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EDITORIAL

“The adopted child is a child like any other, with his peculiarities”: a basic principle which sometimes has difficulty being applied

The specificities of adopted children are still too often the source of unsuitable patterns of behaviour at all levels of society. More awareness raising is still necessary.

An adopted child is a child like any other with his peculiarities, is a phrase that can be repeated ad nauseam by those who participate in adoption matters. It suggests that it is important to take care of an adopted child like any other by recognising his past and being aware of specific needs, which he may put to the test. This basic principle, full of common sense, is sometimes, however, difficult to implement. In a worldwide society, which paradoxically leaves little room for differences, the particularities of the adopted child too often sparks off unsuitable behaviour, generally by a lack of familiarity or information, and all the more so if the particularities of the child are visible.

Over-empathetic behavioural patterns

Beyond racist and discriminatory attitudes that evidently figure in the register of inexcusable conduct, less flagrant ones can be very damaging. Thus, a concern too keenly shown or an empathy supported for an adopted child can be inappropriate, constantly reminding the child of his difference. It is not uncommon to observe the contrasting attitudes of the family circle with regard to the siblings, depending upon whether the child is biological or adopted. For example, there are many who have a tendency to be much more conciliatory with

an adopted child, "because the poor thing has already experienced such difficulties" or "because adopted children often have a difficult character". These attitudes of course start from good intentions, but rarely help the child to integrate into his environment, and to grow up and fully take his place of a child like others. Rather, they tend to imprison him in his differences and keep him in a state of weakness in a difficult position.

Clichés, the hackneyed phrases for stereotyped behaviour

As Mary Josée Lambert the Quebecan authoress, highlights in her book "Adoption and Apprenticeship" introduced on page 5 of this bulletin, for certain people, the adopted child is symbolic of an exotic cultural treasure that fascinates them, thus stigmatising the child with clichés linked to his origin. Thus the little Chinese girl must be disciplined and successful in class; the young Ethiopian must be fast on the running track; the young Brazilian girl must have rhythm in her bones. Here as well, these behavioural patterns are not without consequences for his upbringing and the child's identity, for they implicitly incite sticking to the image that one has of him and makes it difficult for him to construct a realistic image of himself. Such conduct can be all the more damaging than the

clichés bandied about and can be very negative.

Finally, one still notes too often that the media also have the tendency to prioritise the "status" of the adopted child, when he is involved in an event in the news (eg: crime), even if there is connection with the child's family filiation to the event.

Peculiarities not assimilated in the system

So that an adopted child can be considered like others and can integrate himself perfectly in society, it is also important that the specificities of adoption be assimilated at all the social and administrative levels of the system. It is particularly essential that the various public and private administrations adapt their procedures and policies so as to integrate this kind of family. As we have underlined several times in this bulletin, it is furthermore desirable that the school includes issues such as adoption as a family tie when it takes up, amongst other things, questions linked to genealogy (see particularly bulletin 2/2009). Leading health professionals should also be trained in the specificities of adoption so as ensure the provision of care that is appropriate for the children concerned (for example, the family's medical allergies and antecedents).

Better awareness raising within society is still needed

Unfortunately adopted children are still too often confronted with failures of the system or with unsuitable demands of their specificity during administrative or other steps. For example, when a questionnaire asks for a

place of birth, to reply with the country of origin of the adopted child is going to lead automatically to a procedure used for foreigners. At each of these obstacles, the child is pushed back to his adopted condition and the deep wounds reappear.

In this context, there appears to be a basic need to raise society's awareness of the reality of adoption and the needs of adoptees, and this must be done at all levels. Professionals and stakeholders can contribute to this by defusing a maximum of information through the media, publications and during the preparation of adoption applicants. Social workers and professionals in the field of health and education should, for their part, receive a minimum training relating to adoption during their courses so as to familiarise themselves with the characteristic principles of this family tie. The authorities and the individuals in charge of various administration also have a role to play in its promotion, and its application at all levels of the ethical and legal principles in force in matters of adoption. It is important that adoptive parents dare to invest more of themselves in awareness raising in their close surroundings so that their child may be integrated in the most natural way. Good co-operation among actors is required so that the child can fully find his place in society.

The ISS/IRC team
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