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Openness in Adoption

As more and more adoptions involve some openness between the adoptive and birth parents, the issue seems to be, what is openness?

In open adoptions, communication may include letters, emails, telephone calls, or visits. The frequency of contact ranges from every few years to several times a month or more, depending on the needs and wishes of all involved. The goals of open adoption are:

- To minimize the child's loss of relationships.
- To maintain and celebrate the adopted child's connections with all the important people in his or her life.
- To allow children to resolve losses with truth, rather than with fantasy.

Hints for Parents Considering Openness

Work with an accredited agency and/or a qualified attorney.

State your wishes, needs and fears. Talk about these things and process the information with your adoption professional.

Read about open adoption. Talk to others in open arrangements.

Look to the future. Think of your family 5, 10, 15 years from now. Consider other children in the family, both birth

Children in foster care whose goal is adoption are likely to achieve better outcomes by maintaining their existing connections with extended birth family members, siblings, and other adults with whom they have significant attachments.

The length, frequency and nature of contact, as well as any special requests can be agreed upon between all parties involved. When discussing the nature and frequency of ongoing contact, it is important to involve the special and impartial skills of an adoption professional or mediator.

An open adoption agreement is a detailed contract between the birth parent(s) and the adoptive family. This contract is negotiated prior to finalization and is made part of the adoption; it is not something that can be added after the adoption.

These agreements normally detail the type of contact and role the birth parent's play now and into the future; from day to day activities, letters, gifts, yearly vacations, phone calls, two sided contact or one sided contact. Like any contract, everything is negotiable.

You should also take the following into consideration when thinking about an open adoption agreement:

- Is this agreement in the best interest of the child(ren)?
- Is this type of contract suitable for our family?
- Is the contract for birth mom and birth dad the same? If not, can we live up to both agreements?
- Is contact with the birth family, in general, in everyone's best interest?
- Is contact with other birth siblings in the best interest of our child(ren) and the other

children and adopted children.

Think flexible. What seems like a good idea now may not meet the needs of your child in a few years.

Where can I go for more information

Useful web sites

[Child Welfare League of America](#) CWLA's Standards of Excellence for Adoption Services provides best practice regarding openness in adoption.

[Cooperative Adoption Statutes](#) Provides adoption statutes for each State, compiled by Child Welfare Information Gateway.

[Insight: Open Adoption Resources and Support](#) Offers resources for professionals, adoptive parents, and birth parents considering open adoption.

Useful books and articles for families

Children of Open Adoption by Patricia Martinez Dorner and Kathleen Silber (1997, Independent Adoption

siblings?

- Is your wish to have a child over-shadowing your intentions for a balanced open adoption agreement?

Open Adoption Agreements are not legal in all states and each state has different rules and laws that govern these agreements.

Walk into this agreement with your eyes open!

Child advocates realize the life-long impact of adoption on the adopted person, and believe that on-going contact with the birth family can be healing and beneficial to the child as he grows to adulthood.

Adoptive parents who feel their parenting roles may be lessened if their long-awaited child has contact with the family of origin most often fear long-term contact agreements. Open adoption advocates argue that adoptive parents are the ones who make most of the decisions about the degree of openness allowed, while the children and the birth parents are affected the most long-term. They strive to change this by helping the adoptive parents and the birth parents to be open about their feelings early on and to look into the future as much as they are able. Also, they help the parties focus on putting the child's needs first. This is complex, as the child or children are not able to speak up at the time many open adoption arrangements take place.

Helpful Links

[CWLA](#) is a powerful coalition of hundreds of private and public agencies serving vulnerable children and families since 1920. Our expertise, leadership and innovation on policies, programs, and practices help improve the lives of millions of children in all 50 states. Our impact is felt worldwide.

The purpose of these [AAOAA](#) pages is to give you the best information possible about adoption. The information here will help you find the agency

Press). The topics in this book include adoption understanding, developing relationships, families with open and closed adoptions, bonding, communication, and sibling issues.

How to Open an Adoption by Patricia Martinez Dorner (1998, R-Squared Press). A book for adoptive parents, birth parents, and adoption professionals on how to open the lines of communication and navigate more inclusive relationships.

Lifegivers: Framing the Birth Parent Experience in Open Adoption by James L. Gritter (2000, CWLA Press). This book examines the ways birth parents are marginalized. The author makes the point that adopted children are best served when birth parents and adoptive parents work together to ensure that birth parents remain in children's lives.

The Spirit of Open Adoption by Jim Gritter (1997, CWLA Press). This book takes a realistic look at the joys and pains of open adoption for birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents.

providing the highest quality of infant and older child adoption services.

Post adoption contact agreements between birth and adoptive families:
Summary of State Laws. [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)

Thank you to Families Like Ours and Child Information Gateway for providing information for this article.

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/>

<http://www.familieslikeours.org/>

What is Open Adoption? by Brenda Romanchik (1999, R-Squared Press). Written from the perspective of a birth mother in an open adoption, this pocket guide provides concise information and resources.

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