

family FOCUS

Adoption Services

EMPOWERING CHILDREN / TRANSFORMING LIVES

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AGENCY POLICY STATEMENT: CHANGING FIRST NAMES AT ADOPTION

On occasion, FAMILY FOCUS has been asked what our policy is on adoptive families changing children's names. This is our response:

In New York certainly, it is the right of the adoptive family to change the name of the child they adopt to any name they choose. We are in strong agreement that a child should take the adoptive family's last name as his or her own (assuming that the family has a shared last name). In our society, the last name is generally the name of the family, and a child entering the new family should take on the family's name.

However, we are very strongly opposed to an adoptive family changing a child's first name. A child's first name represents that child's personal identity. Whoever first gave that child that name, it became that child's name permanently when it was given. No one has the moral right to take that name away.

A person's first name represents that person's history. Particularly for children in the foster care system, their name may be the only thing that has remained with them from their birth. The first name connects a person with his or her entire history and all prior experiences.

We do understand the desire of an adoptive family to have their child "begin anew" at adoption - especially when the child's history may be a horrible one. What better way to begin anew than by changing one's name?

The reality, though, is that adoption does not ever wipe out an adoptee's connection to the birthfamily. Nor should it. One's history is one's history. It is among the most personal of the personal.

Even when a child is old enough to want to change his or her first name, we remain opposed. Children who are adopted with first names already in place - which is just about every child except some newborns - should not have their first names changed upon being adopted. We believe very strongly that it is a long term mistake to do so, and we urge all of our families to respect the identity and history of their adopted children by keeping a child's original first name.

(7/08)