

To Whom It May Concern:

The good news is that forty-five percent of Canada's Top 100 Employers now top up Employment Insurance (EI) benefits for parents who adopt children; some even help their employees with the cost of adopting a child. We congratulate those forward thinking employers and thank them for their support of adoptive families.



The bad news though is that adoptive parents are eligible for 15 weeks less EI than biological parents and, when many employers top-up parental leave benefits, they often exclude adoptive families and the needs of their babies or children.

Treating adoptive families as less deserving of paid time off with their children than biological parents is unfair and discriminatory. Such policies put a lower value on families formed through adoption than through birth, and do not recognize that adopted children need as much time with their parents as birth children.

In many cases, employers offer extended parental benefits to biological parents because they believe that a woman must have extra time to recover from pregnancy and giving birth, the same basis upon which the Canadian government discriminates against adoptive parents by giving them 15 weeks less EI leave than biological parents. Though adoptive mothers do not have to recover from childbirth, there are additional challenges that they may face with their children that are equally important and must be recognized by employers.

Dr. Lucy Le Mare of Simon Fraser University, an internationally recognized expert on adoptive children, has researched the development of adopted children and recommends that the primary caregiver stays at home with a newly adopted child or baby for a period of at least one year to facilitate healthy attachment between a child and his or her new parent/s. This recommendation is backed-up by a vast body of research and by a host of other experts on adoption.

We would like to outline some of the extra challenges that adoptive parents face.

1. Adoptive children join their families at different ages, some hours after their birth, others weeks, months or years later. Some of the children are adopted from as far away as China, India or Russia. Others have been living in foster care in British Columbia—some have lived in several different homes, many have special needs that arise from the abuse and neglect that they have experienced before they joined their adoptive family.
2. Joining a new family can be traumatic for children. Many have never experienced a one-on-one relationship with a caregiver—this does not come automatically—the children need time to form a strong attachment with their new parents and siblings.
3. Children adopted internationally are from different cultures, usually have no comprehension of English, and have often spent time in institutions where they have been neglected or abused. They may be suffering from malnutrition, and may have other medical issues that their new parents must deal with.

4. Adoptive parents also need additional time to adjust to their new lives as parents. They often have little notice of their child coming home and have to take the impact of becoming a new parent at full force. They need more time to bond with their child and to learn how to respond to their child's needs.

5. Research has shown that adoptive parents suffer from the same level of physical exhaustion and sleep deprivation after adopting their children as biological parents. Without support during this stressful time they can experience post-adoption depression—which often goes unrecognized.

Canadian law recognizes no distinction between a child that has been adopted and a biological child. Employment legislation and discriminatory employment policies goes entirely against this principle.

Many of AFABC's members struggle to gain equal treatment for themselves and their children. We hope that once the issues are pointed out that you will treat all the parents that are employed by your organization equally, regardless of how the child joined their family.

If you need any further information on any of the points raised in this letter do not hesitate to contact AFABC.

Sincerely,



Karen Madeiros
Executive Director

