

## PRE-FINALIZATION ADOPTION SERVICES

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### Strategies to Help Children Adjust

- **Tell the child early and often that you understand her sadness at leaving important people.**  
Give her permission to express her feelings of sadness, anger, or grief (Ward, n.d.). Avoid saying such things as: “That was yesterday, and you’re with us now,” “Don’t think about them, we’re your parents now,” or “Don’t worry, you’ll forget them soon.” Give the child permission to grieve. “It’s ok to be sad because you miss them.” “I bet lots of kids who have been adopted felt the same way.”
- **Keep the child's schedule relatively free from constant activity.**  
Adoptive parents often attempt to help their children forget about the past by filling up their children’s schedule. At this time, children do not need constant motion, but rather an environment in which time for sharing and talking is a priority.
- **Keep the Lifebook accessible to the child.**  
Adoptive parents should not try to erase the child’s past by putting the Lifebook out of sight and out of reach. Revisiting the Lifebook is similar to visiting the cemetery following the loss of a loved one. It helps the child move through the grief process (Riggs, n.d.).
- **Do not feel rejected by the child who remembers relationships with lost attachment figures.**  
Grieving children will often mention the happy times with birth parents or foster parents. They may point out that “our foster mom never did it that way,” as they experience feelings of loss regarding the former caregiver. Responding positively to the children as they mention past activities, memories or traditions will send a message to children that they are accepted and loved.
- **Make arrangements for regular contacts with foster parents, birth family and other important attachment figures.**  
Abrupt separations create trauma and add to the panic and fear attached to loss. Periodic and planned contacts by phone or in person with former foster parents and other attachment figures can help a child through the stages of grief. Maintaining contact with birth family members is critical. There are many benefits to the child when she is able to continue having a relationship with the birth family. For example:
  - Access to important genetic and medical information
  - Develop a deeper sense of understanding their identity and a greater sense of wholeness
  - Preserve connections not only to their birth family but also to their heritage
  - Develop a better understanding for the reasons for placement, which can lessen feelings of abandonment and increase of sense of belonging
  - Relate to birth family members as real people with strengths and flaws rather than idealized (or overly negative) fantasies ([https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_openadopt.cfm](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_openadopt.cfm))
- **Remember the importance of physical touch.**  
Children feel strength from a parent who sits close to them when they are sharing strong feelings. A touch on the shoulder or a lap to sit on reassures a troubled youngster of secure love and concern. It should be noted that older children need the reassurance and security that comes with sitting on an adult’s lap or a hug as much as do the young children.