



Fact Sheet N° 30

Adoption

THE FOLLOW-UP AND POST-ADOPTION SERVICES¹

It is generally accepted that post-adoption follow-up is an important measure for the success of an inter-country adoption. The countries of origin attach great importance to it and require it be carried out in the receiving countries. It is reasonable to consider that if the State requires this service for inter-country adoptions, it should also do so for domestic adoptions. It should be borne in mind that risks of dysfunction and of failure also exist in this context.

A professional support

The first stages of their life together may require *professional support*, in the best interests of the child, as support for the adoptive parents and as a sign of respect for the parents of origin. *Overseeing the placement in view of adoption* can be useful or even essential up until the legal completion of the adoption, the moment when the adopters officially and definitively become the parents. The verification of this effective act of creation and of a sufficiently harmonious parent-child bonding further allows the judge charged with declaring the adoption to take his decision in the best interests of the child. Furthermore, if this tie does not materialise, an early shift of the child to another family has often proved in practice to have a positive result for the child.

After the legal finalisation of the adoption, the situation is quite different since the adopters are henceforth recognised as the child's parents. In the interests of the whole adoptive family, and particularly of the child who then needs emotional stability and a feeling of integration, it might be preferable, in principle, for the authorities and agencies to abstain from intervening with the family. The adoptive family becomes a family like any other, in the sense that it must benefit from the same

protection and the same offers of assistance as any other family, without being suspected more than another of dysfunctions.

A specific support, ideally made available upon request

Nonetheless, this family remains different since it must reconcile itself with the fact that the adoptee « comes from somewhere else », bearing a path of earlier disruptions and abandonment before his entry into the adoptive family. Moreover, the adoptee will recall it himself if this reality was to be denied. By virtue of this special family structure, the adoptive family may well need more specific support, ideally made available upon request. These services can be provided by governmental agencies, nongovernmental organisations or by associations of adoptive parents. Associations of this kind are currently being set up in various countries of origin as well as national and regional networks

In this perspective, the follow-up should be conceived as a supportive measure, *not as a social checking-up on them. It is of fundamental importance to provide this support in the first moments of the cohabitation* to solve the little problems when they arise before they become serious later.

The support consists more than anything of assistance to the adoptive parents in interpreting the behaviour and the reactions of the child on the basis of his personality, his past experiences and the type of attachment he developed up to that time. Without this support, many parents misinterpret this behaviour and see it as a lack of love, of gratitude or of the wish to integrate in the bosom of the adoptive family. More correctly this kind of conduct reflects a lack of security in the child and his related attempts to test the capacity of the adults to protect him in a stable and warm manner. Many times, after having been cheated on various previous occasions, the child ends up doubting the permanency of the life plan that is being offered him.

Training of staff working with children

To make this offer of specific supportive action effective, several countries ensure the training of staff who work *with children* (teachers, social workers, psychologists, doctors...) by underlining the specificities of the adoptive situation and the need to offer forms of support which are adapted to adoptees and their family. This support might be assured by specialised post-adoption *services*, offered by accredited adoption bodies and/or specialised psychosocial bodies. A variety of services may be developed, preferably in a complementary

For more information:

HOWARD Jeanne. "The Importance of Post Adoption Services", Illinois: Center for Adoption Studies, Illinois State University, 1999, 6 pp.

BARTH Richard. "Assessing the Field of Post-Adoption Service: Family Needs, Program Models, and Evaluation Issues. Literature Review". North Carolina: Chapel Hill and Research Triangle Park: University of North Carolina School of Social Work, Jordan I, 2001, 43 pp.

manner: hot lines; individual consultations; family, adopter or adoptee groups or meetings; information, documentation, conferences, training; visits to the country of origin.

During preparation for adoption or at any other moment during the process culminating in adoption, the prospective adoptive parents in several countries are expressly informed of the need, in certain cases, for post-adoption supportive action, and of the services available.

A tool to prevent failures

Post-adoption services constitute the last link in the chain of *professional and multidisciplinary services that are* indispensable in guaranteeing that the global adoption process succeeds in the best interests of the child and out of respect for all interested parties. The existence of this chain of services constitutes probably one of the best tools in the prevention of adoption failure.

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¹ Note: A fact sheet will be dedicated to follow-up reports in the international adoption chapter.

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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