

## What to Consider When Considering Adoption

The decision to adopt is not unlike the decision to get married. It is a huge step with life-long implications. Many couples spent months planning the wedding to find they weren't nearly as prepared for marriage. The same can hold true for adoption. The dream of becoming a parent can be all-consuming, so much so that we may not be as knowledgeable or as prepared as we should be about what it means to parent through adoption. In this tip sheet, we will explore some of the questions to ask and perspectives to consider when considering adoption.

### Grief and Loss

Adoption is created through loss. Where adoption can be a dream come true for the adoptive parent, it means separation from the birth family and loss of personal history for the adoptee. Even if the child is adopted at birth, that loss can affect the adoptee on a profound level throughout their lifetime. Although this may be an unsettling thought for the adoptive parent, an awareness, acknowledgment, and understanding of this loss and the resulting grief is crucial to the well-being and identity of the adoptee.

Some parents believe that you can spare children pain by not telling them they are adopted or waiting until they are adults. Although this is well-intentioned, all children deserve to know their stories and origin. Openly and honestly talking about adoption from the moment a child joins the

family is the best way to promote a healthy view of adoption.

### Managing Expectations

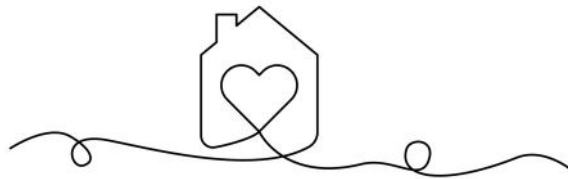
All parents have expectations for their children. Maybe you've always had visions of tea parties, dress-up, and shopping trips with your little princess—but the child you adopt prefers monster trucks to tiaras. What

happens if the child's interests, temperament, and personality feel mismatched for your family?

It's important to remember that nearly *all* parents have unrealistic expectations for their children. The best way to ensure disappointment is to

root your expectations in your own needs rather than the child's. What is unique to the adoptive parent is how easy it may be to assume expectations would have been met with a child who was biologically yours. This doubt can lead to disconnection or difficulty bonding with the child. Before deciding to adopt, consider your motivation and expectations. Try flipping the script and considering what the child will need from *you*. Take inventory of what you have to offer as a parent. A willingness to learn? Flexibility? Unconditional love and acceptance?

The best way to prepare for the realities of parenting through adoption is to talk with those with experience. Seek out opportunities to hear the perspectives of



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adoptees and adoptive parents. Find blogs, attend webinars, or read books offering varied perspectives. The more you can educate yourself, the more likely you are to embrace whatever comes your way.

### Open Adoption

Whether you are considering private adoption or adoption through foster care, have you considered maintaining birth family connections? If your immediate reaction is, “No, that would be too confusing to the child,” we encourage you to think again.

Open adoption, or adoption where a connection to the birth family is maintained, is increasingly considered to be in the best interest of the child whenever it can be done safely. Far from being a threat to the child’s relationship with the adoptive family, providing your child with an ongoing connection to their birth family and culture can create safety and security. This connection may be with birth parents, extended family, or even other significant people in the child’s life, such as a former foster parent.

You might want to seek opportunities to speak with adult adoptees, an adoption counselor, or adoptive families with open adoptions. One parent said, “It’s wonderful to have more people who love and care about my child.”

### Transracial Adoption

Whether you are intentional about adopting transracially through international adoption or you’ve become the adoptive resource for a child placed with you through foster care, there are a multitude of considerations with transracial adoption.

The importance of culture and identity cannot be overstated. As one adoptive mom put it, “We didn’t understand what he was going through. We never had to struggle through anything race-related.”

It can be easy to assume the child will just acclimate to your family and all will be well. Unfortunately, it’s not that simple for the adoptee. 19-year-old Erika shared, “My family sees me as white by extension. I shouldn’t be made to feel like I’m betraying my adoptive family by embracing my Blackness. And they can’t keep believing their white privilege protects me when I’m out in the world.”

Preparing for the possibility of transracial adoption takes effort, intentionality, and some very honest self-examination.

- How diverse is your community and your support system?
- What are you willing to do to educate yourself to meet the cultural needs of a child placed with you?
- Do you or members of your family have biases or beliefs that could be harmful to a child of a different race or culture?
- How comfortable are you in maintaining family connections with a family of a different race or ethnicity?

Adopting requires nothing less than a total commitment to acknowledging, meeting, and celebrating the cultural needs of the child in your care.

### Unresolved Infertility Issues

Just as there is a loss in adoption for the adoptee, there is a loss for those adopting due to infertility. For those who have dealt with infertility, you recognize that the grief may never go away completely. However, it is important for everyone involved to reach a place of acceptance—where your feelings can be managed in a healthy way—before pursuing adoption. How do you know if you’re ready? Here are some questions to consider:

- Is your motivation to adopt primarily driven by the desire to meet a child’s needs or your need to parent?
- How important is it to you or your partner that a child be biologically yours? Are you

on the same page regarding the decision to adopt?

- How would pregnancy during the adoption process impact your desire to adopt?
- Are you hopeful and ready to dedicate all your energy to the adoption process?

You deserve to be excited about the adoption process. By working through your grief and loss before considering adoption, you will be able to provide a compassionate and empathic home when the child in your care is grieving their own adoption losses.

### Support System

Every parent needs support throughout their parenting journey, regardless of how you became a parent. But parenting through adoption is undeniably different, with its own unique joys and challenges. The well-meaning loved one who suggests you'll spoil a child if you don't let them "cry it out on their own" likely didn't parent a child who was uprooted from an orphanage in another country, had prenatal drug exposure, or experienced neglect. Remember, adoption, even under the best of circumstances, is still trauma and loss for the child. Does your support system include other adoptive families who understand parenting through a trauma-informed lens?

Despite the many considerations and unique challenges, the decision to adopt can be the best decision you'll ever make. Throughout this tip sheet, we've stressed the importance of learning all you can about adoption to make an informed decision. In particular, those who have adopted, have been adopted, or work in adoption can be great sources of information and inspiration. To find out more, contact us at the Wisconsin Family Connections Center. Our Resource Specialists are happy to help.



## Resources

*Training From [Champion Classrooms](#)*

- [Taking Time to Help and Heal: Child Development Through a New Lens](#)
- [Attachment Difficulties: Supporting Parents as Kids Age](#)
- [Relationship Resilience: Thriving in Your Parenting Partnership](#)
- [Transracial Parenting Series](#)

*Inspiration & Hope From [No Matter What Families](#)*

- [Grief Is Part of the Fabric of Adoption](#)

*Additional Resource*

- [When Did You Turn Black? Coming to Terms with Racial Identity](#)