

## PRE-FINALIZATION SERVICES

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### Typical Phases of Adjustment

Pinderhughes and Rosenberg (1990) offer a model of adoptive family adjustment with five stages: Getting Acquainted, The Honeymoon, Ambivalence, Reciprocal Interaction, and Bond Solidification.

1. **Getting acquainted** - This phase generally occurs during pre-placement visitation. At this point there is no real attachment.
2. **The honeymoon** - This phase is characterized by excitement and great optimism. Everyone is eager for the adoption to occur. There is great anticipation and expectation for the newly forming family.
3. **Ambivalence** - The adoptive family and adoptee experience ambivalence. If the family and child are unable to navigate through the Ambivalence Phase, the adoption may disrupt or be an unsatisfying experience.
4. **Reciprocal Interactions** - When adoptive families are able to cope with their ambivalence in a constructive manner, they generally progress to the “Reciprocal Interaction Phase.” The assessor should continue to assist the family in making suggestions and problem-solving to help the family begin to accommodate the child.
5. **Bond Solidification** - All family members feel increased satisfaction with family relationships. The family plans a future that includes the adopted child.

## ***Getting acquainted***

### Possible adoptive family and adoptee behaviors:

- All are on their best behavior
- Engaged in learning about one another
- Getting acquainted phase allows for attachment process to begin

### Role of the assessor:

- Training the adoptive parents about the stages of family development
- Using the "prediction path" to inform parents of child's adjustment patterns during previous separations
- Helping the adoptive family to assess expectations for themselves, their family, the child and for adoption
- Reviewing the child's history with the family
- Assisting the family in providing some structure and limitations for the child
- Forging a positive relationship between adoptive family and foster caregivers, birth family and other important people
- Preparing the child and adoptive family for placement
- Helping the family see the importance of providing some "normalcy" so the child can see day-to-day family life
- Debriefing with the child and adoptive family after each visit

## ***The Honeymoon***

### Possible adoptive family and adoptee behaviors:

- Belief that assessor was negative in preparing them for placement
- Over-indulging child with gifts, trips, special foods, no limits
- Overlooking inappropriate behavior and minimizing importance of problems
- Children in family enjoy the novelty of new siblings and interact without arguments, competition, etc.
- Compliant and eager to please adults receiving considerable gratification at the center of attention;
- Emotionally detached from family and is likely to be superficial in relationships
- Emotionally numb from the shock of the move

### Role of the assessor:

- Encourages entitlement of the new parents
- Continues to provide education regarding typical patterns of adjustment
- Encourages positive interactions cycle during honeymoon
- Answers the child's questions and concerns

- Reviews the child’s trauma history with family and encourages them to complete trauma-informed training
- Provides positive feedback to child and parents
- Assists in maintaining the child’s important relationships with foster, birth, kinship family and siblings
- Encourages child to make friends and build family relationships
- Reassures child regarding their safety and well-being

## ***Ambivalence***

### Possible adoptive family and adoptee behaviors:

- Family begins to report behavioral problems with the child
- Parents’ excitement and enthusiasm begins to wane due to “normal” being disrupted
- Parents are fearful of the adoption but not talking
- Extended family members may withdraw their support
- Parents may show evidence of marital strain especially when degrees of readiness to adopt are manifested in the family
- Parenting styles will show differences within the family
- Parent makes comments such as, "I'm not sure we are the right family for..."
- Siblings may feel resentful or threatened and behavior will regress
- Children are angry that new sibling is not "grateful" to the parents and are upset of disrespectful treatment of parents
- Adoptee is no longer compliant, resisting parent’s authority
- Adoptee begins to test parent’s limits and commitment
- Adoptee experiences an emotional conflict with extreme anger and guilt re: birth mother. In an attempt to resolve this conflict, he “splits”, or divides his feelings about his two mothers. He attributes blame and anger towards the adoptive mother, since, in his perception, this is safer than being angry toward the birth mother. He also idealizes his birth mother.
- Adoptee tells worker he is being mistreated;

### Role of the assessor:

- “Shepherd” the family through the stage
- Workers need to acknowledge family experiencing ambivalence and talk of it being a normal feeling when an individual is confronted by a new situation such as marriage, new job, new home, or moving to a new city
- Guide families to utilize the resources and supports that are valued within their family’s diversity
- Get a “blessing” for the adoption from the birth parents

## ***Reciprocal Interactions***

### Possible adoptive family and adoptee behaviors:

- Family reports feelings of "success" in managing the difficult behaviors of the earlier stage;
- Parents begin to ask questions about process and timing of legalization;
- Parents demonstrate more comfort in making parenting decisions regarding the needs of the child;
- Parents share examples of pleasurable moments with the child and have more good days than bad;
- Family members share a genuine feeling of closeness and can be observed with “give and take” philosophy;
- Parents feel less threatened and begin to manage the child’s misbehavior with less resentment;
- They are anxious to share small accomplishments with the child and now have a sense of hope that the adoption will succeed;
- Other children have developed a more realistic and accepting view of the new family structure;
- Conflict between children continue at a manageable level;
- Adjustments to change in birth order are made;
- Adoptee talks of a future with this adoptive family;
- Adoptee engages in less testing/conflict with other family members;
- Adoptee will believe that they are going to stay, works to establish a place for himself within the family unit;

### Role of the assessor:

- Encourage the adoptive parents to use the positive interaction cycle and claiming and work to build attachment;
- Reinforce commitment and successes of parents in making adjustments— give kudos;
- Refer family to adoptive parent support organizations;
- Assist parents in working on their trauma-informed parenting skills;
- Encourage the parents to take opportunities for self-care;
- Help adoptee to continue relationships with foster/birth parents, siblings and other important people;
- Problem-solve challenging situations with the parents and adoptee. Example: A family complains that their 12-year-old son can't get to the school bus on time and that every morning is a battle. After exploring this issue with the family, the assessor discovers the child is not a morning person. Together, the family and assessor make a plan for the child to shower and prepare for school the night before.

## ***Bond Solidification***

### Possible adoptive family and adoptee behaviors:

- Parents demonstrate much more entitlement, are less reliant on the assessor, foster parents and mentor adoptive parents for guidance;
- Attachment has been strengthened;
- A new family system emerges that acknowledges the child's needs, abilities, likes and dislikes;
- The family has re-established its equilibrium, and has re-stabilized;
- Parents are eager to legalize the adoption;
- Parents talk of creating or updating a will to include the adoptee;
- Parents use terms "parents" and call the child "our son" or "our daughter";
- Adoptee might express interest in choosing a middle name that "connects" him to the adoptive family;
- Adoptee is clear about referring to adoptive parents when he speaks of "my parents";
- Adoptee feels connected to members of extended adoptive family;
- Adoptee now sees themselves as part of the family, and has begun to incorporate adoptive family traits into their identity.

### Role of the assessor:

- Assessor asks parents and child if they feel comfortable with the idea of legalization;
- Assessor asks parents and child what needs to occur to help them feel more comfortable with legalization;
- Assessor prepares parents and child with the court processes associated with legalization.