

The Eight Great Fallacies of Adoption

Adoption is one of those subjects that everyone thinks they know something about – and has an opinion on. Unfortunately, many of these opinions are wrong, since most people are not adopted, and have no first-hand experience of the adoption process or the effects it has on the families involved in adoption. There are many fallacies concerning adoption – some of them may surprise you!

One: Adoptive parents make better parents than ordinary people because they wanted a child so badly and went to so much trouble to get one. Actually, adoptive parents are no better and no worse than any other parent. The idea that just wanting a child makes anyone into a good parent is shallow. It's the amount of time, thought, love and labor that goes into raising a child that distinguishes the good parents from the poor ones. Most parents, adopted or not, do their honest best for the children they care for. To expect parents to be extra good at parenting simply because they adopted is to burden them with impossible standards to live up to, and this can place a strain on the relationships in the family. They may, in fact, feel unsure of themselves, because they had to go to so much trouble to get a child. They may also transfer a portion of these unrealistic expectations to the child.

Two: Happy adoptees, who are completely satisfied with their parents and home will never want to search for their birth kin, only the unhappy and maladjusted will feel a need to search. The reverse is true. Dr. William Reynolds found that there was no correlation between satisfaction with the adoptive relationships and a desire to search. Searching indicates no more than a strong desire for knowledge on the part of the searcher – it is not an indication of rejection of the adoptive family. In fact, the adoptee who feels secure and wanted in his family may search for the truth of his past, knowing that he will lose nothing in the process and may gain a great deal. The unhappy adoptee may not care to risk his precarious relationships with his family and decide not to search.

Furthermore, since all adoptees are curious from time to time, to one degree or another, to believe this fallacy is to believe that all adoptees are unhappy about being adopted, or dissatisfied with their families – a clear insult to every adopting couple in the country, and to all adoptees as well.

Three: Adoptees who search are looking for fantasy, the “perfect parents” who will love and cherish them, and they will inevitably be cruelly disappointed when they meet with reality. This is the natural conclusion of Fallacy No. Two; since adoptees are dissatisfied with what they have, they must be looking for the impossible dream. Truthfully, the one thing that adoptees who search are NOT looking for is fairy tales! They are tired of fantasizing, wondering, thinking; they are seeking the truth. Of course, they hope that what they find will be pleasant, but they know very well that it could end in disappointment. If they were looking for a dream, they wouldn't need to search at all – dreams are easy to come by.

Four: A searching adoptee poses a real threat to the security and anonymity of the birthparent(s). To believe this one, you must also believe that people who have been raised as adopted children are all incompetent, insensitive, immature idiots who could not be taught by parents or anyone else to care about the rights and feelings of others. This is a belief that indicates a deep lack of faith in adoption and the families that adoption creates. What people do not seem to realize is that an adoptee has no reason to be so thoughtless and inconsiderate. How much information could an adoptee get from a shocked, angry or frightened birthparent? The adoptees must be careful, for their own sake, as well for the sake of the birthparent.

Five: An adoptee belongs to his or her new family forever – and owes them something more than the ordinary offspring owes his family. Correction: an adoptee will be a part of the people who love him forever, but belonging is a term used for property. An adoptee owes his or her parents nothing more and nothing less than any son or daughter actually born to them. To insist otherwise is to put the adopted into a special class. It is to transform adoption into a charitable institution, and to make the children who are “benefited” by this service into objects of charity. It is actually a self-pitying plea for gratitude, not an honest recognition of the human relationships that have grown over the years.

Actually, it was the parents who asked to be allowed to adopt, not the child who was asking for the gift of a family. The parents wanted to have the pleasure of watching a young life grow, much as any other parents would. They did not (we hope!) adopt as a social statement, or as a “good deed,” and they have benefited from the relationship as much as the child. Adoptive parents cannot and should not expect more than ordinary parents are allowed by custom or law to expect, for they are, after all, just ordinary parents, too!

Six: Sealed records protect the birthmother from intrusion into her life by the child she relinquished for adoption. Sealed records protect no one, least of all the birthparent. Sealed off from any knowledge of the child she relinquished, ignorant of conditions in the adoptive home, unable to get the slightest information from the placing agency, she cannot know if the son or daughter is curious about her, or if the grown adoptee is searching.

Everyday, thousands upon thousands of adult adoptees are searching in this country for the evidence of their births and ancestry. And they are finding, in spite of sealed records, uncooperative agencies and courts and discouragement on every side. With no way to communicate with the birthmother, they hesitantly, tentatively reach toward her. At any moment, the telephone or the mailman can shatter the birthmother’s illusion that sealed records are her protection.

Most birthmothers did not want this protection, did not ask for it, and are delighted when their grown son or daughter seeks them out. There are very few birthmothers who did not give up their child with grief and regret. Most of them would have preferred to keep their child, if that had been possible at the time.

Sealed records, whatever you may have heard about them, were actually designed to keep the adoptive parents happy – free from the worry that someone would take their hard-won child away from them.

Seven: Adoptees are better off not knowing that they are adopted. They will never need to search, and will not grow up feeling “different.” This fallacy offers an illusion of kindness – but is actually the most cruel of them all. The truth is that a secret cannot be kept forever. The adopted always finds out, sooner or later. And even when they are unaware of their status as an adopted member of the family, they do frequently feel “different” without knowing why. When they do find out, often by accident, they discover at once that nothing they have believed or been taught is true – and that the people they have trusted all their lives have been systematically lying to them. It is a shattering discovery that rips their world to shreds.

Adoptive parents need to armor their child against this kind of harm by being honest about adoption. It is better for the adoptee to hear the truth from the ones he trusts and so be able to accept it comfortably. It is also without a doubt better to learn about adoption when young, especially when the child is allowed to continue to ask for and get answers to questions as he grows.

Eight: An adoptee is bound to honor the agreement of adoption and to never challenge the wisdom of the sealed records, he has a right only to the information that others are willing to give. Bound by what? Why should an adoptee be required to honor an agreement he never saw, never read, and never agreed to? As a slave was obligated to look after his master’s property (himself), so the adoptee is asked to keep promises made by others on his behalf. In most states, an adoptee is not even permitted to see the records of an event that has profoundly changed his life.

Where ordinary parents know and expect that they will see their minor child grow into independent adults, capable of making decisions and managing their own lives, adoptive parents seem to require that the control they have over their children should extend over the child’s entire life. No matter how old that “child” becomes, he will never be old enough to decide for himself how much he wants to know and never will he be old enough to be trusted with the entire truth.

As one adoptee said, “I will honor any contract or agreement that I myself have read, understood and signed. But I did not and will not agree to lose my rights through an agreement signed by others years ago on my account.”

Too many of our states still carry on their books laws that reflect these antique attitudes toward adoption and adoptees. It’s high time that a fresh breath of common sense should blow the cobwebs off these laws so people can see them for what they are – monuments to insecurity and fear.

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