



Getting the Family around to adoption

Adoption can be classified into two categories – Voluntary and Involuntary. The former deals with choices that individuals make without there being an *explicit* need to adopt. Involuntary adoption relates to cases where parents feel there is no other option but to adopt – and their own buy in towards adoption being at varying levels of commitment. Even as there has been an increase in the proportion of voluntary adoptions, the support and participation from immediate family, friend and colleagues is often found minimal – more so for voluntary adoptions. This is because where parents see adoption as the last resort to build their family, they somehow get the support of their family members too, as there is an element of sympathy and compensation. But where parents are choosing to adopt voluntarily, the immediate relatives find it difficult to accept and comprehend as to why should anybody be adopting, without a pressing need.

In either case, when the next of kith and kin are not supportive, the parent is tempted to continue the journey excluding them from the adoption experience. This may sound like a convenient option and one with least conflict – but is least advisable from child's development. So how do we bring around the *non-compliant* family members? Or should we, in the first place?

Not involving the immediate family has multiple repercussions:

1. The family may feel that you do not care about their wishes, and may become distant
2. In most cases, the family has never had a first hand experience of adoption. They carry numerous myths and biases, as understood from films and fiction. Not involving them will further strengthen these stereotypes and every one misses an opportunity to see adoption up close.
3. The family is likely to treat the child differently, and future assimilation may become even more difficult
4. The child will ask, and miss out on invaluable memories through growing up years – if a significant part of family is excluded from celebrations and memorable occasions

In comparison, the risks of involving the family are few and temporary. One may have to face unprecedented expressions (of words and deeds), mechanical participation and at worst some insensitive behavior from ignorant family members. We need to understand that the friends and relatives are not really wrong – they are simply uninitiated into adoption – and may be learning about it, as much as the parents.

Here is a quick cheat sheet to involving the reluctant family into adoption –

- Be truthful upfront – whether you are adopting out of a necessity or without one, you need to be honest about your intentions from Day One
- Involve them in the process – ensuring that your loved ones participate in the adoption process will dispel many myths and clear many of their doubts. Their referrals for adoption, presence during the home study, visits to the adoption agency and presence when the child comes home creates significant milestones that your child will cherish – looking back. It will also educate them on the safeguards, transparency and yeomen service provided by the care givers – so that no body feels that adoption is getting a child from the road.
- Seek Counselling – if the immediate family’s hesitation becomes overbearing at any point in time (irrespective whether they are living under the same roof or not), seek immediate counselling. Counselling helps the parent develop a holistic view. It points them to several other parents in adoption who may have lesser or greater situations ahead of them. It comforts you to know that you are not alone in the process. Counselling also points you to useful resources like books, support groups, adoptive families etc that can be very useful in calming the mind and mitigating the ignorance.
- Spend time with family – it is critical that some of the immediate family is by your side, soon after your child comes home. It is very important for the child to view the family as a whole and establish its own identity vis-a-vis other family members. Including the family in your initial weeks also brings them closer to the new member in the house.
- Go on a vacation – if the child is not too small, arrange for a vacation or a family celebration to take undue attention away from adoption. Come together as a family and share happy memories.
- Give Time – even after all your efforts, if a few family members remain reserved, apprehensive or critical about the adoption event, give them time. Over a period of time, the child will develop its own chemistry with each member in the family – and you don’t have to work through the relationships – all the way.

We need to be aware that the child comes home to a real world and family. Including all the members generates positive reinforcements for the child, while non-participation from even a few will create a doubt for the child that adoption may not have been a desirable event for that family member.

We also need to recognize that most family members would not have prior experience to adoption, and they have to be given time to assimilate all the new developments that take place, at a fast pace – that may be too quick for them to absorb and respond.

At the end, whether it is family, friends, relatives or colleagues – they will see your unwavering commitment and love towards the child and begin responding likewise.

Many a time, our fear is about hypothetical situations that we imagine – fearing the worst. Most of these situations may never arise, and you never know, we may also get pleasant surprises on the way. After all, it is a first time for your family too!