

book reviews

Adopted children speaking

Caroline Thomas & Verna Beckford
with Nigel Lowe & Mervyn Murch

British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering, London, 1999. 161pp. (www.baaf.org.uk)

Children are increasingly consulted in research about their own lives. Nevertheless, *Adopted Children Speaking* is still an unusual research report, in that a large part of it consists of the children's own descriptions of their experiences and feelings.

This is the report of a UK research project undertaken with 41 children who were adopted between the ages of 3 years and ten years (average age 6 years). It is a very interesting book for a variety of reasons. Firstly, there are many fascinating insights about the adoption process from the children's point of view; secondly, the description of the research methodology is clear and concise; and thirdly, the research team developed some lovely child-centred research 'tools', such as an 'Invitation Pack' (including a cassette tape) inviting children to participate, a consent form, prompt cards and a participation certificate. These are included at the back of the book.

The children's views are presented on every part of the adoption process – when they were first told about the possibility of adoption, the matching and introduction process, working on life stories, moving to the new family, going to court, contact with birth families and starting at new schools.

Some of the children's comments which stood out for me were:

On the beginning of the process:

Any child would be surprised if they knew their parents were going to give you to someone else (p.33).

On the introduction:

I wanted a family that would take care of me and not leave me alone. And when I want them, they always come. And feed me properly, and look after me, and be kind (p. 39).

On moving:

Meet new family, meet new friends, meet new cousins, meet new houses, meet new schools. Everything really. Meet a new world (p. 59).

On contact:

Like sometimes when we see (birth mother) you feel that you need to cry when you leave her and things, but you hold it in to be brave for everyone else ...I mean it's OK if you get used to holding your tears in, if you know you're going to see your Mum again ... (p. 96).

The book ends with a chapter which not only emphasises the importance of involving children in research which is about them, but also draws together the implications for practice inherent in the children's descriptions of their experiences. This is an excellent summary of what children need from the professionals who guide them through the adoption process.

This book is recommended for professionals who work in foster care and adoption; for researchers who plan to undertake research (of any kind) with children; and for adoptive and foster parents.

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We are family ... Sibling relationships in placement and beyond

Audrey Mullender (ed)

British Agencies for Adoption & Fostering, London, 1999. 344pp. (www.baaf.org.uk)

This book is another excellent example of the interesting, clearly written, practice-oriented books published by the British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering.

We are family is an exploration of the complexity of sibling relationships when some or all of the siblings are in out-of-home care. The contributors represent a wide range of experiences, professional and personal. The inescapable message of this book is that siblings are very important to each other, even if they have not lived together or, indeed, never met.

The first section of the book is an overview of the psychological research on sibling relationships (much of it North American); as well as an exploration of some of the factors which may or may not be part of any sibling relationship. For example, in Chapter 2, Elgar and Head describe nine different kinds of sibling relationships, based on variations of common genes; common legal status; and common history, family values and culture.

The second section of *We are family* looks at seven recent British research studies on sibling placements and