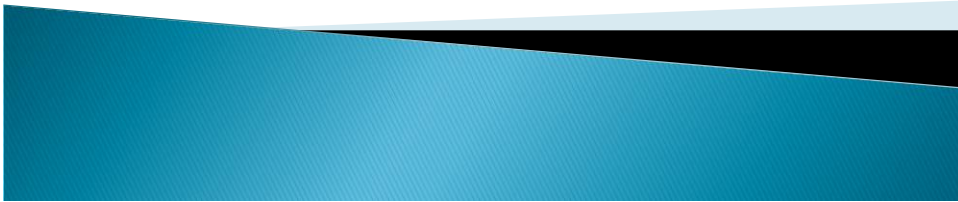


# Challenges in Adoption: *A Clinical Perspective*

*A Presentation for the NC Child Fatality Task Force –  
Intentional Death Prevention Committee – February 24, 2014*

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## Expectations in Adoption


“ Longing for a child to love,  
I’d wish upon the stars above.  
In my heart I always knew,  
A part of me was meant for you.  
I think how happy we will be,  
Once I adopt you, and you adopt me.  
I dream of all the joy you’ll bring....”

From *Teri Harrison’s Poem –  
“ The Chosen Heart”*




# Adoption is a Life Long Journey

## Steps in Adopting

- ▶ A family decides to adopt and chooses an agency.
  - ▶ The family completes the required assessments and preparation with their agency.
  - ▶ The family is matched with a child.
  - ▶ The family visits with the child.
  - ▶ The family brings the child home.
  - ▶ The family works at becoming a family together.
  - ▶ The family legally finalizes the adoption.
  - ▶ The family continues to parent and meet the needs of their adopted child throughout their life.
- 

# Adoption is a Life Long Journey

- ▶ **Preparation steps required before a child is placed with a family:**
    - The family chooses an adoption agency based on the type of adoption the family is pursuing.
    - The adoption agency completes a Preplacement Assessment (also known as an adoptive home study) required for all adoptions.
    - The adoptive family participates in the required preplacement training and completion of any required documents or licensures.
    - The adoptive family prepares their home and family for a new child.
- 

# Adoption is a Life Long Journey

- ▶ Clinical issues to consider in adoptive parent preparation:
  - Realistically, what is the **best situation** for this family based on their life history and experience?
  - Does the family have **unresolved losses/trauma** in the past or present that would create an inability to meet the child's needs?
  - Does the family show an unwillingness to acknowledge and work with **important people from the child's past**?



# Adoption is a Life Long Journey

- ▶ Clinical issues to consider in adoptive parent preparation (continued):
  - Is there **rigidity in the family system**?
  - What is the family's level of **desperation for a child**, resulting in unrealistic expectations of foster care, adoption, and orphans?
  - Does this family have **high stress and anxiety levels, aggressiveness, or power & control issues**?



## Characteristics of Families Who Successfully Adopt

- ▶ Have realistic expectations for the adoption
- ▶ Are fully aware of the child's needs & have the ability to delay parenting gratification
- ▶ Tolerance for the child's rejection
- ▶ Ability to set structure and limits in a caring way
- ▶ Have a proven ability to handle problems
- ▶ Are flexible (expectations/family roles), optimistic, and have a sense of humor
- ▶ Have the ability to maintain a commitment to the child in spite of challenges – ability to fully claim the child as their own



## Characteristics of Families Who Successfully Adopt Continued

- ▶ Can appreciate the small gains the child makes
- ▶ Are comfortable using resources and treatment services when needed and to meet personal needs
- ▶ Can attach and bond to others
- ▶ Have strong marital relationships
- ▶ Maintain an open communication style
- ▶ Tolerance for their own ambivalent and negative feelings about the child
- ▶ Openness to connections with birth family

*From Holt International Children Services & Spaulding for Children*



## Adoption is a Life Long Journey

- ▶ **Matching of a child with the family:**
  - **Preparation of the child** before the family meets the child.
  - **Information Disclosure** about the child's background should be provided to the adoptive parents to ensure that both the family and agency agrees that the child can be successfully parented by the family.



## Adoption is a Life Long Journey

- ▶ **Clinical Issues to consider at matching:**
  - **Has the child received treatment** to address any trauma or maltreatment they have experienced ?
  - Does the family have the skills or can they develop the skills needed to **meet the social, emotional & physical needs of the child?**
  - Once the family hears the information – are they **realistic** about what it will take for this adoption to succeed?



## Adoption is a Life Long Journey

- ▶ **Once matched with a child –**
  - There are visits to get to know the child and prepare the child and family for moving into the adoptive home.
- ▶ **Clinical issues to consider at transition:**
  - How long will the **transition** process take?
  - How can all parties be **careful not to rush the transition** so all are comfortable and have what they need?
  - Is there a **safe person** for the child to process the transition and the multiple losses they are experiencing?



## Adoption is a Life Long Journey

- ▶ **Once the child moves into the home, the work begins to form as a family.**
- ▶ **Clinical issues to consider once home:**
  - How will the family **help the child adjust** to being a part of their particular family?
    - What things need to happen to **integrate the child into the family system**?
    - Does the family have a plan to **seek outside professional support**?



## Adoption is a Life Long Journey

- ▶ **Clinical issues to consider once home (continued):**
  - How does the family need to **adjust their parenting based on the child's needs?**
    - How will they help the child **overcome the trauma & challenges in their background?**
    - How will they **attach and bond with their new child?**
    - **This re-adjustment process** may need to continue until the child becomes adjusted or as they revisit losses.



## Adoption is a Life Long Journey

- ▶ **After a period of time, the adoption becomes legally finalized.**
- ▶ **Clinical issues to consider:**
  - **Legal finalization** does not mean the process of emotionally becoming a family is over.
  - **Life long development and milestones** will also bring up social & emotional challenges for the adoptive family.



## The 6 Stuck Spots of Adoption

1. Reason for Adoption
2. Missing and Difficult Information
3. Difference
4. Identity
5. Loyalty
6. Permanence

by Debbie Riley, CEO of the Center for Adoption  
Support & Education (CASE)



## Additional Questions

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