

## HINTS FOR BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR BIRTHPARENTS

Carole LieberWilkins, M.A., Marriage and Family Therapist  
1460 Westwood Boulevard, Suite 204  
Los Angeles, CA 90024  
(310) 470-9049

Establishing and maintaining a relationship with birthparents during the process of adopting can be an intimidating, sometimes frustrating experience. It can also become one of the most enriching and rewarding experiences you will ever have. These hints may help you keep perspective and stay less anxious as you meet and learn to know your future child's birthparents. While many of these suggestions seem impossible to you now, they are quite feasible, albeit challenging. And while we rarely achieve any ideal relationship with anyone, keeping in mind some of these thoughts may help shift your thinking to allow you to create a mutually respectful, gratifying adoption experience.

1. Be yourself. Really yourself. There is a birth family and a child out there for everyone. No matter what your age, religion, ability, economic status or profession, birth parents will choose you for a variety of reasons. If you pretend now to be other than who you are, your adoption will be based on a falsehood and could eventually have negative ramifications for you and the family you are trying to create.
2. Birth parents are at least as frightened as you are. They are afraid of being rejected, afraid they will end up giving birth to a child who has no parents to care for it, and afraid they will have to choose to parent when they are unable to. Birth mothers have often been abandoned by their child's father and have little emotional support from family and friends. Even if they do have partners and family support, this is a very frightening and emotionally demanding time in their lives. As you can see, there are many similarities between the adopting and birth parents' experiences.
3. Focus on the birth parents' strengths. They are the attributes you will eventually share with your children about their origins. Children usually care less about eye and hair color than "am I like my birth mother?" Frame attributes in the positive. Most birth parents are quite resourceful, even if they have not made great decisions. Who among us hasn't? Adoption is a great decision and so was following through with action that eventually led them to you.
4. Resist the temptation to convince a birth parent what a great parent you will be. Birth parents see adopting parents as having everything they don't have. These usually include maturity, stability, a good marriage, financial stability (not wealth), and of course the desire, willingness and ability to parent. The aspects of your life that you would like to improve are probably invisible to a woman who sees you as someone

who can and will provide for her child everything she cannot provide at this time in her life.

5. You probably have major issues of control after infertility. Adoption, like infertility, can make us feel “out of control.” Someone else is carrying your child. Be AWARE of these issues in yourself and try not to exert control when it is inappropriate.
6. GET SUPPORT EVERYWHERE AND ANYWHERE but not from birth parents.
7. Keep in mind that adoption is a lifelong process. It began with your infertility and never ends. It continues through to your child’s children and on.... We are leaving something behind, just as genetic parents do. The seeds you plant now will grow throughout the life cycle of the family you create.
8. Enjoy this time as much as you can. You’ve earned it!