

Statements on Open Adoption

What is Open Adoption?

“Open adoption means that the birth family and the adoptive family, after meeting and exchanging identities, commit themselves to lifelong relatedness for the benefit of the child. It recognizes that each family has important ongoing contributions to make to the adoptee’s overall well being. Each family carries significant responsibility to sustain and nourish this vital relationship.” (Open Adoption as Standard Practice conference, 1998)

What is the History Behind Open Adoption?

“During much of history and in many cultures, a child’s move from one family to another was done openly and his original identity remained unknown. In the United States, the first law ‘closing’ adoption was passed in Minnesota in 1917. By the 1930’s, virtually all states had followed suit. With these confidential adoptions, new birth certificates were issued listing the adoptive parents, and documents pertaining to the adoption were forever sealed, including the child’s original birth certificate. The primary reason for keeping the child’s original identity a secret was to allow the child and her birth parents a fresh start... During the 1960s and 1970s – roughly the same time that adoptees and birth parents began to speak openly about their experiences – changes in sexual practices reduced the stigma to unmarried women who gave birth... Social scientists... place... renewed emphasis on the power of genetic influence.” New understanding of the way people grieve brought more acknowledgements of losses in adoption for all parties and new honesty & openness. (Excerpts from *The Open Adoption Experience*, Melina & Roszia, 1993, pp 4 – 11.)

What is Choices for Women’s Position on Open Adoption?

Choices for Women (CFW) offers education for all adoptive and birth families on open adoption. CFW recognizes that each open relationship is unique, with fluid and changing dynamics. Open adoption also has a common denominator of commitment to respect, honesty, communication and an ongoing relationship between birth and adoptive families. CFW encourages open adoption for parties who desire to make this commitment for the sake of the child. The assigned social workers will work with the parties to provide information, facilitation, direction, and a safe place to explore fears, consider motivations, and process decisions.

What are the Benefits of Open Adoption for Each Party?

(Taken from *The Open Adoption Experience*, Melina & Roszia)

Advantages for Children

“By staying in touch with each other, children do not have to lose people who have significant connection to them. They can see that they are valued by their birth family, and the adoptive placement wasn’t a rejection. They can have access to reliable information about their origins and the reasons for the adoption plan.”

Advantages for Adoptive Parents

“Adoptive parents feel more secure in their role as parents when they receive direct permission from the birth parents to be their child’s parent, and when they see that the birth parents’ presence in their lives does not diminish their genuine parent-child relationship.”

Advantages for Birth Parents








“Birth parents do not have to lose touch with their children to ensure that they will find permanent parents and can be reassured that they made a good choice as they observe their children growing and thriving.”

Advantages for All Parties

(Excerpts from *The Spirit of Open Adoption*, James Gitter, 1997)

- Provides an avenue to remove some of the unknowns, mysteries, & fantasies that can go with closed adoption
- Access to both families allows everyone to process better
- Open adoption can not remove the losses and grief that come with adoption, but it can add some honesty to deal with some of the losses
- Provides an avenue for growth, cooperation, and relationship in the adoption experience
- Honors the child by providing open access to his/her birth heritage
- Direct communication can eliminate third-party misunderstanding

What are the Keys to Successful Open Adoption

-  Candor and honesty
-  Communication & problem solving
-  Trust-building
-  Respect
-  Focus on child's best interests
-  Boundaries
-  Commitment on the part of the adoptive parents and birth parents to make the relationship work

What are the Tasks/Roles of Each Party in Open Adoption?

-Tasks of Birth Parents in Open Adoption

- *Preparation
- *Gentle transitioning for the child
- *Grieving
- *Working through possible regret
- *Committing to success of the relationship
- *Finding a basic role (moving on from the “parenting role”)
- *Nurturing their relationship with the adoptive parents
- *Self acceptance
- *Moving ahead
- *Responding to the child's questions
- *Giving emotional gifts to the child and adoptive parents (affirming their role)
- *Developing a spiel (telling your story)

-Tasks of Adoptive Parents

- *Preparation
- *Gentle transitioning for the child
- *Committing to success of the relationship
- *Finding security
- *Coming to terms with the importance of biology
- *Parenting
- *Interpreting the experience
- *Nurturing the relationship with the birth parents
- *Handling emotional indebtedness (adoptive parent's joy comes at birth parent's pain)
- *Giving emotional gifts to the child and birth parents (affirming their role)

Quality open adoption means thinking of the child's needs first – it means gentle transitioning, honoring the birth heritage, having the adults be responsible to build and maintain a satisfying relationship (not putting the burden on the child to keep the connection). James Gitter, *Spirit of Open Adoption*

What are the Challenges of Open Adoption?

Open adoption takes commitment, time and effort. Bumps in the road are to be expected. The openness efforts will backfire if the birth and adoptive parents use the relationship to meet their own needs at the expense of the child's needs. It will also backfire if adoptive parents pretend to desire open adoption just to receive the placement of a child or the birth parents pretend that they really do not need to relinquish parenting if they have an open adoption. Meetings and openness without direction, preparation and purpose will be less effective. Extended family members participating in open adoption also need to be on board with its purpose and values.