



## Accepting the First Child Referred to you

You have been waiting for months to receive an update on your adoption application. You have checked your mails and SMS several times a day initially, then few times a week and now a few times every month. Once your wait list dropped to under 30, you virtually started co-inhibiting with your device, lest you missed out on that important announcement. And here it is – you have got a reference for a child, as per preferences indicated by you – and you have to act fast. Forty eight hours to be precise.

Here are some good practices to place that bundle of joy right where it belongs – in your heart and within your family – NOW.

1. Meet families – By meeting people who received similar referrals in last few months, you get a preview into the states, agencies and profile of children being referred in the same timeline. Quite often there may be a pattern, as a large pool of children from a given State (now available for adoption) will be referred to parents around your seniority together. For example, there is a large pool of children from Orissa currently. It was Maharashtra until some time back. It is possible for more children to be referred from some other State, in future. It helps you plan for the travel, manage your expectations and your interaction with the agency. Agencies could differ in their respective child care, communications, response time, processes and quality of documentation and being fore warned is being fore armed. As the child has to be reserved within 48 hours, that is hardly a window to interact with anyone, for an informed decision making. As a rule of thumb, start meeting families when your wait list goes past 50, for most relevant advice.
2. Visiting the Agency – With the new CARA Guidelines, visiting an agency to kick start the adoption procedure is no longer required. Most parents, therefore, will visit the agency for the first time, after receiving child referral. Having interacted with parents who received referral in recent past helps you get a glimpse of the agency. It will help you break away from stereotypes created of agencies in films and fiction. You may be pleasantly surprised with the hygiene and care at some of the agencies. At the same time, some agencies may come across as minimalistic in appeal. It is recommended to visit the agency with least amount of family members – ideally, just the parent(s). Be prepared to come across children with varying profile. It could be emotionally demanding. At the same time, please refrain from deliberately seeking to see more kids, than the child referred to you. It is a good idea to develop a rapport with the management / key people at

the agency beforehand, over phone, so that both – you and the agency – are comfortable with each other.

3. Accepting the child – You are bound to experience multitude of emotions as you meet “your” child. The child may appear different from the photo in the CARA profile. This is normal. Most children tend to appear weak, and will pick up health once in family care. The child could have been sleeping, shy, hesitant or hyper active. If need be, plan for a couple of days, and give yourself some time to understand child’s behavior. Most parents have the doubt on how much to rely on the child’s Medical Examination Report (MER) prepared by the Agency. They want to know if they can conduct their own tests. Please note that you can do some extra vital medical tests on the child, to assure yourself provided, the agency is in a position to help you with that. They will have to send someone with you and the child to the nearest doctor. Also, take care not to stress the child in this activity. In most cases, talking to the agency will assure you if their MER is reliable or not. Their body language, eye contact, quality of documentation will give you additional inputs for you to trust their due diligence. As our own pediatrician advised, “there are over 900 tests in this hospital. Do you really want to expose the child to that misery? For all you know I and you may have a condition not diagnosed so far. Parenting comes with lots of uncertainty. Have faith in your instincts. Assure yourself on some key vital parameters, and enjoy your child”. Unless you really find something contradictory in the child’s profile, documentation and the child as presented, try not your biases or ignorance come in way of connecting with your child. Have faith in the larger scheme of things around you, give your best to the child, and the best shall happen to you.
4. Plan Logistics –The agency’s recommendation of taking the child with you should not take you by surprise. Not having secured leave from your employer, or help with your immediate family by the time you get your first referral poses great risk of losing your chance – and your child being referred to the next parent. At your expense. Start planning logistics, down to the T, as soon as your wait list drops below 100. Some of these tasks need couple of months, for example leave from employer, travel by a family member, search for a care taker, identifying the pediatrician etc. As you depart for the agency, such tasks cannot be delegated to another family member, and all of these need to be closed by the time you return home with your child.

There are several benefits of accepting the first child that is referred to you, as follows:

- Just as in a birth in the family where we accept the child whole heartedly, irrespective of the color, weight, height, shape of the child, accepting the first child referred to us, helps us retain our innocence, commitment and dedication to the child. We are not judging, but accepting the child.
- Given the ever changing situation around availability of children and our own commitments (I have known people who had to suddenly travel abroad, after they received their first referral, which they declined – or some constraint in the family requiring them to delay adoption etc) it is best to begin our beautiful journey on parenting – than delay the happiness coming our way.
- The concept of “choice” in current CARA process is actually an ill-fitting legacy of previous regime, where parents could see many children within or across agencies, before making up their mind. Now, CARA only allows you multiple referral with a binary decision at each stage. So there is no option to going back on the first child that you saw, should you desire so, after going through all the referrals. Also, there is hardly any justification for “comparison” between the 3 referrals that you are “eligible” for, as the first child could be 8 months old from Karnataka, the second a 1

year 4 months old from Orissa and the third an almost 2 yr old from Maharashtra – if the parent opted for a child between 0-2 years from anywhere in India. The parent is only trying to satisfy itself of “let us see more, before we decide” – even as each referral is AS GOOD AS THE OTHER.

- Complete honesty, truthfulness and commitment is the bedrock of relationships in adoption. As you share the story of adoption with your child, he/she will feel more confident when you tell that you accepted him/her as the first child you saw – than if you shared that you did not accept him/her as the first child that you saw.
- Reserving and not accepting even the first child – puts you down at the bottom of the waitlist, and you lose your other two chances also. Not even reserving the first child, for fear of losing your seniority – but to keep your option open to “see” another child – is not even giving a fair chance to the child. For all you know, you are giving away the happiness rightfully destined for you!

Bear in mind, if there is a genuine cause, CARA is there to support you. If you can substantiate that the child referred to you was a result of non-compliance, lack of diligence or an unlawful conduct on the part of any of the intermediaries, you WILL NOT LOSE YOUR SENIORITY – and CARA will protect your rights. Only if you protect the Child’s RIGHTS.

Wish you Good Luck!