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Subject: Common Adoption Terms



Dear

When beginning the adoption process, it may help to understand some of the terminology that is frequently used. The following list includes definitions for many common words and phrases related to adoption.

Abuse: Any action that creates a substantial injury or a risk of injury to a child. Abuse can be physical, sexual or emotional. Physical abuse happens when a child is hurt through beating, shaking, kicking, burning or other types of bodily harm. A child can end up suffering from bruises, fractured or broken bones, internal injuries or even death. When children are denied the basic necessities they need to thrive, it is also considered physical abuse. Infants born addicted to drugs are physically abused, as well.

Approved Families: Families that have completed training, the home study process and have been licensed to adopt.

Adoptive Placement: The period before an adoption is finalized, when a child is living with his/her prospective adoptive parent(s).

Child Welfare System: All agencies that operate to ensure the safety and well being of children. Areas of child welfare include adoption, child protection, and foster care.

Closed Adoption: An adoption that involves total confidentiality and no contact with birth family. The birth family and the adoptive family do not share any identifying information about themselves, and do not communicate with each other, either before or after the placement of the child.

Developmental Delays: Delays in motor skills, speech and/or learning.

Emotional Disabilities: Severe, chronic or pervasive emotional/affective condition that effects a child's relationships and their ability to perform every day tasks. Children with emotional disabilities may be unable to build and/or maintain relationships, they may exhibit inappropriate behaviors or feelings during normal circumstances, they may be unhappy or depressed, or exhibit fears related to school and social situations.

Emotional Injury: Also referred to as emotional abuse, hurts a child's emotional development. It occurs when attitudes or actions repeatedly happen in a family that negatively effect the way a child feels about him/herself. This can impair a youngster's behavior and ability to function. Emotional abuse happens in all kinds of ways. A lack of love and support can be devastating. This can take the form of emotional detachment or a severe lack of affection. Extremely harsh, critical treatment of a child can cause emotional injury, too. This can include severe punishment, rejection and verbal assaults that may include belittling, or scapegoating.

Finalization: The final legal step in the adoption process during which a judge orders that the child's adoptive parents become their legal parents.

Foster Adoption: Also referred to as foster-to-adopt. Foster adoption occurs when a child's foster parents seek to adopt a child that was placed with them. This is often looked at next if reunification with the biological family is not possible to spare the child another move.

Foster/Adoption Training (different name in each state, MAPP, PRIDE, Foundations, etc...): A pre-service training course required of all prospective adoptive families and foster families. The trainings usually are in groups of 8-20 individuals. The amount of training hours required by state will vary, but it is usually 20-30 hours. Its purpose is to help families prepare for adoption or foster care through understanding the losses that waiting children have suffered and the birth family issues that can exist. Adoptive families will take these pre-service training classes before or during the home study process.

Foster Care: Foster care is the substitute family and care that children receive when they have been removed from a situation where either abuse and/or neglect has occurred and neither biological parents nor other extended family members can meet a child's needs. The State agency has placement and care responsibility during this time.

Foster Care Adoption: Foster care adoption, also referred to as special needs adoption, is the adoption of children from state care. These children are typically harder to place based on their race, ethnicity, age, disability, or part of a sibling group.

Group Home: A home-like setting in which a number of children live for a period of time. There may be one set of house parent or rotating staff members living there. In some therapeutic or treatment group homes, there will be trained staff to help children with emotional or behavioral difficulties.

Home study: The home study is a process as well as a final written document. After the family's completion of foster/adoption training, the family's social worker conducts visits to the home in order to become acquainted with the household and the community to ensure they can provide a safe environment for a child. It also allows the social worker to gain a better understanding of how the family functions within the home. The write-up at the end of the process is the family's home study, which is either approved or denied by the agency.

ICPC: An agreement between all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the Virgin Islands that regulates the placement of children across state lines. An ICPC is required for all out of state adoptions.

Learning Disabilities: Children with learning disabilities may have average intelligence, but they have difficulty sorting and storing information. They may have visual or auditory perception problems that make it difficult for them to learn by reading directions or by listening. They learn best by seeing and doing. More than 40 percent of special needs children have learning disabilities. Special classes can help the child with school and learning.

Legally Free: Legally free children are those whose birth parents have voluntarily surrendered their parental rights, or have had them terminated through a court process. These birth parents have no legal recourse or claim to the involved children.

Legal Risk: Children at legal risk are those for whom the process to terminate birth parents' rights has not yet concluded. DSS has determined that adoption is in the child's best interest and does not want to delay recruitment of a family while the court pursues termination of the birth parents' rights. The court case can last as long as two years or more until the final decision is made. In some cases, the birth parents retain the right to visit their child during the time the case is technically in foster care status. The majority of legal risk placements result in the foster child being adopted by the pre-adoptive family.

Neglect: Situation that occurs when a child's basic needs are not provided for. Every youngster needs food, shelter, medical care, supervision, emotional stability and a chance to grow. When a caregiver withholds these things, a child is neglected. This may happen deliberately, through negligence or due to an inability to parent. The environmental circumstances that some parents may face, such as disability, homelessness or inadequate financial resources, are not seen as sources of neglect.

Open Adoption: An adoption that involves ongoing contact between birth and adoptive families, sometimes including visits. Each adoption varies in terms of who remains involved and visitations. Open adoption does not mean shared parenting.

Physical Abuse: Characterized by the infliction of physical injury as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, shaking or otherwise harming a child. The parent or caretaker may not have intended to hurt the child; rather, the injury may have resulted from over-discipline or physical punishment.

Prospective Adoptive Family: A family that is interested in adoption and is either in the midst of the adoption process and/or waiting for a match with a child.

Public Adoption Agency: The public adoption agency is usually the state child welfare agency. For Oregon, this is the Department of Social Services. Services are free of charge through public adoption agencies.

Residential Care Facility: A 24 hour care facility that provides services to children with severe behavioral, emotional, mental or psychological challenges that are adversely affecting their relationships.

Sexual Abuse: Occurs when a child has any sexual contact with an adult. This can happen through intercourse. It includes any oral, genital or anal penetration. Sexual exploitation and molestation are also considered abuse. They are defined as contacts or interactions with a child that are used to satisfy an adult's sexual needs and desires. This includes any verbally enticing language as well as fondling, masturbating or exposure of sexual organs by the adult. Sex between an adult and child is never consensual.

School-Aged Children: Children age 6 and older, and are generally at an age when they are enrolled in school.

Sibling Groups: Children with one or more biological brother or sister.

Special Needs Adoption: Special needs adoption, also referred to as adoption through foster care, is the adoption of children who are in state care. These children are typically harder to place based on their race, ethnicity, age, disability, or being part of a sibling group.

Waiting Child(ren): A child who is waiting to be adopted.

Waiting Family: A family who has completed Foster/adoption training and the home study process, has been approved to adopt and is waiting for an appropriate match to be found.

For a more extensive list of common adoption terms, please visit the Family Builders site at <http://www.familybuilders.org/resources/glossary>

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