

Adoption—The day after

Adopting a child is a long process, and for many families, takes much longer than the customary nine months of pregnancy. The journey can start with fertility issues and years of riding an emotional, and often a medical, roller coaster. The search for a baby can be long and arduous but then the baby arrives and adoptive parents, like all new parents, have to learn how to jump into their new roles.

How to get to know your baby

All new parents have to learn how to read this tiny stranger, anticipate what makes them comfortable or unhappy, or learn the sounds and different meaning of their cries.

Adoptive parents often have extra worries. How much is known about prenatal care and birth history? With older infants and toddlers, there may be no information about what their baby has learned about the world so far—has this baby been held when she cried, fed when she was hungry, learned that people smile when she looks at them?

So what should adoptive parents do?

The basics of parenting are universal and it should be reassuring to adoptive parents that feelings of uncertainty and doubt, and even ambivalence, (as in, what have I done!) are experienced by many parents. Overcoming these early feelings and falling in love with your baby comes not only as you get to know her, but as you begin to believe that you can really care for her.

Some good first steps :

Paying attention—Your baby will teach you so much. Babies change our behavior as much as we change theirs so you may need to adapt your sleep or work schedule, your exercise routines just to accommodate this new baby. If your baby is a little older, give her a chance to get comfortable with a new environment, or if she was born in another country, bring in music or cultural artifacts and food that might ease her transition.

Pay attention to your feelings as well—especially the ones that sneak up on you in the middle of the night. It is not uncommon for adoptive parents to feel some “postpartum blues”. The intensity of the search for a child can be exhausting, and an adoption sudden, leaving parents overwhelmed even before they start parenting.

Be prepared—The lack of birth information can be an issue, particularly if there are behavioral or developmental concerns. Build a network of adoptive parents to support you and qualified developmental pediatricians who are familiar with the special concerns of families who adopt. In addition, everyone feels entitled to make comments about babies, which can range from confusion, if there are ethnic differences, or glowing statements about how the baby has her mother’s eyes and her father’s chin. Be prepared to handle the well intentioned but sometimes discomfiting statements of others.

