

# Is Residential Treatment an Option?

Response by Angela Welch, Post-Adoption Contact Center Lead Consultant

**Q** We are in desperate need of help. We adopted our son internationally seven years ago. He is now 14, and his behavior is out of control. We have two other children and no peace in our home.

**How do we find a residential treatment center that specializes in attachment and trauma, and where can we get financial assistance?**

**A** I'm so sorry your family is going through this. This is never what a parent envisions when they become an adoptive family. Sadly, this question comes to me more than occasionally, and I find myself wishing I could turn back time and help a family before things escalate. Your family is clearly in crisis, and I appreciate your intent to find a program that will address the underlying issues.

## **UNDERLYING ISSUES**

My first questions to parents in these situations are, "What are the behaviors? What's going on? What services have you utilized? What assessments have been completed?" Some families are burned out by a child violating house

rules, being mean and disrespectful, and creating unrest for everyone in the family. They have already sent the child to individual counseling, but maybe they have not found an adoption-competent therapist, or the therapist has not incorporated family sessions in the child's treatment. This can leave a family to see therapy as ineffective and thus seek alternatives to support their child.

The hard reality is, a miserable home environment is not enough to qualify for admission to a residential treatment center (RTC). There are more options to consider, including intensive family therapy where interventions can be modeled and practiced in real time. Programs such as Chaddock's intensive in-home

program are designed to help families before they would need residential services. Staff conduct comprehensive assessments before sending a team of trauma- and attachment-trained professionals to the home. Their treatment team works with all members of the family, individually and as a unit.

Some parents report they have tried family therapy and other post-adoption support, but the family no longer feels safe with the child in the home. RTCs do provide higher structure and supervision for children with unsafe behavior—unsafe with themselves, with others, or both. If that is your situation, out-of-home treatment may be what everyone needs to stabilize and preserve your family.



# No part of accessing or placing your child in residential care is going to be quick or simple.

## FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Contact your insurance provider to see if residential treatment is covered. If so, request the names of approved facilities and the detailed steps required for approval. Generally, insurance companies need proof that you've exhausted outpatient options along with written recommendations from mental health professionals. Sometimes families are able to get court-ordered treatment if the youth is also involved with the juvenile justice system.

If your insurance does not cover RTCs, or the facilities your insurance will pay for do not meet your needs, you will have to research which ones accept private pay (some accept Medicaid only). There are a limited number of RTCs that address trauma, adoption, and attachment issues well, and the cost can be upwards of \$10,000 a month. Post-adoption grants are rare, and none that I am aware of can cover the extensive cost of residential services. Depending on their situation, families may choose to refinance other assets, work with the program's billing department to stretch payments, or possibly create a GoFundMe account. If you choose the GoFundMe option, be very careful not to overshare details of the situation, like your son's diagnoses or specific incidents.

## REPUTABLE PROGRAMS

The National Association for Therapeutic Schools and Programs has a searchable database that will show admission criteria to help narrow your search, such as gender, age range, IQ, diagnoses, etc. Expect to look for out-of-state programs as well. Also, keep in mind that the goal of any reputable program is to help your son reintegrate back into your care. They expect your commitment to him as his parents and require your participation in family treatment. That may be possible via conference calls and virtual sessions, but plan for some travel for family-dedicated events. Some parents have used residential care to permanently remove a child from their family and abandon them, physically and emotionally. RTCs may not admit your son or will discharge him early if they sense you are not going to be involved or do not intend to bring him back into your home.

Once you have identified potential RTCs, research them more closely. Google the name of the RTC plus the word "complaints" to review any lawsuits or reputation issues. Call the program and visit the facility prepared with questions. The Federal Trade Commission (link below) has developed a list of beneficial questions you can use.

## AFTERCARE PLANS

Once your son is in the RTC and you're working with the treatment team, you should begin preparing for his return home. It won't be possible for you to replicate the program's highly structured environment, so expect some regression in his behavior despite the progress he made while in the RTC. Arrange for supports and services for your family as part of your aftercare plan. You might be able to start those services and include your son prior to his discharge if the program transitions him home with extended visits first.

No part of accessing or placing your child in residential care is going to be quick or simple. While we provide training and try to help adoptive parents expect the unexpected, most families do not anticipate needing a residential program. Now facing a crisis, your options are limited. It's frustrating for me, as a post-adoption consultant, to offer so little practical help; and I know it's exhausting for your family to navigate the mental health system and financial barriers.

Take great care in researching the right fit for your son and your family. While we cannot turn back time and prevent these hard times for your family, there is still reason to hope for the future (see related story on page 20). I urge any family struggling with an adopted child to consult with an adoption professional. Finding the right help early on can be critical to keeping your family together. 🧡



[www.chaddock.org/in-home-intensive](http://www.chaddock.org/in-home-intensive)

[www.natsap.org/public/parents/questions](http://www.natsap.org/public/parents/questions)

[www.FonthillBehavioralHealth.com/insiders-guide-getting-insurance-to-pay](http://www.FonthillBehavioralHealth.com/insiders-guide-getting-insurance-to-pay)

[www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0185-residential-treatment-programs-teens](http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0185-residential-treatment-programs-teens)



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