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An introduction to OASIS

Our history

OASIS was founded in 1997 by families who have adopted internationally as the primary family support group for families in the UK being built through Intercountry Adoption (ICA). OASIS has grown from a few dozen families to over 1000 members including pre-adopters, current adopters and those whose adoptions have been complete for some time. As such our service covers all aspects of pre and post adoption support.

The reasons for establishing OASIS

Intercountry Adoption is a temporary solution to the need of children around the world to have the benefits of a family – and in doing so can help people's legitimate desires to build their families.

Children have the right to grow up “in a family environment in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding” and if this cannot be achieved in their country of origin then Intercountry Adoption is a valid means to achieve this goal.

At all times the best interests of the child must be the paramount consideration – and to achieve this, the highest standards must be achieved in Intercountry Adoption.

We must also realise that Intercountry Adoption is not a right for parents – our situation in the UK does not entitle us to the children of the third world. Indeed in the long term it is to be hoped that the circumstances that force children to leave their families, societies and countries of origin will be alleviated so that ICA is no longer necessary.

In addition the reality is that inter-country adoption cannot solve the problem of child poverty: That requires systematic and long-term effort at a community and international level – although ICA families can play a useful role as advocates for change.

But whilst the need still exists, there is a requirement to ensure that Adoptive parents are as well informed and well prepared for, and supported in their roles as possible, so as to ensure the best possible outcome for the children, young adults and adults.

What we do

We are a charitable Intercountry adoption support organization, made up of adoptive families and run entirely by volunteers, designed to share

experiences and knowledge and provide information, educational and cultural resources to our members.

We offer a wealth of relevant experience to established and prospective adopters and those who work with them. Our membership represents a diverse range of adoptive parents and families, including couples, single parents, ethnic minorities, lesbian and gay adopters and families with disabilities. Our families are multi-racial by birth, marriage and/or adoption.

We aim to provide

- An information sharing resource for the international adoption community.
- An open communication channel for those who have needs and concerns regarding international adoption and its related issues
- Knowledge and cultural enrichment programs
- Promotion and development of ethics in adoption.
- Education about adoption and adoption related issues
- A national organization that can link all the diverse members of the international adoption community

We are not an adoption agency.

Our Aims

To ensure that Intercountry Adoption (ICA) becomes equally valid and equally valued as a way of creating a family

To become the essential family support resource for all touched by ICA – “a network for life”

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An introduction to Intercountry Adoption in the UK

Some legal aspects

An Intercountry Adoption occurs where the applicants live in a different country from the child and (usually) do not have the same nationality as the child. In order to bring a child who normally resides outside the British Isles into the UK a prospective adopter must comply with the provisions of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, including:

1. A prospective adopter must have applied to a local authority or accredited voluntary adoption agency for assessment of his/her suitability to be an adoptive parent.
2. The authority or accredited voluntary adoption agency must then provide a report approving the prospective adopter as suitable to be an adoptive parent. The report must set out the family, medical and social background of the applicants and the characteristics of the child to be adopted.

3. The Secretary of State for Children must issue a certificate confirming to the authorities in the overseas country that the prospective adopter has been assessed and approved as suitable – the Certificate of Eligibility to Adopt (COEA).
4. When bringing a child into the country it is necessary to show the child is under 18, unmarried, will be looked after and paid for by the applicants, was adopted legally in the child's country and the adoption meets the criteria set out in the COEA.
The child also has to hold a valid UK entry clearance.

Some popular misconceptions

Repeated stories in the media have served to create a number of urban myths about Intercountry Adoption in the UK including

1. It is easier to adopt from abroad
 - The UK assessment and evaluation process is the same as for domestic adoption with additional criteria to cover the transnational and transracial elements of the adoption
 - The time period for Intercountry adoption is often considerably longer than for domestic adoption
2. Intercountry Adopters are abandoning UK kids who need families
 - Many Intercountry Adopters have examined the possibility of domestic adoption but have been unable to progress this. The need in UK domestic adoption is predominantly for parents from ethnic minority communities or for more experienced parents or carers or those with particular skills and abilities to match the needs of children awaiting adoption in the UK. Most UK adoption agencies have numbers of prospective adopters who have been waiting for years to be matched.
3. Intercountry Adoption stops domestic adoption in sending countries
 - There is considerable evidence to show the opposite is true – by developing programs and procedures ICA can spur on families in sending countries to consider (domestic) adoption. Also the growing use of foster care in sending countries helps to provide non institutionalised child care provision for all children in care.
4. Intercountry Adoption is riddled with Corruption
 - Stories of illegality and unethical behavior in Intercountry Adoption are in truth aberrations and do not represent anything but a tiny proportion of cases.
 - There is very little hard evidence to support many of the claims made in the media. But as Joseph Goebbels said “If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.”
 - What is missing is a sense of perspective. One might read or hear a story where a parent performs perhaps the worst of all crimes and kills their children. “Society” and the great and the good don’t look at this story and say, “We can’t have biological family formation. We must change the laws to increase the

screening of birth parents”. This would be obviously ridiculous – but it is what happens in adoption.

- Whilst there may not be a proportionate amount of media coverage about what 99% of family life is like, we see the realities all around us all the time. We have a context in which to put the horror stories so we don't extrapolate from the specific to make sweeping assumptions about the entire institution.
- The reason it seems to me is because we, as individuals, “society” and the great and the good, have perspective.

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Appropriate Adoption language – a Style Guide

Overview

Increasingly society in general is becoming aware that the way in which we describe people deeply affects them. In the same way that it is no longer acceptable or possible to discriminate against people through race or gender or different ability, so the use of the words “adopted” and “adoption” requires a new context for their use. We would suggest that their use needs to be informed by those touched by the adoption triad (birthfamily/adoptive parent/adopted person) for the full import of their meaning to be conveyed to society as a whole and thus to be properly understood. For this reason we have prepared a guide which we hope you will find beneficial – and which we hope you will pass on to others who you feel may benefit from it.

Use of appropriate language in the media

The language that people use reflects what they think and can influence how we as a “society” view situations. Thus the use of words and phrases that are taken on with out due regard to understanding their underlying meaning and prejudices is no longer acceptable.

OASIS and its members believe that society needs to take a long look at its views on adoption, and Intercountry and transracial adoption in particular, and that writers and broadcasters in particular have a particular responsibility in listening to all those involved in the adoption triad and working with them to lead this re-evaluation.

In the U.S.A the Accurate Adoption Reporting group created a “style guide” for disseminating non-discriminatory adoption terminology to the media and we in OASIS acknowledge their work as the foundation to what we are putting forward today.

Fundamental principles

Adoptive families are normal families. This is the fundamental principle that underlies everything OASIS stands for and supports. It underscores our goal of the acceptance that adoptive families are just the same as any other family in their basic dynamics and in the eyes of the law – we are just as permanent, just as natural, we love each other just as much and in the same way and we

go through all the same trials and tribulations as every other family. Anything less is discriminatory.

It is so easy – and yet so dangerous and potentially damaging - for people (even inadvertently) to portray adopted children or adults as being somehow “different”, and not “regular” family members. It is pernicious to countenance the suggestion that adoptive families somehow fall short of the “norm”.

The biggest danger is to make assumptions and to overlay stereotypes. Rather, we need to realise and act on the fact that poor use of adoption language impacts harshly on ordinary families who happen to have been formed by adoption.

That is why we have put together this style guide to try to reveal some of the use of language that can damage so easily and to put forward some different alternatives for consideration.

Style Guide:

- ◇ Fundamentally, the only time the fact that a person was adopted should be mentioned is where it is essential to the meaning of a media piece – and in this case its relevance should be made clear, as with ability, gender and race issues. A child who joined a family through adoption is simply a child of that family – and deserves the dignity of being described as such. Adoption is an event in a person’s life: it is not a characteristic or trait.
- ◇ In situations where it is relevant, it is best to use the past tense as in “he was adopted in 1998” or “he was adopted aged 3”.
- ◇ Adoptive parents are just parents – father mother dad mum papa etc. An adopted persons other family members are similarly brothers, sisters, grandparents, cousins, aunts etc.
- ◇ The use of the words “real” and “natural” to describe genetic parents is fraught with difficulty – across all cultures and ages, classes and creeds, officially or unregulated, by relatives or neighbours or strangers, adoption has been recognised as the most natural and beneficial route to give a child a loving family. Adoptive parents are not fictitious or unsubstantial.
- ◇ Generally speaking it is easiest to refer to biological family as “birth-parents, birth-mother or birth-father etc.”
- ◇ Children who are available for adoption are usually not orphans and thus it is misleading to describe them as such, except where this fact has been established.
- ◇ No child should ever be described as “unwanted” and the phrases “abandoned” or “given up” are also problematical and should be avoided if possible. Depending on the circumstances it is better to be accurate and say “the birth-parents placed the child for adoption” or “the child was placed

in institutional care” rather than second guess the reasons for this happening.

- ◇ The phrase “...could not have a baby of their (or his or her) own” is simply wrong as well as being deeply hurtful. Children who enter families through adoption are just as much their parents “own” as any other child.
- ◇ The reason people came to adoption is very rarely relevant – in the same way you would hesitate to ask why a couple have undertaken fertility treatment so you should be wary of assuming why they have chosen to adopt. There are many ways to create a family and they are all equally valid – there is no second best. Many families have used more than one of these ways to build their families.
- ◇ Adoptive parents choose to do so because they want to be parents and build a family – but they are not abnormally selfless or “good” or “kind”. They (in the most part) are certainly no more saintly than the rest of society.
- ◇ Care should be taken when referring to the fees paid for services rendered in adoption so as not to create an impression of these fees being in any way related to the child or children in question. The use of words such as “buying” and “worth” create the dangerous impression that children have been commoditised.
- ◇ It should be noted that the same standards apply to all forms of adoption in the UK – domestic, intercountry, transracial, relative etc. and that the process is a long, detailed, invasive and intensive one. It certainly does not happen quickly or without significant efforts from the UK regulatory authorities or without a great deal of determination and dedication on behalf of the parents.

Please take the time to read this and pass it on to others whom you feel may benefit from it. Thank you.

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Press pack **OASIS Ethical Policy**

Part of our remit is to help develop the ethical nature of Intercountry Adoptions in the UK. As such we are one of the primary sources of information for prospective adopters, adoptive families, adoptees, other organizations and government. We also strive to educate and inform the adoption community about larger, global issues impacting adoptions, including improving ethics in the areas of advocacy, pre-adoption preparation, ethical adoption practices and post adoption support.

Intercountry adoption has a role as an option for children. Every day, around the world, children are placed into institutional care or are separated from their

birth families for a wide variety of reasons – illness, death, malnutrition, poverty, cultural or social pressures etc. For a small number of these, Intercountry adoption represents the only viable possibility to live in a permanent family, which is a fundamental right. However Intercountry adoption should never be the first or only option for such children whose best interests must always be paramount. Thus policy considerations must be balanced with effective and realistic practice that will serve the best interests of children.

Policy guidelines

- ◇ Adoption as a social and legal measure must ensure the creation of a family relationship and environment that satisfies all parties; child, birthparent and adoptive parent
- ◇ The best interests and rights of the child must be paramount but care must be taken to listen to and respect the wishes of birth parents and prospective adoptive parents and to consider the extent to which they correspond to the best interests of the child
- ◇ It should be available to any child who needs it without prejudice against race, religion, ethnicity, culture, social situation, physical or mental health
- ◇ All service providers in the UK or overseas should be competent and ethical. Where possible they should be subject to accreditation and inspection by appropriate national authorities
- ◇ A family is the best environment for a child's development. Priority must go to keeping a child in a family, other than in exceptional and justified cases, and a family must prevail over placement or long-term residence in an institution
- ◇ Permanent solutions must prevail over provisional arrangements for an undetermined time period
- ◇ Since the effects of inappropriate care escalate over time, adoption procedures should be carried out as quickly as possible without jeopardising the integrity of the process
- ◇ The legal adoptability of a child must be determined prior to starting adoption proceedings
- ◇ The adoptive family's capacity to parent must be determined by competent and experienced persons
- ◇ Pre placement preparation should not be seen wholly as an examination or evaluation process. There is a need to help prepare prospective parents to understand the long and short term implications of intercountry adoption
- ◇ Qualified post-adoption support services should be readily and immediately made available to families to ameliorate any problems which may arise
- ◇ The child should be kept informed and consulted in a manner appropriate to their age and ability
- ◇ Children have the right to as much information as possible about their history, and all authorities need to preserve any information or documentation and allow access to children on demand. The children also should be given professional counselling to support this process

- ◇ Adoption should not allow children to be abused or trafficked, however fees paid to service providers in the course of an adoption should be paid commensurate with the work carried out and the standards generally enjoyed by others engaged in comparable activities
- ◇ The transparency of the process and the use of monies paid is integral to ensuring proper and principled adoption processes
- ◇ Any abuse of the adoption process should be contested as strongly as possible and perpetrators rigorously prosecuted