

Preparing to Meet Your Child

The first time you set eyes on your child will be a moment you will always remember. It is a moment that you have been anticipating for a long time, and we pray that it is joyous. There are several different concerns that arise in the first few days as you become acquainted with him/her. The information to follow is designed to help prepare you for what to expect.

ATTACHMENT & BONDING

The day that you meet your child is referred to as "Gotcha Day!" Gotcha Day tends to be full of emotion and you should expect the day to be somewhat chaotic, especially as your child will be going through a complete sensory overload for the first few days.

You may meet your child at the Civil Affairs office, hotel lobby, hotel room, or even the hallway and may not have the time you had hoped to prepare. Gotcha Day does not typically bring a calm or peaceful setting. It is important to remember a couple of things during this adjustment period. First, you will look and sound different than what your child is used to, and second, their world as they know it has completely changed.

The initial adjustment period will differ for each child, and may take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks. Children experience a period of grief and transition as they have grown close to their nannies or foster family. Expect this initial grief to last for a few days until they recognize you as their parent(s). It is also common for children to attach to one parent and show disinterest towards the other. Children have usually spent very little time with adult males which may contribute to the favoritism shown towards the mother initially.

Keep in mind that you have been preparing for this day for months and in many cases, years. Your child, on the other hand has not had that same opportunity. For various reasons, orphanage staff and foster parents may wait to inform your child they are being adopted until shortly before you arrive. Additionally, the child you are adopting may have never been part of a family before. Due to these and many other factors, we encourage families to avoid placing unrealistic expectations on Gotcha Day, the days that follow, and ultimately on the child. It is important to remember that attachment is a process and not a one-time event, and that every child is unique. Focus your time in China on having fun with your child and helping them feel secure and provided for by you, and plan to work on setting up a routine and boundaries once you are home and trust is more established.

CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

China has given us a general expectation that children who are residing in foster care typically return to the orphanage for a period of time designated by the Orphanage Director prior to your family's arrival. It is usually not recommended for your family to meet with the foster family as this could be very emotional for the child as they are usually already in a state of grief. It has been our experience in certain provinces that in some cases, the foster family has unexpectedly shown up to the Gotcha Day meeting and would ask for your family to prepare for this possibility and set your expectations accordingly.

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MEDICAL REPORT: Current status versus Referral status

As you prepare to meet your son/daughter you should continue to prepare for the possibility that your child's health status, development, or abilities may not match exactly with the referral information received. As noted in the referral agreements you signed and conversations you had with your social worker and doctor, no one can guarantee or predict the exact health of an orphan until the parents meet the child in country. It is your responsibility to continue to prepare to meet your child and to have a plan in place if there are additional medical needs than those that were known to you during the referral review process.

If there are any major differences in your child's health or developmental status or any minor differences that are concerning to you, you are required to notify your guide and to contact one of the AWAA staff (listed as emergency contacts) in the US if you note any potential additional special need or unforeseen medical issues. We can advise you in seeking both medical counsel and assistance in both China and in the US regarding what this need could potentially entail. You will be able to take the time you need to make your adoption decision. We recommend bringing additional contact information for your social worker and the doctor who reviewed the referral with you, in the event you would like to consult with them about your child's health status while in China.

MEDICINE

After you review the medical report for your child, please consult your pediatrician on specific medications your child might need and prepare to bring them along. You will have access to Chinese hospitals if there is a need for immediate prescriptions. In general, we suggest you bring basic supplies such as diaper-rash ointment, baby Tylenol, and cough syrup. Be prepared for general health conditions such as diaper rash, colds, ear infection, diarrhea, coughs, etc.

NOTE: There are stores in China which carry all of the items listed above, so do not worry if you run out. We suggest that you bring some medicine that you are familiar with for you and your child. In China, it is much more difficult to buy western brands of medicine.

FOOD

Consult your pediatrician on what food is appropriate for your child. If you are feeding the child formula we suggest bottles with disposable liners, as it makes clean up a lot easier. You can buy formula and baby food in China. For some infants, toddlers and older children you should bring bowls, sippy cups, and utensils. Do not forget bibs and burp cloths.

Families are encouraged to educate themselves on common food-related issues that children who have been institutionalized exhibit. Some of these issues include but are not limited to hoarding, oral aversion, and fear that their newfound food supply may disappear. As Love Without Boundaries' Executive Director stresses, we agree that parents should be aware that food is often a source of deep anxiety for international adoptees. Educating yourself ahead of time can help you know what issues your child might face, why these issues are so common, and various behaviors to look for that could indicate there may be an issue.

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CLOTHING

The age of your child and season of travel will determine the types of items you should bring. You can access a growth chart by clicking [here](#) to obtain information suggesting what size of clothing to bring. In general, you should bring enough clothing for about two weeks. However, you may pack less clothes and plan on washing them during your stay. Due to the child's sensitive skin, we do not recommend using the hotel laundry detergent for your child's clothes. For infants, no matter what season, please bring: two blankets, warm pajamas, socks, and a hat. Young children in China are dressed very warmly, regardless of the season.

Do not be surprised if you are approached by a Chinese woman scolding you because your child is not wearing enough layers. These comments should be taken graciously as "bundling" is common practice in China in order to protect children from becoming cold and more vulnerable to sickness.

Though it may go against your instincts, families are encouraged to resist the urge to immediately remove the clothing that the child arrives in on Gotcha Day. It is likely that the child has become attached to certain clothing items and the scents that accompany them, even if they smell unpleasant to you. Keep in mind that your child is experiencing so many new things. Allowing them to hang on to a certain sweater or jacket may be the one thing that brings them some comfort and eases the transition.

SICKNESS

It is important for your family to prepare for potential sickness in advance and expect your child to need extra care and attention during your time in China, especially with the additional stresses of travel and the major changes taking place. Common minor illness include: colds, coughs, flu-like symptoms, bowel issues, and fatigue.

In addition to packing the medications as listed in this document, your guide can assist you in scheduling a doctor's appointment at a western clinic during your time in China should the need arise. These visits are typically very inexpensive and the guides will accompany you if needed.

While sickness is common and expected, please contact your guide and the America World staff in the US if you have any question or concern that your child's condition is above and beyond a minor illness. It is important for both your local and national guide, along with America World, to be aware of any and all concerns you have about your child's health to ensure we can assist your family in the best way possible.

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MONGOLIAN SPOTS (taken from FCC's website)

Mongolian Blue Spots are flat birthmarks with wavy borders and irregular shapes, common among people of Asian, East Indian, African, and Latino heritage. Bluish gray to deep brown to black skin markings, they often appear on the base of the spine, on the buttocks and back and even sometimes on the ankles or wrists. They commonly appear at birth or shortly after birth and may look like bruises.

Mongolian spots are benign skin markings, and are not associated with any illnesses, complications or risk factors. There is no known prevention and they generally fade in a few years and disappear by puberty. Though occasionally they persist into adulthood, there is no need for treatment.

Because Mongolian spots can be easily mistaken for bruises, particularly by well-meaning Caucasians who have no experience with them, they have triggered accusations of child abuse against some adoptive parents. For this reason, it is important to be sure that both your child's pediatrician and the caseworker who completes your post-adoption work record information of the presence of Mongolian spots into their reports. You can assist in the documentation of this information by taking snapshots of the spots and providing prints to be included in your child's files. If your daughter/son will be entering into childcare when you return home from China, it is important to advise your caregivers of Mongolian spots as well.

CHINESE "POTTY-TRAINING"

Families adopting babies and young children should be aware that "potty training" in China may look very different than it does in the US. In some orphanages, children are placed on potty chairs for an extended length of time during which they happen to actually go. This does not mean, however, that they are "potty trained" according to US standards. Additionally, the use of "split pants" is common in China so some children may be accustomed to simply squatting wherever they may find themselves to go to the bathroom. Families are encouraged to be patient with children through this transition and to expect accidents. Always have a change of clothes on hand.

Diapers and wipes can be purchased cheaply in China, but we recommend bringing a 3-4 day supply as well, specifically for the return flight home as they are a bit sturdier than those you will buy in China.