

DISRUPTION and DISSOLUTION - THE FAMILY FOCUS PERSPECTIVE

The disruption or dissolution of an adoption is a decision. That means that it is a choice – is never inevitable. It is a choice, furthermore, made solely by an adult. Adults adopt, children are adopted. So while children may be disruptive, adults choose disruption.

Adoption – FAMILY FOCUS ADOPTION SERVICES perspective on adoption – is an irrevocable decision made by an adult to permanently and unconditionally commit to parenting a specific child who has assented to that adoption. The decision is irrevocable. That means that if the decision is revoked, for whatever reason, by the adult, the original decision could not have been made irrevocably. Adoptions cannot end since the commitment is permanent - they may only be annulled.

Aside from the very few disruptions triggered by the death of a spouse, our experience is that in almost every disruption the adults use the same thinking. That thinking is expressed using some variation of these words: "This child has shown me by his/her behavior that he/she does not want to be part of our family." We, at FAMILY FOCUS, give no credence to those words. We know from our post adoption work that adoption triggers dynamics within a child that sometimes result in severe acting out but more often results in intense communications between child and parent. We do not believe that those behaviors or that intensity indicates a decision on the part of a child to "unadopt" themselves – although it may indicate their realization that the family's commitment to them was conditional, temporary, and revocable. In which case, they would rightly want out. And we should get them out posthaste - and offer them deep and heartfelt apologies for having wrongly placed them.

Post adoption behavior - that is, behavior on the part of a child who is certain that his parents have made an irrevocable, permanent, and unconditional commitment to parent him/her, is an attempt to communicate with the parents and to resolve abandonment issues within the child. It is never evidence or proof that a child "does not want to be part of our family."

Whatever the answer to a child's acting out – post adoption – may be, up to and including residential placement, the parental response must always begin with: "I am your parent; you are my child; those are the

facts that nothing you, me, or anyone else can do anything about."

Disruptions and dissolutions are a function and direct result of an adult not making an irrevocable decision to permanently and unconditionally commit to parenting a child. They have nothing to do with a child's behavior, nor a child's wishes. Failed adoptions lead to an overwhelming feeling of guilt on the kids' part – but on a much deeper level they experience disruption as themselves having been lied to. In truth, these failures are NOT adoption failures on the part of a child. Rather, they truly are broken, although rarely phony, promises on the part of an adult.

Children who have been "dumped" by their adoptive families are the victims solely of broken promises. Unconditional commitments that are contingent on a child's behavior are not unconditional commitments. Irrevocable promises that are broken were not, after all, irrevocable. Permanent parenting that ends prior to the death of the parent or the child was not permanent.

A child cannot be held responsible for the decisions of an adult. And so, disruptions or dissolutions are never the function of any failure on the part of the child.

There are a certain percentage of people who sincerely believe that they want to adopt and/or that they are ready to adopt, but who truly are not. Some of these people find that out during the study process. But the ones who end up disrupting are the ones who don't find that out until it is too late and a child has been placed with them. It is our jobs as workers to figure out how to identify and screen those people out prior to placing children with them. Obviously, if this were easy, there would never be a disruption or a dissolution. A long and very slow and carefully planned transition period before allowing any family or child to make their respective decisions about adoption is one way to allow those people to screen themselves out. If we work slowly enough and carefully enough for these families to find out who our kids truly are before we place the children, we can avoid much heartache and additional pain for both the families, and the children.

If, as we in the field have been taught, disruptions are an inevitable part of adoption, then certainly we have to come up with strategies to protect our kids from the effects of disruption. But too many current disruptions did not, and do not, have to be. The responsibility to prevent those belongs to us as adoption workers and supervisors.