



# SCHOOL 101: FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

School can present challenges for adoptive parents and their children. This brief guide will help prepare you for the school experience and, hopefully, prevent some common problems.

## PREPARING FOR SCHOOL

**1.** If you're not familiar with the school that your child will attend, ask if you can sit in on a school assembly. This is a good way to get a feel for the school's diversity. Talk to the principal about how the school approaches the subject of different kinds of families.

**2.** Attend a Parent Advisory Committee (PAC) meeting. PAC meetings are a great place to promote awareness of the adoption and permanency community, and encourage adoption sensitivity.

**3.** Make an appointment to meet with your child's teacher in September. It may be wise to explain that your child is adopted, and to ask them to be sensitive with assignments about families or the child's history.

**4.** If you decide to explain that your child was adopted, share only relevant information. In most cases, you can explain your child's needs without providing all the background details.

**5.** Encourage principals, counsellors, and teachers to use positive adoption language. Provide them with the information on this page. Give them a copy of this handout.

**7.** Donate a book about adoption to your school's library. Suggest other adoption-related titles for the librarian to include in the next order of new books.

**8.** With the permission of your child, make a presentation about adoption to your child's class or to teachers at a faculty meeting. AFABC Family Support Workers can help you with this. Contact us for more information: 604-320-7330 or [info@bcadoption.com](mailto:info@bcadoption.com).

**9.** Keep an eye out for other adoptive families in the school. Your children may make friends with other adoptees and you will have other adoptive parents to share ideas and solve problems with.

## NEWLY ADOPTED KIDS

**1.** If you think your child needs to spend more time attaching to you, or is immature for his or her age, consider delaying entry to Kindergarten or skip it altogether—kids don't have to attend until Grade 1.

**2.** Take your child to the school before the first day to look around and meet the teacher. This is especially important for children who have had lots of disruption in their lives and who find change and transitions hard.

**3.** Be realistic about your child's abilities. Interruptions in attachment, early deprivations, cultural differences, and multiple moves can cause a child to act younger than he or she is. Your child may not be able to learn as fast other classmates.

**3.** If your child has a history of attachment difficulties, grief and loss, abuse, or other trauma, make sure that the school counsellor and teacher are aware and that they have information on how it impacts your child.

**4.** If your child has Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), make sure that their teachers are familiar with FASD. If they are not, they may assume that your child is misbehaving when in fact they may be struggling because of FASD.

**5.** If you think your child needs services not normally provided in the regular classroom, you need to advocate for them. Do your research about provincial and district policies so you know your rights and options.

**6.** Most students with special needs are entitled to an Individual Education Plan (IEP). IEPs document goals, adaptations, modifications, services, and achievement measures geared to your child's needs and strengths.

**7.** If your child has special needs or designations that have already been identified, bring all available medical records, psychoeducational assessments, and IEPs to the school when you register. Ask at the school office if you need to do anything to make sure the information gets to the right people.

## INTERNATIONAL ADOPTION

**1.** When you register your child at school, bring along your child's birth certificate (if you have one), and any immigration documents such as a citizenship card.

**2.** Be prepared to advocate to get the best services for your child. Teachers and other school staff are often unaware of the needs of internationally adopted children.

**3.** Remember that it's unrealistic to expect older adopted children to develop proficient English language skills within one or two years of adoption and moving to Canada.

**4.** Provide school staff with information on the effects of orphanage life/institutional care on learning and development.

**5.** In many cases, the child will be developmentally behind children of the same age. Beyond being an English language learner (ELL), a recently adopted international adoptee may be adapting to cultural changes, grieving their former life, friends, caregivers, and attaching to their new families.

**6.** Though the school may want your child to join a grade consistent with his or her age, if that doesn't seem right, insist they are put in a lower grade.

**7.** Don't rush your older child straight into school—especially if he or she doesn't speak English. Allow your child to get used to the new home, community, and family. This will also help your child gain some basic English speaking skills.

**8.** Most schools have ESL classes and Language Support Programs for students who are more advanced in their English language learning. High schools have learning resource centres which children can attend to get help with their work.

### DID YOU KNOW?

In some cases, international adoptees are assigned a younger birth age by the orphanage or care home because their birth date is unknown or to make the child "more adoptable."

Adoptees who are older than their assigned age may fare better in an higher grade, among students who are closer to their true age.

An AFABC Family Support Worker can help if you suspect your child's age and birthdate are not accurate.

Find the Family Support Worker in your region online at: [bcadoption.com/familysupport](http://bcadoption.com/familysupport).