

A Pre-Adoptive Expectation: “I Don’t Want to Deal with Birth Parents”

Predominant pre-adoptive expectations:

- “I want to help a child in need.”
- “I am unable to have children.”
- “I heard and ad on the radio.” – “Love will be enough.”
- “I know what they have been through.”
- “I thought a child would strengthen my marriage.”
- “A relative’s child needs my help.”
- “I want my children to have more siblings.”
- “A young child will be easier to integrate into the family.”
- “We thought he would settle down after the adoption was finalized.” (Foster to Adopt Situations)

One by one, these expectations are being presented on this blog. Expectations contribute to satisfaction with the adoption post-legalization. It is important that parents examine their expectations in accord with information about the special needs of the child who will become their son or daughter. A significant goal throughout the adoption process is to help adoptive parents adjust their thoughts about the types of difficulties a child with a history of trauma can present.

This post moves on to examine, “I don’t want to deal with birthparents.” The media has unfortunately sensationalized those rare instances in which birthparents returned for a child that had been adopted. Prime time movies, newspapers and television news have given the false impression that adoptions are reversed, via court proceedings, on a frequent basis! In fact, only 1% to 2% of all adoptions end in such a manner ([Pertman, 2007.](#)) The vast majority of adoptions are never challenged. The domestic or international adoptee, once adopted, remains with his or her parents.

Frightened parents report that a major factor in deciding to adopt internationally is they feel that intercountry adoptions are immune from birthparents tracking them down to reclaim their adopted son or daughter. So, they escape the physical appearance of the birth family.

However, no form of adoption evades the psychological presence of the birthparents. As soon as the adoptee—even if adopted as a young infant—comprehends that he was not born to his adoptive parents, he becomes aware that another mother “gave him away.” From that point on, he is susceptible to feeling the loss of this other mother. This loss is developmental. The adoptee will grieve this loss throughout childhood, adolescence and well into adulthood.

Recognition of the adoptive status also sets in motion thoughts about what life would be like if the adoptee had remained in his or her birth home. Depending on the child’s age at the time of the adoption and the circumstances surrounding the adoption, children will ask various questions among which may be,

- “What do my birthparents look like?”
- “What are their names?”

- “Do I look like them?”
- “Do they have any other children?”
- “Do I have any aunts or uncles or grandparents?”
- “What are they doing?”
- “What would I be doing if I were with them?”
- “What is my medical history?”
- “Why did they place me for adoption?”
- “What would my life be like with them?”
- “What would my life be like in my country of origin?”

Questions such as these lead 50% of all adopted persons to search for their birth relatives at some point in their lives ([Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2004; Muller & Perry, 2001](#)).

The child’s knowledge that he was adopted, and his natural curiosity about his birth family, makes adoptive parents vulnerable to “dealing with” birthparents.