



Fact Sheet N° 26

Adoption

PREPARING THE CHILD FOR ADOPTION

Preparing the child for adoption and for his own adoption is essential for facilitating the success of the adoption. The length of the preparation will depend upon the age of the child, his previous experiences and his capacity to initiate an emotional attachment. It is indispensable in the first place to talk to the child about his life plan. Even if he is very small you still have to talk to him: even if he doesn't understand the meaning of the words said to him, he understands the intention and that helps him. Depending upon his age, he should be consulted on the elaboration of plans that concern him.

Objectives

The objectives are:

- To ensure continuity between the stages of his life
- To avoid disruption or another shock for the child
- To guarantee a smooth transition between two places and two ways of life (institution or temporary foster family – adoptive family)
- To prepare the meeting with the adoptive family
- To register the child with a new filiation
- To create the right conditions for weaving a gratifying link
- To prevent failures

It is a question of helping the child to think back over his past to enable him to construct or reconstruct his personal life story and to begin a period of mourning for what he is leaving behind (his life in the family of origin, the hope of going back to live in his family of origin, his life in the institution...). It should also help him to think of his future, by imagining what will happen to him (life in the adoptive family). This is also the time to start to forge links with his future family

Knowing and accepting the past

It is necessary to:

- Tell him or have someone tell him his personal life story, to explain to him that a return to the past is impossible (going back to live with his family of origin).
- Have him become aware of the painful memories: put his experiences into words.
- Explain the decisions (administrative, judicial, etc.) that have been taken/are being taken that concern him (discover his opinion about the said decisions or, depending upon his age, his consent; it is part of the process of determining his adoptability).
- Help him to initiate a process of mourning. (**BE CAREFUL!** The signs of a beginning to the process of mourning are one of the conditions of psychological adoptability of the child - see Fact sheet n°21-).

Beginning to discover his future

If the child evolves in the sense of accepting his situation and expresses interest in a new family, the professionals in the institution ask him then to express his wishes as far as the family and the place where he would like to live are concerned, any how he imagines them.

The child doesn't know the word "adoption", so there is no point in talking to him about adoption, but rather about the plan to go and live with new parents. He is asked to express his hopes for a new family using three terms: objects, living space, people.

They should help him to express his feelings that the prospects of a new life and a new family awake in him; this expression can be verbal, but recourse to drawings, games with little dolls etc. facilitates things.

Getting to know the new family

After having chosen a possible adoptive family for him (see Matching), it is necessary:

1. To describe them to the child, just like his new place to live, and to express the realities of this family with the wishes that the child had expressed earlier ("you want a family that has two cars and that takes you to the funfair park every day; the one we have found for you only has one car, but it is ready to take you to the park during the holidays ",...); to help the child to imagine his new family and his future life and to work on that with him.

2. To forge links, by organizing exchanges between the child and his future family:

→ What comes from the family for the child:

- a small backpack (symbol of travelling and of joining up the two areas of life: in the backpack the child will carry some small objects-souvenirs of his pre-adoption life)
- a photo album of the family and his way of life
- small gifts (for example a fluffy little toy bear)
- letters that someone around the child can read to him – audio and video recordings.

→ What the child sends to the family:

- Some drawings or letters (depending upon his age)

- small gifts (painted stones, etc.) and to the extent possible, photos.

This exchange allows one to begin to weave the ties between them before they meet in person, which facilitates this meeting to a large extent and reduces the risks of rejection at this crucial moment.

Preparing his exit

One has to facilitate the disruption of his attachments to the care-providers and companions of his life in the institution (or with the temporary foster family). For this, little steps some of them symbolic, can be very appropriate:

- Urge the child to keep a "treasure chest" in which he puts small objects and souvenirs of his life in the institution so that he can take them with him, which will make the separation easier.
- When it's possible, it is useful to take the child out of the institution for a number of short outings; take him to places where he will meet his new family (hotel, court, airport,...) as a way of preparing him and calming him down. These outings will be appreciated as moments of exchanges with the child.

This way of working should be strongly advocated in the institutions. The staff should be trained in this direction. Each time an adoption is planned for a child in their institution, one should manage to inform the entire staff to associate themselves with the preparation, as well as the other children in the institution (to inform them, explain to them, ask them to do a drawing for a companion who is leaving,...) so as to avoid on their part negative attitudes that would make the separation of the adopted child more difficult.

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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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