



SOUTH AFRICA

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 South Africa! 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 South Africa and how to make plans for your trip, we also want to make sure that you are preparing your mindset for this trip.

South Africa 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 South Africa. Keep in mind that even if certain aspects of travel in South Africa 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 South Africa be a memorable and wonderful experience!

Blessings,

AGCI South Africa Adoption Team

TABLE OF CONTENTS

We are so thrilled for your family as you approach this milestone of your adoption journey – traveling to South Africa to meet your child or children! We and our team at JCW will be with you every step of the way!

PREPARING TO TRAVEL

- a. Airline Reservations
- b. Accommodations
- c. Vaccinations
- d. Visas, STEP, & Passports

Document templates and examples are located on the family portal.

TRAVEL TIPS

- a. Understanding the Basics
- b. What to Pack
- c. Money
- d. Gift and Donation Ideas

TRIP DETAILS

- a. Required Documents
- b. Itinerary
- c. Meeting Your Child
- d. First Days with Your Child In-Country
- e. Travel Expenses
- f. Activities in Johannesburg

CONTACT INFORMATION

- a. Communication
- b. Contacts

THE ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

- a. Bonding and Attachment
- b. Establish a Schedule
- c. Keep AGCI Informed

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

PREPARING TO TRAVEL

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Airline
- Reservations
- Accommodations
- Vaccinations
- Visas, STEP, & Passports

AIRLINE RESERVATIONS

What You Need to Know:

- 1) **Please consult with a travel agent (recommended for support) to find the best tickets.** You will find flights from the USA to Johannesburg, South Africa. Please consult with your travel agent to find the best prices and itinerary. Sometimes the best price does not mean the best itinerary. You will want to buy the tickets one-way, because we will not know the exact return date. Always verify with travel agency that this is allowed; subject to change and some airlines and countries require you to show 'proof' that you will return to the US. If this is told to you, discuss with your IAS so we can make a tentative plan
 - o U.S. to Johannesburg, South Africa
 - o Johannesburg, South Africa to U.S.
- 2) **DO NOT book a return ticket for your child.** You will book this when you are in South Africa per the guidance of JCW.

Accommodations:

- The following accommodations are specifically recommended by JCW. They frequently accommodate internationally adopting families and are familiar with the inexact extended stays. If you want to look outside of these accommodations, please stick to the following areas: Sandton, Rosebank, Craighall, Park town, Saxonworld. **DO NOT book an accommodation outside of the four below until it has been cleared by AGCI and subsequently JCW for safety and convenience.**

PREPARING TO TRAVEL

- **Rosebank Courtyard, 39 Tyrwhitt & Oxford Avenue, Rosebank** (4-star hotel), buffet breakfast available, families might need to order supper at the hotel. There is also a mall across from the hotel with a variety of restaurants.
- **Garden Guest House Place, 54 Garden Road, Orchards** (Self-catering accommodation). They have 12 cottages and transportation is readily available. There are also restaurants a few kilometers from the place, so families can request for Uber-eats and Mr. Delivery.
- **Amanzi, 64 Rutland Avenue, Craighall** (self-catering accommodation). They have lovely cottages that families may use. It is exclusively self-catering. There are malls and restaurants a few kilometers from Amanzi so families can request for Uber-eats and Mr. Delivery.
- **Remote corner, 41 Wexford Avenue/28 Galway Road, Parkview** (self-catering accommodation). They have beautiful cottages as well with a lovely garden. The corner house is highly recommended for bigger families. It has 3 bedrooms, lounge, and a kitchen. It is exclusively self-catering. The Rose cottage is recommended for first time adopters. It has 2 bedrooms, and 1 bathroom and an open plan living area/kitchen. There are shopping complexes and restaurants within a few kilometers.

Vaccinations:

- Please speak with your doctor about what vaccinations the CDC is currently recommending for travel to South Africa. The recommendations are subject to change on a regular basis: [South Africa - Traveler view | Travelers' Health | CDC](#)
- As of 1/20/22, COVID19 Vaccine is RECOMMENDED but not REQUIRED to enter South Africa. This could change at any time. Please see entry requirements here which are subject to change: [South Africa International Travel Information \(state.gov\)](#); [COVID-19 Information - U.S. Embassy & Consulates in South Africa \(usembassy.gov\)](#)

Visas:

- Absent of a visa, American citizens can only be in SA for 90 days. We've had families complete applications to extend their own allotment of time in South Africa. The penalty for overstaying is being deemed "undesirable" and banned from the country for 1 year or 5 years depending on how long you overstay.

PREPARING TO TRAVEL

- Although DHA approves or denies visa applications, the filing for the application is made through Visa Facilitation Services. They must make their application AT LEAST 60 days before their 90-day allotment expires. It often takes families 2-3 days to get their documents together and to get an appointment so you should start your application well before you reach 30 days in country.
 - Here's the DHA page that specifies that extending the validity of visas is done via VFS: <http://www.dha.gov.za/index.php/immigration-services/types-of-temporary-permits>
 - Here's the VFS website: <https://visa.vfsglobal.com/zaf/en/dha>
 - Here's an unofficial resource, but a helpful one. It's a blogger detailing step-by-step the process: [How to Extend Your South Africa Tourist Visa in 13 Steps \(theunconventionalroute.com\)](#)
- One note – families have to fill out the online forms and submit the fee online before they can get an appointment. There's no way around that. Some families have no issue paying via their US bank card and some could not get the online system to accept a US bank card despite tries on every internet browser and it didn't work. Families may end up getting JCW's support in using a JCW card with reimbursement from the family to JCW for the exact amount of Rand however, we recommend bringing debit, credit, visa, master card or as many variety of cards as possible so you can do this process.

STEP:

- We recommend you register your trip with the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program. The Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) is a free service to allow U.S. citizens and nationals traveling and living abroad to enroll their trip with the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Here is the registration link: [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program \(state.gov\)](#)

Passports:

- We recommend you think ahead and ensure your passport is valid for at least 6 months from the start of your travel. Many countries will not let you enter or leave if your passport is outside of that 6 month window.

2. TRAVEL TIPS

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Understanding the Basics
- What to Pack
- Money
- Gift and Donation Ideas
- Activities in Johannesburg

UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS

Things to Remember in South Africa:

- The phrase “Assume nothing” will keep you vigilant and your sense of humor intact.
- Only eat food that has been peeled or cooked.
- You are in a foreign country with rules that are set by the cultural standards; please keep this in mind, be respectful, ask the JCW team if you have any questions about what may or may not be appropriate.
- Be street smart and keep your eyes wide open while walking around.
- South African drivers may not yield to pedestrians; as in all major cities, be careful when crossing the street.
- Be considerate and realize that JCW staff are working hard to complete your adoption; therefore, they will not always know that you need to go shopping for food, or any other items, unless you communicate this need.
- Avoid traveling at night without the JCW team member to support you in-country.
- The orphanage personnel are professionals, and it is their job to enforce orphanage policy. It is also part of their job and responsibility to observe you with your child(ren), since they too wish only the best for that child.
- Don't be afraid to speak up! The only way a problem or concern of yours can be fixed is to tell AGCI staff or JCW team members. They are there to help you through every step, including unforeseen problems that may occur along the way.

2. TRAVEL TIPS

- Do not offer to pay for meals or drinks if you are meeting with any South African contacts you meet, or people who have “control over the child” such as a caregiver, shelter director, or Central Authority member or US Embassy Staff as well – this friendly and kind offer/gesture can be misconstrued as a bribe and can put your adoption in jeopardy. AGCI staff are the exception to this, and you may provide small gifts or recognition of appreciation/gestures to JCW team.
- It is not unusual to have someone approach you on the street and ask for money. It is strongly recommended that you don’t engage and you do not give money. You may offer prayer and good will, but it is best not to engage in this while visiting.
- Remember you are not going on a vacation or tour; you are going to your child(ren)’s birth country to complete your adoption and to bond/attach with them! It will be a long time in-country and time to enjoy and learn about the culture of South Africa! Our team at JCW can support you in planning activities and what to do on some of the days so you have time planned out. They will be delighted to support you in getting to know South Africa while keeping the focus on your child and attachment.
- Since your trip is not a vacation or tour, entertainment is not provided for the “down time” in the guest house, although, as we shared about – some activities can be supported and coordinated by the JCW team. They will do their best to help you. Please bring books, games, cards, toys, and other forms of entertainment for you and your children.

Considerations Regarding Additional Travelers:

In the best interest of children we serve, AGCI requires that only immediate family travel on the trip to South Africa. On your trip, the fragile beginning stages of attachment are taking place and are best formed when only the adoptive parents are interacting with the child. In addition, it is important that the family have limited distractions while in-country in order to navigate their adoption process. The child’s transition into the care of their adoptive parents involves immense loss and confusion as they separate from all relational and environmental attachments, most often resulting in extreme behaviors and vulnerability. This challenging transition requires the full support and undivided attention of the adoptive parents and should be done without any extended family members or friends present. For all of these reasons, we require that only immediate family (adoptive parents) make the trip to South Africa to pick up their child.

2. TRAVEL TIPS

WHAT TO PACK

Undoubtedly, you will find packing for South Africa 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 list below.

Clothes:

It is important to show respect by dressing nicely while in South Africa. We recommend dressing in layers and prepare for rain. Sandals are fine but close-toed shoes are best. Bring flip flops for the showers. Please include business-casual clothes for meetings with government officials (court), the US embassy, and if you attend any social event or gathering. Clothes should not be revealing (think: Sunday Best). Women should wear modest dresses/skirts/pants/capri pants. Please cover any tattoos as much as possible.

General/Traveling Essentials:

- Water bottles – Many hotels and guest homes will have “water cooler stations” to refill your bottle! What a great way to be eco-friendly on your adoption journey!
- Backpack
- Ziploc bags
- Hand sanitizer
- Wet wipes
- Toiletries
- Flashlight
- Photo book of your family
- Extra glasses, contact lenses, and solution
- Any essential vitamins, prescriptions you may need
- Notebook, journal, and pens to record “firsts” for your child(ren)
- Camera/video camera (bring all camera accessories, including memory cards, film, and batteries)

2. TRAVEL TIPS

Essential Items for Your Child(ren):

- Toys (puzzles, Legos, play dough, coloring books, crayons, etc.)
- Snacks (may purchase familiar South African snacks at the local grocery store)
- Formula, baby food (may be purchased on South Africa)
- Bottles, pacifiers, bibs
- Medicine (see next sections)
- Clothes (see next sections)

Clothes/Shoes for Your Child(ren):

You will be responsible to dress your child(ren) from the time you first bring your child(ren) back to your accommodations. This means you will want to have extra changes of clothing for your child(ren). You may want to pack a few pull-ups for older children, just in case. After you pack, you may want to fill all the space in your suitcases with little toys to entertain your child(ren) during long waits, such as at the U.S. Embassy visa appointment. If you are adopting an older child, you might want to flatten out a small empty backpack in your luggage. Before traveling with your child(ren) back home, you can fill the backpacks with toys and books for the trip home.

Health Aids (Optional):

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

- Imodium AD
- Mosquito repellent
- Cipro (prescription required)
- Malaria medication (prescription required)
- Bug spray
- Tums
- Pain reliever (Advil, Tylenol, Excedrin, etc.)
- First-aid kit
- Dramamine
- Over-the-counter antibiotic ointment, such as Polysporin

2. TRAVEL TIPS

Food (Optional):

- Crackers
- Peanut butter
- Dried fruits, nuts
- Granola bars
- Candy, cookies
- Jerky

MONEY

Money Exchange:

AGCI staff will assist you with exchanging money once you arrive in Johannesburg. It is advised that you exchange money in small increments, because it is difficult to exchange it back to U.S. dollar once you return home. You will want to bring some cash with you as well while traveling to South Africa.

Protecting Your Assets:

- As in every major city, there are pickpockets. Carry your cash, credit cards, and passport in a money belt, neck wallet, or similar.
- As previously mentioned, do not give money if you are approached on the street.
- Do not provide any donations directly to any persons, orphanages, or entities. Again, this kindness could be misconstrued as a bribe and can put your adoption process at risk.

Actual Bills:

- It is easiest if you carry most of your money in \$100 bills, though it is helpful to have some smaller denominations as well. Call your bank at least three weeks before your departure to ensure that they will have enough money for you. The bills must NOT be older than 2006. The newer the bills, the better.

GIFT AND DONATION IDEAS

It is customary to give a small gift or tip to show your appreciation when someone has been helpful to you.

2. TRAVEL TIPS

Families are encouraged to bring gifts for the following people:

- Johannesburg Child Welfare (AGCI's Partner) – Ideas for JCW are gifts that can be for the office, such as local flowers or chocolates.
- Johannesburg Guide – Ideas for your guide in Johannesburg are gifts that have your state or city's name on them. T-shirts, coffee mugs, pens.
- If your child has a "granny" or "gogo": Ideas include a photo of your child(ren), gifts that have your state or city's name on them, coffee mugs, pens.
- Gifts for the children's home director are not recommended. Instead, prepare to bring some donation items for the children's home (diapers, wipes formula). These can be given to JCW to distribute. Adoptive parents should NOT distribute the donations/goods but rather should focus on the time with their child/meeting the child and allow the local team to be the one to distribute the donations. Again, donations in KIND as "gifts in kind" such as diapers or wipes are okay, but monetary donations SHOULD NOT be made at this time. In the future, when you're home with your child, monetary/financial donations can be made.

Donations for the Children's Home (Optional)

Donations are always welcome. The below listed items are always needed and can be quite expensive to purchase in South Africa. Below are some suggestions of items that are always needed. Be sure to discuss these donations with JCW before giving them to the orphanage – again, JCW should distribute. They will be sure that it is done in the appropriate way at the appropriate time.

- Children's vitamins
- Inflatable toys
- School supplies (pens, markers, coloring books, etc.)
- Children's Tylenol
- New or gently used shoes
- Soccer balls
- Bubbles
- Chalk
- Soap and shampoo
- Lotion

2. TRAVEL TIPS

Families can bring cash to purchase donations in South Africa. You are welcome to do that, but we advise again, DO NOT give any cash directly to the children's home director or staff. You are encouraged to give in-kind donations.

ACTIVITIES IN JOHANNESBURG

- Neighborhood Markets (Shopping/lunches – JCW can recommend some depending on where you are staying)
- Try a Braai – this is a South African barbecue feast!
- Rosebank Market – [Rosebank Sunday Market – Rosebank Mall Rooftop Market Johannesburg](#)
- Food/Family Dinners – [Bambanani](#)
- Lion Park – Lion & Safari Park | [Gauteng's Must-See Tourist Destination](#)
- Soweto (Please discuss with JCW if you'd like to visit historic Soweto)
- [The Joburg Zoo](#)

3. TRIP DETAILS

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Required Documents
- Itinerary
- Meeting Your Child
- First Days with Your Child In-Country
- Travel Expenses

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

Paperwork Required for YOU to Prepare and Take with You:

- Printed email of visa interview confirmation (will be received in South Africa)
- Confirmation of embassy medical clinic appointment (will receive in South Africa, if not completed before your arrival)
- Child's birth certificate
- Signed and notarized Vaccination Waiver: [DS-1981 Affidavit Concerning Exemption From Immigrant Vaccination Requirements for a Foreign Adopted Child \(state.gov\)](#)
- Copy of the National Visa Center Letter Invitation
- Copy of the DS260 Filing Confirmation Page
- Home study and updates (if applicable)
- [I-864W](#) with the original signatures
- Copy of USCIS immigration approval (Current 800A & Current 800) w/ fingerprints EXTENDED through travel
- Copies of each of your passports
- Your actual passports
- Two passport photos of your child (will receive in South Africa)

ITINERARY (APPROXIMATE)

Day 1: U.S.A. to Johannesburg

When you arrive in South Africa, you will be met by a JCW driver at the airport. They will be waiting just

3. TRIP DETAILS

outside the airport exit holding a sign that says your first and last name. They will take you directly to your accommodation.

Day 2-4: Visiting the Children's Home

You will go to the children's home and be introduced to your child(ren). Some children's homes may require you to visit the child multiple times. Then, they will remain with you from this point forward. During this time at the children's home, you will have the opportunity to talk with the children's home director and absorb as much as possible of your child(ren)'s home. It is possible that the children's home may organize a party for your child to say goodbye. Take pictures of their care takers, friends, their room and bed. You may have an opportunity to go back to the children's home later on in the trip.

Day 4-7: Bonding and Attachment

These days are all about bonding and attachment with your child(ren).

Day 7: Court Day

Expect today to be a long day. Make sure to bring lots of engaging toys or activities, as well as familiar snacks and drinks for yourselves and the child(ren). Court is where your adoption is finalized. While there is an established court time for the appointment, it will likely be delayed.

After Court: JCW will work with you to arrange the next steps of the process. For the most part, you will not have additional appointments until you either apply for the child's name change through the Department of Home Affairs or US Embassy appointment. Estimated times in country vary based on the jurisdiction your child's case is being processed in for vital documents and immigration. You can ask your IAS if your case will be one of the two options below (only after you're matched will we know this):

- Non-DHA (Dept of Home Affairs) cases – 3-6 weeks in-country
- DHA cases – 3-4 months in-country

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, but it is also a very new and possibly overwhelming moment for your child. Please remember to take time and allow your child to warm up to you. This will take time.

3. TRIP DETAILS

Below are a few suggestions that you may want to consider:

- **Bring toys and snacks for your child.** You may want to pick one special item for your child, 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.
- **Bring a photo album of your family.** If your child is old enough, you may want to bring pictures from home to share with your child. It will be a great icebreaker to look at pictures and interact with your child.
- **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.
- **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 look at their new mom like 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 take some more time to 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 (Family education coordinator – clinical team)** about any questions or concerns that you may have about this first exciting meeting with your child. This will also be discussed in your final FEC travel call.

FIRST DAYS WITH YOUR CHILD IN-COUNTRY

It is common for parents to experience a great deal of anxiety when finally left alone with their child in the hotel or apartment. It is usually a great comfort to be with your coordinator who can help both parent(s) and child to understand one another's cultural cues. Be patient with yourselves and be patient with your child. Above all, be prepared for anything. Please read the "Adjustment Period" section of this packet, and also feel free to consult with your program director if you are feeling like you could use some tools for the toolbox for this timeframe.

3. TRIP DETAILS

Depending on the language your child speaks, you may find communication with toddlers and older children difficult but be creative – charades works wonderfully! Prepare a picture book before your trip with the basic essentials labeled, so you can point to things like brushing your teeth, the toilet, going to sleep, and eating food. Please review our TBRI® Packet as well! We have it in all 3 common languages from South Africa and with English translations!

Sometimes children adapt quickly to leaving the orphanage, and other times it can be a struggle. Common behaviors can be rocking, banging their head, hitting themselves, tantrums, and biting. Often, children are afraid of taking a bath. To prepare for this, some families have brought swimming suits and gotten into the bathtub with their child, and this has helped their child realize that a bath does not have to be scary and can be fun! They splash and play with toys and soon fears are gone; but if not, that is normal too and we can always help you walk through the behaviors.

It is extremely important to not over-stimulate your child while in Johannesburg, South Africa, and when first arriving home. Everything is now a first for your child, and too many things at once will make your child anxious and may exacerbate some of the behaviors listed above. Please do not plan on seeing every sight in town after you have your child. Going a few places and seeing a few things is fine, but be sensitive to your child's reactions, and be prepared to spend time alone together in the hotel or apartment. If you want to do a great deal of sightseeing and shopping, it is a good idea to arrive to South Africa early, and to plan any stops in other countries on your way to South Africa, and not on the way home with your child. **YOU ARE NOT PERMITTED TO STOP** (go through customs) before coming home. You must take a direct or 1-stop flight to the US with your child and you cannot go through customs in your layover country but rather, just through 'connecting flights'. This could have serious impacts on your child's US Visa and US Immigration Status.

AGCI staff will schedule a call with you prior to your trips to prepare you for what is ahead.

TRAVEL EXPENSES

The following table provides a list of the expenses you will incur on your trip to South Africa.

3. TRIP DETAILS

DESCRIPTION

FEES (U.S. DOLLARS)

Airfare One way from U.S.to Johannesburg One way from Johannesburg to U.S.	\$1,000 - \$2,000 per person \$1,000 - \$2,000 per person
Lodging Hotel (cash)	\$1500 - \$2000 per month
Food	\$20 - \$30 a day per person
Transportation Driver/Gas/Car	Approx. \$75-\$125 a day when used
Souvenirs/Gifts	Varies per family
Outings	Varies per family

4. CONTACT INFORMATION

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Communication
- Contacts

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 AGCI Team Member. Please be sure to download this prior to your travel. Below are other important phone numbers to have on hand.

CONTACTS

Gugu Gumedede	JCW Social Worker	+27-79-141-3841	CFU-14@jhbchildwelfare.org.za
Bhekani Masina	Guide/Driver	+27-78-584-9373	bkamasina@gmail.com
Hotel	Varies – Please see accommodations. Be sure that you travel with the full name, address, and phone number of the hotel you are staying in.		
Lyla Omernik	South Africa IAS	360-609-9631	lomernik@allgodchildren.org
US Embassy in Johannesburg		+27 (11) 290-3000	JohannesburgIV@state.gov

5. THE ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

SECTION CHECKLIST

- Bonding and Attachment
- Establish a Schedule
- 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 of 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 dis-equilibrium. 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/she 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/she 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.

5. THE ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

“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.

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 visit to South Africa 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 parent that they imagined. Getting used to the baby or child’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 grow at a personal and unique pace. 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 their grannies speak native languages and may be scared and cry because they do not recognize English or miss hearing the other language. The sound of different voices, smells, and lack of infant cries may be unsettling for them.

5. THE ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

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 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 overall transition in 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 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 South Africa to the U.S. It is sometimes a good idea to sleep with your child if he/she 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/she needs you.

5. THE ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

Feeding:

Some parents encounter feeding issues with their child after they arrive home. This is due to the change in his/her diet from South African 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, pastas, breads, 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 McDonalds 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 to use for protein intake, 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/she 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 their native language they have learned.

Developmental Delay:

Be prepared that your child will have some global scales of developmental delay. 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.

5. THE ADJUSTMENT PERIOD

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-placement reports and the timeliness in which they are received. Although we understand that post-placement reporting is bothersome, it is of utmost importance to the government of South Africa, 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.