
Surviving Pre-Adoption During the Holiday Season

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“Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul, and sings the tune -- without the words -- and never stops at all....” - Emily Dickinson

- I. **Purchase the book, “Adoption is a Family Affair”, by Pat Johnston and give it to your loved ones as a holiday gift.** Help infuse the people you are counting on to support you during your wait for your child – and long afterward – with information and awareness of the truths surrounding adoption. Spreading truth dispels fear and ignorance and gives your loved ones the tools they need to support you more effectively on the journey of adoption. Remember that your loved ones may have the same fears you once had before you sought out valuable education and information. Seek to share that same current and accurate information so your loved ones can better understand your special joys and challenges as you await your child’s homecoming.
- II. **Use Active Listening Skills.** When talking with your partner or loved ones about the adoption journey, your enduring wait time, your private hopes and dreams for your family, use active listening skills. When we love someone, we want to fix the problem, find the answer, stop the pain. So often, however, the most healing and supportive action you can take is to STOP. Then BREATHE. Then LISTEN. Ask some open-ended, non-judgmental and non-reactive questions, then listen. Don’t try to problem-solve. Instead use affirming statements like, *“This must be so difficult for you,”*, *“I can only imagine how you feel”*, *“Is there anything you’d like me to do?”*, *“What do you need from me right now?”*
- III. **Practice Using Respectful Adoption Language.** RAL is vocabulary about adoption which has been chosen to reflect maximum respect, dignity, responsibility and objectivity about the decisions made by birth parents and adoptive parents in discussing the family planning decisions they have made for children who have been adopted. Use this language during the season as a chance to focus on your outcomes and goals and how you will protect your child and caretaker your adoption over the years. Be an example for your partner, your family, and your friends who will learn by your example.
- IV. **Beware of the Deadline Syndrome.** Sometimes it may seem that the only way to survive a holiday season without your long-awaited child is to imagine the arrival of that baby by the same time next year.

As Linda Salzer writes, *“This deadline syndrome can bring a feeling of temporary hope, but it can also result in sadness and depression when you realize that the present moment is last year’s unfulfilled deadline.”* Hold fast to hope, but hold onto it without deadlines.

- V. **Find out who will be attending your family gatherings and events, and then decide whether or not to go.** You know your family and friends better than anyone. You are also experts on yourselves. You know what you need, and you know who can deliver and who can't. Do your research before blindly accepting all invitations. Are there a multitude of pregnant people or parents with newborns at the party you've been invited to? The family dinner? Summon the courage to withdraw temporarily from family traditions or gatherings that are painful. Give yourself permission to skip those events this year, but also give yourself permission to celebrate in others' joy if that is a way that helps you cope. There is no right or wrong, just different people with different needs. You are entitled to your own feelings without judgement from others. Be selective and choose events that are opportunities for you to receive much needed encouragement and support. Pass on those that will ultimately leave you feeling more empty than when you arrived.
- VI. **Journal.** Write your thoughts, feelings, ideas, hopes, and dreams down in a way that can one day be part of the Lifebook for your child. Children love opportunities to hear stories -- not just about how they joined your family -- but what you were doing while you waited for them to come home. Give them the details that they will revel in when they are old enough to understand everything you went through and endured because you believed one day your child would indeed find his or her way home to you. Don't censor. Write raw and real.
- VII. **Make self-care your #1 job.** Eat well, exercise, meditate, sing, dance, play, read, pray. Do whatever it is that lifts your burden and brings you peace.
- VIII. **Donate your time or resources to a charitable organization.** Give back to others to put your pain in perspective and give you a sense of community in the midst of your longing.
- IX. **Join a waiting parent support group, connect with your agency professionals, attend workshops, read books and blogs.** Stay open to the possibilities of meeting with others who uniquely and profoundly understand your feelings because they have walked a similar path.
- X. **BELIEVE that it will happen. Because it will.**

" DEAR EDITOR: I am 8 years old. Some of my little friends say there is no Santa Claus. Papa says, 'If you see it in THE SUN it's so.' Is there a Santa Claus?" "Yes, VIRGINIA,

there is a Santa Claus. He exists as certainly as love and generosity and devotion exist, and you know that they abound and give to your life its highest beauty and joy....”

Look for your child in the sun. Imagine him or her there. See him or her in your minds' eye. Feel him or her in your heart. Believe in your dreams, even on dreary days when the sun seems to hide from view. Even then, we know it is there.

