



FAMILY TIMES



FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

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Kinship Adoption: Meeting the Unique Needs of a Growing Population

Created by ChildFocus and the North American Council on Adoptable Children, April 2010, http://childfocuspartners.com/wp-content/uploads/CF_Kinship_Adoption_Report_v5.pdf

How Is Kinship Adoption Different from Other Adoptions?

Every adoption presents a unique set of opportunities and challenges for children and their adoptive families. But kinship adoption presents a particular set of issues by virtue of the pre-existing relationship that relative caregivers typically have with the child and her parents.

While it is true that every kinship family is different (and some don't have a pre-existing relationship) there are some things that set most kinship families apart from traditional adoptive families.

The issues below are adapted from the work

of Joseph Crumbley, a clinical psychologist who has worked with and documented the experiences of countless kinship families, including those who have adopted. For more information on Dr. Crumbley, see www.drcrumbley.com.

Preexisting relationships

The pre-existing relationship between a relative caregiver and a child is one of the things that can make kinship care a positive experience for vulnerable children.

Kinship caregivers know the child's history and unique

needs, which can lessen the trauma of being separated from the parents. Even if the child and relative have never met, they have familial ties that can be reassuring for the child.

But kinship adopters who have a pre-existing relationship with a child's parent also faces a special set of emotions that should be addressed directly as they prepare to adopt a child.

Emotions include guilt about the situation in which the child and parent find themselves ("I could have done something about it") or anger over a

parent's inability to get his/her act together. Confusion might result from having to become more like a parent and less like a doting grandparent, aunt, or uncle.

And unlike an unrelated adoptive parent, kinship caregivers often have a difficult time fully celebrating a finalized adoption. For them and their children, the adoption might be viewed as a bittersweet experience.

Children living in kinship arrangements also experience a range of emotions as a result of the pre-existing relationship. Children might not understand why their grandparent, aunt, or uncle is now acting more like a parent. They might resent or be confused by the

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fact that adults they knew in one context are now playing a completely different role.

Older children in particular might feel that relatives are betraying their parents by terminating parental rights and pursuing adoption. Other family members might also feel the relative is overstepping her boundaries by adopting the child.

Parents might also be angry with the relative for “conspiring” against them and might feel it was the relative who was responsible for terminating parental rights. They might be jealous that the relative can safely care for the child when they are not able to. Some parents might try to turn the child against the relative or sabotage the healthy relationship between the child and the caregiver. They might question the loyalty of the caregiver, whom they feel has put the child’s needs and priorities ahead of their own needs.

Knowledge of family dynamics

Relative caregivers have intimate knowledge about family history and family legacy that traditional adoptive families do not have. On the one hand, this can be positive for the child, as relatives can help them understand and deal with this legacy in a healthy way.

Relatives can help children break intergenerational cycles of violence, substance abuse, and poverty and be a role model within the family network for how positive choices can lead to a more productive life.

But knowledge of family dynamics can also be a burden. Kinship caregivers might worry excessively about the child becoming “just like her mom” and become overly protective just at a time when a child needs increasing independence. They might also inappropriately communicate about the parent’s shortcomings in front of the child.

Ongoing relationship with the parent

One of the benefits of kinship adoption is that children do not have to completely sever the emotional bond they have with a parent. Relatives can help children stay safely connected to their parents, as well as to their family and cultural heritage.

While this can also occur with adoption by non-related caregivers, it is sometimes more difficult for a stranger to understand the child’s need for a birth parent con-

nection.

Ongoing interactions between a child and parent can also be a source of strain for the kinship family. Caregivers must prevent a parent’s unhealthy patterns of behavior from negatively affecting the child and set boundaries for a child’s relationship with the birth parent.

At the same time, the caregiver’s own relationship with the parent might be a source of conflict and stress for the caregiver, child, and parent.

Differences in preparation for caregiving role

Traditional foster and adoptive parents make a conscious decision to foster or adopt a child and have many opportunities for training, support, and counsel before bringing a child into their home. For the kinship caregiver, the decision to care for a child usually happens with little preparation or support and, if the family has child welfare involvement, may well take place within 24 hours.

While a kinship caregiver who adopts will have time to make a decision about whether this is the right thing for the child, they often do not receive the same preparation and as other adoptive parents.

Continued from Page 2**Kinship Care**

vs.

Traditional Foster Care

Pre-existing relationship with child
 Redefines existing family relationships
 Mixed feelings about loss of parent to child

No pre-existing relationship with child
 Strengthens new family relationships
 Celebration of a new family

Mixed feelings about loss of role as
 grandparent, aunt, uncle, etc.

Excitement about new role as parent

Knowledge of family dynamics
 Decision to become a caregiver is
 unplanned and in crisis

Limited knowledge of family dynamics
 Decision to become a caregiver is
 planned and voluntary, request from parent, child
 protection or courts

Limited preparation for care-giving

Preparation for care-giving role
 and support already in place before child
 is placed in home

Unanticipated requirements
 to become a foster or adoptive parent

Requirements to become foster or
 adoptive parent are anticipated

Guilt over birth parent problems
 Guilt for taking over parental role for child

No guilt over birth parent problems
 Feelings that they are saving the child

Perception that they are betraying
 birth parent by assuming legal relationships

Feeling they are displaying loyalty
 and commitment to child by assuming
 legal relationship

In competition with birth parent if child
 Becomes attached to relative

Motivated to demonstrate
 attachment that is as strong as previous
 attachment with birth parent

Split loyalties and hesitation
 to legalize relationship

High motivation
 to legalize relationship



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KVC is accredited by The Joint Commission. KVC is a member of the Child Welfare League of America and a recipient of United Way funds.

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For additional information or to request services, please contact KVC at: 1-888-655-5500 or by e-mail at: adoptionsspecialist@kvc.org

Christmas is right around the corner and I need your help! KVC still has many foster children all ages that need sponsored for Christmas. If you would like to do something good for someone else this holiday season please contact Jackie. She will send you a Christmas tag that includes the child's clothes/shoes sizes and Christmas wish list along with a green bag to fill with the goodies! (The gifts will need to find their way to the Lenexa KVC by as soon as possible). You can put a smile on a child's face Christmas morning. Thank you!



**Contact Jackie with any questions.
Jackie Harwig
913.956.5319**

Heaven is sweet and artistic and does well in school. She enjoys playing soccer, hanging out with her friends, listening to music, and reading. Sometimes she can be shy and will take some time to become familiar with her surroundings. When she does, she is very outgoing and fun to be around! She likes animals, playing games, fishing, and overall just being outdoors. When asked what is important to her about her forever family, Heaven says she would like "someone to spend time with." If you are interested in Heaven, please Call 1-888-655-5500, Or email adoptionsspecialist@kvc.org

