

**SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES IN ADOPTIVE PARENTING: CONTRIBUTIONS OF ADOPTION DOULAS TO THE COMMUNITY**

## APOIO ÀS FAMÍLIAS NA PARENTALIDADE ADOTIVA: CONTRIBUIÇÕES DAS DOULAS DE ADOÇÃO JUNTO À COMUNIDADE

## APOYO A FAMILIAS EN PATERNIDADE ADOPTIVA: APORTES DE LAS DOULAS DE ADOPCIÓN A LA COMUNIDAD

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**Abstract:** Services to the community with public policies to support adoptive families, children and adolescents who have already experienced ruptures in their family ties of origin, is the duty of the State and society, according to the Statute of Children and Adolescents. This article presents two actions of the Doulas de Adoção Brasil extension project that, since 2019, provide services to the community during the transition from adoptive parenting, with strategies of preparation, care and gradual transition, of children welcomed to the adoptive family, impacting in the bonds that will be built. The Approximation Program took place in partnership with a Childhood and Youth Court of the Court of Justice of São Paulo, during the Covid-19 quarantine, remotely and with the required health care, based on the planning of strategies to assist reception professionals and five new adoptive parents in transition during the approach of foster children up to one year old. The Adoption Conversation Wheel, started in 2019, with more than 40 meetings with suitors, adoptive families, professionals and the extended family, works as a preparation, guidance and support in the transition of parenthood

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and as an important sharing space to develop families' belonging . The two actions of parental guidance in adoption contributed to reflections, construction of adoption as a way of parenting and successful bonds between adopted children and new families. They also raise awareness of the importance of gradual, healthy and respectful social, community and family integration in the relationship between parents and children.

**Keywords:** Adoption. Parenting. Adoptive Family. Relations. Parents and children.

**Resumo:** Serviços à comunidade com políticas públicas de apoio às famílias adotivas, crianças e adolescentes que já vivenciaram rupturas de seus vínculos familiares de origem, é dever do Estado e da sociedade, conforme o Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente. O presente artigo apresenta duas ações do projeto de extensão Doulas de Adoção Brasil que, desde 2019, presta serviço à comunidade durante a transição da parentalidade adotiva, com estratégias de preparação, cuidado e de transição gradual, de crianças acolhidas para a família adotiva, impactando nos vínculos que serão construídos. O Programa Aproximação ocorreu em parceria com uma Vara da Infância e Juventude do Tribunal de Justiça de São Paulo, durante a quarentena da Covid-19, de forma remota e com os cuidados sanitários exigidos, a partir do planejamento de estratégias para auxiliar profissionais do acolhimento e cinco novos pais adotivos na transição durante a aproximação de crianças acolhidas de até um ano de idade. A Roda de Conversa de Adoção, iniciada em 2019, com mais de 40 encontros com pretendentes, famílias adotivas, profissionais e família extensa, funciona como preparação, orientação e apoio na transição da parentalidade e como espaço de partilha importante para desenvolver o pertencimento das famílias. As duas ações de orientação parental na adoção contribuíram para reflexões, construção da adoção como via de parentalidade e vinculações bem-sucedidas[1] entre as crianças adotadas e as novas famílias. Também conscientizam sobre a importância da integração social, comunitária e familiar gradual, saudável e respeitosa na relação entre pais e filhos.

**Palavras chave:** Adoção. Parentalidade. Família adotiva. Parentesco. Relações pais e filhos.

**Resumen:** Prestar servicios a la comunidad con políticas públicas de apoyo a las familias adoptivas, niñas, niños y adolescentes que ya han vivido rupturas en sus lazos familiares de origen, es deber del Estado y la sociedad, según el Estatuto de la Niñez y la Adolescencia. Este artículo presenta dos acciones del “Proyecto de Extensión Doulas de Adoção Brasil” que, desde 2019, ofrecen servicios a la comunidad durante la transición de la crianza adoptiva, con estrategias de preparación, cuidado y transición gradual, de niños acogidos a la familia

adoptiva, impactando en los lazos que se construirán. El Programa de Aproximación se realizó en junto con un Juzgado de Niñez y Adolescencia del Tribunal de Justicia de São Paulo, durante la cuarentena por Covid-19, a distancia y con los cuidados de salud requeridos, a partir de la planificación de estrategias para asistir a los profesionales de acogida y cinco nuevos padres adoptivos en transición durante el abordaje de niños acogidos hasta un año de edad. La Rueda de Conversaciones de Adopción, iniciada en 2019, con más de 40 encuentros con pretendientes, familias adoptivas, profesionales y familia extensa, funciona como una preparación, orientación y apoyo en la transición de la paternidad y como un importante espacio de intercambio para desarrollar la pertenencia de las familias. Las dos acciones de orientación parental en la adopción contribuyeron para reflexiones, construcción de la adopción como forma de crianza y vínculos exitosos[1] entre los niños adoptados y las nuevas familias. También sensibilizan sobre la importancia de una integración social, comunitaria y familiar progresiva, sana y respetuosa en la relación entre padres e hijos.

**Palabras clave:** Adoción. Crianza. Familia adoptiva. Relaciones. Padres e hijos.

## INTRODUCTION

With an emphasis on the principles of primacy, full protection, absolute priority and the best interest of the child and adolescent, as already advocated by the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (ECA) (BRASIL, 1990), the aim is to bring to society, especially to adoptive parents, the relevance of coexistence, affection, affection and attention when proposing, as a protective measure, a gradual transition from foster care to the adoptive family (MARTORELL et al., 2020). Contrary to common belief imagined, the bonds built in family or foster/institutional care facilitate the attachment to the Adoptive Family (IFH, 2019). It is crucial for the Adoptive Family to understand that family and community life, in addition to being a fundamental right of children and adolescents, more effectively provides for integral development, healthy growth and personality building, thus ensuring the dignity of child and adolescent (BRASIL, 1990; IFH, 2019; SCHETTINI, 2006; PEITER, 2016; WEBER, 2015).

Adoption is a complex process that mobilizes multiple emotional, social and legal actors and systems. According to Souza (2008), the culture of adoption underwent significant changes throughout the 20th century. In Brazil, the first legal frameworks emerge with the

Civil Code of 1916 and later modifications with the Code of Minors in 1927. However, it wasn't until 1990 that the National Council of Justice (CNJ) was established as the central body of control and strategic planning of the Judiciary, advocating for well-being of the child and adolescent with the enactment of Law number 8.096 (BRASIL, 1990) which establishes the Statute of Child and Adolescent. This law ensures the full protection of the rights and desires of children and adolescents. While some cases still involve charity as the primary motivation for adoption, the adoption culture has seen significant changes with the recognition of children and adolescents as subjects with rights and desires.

However, even today, adoption is surrounded by concerns, fears and prejudices that prevail in the common perception. The lack of knowledge about what adoption truly entails as a form of parenting affects many prospective parents and adoptive parents who, throughout the process, encounter specificities and undergo psychosocial challenges in adoption (SCHETTINI, 2017). Families report feelings of loneliness, helplessness, incomprehension, and lack of social and family support when expressing their intentions and when the formation of the family through adoptive affiliation is finalized (PEREZ, 2022; SCHETTINI, 2006). Doubts and ambivalent feelings also permeate the relationship between prospective parents and adoptive parents and the professionals of the Childhood and Youth Court teams (SCHWOCHOW AND FRIZZO, 2021) who carry out the assessment for family eligibility in the adoption process, as well the placement of the child in Adoptive family. Moreover, the post-adoption follow-up, which should ideally occur more closely, often lacks adequate human resources within the judicial system, leaving families without support during the transition to adoptive parenting.

According to Lalayants (2020), post-adoption support services can be categorized into different types: educational, informative, clinical, and material. Educational and informational services provide prospective parents with information about their child, the current adoption landscape in the country, and the adoption process itself, including actions offered through support groups, literature, and connection with other relevant services. Post-adoption services can be either informal or formal, with informal supports services provided by friends, family, parent support groups and reference services, while formal supports include clinical services, adoption subsidies and crisis intervention.

The gaps in the public service system in Brazil are filled by both formal and informal support services, carried out by civil society with specialized professionals and volunteers. Their objective is to provide information and support for prospective parents and guidance for

adoptive families, promoting adoption as a legal form of parenthood, in the best interest of the child and adolescent. Moreover, adoption support services aim to reach broader audience, encouraging active participation from individual who can contribute to the new culture of adoption (MISSIO AND MISSIO, 2021), supporting prospective parents and adoptive families, and ensuring that children and adolescents have the right to family life through reintegration into a new family when applicable. Thus, the formation of society that supports adoption is essential to reduce the challenges and conflicts experienced by adopted children, adolescents and adoptive families as a whole.

The Adoption Support Groups Movement, as members of civil society, has been organizing for over twenty years with informative and educational activities. They also collaborate with specialists to support through group session and support circles for the preparation of prospective parent and families during pre- and post-adoption period (MISSIO AND MISSIO, 2021).

In line with public policies that promote extension projects, research, and studies, as well as support groups, psychological support, therapy, and spaces for exchange, these support services contribute not only as educational and informative groups but also as emotional and/or therapeutic support in spaces of care. They provide listening and offer the possibility for individuals to express their feelings and thoughts. According to Perez et al. (2022), it is in these support spaces, such as adoption support groups, that individuals could discuss doubts and often cope with internal and external pressures from family, friends, and society in general regarding the decision to become parents through adoption. These actions should be implemented and structured to support prospective parents and adoptive parents in the post-adoption phase, as well as their children. Originating from Greek, the word “Doula” means “woman who serves” – it refers to a trained professional who accompanies, guides, and offers emotional support during transitional moments in our lives. This professional accompanies all paths to the birth of a family, including adoption, and can provide physical and emotional support to families, before, during and after the adoption process (MURADAS AND AIELLO, 2019).

Therefore, the Adoption Doula is a professional trained by the Doulas of Adoption Brazil Institute, a private institute for education, research, and extension, which works to guide families on the legal specificities of the psychosocial adoption process. With the purpose of humanizing the parenthood process through adoption, the Adoption Doulas

provides support and validating of the emotional and social aspects of families, including the changes involved in their various phases: decision-making, preparation and post-adoption. Throughout the adoption process, they engage in parental guidance practices and provide qualified emotional support to facilitate the best possible adaptation between the Adoptive Family and their children (MURADAS AND AIELLO, 2019).

The Adoption Doula can play a role as an intermediary in the transition process of the adoptive family, support doubts about child transition from Foster Family or Institutional Foster Care and entering their forever home with their adoptive family. Sensitive is an essential skill of the Adoption Doula, enabling empathy with each member of the family and understanding the current scenario of the Adopting Family, the adopted child and the foster setting (MURADAS AND AIELLO, 2019).

This is because, in general, the child or adolescent who was been in foster care has a history of abandonment, losses and possible violence that can negatively impact their development if not reinterpreted, whether through the way words are used or how adults who care for then recount the real events experienced by the fostered children. These factors are significant in determining their psychological marks related to certain events ((MARTORELL et al., 2020; PAIVA, 2004; PEITER, 2016 ). Similar, the adoptive family also has its own history, which may involve a long waiting time, frustrations and losses. Therefore, it is essential to provide individualized and attentive attention that experience of the child regarding to their entire history (PEITER, 2016). The Adoption Doula plays a critical role in guiding the Adopting Family with concrete knowledge according to the legislation and scientifically grounded studies, while also providing support and empathy, as they are there to lend a helping hand, share knowledge, encourage, and offer comfort.

Therefore, the participation of Adoption Doulas is relevant in what may be one of the most vulnerable moments for some adoptive parents: the transition from parenthood when the child arrives in their new home. Given that the desire and anticipation for many years can be accompanied by frustrations and disappointments, undermining the sincerest commitment of the parents and potentially leading to adoption disruptions, this transition is a delicate and complex moment for both children and prospective parents (IFH, 2021 ). Ghirardi (2015) describes that the suffering experienced by adoptive parents is a consequence of excessive high expectations placed on the adoption and the child and adolescent, resulting in feelings associated with failure.

Data from the National Adoption System (SNA) published by BBC News (G1, 2022), indicate that in 2020, 401 (8.7%) out of 4,609 adoptions initiated were interrupted and resulted in the child being returned. In 2021, out of 4,183 adoptions initiated, approximately 363, also 8.7%, were returned during the cohabitation stage. This refers to situations where a child or adolescent leaves foster care to be adopted and live with the adoptive family, but it returned to foster care during the cohabitation period. Preliminary data from 2022 show that the percentage is decreased to 3.8% or 62 out of 1,613 adoptions initiated. Although these numbers are still relatively high, the trend from 2020 to 2022 indicates a decrease in disruptions, but they still occur in Brazil. With more information, listening, exchanges and reflections, it is believed that these numbers will continue to decrease. Furthermore, such cases can be even more significant when we consider irregular adoptions, that are not regulated by the SNA, as they may cause deeper scars for the adopted children and adolescents.

This article aims to share the actions of a communities service belonging to the Doulas of Adoption Brazil Project, carried out between 2019 and 2022: the Approach Program and Adoption Conversation Circles. The Doulas of Adoption Brazil Project aims to guide, support, and embrace families in the process of transitioning to adoptive parenthood, promoting healthy parental relationships, and contributing to the awareness of successful adoption in society. The Adoption Doulas complement the adoption support network, along with psychologists, support groups, professionals, and various institutions. Being aware that they are part of a very special moment in people's lives, the expansion of a family and the establishment of new caring bonds for children and adolescents in vulnerable situations, the participants of the Adoption Doulas Project believe in the importance of providing information, exchanges and reflections. Thus, with increased strength, awareness and security, prospective parents and new families will be better equipped to realize their adoption plans. Ultimately, this approach also increases the likelihood of providing good families for the children and adolescents, which is the primary goal of adoptions.

## **MATERIAL E METHODS**

This article aims to present two projects that were designed to meet community demands: the “ Approach Program and the “Adoption Conversation Circles”, which are part

of the Doulas de Adoção Brasil project. The present results pertain to the qualitative description of the actions developed based on the identified needs.

The Doulas de Adoção Extension Project began in 2019 with the realization of the first in person Adoption Conversation Circles in active maternity and parenthood spaces in the city of São Paulo. From these meetings, the project was structured to include research, education and support for families at any stage of the adoption process. Its purpose is to guide, support and embrace adults who have been adopted, prospective parents preparing for the arrival of their children, as well as parents in the transition and during the transition and bonding of the new families through adoption.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Approach Program**

The Approach Program was developed in partnership with the technical team of one Childhood and Youth Court, jurisdiction of São Paulo. The demand arose during the quarantine in the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2), in 2020, when in-person visits were halted for several months and later resumed remotely. During this period, professionals and families had many questions regarding the socio-cultural context of conducting safe and successful remote visits between adoptive parents and children under one year of age in institutional care.

A group of three Adoption Doulas professionals collaborated in the planning, organization and executing the Approximation Program aiming to assist adoptive parents and guide professionals from the hosting institution in the transition of children to the adoptive families. Five legally approved heterosexual couples in the National Adoption System were assisted, who were called, via SNA, to initiate the adoption process with the children in institutional care. Among the five assisted families, three adopted children were previously under the care of municipal Foster Families and two were in an Institutional Foster Care Service (SAICA).

The program was developed as a community identified by the technical team of the Court, providing a space for adjustment and reorganization in the face of challenging context of adoption during the pandemic. It also offered reflection, listening, emotional support and relevant content curation for each family.



The program conducted five remote meetings through the Zoom application, each lasting 1.5 hours, with three families opting for individual sessions and two group meetings lasting two hours each, in which all five families participated. The meetings served as a means of sharing experiences, feelings, and reflections among peers going through the same stage of adoption, and all participants also joined a messaging group (WhatsApp) to share thoughts, challenges and doubts. At the end of the program, each family was provided with the opportunity for continued assistance and possible referrals to public support services.

The first action of the program was the development of an orientation letter introducing the Doulas de Adoção project, the Approach Program and providing guidelines on how to conduct the transition of the child from the care institution to adoptive family during the pandemic. This letter was made available to the adoptive family and the SAICA professionals responsible for the cohabitation stage between the children and the adoptive family.

During the initial contact with the families, the support service for adoptive families with the Doulas de Adoção project was present, which aimed to support all those who wish to experience parenthood through adoption and offer support to families waiting for their children, those in the cohabitation process, and those who already have their children at home. The Approach Program was also introduced, developed in collaboration of the Childhood and Youth Court of one Court of Justice of São Paulo, to assist children and families in the process of forming families through adoption during this complex time of the pandemic, through group sessions and individual consultations to ensure they receive support in building new bonds.

Guidance was provided regarding the objective of adoption, following the new culture of adoption, which aims to ensure the right of every child to grow up and be educated within a family, according to the best interests of the child and adolescent. The Statute of the Child and Adolescent states that children/adolescents need to be gradually prepared for adoption and have the right to know about their adoption process (BRASIL, 1990). Therefore, the role of the child's reference caregivers in preparing them for adoption was emphasized, providing a previously thought-out and structured space, conversations with the child about the new adults they will meet as their new family, and a gradual approach that encompasses the processing of changes resulting from adoption (IFH, 2021).

The meetings centered around the transition and adaptation of children and families. Reflections were made on the importance of a slow and respectful transition, which involves preparation the child and the adoptive family, making necessary adjustments and reorganization of dynamics, of life, including emotional and financial planning and mobilizing the support network, among other changes.

The development of each step of the gradual approach plan was reviewed each week, considering the reality and context of each family, child and institution. Essential restrictions and precautions were considered during the pandemic, along with the need for social distancing. The reflective process of each step of the cohabitation experience had a positive result in terms of all involved feeling more secure and supported in sharing their doubts, complaints, and concerns, which reflected in smooth transitions for all when approached gradually and with support.

The child's departure from the care institute is a delicate moment, filled with contradictory feelings. While professionals and children may feel joy for the child leaving, they also experience sadness and longing (IFH, 2021) . The child, too, experiences various feelings during this transition, such as joy, fear, suspicion, and sadness. Therefore, it is important to take care for and plan this moment. Regardless of the child, they need adapt to a new environment, to other figures of affection and security and to different ways of relating. Even a young baby will encounter a completely different environment, other people, touches, scents, objects - everything changes, and the baby will need time to adapt to these changes.

The period of the child's approach to prospective adoptive parents regardless of how long it lasts, is a privileged time for the care service team to exchange information and talk about the child. The more information about the child, their history, personality, habits and routine, the better for their later adaptation to the new home.

Based on the experiences of the professionals involved in the Approach Program, transition strategies were developed and shared with families in group and individual meetings. One of them refers to respectful communication with the child, who, regardless of age, needs to be informed about what will happen to them. Therefore, service professionals were instructed to talk to the child about the future adoption, anticipate the first meeting, and later talk about the farewell, as well as expressing that they will miss them, if applicable. Words name and and give meaning to the lived experiences, and they are essencial to provide security to the baby leaving the care service.

Regarding communication, guidance was provided about the importance of saying farewell, allowing the child to say goodbye to all shelter professionals, the other children, their school (if applicable), and other figures that were important to them during the period of care. If, due to isolation, this was not possible, educators could send videos and letters to the baby, or even make video calls.

Some families share their concerns about their child's belongings. We discussed the importance of the team can organizing the child's belongings to take to the new home: a suitcase with objects that are significant and important to the child, such as favorite toys, clothes, security blankets, pillows, pacifiers, bottles, etc. Clothes, crib sheets and pillows carry a familiar scent that is crucial to provide some continuity in the new home. Therefore, they can and should be offered to the Adoptive Family so that their belongings accompany them during the transition and arrival in the new environment, their new home.

And yet, one strategy indicated in the Approach Program was the use of the life story album with the use of images. In this album, photos of the time the child spent in care, pictures of all caregivers who took care of them, records of the shelter, their room, and play area, among other thing, we organized. (IFH 2021; 2022b). Educators can also use the album to leave notes and notes. Other photos and videos can be saved on a pen drive and made available to the Adoptive Family.

An alternative to the album, it is possible to create a treasure box with memories of the life story, the birth family and the time in care. This box can hold objects that represent special moment, routines, preferences, records of the new family's meeting with the child and representations of each one's life story. It's important for the child to participate in some part of this process, but it can also be used to aid the transition during each visit in the approach process. The box can also contain an album with the family's history, photos of significant moments from the past, present moments the family is experiencing, or experienced during the waiting process.

An object can even be created, such as drawings, writings, collages and frames with clay. It is important to identify what the child's preferences and tastes to leave materials that they can easily access to express themselves between meetings or when they are together during the approach. Some examples are a photo or drawing those records ta trip to the park, the child's favorite toy or book from childhood, creating a recipe book with their favorite food, or a notebook that tells something about their life through collages, drawings and more.

The box can be used initially after each meeting, and new objects can be added to share throughout the approach in care and also in the new home.

Finally, farewell rituals are a symbolic way of marking an important transition. Especially on the day of departure, it was recommended to prepare some symbolic activity to mark the passage from one place to another. Marking the farewell is fundamental and shows that during the child's time in care, they were loved, protected and built important bonds of affection (IFH, 2019, 2022a). Each care service and family can create or find their way of saying goodbye and marking the transition, but it is essential to have this moment, both for the child leaving and for the children staying in care, and also for the adults who have cared for this child until then. Just as there is a ritual to mark the arrival of the child in the new home, it is important to take care of how the new environment in which the child will live is narrated and presented - the climate, the place, the details. We advise avoiding meeting with many people in the few days and in the first month, not only due to the pandemic, but also to support the child's attachment and bonding with the new parents before introducing new family members.

The child or adolescent farewell is considered one of the most delicate moments of the care process, involves various intense feelings - it would be ideal if these feelings always left a lasting trace of care and affection in the trajectory of those involved. involved (IFH, 2021, 2022a). In this process, the Adoption Doula assists the Adoptive Family in recognize, validating and reinterpreting these feelings.

Other topics that arose in the Approach Program meetings with families in transition included: Motivation for adoption; Conjugal family history (couple); History of waiting, active waiting and preparation; Transition to parenthood; Relationship with the VIJ technical team and the care institution; Building a bond with the child; Adaptation of new parents, post-adoption period and puerperium; Visiting the shelter: first contacts, contact with other children; Care and transition; Getting to know the family and their issues; Emotional and environmental preparation in organizing life for the arrival; Child/adolescent 's adaptation to the new home: arrival, first overnight stay and first days: challenges, fears and expectations, the child's and parents' views of the first experiences; Extended family visits; Racism, colorism, interracial families.

## **ADOPTION TALK CIRCLE**

The second action of the Doulas de Adoção extension project to the community refers to the Adoption Conversation Circles as part of a movement from civil society that organizes support and discussion groups, both before and after adoption. With monthly frequency and an average duration of two hours, the Adoption Conversation Circle serves as a service available to the entire community, providing a space for sharing experiences, both successful and challenge ones.

The Adoption Conversation Circle is part of the participatory methodologies that have a long history in humanity (AFONSO E ABADE, 2008). Its aim is to encourage participation and generate reflection, fostering a deeper understanding of adoption, considering psychoemotional, social and legal aspects, in accordance with the ECA (Statute of the Child and Adolescent). Participants often express surprised upon realizing that it is not a lecture or a class, but rather a space for them to discuss their family project, their choices, motivations, doubts, and concerns regarding the adoption process.

The content of the Adoption Conversation Circles is structured bases on the group's questions and how well the group can process it (AFONSO E ABADE, 2008). The central theme of each session is not predetermined bus emerges during the meeting connected to topics related to the role of the Adoption Doula's, such as the transition to parenthood, building bonds and adoption as a legal, secure and permanent choice. The depth and pace of adoption-related discussions in the Adoption Conversations Circle depend on the participants present. It involves sharing new or unknown information to the group and sometimes the challenging preconceived notions about adoption, as participants share their perspectives, thought processes, associations and values related adoption that support the role of Adoption Doulas.

Therefore, Adoption Conversation Circles do not have a pre-defined theme, and the topics that arise are explored in this open space for exchange and reflection. In each meeting, the participants bring to the group what their thoughts and feelings, what they want to share, their pain, anxieties, reflections and doubts. The conditions provided in the Adoption Conversation Circles align with the objectives of the Adoption Doulas to providing empathic listening, humanization and reliable information to the participants according to the content they wish to share.

Unlike a lecture that focuses on sharing a lot of information and knowledge from one person, the exchange in the Adoption Conversation Circles allows a small amount of content

to generate much more reflection and the exchange of knowledge and experiences among more people. The Adoption Conversation Circle takes place in a context where people can express themselves in a participatory manner, using literary or playful resources that invite involvement in participatory dialogue (AFONSO E ABADE, 2008).

Each meeting is facilitated by a pair of facilitators, adoption doulas, who take care of the space, the participants, active listening and support. From 2019 until August 2022, there have been more than 40 meetings, whether in person or online. The in-person meetings took place in parenting spaces, clinics and offices, while online meetings are conducted via the Zoom application. The Adoption Conversation Circles have welcomed over 1,400 participants from various states in Brazil and other countries around the world, Portuguese speakers. These include individuals interested in adoption, qualified and waiting prospective adoptive parents, parents from diverse family configurations, those in transition and attachment, grandparents, uncles, professionals from companies and support services, all seeking reliable guidance, a safe space to share their anxieties and doubts, and finding empathy, active listening and a sense of belonging. It is a space for the construction and redefinition of parenthood through adoption that encompasses the whole society.

The space is carefully attended to, ensuring that all participants can engage and feel included. Additionally, the Adoption Conversation Circles curate reliable themes and references that will be part of the preparation and training process, contributing to the adoptive mindset of those wishing to adopt, those in any phase of the adoption process, or those who have already adopted, as well as extended family members and members of the community in general, to promote legal, secure and permanent adoption.

## **DISCUSSION**

Adoption involves specific and distinct aspects compared to biological parenthood, among many, highlighting the fact that people who adopt or wish to adopt experience this process alone and do not share this journey with family or friends. This is because, most of the time, it is quite exhausting, and one does not know when it will end. Additionally, it can be quite difficult to talk about the impossibilities and the desire to have a biological child (PEREZ, 2022).

In these spaces among peers and in a circle, prospective adoptive parents report feelings of loneliness, helplessness, misunderstanding, and a lack of social and family support

when they express their intentions and when the family formation takes place through adoptive affiliation (PEREZ et al., 2022; SCHETTINI, 2007). Ambivalent feelings that permeate the relationship between applicants and professionals from the Childhood and Youth Court teams are also shared (SCHWOCHOW AND FRIZZO, 2021). This is because during the interviews, which have an evaluative nature, they do not feel sure to show who they really are, feel, or think, as it is the moment to decide whether they are able to adopt (PAIVA, 2004). On the contrary, they feel examined, invaded, and even blamed for their inability to bear a biological child, when applicable. After qualification, the teams do not provide feedback on how their processes are going, and there are no spaces for exchanges and resolving doubts, fears, and misgivings. Schwochow and Frizzo (2021) review the different feelings that permeate applicants in the various stages of the adoption process, from pre- to post-adoption, such as anguish, discouragement, loss of control over the process, frustration, among others.

In spaces such as the Adoption Conversations, adopters found, together with other people, conditions, sometimes similar, and the possibility of sharing the feelings and emotions that are present. In this way, the support offered to adopters is important subsidies for the construction of a psychic space in the dynamics of the couple and/or family and will allow the newly arrived child or adolescent to occupy the condition of a child and, in the relationship with the new parents, constituting oneself as a subject (IFH, 2018).

An important stage that the Adoptive Family must go through as soon as they receive the child in their home – is learning to be a family – because, more important than the school experience and living in society, is learning to be a father, mother and child. Understanding that the child will only learn to be a child when the parents learn to be parents. For this, the adopted child needs to feel safe, supported, welcomed, in all its specificity, understanding that the parents accept him the way he is. Along the same path, it is also necessary to learn to listen to him, validating his story and his feelings resulting from everything he has gone through. “The first two years are the most challenging - it is the adaptation period - in which the family should not be so concerned with the school report card, but with the affection report card, the bond report card, the reception report card” (SCHETTINI, 2020).

Children and adolescents need to adapt to a new family environment, with different references of affection and routine, they can be contemplated with the reflexes of doula caring process. The Adoption Doula, considering each challenge inherent to the changes that have

occurred, helps the family, and each member, in working out the mourning related to their losses. The unfolding of each entanglement takes time, and each person will take their own, in their individuality. When the feelings are repaired, the Adoption Doula will contribute even better regarding parenting issues.

Considering the life story of the child or adolescent is crucial, as it facilitates the initial relationship between parents and children and will ensure the emotional health of all of them. In addition, it enables the development of the child's sense of belonging to the family, also collaborating with adaptation to the household routine. Levinzon (2020) points out that some parents, when they do not feel that the bond of belonging is firm, may face difficulties with the discipline of their children, being either too permissive or too demanding.

Intermediating in this bias, the extension actions of the Doula de Adoção Brasil project favor the elaboration of a more peaceful adaptation, when it helps the family to recognize the particularities of the newly arrived child, such as the routine and schedules, what makes him happy and what dislikes, likes and dislikes, favorite things and specific needs.

With active listening, the adoption Doula is able to reorganize the collected reports and ideas, and pass them on in a clearer, more objective and meaningful way for each situation, whether in a specific program such as the Approximation Program, or in meetings monthly Adoption Conversation Roundtables. You can also guide with tools that facilitate the construction of bonds and a communication channel, such as the construction of records, such as albums and diaries and reading mediation. Getting to know the child and the story he carries through the album can facilitate the initial interaction between parents and children. In addition, when this story is unknown to the adoptive parents or conveyed only by the actors of the judiciary, the colors given to it can have a unique tone, sometimes a dark tone. From ignorance or the single version of only part of those involved, fanciful, prejudiced and stigmatizing ideas arise (IFH, 2022b).

Each transition process is constructed by valuing the importance of the uniqueness, needs and possibilities of the families and the foster child who is about to be adopted. A cautious transition presupposes listening to and understanding the reactions of the child or adolescent and supporting them in working out their feelings (IFH, 2019).

In practice, there are reports in which the child and adolescent only express themselves when they feel safe with the adult and, therefore, some stories will only be received by the Adoptive Family after the adaptation period. Once again, the importance of



the feeling of belonging to the family emerges and develops. What may seem surprising, has a positive point in the context and is the issue of trust, because the child now starts to trust someone, who welcomes and understands him, so he can express himself. (SCHETTINI, 2020).

Therefore, the adoptive attitude is crucial in the adaptive process, understood as the action of asserting the best interest of the adopted child, by inserting him in society (SCHETTINI, 2020). In the same vein, when the child and adolescent are adopted, other support and care figures, such as the extended family and the school, can and should be involved, so that, together with the parents, they can prepare to receive them, as well as update yourself with necessary knowledge. All adults who care for and refer to the child can participate in the actions, to obtain emotional security, belonging and awareness in favor of legal, safe and forever adoption and as a way to encourage, encourage and accompany the family in this process. And, when the subject of adoption is contemplated with friends and extended family, at school and in the classroom, considering the many forms of contemporary families that exist, it will also be contributing to the transformation of a more humane society – this is an adoptive attitude - a differentiated look to meet the demands of adoptees.

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Considering that the transition time from one story to another is not immediate, the child is unable to assimilate the present with the past and future. In this context, Schettini (2020) points out that adaptation is the bridge until the child reaches the other side. It can be understood that a constructive process is needed, which repairs, aligns, and adapts the historical line with the cognitive development of the adopted child during the adaptive period.

In this sense, both the Approximation Program and the Adoption Conversation Circles served as a bridge and contributed to constructive reflection on adoptive parenting. In this way, they functioned as active mechanisms in preparing suitors, families, and professionals about transition, adoptive attitude, acceptance, bonds, and ruptures.

Public policies that encourage studies, research, extension, support groups, psychological, and therapeutic support, spaces for exchanges, listening, and welcoming to suitors and parents in the post-adoption period, as well as children by adoption, must be continuously implemented as support services for the community.

Community support services have the function of supporting, welcoming, informing, and training applicants, new parents, and society in general. They are essential services to reduce internal and external conflicts, as well as to promote an alliance between families and professionals involved in legal parenting through adoption. We also believe that community actions promote a cultural change about adoption, with a redefinition of beliefs about adoption as a way of parenting and not charity. Additionally, they highlight the importance of the entire society being involved in protecting and guaranteeing the rights of children and adolescents. In this way, the community is strengthened as an active subject and agent in social and community integration, ensuring that children and adolescents have the right to family life after reintegrating into a new family, if that is the case.

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