



Fact Sheet N° 44

Inter-country Adoption

PREPARING THE CHILD FOR HIS INTER-COUNTRY ADOPTION

Preparing the child for adoption and his own adoption is essential in facilitating the success of the latter from the outset and in preventing crises that might arise later. Besides the general aspects previously quoted (see Fact Sheet No. 27), preparing the child for his inter-country adoption must take into account certain specific criteria and guarantee that the child is adequately accompanied in the moments of transition and when he's being transferred to his country of adoption.

Specific criteria for preparing the child for his inter-country adoption

The intercultural dimension of inter-country adoption is a rich component, which will however lead the professionals accompanying the child and his adoptive parents to take specific components into consideration, such as:

- *The child's communication with his new family and social environment:* at the child's first meeting with his future adoptive parents and upon his arrival in the receiving country, the child runs the risk of having to face up to communication difficulties. Indeed, it often happens in cases of inter-country adoption that the child does not speak the language of his adoptive family and vice versa. To avoid increasing the difficulties of what is already a traumatising experience for the child, it is important to consider this fundamental aspect during his preparation, like, furthermore, that of his parents, and to teach each of them a few essential words of common usage. These few words could already constitute a big step towards the other. When it entails adoption of older children, this component appears all the more important in enabling the child to feel as little isolated as possible.

- *Sensitizing the child to a new culture:* one of basic characteristics of inter-country adoption is the meeting of two different cultures for which it is advisable to prepare the child as well as

possible. The situation when the child finds himself immersed into a different culture constitutes a real shock, to which he has to be sensitized. Indeed cooking habits, the climate, relationships between people may differ greatly depending upon the countries. For example, in certain cultures, affection is shown by touching (hugs, cuddles, etc.), in others the physical distance between individuals, including within the same family, is a social characteristic. All these factors are just so many components that represent landmarks in the child's life and which will find themselves disrupted. The act of explaining all this to the child and of preparing him for it makes the change smoother and more surmountable.

- *The child's integration into school environment:* when it comes to older children, whose adoption is more and more frequent, there is a very strong chance that they will be rapidly integrated into school very often quite different from the one they used to go to in their country of origin. Furthermore, the school environment is an important moment to socialize with his future school friends and a significant step to take in his new life. The more the child is informed about the characteristics of his new school (its whereabouts, its size, the timetable, etc), and particularly about his future class friends, the more ability he will have in familiarizing himself with this new environment. It is possible that the child will have to face up to racial and sometimes cruel attitudes on the part

of his school friends or even from other people in his surroundings, attitudes for which he must also be prepared. Announcing the child's arrival to other students, to teachers and staff of the school could be a helping hand for the child in successfully integrating into school and for his acceptance by everyone. Although these measures mean further enhancing the responsibility of parents, the professionals can already approach the subject beforehand and thus facilitate their task.

This list of the different aspects to take into consideration is not exhaustive and involves recourse to qualified professionals, particularly in psychosocial fields in receiving countries and those of origin. In cases where countries of origin do not have the necessary human resources available, they should be able to appeal for support from foreign accredited agencies so that they take charge of the child's preparation, once matching has been accomplished, as well as training the staff in institutions with which they work. That presupposes that the representative of the foreign accredited agency in the country of origin has professional skills in the psycho social field and that they know well the receiving country. It is advisable to underline here that preparing the child is of paramount importance in domestic and inter-country adoption alike, and that it must, as far as possible, be of equal quality in both cases.

The child's transition and transfer to his country of adoption: key moments in his preparation.

These stages of adoption are crucial in the life of the child and their full success depends partially on the establishment of a solid link between the

child and his new parents. The majority of countries of origin require adoptive parents to spend a certain time with the child in his country of origin before the adoption is finalized. This moment of transition is important, both for the child and the parents. As when the child leaves the institution where he was staying, it is of primary importance to leave the child the time he needs to cover these stages. It is advisable, therefore, to give priority to the needs of the latter and not to strictly respect the deadlines imposed by legislative and regulatory texts. It so happens that the child needs several hours, even several days extra beyond what is envisaged. In his interest and that of the future adoptive family he must be granted this additional time.

Other provisions, such as hiring an apartment for initial period of the child's life with his adoptive parents in the country of origin makes it possible to soften the abrupt change in the child's life. This time, that some prospective adoptive parents consider wasted, in fact constitutes a time and safety savings for the harmonious development of the adoptive family's relationships. Organising the child's transfer also figures in the child's preparation for his new life. Although practices and opinions diverge on this subject, it seems that the presence of the adoptive parents at the child's departure time, during his journey, and upon his arrival in the receiving country is an important landmark for him. These people will, in fact, be his first points of reference in this new geographic, social and family environment.

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For more information:

TABAJASKI Betina, PETERSEN CHAVES Verônica, *An experience of prevention: The preparation of children for adoption*, Porto Alegre and Canela, Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, 1997; the electronic version of this document is available at ISS/IRC.

TRISELIOTIS John, SHIREMAN Joan and HUNDLEBY Marion, *Adoption: Theory, policy and practice*, Ed. Cassell, London, 1997.

We are interested in your opinion! To tell us your experiences, ask us your questions about the themes addressed in this file, or to send us your suggestions for changes, don't hesitate to write to us at irc-cir@iss-ssi.org. We also invite you to share this file with other interested persons in your country. Thanks in advance!

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