

Adoption is Changing

Adoption has changed tremendously over the last few years. I have been a private adoption practitioner since 1980, as well as an Adoption Worker at Northumberland Children's Aid Society (now called Highland Shores CAS). Adopting internationally (from a country other than Canada), has become more complicated with longer waiting periods; there are fewer private adoption of infants every year and some children adopted through the public system (adoption of a child from foster care) come with complicated histories. So what can families do?

- **Take the process seriously and slowly.** Adopting is a lifetime commitment. If it takes a little longer to bring your child home, the time taken to be sure you are adopting the right child into your family will be of vital importance to everyone.
- **Take advantage of ALL of the educational opportunities you can find.** The more information you gather about adoption, attachment and parenting, the better prepared you will be. You will gather professional resources while you are attending educational seminars. You will meet other prospective adoptive parents who could become your future friends and your future link to help that you might value later.
- **Take your time.** Most parents want a child tomorrow - or today if possible. Of course you do. You want to be a family. Most adoptive parents have been trying to become parents for years before they begin the adoption process. It is very, very hard to be patient and wait, BUT hurrying or rushing into adoption can be a disaster for everyone.
- **Listen to what the adoption professionals are telling you.** Families don't want to listen or believe sometimes what they are being told. Who wants to hear that kids might be difficult; settling in may take a year or more; it might take two or three years - or the hardest to hear, that an adoption might not happen.; that there are few babies available; that birthmothers do sometimes change their mind; that children adopted from orphanages can have serious developmental delays or attachment problems. Most adoption professionals have been working in adoption for many, many years. They want to help. Listen because what they are telling you affects your future.
- **There are GOOD stories.** It is the job of professionals to tell you all of the options and possibilities. That includes the problems and pitfalls. It is not good to keep your head in the sand or your ears closed to information. It is also not necessary to think that all adoptions fail or have serious problems. In my over 30 years of adoption, I would say 90% of the adoptions that I have facilitated (that may be a bit high or optimistic but I think it is true with myself and others in the adoption field) have been good and/or more than good enough. If your adoption is part of the 10% that are very difficult, heartbreaking and heart wrenching, life can be miserable. I have to tell you though, that there is an absolute joy and delight when visiting a family who have their adopted child and everyone is elated and a family at last. Adoption, like birthing a child, is incredible for the parents, the adopted child, the extended family, the friends and the community. Why else would we continue to help families adopt and children find homes? It is because adoption is a good thing for everyone even though there are difficulties sometimes, delays lots of times and heartbreak sometimes.
- **Look at all avenues of adoption.** Trust that you cannot know where your child might come from to join your family. Every family has a particular avenue of adoption that suits them best. Gather information about all ways of adopting. Attend seminars with private domestic and international agencies; attend an information meeting at the CAS; find out the dates for the spring and fall Adoption Resource Exchange; go to a seminar with Adopt Ontario.
- **Educate yourselves about Open Adoption.** Most people are nervous when they first hear about Open Adoption. Talk to professionals; talk to families who have an open adoption; attend a seminar with Jennie Painter in Kingston. Open Adoption is a good thing in almost all cases. CAS's are now facilitating open adoptions as well.

- **Trust your instincts.** Some families decide that they do not want to adopt as they go through the process. Other families decide to change directions and adopt domestically instead of internationally or from one country instead of another or from CAS instead of privately. Sometimes one partner isn't on board. It is NOT a good idea to adopt unless both partners are committed to an adoption. Single parents might decide adoption is too much for them. Trust your instincts to do what is best for you and your family.
- **Gather resources.** I believe that most of the unsuccessful adoptions are because families are not well informed or they don't have adequate support. Support includes friends and family or joining an adoption group but sometimes requires therapy, sensory assessments, physiotherapy, or psychological services. Adoptions sometimes fail because families wait too long to seek assistance from appropriate professionals. Getting help takes courage. It is not easy to say that things are not going well when you have waited so long to adopt. It is hard to say that things aren't going well but professional help and help from other families who have adopted can make all the difference to your family's mental health and well being.

I believe that the majority of adoptions are successful. Families bring children into their homes because they want to grow their families; they want to be parents and they want to help the children who need families. I have been fortunate. I have worked in public adoption, domestic private adoption and international adoption. I have visited orphanages in Russia, China, Jamaica and Haiti. I believe that there are many, many children in Ontario, Canada and the World who deserve to be a part of a family. There are fabulous individuals, couples and families who will be good parents to an adopted child. There are delightful, amazing children who want to be part of a family.

I am also a therapist specializing in trauma and attachment focused therapy. I see the families who have mild to serious problems in their adoptions in my office. Some of these situations require a few sessions and some of them require years of intervention. I always hope and plan that an adoption will be relatively smooth and successful for everyone. That doesn't always happen. Most adoptions that are having difficulties can be helped to resolve the issues, heal and become healthy families.

Twinkle Twinkle Superstar
How I wonder who you are
I can hardly wait to see
When you grow up what you will be
Twinkle Twinkle little star
How I wonder who you are

This is the attitude we want to have about all of the children who are being adopted. Children need to feel that they are superstars in our eyes. Parents also like to feel that they are stars in their children's eyes. Being a family is incredible. Adoption is incredible. Take your time to decide what type of adoption is best for you.

Sandra Webb