

ROBERT G. LEWIS

Keeping our promise of a permanent home for every child.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?[©]

Volume 2, Issue # 3

JANUARY 2001

TOPIC: ADOPTION IS SHARED PARENTING

IDEAS: Adoptive parents eventually learn that all parenting is shared. Birth parents, foster parents, grandparents as well as adoptive parents, all are real parents. Attempts to replace one or deny the other are destructive to the children.

DISCUSSION: Adoptive parents often come to an agency looking for a child “to make their own”. That sense of ownership of children that pervades our culture and our legal system can lead even the most caring adults down an unreal thought-path of exclusive membership in one small family. As children mature and ask challenging questions about themselves and the past, parents learn that the other parents in their children’s lives are vitally important to them. Adoptive parents learn that they have not so much changed a child’s family as extended it in another direction.

Coming to the realization of their histories, adopted children reach back into the past and pick up those elements that have meaning to them. The influence of birth parents, foster parents and others can be profound. It isn’t what parents or professionals identify as strengths, but what a youth values that he/she reaches back for. Helping one’s child to draw on those parenting experiences without prejudice is a precious gift from parent to child.

When parents compete for the full “loyalty” of their children, they deny not only their own humanness (nobody’s perfect), but also the child’s right to develop him/herself. To force a child to abandon or deny the contribution, nurture and nature, from other parents adds conflicts, confusion and confrontation where the seeds for such difficulty may already exist. Parents and professionals try to control what is inherently beyond them. What can we do to help adoptive parents recognize that their parenting is not a

competition with the past? How can we help them learn that parenting, just like growing-up, is a process of discovery in the present and into the future?

WHAT DO YOU THINK?