

FAMILY REUNION INSTITUTE'S

STICKY REUNION SITUATION

FAMILY = ADOPTED MEMBERS TOO

June 2022

The Situation:

A family cousin has adopted three siblings she's been fostering for over five years. The children have been part of the family since she first got them. She has signed them up to receive several of the educational awards we provide to school-aged students. However, some family members say the awards should be for blood family members only. These children have been part of our lives for 5 years, it seems wrong not to let them be included. What do you think?

The Fix:



Helen Wilkinson

Unless it is written in the family's By-laws, Policy & Procedures, etc. these youngsters should be included in the receiving of educational awards. The key identification for me is "adopted", as most legal documents usually state the rights and privileges adoptees have.

I strongly suggest that these youngsters be given the earned educational award(s). Is it possible that these youngsters out ranked (grade point average) those who objected. This hic-cup should be discussed. An Aware/Scholarship Committee, etc. should be established; their findings presented and voted upon at a future family meeting; and the folks in attendance debate and thrash out issues. I guarantee exclusion issues will surface in the future and there should be a framework for solutions put in place to deal with situations.

The Fix:



Doug Harris

It seems wrong to me as well. First, from the standpoint of an uncharitable act toward innocent children. Why make them feel like outsiders? Secondly, they've been part of the family for five years. That's long enough for them to have earned love and acceptance. Thirdly, I feel this attitude is an affront to African American culture and history. Because of the mass separation of families during slavery, a hallmark of Black American culture has been the bonds of love, not blood, that characterize our family structures. We have a long history of taking in and raising children unrelated by blood. It is a unique, admirable part of our culture, born out of the adversity of slavery. It acknowledges that it takes "a village (not blood relatives) to raise a child." Many of us grew up with "play" aunties, uncles, cousins, etc.—people with no DNA connection but totally accepted as family. That spirit lives today because of a resilient capacity to love that even slavery could not quench.

It would be heartbreaking to exclude deserving young people just because they were adopted into the family. Blood is thicker than water, but love conquers all.
