
LIGHTS, ACTION, CAMERA!!!!

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At the University of Minnesota’s International Adoption Clinic, we are asked to view hundreds of videotapes of children who are being considered for adoption. The use of videotapes by prospective parents has increased significantly in the past several years as technology has improved and using videotapes has become more widely accepted by agencies and orphanages.

Prospective parents frequently have questions about a child’s medical status, developmental level, possible developmental disabilities and/or general questions about a specific child. While seeing a videotape cannot substitute for a thorough hands-on evaluation, a video—if done properly—can help identify or eliminate some risk factors or areas of concern that a prospective parent may have.

When viewing a video, we try to identify medical or health concerns—whether or not the child appears to be able to see and hear, what he/she is doing developmentally in the areas of gross and fine motor skills and self-help skills, how alert he/she is, and how he/she responds to language. In addition, we try to observe how the child is responding socially and emotionally to his/her surroundings. The better the video, the more information can be obtained from it.

While a well-done videotape can provide more information than a still photograph, there are many limitations regarding the information that can be obtained. We hope that the following suggestions will be helpful to you if you are making videos or using them to gain more information about a child you are considering for adoption.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

- ✓ Write the child’s name, date of birth and date the video was taken, and attach this information to the video.
- ✓ Include any/all medical, birth and developmental information with the videotape.
- ✓ Growth measurements are especially important, including height, weight and head circumference at birth and as the child gets older. Current measurements are extremely helpful.
- ✓ Request that the information be translated into English.
- ✓ Make sure that the equipment and tapes are compatible with equipment used in the United States.
- ✓ Have the video reviewed by professionals experienced with international adoption and with medical and developmental issues commonly seen with this population.

A VIDEOTAPE MAY HELP:

- ✓ Identify obvious medical/congenital problems.
 - ✓ Identify severe malnutrition.
 - ✓ Determine a child’s developmental level in some or all areas.
 - ✓ Rule out or clarify medical diagnoses such as cerebral palsy.
 - ✓ Identify other risk factors such as attachment concerns, language problems and/or long-term special needs.
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LIMITATIONS

A VIDEOTAPE:

- ✓ Cannot guarantee a healthy, normal child.
- ✓ Is limited to a single point in time.
- ✓ Is limited by the quality and content of the video; *e.g.*, a child may have more skills than what is shown on the video.
- ✓ Cannot identify unseen things such as infectious diseases.
- ✓ Cannot rule out all medical or developmental problems.
- ✓ Needs to be used with other medical/health information.

SUGGESTIONS FOR MAKING A SUCCESSFUL VIDEO

- ✓ Practice using your video camera before trying to videotape a child.
- ✓ Videotape the child when he/she is most alert.
- ✓ Videotape the child with familiar people and in a familiar place.
- ✓ Make sure that the child feels safe.
- ✓ Tape the child for at least 10-15 minutes.
- ✓ Have the person who is with the child stand so that they are **NOT** between the child and the camera.
- ✓ Adapt the activities in video to the age of the child.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INFANTS

- ✓ Undress the child (diapers can be left on); it is easier to see how the child moves if they are undressed.
- ✓ Place the child on the floor or a safe, firm surface where he/she can be easily seen and can move more easily than on a soft or unstable surface.
- ✓ Allow the child to move on his/her own so that the movements seen in the video are those of the child rather than the handler. Try to avoid pulling or jiggling arms and legs to get the child to move.
- ✓ Place the child on his/her tummy or back to start. If the child doesn't roll independently, then turn him/her over after several minutes.
- ✓ Place the child in a sitting position and provide only as much support as the child needs.
- ✓ Provide small objects such as rattles to encourage the child to reach. Keep the camera positioned so that the child's face and hands can be observed during reaching.
- ✓ Position the camera to obtain a good, clear close-up of the face (approximately 12 inches from the face).
- ✓ Allow the child to interact with adults in the video.
- ✓ Try to record any sounds that the child makes.
- ✓ Support the child in standing to see if he/she can take any weight on his/her legs.
- ✓ Try to have most of the video showing the child's entire body as he/she plays and moves.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TODDLERS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

- ✓ Have the child in diapers or shorts and a sleeveless top.
- ✓ Place the child in a safe, familiar environment and allow him/her to play or interact with familiar people.
- ✓ Adjust your activities to the child's motor and developmental abilities; *e.g.*, if the child cannot sit alone, provide support and then see if the child can reach for and grasp an object.
- ✓ Allow the child to move around the area. If the child is walking independently, encourage him/her to do higher level activities such as squatting down to pick something up or running.
- ✓ Have the child do fine motor activities such as picking up small objects; encourage him/her to use both hands.
- ✓ Videotape the child doing any self-care activities that he/she routinely does, such as eating at mealtime or dressing independently.
- ✓ Keep as much of the body in the camera shots as possible, but also try to get several close-ups of the face.
- ✓ Encourage the child to interact with familiar adults and tape his/her face whenever possible while he/she is responding to people.

- ✓ Try to tape sounds or any vocalizations that the child is making. If possible, have someone translate what the child is saying. Singing songs or playing word games is also helpful.