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The Five Stages of Adoption

STAGE 1 EXPLORING ADOPTION FINDING OUT WHAT'S RIGHT FOR YOU

Making an adoption plan:

Understanding the risks: financial, emotional & legal Budget Type of child (race, age) Support System Degree of Contact (letter, pictures, visitation) Locating birth parents who wish to place their child with you

STAGE 2 THE PRENATAL THE "ROMANTIC" STAGE

When your dreams are about to come true and your objectivity goes out the window! Remember, before the baby is born no one is a birth parent, they are still an expectant parent who may be considering adoption but has not yet made their final choice about what is best for their baby.

Meeting the expectant (birth) parent(s)

Good first questions are: Is the expectant parent still shopping for adoptive parents or has she/they decided on you? What made her choose you? What made her opt for adoption? Who knows of her situation? (Support group? Birth father? Her parents?)

It's a match...what now?

Be sure you want to adopt this child. If you don't feel good about the birth parent(s) and the baby, you should probably pass on this situation.

Ambivalence about parenthood at this stage, and continuing through the birth is normal. It manifests in many ways; concerns about money, concerns about the professionals you are working with, concerns about the requests of the birth parent and reactions of your family members. You know yourself best. If you do not want to proceed, or if you feel you need to sort things out, listen to

those doubts and slow the process down.

Expectant fathers must be considered even if the birth mother would prefer not to. If you have not yet talked to the expectant father, this is the time to act. Expectant fathers may have a superior right to you to have custody of the child. Don't assume that your expectant mother knows the expectant father's true feelings or intentions about the situation, or that she has the knowledge to make an appropriate decision on his behalf.

Expectant parents need a sense of control gained though knowledge of the emotional and legal components of an adoption. In order for the birth mother to follow through with the adoption plan, she needs to be clear about her rationale for the adoption. This will serve her during times of great emotional distress. It is imperative that no one speaks for the expectant mother. If you feel that she is action on pressure from others, make sure that you speak to her directly, without others present. Counseling to equip her for separation during the grief process is essential.

STAGE 3 NATAL - REALITY" STAGE (DIRECTLY BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE BIRTH)

Saying good-bye to romance-it's difficult to do, but absolutely essential if the adoption is going to work. This stage has more potential for conflict than any other and is the most critical phase of the adoption.

Whatever you and/or the birth parents avoided dealing within the previous stages will come up now as each party comes to grips with the practical and emotional costs benefits of adoption. Counseling is very helpful at this pinion. For example, expectant/birth parents may experience a lot of indirect pressure from peers and family around the time of the birth, encouraging them to keep the child.

Throughout this stage, your expectations of joy and happiness will frequently be displaced with fear and grief issues for you and the expectant/birth parents. It's a very stressful time. You may feel angry and helpless about a situation that is not in your control you may learn information you don't like or you may like the expectant/birth mother so well that it is difficult for you to be happy knowing that she will be in pain.

Opting out:

As realities surface, each party may opt out for valid reasons. 5% of expectant/birth mothers change their mind about the adoption within forty-eight hours of the birth. This includes birth parents who decide to keep a child born with a serious medical problem. 4% of adoptive parents opt out during this period. Adoptive parents and birth parents are experiencing a wide range of emotions and both may be reluctant to express them. Use your best judgment and be sensitive. Many birth parents yearn to see joy and excitement in adoptive parents to feel confident in their choice.

STAGE 4 POSTNATAL "MAYBE BABY"

Signing of the consent:

The birth mother can legally reclaim the child at any time prior to the signing of the consent. Approximately 2% of birth mothers reclaim the child after placement (before the consent is signed). It is not unusual for a birth parent to be tempted to reclaim and many times she needs reassurance that she has made the right decision. The same information holds true for birth fathers. However, if the birth father refuses to acknowledge paternity, he may sign a denial of paternity which may be used to terminate his rights. In the event that he refuses to sign any document, his rights may be terminated by court action.

Taking care of yourself & educating others:

The interim period between bringing the baby home (or to a hotel if you are in another state or city) and consent signing is very difficult. It is very different from bringing a baby home after giving birth. The emotional process is a seesaw as the new parents begin to incorporate the child into the family with the uncertainty that the adoption will be completed. Some days you will feel like a baby sitter. This is normal; let the feelings come and go naturally.

New parents need to educate their support system to hold some enthusiasm in check until after the consent is signed. The best time for major celebrations and sending out announcements is after the adoption consents/relinquishments are completed. If you have other children

at home, be extremely accurate about the baby's stay with you. Until it is a SURE thing, it is best not to tell children that the baby is their brother or sister, you don't want to have to tell them you made a mistake later if things change.

Redefine your relationship with the birth parents:
Communication with birth parents may not follow the agreed-upon plan you made earlier. The key here is flexibility in terms of accommodation the birth parents needs as well as your own. Sleep deprivation for adoptive parents and separation anxiety in birth parents makes this a very touchy time.

Reacting too strongly to issues that arise with the birth parents can undo an otherwise workable adoption.

Birth parents need reassurance that the child is loved and well taken care of. The internal conflicts that they feel take months to work through, regardless of whether or not they have signed the consent. If the birth mother contacts you when she is in serious emotional pain regarding the adoption, be compassionate. It is not, however, appropriate for you to serve as her counselor or to attempt to solve the problem. Encourage her to contact a professional counselor (preferably the one she worked with earlier in the adoption).

Adoption agreements need to be entered into with care and integrity. It is important to honor your agreements since the basis of all adoptions is trust. After all, the birth parent has trusted you with her child. If you have promised her visitation or annual letters and photos, and the birth mother relied on your promises, do follow through. Though your motivation to communicate with the birth mother has possible changed, you have a moral obligation to keep your word. Many adoption parents find that although they promised not to keep in touch, that they have question only the birth parent can answer. You might ask your adoption facilitator to make the initial contact, since this will be less threatening.

STAGE 5 PARENTING IS FOREVER...

Adoption is a lifelong journey. It's important to remember that even though adoptive relation ships are different than non adoptive relationships, they are not better or worse in any sense. Whether you have created your family through adoption or through adoption or through giving birth, the rights and responsibilities and the joy and pains of parenthood are yours for a lifetime. Seek out others to share the experience with and get education and support not only for yourself as a parent but for your child(ren) as well.