

ADOPTION

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**GUIDELINES ON POST-ADOPTION SERVICES AND THE
USE OF VIDEO INTERACTION GUIDANCE
(AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH ONLY)**

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Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption*

Permanent Bureau | *Bureau Permanent*
6, Scheveningseweg 2517 KT The Hague | *La Haye* The Netherlands | *Pays-Bas*
telephone | *téléphone* +31 (70) 363 3303 fax | *télécopieur* +31 (70) 360 4867
e-mail | *courriel* secretariat@hcch.net website | *site internet* <http://www.hcch.net>

**GUIDELINES ON POST-ADOPTION SERVICES AND THE
USE OF VIDEO INTERACTION GUIDANCE
(AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH ONLY)**

Stichting Adoptievoorzieningen
voorbereiding en nazorg op één lijn



Guidelines on Post Adoption Services (PAS)

Corinne J. Verheule & Anny Havermans, Adoption Services Foundation, The Netherlands

Guidance during the first years after the arrival of the adopted child.

When adoptive parents have met their adopted children and taken care of them for a while, it only just begins. Hopefully they had a good preparation course as a starting point, but to translate all ‘theory’ (e.g. about possible developmental lags, or how to encourage a safe attachment) into daily practice is not a simple job for most of them. Adoptive parenthood is not as natural or self-evident as biological parenthood. Moreover, the adoptive child already has a certain, often unknown, history which it does not immediately share with its adoptive parents. This history influences the attachment process between parents and child and the child’s development. Therefore, it is very important that adoptive parents can call for professional guidance, both just after the arrival of their child, and later on during phases when other questions may arise.

Adoptive parents are usually, especially after a good preparation course, strongly aware of the importance to work on safe attachment between themselves and their child. Question is: how can this be done?

Before the adopted child arrives in the family, it already has a mental picture (a representation or ‘scheme of being-with’) of what a caretaker or parent can mean to him (Daniël N. Stern, ‘The motherhood constellation’). This inner representation influences its observation of its new parents and it determines its reactions. For the parents this can be very confusing. E.g. the parents want to comfort their child because it has hurt himself or is afraid, but their child rejects them, because it has learned that adults can not be trusted.

Likewise, adoptive parents have their own inner representation of how a child of a certain age would react stemming from former experiences with children.

If this expected reaction does not coincide with the reaction of their adopted child, parents can become confused and (more) insecure.

Safe attachment is built up in different phases, which can be called the ‘building stones of attachment’ (cf. appendix 1, Building stones of attachment, by C.G.M. Bakker-van Zeil, based on the theory of development by Erickson).

The first stone is named ‘Feeling accepted and secure’. This is the ‘feeling’ phase, when the child is 0-3 months old. Important in this stage is that the child can feel safe, that it is good to be there, that he’s got a place for himself, etc. The task for the parents in this stage is to ‘mother’, to comfort the child, to protect it, to regulate its emotions and be responsive to signals and needs of the child and to be in the lead.

The second stone is called ‘Entrusting’. In this phase, when the child is 3-9 months old, the child starts to surrender itself to its caretakers, it opens itself and accepts care, it is making eye-contact. The parents offer pleasant physical contact, take care, satisfy needs, are reliable and name everything the child does, wants, or feels.

The third stone is called ‘Self-confidence’. The child (9 months-2 years) discovers the world, can share its experiences with its parents, is actively looking for attention and understands that separation is non-permanent. The parents support and stimulate their child’s exploration, they show compassion and understanding, they are actively listening and giving words to everything involving their child.

The fourth stone is called ‘Being independent’. The child (age 2-5 years) discovers its own identity and abilities, is aware of being an individual and its fantasy develops. The parents are assertive, give space and draw boundaries without rejection.

The fifth stone at last is called 'Being creative'. The child is able to feel its own needs and to look for its own solutions, he can consider others and ask for help and he can role-play. The parents can let their child go in confidence.

Most adopted children neither had a safe home nor got enough attention in their first years. Therefore their 'building stones' are not well developed and for the adoptive parents it is very important to find out what their child has missed and how they can restore this.

With most of these children the parents have to start with the first or second building stone of attachment. These children feel insecure, they miss basic trust and they cannot entrust themselves to others. Often these children shot through to the third stone and show a 'would-be-confidence'.

Adoptive parents need to see through this and they have to treat their child as if it were much younger. It is important that adoptive parents are guided by a professional who has knowledge of attachment processes and the influence of the child's history on this process.

Upon arrival, most adopted children show insecure attachment (ambivalent, avoidant or disorganised), but they may grow to safe attachment with their new parents. To obtain this safe bond it is necessary that the adoptive parents are sufficiently sensitive and responsive. Of course, the same applies to biological parents. However, for adoptive parents it will be more challenging because the behaviour of their child is more difficult to understand as a result of its history. How sensitivity and responsiveness can be improved will be discussed further on.

GOOD PRACTICE IN COUNSELING ON ADOPTION

How to stimulate secure attachment: the Video Interaction Guidance

Staffmembers of the Foundation Adoption Services (Stichting Adoptievoorzieningen) in the Netherlands developed (since 1996) a short-term individual support programme, called Video Interaction Guidance, to make parents feel better equipped for adoptive parenthood. This programme stimulates positive communication and thus encourages safe attachment between parents and adoptive child(ren). Foundation Adoption Services is subsidized by the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Youth and Family, has its own Board, and is independent from any adoption agency and its main task is to take care of the (obligatory) preparation course for aspiring adoptive parents.

The basis of Video Interaction Guidance (V.I.G.) lies in scientific research. Over the last few years research and field experience have shown that adoption aftercare with video guidance provides an essential key to a successful integration of an adopted child into the adoptive family. Also it will stimulate its adaptation to the new social environment in the adopting country.

Drs. Femmie Juffer, a Dutch adoption professor, has achieved important results in the field of attachment behaviour research. It has proven that stimulating communication between parents and adopted children will increase the parents' sensitivity and responsiveness and this will increase safe attachment. Video Interaction Guidance is a very effective method to accomplish this. (Juffer, Femmie, c.s., 'The importance of parenting in the development of disorganized attachment: evidence from a preventive intervention study in adoptive families', *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 46:3 (2005), pp. 263-274).

The V.I.G. counsellor observes the attachment between the adopted child and its new parents. Here she focuses on their communication and whether the parents recognise the behaviour and the signs the child is displaying. She also analyses what stage of development the child is in, what the parents can do to connect with and respond to the child's needs as well as help the child progress in its developmental tasks. In addition, V.I.G. can be used diagnostically. If necessary the counsellor refers the parents to another form of care.

The strength of Video Interaction Guidance is that the video recording works as a magnifying glass, you can see all the signals the child makes. Neglected children tend to make weak and unclear signals, which become much more visible on tape.

The Video Interaction Guidance counsellor doesn't (only) look for what is missing but emphasises the strengths and healthy parts of parents and child. She uses the footage to activate the adoptive parents to be alert to the signals the child is making and to respond to them in a positive way. To do so she looks for the positive verbal and non-verbal moments of communication between the child and its parents.

The V.I.G. counsellor starts by observing and analysing the *basic communication (verbal and non-verbal) of the family*, the chain of interaction and reaction, over and over again. She teaches and stimulates parents to use this Basic Communication in a positive way.

With Video Interaction Guidance we pay attention to the following verbal and non-verbal aspects of basic communication:

Regarding the child:

- How does the child initiate contact?
- Non-verbal communication: the facial expression of the child and its body-language, turning towards someone, eye-contact, smiling, movement of arms and body and the emotions of the child. Can you see when the child is happy, sad, angry or in pain? Is the child relaxed or stressed? Does the child enjoy cuddling, touching or caressing or sitting on the lap of the parents? How does it sit, relaxed, with its body against the body of the parents or with a stretched back? Does the child feel relaxed to the parents?
- Verbal communication: babbling and chatting of a baby, talking and laughing.

Regarding the parents:

- How do the parents *receive initiatives* the child takes and how do they make contact? Do they receive and confirm the initiatives of the child?
- Non-verbal: friendly nodding at the child, smiling, mirroring the child's expression, turning towards their child when they are making contact, open posture, eye-contact.
- Verbal: do they give feedback to the child by *naming* what the child does, wants or feels, and what it is looking at or by repeating the words the child is saying? Do they expressively use their voice with a friendly intonation?
- Do the parents *take turns*: do they pay attention to each child and divide their attention to their children?
- Do the parents *make a circle* with all present family members: how do they help the children to be interested in each other? When they give attention to one child, they can also involve the others on what is happening with this one child, so every child has the feeling to be part of the family and to be seen (verbal and non-verbal) by the parents.
- Do they *guide* their child by adequately responding to its initiatives; taking the lead when necessary?

The positive effect of basic communication and naming is that the child is given the feeling, and possibly the new experience, that it is seen by somebody who is really interested in it. Verbalising creates self-awareness in the child, the feeling to be allowed to be there. It tells the child that it is okay to be there and hence attachment can grow. So naming has a positive effect upon the confidence of the child in its caretakers and in itself.

With regards to the "*building stones of attachment*" mentioned before: when parents use basic communication in daily life, they are working on the first, second and third "building stones of attachment".

The use of basic communication helps the parents to be sensitive to the signals of their child and to react in a responsive way.

A good balance between education and emotional bonding.

Before parents can start educating their child there must be an emotional bond between them. Adoptive parents who are uncertain and who don't have a bond with the child yet are usually focused on education and sometimes forget to work on emotional bonding. So with VIG we watch for a balance between attention for emotional bonding and education.

A child is able to listen/obey and can be educated only if he has the experience that he is heard and when there is a safe bond c.q. attachment and love between parents and child. That is why parents have to give attention most of all to the first 'building stones' in the first period of adoption. Parents can help the child to feel safe and secure by giving attention to the needs of their child corresponding to building stone 1, 2 and 3. When the bond, trust and self-confidence grow, parents can start to educate and give more rules (building stone 4).

The practical procedure of VIG.

Our adoption counsellors are child psychologists who are specialized in adoption care and trained in Video Interaction Guidance, to analyse the video pictures, and to help the adoptive parents to turn the observations into effective parenting. The counsellor visits the family and makes a video recording of about 20 minutes at a moment that all the family-members are present. This can be while playing a game, at mealtime or, simply, having tea together.

Then the counsellor makes an extensive analysis of the video recording, especially of the verbal and non-verbal communication patterns of the family-members. The following session she discusses the footage with the parents in order to help them discover what kind of behaviour the child shows and how parents and child react to one another. The counsellor shows the parents how they can stimulate attachment and how they can notice if attachment grows.

In all we make four recordings per child (so when parents have adopted e.g. 3 children at the same time they can get 12 recordings in total), each followed by a discussion with the adoptive parents. We spread these recordings over ca. one year.

When parents and/or schoolteachers have questions about the behaviour of the child at school we also can make a video recording at school, which we discuss later on with both parents and teacher together.

Adoptive parents can apply for our preventive Video Interaction Guidance programme within the first three years (the attachment-period) after the arrival of their child. The guidance is not obligatory, though many families ask for this kind of support, as it is well known that an optimal start facilitates a sense of well-being for child and parents.

As the Ministry of Youth and Family subsidises our preventive VIG project, the parents only pay a small fee.

Developmental movement method of Veronica Sherborne

Since 2004 we have combined VIG with the developmental movement method of Veronica Sherborne because we liked to emphasise more the non-verbal communication between parent and child. For one uses all senses in getting attached to someone. When a baby is born all senses are open and active to the experience of 'being-with' and the attachment process. A neglected or maltreated (adopted) child will fix feelings of fear and stress in its body. And when a child has got a lot of stress in its body, this may block the attachment process. With the developmental movement games parents will give the child new positive body-experiences and the child will make up for missed early-childhood sensory experiences.

With this method we stimulate the physical contact between the child and the parents. These developmental movement games also make the child aware of its body, its body in relation to its environment and in relation with others. Through these new experiences the child's trust and confidence in its parents will grow and also the feeling of self-confidence.

We combine this developmental movement method with video interaction guidance. When we discuss the footage of these developmental movement games of the parents with their child, sensitivity and responsiveness will increase by giving feedback to the parents about how the child and the parents made contact together and how the child experiences these games and what the child needs to enable him to attach himself in a safe way. We have developed this method specifically to stimulate a safe attachment between adoptive parents and their children and call it Sherborne Samenspel. We are enthusiastic about the results.

The "developmental movement method of Sherborne Samenspel" is based on the theories and work of Veronica Sherborne.

All children have three basic needs to strive for:

1. *Body awareness*: learning to trust one's body; the need to feel at home in one's body and so gain body mastery. Flexibility of the centre, awareness of the weight bearing parts of the body.
2. *Relationships*: being given the opportunity to engage in meaningful relationships. Specific goals aimed at supporting the relationship between parents and child are: promoting body-contact between parent and child; facilitating the bond between parent and child; emphasising parental skills; making parents aware of the importance of being able to listen to their children in order to understand their needs; suggesting they have joyful play-time together.
3. *Awareness of space*: Specific goals related to the children are: letting them develop a better awareness of their own bodies and their motor skills and a better awareness of the space around them.

Environment: getting to know and trust the surrounding world, seeking and creating a situation of well-being, offering an environment without demands, allowing parents (caretakers) and children to feel at ease.

With the developmental movement games the child will have different relational experiences:

Caring or "with" relationships: The adopted child experiences that he can relax and release its fear and the control in its body, because the parent takes care of him and is really interested. He can experience that it feels good to entrust himself.

"Shared" relationships: The adopted child experiences that she and its parents can tune in to each other, being interdependent and play together. Sometimes the parents have the lead, sometimes the child.

"Against" relationships: This gives the adoptive child the experience that he has strength in its body and that he can use this strength, which supports its self-awareness. So he can practise to release, and to oppose to its parents.

Once again remembering the theory of "the building stones" mentioned before: with these different developmental movement games, parents can work on the corresponding building stones of attachment (especially on the stages of feeling and entrusting).

Appendix 1

Building stones of attachment (G.C.M. Bakker-van Zeil)**Being creative vs. helpless**

- Child: to be able to feel its own needs, to look for own solutions, to consider others and ask for help, role-playing
- Parents: let their child go in confidence

Being independent vs. lonely and lost

- Child (age 2-5): discovering its own identity and abilities, apart from others, fantasy develops
- Parents: being assertive, allow space, drawing boundaries without rejection

Being self-confident vs. being insecure (would-be confidence)

- Child (9 months – 2yrs): discovering the world, sharing experiences with parents, actively looking for attention, understanding that separation is non-permanent
- Parents: support and stimulate their child's exploration, compassion and understanding, active listening and naming

Entrusting vs. distrusting (shut oneself off)

- Child (3 - 9 months): surrendering; openness, accept care, eye-contact
- Parents: pleasant physical contact; take care, comfort, satisfy needs, being reliable, naming

Feeling accepted and secure vs. insecurity and fear

- Child (0 – 3 months): 'feeling' phase; feeling satisfied, being allowed to be, safety, feeling at home
- Parents: 'mothering'; help regulate emotions, allow space, leadership, protection, react to signals and needs of their child

Appendix 2

DVD about attachment and Video Interaction Guidance

Subtitled versions available in English, Spanish, French and Danish

”Adoptie in beeld” Truus Bakker –van Zeil

“Do you see me?” (English, Spanish, French and Danish)

“Confidence in adoption” (English, Spanish, French and Danish)

“Addressing the issue” (English, Spanish)

“ A good start” (about Video Interaction Guidance) (English, Spanish)

Information: www.metropolisfilm.nl

“A good start” (Video Interaction Guidance) (English, Spanish)

is also available at Stichting Adoptievoorzieningen, P.O Box 290, 3500 AG Utrecht, The Netherlands, www.adoptie.nl. Price 35 euro.