



Fact Sheet N° 28

Adoption

THE MEETING AND THE MUTUAL ACQUAINTANCE

The meeting and the period for child and family to get to know each other can be considered the last stage of the matching.

Objectives

Beyond being the opening of family relations between the child and the prospective adoptive parents, *this period allows the professionals to assess (although within limits) if the matching can be definitively confirmed and if one can move on to the legal decision on adoption.* However, it must remain clear, after the first stage of matching, that *the meeting is not intended to give the family the chance to accept or reject the child*; a rejection is destructive for the child and if it is clear that it might occur, it cannot be taken lightly. In case a rejection does take place, no other child would ever be entrusted to this family right away. The whole situation would have to be reassessed on the basis of what happened before taking any decision whatsoever relating to both the child and the applicants. The meeting and the period for getting to know each other are intended to provide an opportunity to detect possible errors in the proposed matching and thus to limit the risks of failure in the adoptive relationship. It is *important to understand that a good preparation for the meeting, both for the child (see Fact sheet 27) as well as the family (see Fact sheet 28), greatly reduces the risks of a mutual failure in these moments.*

Process

The meeting and the period for getting to know each other are a period of *great emotional stress* both for the child and for the prospective adopters, and to a lesser extent, for the people who have cared for the child. It is important to handle this stage with great care and help the prospective adoptive parents first and to spend progressively more time with the child.

The first meeting between the child and his prospective parents would ideally be in a "neutral" place, that is to say, not in the institution but in some special place; it is better for the child to be accompanied by someone from the institution who knows him well and that the meeting takes place in a private spot that ensures intimacy far from the gaze of other children of the institution or strangers.

Various meetings and/or a period of cohabitation between the prospective adoptive family and the child, preferably outside the institution and in a place similar to the usual living space (the apartment type), are to be recommended. During this time, *the supportive presence of a professional should be provided "at a distance", in order to help the adopters and the child to express their feelings and emotions in these first contacts. These first moments are crucial for the development of the adoptive relationship. Many*

adoptive parents, who later experienced serious difficulties and disappointments (or even failures) with their adopted child, often say that from the first moment, they felt that something was not going right, that the contact between them and the child was bad. So it is essential to accompany the adopters and the child in this moment, so that they can express their happiness, their emotion as well as their disappointment, their ambivalence, and that the parents be advised on the attitude to adopt with the child. This stops little problems which arise at that moment from later taking dimensions which turn them into problems which are difficult to manage.

After this period, when the relationship is confirmed and the evaluation of the potentials of the adoptive relationship is positive, the child, possibly with the contribution and participation of the adopters, "*offers a little party*" in the institution for his peers to celebrate his departure, during which he and his old friends exchange little presents between

them (little things, sweets brought by the adopters, drawings done by his peers for the adopted child). Thus the passage to a new stage of his life takes place in less traumatic conditions. And things are clear and transparent for all the stakeholders involved.

The trial period

In some receiving States or States of origin, there is an *obligatory trial period of several weeks or months* for intercountry adoption before the adoption order is finalised. It aims at evaluating the mutual adaptation of the child and the family, and at ensuring that the final adoption can be pronounced. This follow-up has the advantage of facilitating the early detection of any problems or tensions and of finding an easier solution. However, it requires the adequate training of the professionals (in the psycho-social field) involved.

ISS/IRC January 2007

For more information:

SCHOFIELD Gillian and BEEK Mary, "Attachment handbook for foster care and adoption", London, BAAF, 2006, 450 pp.

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!

The ISS/IRC would like to thank the Canton of Geneva, Switzerland, for its financial support for this Fact Sheet project and the Committee for Inter-country Adoption of the Presidency of the Council of Italy for its funding of the Handbook "The Best Interest of the Child and Adoption", which is the basis of several Fact Sheets.