

HOT TOPIC BREAKAGES



Q My 10-year-old daughter breaks and damages toys and other belongings and Christmas is a particularly challenging time for this. In the past, some of her presents have been broken before Christmas Day is even over. Whenever this happens she seems not to care, but I'm not sure if this is really the case. This year she wants a tablet and some earphones and I don't know what to do. All her friends have them and I'd love to give her these things. I can't afford to replace them and I know I'll be cross if, or rather when they get broken. I don't know what to do for the best.



A What an upsetting situation for you both. Your daughter is seeking attention, excitement and comfort in your gifts, and even though you are willing and able to give them to her – and meet that need – she is unable to receive it.

Your daughter may not be able to tell you about her experiences of gifts and attention, and only able to remember them on a physical, pre-verbal level. Not being able to express herself can mean that her behaviours seem challenging and unusual. However, if we look at the reasons why she is acting out in this way, we can help you both make sense of what is happening.

Children start to develop prosocial behaviours – the behaviours that help us to think about others and ourselves in relation to others – from 18 months-old. By the time the child is around 30 months-old, they will be fully aware of how their behaviours impact on others and the differences between 'good' and 'bad' behaviours. Your daughter may not have been thought about in a way that she needed as an infant and toddler and, as such, she may not be able to process being cared for in a positive way. Her feelings of guilt and shame have taken over.

Guilt and shame are often talked about in the same breath but there is a difference. Guilt is the perception of one's behaviour being negative, whilst shame is the perception that one's self is negative. With guilt, the child might know they have done something wrong and they will seek to repair this situation with their peer or adult. When the child

is experiencing shame, they feel that they can't fix the bad feelings inside and therefore turn away from their peer or adult, unable to make things better. Guilt focuses on the emotions of others and shame focuses on the emotions inside of us. And I think your daughter might be feeling more shame than guilt. Her breaking the toys she so desperately wants (to keep up with her friends, to enjoy herself) is like her saying that she isn't good enough to have these lovely things. She might also not feel good enough to have your love that you are expressing through these thoughtful gifts.

It can be hard for us parents to think about the reason behind the behaviour but with some perspective from a therapist, or trusted friend, it is always helpful to spend time doing so. It might also feel sad knowing that your daughter does not feel loveable even with your consistent care and safe home and this is another challenge of living in an adoptive family. With all of this in mind, I thought it might be helpful to provide some tips for supporting your daughter to cement that secure base you have given her, and to know she is worthy of the gifts and affection she is craving.

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Modelling

When we start to help our children with a new skill, we want them to feel comfortable enough to make mistakes and find new ways of being. As parents, we can model the skills we would like our children to try and this can include how we deal with shame. For example, if you make a mistake, narrate your thought process and what you are going to do to deal with it. If someone gives you a gift, explain to your child how nice it feels for someone to love you. Of course, there will be a natural way for you to do this within the dynamics of your family so explore ways to connect with modelling.

Think about your language

From quite bold statements such as us angrily asking our children where they have left their school coat, to more gentle ones like, "you would forget your head if it wasn't screwed on!", the words we choose to prompt children can have more of an impact on a child who is feeling shameful, even when our intention was positive. You can make the lost coat (or broken object) a chance to work together as a team to understand what the feelings are behind it. For example, "Oh you haven't got your jacket. Shall we have a think together where you put it?". Or, "I can see you really love your toy – is there a way we can look after it together?".

This might help your daughter feel like she is really thought about. Also, if you do say something you feel uncomfortable about, don't feel shameful yourself. Explain this to your daughter and make repairs to the interaction. Saying sorry is just as important for adults.

Find positive ways to get those big feelings out

One thing we can often get tied in to is trying to push down those feelings that overwhelm us, but they will come up in another place sometime soon. I always think of those 'Whack-a-mole' games where you hit him down and he pops up somewhere else. Help your daughter manage and acknowledge the feelings by meeting her energy. Instead of destroying the toys, throw a ball around the garden, tear some paper up, scream and shout and run around somewhere safe. Then, you can go back to the modelling and your language – "Wow, that was some big energy! I am so glad we got that out together. Shall we have a cuddle and play that game now?".

Are you happy for your child to receive a large cash inheritance?

If you die without leaving a will, following your death (if you are single or co-habiting) or following the death of you and your spouse, your adopted child will inherit your estate equally with any siblings once they turn 18. At 18 they will become entitled to the whole estate which could be a substantial sum.

Many of our clients tell us that due to the emotional and other challenges their children face, that they do not feel that it is in their child's best interests for them to inherit everything at 18.

We are specialists in advising adoptive parents about the most effective ways of ensuring that their estate passes to their children in the most suitable way for their child and their needs.

We are offering free initial consultations to all adoptive parents to discuss their specific circumstances and requirements.

Call us on 0800 860 6265 and quote 'Adoption UK' to receive your free consultation.



info@adoptionlegalcentre.co.uk
www.adoptionlegalcentre.co.uk



Call us now:
0330 440 1838
referrals@wearechroma.com

Chroma continues to offer online therapy services for adoptive families

Music Therapy | Dramatherapy
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We have developed an online therapy service in response to COVID19

We are taking new referrals, so please get in touch



If you or your children need our support contact us on:

t: 0330 440 1838
e: referrals@wearechroma.com