



Fact Sheet N° 25

Adoption

MATCHING: CONDITIONS AND CRITERIA

Matching is the act of proposing to entrust a child in need of adoption to prospective adoptive parents who are considered appropriate. It is not yet the adoption decision; that is a later stage. Matching is a key stage in as much as it is a choice (if it is confirmed by the continuation for what constitutes the legal status of adoption) that will alter for ever the child's life and that of the family that will receive him. It is thus a matter of heavy responsibility.

Matching should never take place on the basis of a choice made by prospective adoptive parents from a group of children. In the first place, it is proven that such a choice never guarantees the success of adoption; it is based upon certain external physical features or on a first impression that does not reflect the chances of the child's bonding and family integration. In the second place, nothing is more traumatizing for children admitted to an institution than seeing adopter applicants arriving, choosing one of their companions for adoption in full view of all the other inmates and leaving them to themselves, with the feeling of having been rejected.

Matching should take place before a meeting in person between the child and the applicants has taken place.

Matching is a responsibility that must be assumed by the team of professionals dedicated to the protection of children (psychologists and social workers mainly – with the support of a jurist to assure in addition the legal aspects).

Matching occurs on the basis of the files: the child's file and those of the different applicant families for adoption, from whom

one family will be chosen. This entails that the files be as complete as possible (see Fact Sheets N°22 and 24).

There is no magic formula for matching. However it is of much more importance that a competent authority establishes the criteria for guiding the work of the professionals in that agency or in the agencies responsible for the matching in matters of domestic and inter-country adoption. The family chosen should possess the characteristics compatible with the temperament, personality, physical, psychological and emotional needs and tastes of the child. It should be able to take on the problems that can arise, after the adoption or in adolescence, due to the traumas or deficiencies the child has lived through earlier. In the case of a child with special needs that are physical (for example, the disabled) or personal (for example, age, traumas, siblings) the family should be capable of dealing with them. Hence the importance of the detailed description of the personality of both parties in the files and the description (in the applicants' file), with their resources and their problems, of the internal and external environment in which the child will have to integrate.

They should also make a choice that allows the child to feel comfortable with his new family. Although matching is not the final adoption decision, but only a proposal that has to be confirmed, it has to be implemented with great care because when it does not work out, it causes suffering both for the prospective adoptive parents and the child alike.

In matching the professionals should, to the extent possible and if it corresponds to the best interests of the child, take into account the wishes of the family of origin as to the profile of the adoptive family, when they have expressed such wishes. When this occurs, the professionals should see to it that they explain it both to the family of origin as well as to the adoptive family and the child, thus ensuring continuity in the course of the child's life.

To the extent possible, the proposal drawn up for matching by the competent entity should be discussed with those responsible for the institution where the child lives since they know him and can give an opinion of the appropriateness of the adoptive family proposed for the child's characteristics and needs.

It should also, afterwards, be submitted to the chosen family to obtain their prior

approval for putting them in contact with the child. The way in which the most suitable family is chosen for a child may vary, particularly in inter-country adoption, since in that case it is a matter of joint responsibility of the professionals in the country of origin and in the receiving country.

The consultation with the family about the proposal for matching aims to reduce the risks of rejection. The proposal must be submitted to the prospective adoptive parents in the course of an interview carried out by a professional where the data in the child's report are explained, presenting them with the strengths and weaknesses, the resources and the limitations of the child, what brings him closer and what distances him from the expectations of the applicants for adopting. It is recommended that they not be shown photos right away so as to avoid them focusing solely on visible physical features. Giving the couple time to reflect together before giving their response: this is particularly important when it is a question of children with particularities. If the prospective adopters do not feel convinced, it is better that they reject the proposal before they meet the child in person to avoid prompting another failure.

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For more information:

SCHOFIELD Gillian; BEEK Mary 'Attachment handbook for foster care and adoption', BAAF (British Association for Adoption and Fostering), Saffron House, 6-10 Kirby Street, London EC1N 8TS, UK; www.baaf.org.uk; 2006, 450pp.

We are interested in your opinion! To tell us your experiences, ask us your questions about the themes addressed in this file, or to send us your suggestions for changes, don't hesitate to write to us at irc-cir@iss-ssi.org. We also invite you to share this file with other interested persons in your country. Thanks in advance!

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