

CHANGING YOUR ADOPTED CHILD'S NAME – FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Institutionalized children have “difficulty remembering new material as well as previously learned material”. (Perrin, Smith & Yule, 2000, in Beavers et al, 2006). *This would be one reason not to change a child's given name. Why make this harder on the child who is already struggling with processing difficulties because of the effects of institutional care?*

“We know that international adoption is an act of love by adoptive parents and sometimes an immediate solution, because, for many children death was the alternative. International adoption should be seen as an opportunity to solve some of these real and desperate problems for some children” (Hollingsworth 2003). *But we also realize that many children are available for international adoption due to an unjust social structure. Therefore it is our opinion that we must uphold the child's individual rights to identity and sense of self all the more vehemently when internationally adopted.*

“The United Nations Convention (1989) called on countries party to the convention to take action to demonstrate respect for the preservation of children's identity "including nationality, *name*, and family relations as recognized by law without unlawful interference" (Article 8, No. 1, p. 385). If a child is illegally deprived of her or his identity, countries party to the convention would be expected to provide measures necessary to assist the child in re-establishing her or his identity” (Hollingsworth, 20003). *Although it is legal to change a child's name upon adoption, we encourage adoptive parents to leave the child's first name intact. Matters of social justice cannot be addressed purely through legal processes, and we are encouraging the retention of the child's name, as part of his or her identity, remain intact as an ethical consideration.*

“According to the Hague Conference (1993), eligibility criteria to adopt internationally *would include an adoptive parent's ability to undertake the child's identity development* (Article 15, No. 1). Identity information about the adoption and the child's biological parents was to be provided to the adoptive parents. The central authority (the coordinating body representing the country in question) would consider a child's upbringing and "his or her ethnic, religious, and cultural background [in facilitating the adoption]" (Article 16, Nos. 1a & 1b, p. 1141)” (Hollingsworth, 2003). *We realize that a lot of information may likely be missing from a child's linkage to his birth parents or place of birth and see this as more reason to maintain a child's identity through his or her given name.*

Most reports indicate that trans racial adoptions occur for child-centered reasons rather than overt political agendas (Szabo & Ritchken, 2003). *We know that harm can occur if the child has a sense of alienation from one's original culture, so it is our opinion that keeping the child's name intact will help the child identify more fully with their culture of origin. Adoptive parents need to have a strong commitment to providing links to the child's culture of origin if they adopt trans racially.* It is known that at least 70% of

trans racial adoptions have successful outcomes (Szabo & Ritchken, 2003). *It is our hope that keeping a child's original name and sense of identity intact will improve the outcomes further.*

For children in trans racial families, their process of identity formation is different than for children raised in culturally and racially homogeneous families. These individuals require helping professionals trained in their unique needs of identity formation (Baden & Steward, 2000). A crucial factor of development is race and cultural identity development, and this is where extra care and attention is needed for international adoptees. Studies have found that their identity development needs can be met in integrated families with attention paid to these factors of identity development. "It is important to note that many children with impaired attachment and traumatic early childhood experiences, experience dramatic improvement [in] healthy loving attached families" (Johnson & Whiffen, 2003, as cited in Beavers et al, 2006, p. 2.).

It is our hope at CHOICES that you will consider the positive effects for your adopted child in relation to his or her name of origin, which has thus far helped in forming the child's sense of identity. Ignoring differences does not help the formation of the child's identity, but attending to them and embracing those does.

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Hollingsworth, L.D. (2003). International adoption among families in the United States: Considerations of social justice. *Social Work*. 48(2), pp. 209-217.

Szabo, C.P. & Ritchken, D.A. (2003). Short Communication: Race and family placement: a case report and review. *South African Journal of Psychology*. 32(4), pp. 60-63.