



## **GIFT Family Services, LLC** **Adoption Philosophy**

1. Adoption is an authentic and important way to become a family.
2. Being an adoptive family is as real as being a biological family. However, there are differences.
3. There are unique needs that must be met for all members of the adoption triad (adoptee, birthparents, and adoptive parents.)
4. Support systems are vital in assisting families with the realities of living as an adopted family.
5. Adoption brings tremendous gains and significant losses to all parties involved.
6. Adoption affects all family members. Each has unique loss and grief issues which shape who they are and how they respond within their families.
7. Adoptive families may face issues with their extended family. For a healthy family, these issues need to be acknowledged and addressed.
8. GIFT believes adoption influences a family throughout their lives. We challenge the cultural myth which asserts adoption is a “happily-ever-after” event that permanently and painlessly solves the problems for children, adoptive parents, and birthparents.
9. Parents can fall into the trap of minimizing the challenges of being an adoptive family.
  - Adoption brings great joy to parents. This delight can cloud their ability to recognize an adoptee’s conflicted feelings.
  - Often this results in the parent’s desire to wish away any pain experienced.
  - These challenges spiral in and out of awareness, with varying levels of consciousness and resolution.
10. Adoptees and their families face various issues:
  - abandonment and rejection
  - divided loyalties
  - understanding how love resulted in relinquishment
  - feeling different -- especially at school or at extended adopted family gatherings
  - uneasiness about the permanency of adoption
  - conflict between being attached to and loving their adoptive family yet still missing birth-connections
  - distress over events like birthdays because of innate connection to relinquishment
  - lack of health history
  - longing for photographs and letters from birth parents
11. Adoptees face struggles with identity. Guidance can provide positive growth and acceptance of oneself as well as help eliminate shame.

12. Most birthparents anguish over their choice, sincerely want what is best for their child, and continue to think about and miss their children. It is important to assist adoptees in seeing them with respect and empathy. Birthparents are part of our children.
13. Adoptive parents had a soul-deep desire for their adopted children. It is important that we help our children understand that we benefited as much as they did when we became a family.
14. Being a family is a relationship built on love, commitment and connection rather than a transaction with a (continuous) expectation of gratitude.
15. Love is essential, however, it is not all that it takes to create a successful and healthy adoptive family. A healthy dose of humor and play is essential as well.
16. There is a subtle negative value judgment against adoption in our culture. That is why adoptive parents are hailed as 'heroes.' (We've all heard how 'wonderful' we are because we chose adoption! This can also build high expectations and pressure on adoptive families.)
17. Behavior and talk that labels, minimizes, stereotypes, shames, or ridicules the child or the family exists. This type of communication needs to be eliminated from our culture.
18. Adoptees own their adoption stories; it is up to them to decide with whom to share it. Adoptive parents must model healthy boundaries when it comes to discussing adoption in public as well as with friends and extended families.
19. People have the right to their feelings; it is healthy and normal for a child to grieve their adoption related losses. Denial of these feelings leaves them to wrestle with these complex issues alone and lead to further pain and confusion.
20. Adoption must be a safe topic. While adoptive families face various challenges, children should feel invited but not compelled to discuss them.
21. To create a sense of common experience, parents can share with their children, at an age appropriate time, their own sadness about the complexities of adoption.
22. Talking about the complexities of adoption is a practice of unconditional love.
23. Adoptees can be attached and devoted to their adoptive families and still miss their biological families.
24. They may have fantasies of being born into their adoptive families. They also may have fantasies about their biological families.
25. Adoptive families thrive best by cultivating a high "AQ"-- Adoption-Attunement Quotient which includes:
  - Adoption-sensitive parenting techniques
  - Sound adoption language
  - Knowledge of the attachment process
  - Consideration of grief and loss issues
  - Respect for birth parents
  - Modeling healthy boundaries
  - Educating family, friends and teachers on adoption
  - Remembering that a child's story belongs to him
  - Recognizing that adoption is a family experience
  - Encouraging playfulness and good humor as a family value
  - Integrating a child's birth heritage
  - Identifying "ambiguous loss"