



## **Introduction**

Many families are choosing adoption as an alternative to conceiving children naturally, either because of infertility or they truly believe in helping children find a loving home. Adoption has dramatically changed since its formal conception in the 1850s and continues to evolve into the 21st century. Over the past thirty years, adoption practices shifted toward a more open and direct approach when navigating through the placement of a child, specifically between the birthmother and adoptive parents. Open adoptions have become commonplace and more acceptable in today's society.

## **Open Adoption: Defined**

As adoptive families and birthparents navigate through their adoption journey, they must decide what type of adoption they want for their family, open, semi-open or a closed adoption plan. The term open adoption can vary widely between each adoption placement and the degree of openness that

is acceptable to both parties involved. According to Berry (1993), open adoption is defined by the sharing of information and level of contact between the birthparents and the adoptive family before and after placement of the adopted child. As mentioned, the degree of openness can vary from talking once a month to every 6 months or simply the sending and receiving of pictures and letters once a year of the adopted child. It is important for both parties to be in agreement on the degree of openness from the beginning of the adoption relationship.

### **Benefits of Open Adoption: Control For Adoptive Parents**

It is reported that adoptive parents benefit from learning the adoptees heritage, biological and genetic background and are better prepared to take care of the child when these facts are known. In a closed adoption, where little information is shared, adoptive parents tend to feel marginalized by the secrecy of such vital information regarding the adoptee's background. When this information is shared, adoptive families also feel more in control and are more trusting in the adoption process. Open adoption helps adoptive families build rapport and a profound relationship with the birth parents and the adoption agency. They are able to better understand the situation and empathize with the birthparents circumstances and decision to choose adoption.

### **Control For Birthparents**

Furthermore, according to Marianne Berry, P.H.D. (1993), open adoption has significantly helped birthmothers cope and move forward with their lives once their child is placed for adoption. Research suggests that birthmothers experience prolonged periods of grief and loss after the placement of their child. Open adoptions can help birthmothers feel more in control during the adoption process because they were able to play a major role in choosing the adoptive family and the sharing of information can allow them to envision their child's future with the selected parents. Open adoptions can help relieve some of the guilt of putting their child up for adoption.

There is an ongoing debate with regards to the advantages and disadvantages of open adoption versus closed adoption. Further research needs to be conducted so families and birthparents can make the best decisions for their family. It is important that each party learn about their options while pursuing adoption and understand the adoption process as well as the long term effects for each party involved.

### **Prevents Identity Confusion**

In a closed adoption setting adoptees can face greater identity confusion than in an open adoption. Studies show that many adoptees can suffer from lower self-esteem and experience a higher rate of mental and emotional disturbances as well as experience more confusion about their past and their current identity. Adoption professionals theorize that the confidentiality of the adoption placement contributes the adoptees curiosity, confusion, and negative feelings towards their birthparents. Open adoption can provide immediate answers for the adoptee and eliminate the curiosity and confusion about who they are and where they came from. Research suggests that most adoptive parents and birthparents chose open adoption because they thought it was in the best interest of the child.

If families and birthparents choose open adoption, it is important to build the foundation of their relationship on mutual trust and understanding. It is also important to find a balance of openness that is the best interest of the child and both sets of parents. Finding that balance is a crucial part of moving forward and building a happy and fulfilling life for everyone involved.

### **How Do I Know Open Adoption Is Right For Me?**

If you are experiencing an unplanned pregnancy and are considering adoption for your child, you are probably trying to decide if you would like to pursue an open or closed adoption. Here are some questions to consider:

- Do I want to have a say in who raises my child?
- Is it important to me to know that my child is safe and healthy?
- Do I want to learn about my child as he/she grows through pictures, letters or visits?
- Do I want to be able to tell my child about his or her family background?
- Do I want my child to know if they have similar characteristics or personality traits as someone else in my family?

If you answered 'yes' to any of these questions, open adoption may be the right decision for you and your child.

### **Overview of Benefits For Birthmothers**

- Greater control over your child's placement and decisions during the adoption process
- Greater comfort in knowing your child is growing up in a loving and stable home
- Develop personal relationship with adoptive family
- Birth family members can benefit from the open relationship
- Greater satisfaction throughout the adoption plan

An open adoption plan can be formed to your liking and can change over time as both sets of parents navigate their relationship.

### **Conclusive Remarks**

Adoption practices have come a long way since its conception in the early 1850s. The modernizing of the world and the 21st century have brought about significant change to the adoption process. Over the last 30 years, open adoption placements have become the emerging trend for women and families considering adoption. Open adoption can provide a better sense of control for the birthparents and adoptive families as well as prevent identity confusion for the adopted child. As mentioned, if families choose open adoption, it is important to find a balance of openness between each party and what level of openness is agreed upon.

