

Dear _____

We are writing to fill you in on some exciting and promising news in our family. It is really important to us that you all understand what we are trying to accomplish and why we are parenting the way we do.

We are so happy to be **adoptive/foster parents**; however, we have learned that there is so much more to it than we could have imagined. The reality is that there are times when things are status quo; this is when things are as we expected they would be – not perfect, takes some time for us all to settle in, etc. The part we couldn't have been prepared for is the rest of the time.

We don't think it is fair to go into the detail of our child's background, it is her story. However, what we think is important to share is that she has been greatly impacted by it as any human being would. We have committed to help her heal No Matter What & for However Long It Takes (for many children this is a very long process...years and years).

We'd love to share some of the important information we now know in hopes that you can help us help our child when we are together. All of us working from the same page will make great impact! In order to really help our _____, we have to look at how they have been impacted so far.

The first thing we have learned is that a child's brain is doing most of its wiring in utero and the first 3 years of life. Our child was wired to manage and succeed in the environment that _____ he was in before he came to us. (give a little description—using words like; inconsistent, neglectful, chaotic, frightening, unsafe, etc to describe it a bit.) His brain was literally wired to live in the exact opposite situation we are asking him to do now. This is the first explanation for the “part we weren't prepared for” that we talked about above. As a result, at home we deal with lots of big emotional turmoil that comes out in _____ (insert some behaviors here). What we have come to understand is that you all won't typically see that behavior because our child is a survivor – it is when we try to parent children who have lost a parent and suffered trauma that we see the behavior.

The second thing we learned is that our child has suffered much trauma...trauma that specifically happened within the caregiving system that was supposed to protect them. This kind of trauma is very pervasive and impacts every system in the body: how they learn, their emotional abilities, if they can trust, how they physically feel or show pain or discomfort, if they believe they are worthy of good, if they believe they are worthy of a one and only like we want to be, and ultimately their ability to flourish one day.

We really believe everyone deserves to have parents that they can believe will love them, specifically them, **NO MATTER WHAT!** We want _____ to have that and what we now know is that that kind of healing will take a long time and some really intentional choices on our part. It will take us going back and constructing the foundation of our relationship from the beginning. Starting as if they were 0 years of age not _____.

Finally, we have learned about the part of our child's brain most affected by their past. This part is called the Limbic System. The sole function of our Limbic System is to keep us safe/alive. When we live in a safe and consistent environment where discerning adults are taking care of us, our Limbic System functions properly...it analyzes sensory input, decides if we are safe or in danger, activates the body appropriately and then resets itself.

However, if we live in a chaotic, unsafe, neglectful, etc., environment, our Limbic System is affected by the over use. Its ability to reset is lost so to speak. The brain chemistry that is released over and over again with such frequency does damage to the physical brain and its ability to ready a situation correctly. Meaning that our daughter/son often feels unsafe in any given situation. These feelings trigger her and we see her fight, flight, or freeze up. In order to help her Limbic System heal, we are working very hard to be sure she is not triggered any more than absolutely necessary. The reality is that we have been able to label some of the things/times that trigger her, but others feel like they come out of nowhere.

We offer all of this important information as a base for you to use as an explanation for our parenting choices. As you can understand from what we have shared, we have to “parent differently.” **Differently than you do/did, then we did with our bio’s, and even differently then we initially understood.** (put your own situation in here) We would like to share with you that this is counter-intuitive and therefore sometimes exhausting, but our child is SO much more successful when we do it. It often stretches us, but we are committed to helping _____ heal.

This all has to be a bit overwhelming for you. We’ve been discussing, planning, strategizing, learning, practicing, tweaking _____, _____ for months or years now (put here your story) now. It is hard to explain. especially because most of the time you see our kids in good shape. The reality is that the reason for this is a combination of things; first they are survivors – they learned a long time ago that it doesn’t pay to allow others to see your vulnerabilities - and second you are not trying to love them like a Mom or Dad...the very caregiving system that let them down so much in the past.

You, our family and friends, are very important to us. We need your help as we work to help our children heal. We are really hoping that by sharing some of what we have learned you can understand and still support us when we ask you to “do it differently” too.

Because this letter is getting longer than we intended, we are going to start with a small list of our first requests below. If you have questions as to why, please ask. But let’s talk about it away from the kids so they don’t have to carry any more anxiety than necessary.

1. We would like to be the ones to provide for the basics of life until we let you know that we have made progress in this area. (Remember, you are giving our child a loving gift here)

- please help us be the ones to give our child any food or drink
- send them to us if they are helping themselves
- don’t be offended if we bring our own food for our child

2. We are going to keep our child’s world the “size” they can feel emotionally safe in.

- please point any decision our way or Mom’s way and not give the okay yourself
- please help us find a positive landing place for our child while we are at your house
- please, please, please don’t question our decisions – remember it won’t ALWAYS be this way healing will happen
- please don’t feel the need to entertain or engage our children we are going to create opportunities for them to just veg and they need that

3. The needs and expectations our children think others have of them trigger them. Please give them time and space to do the relationships they need to do with us before they extend themselves further.

-please give high-fives instead of hugs unless we have talked about another plan with you

-please let us be the driving force on gift choices and giving

-please know that our children have learned to survive in the midst of unhealthy boundaries from their past. If they aren't comfortably sitting on our laps yet, please don't encourage or allow them to sit on yours. (This isn't mean—You can use a distraction or something so you don't feel bad)

-always point back at Mom or Mom and Dad as the foundation or home base.

We understand it all seems kind of weird- actually we totally get that! It has taken a lot of education and practice on our part too. But it IS working. We see a calmer brain, we feel trust growing, and we know that ultimately our child will have an awesome life! It is sad that there has to be children who have to suffer the hardship and pain that _____ had to, but we feel very hopeful, that with your help, she/he will someday know deep in her core how wonderful she is and how much she is loved. A No Matter What kind of love—from all of us!

Thank you for everything,
