



Fact Sheet N° 6

A global policy for Children and the Family

ELABORATING A LIFELONG PLAN: PREPARATION OF THE CHILD

The abandonment of a child, and particularly the abandonment of a child of young age, deserves special attention. The fact that a child has been abandoned, whether at birth or later, may involve serious problems that must be considered by the social workers when it comes to devising a lifelong plan for this child. For this purpose, the availability of such information, and knowing just how the abandonment occurred, under what circumstances, and what experiences the child went through always help to greatly clarify the situation and make it possible to prepare the precise healing methods.

The development of abandoned children

Children abandoned at an early age, come with a sense of danger borne out by reality, which provokes a greater capacity for anxiety and an increase in sensitizing themselves as one of the defence mechanisms that allows them to feel they exist, to feel they are alive. Children who cannot express themselves also show a strong sense of guilt.

Children invent fantasies. They always think that whoever abandoned them (the father, the mother....) is going to come back. On occasions we can appreciate how, in conjuring up adoption, the child identifies the adoptive father with the father who abandoned him/her, thus a reversal takes place, just as he would have wished it to have occurred. In this sense it is of paramount importance not to confuse the different levels of reality:

1. External reality; the one we perceive, our environment.
2. Internal reality, which exists inside each of us, confused in our memory with wishes and aspirations. To

become known, it has to be projected out into the open through behaviour, symbols, gestures that must be interpreted.

Importance of the information

To be able to properly interpret the child's behaviour, we have to equip ourselves with as much information as possible, and make a permanent distinction between the reality inside us and the reality which the child invents for him/herself.

The child must also get to know the whole of reality to be able to accept it and elaborate it. We should not keep bringing up the guilt of his/her situation unless he/she needs to know the facts so that he/she can accept them and overcome their consequences.

For this, it is extremely important if the child's mother expresses the wish to give up her child or if there is a risk of abandonment, that the maternity experts, the hospitals and health centres use the occasion to gather the maximum information about her, about the father,

about the extended family (the family, social and medical history), about the pregnancy and the reasons that have led her to leave her child in the care of the State.

Also, the police, the staff of the courts and the professionals who work in the institutions and social services that receive the children and families must gather, accumulate and transfer to whoever assumes responsibility for the child's future, all the information at their disposal about the child's family, his/her health and what circumstances have surrounded the child since birth. Not to do so at this moment is to presuppose the loss of ever making it available again.

It is profoundly important that all the people who manage to get in contact with the mother, with the person who is giving the child up to them, or with the child, display a welcoming and respectful attitude and take the time to open a dialogue. In fact, a polite reception of the people who bring the child is essential at this moment so as to limit the trauma, to collect information and to encourage maintaining contacts in the future.

This preparation is not yet common practice in many countries of origin, although there are valuable lessons to be learnt from it. Some Central Authorities or competent authorities have incorporated it in the adoption process; some accredited bodies in the receiving countries or countries of origin are attentive to such a preparation.

To prepare the child for adoption and for his/her own adoption is essential in paving the way for the success of adoption. The duration of the preparation depends upon the age of the child, of his/her previous experiences and capacity to forge new affective links.

It is a matter of helping the child to think about his/her past and future:

1. to construct or reconstruct their personal history;
2. to begin building a process of mourning for what has been left behind (his life in his family of origin, the hope of going back to live in the family of origin , his life in an institution ...):
 - a) to envisage for him/herself what is going to happen (life in the adoptive family),
 - b) to begin to weave ties with his/her future adoptive family;
3. to prepare the child to extract themselves from the institution where they were living.

Preparing the child for adoption

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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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