

AGENDA

- I. Adoption Preparation Questions
- II. Adoption Myths
- III. Successful Traits
- IV. Post adoption Services
- V. Lessons From the Trenches

VOCABULARY

Adoption: The official transfer through the court system of all of the parental rights that a biological parent has to a child, along with an assumption by the adopting parent of all of the parental rights of the biological parents that are being terminated and are assumed in their entirety by the adoptive parents, including the responsibility for the care and supervision of the child, nurturing and training, physical and emotional health, and financial support.

Decree of Adoption: The document that a judge signs to finalize an adoption. It formally creates the parent-child relationship between the adoptive parent(s) and the adopted child, as though the child were born a biological child to the adoptive parent(s). It places full responsibility for the child on its new parents and changes the name of the child to the name selected by its new parents, and orders a new birth certificate to be prepared and issued for the child. If the parental rights of the biological parents of the child are being terminated by way of their voluntary consents as part of the adoption action, the Decree will also formally terminate those parental rights.

Disruption: This term generally refers to the removal of a child from an adoptive placement before the adoption is legally finalized. This term is also used to refer to any failed adoption attempt or adoptive placement. This can occur due to a variety of reasons: child's readiness for an adoptive placement, inaccurate assessment of family's ability to meet the child's needs, emergence of unpredictable circumstances, lack of preparation of either the family or the child or both.

Dissolution: End of an adoption through a termination of parental rights or a voluntary surrender. The adoptive parents are not able to meet the needs of the child. This can occur for a variety of reasons, the most common of which are: 1) that there was not a good match of the needs of the child with the talents and capabilities of the adoptive family, and 2) that the circumstances of the child or the adoptive family have changed substantially since the finalization, making a continuation of the relationship impractical or impossible.

Finalization: The point in time when the court grants the Petition to Adopt of the adoptive parents and takes the necessary action to formally make the child a legal member of their family by issuance of a Decree of Adoption.

Placement: This term is used to describe the point in time when your child comes to live with you in your home. The agency retains legal custody of the child and provides supervision until the legal finalization.

Post-Adoption Period: This is a period of time, of unspecified length after an adoption is finalized during which the members of this new group of legally related

individuals learn together to become a real family unit, with all the joys, challenges, accommodations, and wonderful experiences that go with it.

Post-Legal Adoption Service: Services provided subsequent to legal finalization of the adoption. There are primarily four types of post-legal service providers: social service agencies, private therapists, mental health clinics, and self-help groups.

Respite Care: Temporary or short-term care of a child that is provided, either for pay or on a voluntary basis, by adults other than the primary parent(s), resource parent(s), or adoptive parent(s) with whom the child normally resides with, which is designed to give the parent(s) some time away from the child, and event the child some time away from the parent(s), to allow them to recharge emotionally and become better prepared to handle the normal day-to-day challenges of parenting.

Waiting Children: This term generally refers to non-infant, school age children, who have become legally available for adoption. They will generally be under the jurisdiction and care of public foster care agencies, and will have come into the foster care system for a variety of reasons, (i.e., neglect, abandonment, abuse and/or some other dysfunction within their family environment.) Waiting children may or may not have developed emotional and/or behavioral reactions to these experiences, and may or may not be physically or developmentally challenged or delayed as a natural result of what they have experienced. How severe and treatable these conditions will be will depend entirely on the individual circumstances of each child. By the same token, many waiting children will be healthy and well-cared for, but will have become victims of some type of family tragedy that has put them in a position where they need responsible parenting. Many waiting children have siblings who are also available for adoption, and who would prefer to stay together as a family unit. In most geographic locations, more than half of the waiting children are ethnically diverse or children of color. Two things that all waiting children will have in common are: 1) their need to become a permanent part of a responsible and nurturing family, where they will be loved and encouraged to achieve their full potential, and 2) although imperfect and most often challenging, they can bring tremendous joy and satisfaction for their new families.

Adoption Preparation Questions

How will I handle my friends, family, and co-workers telling me horror stories about adopted children, and trying to dissuade me from adopting?

Am I comfortable with the fact that my child will have a somewhat complicated life, due to having two families?

Do I understand that my child will most likely be traumatized at first by being moved to new smells, new food, new people?

How will I feel toward the primary parents?

When my child shares memories, or asks questions about his/her past, can I be comfortable and patient in talking about them?

Am I expecting my child to feel grateful for adopting his/her and taking his/her from his/her "bad" life to a "good" life?

Can I accept the fact that if I adopt an older child, he/she probably won't consider his/her past "all bad" and may, in fact, be angry at first with me for adopting him/her?

Do I understand about attachment and bonding? Am I willing to learn what it takes and spend the time to foster a solid attachment between me and my new child?
Am I willing to put some of my life "on hold" until my child feels comfortable and attached?

What if my child needs counseling/therapy? Am I willing to commit the time and money to get the care he/she needs?

What if my child has a biological or psychological disorder that I don't know about before adopting?

How will I handle inappropriate questions about my child's past?

Risk Factors for Adoption

Child risk factors include:

- survival behaviors which originated when they lived in dysfunctional families and a dysfunctional system.
- individual vulnerabilities.
- previous traumatic events.
- unresolved separations or losses.

Parent risk factors may include:

- lack of empowerment and entitlement.
- “echoes” from the parent’s past
- unrecognized or unresolved losses.
- unrealistic expectations for child and self.

Resources for Resource Parents

Georgia Center for Adoption and Foster Care Resources and Support

2250 North Druid Hills Road
Suite 145
Atlanta, Georgia 30329

Toll free telephone: 1.866.A.PARENT
Atlanta telephone: 404.929.0401
Fax: 404.929.0405

www.gaadoptionresources.org/

Adoptive and Foster Parent Association of Georgia

www.afpga.org

Ten Essential Lessons from the Trenches

1. **Good timber does not grow with ease; the stronger the wind, the stronger the trees.** Family resiliency comes from family crisis – both primary family and adoptive family!
2. **Take charge!** Adult centered families are stronger than child-centered families!
3. **Failure is feedback.** The strongest families emerge from painful experiences with depth, energy and problem-solving abilities!
4. **Optimistic families are healthier families.** We can learn to resist helplessness and to strengthen our ability to create change.
5. **Emphasize “doing” rather than “feeling”.** Feeling good or having “good self-esteem” is not the same as being good or doing good!
6. **Parenting is an experiment!** Let go of the cultural myths of unconditional love and parental omnipotence! Remember, Leave It To Beaver and Father Knows Best were television shows!
7. **Break the rules.** Improvise parenting and family life and take great leaps of faith!
8. **What you reward is often what you get!** Pay attention to the behaviors you love rather than those you don't. We become the family we think we are!
9. **We need humor and laughter to be resilient.** When in doubt, make a fool of yourself! Do something to share your humanity and make your children laugh!
10. **Connect!** Create rituals, celebrations, stories, routines and traditions that honor the adoptive family – we are different but normal! Connect and celebrate with family, friends, communities and countries!