

Preparing Your Heart



When working with hopeful adoptive families, one of the most common questions I get asked is, “How do we prepare for an open relationship with a placing family?” My answer is somewhat unhelpfully vague but intentional. I encourage families to prepare themselves and their hearts to have a spirit of openness. Because every adoption triad is composed of unique individuals and circumstances, it is nearly impossible to give specific advice until a family is matched with their placing family and knows more about their specific situation. I find it is best for families to focus less on preparing for specific interactions with placing families and instead to focus on preparing their hearts and minds to receive the family with a spirit of grace, thanksgiving, and love.

If you take a step back and really think about relationships, every single one starts with strangers meeting for the first time (at some point.) Your spouse, your mother-in-law, your best friend; at some point, you were a stranger to them and had to work to build the relationship you have today. Some relationships are quick to strengthen, and some take time. It is important for hopeful adoptive families to give themselves grace when approaching this new relationship. Remembering that relationships take time to build and require shared experiences of all types before bonds can be formed and strengthened. I always encourage my families to lead with grace and love and allow their personalities to shine. Most often, placing families are just as nervous and anxious about this relationship as the adoptive family, and both parties will benefit most from a sense of grace and empathy.

During the home study process, most adoptive families undergo training and education relating to the reasons why many placing families choose adoption. I encourage my families to truly dive into this education and embrace a spirit of thankfulness regarding the placing family’s decision to choose life and adoption for their embryos. The Bible reminds us in *Philippians*, *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with **thanksgiving**, present your requests to God. And the **peace** of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* I find it much easier to handle situations of uncertainty when I approach them with prayer, and I thank the Lord for his presence in the midst of my weakness. As hopeful adoptive parents, it is easy to become overwhelmed by the unknowns of what a placing family may be like. Instead of dwelling on these unchangeable uncertainties, I encourage families to dwell on the

placing family's selfless choice, their strength, and sacrificial love and to dwell in an attitude of thanksgiving to the Lord for his presence in their lives.

One final thing I encourage both families to do as they prepare for openness is to cultivate a feeling of love towards one another. It is easy to be bogged down by fears. This makes the thought of openness very frightening and unappealing. The Bible tells us, however, that the Lord did not give us a spirit of fear, and he calls us to be rooted and anchored in love. When thinking of your matched family, I encourage families to pray for them lovingly. To pray that they feel the love of the Lord. It is much easier to approach a relationship with someone you feel love and empathy for them rather than fear and uncertainty.

While preparing for openness with a matched family is not a checklist to be completed or a formula to follow, I feel hopeful adoptive families can be very successful in cultivating a spirit of openness in their hearts by approaching the relationship with grace and empathy and allowing themselves to embrace a feeling of thankfulness and love for them and their decision. There is a Christian song that plays on the radio that I love called *Fear is a Liar*. I encourage all hopeful adoptive families not to let the fear of uncertainty lie to them and rob them of the ability to make a beautiful and long-lasting connection with their adopted child's family. Dwell in the Lord's power and ability to make beauty from ashes and create wholeness from brokenness. Adoption truly is a picture of the Lord's sovereignty and power.