



MARE'S ADOPTION PARTY GUIDE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Adoption parties are great opportunities for adoption newcomers to meet experienced adoptive families, for waiting children to make new friends and reunite with some old ones and for everyone to have a chance to share and learn from others. They are good resources for both information sharing and matching.

Adoption Parties also provide an opportunity for experienced adoptive families to extend their network and share their expertise. Adopted children may mingle with others who share similar experiences.

Good Reasons for Waiting Children to Attend:

- For some children, attending a party reassures them that they are not the only children waiting for an adoptive family.
- For some children, adoption parties may demonstrate that their worker does care and is doing everything possible to find a family.
- Children who are waiting have a chance to meet adopted children and realize that getting adopted can and does happen and that it can work out successfully.
- Adoption Parties provide a great opportunity for siblings who are placed in separate homes to get together for a visit.
- Social workers have agreed that attending an adoption party with their child has helped them learn more about the child.
- Parties give the children a chance to “look over” the families present, think about the type of family they might like and discuss this further with their worker.
- "Chemistry" plays an important part in any relationship; spontaneous relationships can and do occur at adoption parties.
- Many workers have used an adoption party as a “first visit.” An adoption party is a wonderful means of casually introducing a child to an appropriately selected family. Meeting this way may involve much less anxiety, for both the child and family, than a typical first visit.
- Finally, matches do happen as a result of families meeting children in person at adoption parties.



TIPS FOR PREPARING CHILDREN FOR AN ADOPTION PARTY

- **Prepare the Child:** Social workers need to prepare children for adoption parties in advance. Focus the child's expectations on having a good time; meeting other children, both waiting and adopted; and meeting prospective and experienced adoptive families. Many workers encourage their child to “check out” the families who will be attending, in this manner dispelling the child's anxiety about “being on display.” Let the child know the type of activities that they can expect and what the day might be like. Tell the child that this is one of the many ways that you are trying to help find the right family for him/her. Be honest. Let them know that there are no guarantees; that this is a chance for people to find out about adoption and for everyone to have a good time.

Most older children know you are looking for a family for him/her. Reassure the child, particularly teens, about confidentiality. Only first names will be used at the party. They need not talk about themselves if they do not feel comfortable. Call MARE and find out if any other children of a similar age will be attending. Help the children feel good about themselves.

Make sure their foster families or residential facilities understand what is going on. They may be able to arrange for a haircut and prompt the child to dress nicely, and can be supportive to the child.

- **Use This Opportunity to Improve Your Relationship with the Child:** Adoption Parties are a good chance to get to know the child better and to see how he or she interacts with other children and with families. Supervision and reassurance are important. Use the time you have driving the child to and from the event to talk with him/her about the experience.
- **Make the Most of the Party:** Be open to discussions with the parents, other social workers, and volunteers staffing the party. Share your knowledge of adoption with newcomers. Help widen their awareness of the kinds of children available for adoption and share insights and resources with other workers.
- **Consider Using the Party for a First Meeting:** Without raising expectations unrealistically, you might consider using this event as a “first meeting.” Having a number of other children and families present makes this interaction less pressured than a one-to-one encounter.
- **After the Party:** Children (as well as adults) need to understand that matches don't happen instantaneously at adoption parties. They happen over a span of time, often after families have gone home to talk about their experience at the party. A child may want to know why they were not matched, for example, when preparing them for a subsequent party. The best answer to that question is that we, the adults, were not able to find the right family at this event, but we will keep on trying.

visit our Web site at www.mareinc.org

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January 2007



TIPS FOR PREPARING FAMILIES FOR AN ADOPTION PARTY

- Social workers need to prepare their families. The families should be prepared to make an effort to meet the children present, to introduce themselves to the children's workers and to relax and have a good time with the children. It should be suggested that families dress casually, utilize the information table and actively participate in the day's events. If families are uncomfortable with interacting with the children, however, it is perfectly appropriate for them to network with the adults present.
- If families choose to interact with the children, it is important that they do not talk about foster care, adoption, or the child's birth family. These are very personal things to share with a stranger. They should not make any promises and should always be honest, even when a child asks a tough question like, "Are you going to adopt me?" It is helpful to role-play some of these difficult questions and the appropriate answers with families.
- Please let families know that it is inappropriate to touch the children. For some of these children, even a pat on the head could make them uncomfortable. Again, families need to remember that they are strangers to these children.
- Families need to understand that it is appropriate to get a child's social worker's name and phone number. They can then call them during the work week to express their interest in the child and ask any questions they have. **It is not fair to the child to have a conversation that concerns the child in the his or her presence, or to let the him or her think that the family wants to adopt them when that may be premature.** This procedure circumvents that problem. Also, we encourage families to keep any of the printed materials (i.e. "Today's Waiting Children" booklet) out of sight when they are around the children.
- This is a good opportunity for the family's social worker to observe the family interacting with the children who wait for placement. What the worker observes may assist them in helping the family clarify their feelings and fears about the waiting children and the child they hope to parent.
- If a "first visit" is about to be arranged with one of the social worker's families, the worker could suggest using the Adoption Party for that purpose. It would be important that the social worker attend with their family in order to observe their interactions in the informal setting and be able to discuss the family's reactions to the child at a later date.
- If families have questions or concerns, they should seek out a social worker or MARE staff person.