



By Alison Baugh

INCLUDING THE WHOLE FAMILY

My baby sister was placed in my arms as Mom sat next to me with tears running down her face, and Dad recorded it all on video. I knew this baby girl belonged in our family. We had started the adoption process two years earlier, and since then, I had been anticipating the time when I would no longer be an only child and we would have another member of our eternal family. Now that day had come!

Although there is a seven-year age difference between my sister and me, the transition from being an only child to an older sibling was easy. I attribute this to my parents' teaching me the importance of families and involving me in the entire adoption process. Following are some of the ideas my parents used to include me, the sibling, in the changes taking place in our family. If you

Adoption means big changes for the whole family. Here's how my parents helped include me in this special event.

choose to use any of these, you may need to adapt them for your own family needs and personalities, but they worked for us.

Be Open with Children

From the time they first met with a social worker at LDS Family Services, my parents were open with me about their adopting a baby and my having a new sibling. When they met with the social worker without me, they let me know what had happened. They explained to me things we wouldn't share outside our immediate family, and this helped me feel important and trusted. Although I asked questions that had answers too complicated for a five- or six-year-old, my parents gave answers that were appropriate for my maturity level.

When our social worker visited our home one day, he noticed a chalk drawing on our

sidewalk I had made a few days earlier of our family holding the new baby. While he was visiting with my mom, the social worker told me that he loved my drawing. He also told me that I would soon be able to put a name by the baby, as I had for the rest of us. I was ecstatic—he loved my picture!

Later, after my sister was adopted, my parents began doing presentations for LDS Family Services, and I was able to attend some of them. Hearing their testimony about how adoption had changed our lives helped me feel included in the entire process.

Let Children Know What Is Coming

Adoptions are generally more open than they used to be, and often the birth and adoptive parents meet and talk prior to the birth. Although we knew that a birth mother was considering our family for placement, we didn't know it was final until the social worker called us. The day we heard our good news began as any other day with my mom and me eating breakfast. Then the phone rang, and a new chapter began in our lives. Soon there were tears running down her face and she reached over to squeeze my hand and whispered, "We're getting our baby!" Her including me in that moment is something I will always cherish. We had to keep the news to ourselves for three days until we could pick up my sister—not an easy feat for a seven-year-old. (This was in case the birth mother changed her mind.) But again, it made me feel special and included.

Let Children Help Select or Create Gifts

If you're buying gifts for the new sibling or for the birth mother, I suggest including the older children. I drew my sister's birth mother a picture while my parents met with her and her family. I don't remember what I drew, but I do remember wanting to show her how grateful I was for what she had sacrificed for me to have a little sister. I was also able to help select some new clothes and toys for my sister to have when she came home.

Involve the Children in Welcoming the Baby

My most treasured part of the adoption process was seeing my sister for the first time. When hospital staff brought her into the waiting room, my parents let me be the first to hold

her. They even let me help choose her name. I felt like the luckiest big sister in the world. I also got to call and share the good news with extended family and friends. This was one of my favorite things, especially after having had to resist telling everyone the news that my sister was coming. My parents let me be a proud older sibling and show off my sister, which was something I had been awaiting for a long time.

Let Children Attend the Official Court Hearing

Following paperwork and a waiting period, adoptions are finalized at a court hearing. Because I was able to be there, I had a better understanding that the process was legally complete and my sister would *always* be a part of our family. Getting our picture in the local newspaper because ours was one of the first hearings in our district's new courthouse helped make the hearing even more exciting for me.



Alison and her sister, Kirsten, in February 1995.

Show Gratitude for the Temple Sealing

My family could be sealed in the temple just weeks after the adoption was made legal. My parents used this unique opportunity to instill in me a greater appreciation for the sealing power that allows families to be together forever. I'll never forget what it was like to be dressed in white, to look at our reflection in the mirrors, and to know my family could always be together. Since that time, I've known I will never settle for anything less than an eternal family in my future.

In the years since the adoption, my sister and I haven't been without the usual sibling rivalry, but I will always be grateful for the opportunity my family had to adopt her. I will also always be grateful to my parents for involving me in the process and making it a family affair. ■