

# CHAPTER 15



## SINGLE PARENT ADOPTION



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# **ADOPTING AS A SINGLE PARENT: THE IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT**

**BY LAURA EGGERTSON**

One night four years ago, after returning from a barbecue at a friend's house at about 10 p.m., my two daughters and I discovered our black lab-mix sporting a gaping hole in her chest and limping in pain. Leaving my 14-year-old in charge to put her younger sister to bed, I hustled the dog off to the emergency pet hospital, visions of dollar signs flashing in my head.

Upon my return hours later, dog still at the hospital awaiting surgery, I found two of my best friends sitting on my couch and my pajama-clad daughters bundled up in blankets. Turned out that shortly after I left for the vet's, both my girls had become violently ill (probably from undercooked hamburgers). Knowing I was dealing with one emergency, my older daughter had called in the cavalry.

Welcome to the world of single parenting.

If you're thinking about adopting on your own, as I did for the first time 10 years ago, I have just one word of advice: support. Having friends or family members you can call on in the middle of the night when your dog is bleeding and your kids are puking is the difference between losing or saving your sanity. If you don't already have a support network, you'll need to work hard to create one.

As a single parent living in a city without any family members closer than a five-hour drive, I was fortunate to have a core group of friends I had known since university whom I could rely upon without question. I talked to all of them about my plans to adopt, told them why and what I planned to do, and enlisted their help. Having those supports was also one of the reasons the social worker I dealt with through the Children's Aid Society during my home study felt confident about approving me as a parent. She knew – as I only guessed – how vital that network would be for me in the years to come. I couldn't have done it without them.

Friends with kids, and friends without kids, are equally important. The friends with kids gave my daughters their own instant network of places we could go and things we could do that were fun for them. They took us to all the best festivals, concerts and activities around town that I, as a single adult, had not known about. That was crucial for my daughters, who were 8 and 9 respectively when I adopted them, and who left other friends and foster families behind. Being able to go over to dinner at my friends' homes, and have the kids play together, gave me a chance to talk with adults, and the girls a chance to play without me hovering. Simple – but vital.



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The friends without kids sometimes took my daughters out on their own, giving me some down time. They took them shopping for birthday or Christmas gifts for me – one of those important rituals you don't think about before you become a single parent. One of the best gifts one of those couples still gives me is the opportunity to arrive at their house, with little warning, for an evening of watching a movie and having dinner while my younger daughter has an evening with her “big sister.” It doesn't cost me anything, and it's fun. They've also moved in and stayed with my kids when I travelled for business, or for a weekend away. Other friends have had us over for dinner, even dropped off lunches so I didn't always have to make them. What a gift.

Taking care of yourself, and making sure you have some time to yourself, is critical. This paragraph was originally at the bottom of this article – until I realized that once again, I'd left one of the most important aspects of being a single parent to the end. As a single parent, your resources will be taxed to their maximum – and beyond. Be selfish sometimes. It won't kill your kids to forgo a few activities if you need a nap or a bath or a break with a good book instead of driving them to and from their friends' house one afternoon. Don't turn down offers from others if it means you will get a break. I always accept every dinner invitation and offer to have my kids over that comes my way. And yes, you do reciprocate, when you can. But let people help, if they want to. You will have more patience and more energy to offer your kids if you are more rested and relaxed.

My church has also been important to our family. After I adopted my first daughter, she was baptized in our church, and our minister, who adopted one of his own daughters, included a special mention of the adoption at the baptism. There is something very affirming about having that church community know our story, and welcome our family. My kids grew up in that church, and we have always found it a welcoming place and a source of both social activity and comfort.

Support groups have been a lifeline. Shortly after I adopted my first daughter, our local Children's Aid Society invited me to a group for adoptive parents run, at that time, by a social worker and another parent. Once a month, we met, had tea, asked questions and blew off steam. Often, we learned that what our kids were doing had nothing to do with their past trauma or issues stirred up by settling into a new home – they were just at the developmental stage where most kids assert their independence and talk back. Eventually, I became the facilitator of that support group, which moved into parents' homes and met without the presence of a social worker. Through that group, I have formed new friendships with people who include other single parents. We have shared ideas, resources, and Kleenex. We have celebrated successes and commiserated during crises. We have had each other's kids over, organized picnics, tobogganing runs and pool parties. Most of all, we have supported each other's decisions to enter the world of adoption and to invest our time and energy in kids we didn't give birth to, but who fill our hearts.

Involvement in the adoption community has also provided me with tremendous emotional support and vital information. One important tip I learned from the adoption community was to take a friend with me when I was going to a potentially difficult meeting at one of my kids' schools or with a social worker or another professional. There's no need to be outnumbered just because you are on your own. Often, as a single parent, you are met with reactions from the outside community – and from professionals who may be interacting with you or your children – that are not helpful. I was either told I was a saint (one of my daughter's teachers), or I had people question my motivations for adopting (usually doctors). Neither perspective recognizes the reality of single-parent adoption, and both can erode your confidence in your parenting skills.

The reality is that as a single adoptive parent, you are no more saintly than any other parent, nor do you need to be. I feel just as fortunate as my kids – probably more so, on the days when they're sick of me telling them to get started on homework and put their dishes in the dishwasher. My daughters gave me the opportunity to be a mother. And as single parents, we chose to adopt for the same reasons other people choose to give birth: we want children. And we know there are children out there who need homes and permanent families. It's as simple and as complex as that.

Interacting with other adoptive parents and with organizations that promote adoption, like the Adoption Council of Canada and the North American Council on Adoptable Children, brings you together with other people just like you. They don't question your motivations – they adopted for all the same reasons. They're not interested in why you did it, and they KNOW you're definitely not a saint. They're just interested in sharing their experiences and in helping you find the information, resources and support you need to help build the strongest family you can. What a relief. I highly recommend going to any training, support or adoption-related conferences you can find, even if you need to turn to on-line resources because there is nothing in your community. Some of the organizations, like NACAC, offer scholarships to help people attend their conferences, held once a year in the United States or Canada. They're happy to award them, so don't be shy about investigating.

One of the important lessons I've learned as a single adoptive parent is that asking for help is a strength, not a weakness. That help can be as simple as calling a friend in the middle of the night to stay with one child while I'm at the hospital with the other child. The help can be as difficult as going back to the Children's Aid Society to say hey – I'm overwhelmed – I need some relief. It is difficult to do that, particularly because as a single parent you have already surmounted many bureaucratic and systemic obstacles to adoption. Our natural fear is that if we acknowledge that we are struggling with any issue, some social worker will decide we can't keep our child, or we shouldn't have adopted in the first place.

In Canada, we do not have a good system of post-adoption support, either through private agencies or through the child welfare system. Creating that system, beginning with

parent-to-parent support, is what this training manual and these articles are all about. If you don't feel you can ask your local child welfare workers for help, then seek out friends, family members, school resources and other parenting supports in your community. Sharing your concerns can make a huge difference.

Adopting as a single parent can be particularly challenging on the work front. When I adopted my first daughter, I was working as a reporter on Parliament Hill for Canada's largest circulation newspaper. I assumed that my employer, whose editorials were extremely liberal, would support my choice to become a parent. That was not the case. Less than a year after I had adopted, I found myself having to change not only my job but my career. I went from being an employee to running my own business. Although in the end that decision has proven to be extremely beneficial for my family life, it was initially difficult to make the professional adjustment. I'm not sure any parent ever fully appreciates the change in lifestyle that occurs when their children arrive. When you're single, it's that much more difficult to meld expectations with reality.

On the plus side, however, parenting on your own means you don't have to argue over the decisions you make – at least not with your partner! Whatever you decide is what you do. There have been times when I have wanted the reassurance that I was doing the right thing – and in a good partnership, that's what you would get. So I have talked over many of my decisions with family members and friends, and agonized over choices. Fortunately, my friends and family have been willing to listen – even if, at times, I had to hear that since this was what I chose, I didn't have a right to complain! I've learned to respond firmly to that one, too. Yes, I chose to parent on my own. Just as they chose to parent with a partner, or not to parent at all. We all make life choices – and we all need to vent, regardless of what we chose. Having a group of supportive people around you to listen and to provide practical support is essential.

Single parenting involves making a lot of choices, especially if you have more than one child. You can't always get both your kids to all of the ringette or hockey practices, games, music lessons and school meetings that seem to be on at the same time. That time commitment held me back from involving my daughter in some activities, because I didn't know how I would handle all the logistics. Ultimately, when I did sign my daughter up for ringette, I decided to be open with the other parents about the fact that I am parenting on my own, and I would need help sometimes with the driving. Most responded with offers of car pooling, and sometimes I was able to reciprocate. I've also found it helpful to let schools know that no, I can't volunteer for everything. I've had to beat down those feelings of guilt, and be ruthless about what I can take on.

Being a single parent has been one of the greatest challenges – and greatest rewards – of my life. I feel fortunate that I live in a time where I could choose this option, and could make it work for my family. I still struggle with the negative single-parent stereotypes perpetrated by politicians, social scientists, and the media. For our family, single parent adoption has given three people that would otherwise not have known the same love and

security the opportunity to be a family, with all the joys and griefs of any other family. We could not have done it without the friends and family who provide the network that keeps us going. I have been blessed.

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Suggested resources:

Lamott, Anne. *Operating Instructions*. Just a great book by a wise and funny writer who had a child on her own. Not adoption-related, but relevant.

**Mattes, Jane.** *Single Mothers by Choice: A Guidebook for Single Women Who Are Considering or Have Chosen Motherhood*.

Single Parent Adopters of Ontario – provides an on-line discussion and support group.

<http://www.personainternet.com/theadamsfamily/index.html>

[http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/adoptive\\_parenting/77833](http://www.suite101.com/article.cfm/adoptive_parenting/77833) Article on the pros and cons of single-parent adopting

<http://www.familyhelper.net/arc/single.html> A good Canadian resource by Robin Hilborn.



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# A SINGLE MOM MEETS THE CHALLENGES OF ADOPTIVE PARENTING BY JOANNE THALKEN

*Source: Adoptive Families Association of British Columbia (AFABC):  
[www.bcadoption.com](http://www.bcadoption.com). NOTE: Focus on Adoption is available for \$40 per year to all  
Canadians*

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Jo Reaney loves talking about her kids. Whether it is the skating medals of her eldest daughter, the artistic ability of her middle daughter, the sweet easygoing nature of her youngest daughter, or the grandchild she is expecting, she brims with pride.

Jo has four children, including a thirty-two year-old biological son, David. She also suffered a tragic loss of two other biological children many years ago. Jo had always wanted to have more children and chose to adopt from China because of her close connection to the culture through her Chinese sister-in-law. Her younger children are, in order of adoption, 14-year-old Paige, adopted from China at four months (she lived with extended family until her adoption), Katiana, now nine, adopted at 18 months from Haiti, and Jillian, now 12, adopted at age six-and-a-half from China.

Jo's experience parenting her first two children was relatively easy. They were both developmentally above average, learning to talk, walk, and read at early ages. Though she did experience some attachment issues with Paige, she says there was a moment several months after she had returned home from China, when she knew she had been accepted completely as her mother not just as another caregiver — Paige relaxed into her arms and lost the tension in her body.

Paige has also experienced grief over losing her birth mother and has occasional struggles in school with racism and a lack of support from her school on these issues. However, she is strong and confident and fights her own battles vigorously, even if she shouldn't have to. Paige has managed to avoid many of the other difficulties her sisters have faced, thriving academically, socially and athletically. She is now one of the best young figure skaters in the province.

When China closed to adoption temporarily in 1996, Jo looked to Haiti for her second adoption. When she met 18-month-old Katiana, she was not prepared for the emaciated, lethargic, unresponsive child she was faced with. Katiana weighed only 18 pounds. For the first nine months of her life she lived with her birth family. They were very poor, and had little food or clean water. Haiti has an extremely high infant mortality rate, so Katiana was lucky to have made it that far. She made only a small improvement at the



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orphanage — she was not walking, she was extremely developmentally delayed, she had no language skills other than grunts and bird noises and she had very little facial expression — it took her 10 days to smile at her new mom. Jo was both shocked and worried that the malnutrition may have left Katiana permanently brain damaged. Despite these concerns, Jo was totally committed to working through whatever challenges they might face.

Those challenges were enormous at first. Katiana had constant diarrhea and failed to thrive, even after many months in her new home. They went through endless medical tests and visits to doctors. Eventually, the little girl started to gain weight and, with care, attention, good nutrition and lots of exercise, the progress continued. Remarkably, by the time Katiana reached kindergarten, she was on target developmentally. Though there were some attachment issues, Jo says that Katiana was solidly attached by the time she had been home for a year. Since then, her behavior has never been an issue. Jo describes Katiana as easy-going, gentle natured and a joy to be around. Like her sisters, Katiana is a talented skater.

When China reopened to adoption, Jo was proposed a six-year-old child living in an orphanage in Anshan province. Like her younger sister, Jillian was extremely small for her age. She weighed only 32 pounds. She also was extremely undernourished and had been very under-stimulated in the orphanage. All she knew was the institutional culture of strict routines and discipline. Adapting to a new life would prove extremely difficult for her — her social skills were similar to her 18-month-old sister.

This meant Jo had to make many changes in the way she parented. She quickly realized that her daughter could only function if her day was regimented and controlled in the way it had been at the orphanage. As soon as they moved to exact bedtimes and mealtimes and a more structured life, Jillian improved immensely. Jillian also has a birth defect that has left her without her right ear. She has almost full hearing in her left ear, but this made it very difficult for her to learn English. She also stopped speaking Chinese after arriving in Canada — Jo thinks she did this because she felt she might be sent back to China if she spoke her native language.

Her mother describes Jillian as a “work in progress” as far as attachment goes. Jo says this is no reflection of the love they feel for each other — they have a very strong bond, but Jillian has the need to constantly test her mother, as many children with attachment issues do. Jo often will just say, “No matter what, we are going to make it,” reassuring Jillian that she is never going to give up on her. Jo has found it difficult to integrate things she has learned about attachment into practice in her relationship with her child. Jo’s main strategy, one that has worked, is always talking things through with her daughter, asking her to try to articulate why she has behaved in a certain way and to try to express how she feels. Jo also makes sure that she has realistic expectations and makes her children feel safe, protected, and loved.

Jo's experiences certainly confirm the research findings of Dr. Lucy Le Mare of Simon Fraser University. Le Mare has found, when studying Romanian orphanage children, a high correlation between time spent in an institution and difficulties children face in forming healthy attachments and in other areas of social, emotional and intellectual development.

There have been challenges at school for all the children but mostly for Jillian. When given the reasons for Jillian's ongoing difficulties, one of the teachers commented that, "She should be over all that by now." Jo has had to be a strong advocate for her kids, constantly trying to communicate with reluctant teachers and often finding the system fails to adequately meet their needs. Jo often has a difficult time convincing teachers to change their methods and not to make unreasonable demands. She would advise parents of older adopted children that they will need to be highly involved with the school.

Jo has also taught her children to be strong advocates for themselves, by letting the teachers know what they need and if they have experienced racism or discrimination.

Jo has had to work through all her children's health issues, school issues and all the other stresses of being a single parent to three young children. She admits to finding this difficult. She would love to home school her kids, but is unable to do this as she works full-time. Jo is lucky that her job and her children's school are close by and that she lives in a smaller, supportive community.

The Reaneys love to celebrate all the cultures represented within the family. They have close Chinese friends (Jo's sister-in-law is also Chinese) and love to cook Chinese food together. The family also goes to the culture camp for kids of African heritage in Naramata every year.

Openness is important to Jo, and she will do everything she can to help her Chinese heritage children to search and connect with their birth families. While they are more closely connected to Chinese culture, Katiana is the one child who has ongoing openness with her birth family in Haiti.

Despite the struggles this single mom and her kids have faced, Jo says that if she could, she would love to have more children.

# SINGLE PARENTS AND TRANSRACIAL ADOPTION

Source: *Adoptive Families Association of British Columbia (AFABC)*:  
[www.bcadoption.com](http://www.bcadoption.com). NOTE: *Focus on Adoption* is available for \$40 per year to all  
Canadians

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When you decided to adopt a child as a single person, you bravely took on the full responsibility for raising your child on your own.

You also chose to take on the extra issues of transracial adoption because you are a single parent and because you and your child are obviously not of the same ethnic or racial background, you get to face the task of meeting curious people's challenges about whether or not you and your child are a "real" family.

Redefining the single parent transracial family is different from the two-parent family in only one way: there's only one of you calling the shots. Single parents we have worked with have taught us that there are advantages in not having to reach consensus with a partner when facing complex situations. This autonomy can free one to act more quickly and, perhaps, more decisively. But single parent or not, you face the same challenges as any other trans-racial adoptive family. You've got to build a sense of family identity, unity and strength in the face of challenges, express or implied, from those who doubt you're "really" a family.

The most effective way to come to feel like family is to act like family: parent takes care of and provides for child; child responds to and is attached to parent. It's when you act like a family, and not just some unrelated group, that others will see you as family. In part, this means that even in the face of intrusive questions, you put your job as parent first and foremost, taking care of the child's and family's needs before responding to outsiders.

## Feeling Guilty

What is clear is that this experience is different. It is possible to build delightfully intimate and enriched relationships between parents and child, while it is also important that roles stay clear, allowing the child to remain a child without slipping into the role of companion to his parent. It seems a waste of time and valuable energy to lament being only a single parent; instead, that energy and time can be used by creating positive activities to strengthen your family. Increased challenges simply create more opportunity to grow. Sometimes having more can be a special gift.



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## Providing Role Models

While single parents can create wonderful families, it is particularly important in single-parent families that children have significant relationships with other adults who offer them support and involvement. For children of single parents, opposite gender role models are essential. For children of colour with white parents, cultural role models are essential. The challenge for single parents is to develop relationships with adults who can become family friends available to the child. This task often means expanding one's outreach into the community, even when the obligations of work, childcare and family life seem to leave no time for anything beyond that. Nevertheless, it is important for your child and yourself that you develop these relationships.

The ways and means are as individual as the personalities involved. What matters most is first to make the commitment to the process of making new friends or deepening relationships with old ones; then, staying committed to making time, both family time and adult time, to spend with these important people. All this is easier said than done, we know, but if we were to tell you that between your child's birth and her 18th birthday you only have 6,570 days with your child, (and you have already spent a portion of them), you might feel increased urgency about getting connected with folks your child needs in his life. There is not a day to waste. Your child needs these role models as much as he needs air and water—and so do you.

Reprinted from “An Insider's Guide to Transracial Adoption” by Gail Steinberg and Beth Hall.

# MOM STRUGGLES WITH THE ATTACHMENT CHALLENGE

## BY SIOBHAN ROWE

*Source: Adoptive Families Association of British Columbia (AFABC):  
[www.bcadoption.com](http://www.bcadoption.com). NOTE: Focus on Adoption is available for \$40 per year to all  
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I met adoptive mom Sara in her cozy home in Vancouver. The living room is full of ornaments and photographs of Sara and her daughter, Jas.

When, as a single parent, she adopted Jas, Sara knew it was going to be tough. During the three-year wait, she read books, attended what courses were available and contacted other adoptive parents.

When Jas came home from an orphanage at 11-months-old, she was found to have several serious medical problems—other problems had been obvious from the moment Sara met her in the orphanage and also during many long and stressful nights in their hotel. It took many months and much effort to work through these and to reduce Jas's physical pain and suffering.

Though Jas smiled a lot as a baby, she didn't want to be touched or held. By the time she was 18 months, Sara was sure she had behavioral and emotional problems beyond the norm—she just couldn't put a name to it.

Jas was doing well at a part-time day care. The daycare workers were full of praise for the lively, extroverted little girl who engaged with everyone. But it was far more difficult for Sara when she was at home. Jas would not listen to Sara, wouldn't hold her hand, had frequent tantrums and was very controlling.

Sara attended an evening course on parenting challenging children. One night the instructor didn't turn up, and the three parents who did ended up talking. They expressed their concern that the behavior modification techniques that the instructor insisted they try just weren't working for their kids. Sara was fascinated to discover that all three were adoptive parents. Looking back on it, she thinks that the methods weren't working because the underlying problems with the children were probably attachment based.

Around the same time, Sara was taking courses in developmental psychology at UBC. In a lecture on attachment, the professor had asked several parents to bring their toddlers to class to demonstrate parent-child attachment. Jas passed the simple tests and the



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professor pronounced her “well attached.” But Sara had her doubts, even then. What she has learned since has made her realize that there are many layers of attachment and that the professor’s rudimentary assessment was not accurate.

Looking back on it, Sara thinks that while Jas liked her mom at that time—and oriented to her sometimes—she was not attached to her. She still disliked physical contact, avoided eye contact and would not listen to her, but would go to other people indiscriminately.

Sara read everything she could find on attachment. She initiated a number of attachment activities—one that was tremendously successful was a “lap time” during which she attempted to win eye contact from her daughter—it took months of daily 15 minute sessions.

At the suggestion of her GP, Sara tried to get an appointment with well-respected child psychologist Gordon Neufeld. He was the first person who confirmed for her that behavior modification techniques, with all their consequences, wouldn’t work with Jas and that she must work on their attachment relationship.

He told her that to enable Jas to behave, they had to have a huge reservoir of attachment and that she needed to build that up. One of the things this means, and it’s not easy when your child is behaving aggressively and is continually rejecting you, is that you do not leave your child and do not do time-outs. Sara had to learn not to be reactive during Jas’s outbursts and tantrums. She has had to be immensely patient and constructive with her daughter rather than confronting or rejecting her.

Sara recalls that phone calls were impossible to have with Jas around. Dr. Neufeld suggested that the next time Jas became disruptive while her mother was talking on the phone, Sara end the conversation as though she intended it to end and then say, “I feel so alone when mom’s on the phone.” When she did exactly that, Jas broke down and cried. Sara had managed to express for her child how she felt. After that, phone calls were prefaced with attachment reminders and became much more manageable.

Dr. Neufeld’s counsel helped a great deal, so much in fact, that Sara eventually stopped seeing him. Jas transitioned well from day-care to preschool. She learned to read and to do simple arithmetic in a private Montessori kindergarten. She simultaneously attended a public school French Immersion Kindergarten for three months.)

Grade 1 in the public school system was a disaster. In one and a half months, Jas went from being an enthusiastic and motivated learner to a child who hated school. From a child who bounded out of bed in the mornings, she became a child who woke up weeping and refusing to move. She displayed what Sara calls “orphanage behaviors” such as banging her head and hoarding food. She would say to her mom “I don’t want to live anymore. I’m so stupid.” She had no positive connections at school and the negative

discipline, such as putting her outside the classroom when she could not sit still, was exacerbating the problem.

Despite much effort on Sara's part, and even a psychologist's letter, the school refused to change their approach. "It was an unworkable situation," says Sarah.

This was particularly distressing because Jas had done well at daycare, preschool and kindergarten. Sara thinks this was because the teachers at all these places were far more child-centered and deliberately tried to attach to their kids. They were down on the floor with them, played with them and provided far more supportive, structured and safe environment—perfect for a child with attachment issues.

Interrupting her studies, Sara reluctantly decided to home school Jas. (Sara had returned to see Dr. Neufeld and this was his strong suggestion). For three years, Jas thrived as a home-learner. Sara says their relationship benefited immensely, and Jas enjoyed many programs and classes tailored to her interests.

Two years ago, Sara felt a need to return to some income-making activity, so she decided to put Jas in school again—she was by now eight years old. In April, Jas was accepted into Grade 3 at a public school. At the time she entered school, Jas had been thriving as a home-learner.

However, social and academic success at school has proven an ongoing challenge fraught with frustration and tears. Jas is impulsive, can be controlling when she is anxious, and has specific cognitive deficits that make social navigation difficult when she is on her own.

Several errors in judgment early in Jas's school career earned her the contempt of a number of girls in her class. Jas found recess and lunch times increasingly distressing as the rejections escalated. Sara says that school represents an attachment void for Jas—she is adrift in this environment with no compass point or anchor.

The classroom environment was marginally better but entirely dependent on the teacher's style. Jas usually did better in classes where structure was high and the teacher was child-friendly and present for the students. But given the ongoing social dynamics and resulting distress, Jas's cognitive abilities became very disorganized with resulting poor grades even in subjects she had understood well.

Sara has been in constant contact with the staff and principal of the school regarding her daughter's challenges. While they have been aware of the obvious behavioral problems and have mostly been empathetic, they have not been able to give her daughter much support in regard to the social difficulties.

Despite the challenges of the early years as a mom, Sara says that dealing with the school has been the most stressful time of her life as a parent. Jas has been professionally

documented as having ADHD, ODD, and a history of attachment issues as well as a chronic medical condition that contributes to the other conditions. These diagnoses were reluctantly documented for the school in the hope that they will help deliver some of the one-on-one help Jas needs—especially if the people helping her understand attachment issues.

Sara says that Jas has a strong loving attachment with her now and, most days, Jas knows that Sara is there for her. Sara is allowed to give and also receives lots of affection from Jas. At home, they have clear structure and routines that help with Jas's ADHD. However, the ongoing school stresses do take a toll on their relationship too—it is a daily challenge to get beyond the “defendedness” Sara says Jas retreats to while in school. Jas's self-esteem in relationship to friendships and peers is very low.

Jas is a bright little girl who can play the piano, loves her ballet and figure skating classes and is very excited about her new violin lessons. Sara has encouraged such activities not only because she knows Jas has a high need for physical activity but also because she wants Jas to have interests and accomplishments to hold on to as she gets older—she is very aware that in the future Jas may attempt to fill attachment needs in less desirable or safe ways unless she has more anchors.

Before we met, I knew something of the enormous struggles that this mom and daughter have had, and continue to face. Making sure that her daughter gets what she needs has consumed Sara's life. She has made enormous personal and financial sacrifices.

Unless the problems at school can be resolved, those sacrifices will continue to take a heavy toll. Sara faces the prospect of once again home-schooling Jas, which will again prevent her from getting back to work. By the time I leave, I am filled with admiration for her and for her daughter: they both walk a long and difficult road.

• *Names in this article have been changed.*

**RESOURCES ON SINGLE PARENT ADOPTION  
COURTESY OF CANADAADOPTS!  
WWW.CANADAADOPTS.COM**

- [About.com](#)  
An online resource that contains basic information about single parent adoption.
- [Adoption.org](#)  
More online tips and features for single parents considering adoption.
- [Single Father](#)  
An online resource including information and support for single fathers.
- [Single Mothers](#)  
A virtual community for single mothers by choice and chance.
- [Single Mothers By Choice](#)  
Features support and information, including an e-mail list and newsletter, about motherhood and parenting.
- [Single Parent Adoption Network](#)  
Another online community for single adoptive parents.
- [Single Parents Network](#)  
A hub for all things about single parent adoption.



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