

# Woman's World



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**ADC**

pg 20 Know how to deal with falling in love at an older age

Afternoon Despatch & Courier

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>> Celebrities such as Tom Cruise (left), Angelina Jolie (centre top) and Katherine Heigl (right) have adopted children. Closer home, Sushmita Sen (centre bottom) is a proud mum to an adopted girl



## A WHOLE LOTTA LOVE

Angelina Jolie, Charlize Theron, Sandra Bullock and Sushmita Sen – what do these women have in common? They've all adopted and consider it one of the best decisions they've made. But, if you're planning on going that way, there are things to keep in mind. **Rhea Dhanbhoora & Gargi Bansod** bring you a beginners' guide to adoption

Angelina Jolie seems to be the ambassador for taking young children under her wing and celebrities such as Madonna, Charlize Theron and our very own Sushmita Sen are also proud adopters. "Adoption is becoming increasingly common and more people are receptive to the idea of adopting a child. However, the reasons for adopting vary from person to person. It could be because of a reproductive problem the couple has or because you want to provide a better life to someone who does not have the means for it. All in all, adoption is becoming acceptable to a larger segment of the population," says Dr. Samir Parikh, director of Mental Health and Behavioural Sciences at Fortis Healthcare. If you've decided that you want to adopt a child, read on to find out what you need to keep in mind.

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## WHY ADOPT?

Dr. Harish Shetty, a psychiatrist at Hiranandani Hospital, tells us that the reason most people adopt is to experience the feeling of being a parent, to enjoy growing with a child and feel secure about the future — to feel complete in a sense. Dr. Samir explains, "The main aspect is the need that all couples and individuals have of having their progeny, someone to take forward their legacy and who would take care of them in later years. Stemming from this strong desire to have children of their own, a lot of people turn towards adoption in situations where they are not able to have their own children." It doesn't matter what your reasons to adopt a child are. At the end of the day, it's a process that involves a lot of thought and patience, so make sure you have all the facts and discuss it with your partner before you make the big decision.

### PROS & CONS

It is a big decision and an unsettled mind is not a good sign in such delicate matters. So, we help you by weighing out the pros and cons of adopting:

#### Pros:

- You will be giving a child the greatest gift of all — a loving, nurturing family.
- The child will get a chance to fulfill his dreams and be financially capable to achieve them, something they can't always do in foster care or an orphanage.
- You'll gain a new family member and have the family that you've dreamed of.

#### Cons:

- Someday the child will want to know his roots and this will not be possible because of the strict privacy laws.
- Adoption sometimes creates a feeling of abandonment and anxiety in the adopted child that can manifest itself throughout their lives.

## KEEP IN MIND

There are a lot of things to keep in mind when you decide to adopt and as Dr. Samir says, "Adoption is a long process and for anyone who plans to adopt, it is essential to make a very conscious and well-thought out decision. It is important to be absolutely clear in your mind about the responsibilities associated with having an adopted child. Also, you need to be prepared to ensure that you do not allow this aspect to interfere with how you treat the child."

Learning to accept your children the way they are and staying away from over compensating is an important thing to keep in mind. According to Dr. Harish, parents should not be scared of sharing the truth with their adopted children. "Preparing the entire family for the adoption is also an important aspect that needs to be taken care of. This includes talking to your immediate as well as extended family, as the child who is being adopted should not be made to feel different by anyone around," Dr. Samir adds.



## ADOPTION AGENCIES

Here's a list of reliable adoption agencies whose door you can knock on to give a child a better life:

### • BAL VIKAS

**Where:** Valentine Complex, Off General ArunKumar Vaidya Marg, Malad (E) **Contact:** 8422802

### • BAL ASHA TRUST

**Where:** Anand Niketan, E. Moses Road, Mahalaxmi **Contact:** 4944090

### • BAL ANAND WORLD CHILDREN WELFARE TRUST

**Where:** Sai Krupa, 93, Ghatla Village, Chembur **Contact:** 5564914

### • CHILDREN OF THE WORLD TRUST

**Where:** 401, Arun Chambers, 5th Floor, Tardeo **Contact:** 4960032

### • INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR PROMOTION OF ADOPTION AND CHILD WELFARE

**Where:** Kanara House, Room No.7 Ground Floor, Mogal Lane, Matunga (W), **Contact:** 4307076

### • MISSIONARIES OF CHARITY

**Where:** Church Road, Vile Parle (W), **Contact:** 6184068

## OPEN AND CLOSED ADOPTION

Closed adoptions are those where the birth parents' identities or information are not disclosed and the privacy of all involved is carefully guarded. Open adoptions on the other hand, can mean that the adoptive parents receive information about the birth parents' histories and identities. They can even meet the parents in some cases.

## HAND OF THE LAW

The adoption procedure in India is shorter as compared to other countries. It doesn't take more than 4-6 months for the process to get going. The first thing to do is to register with a local Adoption Agency or with the State Adoption Cell. The agency will do a home study and decide if you are capable of rearing a child, in terms of your financial and emotional capabilities. Once a child is selected, then the paperwork starts and this involves permission from the courts. Once you have adopted your child, there are regular visits by social workers to check up on your family in order to ensure that the child is adjusting. This follow-up usually happens for a period of one year. Here are a few other things you must know about the process:

- In India, a single male is usually not eligible to adopt a child. Even in special cases, he can only adopt a male child.
- Adoption laws in the country actually differ according to religion and race. For example, if you're a Hindu, Jain, Sikh or Buddhist, you can formally adopt a child but not more than one of the same sex.
- If you're an Indian citizen of Muslim, Parsi, Christian or Jewish descent, you're only the

guardian till your child is 18-years-old.

- If you're a foreign citizen or NRI you have to, quite obviously, accept the laws of the country you reside in.
- You can write down specific details about the kind of child you want, which agencies have to keep in mind before showing you prospective children.

## CAN YOU ADOPT?

Here are a few things you need to be in order to adopt a child:

- Financially comfortable enough to support another person.
- The legal age (in India, it's 21-years-old).
- Medically fit enough to raise a child.
- Not older than 45 years.

## PREPARE YOURSELF

As much as you need to be financially prepared to bring in an adoptive child into your life, being mentally prepared is even more important. Dr. Samir says, "As a parent it is important to be prepared for the roles and responsibilities that are associated with being a parent. It is important that one understands the changes that a family undergoes with the entry of a child in the

house and be prepared for those changes. Parenting is a difficult task in itself and building patience is an absolute must. Be calm and take things slowly." Dr. Harish agrees, adding, "There should be a desire for nurturance. Once the desire is there then you should not block, but hug it."

What you can do to prepare yourself?

- Read, research and educate yourself as much as possible about attachment issues, transition ideas, adoption issues you may face now and in the future. Be prepared for the worst and hope for the best.
- Reading books about adoption and adoptive children helps a lot too.
- Network with other adoptive families whom you know of or find out groups for adoptive parents. Try joining online communities as well.
- Pick out baby names so that you already start thinking about your child. It'll gear you up for the child and the enthusiasm will make you want the child even more.

## TELLING OTHERS ABOUT YOUR DECISION

As much important it is for you to be prepared, preparing your family to welcome an adoptive child is a delicate issue. Telling them about your decision can lead to either extreme happiness or resistance. Dr. Samir says, "Be clear in your mind about the reasons that you are choosing to adopt and clearly elicit these reasons to your family and friends. Ensure that you communicate to them that all possibilities have been explored." Dr. Harish however believes there's a much simpler process. He explains, "You should share the news of adoption as you would share the news of the birth of your own child."

You need to be very careful while explaining to your biological children about bringing home an adoptive sibling because children are quite sensitive. "Children are children, so what applies to adopted, applies to biological as well. Honest, open and affectionate communication is the key," says Dr. Samir. Dr. Harish adds, "Make your biological child a part of the complete process. Take them with you to the agency and involve them in the adoption procedure."

## TELLING YOUR ADOPTIVE CHILD

Telling someone that he or she is adopted is tricky business. Dr. Samir and Dr. Harish give us a few tips on breaking the news:

- Be clear in your mind about the need to disclose that your child is adopted.
- Be sensitive to your child's emotional needs at that time.
- Be prepared to answer all questions and

ensure that your child understands that you think of them no differently than before they knew they are adopted.

- Take care of being more available to your child so that they feel as though they can talk about their thoughts and feelings about the adoption without worry.
- If you feel as though things are not working

out the way they should and your child is reacting badly, solicit the help of an expert psychologist to help with the process.

- The process should be a slow one and should be explained with a lot of sensitivity.
- At the same time, all your child's questions should be answered honestly to give them a sense of security.

