. The parents are baffled, they just don't get it, they don't understand that adoption has anything to do with their child's acting

out. One of the hardest situations to handle is the child who actually provokes the very rejection that they fear to begin with. For many foster/adopted children who I work with, allowing themselves to be loved is too dangerous; they simply can not trust that they will not be abandoned again.

Often when our children act out toward us we are left feeling as if we have done something wrong, that we are to blame, that we are not good enough. Some of our children act in ways that leave us feeling inadequate, small and just downright horrible at times. Many become so controlling, manipulative and defiant that our homes and our lives become consumed with chaos. The provocative, destructive and testing behaviors we see become incomprehensible to most parents.

Seems almost impossible, I know, for a child even adopted at birth to wonder about abandonment. Yet many of them do. After 20 years of working with foster and adopted children, and 15 years of fostering more than 60 children as well as raising 4 biological children I have learned a truth that is often denied. The love that I understand, the love that I long to give, the love that I long to receive from my children is not always the love that will conquer all. I have had to learn to love myself and my children in some new ways.

I have learned the most from children who have aged out of foster care, or who now in their 20s and 30s share their stories of growing up in adopted and foster homes. This journey has not always been easy for me. My marriage has suffered, my biological children have had their share of pain, my neighborhood, our grocery stores, our church have all seen the manifestation of untrusting and scared children who have lived with us.

However, the emotional state of my life today, the joy, the incredibly connected relationships I have with my 4 biological children, the love and most of all the amount of internal peace that I feel would not have been possible if not for all of the pain. I had to experience everything that I have in order to learn that I am more than a mother. I am more than a wife and even though those two roles are the most important roles I will ever have, I am more.

I am Peace. I am Joy. I am Fun. I am Risky. I am Energetic. I am Healthy. I am Sensitive.
I am Authentic.

I had begun to lose all of those truths about me. All of the therapists wanted to focus on the children, on their behaviors, on their pain, on their suffering. I learned all I could about trauma, attachment and emotional regulation. I read all the books, I went to all of the trainings. Yet, I was losing myself. I was angry, I was scared, I was tired even hopeless at times. I wanted them gone, out of my home. I was not healthy in my mind/body/spirit. I knew, just knew that something had to change.

I had to find my truth again. I could no longer deny my truth in the face of their pain. I was in pain too. Their pain was becoming my pain! I could no longer blame my children. I had to face my own pain while learning that I could not take their pain away. We had to learn to get through this thing together. We discover the truth of who we are in relationship to others, and boy do we

learn with our children. The bonding that has transpired between me and my foster/adopted children has been forged through sacrifice and suffering and has not been always easy. It was not the fluid, loving, gentle bonding that took place between me and my biological children.

The most important lesson in all of this; that which has sustained me through years of this work is in learning how to stop absorbing other people's negative, toxic emotions, especially those of my children. In other words, I have learned that

Their anger will not become my anger; their fear will not become my fear; their rejection of me will not become my rejection of them.

I had to not only find my truth but learn to live my truth while parenting some very wounded children. My number one truth is that I Am Peace. I had to work at remaining Peace even in the face of their chaos. I have had to work at living my truth of Peace amidst their unconscious attempts to incite rage. Liberating myself from negative emotional states has literally saved my life.

I have learned to stay centered in stressful, highly emotionally charged situations. I have learned that emotions are energy and that we can catch energies from others. When others are extremely sad, we feel sad. When others are exuberant we tend to feel some of that with them. When our children live in a world of anger and fear we can catch that too and become angry and scared ourselves. We become an emotional sponge. We don't even know if what we are feeling belongs to us or is really someone else's that we picked up along the way. How did I become so unhappy? I am not an unhappy person...or am I?

Here are some tips for clearing your emotions while maintaining healing homes:

1)Whenever chaos is emerging, inside of you or out:

Stop: stop everything, stop moving, stop talking, stop yourself. Quiet the mind.

Drop: drop into your breathing. Just deep breaths as you get yourself 'back'

Roll:roll into your truth first, then roll back into relationship with the other person

2)Ask yourself, is this my true emotion, or is it theirs?

3)Focus all of your attention for just a moment on inhaling positive exhaling negative

4)Respond don't react: respond to the fear that is typically under their anger, instead of reacting to the anger by engaging in the conversation. "Ruth, you only act this way when something is wrong...what's up?" instead of, "do NOT talk to me that way." (*their anger is not your anger, don't let it be!*)

5)Repeat your mantra before engaging, "I Am Peace"

6)You must find a time, every day, to quiet your mind, stop your body, rest into your spirit of love and peace. Surrender there a few minutes, every day.

We can not provide a healing environment in our homes if we do not have a healing environment in our hearts. If we are angry, resentful or blaming we need to reach out, get some help. It is not your fault, it is not their fault. It just is. You should not be expected to do this alone. We are one tribe, us adoptive/foster parents, of many colors; but one tribe. We need each other.

Over the course of 2011 I will be sharing with you more of what I call **TIPS, Trauma Informed Parenting Strategies** in each issue of Adoption Today. Your feedback and questions are welcome at info@coaching-forlife.com

In the meantime:
Peace,

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Juli Alvarado is the founder and Sr. Clinical Consultant at coaching for LIFE!, a personal and professional development organization.

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