

KEY ELEMENTS TO SUITABILITY: PREPARING AND EVALUATING PROSPECTIVE INTERNATIONAL ADOPTIVE PARENTS

Berta Boadas Mir

Representante de las Instituciones Colaboradoras de Integración Familiar (ICIFS) de Barcelona

bertabm@blanquerna.url.edu

Abstract

A family's decision to adopt a child from a foreign country is the result of a process of personal reflection, shared or not with close family and social contacts. Starting from this evidence we understand that what we call the initiation of an adoption process starts in as diverse and heterogeneous way as are the applicants for international adoption and their circumstances, with the intervention of a series of factors that crystallise in the documented presentation of the application to the competent administration. That is the moment from which the contact with some teams of professional experts starts, those entrusted by the Administration to evaluate the suitability of the family for adoption, in this case an international adoption.

The previous preparation of the application can have acquired different forms according to the family's prepared resources: previous information, conference attendance, contact with adoptive families and/or parent associations, reading pertinent books and articles, personalised assessment or therapeutic work. All that, and their own motivation and vital course, situate each family in a different way before the legally regulated initiation of the process and that generates expectations, anxiety and fears towards the professionals, unknown to them, who must evaluate their aptitude or not for adoption.

In the case of Catalunya, we at the ICIF (Collaborating Institutions for Family Integration) comprising teams formed by psychological professionals social workers and pedagogues, are in charge of carrying out the double process of preparation and evaluation study that in an integrated, continuous and coherent way lets us accompany the families in this phase until issuing the proposal to the Administration of aptitude or non-aptitude. The pre-adoption formation should facilitate, amongst other objectives, a realistic approach, adjusted to the variables that make up an adoption as a different form of parenting from the biological one and to the specifics of the children who are susceptible to being adopted. It is also an area to emphasise the fact that adoption is a measure for the minor's protection and with the priority implied by this for the Administrations when issuing a certificate of aptitude.

The declaration of aptitude of each family is based on the evaluation of different areas grouped under: the applicant's personal circumstances, family and personal history and that of the couple, if it is the case, personality characteristics, adoption motivation, family and social surroundings that favour the minor's integration, social, economic and working situation, educational aptitudes and the acceptance of the minor's characteristics and circumstances. In the case of an international adoption we must add the comprehension of what a racial difference supposes in the construction of the child's own identity in the new surroundings.

During the evaluation process we work with the families offering them new information related to what adoptive parenting means, facilitating elements for reflection that perhaps they had not considered so much in connection with the meaning of the adoption project as opposed to its viability, redirect their resources and orient them about their limitations. All this results in the fact that we professionals must recognise in a family both their potential and strength to take on the paternity/maternity of an adopted child and facilitate their situation in a new

existence, but also identify the possible risks that are involved in the arrival of a child into a home in which they may not feel protected, loved and wanted as a son/daughter. We are situated, therefore, facing the consideration that the study and evaluation process is translated as a task of prevention, that the families do not understand in the same way but accept with professional responsibility.

The growth of adoption applications and the number of adopted children in Catalunya in the last few years is obvious and has already been repeated in other expositions of the Forum. From our point of view we notice in the daily work that, the transparency of the adoption both from visual esthetics and from ethics of solidarity has been transferred to all walks of society and the media of communication. This is one of the causes that stimulate confidence that the families have that their adoption project will not be denied because quantitatively other families with apparently similar characteristics have managed to obtain the certificate of aptitude. The coordinates of each situation and the opportunity of the adoption project must be considered in a personalised way and we professionals must transmit to the applicants the differentiated dealing and the criteria on which the technical team bases its evaluation. The importance that the study result has for the family must not make us forget the superior interest of the child on which our decision is based. The respect for the applicants' personal values is transmitted even having concluded the non-aptitude for adoption. This does not avoid pain, upset and anger that this can produce, and it will be necessary to elaborate in time or combat by appealing against the said decision.

The actual context in which the individual wish and a false conception of tolerance and respect for the decisions of others, on which a large number of our actions prevail, rests also on the acceptance of the opinion and advice from the professionals. The recognition of their wisdom and experience cannot always be translated as an acceptance of their contrary proposals as they think the adoption is correct for that family at that moment of their history. Arguments such as assimilation of adoption with growing immigration minimise and reduce the capacity to understand that the bonding that they, as parents, must establish with their child at the beginning of a history in common, non-existing before, must not be founded only on the social integration in diverse surroundings, or the confidence in the resources that, as biological parents they have already acquired and seen in the majority of families with children who wish to adopt a child from another country with the wish to incorporate him/her into the group of siblings with the greatest equality possible. On these reasonings as an example we base ourselves in order to consider the need for the already increasing collaboration between the different institutions that work in the context of international adoption, ICIF, ECAI and Parent Associations. Team work amongst all of these agents should let us create a solid adoption culture for which we can continue working with responsibility on the passionate task of finding the best home for that child, in which the "parents and children can set up dynamics of good dealings and mutual care, strengthening family, affective and social links, free of false solidarity". (Barudy y Dantagnan 2005)

Bibliography

Angulo, J. ;Reguilon, J.A. 2004. *Hijos del corazón. Guía útil para padres adoptivos*. Madrid: Temas de Hoy.

Barudy, J.; Dantagnan, M. 2005. *Los buenos tratos a la infancia. Parentalidad, apego y resiliencia*. Barcelona: Gedisa

Brodzinsky, D; Schechter, M; Henil, R.M. 2002. *Soy adoptado. La vivencia de la adopción a lo largo de la vida*. Barcelona: Random House Mondadori.

Marre, D; Bestard, J. 2004 *La adopción y el acogimiento familiar:Presente y perspectivas*. Barcelona: Departamento de Antropología Cultural. Universidad de Barcelona.

Mirabent, V.; Ricart, E. (comp.). 2005 *Adopción y vínculo familiar. Crianza, escolaridad y adolescencia en la adopción internacional*. Barcelona: Paidós

Polaina, A.; Sobrino, A.; Rodríguez, A.(Eds.). 2001 *Adopción. Aspectos psicopedagógicos y marco jurídico*. Barcelona: Ariel.