

A Family For Every Child Matching Assistance



*"We should not be asking who this child belongs to,
but who belongs to this child."*

Common Reasons for Adoption Disruption

Adoption disruption is defined as the removal of a child from an adoptive placement before the adoption is finalized. Thinking about or talking about adoption disruptions may be uncomfortable for families. No wants to think about disrupted placements and the feelings that are associated with it, but it is an important topic to discuss. Per a 2010 study by the University of Minnesota and Hennepin County, it was found that 6-11% of all adoptions disrupted before they were finalized. For children who are older than 3, the rates are 10-16%. For teenagers, it jumps up to 25%. [\[Source\]](#). There are steps parents and adoption professionals can take, however, to help prevent adoptions from disrupting. While these methods are not foolproof and may not work for every family, they are important to keep in mind and employ if you are struggling with your placement.



Most Common Reasons for Adoption Disruption

Not a good match - The child may exhibit behaviors the parent cannot tolerate; there may be a clash in personalities; or there may be religious or cultural differences that cannot be overcome.

Lack of preparation - The family may not be prepared to adopt a child with certain special needs; the child was not ready to be adopted; or clear expectations were not provided to the child.

Lack of post-placement support and resources - The family may not reach out to adoption professionals when they need help; no support or resources were provided to the family; or family members are not supportive of the adoption.

Unrealistic expectations - The family has an ideal image of who the child is and how they will behave, and are disappointed when the child does not fit that image.

Lack of attachment - The parent(s) may have a hard time bonding with the child because they

don't understand the child's behavior; or the child may have a hard time bonding with the parents due to unresolved grief or attachment disorder.

External stressors - The family may be undergoing stressful time (loss of a job, financial struggles, relationship challenges) and they cannot take on meeting a child's special needs.

Unforeseen circumstances - A sudden death, illness or pregnancy can shift a family's focus and put strain on the family.



Steps Leading to an Adoption Disruption or Dissolution

Step 1: The Honeymoon. The parent(s) and child are getting along well in this phase, and everyone is on their best behavior. The parent(s) cannot see why everyone warned them about the challenges that were to come. Unrealistic expectations and perceptions may start to form in both the parent(s) and the child.

Step 2: Disappointment. What was once seen to be a cute or tolerable behavior is becoming irritating. There may be some tension between the child and the parent(s), and the parent(s) may try and hide or ignore their feelings that things are not going as well as they hoped. Identifying what the parent(s)' issues and concerns are at this stage is crucial.

Step 3: The Problem Child. The parent(s) are unable to handle or tolerate their child's behaviors, and this creates tension amongst the family. The child senses the tension, and acts out more. The parent(s) may interpret their child's behaviors as rejection, causing further doubt. At this stage, it is crucial the family and child enter into counseling services. The parent(s) needs to recognize where the child's behavior stems from (their past trauma) and find ways to help the child heal.

Step 4: Public Issues. The child may start acting out in school, in the grocery store, at the park, or in front of family members bringing the child's behavioral and emotional issues to light. Friends and family may offer advice or suggestions on how to deal with the child, which may be good or bad. At this point, there is still hope that the placement can be maintained if the family reaches out for support and stability services.

Step 5: Turing Point. Things continue to go south between the child and the family. The child may exhibit a behavior that "crosses the line" and in the parent(s)' eyes there is no hope for reconciliation.

Step 6: The Ultimatum. The parent(s) may lay out an ultimatum ("if things don't get better by X date, the child must leave", or "If they do not accomplish *this*, they must leave"). The parent(s) may or may not realize they are setting the child up for failure at this point. Coming up with this ultimatum allows the parent to justify their choice.

Step 7: The Last Straw. The child may do something that the parents decide is completely

unacceptable and they cannot go on with the placement anymore. Or, the ultimatum has arrived and the child did not meet the expectations.

Step 8: Disruption/dissolution. The family, child, social worker, adoption worker, or child's therapist may ask that the child is removed from the family. The parent(s) feel an overwhelming sense of guilt, loss and failure following the removal of the child. The child feels hurt, rejected, and possibly guilty. The parent(s) may not want to reach out for support because they feel ashamed. It is important the parents seek support or counseling at this stage to cope with their feelings.



Things to Consider Before You Sign

Before you sign the papers to adopt, or even make the decision to adopt the child, consider the following questions:

- *Do I have time to raise this child? In a year? In 5 years? Into adulthood?* Remember, you have time for what you make time for.
- *Am I financially able to care for the child?* Adoption assistance may be available, but it is not meant to cover all the costs of raising a child. You need to be able to support your family on your own income as well.
- *Do I have adequate training to parent a child with a trauma background?* One of the most common reasons for adoption disruptions is lack of training. Continue to educate yourself on parenting children with a trauma background. Do not agree to adopt a child if you cannot meet all of their needs. The [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) has excellent resources to help parents raise children who have experienced trauma.
- *Have I read the child's full profile? Do I understand what their needs are? What do I know about their biological parents/family?* Reading a child's full profile can be daunting. There may be extreme behaviors or unfamiliar diagnoses listed. If you don't know what something means, ask. Do some research on a reputable site, or talk to a pediatrician. If you have questions or concerns about past behaviors, ask. Talk to the foster parents. Talk to the caseworker. Talk to the child's teacher and therapist. Try and obtain as much information about the biological family's medical history, including confirmed and potential diagnoses, so there are fewer surprises later on. Create a binder with this information and bring it to all of your child's appointments. Get all the facts you need before making a final decision.
- *How will my community and family support me?* ALL families need support, even experienced parents. This is also true of transracial families. You need to be sure that you have support systems in place prior to the child being placed in your home. Seek out other adoptive families, respite care providers, and organizations that are experienced in working with adoptive families and children with trauma backgrounds.
- *Have I considered the challenges that may arise post-adoption, especially as the child heads into their teen years?* Trauma issues will manifest themselves differently as the child gets older. New issues will arise; identity issues are very common in older children and teens. You need to be sure you will be able to meet these challenges as

they come up. It's easy to focus on what is going on now, but you also need to be thinking about what will happen in the future with your child.

- *Can I take over all the decision-making for a child?* Your adoption worker and a child's caseworker will be with your family until finalization. After that, you will rely solely on your support network and other organizations. Be sure that you can handle this and are prepared for that day.
- *Can I love and accept this child, even if they don't get better?* Love heals some hurts, but not all. Your child may take a long time to bond with your family, or they may always keep you at distance. Being a parent is forever, and you need to be sure you will be able to love your child no matter what happens.



Things to Consider Before Moving Towards Disruption/Dissolution

Before deciding to disrupt or dissolve your adoption, consider the following:

- Is a human family member in physical or psychological danger if the adoption continues?
- If my biological child were acting this way, would I feel the same? What about my adopted child makes me feel differently?
- Have we given the child enough time to adjust? Have we provided him/her with enough support and resources?
- Is this a temporary crisis we are experiencing?
- Is the child not meeting our needs or expectations?
- Did we thoroughly examine our expectations? Are they still realistic?
- Have we made an honest attempt to bond with the child despite their behaviors?
- Have we sought out all potential support and resources, both for our child and ourselves?
- Have we continued efforts to educate ourselves on our child's needs?
- Have we tried every possible parenting technique?
- Are we placing the blame on someone else (child, adoption agency/worker) or are we accepting our role in this situation?

- Have we considered what will happen to both us and the child if we disrupt/dissolve our adoption? How will this effect our relationship? How will this effect the other child(ren) in the home?

It is important that you answer these questions honestly. This is a huge decision that will have a major impact on both you and the child, and any future relationships you both develop.

If you do decide to disrupt or dissolve your adoption, **contact your adoption agency** right away. Your agency has policies and procedures in place to make the disruption/dissolution as seamless as possible, and to properly support you and the child in the process. It is dangerous to sign over your parental rights to a family you meet on the Internet, and it is illegal to send a child to live with a family in another state without notifying the appropriate ICPC offices.



Additional Information & Resources

Adoption Exchange - [All State Resource List](#)

List of adoption specialists in all 50 states for families to contact about local support groups

Child Welfare Information Gateway - [Adoption Disruption and Dissolution](#)

Child Welfare Information Gateway - [Coping with Disruption/Dissolution](#)

Child Welfare Information Gateway - [Finding and Using Post-Adoption Services](#)

Child Welfare Information Gateway - [Selecting and Working with a Therapist Skilled in Adoption](#)

EMK Press - [Disruption & Dissolution: Unspoken Losses](#)

EMK Press - [Realistic Expectations: The First Year Home](#)

GACRS - [Avoiding Disruption Webinar](#) (free!)

LinkedIn - ["You Just Have Bad Genes"](#) by Dawn J. Post

NACAC - [Disruption Support is Crucial](#)

NACAC - [Plan, Prepare and Support to Prevent Disruptions](#)

National Parent Helpline - [Find Support](#)

Today.com - [It takes more than love: What happens when adoptions fail](#)