

# Getting the Emotional Support You Want and Need

Open communication can help create positive relationships with family and friends.

The road to adoption is not an easy one for most families. If you're like most, you have probably endured tremendous disappointment, loss, stress, and a drain of financial resources, not to mention a roller coaster of alternating and exhausting emotions.

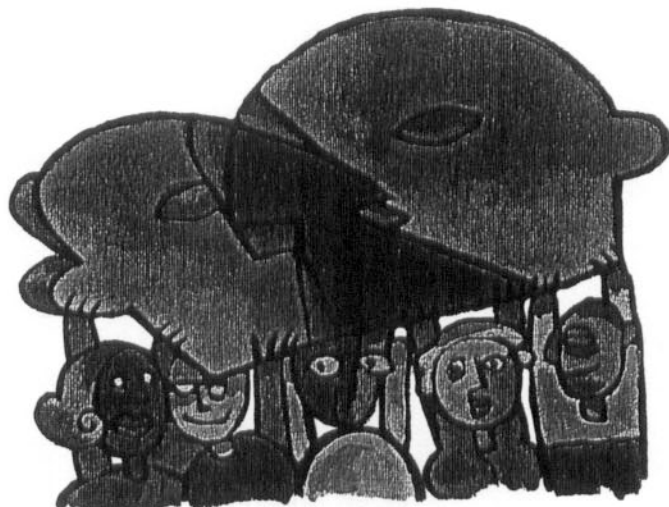
If infertility was an issue, you and your partner are understandably disappointed. It can be overwhelming, to say the least, to have to begin yet another new experience—adoption—to get to your original goal of parenthood.

When key people in your life—family, friends, neighbors, and others whose opinions you value—do not agree with your decision to adopt, the process can be even more discouraging and frustrating. By communicating openly, though, and understanding your role in educating family and friends about adoption, you can find the support you want and need during this challenging time.

## OBSTACLES TO SUPPORT

The biggest obstacles most prospective adopters and their families face is fear and misinformation.

Fear comes in a number of sizes, shapes, and forms, and originates from many sources. Prospective



adopters may fear a birthmother changing her mind; fear possible unknown medical issues; fear having to prove their competency as parents through a homestudy assessment; fear being out of control; fear becoming parents sooner—or later—than they expected; fear the unknown.

It's sometimes easy to forget that the same fears and falsehoods that have invaded your lives as prospective adoptive parents have also been busy invading the lives of your family and friends, too.

These same family and friends may share their concerns (before, during, and after your adoption) in less than supportive ways.

"I just don't know if I could love someone else's child as my own..." "It costs how much???!!" "I'm sure you'll get pregnant, maybe you're just trying to hard." "I could never give up a child!" "What if the birthparents

change their minds?" "What's the "real" mother like?" "Are you going to keep trying to have one of your own?" These are just some of the comments that you're likely to hear.

Like fear, misinformation originates from many sources. People get their information and base their attitudes about adoption on what they read in the media, their generational, cultural, or religious beliefs, and their personal experience with adoption with others who are adopted, have adopted, or know someone who has adopted.

When you encounter fear or misinformation from a family member or friend, remember that you, too, have struggled with some of the same issues and concerns. Just as education and accurate information helped you move forward in your decision to adopt, so, too, will it help your family and friends. Share with them books or articles about adoption that you have found especially helpful. Bring them with you to information or support group meetings.

## BEING SENSITIVE TO OTHERS

Just as you expect that family and friends should be sensitive to the disappointment, loss, stress, and strain that you're experiencing, you must be sensitive to how your decision to adopt has affected those who are close to you. Would-be grandparents, aunts, and uncles may need to move on from the loss of a genetic grandchild, niece, or nephew. Friends and other family members may find it difficult to end their own pregnancies while you wait for your child to arrive if you do not give them permission.

Like you, many of your family members may feel a loss of control. Most people are familiar with the mechanics and emotions involved in a biological pregnancy. There is a larger level of acceptance of the pregnancy experience as a whole (even though no pregnancy guarantee a successful outcome and a

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healthy child). Because in a pregnancy there are no choices involved to determine the age, gender, or relative health of the child, the family is relieved of making stressful decisions. In an adoptive pregnancy, decisions that need to be made—boy or girl?, how old?, international or domestic?, from which country?, how healthy is healthy?, whether to accept a specific referral?, and on and on—can be overwhelming and misunderstood by well meaning yet uninformed loved ones.

The abstractness of an adoptive pregnancy is also difficult for family and friends. There is no increasing bulge at the tummy, no copies of ultrasounds, no eccentric eating habits to remind them that the pregnancy is progressing. Getting them involved in the process, though, will make it more concrete, and help foster a new sense of entitlement to the child who will be joining your family. Involvement can take many forms, including helping to decorate the child's room, helping select the child's name, or helping create a life-book for the to-be-family member.

**BUILDING BRIDGES**

Understanding that it may be difficult for others to be able to empathize or even cope with the stress of your adoption won't necessarily bring you instant support, but it will help you cope with a disheartening response or questions and concerns from family and friends. It is also important that you seek support from people who are already familiar with adoption, such as other adoptive families, support groups, and family counselors as well.

Bridges sometimes have to be built from relationships to adoption, they don't always just happen. But by taking a proactive stance to educate your loved ones about adoption, you will be one step closer to your dream of a family with the love and support you want and need. **AF**

*James Molter is Executive Director of God's Children International, an adoption agency located in Orange County, California. He can be reached at 949-858-7621 or e-mail: director@godschildrenadoptions.org. He is also the adop-*

*tive father of an 11-year-old from R. and the stepparent of a 28-year-old daughter.*

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**Use the following acrostic to help you remember the key factors in building a strong support systems for your adoptive family.**

**F**ocus.

Focus in on your loved one's specific concerns to help him or her understand more, faster. Keep it 'simple.' Think "small bite sized chunks." More than likely, friends and family will not have been involved with adoption before and will need time to digest your information.

**E**ducate.

Educating (or possibly re-educate) your loved ones to give them the tools they need to better understand adoption. Eliminating their fears with accurate information will help them support to you and your new child as you begin your life together. Keep in mind their attitudes and information about adoption may have been influenced by negative media portrayal, misconception, or comments from others. By providing them with accurate and current information you can help them first to understand, next to accept and finally to appreciate your adoption.

**A**cept.

Accept that your family and friends will require their own timeline for getting on board with your adoption. Everyone is different. It will take some longer than others to comprehend and accept the path you have chosen. Whatever their initial reaction to your decision, however, open communication and honesty are the place to start. Don't make assumptions. Ask questions to learn their concerns. Accept, too, that you may ultimately find that a friend or family member can't resolve his or her previous feelings or beliefs about adoption. You may need to limit contact or have no contact at all if this loved ones attitudes are too hurtful to you or your new child.

**R**esolve.

Resolve will mean different things for different families. However, it should focus on not ignoring anything that erodes the personal relationships you want and find valuable in your life. Family and friends will affect and influence you and your child on multiple levels. As a good parent who wants to assist his or her child's development and self-esteem, you'll want to make sure the influences around him or her are positive. Some family and friends will be very comfortable sitting down and talking about their differences of opinion, others may require outside assistance in the form of an experienced family counselor to get to a point of resolution.