



This is the time of year where people reach out to help others in their community. One way to help others is to purchase holiday gifts for families which are struggling financially. For example, churches, businesses, book clubs and gyms may select a few local families or individuals to receive clothing, toys, and household item donations.

I enjoy providing for those in need during the holiday season. However, it makes my skin crawl when these wonderful programs are advertised as an "Adopt-a-Family." For most adoptive families, including myself, this is an offensive and troublesome way to use the word "adopt." The family being donated to is not being "adopted" but actually being "sponsored." If they were in fact being "adopted" then there would be home studies, lawyer fees and then there's the issue of the family coming to live with them.

### **Not Respecting the Word "Adopt"?**

Why do I even care about this wording? A lot of it has to do that I am proud to be a family created by adoption. I cherish the word "adopt" because it was the choice and process which allowed me to bring my three beautiful children into my family. I had to go through a lot of paperwork, difficult decisions and emotional trials to adopt my children.

To me "adopt" means a *life-long* commitment to parenting and loving children who were not born to me. It's not just a commitment for a few weeks around the holiday

season. Isn't it possible that young children who were adopted may wonder if they too could be abandoned after New Year's just like the "Adopt-a-Family"?

My children have been told many times that Paul and I adopted them. They know the stories of why we chose adoption, why their birthparents chose adoption and how grateful we are that adoption formed our family. How am I to explain to them about a friend who as a holiday gift received a zoo "Adopt-an-Animal" certificate? The friend now has a paper saying they adopted a penguin and that they are an adoptive parent. The next time my children hear me state that "I am an adoptive mother" they may think, "Big deal. Anyone can adopt. She got me just like my friend adopted that penguin."

### **Other Wording Options**

At the holiday season when my family participates in an "Adopt-a-Family" program, Paul and I choose other wordings which are more accurate and not offensive to explain it to our children. It's not as if "adopt" is the only word that can be used. How about "Sponsor-a-Family," "Support-a-Family," "Donate-to-a-Family," "Provide-for-a-Family," "Contribute-to-a-Family" or even "Give-to-a-Family"?

Let's see if the definitions of these words as verbs are appropriate.

*Sponsor:* to promise, vouch or answer for.

*Support:* to maintain (a person, family, establishment, institution, etc.) by supplying with things necessary to existence; provide for.

*Donate:* to present as a gift, grant, or contribution; make a donation of, as to a fund or cause.

*Provide:* to make available; to supply or equip

*Contribute:* to give (money, time, assistance, etc.) to a common supply, fund, etc. as a for charitable purposes.

*Give:* to present voluntarily and without expecting compensation; bestow.

A synonym of ?sponsor? is ?support.? A synonym of ?donate? is ?provide.? A synonym of ?provide? is ?contribute.? A synonym of ?contribute? is ?give,? ?donate? and ?provide.? Notice how the word ?adopt? did not show up in any of these definitions or synonyms? Notice how these definitions are accurate for charitable programs?

## **The Wrong Word of Choice**

Here is information about the word ?adopt? which is used often this time of year.

*Adopt:* to take and rear as one's own child, specifically by a formal legal act.

*Adopt:* to choose to take as one's own; make one's own by selection or assent.

*Adopt:* to vote or accept formally and put into effect.

Some synonyms for ?adopt? when referring to adopting a child include ?raise? and ?take in.? When referring to choosing to take as one's own some synonyms include ?embrace,? ?endorse,? ?support? and ?select.? However in charitable context I doubt anyone who agrees to buy Christmas gifts for a family is trying to ?take? them as their own so this definition of ?adopt? still is not appropriate.

## **How to Change?**

So what can be done about this wording? Speaking to the head of your church, your work's Human Resources department, the boss of a store you are visiting or anyone else who is promoting a ?Adopt-A? program is sometimes enough to spark change. Your discussion does not need to be long or abrasive. Simply present the adoptive families' point of view on the wording of the program. If you need extra help, Adoptive Families magazine has wonderful [sample letters](#) which any adoptive parent can use as a template to address this issue.

Most people use the word ?adopt? for their programs because it's what they have heard before. I doubt any of them deliberately use the word to offend people. Hopefully once presented with the information they could very easily change the wording of their charitable program. In actuality, they would then be more accurately portraying what they are wishing for from their donors.

I would never promote boycotting any charitable program based on the wording that offends my family formed through adoption. But I do ask that this holiday season when you see the words ?Adopt-a-Family? you take note of it. Possibly you can mention rewording it to whoever is in charge. Or else you can start using different words when speaking of the program with your family and friends. Every little bit helps.

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