

About Deborah Hage:

Drawing on 50 years of experience, both as a parent of 14 foster and adopted children and as a reactive attachment disorder therapist, working with emotionally and behaviorally impacted children (resulting from early childhood abuse and neglect), Deborah specializes in coaching parents help their children adjust and heal from past traumas, overcome their fears, and effectively integrate into their new families and environments. As a lecturer, author, therapist and coach, Deborah has helped thousands of families overcome the impacts of past neglect, abuse and other traumas; providing the support and tools they need to create for themselves a happier and more connected life.

The ideas and interventions presented here have not been developed solely by Deborah. She has worked with numerous other therapists and parents over the years, notably Nancy Thomas, whose continued partnership and collaboration she appreciates.

To learn more about Deborah, her practice and her family, please visit deborahhage.com

Carry the Baby, Not the Baby's Carrier!

by Deborah Hage

Americans have developed the art and science of convenience to new heights. If it makes our life easier than we want to have it. Sometimes, however, essential elements are sacrificed. Such is the case with the current and pervasive trend regarding infant seats. Developed initially as car restraints to increase infant safety they have become multi-purpose tools. The same seat now comes with a handle so the baby can be carried in it. It comes with back props so it can be used as a high chair. It comes with rockers so the baby can be rocked. All of this can now occur without anyone ever having to actually touch the baby! The wonders of modern science!

Children born to their mothers have spent 9 months adjusting to her rhythms, sounds, and smells. Relaxing into her arms after the birth is entering a comfort zone. The baby intuitively seeks out her face and she focuses on his. When the baby is held close than he only has to make minute movements with his face and/or body and his parent knows he is tired, wet, hungry, upset, or contented. Mom or Dad then adjusts to his needs and he learns to adjust to theirs. Being held close helps the baby mimic their patterns, being active when they are active and quiet when they are quiet.

Adoptive parents must work harder to develop a relationship with their baby as they do not have the benefit of the first nine months in utero. They must spend more time with their new child - not less. They must make every effort to have the baby close to make up for the child's sense that he has lost his comfort zone. Sleeping with the baby between them is a wonderful start. It also makes night time feedings easier and more restful for the entire family. (When babies are put down in another room to sleep then they need to make lots of noise and movement in order to attract their parent's attention. They learn to cry loudly in order to let them know they are hungry, awake, cold, or wet. By the time their needs are met, both parent and child are wide awake and both have more difficulty getting back to sleep.) During the day a front pack which the baby sleeps in helps the baby attune to the rhythms, smells and sounds of this new parent. Having a parent who is so familiar to the child's signals that the baby can communicate his needs subtly is very reassuring to the child. The child can relax into the knowledge that all is well.

Occasionally a newly adopted child does not relax into the parent's closeness, but stiffens and pulls away. Parents who are sensitive to their child then interpret that to mean the child is more comfortable when they keep their distance and so oblige. It is true that the child is more comfortable when the strange parents keep their distance - however, it is not true that it is good for the child. If a child is not comfortable with his new parents then there is no time like the present to get the child comfortable. Numerous Theraplay techniques can be used to gradually lengthen the time the baby is able to settle into Mom's arms. However, it is essential for the

development of the parent child relationship that the baby learns to settle and relax in the parent's arms. Accepting nurturing from the parents will be crucial to all future stages of growth and development.

Being carried, rocked, fed, etc while remaining in a car seat is enormously convenient. Parents can go to the store and put the baby on the floor or in the shopping cart while they shop. They can leave the baby with the sitter and, unless the baby wakes up, the child need never know. The parents don't have to be constantly shifting packages, keys, and swaddling clothes. They can feed the child and not fear getting milk dripped all over them. They can mix formula, eat, cook, fold clothes, make the bed, read, etc. with both hands instead of learning to do it all with one. They never receive a soaking from a leaking diaper. However, it also means the parent and child will lose out on critical, subtleties in the developing relationship.

Carry the baby - not the baby's carrier. Inconvenient? Yes! Worth it in the long term? Absolutely!!!

Deborah Hage, MSW

www.deborahhage.com