

The New Family

FIVE CARDINAL RULES FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTS

- *NEVER THREATEN ABANDONMENT.* It is what the child expects, but no matter how hard he pushes for it, it is *not* what he wants. In the short term, threatening abandonment seems like an effective behavior modifier, but in the long term, it only raises anxiety and fosters more acting out.
- *ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR CHILD'S FEELINGS.* Never say to your child, "You shouldn't feel that way." Everyone has a right to his feelings. Feelings come from the unconscious. A person doesn't have to act on his feelings, and should take responsibility for his behavior, but feelings are what they are. They mean something and should be acknowledged and respected.
- *ALLOW YOUR CHILD TO BE HIMSELF* as fully as he is able. Withdraw expectations which are alien to his personality, proclivities, and talents and value his uniqueness.
- *Adoptive mothers: DO NOT TRY TO TAKE THE PLACE OF THE BIRTHMOTHER.* You both are your child's *real* mother; she the real biological mother, and you the real nurturing mother. The child can love you both, just as you can love more than one child.
- *As difficult as it is to acknowledge, YOU CANNOT TAKE AWAY YOUR CHILD'S PAIN.* He must work it through for himself. What you can do is acknowledge his feelings and provide the means by which he can work through his pain.