

Surviving the Wait

By Dawn Davenport

Excerpted from *The Complete Book of International Adoption: A Step-by-Step Guide to Finding Your Child*

Congratulations! Your paperwork is now signed, sealed, and delivered. The piles of documents that had taken over your dining room table and living room floor are now gone. Your house has reverted to its natural state following the spit and polish splendor preceding the home study. Things are back to normal. So now what do you do? You wait.

“Hurry up and wait” is the mantra for airplane travelers, soldiers, and international adopters. Most people are ready for the calm after the storm of the paper chase, but few want it to remain calm for long. They are more than ready to be caught up in the turbulence of their child.

The old proverb is right—time does indeed move slowly for those who wait and after a few months, *slow* takes on a whole new meaning. Keeping busy is the only way to survive. Fortunately there is much you can do during this time to keep your mind off the creeping calendar, and it’s not just busy work. You have more time now to accomplish things that need to be done, and your post baby life will be easier if you do them now. In keeping with the often over-done pregnancy theme, I have provided nine months worth of activities if you do one a week.

Feel free to pick and choose your way through the list. Which items we choose probably speak volumes about us. A friend of mine favored the nesting and cleaning activities. By the time her daughter arrived she had organized and cleaned everything in her house and had moved on to the garage. I, on the other hand, favored the pamper yourself activities. I wanted to eat, soak and shop my way through. I would recommend doing the later items after you have a referral, since the wait will be harder once the nursery is ready and baby things are scattered around the house.

1. **Get in shape.** You will soon be carrying, bending, and running more than you have since you were a kid and you will be doing all of this carrying, bending and running while carrying your child. You don’t need to add a sore back and aching muscles to the stress of travel and new parenthood. Start exercising. Carry a 5 pound sack of flour in your baby carrier throughout the day to get ready and gradually work up to a 20 pound sack of rice.
2. **Choose an international adoption medical specialist if you plan to use one.** I include information on how to do this in my book, if you don’t know.
3. **Choose a pediatrician.** I include information on how to do this as well.
4. **Get the required immunizations for your adoption trip.** Some immunizations, such as hepatitis B, require several shots over about six months, so get started.
5. **Prepare a will or review your existing one.** Most wills are written to cover children by birth or adoption, but make sure. Pick out guardians and godparents.
6. **Find out your employer’s policy on adoption leave.** If they do not give parents paid time off for adoption, put together a proposal to change the policy. Argue the fairness factor-- if the company offers leave for employees who become parents by birth, it is only fair that they offer leave for employees who become parents by adoption. Stress the long term health benefits of firmly

establishing attachment. Educate yourself about the Family and Medical Leave Act and what your employer is required to do.

7. **Get both parents up to speed.** A typical scenario during the adoption process is for one parent to take on the role of the prepared one, while the other parent remains blissfully ignorant. Now is the time to right that imbalance, at least a bit.
8. **Child proof your home.** I include resources for this.
9. **Educate grandparents and close friends.** They need to understand the parenting techniques you plan to use to enhance attachment and how they can help.
10. **Singles should line up their support team.** Specifically ask if they would be willing to take over at night every once in a while to let you catch up on sleep if your child has trouble sleeping.
11. **Read adoption books and articles.** But a word of caution: in an effort to show the full picture, many adoption books and articles seem to focus on the problems of adoption. Be selective on what you read. You don't want to ignore the potential problems, but you don't need to immerse yourself in them either.
12. **Read child development and parenting books.** Sometimes we become so focused on the fact that we are *adopting* this child that we forget that he is first and foremost a child and more like other children than different.
13. **Choose a name.** For names with an international flavor, check out my Resource Guide for books.
14. **Pamper yourself.** Consider long soaks in a tub with candlelight and wine if money is tight, but take a vacation if you can afford to. This *babymoon* may be the last childfree vacation in a long while.
15. **Start a journal.** Save it to give to your child someday to show your feelings while you wait for him to join your family.
16. **Write your parents a thank-you letter.** Tell them how excited you are and how much you appreciate all they did for you.
17. **Research early intervention programs.** Most school district and counties have programs help preschool kids with developmental delays. Your child may not need it but it helps to be ready in case she does.
18. **Organize your closets, drawers, and cupboards.** If you are feeling really industrious or anxious move on to your basement, attic or garage. If you still have excess energy, come start on my house.
19. **Take a child CPR course.** It should cover the Heimlich maneuver for babies and young children. Ask your pediatrician where a course is offered or call the local Red Cross.
20. **Learn how to take decent pictures, especially of children.** Check out the Resource Guide for books.
21. **Learn as much of your child's birth language as possible.** At the very least learn travel phrases (where's the bathroom, how much is this) and polite phrases (please, thank you, hello, good bye) and child phrases (I love you, mama, daddy, are you hungry).
22. **Prepare your pets for the baby's arrival.** Make any anticipated changes to their routine (more time outdoors or in a crate) well in advance of your child arriving so the pet does not associate the change with the new arrival. Contact your vet or local humane society for information and see my Resource Guide.
23. **Tackle your *someday* list.** Learn to knit, play tennis, dance, play the guitar, or anything that you've been meaning to do someday. Or, for the more Puritanical amongst you, tackle your *shoulds*: catch up on that stack of paperwork, the clothes that need to be mended, or anything else that you should do.

- 24. Schedule any of your regular appointments.** You won't have time for your regular dentist, doctor, optometrist, and vet appointments when you first get home so schedule them for before you travel.
- 25. Take childcare classes at the local hospital.** Ask your pediatrician or adoption agency who else offers them.
- 26. Buy a cookbook from your child's country.** Learn to prepare a few simple meals.
- 27. Learn a few lullabies and bouncy games.** There is almost nothing more satisfying than singing a lullaby to your child. It is surprisingly hard to find resources for learning lullabies without being able to read music. My favorites are included in my Resource Guide.
- 28. Shop garage sales for baby items and toys.** You will need less equipment than you think and your child may have outgrown the need for some things. Ask your pediatrician and other parents who have adopted similar aged children for suggestions.
- 29. Buy a few favorite children books.** Think back to your childhood and choose books you loved such as a book of Mother Goose rhymes or *Good Night Moon* by Margaret Wise Brown. Also buy a few children's books on adoption.
- 30. Learn baby massage techniques.** See my Resource Guide.
- 31. Send a transition object or photo album to your child.** A photo album will help your child begin to recognize the VIPs in his new life and a *transition object* (a fancy word for a blanket or stuffed animal) will make the transition easier for him since he will have grown accustomed to it in his old life and can bring it with him to his new life.
- 32. Begin preparing a life book for your child.** I list many resources for these.
- 33. Print your posts from the online forums.** Save these in your child's life book. Use discretion on which ones to include.
- 34. Get a local or national newspaper from your child's birth date.**
- 35. Arrange for the care of children you will be leaving at home when you travel.** Write out an authorization for the babysitter to get medical care and leave a copy of your insurance card. If they will be going to someone else's house, consider having them practice for one or two nights while you and your spouse (or friend) get away for a weekend. Buy and wrap inexpensive gifts for your child to open each day you will be gone. In addition to giving him something to look forward to each day, the dwindling stack of gifts will be a visual reminder of how soon you will return.
- 36. Change your long distance calling plan.** If you will be leaving children who will want to call you while you are abroad, the month before you leave change your calling plan with your long distance provider to include international calls. It will save you a lot of money.
- 37. Cook and freeze meals for the first weeks back home.**
- 38. Get information on kid friendly activities.** Your community likely has many inexpensive activities for you and your child to participate in such as library story times, mother/child gym or swimming classes, and neighborhood play groups.
- 39. Decorate the nursery or child's room.** Sprinkle a little baby powder around the room for that delicious baby smell.
- 40. Buy baby/child announcements and address the envelopes.**
- 41. Buy gifts for your child's caregiver and children at the orphanage.**
- 42. Buy and read travel books on your child's birth country.**

43. Make color copies of your child's picture. Show it to everyone and mail a copy to family and friends that don't live nearby. Ask for their prayers and good wishes.

Dawn Davenport is a writer, attorney, researcher, radio host, and speaker specializing in adoption and infertility. Her book (*The Complete Book of International Adoption: A Step by Step Guide to Finding Your Child* (Random House/Broadway)), website (www.findingyourchild.com), and internet radio show (*Creating a Family: Talk About Infertility and Adoption*) help families through infertility and adoption.