

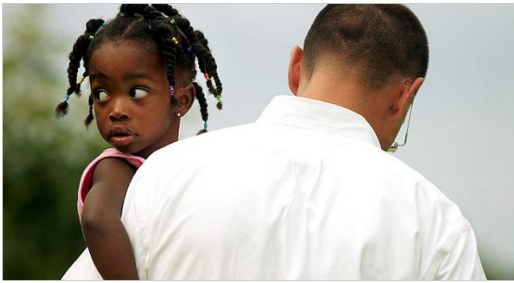
Tips for Parents Who Are Adopting or Thinking About Adopting

When thinking about the possibility of adopting first we must conduct our own self-assessment. It is crucial to examine our own motivations for adopting. The following is a list of issues self-examining questions that may be helpful to examine when determining your decision to adopt.

1. Do you have the coping skills, personality, attitude and lifestyle to meet the needs of the youth you want to adopt?
2. It is important to examine your emotional and financial supports.
3. Ask yourself do we have the emotional capability to handle a youth that may have difficult, uncomfortable emotional issues.
4. If infertility issues are involved have these issues been resolved, have you grieved this loss, and do you understand that adopting may cause these issues to resurface.
5. It is important to think about what needs the youth will have long-term including medical care, education needs, behavioral and emotional needs such as therapy or residential care. It is important to assess how adoption will impact all family members including your own children if this is the case.
6. It is important both spouses or partners want to adopt.
7. Youth with special needs can be extremely demanding and can threaten relationships not make them stronger initially. It is good if the marital or partner relationship is strong and healthy when adopting.
8. It is not a good idea to adopt just to have a playmate for our child as adoption is about meeting the needs of the youth being adopted and not about the needs of our children.
9. It is important to have time and flexibility in your schedule and lifestyle for youth before and after adoption.
10. It is important to know that at times when the adoption occurs it may appear that youth will not or do not want to reciprocate love to parents at first, this is often normal and youth need time, consistency, and unconditional love and nurturing from their family to begin to feel secure enough to reciprocate love and affection.
11. It is crucial to have realistic expectations, having unrealistic expectations sets youth and families up for failure.
12. It is essential to continue to receive training on the special needs of your youth and special issues that may be pertinent to adoption.
13. Get specific background, mental health, and medical information on your youth and make sure you have updated psychological information on the youth.



14. Learn about and keep asking about subsidies for youth with special needs or whatever the needs of your youth may be. Do not waive subsidies because you may need them at a later date.
15. Statistics have shown that the first few months of an adoption may be difficult and trying so it is extremely important to have support relationship already established to help through this time.
16. Parents sometimes expect that youth may be grateful to them for rescuing them and that this may mean the youth will spontaneously love and adore them.



17. Youth are often grieving with multiple losses often during the first few months of adoption. In a lot of cases youth will always yearn for that connection to their birth family and this is normal.

18. It is important that the adoptive parents respond the youth's yearning for their birth family with understanding and open communication rather than defensiveness and very little communication.

19. Ask will we be able to financially provide for the youth's needs and services once adopting and no longer fostering.
20. It is important to know that children adopted when they are not infants often will grieve from the loss of their birth family for most of their lives even into adulthood and this will always be an issue that will need to be open for discussion with the adoptive family.
21. Be open to asking for help from outside supports
22. Have patience to look beyond a youth's negative and sometimes hurtful behaviors to the underlying conflicts, fears, pain of the youth and initiate positive parenting responses rather than negative and punitive responses.
23. Be able to tolerate uncertainty and ambiguity within the youth.
24. Have a willingness to encourage open expression of feelings and experiences within your family.
25. Be a strong advocate for youth at school and in the community.
26. Openness to examine your own limitations, triggers, frustrations and poor parenting responses in order to better your parenting to meet the needs of the youth.
27. Be willing to make personal and family changes as the youth is not the only individual that should be making changes within the family system.
28. Be accepting of frustration and delays in your day and create flexibility for the needs of the youth.

Homework assignment:

For those thinking about adopting but unsure the following exercise may be helpful at examining your motives and determining a decision:

Go over each of the above tips/issues and look at your situation in relation to the advice given and then discuss your answers with your spouses answers or a friend if you are a

single parent. This will get you started on examining your own motives and assessing your self.

Five stages of placement when adopting a child:

1. Honeymoon period: Youth seem to wonder is this for real, youth often act like a guest, do no wrong and parents think they have found the ideal child.
2. Limit testing: Then the youth reverses behavior and pushes all limits to if these caregivers will reject them again. Parents may be questioning why they took in this youth.
3. Disillusionment: After repeated and prolonged limit testing, parents begin to question what they did and maybe they should not have adopted this youth.
4. Coping: The child is still testing parents, but is now realizing with the parent’s consistency and their not giving up on the youth, that they are beginning to feel a little more secure and safe and begin to believe this family may really want them in the family. Parents feel as if youth is responding better to redirection, as if things seem more hopeful and manageable.
5. Interaction: This is when all family members are working together to build trusting relationships and a real feeling of family develops. Parents often think “What would we do if this youth was not in our life.”

A healthy adoptive family does not require that youth give up their birth families and if safe and appropriate it is often positive for youth to have some contact with birth family through letters, holiday visits, occasional phone calls. It is important whether there is contact or not that adoptive families give freedom and opportunity for the youth to celebrate, talk about, process their thoughts and feelings about their birth family.



Claiming One Another

Committing to adopt emotionally involves a foster parent and foster youth claiming each other unconditionally. Claiming should be marked with ceremony and formalized. Claiming is a process reinforced by deliberate actions such as having family portraits taken, making vacation and other long range plans together, and having an adoption ceremony, especially with older adopted youth,

where Adoption Covenants are signed. A foster parent Covenant expresses promises and responsibilities of the parent and the youth’s covenant expresses their belief in what the foster parent promises and their responsibility as a family member. If possible the Adoption Ceremony should be memorialized with photographs or video. The Adoption Ceremony represents closure to the foster care experience and the beginning of the adoption experience. It may also be beneficial to have the family’s supports participate in the ceremony to verbalize how they will be emotional supports to the family and youth. Adding any written documents from the adoption ceremony to the Lifebook is essential which

shows the continuation and transition of life from foster care to adoption through the Lifebook.

Finalization

Finalization should be a beginning not an ending. We need to use the finalization process to narrate the story of adoption and the past, present and future history to come. There is



significance in the development of roots and wholeness for youth who have been in foster care. We need to recognize the magnificence in the adoption process. Finalizing also means adopted parents letting go of long held expectations, by being surprised, encouraging, and noticing every success the youth makes in their life. A ceremony saved for finalization or a party is essential so this important beginning step is not forgotten; where friends, family, and

workers who assisted with the youth and supported the family through the adoption are invited. Families can create and send invitations, have music, food, decorations, and gifts. The date of finalization day can become a new family holiday and should be celebrated like a birthday and new family rituals and routines will be created, celebrated and enjoyed.

By Kim Brown

Recommended Reading List

[Adopting the Older Child](#) by Claudia L. Jewett

[Helping Children Cope with Separation and Loss](#) by Claudia L. Jewett

[Parenting Your Adopted Older Child: How to Overcome the Unique Challenges and Raise a Happy and Healthy Child](#) by Brenda McCreight, Ph.D.

[Real Parents, Real Children: Parenting the Adopted Child](#) by Holly van Gulden and Lisa M. Bartels-Rabb

[The Family of Adoption](#) by Joyce Maguire Pavao

[Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child: Making Sense of the Past](#) by Betsy E. Keefer and Jayne E. Schooler

[Attaching in Adoption: Practical Tools for Today's Parents](#) by Deborah D. Gray

[A Child's Journey Through Placement](#) by Vera I. Fahlberg, M.D.

[Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self](#) by David Brodzinsky, Ph.D.

Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew by Sherrie Eldridge

Creating Ceremonies: Innovative Ways to Meet Adoption Challenges by Cheryl A. Lieberman, Ph.D. and Rhea K. Bufferd, LICSW

The Whole Life Adoption Book by Jayne E. Schooler

Parenting the Hurt Child Helping Adoptive Families Heal and Grow by Gregory C. Keck, Ph.D. and Regina M. Kupecky, LSW

I Love you Rituals by Becky A. Bailey, Ph.D.

<http://www.adoptivefamilies.com/> (adoption magazine)

Resources

New York State Citizens' Coalition for Children, Inc.

Jewish Children's Adoption Network