

# THE STAGES OF A PLACEMENT

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Pathways to  
Permanence 2

Parenting  
Children  
Who Have  
Experienced  
Trauma  
AND LOSS

Session 1

Parenting  
Children  
with  
Extra Needs

Parent's  
Toolbox

## For the Permanent Family

There are normative crisis responses that should be expected – as the permanent parent/s adjust to the new demands placed upon them. Professionals should assist these parents in realizing that their responses are due in part to the increased demands (especially emotionally and psychologically) placed upon them by the system and the needs of the child/ren. Many parents benefit from therapeutic support during the crisis stage of placement.

### Stage 1 The commitment to the fantasy (pre-placement)

- The parent is deeply committed to the ‘idea’ of adoption/parenting
- The parent is adamant about never giving up on a child
- The parent is critical of other parents/system
- The parent over-estimates their own parenting abilities/skills
- The halo effect is strong (I’m highly trained/knowledgeable, and I would never harm, yell, threaten, hit a child)

### Stage 2 The reality phase (placement) or crisis phase

- The bubble has burst, fantasy changed to reality
- I’m not the kind of parent that I imagined I’d be
- I’m much more angry/distressed than I thought I’d be
- This child is not my fantasy child
- I’m not sure I can do this (feeling emotionally depleted)
- This is much more difficult than I’d imagined
- I feel used (dual roles very emotionally demanding/conflicting)
- The system is placing too many demands on me (adjustment to new roles)
- I’m overwhelmed (I need help, support and guidance)

### Stage 3 The re-commitment to the reality

- I know what it takes to do this, and I’m committed
- I now realize how emotionally difficult this is (because I’m living it) and I’m willing to see it through to the end (adoption/reunification)
- Parent distress typically decreases as parent is open to support, mentoring, educational classes, etc.
- The parent’s expectations of self as parent decreases (I’m not perfect)
- The parent’s expectations of child decreases (they’re not perfect)

## What does the Permanent Family Need?

- Empathy
- Guidance
- Answers
- Therapeutic support
- Mentoring (someone who knows what I am experiencing)
- Education (classes/trainings)
- Support groups



## For the Adopted Child

There are normative crisis responses for the child being placed into an adoptive home. For the child, this is a life-altering experience, which presents an overwhelming emotional and psychological challenge.

- 1) **The commitment to the fantasy (pre-placement)  
(Yay I'm being adopted – what's adopted?)**
  - the child is excited about the *idea* of adoption
  - the child is eager to leave loss/pain/distress behind (“Yay, I get to start a new life.”)
  - the child is very unrealistic about how significant his/her life will change
  - the child thinks new life will be like visits (no demands)
  - the child is not aware of the losses they are about to endure
  - the child is unaware of the fear/sadness/anger that they will be feeling as a result of those losses
  - the child may start to show signs of distress (acting out behaviors) in an anticipatory response to move
  
- 2) **The reality phase (placement)  
(No, I don't want to be adopted – it hurts!)**
  - the child may work to “please” parent (honeymoon) for fear of being rejected (again)
  - child's distress may be overwhelming, as they are now suffering the loss of previous attachment/caregivers who were psycho-biological regulators (child cannot self-regulate)
  - I want to go back to my old life, “take me back to the group home”
  - child appears very emotionally reactive (as they now have to auto-regulate prematurely) – need new attachments to become secure
  - child will reject new parents – “I hate you,” “you're not my mom/dad” (a projection of their suffering)
  - child feels abandoned and rejected (many hide this deep emotional pain – and suffer in isolation)
  - “I'm in pain/distress – does anyone see my pain, does anyone care, does anyone know how to help?”
  
- 3) **The re-commitment to reality  
(OK, I accept my adoption – but I know now it's a roller coaster)**
  - the child begins to feel safe and secure in his new environment
  - the child experiences his needs being met (his parents have been consistent and responsive)
  - the child adjusts to the new structure and parenting style
  - the child appears more relaxed (less agitated/distressed)
  - the child talks about his/her future with his new family
  - the child experiences pleasure with parents, seeks parental approval
  - claiming of the child, assists the child in feeling a deep sense of belonging and connectedness to his/her new family