Adopting a Child From a Different Race, Ethnicity or Culture

If you are considering adoption, an important issue that you will face is whether you are interested in adopting a child whose race, ethnic background, or culture is different than yours. Many prospective adoptive parents are clear that they want to bring a child into their family who looks like them, while others are open to creating a multiracial, multiethnic or multicultural family. Following is a discussion on adopting a child from a different race, ethnicity, or culture.

Endless Combinations

In the United States, especially in recent decades, Caucasian couples adopt African-American or Hispanic children. African-American families adopt Hispanic children. Jewish people adopt children from China or Colombia. American families bring home children from Russia, Korea, Guatemala, China, Bolivia, India and Africa.

When you adopt internationally, you bring a child from his or her country and culture to another country with its own culture. If your physical features match your new child's, you may find that the adjustment is relatively easy. It is much more common that parents who adopt internationally bring into their families a child who looks entirely different than they do. Skin color, eye color, hair texture, and build may differ dramatically. These families face challenges both in the home and wherever they go.

Multicultural Families

When they delve into their feelings, many prospective adoptive parents admit that they want children who look like them. Often couples come to adoption after experiencing infertility; the idea of adopting a child who doesn’t look like them brings home the reality that they will never have children biologically.

The children adopted into homes with such differences face incredible challenges. An Hispanic boy adopted into a Caucasian home in New England was the only child of color in his school. He was taunted and derided for being different. An African girl in a family of African-Americans felt that her heritage and culture were ignored so that she would "fit in." The Korean adoptee in the Jewish home always felt uncomfortable at religious gatherings, and as she grew up she struggled with her faith.

Most adoption professionals concur that parents who adopt a child from a culture, race or ethnic background that doesn’t match theirs should work to make the child's birth culture a part of their new family life. This can mean joining multi-cultural support groups, attending religious services, incorporating food and festivals into family life, taking lessons in the child’s birth language, or enrolling the child in a school with children from various backgrounds. You may want to decorate your home with images reflecting your child's race or culture. This is important for the child’s self-image and the parents' education as they try to become the best parents they can be. On the other hand, parents must be sensitive not to make the child's birth culture or race a point of difference in the family. In a sense, when the Italian-American family adopts a Ukrainian boy, the whole family becomes Italian-Ukrainian-American.

Conclusion

Prospective adoptive parents should explore their attitudes toward people of different races, ethnicities and cultures. You should talk with your adoption attorney to discover whether adopting a child with such differences is right for you.
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