

HEART, HEAD, AND HANDS OF PARENTING

(Please talk to your social worker to explore these points fully)

Prospective Adoptive Parents (PAPs) considering the adoption of a special needs child must prepare for a complex array of emotional behaviours stemming from trauma, loss, and their disability.

They should expect challenges in attachment and trust, manifesting as a push-pull dynamic, testing boundaries, or even inappropriate affection toward strangers.

The PAPs must recognize that many actions are stress responses; behaviours like hypervigilance, aggression, withdrawal, or meltdowns are the child's learned attempts to cope with past trauma.

When a special need is present, the reactions of the child are amplified by increased frustration over communication or developmental delays, and a high risk of sensory overload.

Therapeutic Parenting is an essential skill for every Prospective Adoptive Parent and an adoptive parent, especially when caring for a child who expresses intense emotions due to fear or unmet needs. In these moments, the parent needs to be a steady and a calm external regulator, providing predictable support until the child is able to handle their own strong emotions on their own.

This self-assessment is designed to help your family honestly assess if you are fully prepared for this wonderful, yet complex, path, which must be a journey of deep love and commitment. Though it talks about both the parents, it is applicable for a single parent too.

1. THE HEART CHECK: Emotional & Family Readiness

This is about the emotional core of your family—your patience, understanding, and love.

Area	Focus: Are we emotionally prepared?	Status
Patience & Energy	Do we have the extra energy and unlimited patience required for a child whose needs won't simply go away? This is a marathon, not a sprint.	☐ 1= I need a lot of work ☐ 2= I need some work ☐ 3= I am doing just "Okay", and I look forward to developing more in this area ☐ 4= I am doing well but could grow a little. ☐ 5= I feel this is my strength, I am ready

*Guide for Prospective Adoptive Parents to adopt a Special Needs child
by Radha Nagesh, Founder- Joy of Adoption, an online Adoptive Families Support Group
based on her 30 years of experience as an adoptive parent and as an adoption and trauma sensitive counsellor*

Unconditional Love	Are we ready to give unconditional love to the child, even when they may not receive it back from the child? Expression of love can vary with each child.	☐ 1= I need a lot of work ☐ 2= I need some work ☐ 3= I am doing just "Okay", and I look forward to developing more in this area ☐ 4= I am doing well but could grow a little. ☐ 5= I feel this is my strength, I am ready
Trauma Awareness	Will we commit to learning about trauma-informed parenting so we can see challenging behaviour as a cry for help, not an attack?	☐ 1= I need a lot of work ☐ 2= I need some work ☐ 3= I am doing just "Okay", and I look forward to developing more in this area ☐ 4= I am doing well but could grow a little. ☐ 5= I feel this is my strength, I am ready
Grief & Reality	Are we prepared to let go of the "perfect child" fantasy and love the child we get, accepting their past losses and their unique path?	☐ 1= I need a lot of work ☐ 2= I need some work ☐ 3= I am doing just "Okay", and I look forward to developing more in this area ☐ 4= I am doing well but could grow a little. ☐ 5= I feel this is my strength, I am ready
Family Teamwork	Have we talked honestly with our spouse/partner about the parenting and discipline strategies and discussed how to work together and parent our child together?	☐ 1= I need a lot of work ☐ 2= I need some work ☐ 3= I am doing just "Okay", and I look forward to developing more in this area ☐ 4= I am doing well but could grow a little. ☐ 5= I feel this is my strength, I am ready

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2. THE HEAD CHECK: Understanding & Advocacy

This is about knowledge, planning, and becoming the child's greatest champion in the outside world.

Area	Focus: Do we know what's coming?	Status
Clear Needs	Do we have a clear medical and developmental report on the child's needs, and do we understand how these needs might change over time?	☐ 1= I need a lot of work ☐ 2= I need some work ☐ 3= I am doing just "Okay", and I look forward to developing more in this area ☐ 4= I am doing well but could grow a little. ☐ 5= I feel this is my strength, I am ready
Finding Experts & Community	Have we identified the local doctors, therapists (OT/Speech), counsellors, support groups who can work with our child's specific needs?	☐ 1= I need a lot of work ☐ 2= I need some work ☐ 3= I am doing just "Okay", and I look forward to developing more in this area ☐ 4= I am doing well but could grow a little. ☐ 5= I feel this is my strength, I am ready
Future Planning	Have we started planning for the child's adult life (financial security, living arrangements, and long-term support) decades from now?	☐ 1= I need a lot of work ☐ 2= I need some work ☐ 3= I am doing just "Okay", and I look forward to developing more in this area ☐ 4= I am doing well but could grow a little. ☐ 5= I feel this is my strength, I am ready

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Fierce Advocacy	Are we ready to be a loud, persistent voice for our child, constantly fighting for their rights in schools and healthcare systems?	☐ 1= I need a lot of work ☐ 2= I need some work ☐ 3= I am doing just “Okay”, and I look forward to developing more in this area ☐ 4= I am doing well but could grow a little. ☐ 5= I feel this is my strength, I am ready
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3. THE HANDS CHECK: Practical & Resource Commitment

This is about the time, money, and practical help required to meet day-to-day needs.

Area	Focus: Can we afford the time and money?	Status
Financial Security	Have we planned to avail any available government subsidies and budgeted for the ongoing, often high costs of therapy, equipment, or medical care?	☐ 1= I need a lot of work ☐ 2= I need some work ☐ 3= I am doing just “Okay”, and I look forward to developing more in this area ☐ 4= I am doing well but could grow a little. ☐ 5= I feel this is my strength, I am ready
Time Commitment	Is our work flexible enough to handle multiple weekly therapy and doctor appointments and constant meetings with educators?	☐ 1= I need a lot of work ☐ 2= I need some work ☐ 3= I am doing just “Okay”, and I look forward to developing more in this area ☐ 4= I am doing well but could grow a little. ☐ 5= I feel this is my strength, I am ready

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Help & Breaks	Do we have a strong network of friends, family, or professional services to provide respite care (breaks) so we don't burn out?	☐ 1= I need a lot of work ☐ 2= I need some work ☐ 3= I am doing just "Okay", and I look forward to developing more in this area ☐ 4= I am doing well but could grow a little. ☐ 5= I feel this is my strength, I am ready
Parent Self-Care	Do we have a non-negotiable plan to take care of ourselves (our health, our marriage)? Our well-being is essential for the child's stability.	☐ 1= I need a lot of work ☐ 2= I need some work ☐ 3= I am doing just "Okay", and I look forward to developing more in this area ☐ 4= I am doing well but could grow a little. ☐ 5= I feel this is my strength, I am ready

Total Score = _____

Total Score range	Evaluation
45-48	You are ready! Let's do this together!
44-35	You are looking good
42-44	You are on par but may need to try to grow in a few areas.
40-42	You probably need to work through some things before jumping in to quickly Below 40
Below 40	You may need some more skills and development before jumping into this.

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