

# A Family For Every Child Matching Assistance



*"We should not be asking who this child belongs to,  
but who belongs to this child."*

## Phases of Pre-Finalization

You have been matched with a child and they have just moved in. You have 6 or more months before you can finalize, so what happens next? You may be a little apprehensive as to what to expect now that you are taking the final step in growing your family. This guide outlines the "normal" phases of pre-finalization. It's important to note that every family's experience is different, and your family may skip a phase. However, this information is helpful in preparing for the changes that will undoubtedly be coming to your family.



### *Phase 1: Getting To Know Each Other*

In this phase, you are engaging in your pre-placement visitations. Your child may be doing overnight visits with you, or you may be meeting up together in a public location like the zoo or the park. During this phase you and the child are getting to know each other. It's very important in this phase to help your child understand what life will be like in your home and provide some limits and structure. Doing this prep work will help make the transition a little smoother and allow the child to know what to expect.



### *Phase 2: The "Honeymoon" Phase*

You probably have heard of this phase from your pre-service training classes or other adoptive families: This is the time when everyone is getting along, there have been no issues, and life is perfect. During this phase everyone is excited and your child seems to be transitioning well. However, families need to be cautious during this time. At this point the child may still be trying to "impress" you so you don't "give them back". Your child will be on his/her best behavior and will do everything they can to please you. It is important that families continue to maintain consistency and structure during this phase. It may be tempting to let your child get away with little things because you don't want to "rock the boat" and start disciplining them. But this will only cause problems that will be hard to rectify later. You will want to remain strong and consistent from day one, no matter how tempted you are to do anything to get your child to like you. Remember: Attachments are not built in a day; they

take time.



### *Phase 3: Ambivalence*

During this phase your child will begin to test you. They will push all the boundaries and you to your limit. Your child will be struggling with a lot of conflicting emotions during this time. They will struggle with trusting you, but at the same time desire closeness. They will struggle with forming an attachment, but will fear being rejected. Your child may also be wrestling with feelings of disloyalty to their biological parents or former caregivers if they accept you as their parent(s). It can be a very confusing time for both parties, who are left grappling with many different emotions.

Parents will be having their own struggles during this phase, too. They may be questioning their decision to adopt the child, and ask if he/she is the "right" one? You may fear you made a mistake and took on more than you could handle. Parents may be afraid to talk to their partner, family or adoption worker at this time about their feelings for fear that they will be judged, deemed unfit to be a parent, and the child will be removed from the home. What you need to realize, however, is that this is the phase where you will need the most support. You need to be comfortable reaching out to your adoption worker or other trusted adoption professional and ask for help. If families cannot get through this phase, it is likely the adoption will disrupt.

You need to understand that this is a very normal phase in the pre-finalization process. Almost every family experiences the ambivalence phase on some level. Even in life, you probably experienced feelings of ambivalence during a major life change, perhaps during your relationship or following the birth of your child. Think back to how you made it through those uncertain times, and use that as motivation to work through the challenges that lie ahead. If you didn't give up when times were tough before, why give up now? Recognizing that you and your child may be experiencing feelings of doubt and anxiety will help you address the issue head-on and get the support both you and your child will need, and in turn making the adoption work.



### *Phase 4: Shared Interactions*

In this phase, families are finally establishing some routines. You have come to recognize and anticipate certain behaviors, and identify your child's needs. Your child may begin to start to trust you, and figure out where they fit into your family. You and your child start to bond and experience more good days than bad days and rejoice in small victories. Parents begin to believe that things will work out, and are content with taking it one day at a time.



### *Phase 5: Bonding*

Attachments between all family members continue to grow stronger. The child may be feeling that they are now part of the family, and they are more comfortable with accepting you as their parent(s).

[Source](#)



## Additional Information and Resources

**Adoptive Families** - [The Truth About Older Child Adoption](#)

**Adoptive Families** - [When Your Family Needs Help: Resources for Parents](#)

**Child Welfare Information Gateway** - [Finding and Using Post-Adoption Services](#)

**Child Welfare Information Gateway** - [Helping Your Foster Child Transition Into Your Adopted Child](#)

**Child Welfare Information Gateway** - [Impact of Adoption on Adopted Parents](#)

**Child Welfare Information Gateway** - [Selecting and Working with a Therapist](#)

**EMK Press** - [Realistic Expectations: The First Year Home](#)

**Ohio Child Welfare Training Program** - [Avoiding Pitfalls in New Adoptive Placements of Children with Special Needs](#)

