



COLOMBIA

TRAVEL PACKET



INTRODUCTION

Dear Family,

All God's Children International is pleased to assist you with travel arrangements for the adoption of your child(ren) from Colombia! We ask that you thoroughly read this entire packet as each section is designed to give you a better idea of what to expect and how to plan for your trip.

Even though this packet mainly focuses on what to take to Colombia and how to make plans for your trip, we also want to make sure that you are preparing your mindset for this trip.

Colombia is a wonderful country, and the people are welcoming and honored to have you visit. You will encounter very different, and sometimes challenging, conditions in Colombia. Keep in mind that even if certain aspects of travel in Colombia are difficult, you are in a different culture, so you'll need to be flexible and aware of those differences.

We pray that you will be greatly blessed as you begin this step of your adoption process. May your trip to Colombia be a memorable and wonderful experience!

Blessings,

AGCI Adoption Team

"Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my
hope comes from Him."

PSALM 62:5

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Document
templates and
examples are
located on the
family portal.

Please be sure to keep a copy of all documents for your own records.



1 PREPARING TO TRAVEL



**"Be strong and take heart, all you
who hope in the Lord."**

PSALM 31:24

1. PREPARING TO TRAVEL

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Airline Reservations
- Accommodations
- Arrival

Airline Reservations

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

- 1. Choosing a travel agent is an individual choice.** We can only provide information to start you on your search by listing those agencies most commonly used by families and found to offer good fares. AGCI cannot guarantee that the agency we recommend offers the lowest prices.
- 2. If you do not want to use a travel agent, you may also try calling the airlines directly.** However, we have been told by many families that purchasing tickets from agents who offer wholesale or bulk seat pricing is better. Some airlines advertise "adoption rates." Please feel free to check this out; however, most families have found that the adoption rate is calculated by taking the full fare price and cutting it in half. This is usually not the cheapest ticket available. Many wholesalers offer better than 50% off the full fare price.
- 3. If you intend to use frequent flier miles,** you need to understand that your flight options may be limited. If you are unable to use your frequent flier miles for the dates that we give you, you may either choose to purchase tickets and keep the schedule or be rescheduled out several weeks to the next available travel space that coincides with your frequent flier miles.

SUGGESTED AGENCIES:

Adoption Airfare LLC
www.adoptionairfare.com
1673 Independence Ridge
Breeding, KY 42715
Office: 800-277-7651

WHAT YOU NEED TO ASK:

When booking tickets, please keep in mind the following questions so that you are fully informed about airline policy and your own travel circumstances:

1. **How many people are flying to and from Colombia?** Please check with travel agency or airline to book one- way tickets to Colombia.
2. **Book an extra seat for an active or older child.** We have found that parents who adopt a child who is mobile (i.e., walking) benefit greatly from purchasing an extra seat for their child on each leg of the trip. It may be exhausting and uncomfortable to make a long flight with a child who is active on your lap.
3. **What costs are incurred if we change our tickets (even if they are for adoption)?** How many days in advance must we notify our airline before any penalty is incurred?
4. **Are there any discounts for adoption?** If so, what are the discounted prices based upon (full fare)?
5. **What is the phone number to call if we must change our tickets?**
6. **What about frequent flier miles?** Do we have any frequent flier miles or other travel benefits we may use on the domestic or international leg of the trip? If you do choose to use frequent flier miles, this could limit your choices of flights, but is definitely a benefit worth looking into.
7. **What about my child(ren)'s Ticket?** Flights within Colombia and your child(ren)'s one-way tickets to the US will be purchased in Colombia when travel dates are known.

COMMON MISTAKES TO AVOID:

It is important to not book your tickets until you are given a specific travel date by AGCI. In the past, families have booked tickets without their travel date and have lost a considerable amount of money when they learn that they cannot leave on the day they had scheduled. Although the urge to purchase your tickets will be very strong or your travel agent may be pushing you to commit, please do not book your tickets until we have confirmed your exact date. AGCI will make sure all your documents are up to date and you are cleared for travel.

FIRST TRIP PLAN FORMS:

Once you have booked your flights please send your itinerary to your AGCI Adoption Team, who will forward this to our staff in Colombia. We will also provide you a "Travel Plans" form for you to fill out. This helps our staff make all travel arrangements for your family. The "Travel Plans" form can be found on the AGCI family portal.

CUSTOMS DECLARATION:

You will need your customs declaration when you arrive at the airport in Bogota. This will be provided for you by your airline. You need to declare how much money and valuables you are bringing into the country if the value is over \$7,000. You are allowed to bring up to \$7,000 in cash per person without additional documentation regarding the source of these funds.

PASSPORT:

Before you leave for Colombia, make two notarized copies of your passport. Leave one copy at home with a friend or relative who would be able to Federal Express it to you in Bogota in the event that your original passport and copy are lost in Colombia. Keep the other notarized copy separate from your original passport, and keep it with you at all times. If you lose your passport, contact the US Embassy immediately, through your coordinators.

Note: here are no immunization requirements for travel to Colombia. Please check with your local doctor or travel clinic to see what they recommend.

Accommodations

APARTMENTS AND HOTELS:

It is important to remain flexible about your apartment and hotel accommodations. In Colombia, apartments and hotels are very similar to what we have here in the U.S, but it's still important to be flexible and remember that you are traveling in a different country. There are country-specific issues that you will experience no matter where you stay.

APARTMENT OR HOTEL OPTIONS:

The best location for families to stay in Bogata is around the area called "Parque 93". This is a safe and good location that is close to the appointments that are needed for your adoption process. There are also many restaurants (and a Starbucks) and a park that are within walking distance.

APARTMENTS:

Central Apartments

This is a great option for families who are adopting siblings, or older children. the cost is approximately \$110-150 per night.

HOTEL:

Casa Real

This is great for all families adopting younger children and single children. The accommodations are clean but simple. They do give AGCI families a discount bringing the charge down to approximately \$60 a night.

If you have other ideas for a hotel or apartments please send these to your AGCI Adoption Team so they can send this to our Colombia team for approval.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

All accommodations are arranged by our staff in Colombia. Whether you're staying in an apartment or hotel, please use your credit cards to make payments. They will charge your card when you check out.

Note: If you run into any problems or difficulties with any aspect of your accommodations or service while in Colombia, please contact your international adoption specialist immediately. We are here to serve you, and we want your stay in Colombia to be a pleasant one.

Arrival

Customs procedures are usually a formality, both entering and leaving the country. Colombian customs regulations don't differ much from those of other countries in South America.

After exiting the plane follow the signs towards immigration and baggage claim "Reclamo de Equipaje." Please have your passport and declaration forms with you. You will be asked the reason for your trip and your answer will be for "Adoption".

Once you are through immigration you will then move to the baggage claim area where you will pick up your checked luggage. You will then have a final stop through customs to have your baggage screened. This is the final stage and once you are through then you will go through the doors where our staff will be waiting for you with a sign with your name on it.



2. TRAVEL TIPS



**"Guide me in Your truth and
teach me, for You are God my
Savior, and my hope is in You
all day long."**

PSALM 25:5

2. TRAVEL TIPS

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Understanding the Basics
- What to Pack
- Money
- Gifts and Donation Ideas
- Helpful Phrases

Understanding the Basics

THINGS TO REMEMBER IN COLOMBIA:

- The phrase “Assume nothing” will keep you vigilant and your sense of humor intact.
- You are in a foreign country with foreign rules.
- Bogota is a big city with big city problems. Be street smart and keep your eyes wide open while walking around.
- Colombian drivers follow a different set of rules.
- Be considerate and realize that your coordinator is very busy processing your paperwork to complete your adoption; therefore, your coordinator will not always know that you need to go shopping for food, or any other items, unless you communicate this need.
- Clothing appropriate for the season. Do not over pack!! Six or seven interchangeable outfits are enough. Jeans are okay. You will want a couple of nice outfits for your “Encuentro” as well as when you go to the court appointment. You will also want to know how the climates change from Bogota to LaMesa, where the Court process takes place.
- Debit/Credit Card. ATM’s are accessible if you need cash and will give you the best exchange rate.
- Don’t be afraid to speak up! The only way a problem or concern of yours can be fixed is to tell your coordinator. They are there to help you through at every step, including those unforeseen problems that may occur along the way.
- If you ask your coordinator to dinner, or you are invited for an outing by any of the people involved in your travel (interpreter, driver, coordinator), please be prepared to pay for meals. This may be a shock to you since you may be “invited.” If you choose to go, you will find socializing with Colombians and experiencing their culture is wonderful.
- Remember you are not going on a vacation or tour; you are going to your child(ren)’s birth country to complete your adoption.

- Since your trip is not a vacation or tour, entertainment is not provided for the “down time” in the hotel or the apartment. Please bring books, games, cards, toys and other forms of entertainment for you and your children. This is also due to the fact that the main focus is allowing your child to settle into this new environment and most importantly focus on building your attachment.

What to Pack

Undoubtedly, you will find packing for Colombia a real challenge. There are many items to remember, including toys and clothes for your child(ren), numerous medicines for ailments that you may or may not get, and your own clothing and travel items. You will probably have to pack and repack several times before getting everything to fit. We advise that you carry anything valuable in your carry-on luggage. It is also wise to spread your clothes and your child(ren)’s around in different suitcases, in case of loss or theft of a piece or pieces of luggage. To make it easier, please refer to the following list.

CLOTHES:

You should plan to dress as you would at home (except for warmer weather if you live in cooler parts of the country), but please plan to bring slightly nicer clothing (jeans, khakis, and a nicer shirt is fine) for the day of your Encuentro, court, and U.S. Embassy—shorts are not acceptable.

Colombia is a traditional, conservative country, and clothes should not be revealing or skimpy. Women should wear modest dresses/skirts/pants/capris, and men should wear long pants. Sleeveless shirts or sleeveless dresses are fine but absolutely no spaghetti-shouldered tank tops. Sweatpants and jogging outfits are NOT appropriate attire.

GENERAL TRAVELING ESSENTIALS:

- Backpack
- Ziploc bags
- Hand sanitizer
- Toiletries
- Flashlight
- Extra glasses, contact lenses and solution
- Notebook, journal and pens to record “firsts” for your child(ren)
- Camera/Video camera (bring all camera accessories, including memory cards, film and batteries)
- Sunscreen
- Bug spray

ESSENTIAL ITEMS FOR YOUR CHILD(REN):

- 6-7 outfits you can mix or match
- Sweater
- Shoes and extra socks, in case the shoes are too big
- Pajamas
- Several age-appropriate toys and picture books (it will be a long plane ride and wait at immigration when you arrive back in the US.)
- A small waterproof lap pad or changing pad
- Baby wipes
- Ziplock bags in various sizes
- Umbrella stroller (you may want to check with the airline regarding bags restrictions first, if needed, you can purchase one in Colombia)
- Folding toilet seat cover for toddlers
- Small blanket or cuddle toy
- At least two baby bottles and several different types of nipples if adopting an infant as your child may prefer one over another. We recommend disposable liner bottles since they are pre-sterilized. If using disposable liners make sure you take enough with you, as they are not available in Colombia.
- Pacifiers
- Sippy cup
- Non-allergic baby soap and shampoo
- Formula/baby food (this can be purchased in-country but it is much more expensive. We suggest bringing the formula and food you plan to use)
- Medicine (see next page)

HEALTH AIDS (OPTIONAL):

If you have any health issues, be sure to bring any medication that you may need in your carry-on (if it is not a liquid).

- Tums
- Pain reliever (Advil, Tylenol, Excedrin, etc.)
- First-aid kit
- Dramamine
- Over-the-counter antibiotic ointment, such as Polysporin
- Diaper rash cream
- Medications for colds, pain/fever, gas/stomach(ie, Triaminic, Children's Tylenol, Mylecon)
- Teething medicines such as Orajel (can be purchased in-country)
- Infant/Child fingernail clippers
- Infant/Child medicine droppers
- Rectal/Digital thermometer
- Lice kit (it is uncommon for this to be needed but, depending on where your child is coming from this is a good idea to have on hand)

FOOD (OPTIONAL):

- Crackers
- Peanut butter
- Dried fruits, nuts
- Granola bars
- Candy, cookies
- Jerky
- Other snacks for both you and your child

Money

You will find that you are going to carry a large amount of money to Colombia with you. This is going to cover your living and travel expenses, as well as adoption expenses and anything extra.

MONEY EXCHANGE:

Credit cards are accepted at most shops and restaurants. Credit cards such as Visa and MasterCard are accepted in most stores around Bogota. Visa is the most versatile and is accepted almost everywhere. If you plan to withdraw cash on your credit card while in Bogota, check with your credit card company before traveling to Colombia to ensure that your card is set up for international cash withdrawal.

Protecting your assets:

- Inform your bank and credit card company of when and where you are traveling; otherwise, they may lock your account due to suspicious activity.
- As in every city, there are pickpockets. Carry your cash, credit cards and passport in a money belt, neck wallet or similar.

ACTUAL BILLS:

Bills should be in varying denominations of \$20's, \$50's, and \$100's.

Gift and Donation Ideas

GIFTS:

Many families ask about taking gifts to Colombia. You can certainly do this! These will be small appreciation gifts to the staff who work very hard in advocating for our children. You may take some souvenirs from your hometown or even a box of chocolate goes a long way.

However, you may NOT, under any circumstances, give monetary donations to Colombian authorities while in the country.

If you decide to make any donations to your child's orphanage after you are home with your child(ren), please make sure to contact your AGCI Adoption Team.

Helpful Phrases

- Gracias! – Thank you!
- Con gusto. – With pleasure (used in Colombia more often than “de nada”)
- Hola. – Hello
- Caio. – Bye (you can also use adios but caio is more commonly heard in Colombia)
- Quiero. – I want
- Necesito. – I need
- Tengo. – I have
- Listo. – Ready, could be used as a question, as in “listo?” - “are you ready” or “listo.” - “I’m ready.”
- Claro. – Clear, again question or statement, as in “is this clear?” – “claro?” (such as after giving an instruction), or “claro.” – “I am clear.” (similar to “got it.”)
- Cuanto? – How much?
- Tiene un menu en ingles? –Do you have a menu in English?
- Tiene un bano? – Do you have a bathroom (there is a free bathroom on the 2nd floor of the McDonalds near Parque 93).
- Donde esta el bano? –Where is the bathroom?
- Bueno. - Good.

FOR YOUR CHILD:

- Tienes hambre? – Are you hungry?
- Tienes sueno? – Are you sleepy?
- Eres cansada? – Are you tired?
- Esta bien – It’s okay
- Me gusta/No me gusta – I like/I don’t like
- Te gusta/no te gusta – You like/you don’t like.
- Toma mi mano – Take my hand
- Escucha me – Listen to me
- Ayuda me – Help me
- Pare – Stop
- Calma – Calm (As in calm down)
- Jugo – Juice (when you order, they will often ask if you want your juice “con leche o con agua”; con agua seemed more similar to the consistency we are used to).

- Leche – Milk
- Agua – Water
- Juego – Game
- Jugar – Play
- Parque – Park
- Tienes chichi?/tengo chichi – Do you have to pee?/I have to pee



3. TRIP DETAILS



**"Come near to God and He
will come near to you."**

JAMES 4:8

3. TRIP DETAILS

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Timeline of Events
- Meeting Your Child
- Travel Expenses
- First Days With Your Child In Country

Timeline of Events

DAY 1:

Most families arrive in Colombia late at night. There are some exceptions to this but the most common flight itinerary is to arrive at 9:50 PM at night. Your first stop will be the city where the child is residing. Your translator will pick you up at the airport and take you to your hotel or apartment. Our attorney will get in touch with you to discuss the details of the process. If adopting through an IAPA you will have an informational meeting at the IAPA.

DAY 2:

You will meet your child at the orphanage if you are adopting through an IAPA or at the ICBF regional office if you are adopting through ICBF. You will take your child back to the hotel or apartment with you.

DAY 3-8:

You will spend the rest of the week bonding with your child.

DAY 9-13:

Whether you adopt through a IAPA or ICBF, there will be a check in point. This is called "Integration." You will be interviewed about your bonding period and attachment with the child. After this meeting, your attorney will deliver your documents to the court.

DAY 14:

You will be making a trip to La Mesa to start your court process.

Day 15-18:

Towards the end of the week, our attorney calls you to tell you the date for your court appointment. Your driver/ translator will pick you up and take you to court to sign the decree and pick up copies of the decree to process the child's new birth certificate in order to apply for the child's new passport. You will then hurry back to Bogota to apply for the child's new birth certificate and passport.

DAY 18:

You will take the child to the embassy doctor for the child's visa medical exam. If the child is 24 months of age or older they will also receive a TB test that is required. It is possible this is happening earlier in the process. It does take 5 days to read so if it is not able to be completed prior to LaMesa this will happen at this point. If they do have a TB test you will have to go back 48 hours later to have the results read. If they test positive for TB they will be required to have chest X-rays.

DAY 19:

With the medical report in hand, you will visit national ICBF office in Bogota to pick up a letter called the Article 23 and fill out a customer satisfaction survey about your adoption process. The Article 23 is the letter you need to file for the adoption tax credit!! You take the child's medical report, the article 23, and all your documentation to the embassy to apply for the child's visa.

DAY 20:

You go back to the embassy between 3:00 pm and 3:30 pm to pick up the child's visa. The adoption process is now complete and you can return home!

Meeting Your Child

Many parents have high expectations of this meeting, and it is important for you to be realistic and patient with yourselves and your child. This will be an emotional and overwhelming time for you as parents. Please remember to take time and allow your child to warm up to you. Below are a few suggestions that you may want to consider:

- **Bring a new outfit for your child.** Please bring a whole outfit, including socks and shoes for your child. You will give this to the staff for your child to change before coming out to meet you. There may be some IAPAS that do not do this and if that is the case your travel coordinator can let you know.
- **Bring toys and snacks for your child.** You may want to pick one special item for your child(ren) such as a stuffed animal or a blanket and embroider his/her name on it. If you bring more than one toy, realize that it may become community property once you leave the orphanage. If you plan to bring snacks for your child, please be sensitive to other children. You may want to bring enough to share.
- **Do not be afraid to hug, kiss, and show affection to your child.** Take this opportunity to show your love in a tangible way, once your child has warmed up to you. You will also want to stand up to greet them when they come in. This is a cultural value and way to show excitement for this moment. Of course then you can get down to your child's level for a hug and to meet them.

- **Your coordinator will try to arrange some alone time for you with your child.** A good opportunity may be to take your child outside if weather permits.
- **Realize that the orphanage is on a schedule and you may need to work around meals and nap times.** It will depend on the flexibility of the orphanage, and the availability of space, as to how much privacy you will receive. Please be patient and remain flexible with orphanage director and staff.
- **Remember that many children have had little to no contact with men.** This can affect children in different ways. Sometimes children will gravitate towards the father because they may see their new mom as a caregiving nurse. Other times children are afraid of the father and will only warm up initially to the mother. Whatever the case is with your child, please realize that this is a normal response and that once your child is home, they will learn what it is like to be a family and have a mom and a dad.
- **For older children:** Bring toys to play with your kids (stickers, coloring, tattoos, instruments, Nerf balls, etc.)
- **Please feel free to call the office and speak with AGCI staff.** Your coordinator can answer any questions or concerns that you may have about this first exciting meeting with your child.

Travel Expenses

The following table provides a list of the expenses you will incur on your trip to Colombia. Depending on the IAPA your child is living at these could vary.

LA CASA FEES:

Medical Fee - (pay when picking up the child)	\$600
*Pay with credit card at La Casa	

GENERAL CASH AND EXPENSES IN COUNTRY:

Please carry \$4000 in cash on this trip.

**Please convert \$2000 in pesos in-country on the first day you are in country. Our travel coordinator can help you with this. **

This amount will cover the appointment fees listed below (some appts only take cash so use credit cards for the rest) + the main transportation.

ATM machines are available if you need more cash for transportation as our team charges for each ride.

When using credit cards in Colombia, they will ask you how many "installments" you would like to pay the total in - the answer is "one."

IN COUNTRY FEES:

Dr's office and Vaccination (you may choose to waive vaccination)	Approx. 468.000 pesos
Court documents	Approx. 280.000 pesos
ID (7+ years old)	Approx. 30.000 pesos
TB testing	Approx. 400.000 pesos
Passport	Approx 165.000 pesos
Passport photos	Approx 30.000 pesos
Birth Certificates and copies	Approx 150.000 pesos + 6500 pesos
ICBF article 23	Approx 60.000 pesos
Picture for La Casa	Approx 10.000 pesos
Lab Test (15+ years old)	Approx 420.000 pesos
Le Mesa's transportation fee	Approx 350.000 pesos each way
Airport transportation fee	Approx 70.000 pesos each way
*All additional transportation (at each drop off, you will need to pay the driver for that day)	Approx 20.000 pesos/hour
Child's US visa fee	Flat \$325/child (US dollar) in cash to Ana Maria - Make sure it's in \$20 bills + \$5

ACCOMMODATIONS:

In Bogota - Apartment/Hotel	Approx \$60 - \$150 / night Credit card ONLY
In Le Mesa - Hotel	Approx \$80 - \$100 / night Credit card ONLY



4 IMPORTANT CONTACT INFORMATION



**"...The Lord is trustworthy in all He
promises and faithful in all He does."**

PSALM 145:13

4. IMPORTANT CONTACT INFO

Communication

The main way that we will be in contact while you are in country is with an app called "WhatsApp". This free chat app is very useful in contacting your travel coordinator, driver, as well as your IAS. Please be sure to download this prior to your travel.

Ana Maria Fernandez	Colombia Attorney	077-57-315-348-0452	agci.colombia@gmail.com
Maria Elvira	Travel Coordinator	011-57-314-358-8762	
	US embassy in Bogota	011-57-1-275-2000	ambassadorB@state.gov

When calling outside to the U.S., first dial 001 and then the U.S. area code and number. When calling to Colombia, dial 011 and then the country code of 57.



5. THE ADJUSTMENT PERIOD



"For great is His love toward us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever. Praise the Lord."

PSALM 117:2

5. THE ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Bonding and Attachment
- Establish a Schedule
- Behaviors to Expect from Your Child
- Keep AGCI Informed

Bonding and Attachment

This is an exciting and wonderful time as your new family begins! There are some things that parents need to keep in mind in these first few days, weeks, and months. It is important that expectations are kept realistic and that your new family is allowed time to form as you get to know each other. The two key books to have read in preparation for this time are, *Raising Adopted Children* and *20 Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew*. If it has been awhile since you read the book, please reread the chapters on adjustment. (Chapter 2 "Adjustment of the Family" in *Raising Adopted Children* contains particularly good information.)

Keep in mind that bonding is not immediate; it will take time. Children often experience a period of disequilibrium. This is very normal and a lot of parenting is guesswork at how to help your child cope with all of the changes that he/(s)he is experiencing. The two most important building blocks to bonding are safety and security. Your child will be exploring the new environment and testing you as he/(s)he learns to trust.

"COCOONING":

It is important to explain to family and friends before you travel that they may see you at the airport to welcome you home, but that you do not plan on having or attending any large parties or get-togethers for at least a month. Your child needs time alone with your immediate nuclear family to begin the bonding process. Going to busy public places and interacting with many other adults and children will only slow the bonding process. Your child needs to understand that you are his/her parents and also learn what a family really is.

"Cocooning" with your child for 90 days or more is often very helpful in forming a good initial bond and attachment. The child needs to have time to explore the new home environment and to get to know you and any other siblings in the home. I would recommend that you limit the amount of time that family members and friends spend with your child. Treat him/her like a hospital patient at first and limit visits to five to ten minutes. Going to McDonald's for a Happy Meal may seem like a good idea; however, I would suggest that you avoid those activities (maybe even going to church for awhile) until

your child has settled into a comfortable routine. To avoid indiscriminate affection and to help your child bond with you, I would also recommend that you don't let others (except for grandparents) pick up and hold your child. As much as possible, I would also suggest those visits occur in your own home.

Many times families with babies under 12 months do not feel that cocooning is as necessary due to the age. However, please keep in mind even with birthing a baby, mothers cocoon those first weeks at home. God designed the birthing process for mothers to recuperate, and therefore stay close to home, those first weeks out of the hospital. The same process is crucial for the adoptive family to make the proper bonds with their child.

"BABY BLUES":

It is of great importance to prepare yourself for the possibility that you might not bond or attach to your child immediately upon receiving him/her. Even though you have bonded to your child through your visits to Colombia and the pictures and videos over the last months, actually feeding, changing, and incorporating your child into your daily life and routine might not be what you imagined. Some families have experienced severe "baby blues" upon bringing their child home. They have felt like a "caretaker" and not the mother that they imagined. Getting used to the baby's smells, personality, and spirit may take more time for some than others.

Please note, that even when birthing a child, many mothers have experienced these same issues. Bonding and attaching to a child, whether through birth or adoption, can take many months. The amount of love you have the first time you see your child's face and hold their little body will be tripled three months later. Every day spent with your child deepens this bond and attachment. Remember, you are not a bad parent, no matter how you may feel at any given moment. Time, patience, prayer, and rest will do wonders for you once you are home, safe and sound with your child. Give yourself a break and remember that you have been in a foreign country, with different foods, different time zones, and you are jet-lagged, not to mention emotionally spent with the thrill of finally having your child in your arms!

Please keep in mind that bonding is not immediate; it will take time. Children often experience a period of disequilibrium. This is very normal, and a lot of parenting is guesswork trying to figure out how to best help your child, as well as yourself, cope with all of the changes that you are experiencing. It is also normal for children to experience anxiety when they hear a change in language. Even younger infants can be accustomed to hearing Creole and may be scared and cry because they do not recognize English or miss hearing Creole. The sound of different voices, different smells, and lack of infant cries may be unsettling for them.

Below are a question and answer excerpted from the book *What to Expect the First Year*, by Arlene Eisenberg. You may want to check it out from the library and read the chapter on the adopted baby. There are several sections to help you understand some feelings you may be having once you get home.

NOT FEELING LIKE A PARENT:

“Not having gone through pregnancy and childbirth, holding a child born to someone else, I don’t feel much like a mother to our adopted son and I am afraid I never will.”

You don’t have to be an adoptive mother to have trouble adapting to the role of mother. Most first-time mothers experience the very same self-doubts as they hold their newborns. Becoming a mother does not begin with conception and culminate in the moments directly after birth; motherhood evolves over the course of days, weeks, months, and years of loving and caring. Though many women don’t feel like mothers during those first challenging days, virtually all do eventually.

Still, while you are struggling to reach that point you may, like many adoptive parents, wish that you could somehow erase the fact of the adoption. And then—presto! You would feel like a parent. But biological closeness doesn’t guarantee emotional closeness, and though as an adoptive parent you may have a hard time accepting yourself as a mother, your baby will have no such difficulty. You—who love, (s)helter, and provide for all this child’s needs—are the real thing to this baby boy or girl. And you’ll know that long before you hear that first “mama.”

Do keep in mind, however, that all babies are not created equally affectionate. Some tend not to be cuddly and don’t enjoy being touched a lot (see page 156), but this has nothing to do with what their parents do or don’t do. If you have such a baby, don’t blame yourself or the fact that your baby is adopted.

Establish a Schedule

In addition to working at bonding and attachment, there are several other factors that may have an effect on how well your child adapts to his/her new environment. The most common subjects mentioned are daily the routine, sleeping patterns, and feeding habits. Choosing to approach these issues with your child in a healthy manner can greatly contribute to your child’s adaptation and sense of belonging in your family.

ROUTINE:

Most children thrive on routine and schedule. Request a written copy of your child's daily routine and schedule from the orphanage. It is important to stick as close to this schedule as possible for the first days with your child to provide a sense of normalcy. Maintaining this schedule will help with the overall transition to becoming a part of your family. Once you are home and have had ample time with your child, you can then begin to make necessary adjustments to this routine as you both get accustomed to your new life together.

You may also want to limit the number of toys given to your child in the beginning. First of all, your child will be more interested in exploring his/her new surroundings and bonding with you, than in playing with toys. Overwhelming your child with too many things at once can do more harm than good. You will want to have two to three toys that your child can learn to play with, and then introduce new things gradually; maybe then you can remove toys that seem less interesting to your child.

SLEEPING:

Many children experience irregular sleep habits due to the change in environment and the time change from Colombia to the U.S. It is sometimes a good idea to sleep with your child if he/(s)he is experiencing difficulty with going to bed or is having night traumas. Your presence will be soothing, as well as help to provide a sense of security, assuring your child that you will be there for him/her whenever he/(s)he needs you.

FEEDING:

Some parents encounter feeding issues with their child after they arrive home. This is due to the change in his/her diet from Colombian smells and tastes, to those they experience when they come to the U.S. At first, you may need to imitate the diet that your child is accustomed to in the orphanage. Good choices include bland foods, such as yogurt, fruit, vegetables, pasta, bread, and potatoes. It is a good idea to gradually introduce new foods, so as to not overwhelm your child. Your child is also not used to eating a lot of meat, and will most likely not be interested in eating at McDonald's or Burger King. It is common for children to hoard food in the beginning and not be able to regulate food intake on their own. Some children will eat non-stop unless regulated.

Many children tend to have allergies to milk, so be sure to watch for abnormal reactions to dairy products. Some children may just not enjoy drinking milk, so you may want to try sweetening it with Ovaltine. Calcium and other vitamin supplements should be considered if dairy is not able to be a part of your child's diet. Another good alternative for protein, in addition to a regular diet, is the meal supplement drink, Ensure.

LANGUAGE:

Talk to your child a lot. Listening to you is how he/(s)he will begin to learn English. Talking, talking, and more talking is the key to your child slowly recognizing what you are saying. Each child is different in how quickly they will feel comfortable in speaking. Your child will need to completely understand you before having enough confidence to speak himself/herself. If you are adopting more than one child, sometimes it takes a little longer for each child to speak English because they have each other to lean on in speaking Spanish; the need to speak English may not be as great as it would be for a child without a Spanish-speaking sibling.

DEVELOPMENTAL DELAY:

Be prepared that your child will be developmentally delayed. On the average, children are developmentally delayed one month for every three months they spend in an orphanage. The delay may be more pronounced in certain areas of development and more age-appropriate in others. Typical areas of delay include fine motor skills, speech, and independent play. These are normal, typical behaviors to expect from children who have been under institutional care.

Behaviors to Expect from Your Child

In speaking with families over the last few years, we have compiled some important general information for families to be aware of when adopting children who have been institutionalized. These are general observations and they may or may not apply to your adoptive child.

It's important that you try to understand what your child is experiencing from your child's point of view:

1. The child has already experienced trauma in her life through abandonment. (s)he experiences grief and loss, not only from being separated from biological parent(s), but also from the staff at one or more orphanages, and/or a foster care family. While (s)he may have received indifferent care from the staff, (s)he nevertheless has formed a level of trust because her basic needs have been met.
2. The child is leaving a relatively "safe and secure" environment for the unknown. (s)he is leaving that environment with "strangers." Who are you? Can (s)he trust you? Will you meet her basic needs? Will you abandon her like others have done? Will you "give up" on her if (s)he doesn't meet your expectations medically, socially, physically, or developmentally? Will (s)he have to do something to "earn" your love? Are you just some intermediary to some unknown destination over which (s)he has no control? Can you love her unconditionally? Institutionalized children are intuitively aware that something is "broken" and they don't know how to fix it.

3. To protect themselves from any further hurt, trauma, and grief, older children develop a number of self-protecting and self-soothing mechanisms, which may include but are not limited to:

- Thumb-sucking
- Temper tantrums/long cries
- Biting, scratching, kicking others
- Interrupted sleep/night terrors
- Focus on food/seemingly insatiable
- Bed-wetting
- Zoning out (staring off into space)
- Clinginess

Your child may develop these behaviors in order to have some “control” over a small area in her life when so much is totally out of her control. The more understanding you can be to your child’s background and to what (s)he may be feeling, the better her adjustment will be. Show your child in every way possible that you will never leave her, and that you will love her unconditionally, no matter what.

4. The adopted child has come from a sensory deprived institutional environment. (s)he does not receive the type of neurological and physiological stimulation that should be the birthright of every child. Therefore, (s)he is usually developmentally delayed in one or more of the following areas:

- Gross motor skills
- Fine motor skills
- Expressive language
- Receptive language
- Social integration
- Sensory integration

Be aware that many well-meaning family members, friends, and associates will not understand that your child is developmentally delayed. You may hear comments that suggest your child is not acting in an age-appropriate manner. Moreover, your child may need the assistance of speech, occupational, or other professional therapists. It is not unusual for four-to six-year-olds not to be able to use crayons and scissors or to know how to play with a toy.

5. Unfortunately, most adopted children from an institutionalized setting have received very little affection, including hugging, cuddling, and rocking. The child's lack of experiencing affection does not mean that (s)he does not want it. However, (s)he may find it difficult at first to receive your affection. It also may take some time for her to initiate gestures of affection toward you. It is not unusual for even an older child to be very uncomfortable with affectionate gestures. Just because (s)he hasn't experienced it, doesn't mean (s)he doesn't need it! You can't give your new child enough affection.
6. Overstimulation leads to a variety of "acting out" behaviors, including those mentioned earlier. Be aware that your child has come from a very under-stimulating environment. When your child leaves the institutional setting, (s)he experiences what the adoption community calls the "Disneyland Affect." The child is bombarded with a whole new set of sensory experiences that can be very challenging for her to process. (s)he needs space, time, and patience. If your child is acting out, a good question to always ask yourself is, "Has our schedule or routine or anything else changed in the last 72 hours?" Often this is a very important clue to a child's current behavior. Also remember that every child, whether adopted or not, goes through normal periods of disequilibrium that can last for hours, days, or months. A child going through puberty or early adolescence would be an example of that.
7. It is vitally important that your child has a full blood workup in consultation with your pediatrician because the medical information given to the placing agency and the adoptive family can be incorrect or incomplete. It is not unusual for a medical problem to go undiagnosed by physicians in these countries just because their diagnostic tools are dated. Rechecking for things like anemia, lead poisoning, intestinal parasites, Hepatitis B, and sexually transmitted diseases, can help families intervene early if there are undetected health problems. An early developmental assessment by a qualified developmental specialist through your school district, or privately, can also give you a more accurate picture of where your child is in relation to age-appropriate developmental markers.

The following is an excellent book that we have recommended for many families. It is available from Amazon.com or at your local bookstore:

- **Holding Time: How to Eliminate Conflict, Temper Tantrums, and Sibling Rivalry and Raise Happy, Loving, Successful Children** by Martha G., M.D. Welch, Mary Ellen Mark

This section about the adjustment period was provided as a review of the information you received throughout the preparation phase of your adoption. As each family's experience with their child is unique, we will only know if you need assistance once you've returned home, if you are in contact with us. If you have any questions or concerns about your child's behavior and how to cope with it, please do not hesitate to call AGCI. It is very common for parents to feel overwhelmed with the many responsibilities and concerns associated with raising a child, so always know that you are not alone if this is what you are feeling!

Some families find that they have issues right off the bat when they are still in Colombia, while other families enjoy a honeymoon period and issues do not arise until several weeks or months after they return home. It is imperative that you reach out to let us know what you are experiencing so that we may be of help to you, no matter when it is.

Your program director can both be very helpful in calming nerves, allaying fears, and providing suggestions in coping with all sorts of behaviors your child may be demonstrating. We have had parents call from Colombia and be very glad that they did. If contacting AGCI from Colombia, dial 001-503-282-7652. You are not alone in this adoption experience. Your travel coordinator and the staff members here in the U.S. are available for you at any time.

Keep AGCI Informed

POST-ADOPTION REPORTING:

As stated in your adoption contract with AGCI and throughout the dossier paperwork you prepared to complete your adoption, you have been made aware of the importance of post-adoption reports and the timeliness in which they are received. Although we understand that post-adoption reporting is bothersome, it is of utmost importance to the government of Colombia and plays a heavy role in the lives of all of the children left behind. In order for AGCI to continue to place children in loving homes, we must continue to work together to prepare reports for your family on time, with the required amount of photos, proper authentications, and numbers of copies. Our ability to fulfill these requirements is paramount in the lives of all of the children at the orphanage your child came from who still need families. Please do your best to make all appointments with your social worker in plenty of time so that none of your reports are ever late or incomplete. We cannot stress enough how truly important this is.