

A Family For Every Child Matching Assistance



*"We should not be asking who this child belongs to,
but who belongs to this child."*

Open Adoptions

What is an open adoption?

Open adoptions can take a few different forms and should be viewed as being on a continuum. First, there are closed adoptions. In a **closed adoption**, there is no contact between the adoptive family and the birth parents. A second form is a **semi-open adoption**. In a semi-open adoption, there is some contact between the adoptive family and birth parents, typically in the form of letters, emails, pictures, and maybe an annual visit. Finally, there are **open adoptions**. Open adoptions feature a lot of contact between the adoptive family and the birth parents. In open adoptions, frequent visits may occur between the child and his/her biological parents.

As the child's adoptive parents, it will be up to you to decide what type of contact you are willing to facilitate between the child and their parents. A contract may already be in place regarding birth parent contact, but if not, you will need to sit down and think about what type of open adoption level will be the most beneficial for your child.

It is understandable that you may have your doubts about contact with your child's birth parents. There may even be some irrational fears lingering about your child loving his/her birth parents more than you, or leaving you for them later if they are in contact. You may also be angry with your child's birth parents. But as the child's parent you need to put your feelings aside and do what is best for your child. If it is beneficial for them to have some level of contact with their birth family, then that is what needs to happen. In this newsletter you will find questions you should ask yourself when considering an open adoption; how social media is changing the face of open adoptions; and some of the benefits of open adoptions for your child. At the end of the day, you have the final say in what types of contact you are comfortable with, but make sure to take into account your child's needs and

feelings, too.

Questions to ask yourself

Before deciding what level of an open adoption you want (closed, semi-open, or open), you may want to ask yourself the following questions:

- What types of contact am I/are we comfortable with?
- At what age should our child have contact with his/her birth family? (If they're not already in contact with them)
- What role will my/our child's biological parent(s) and possibly other biological relatives play in his/her life?
- How will I/we react if we choose a closed or semi-open adoption, and our child's birth parent's contact him/her via social media?

These are all very important questions to ask yourself, especially the last one. With the rise of social media outlets over the last decade, children and their birth parents are finding each other on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or even Google. When considering the terms of your open adoption it is important to decide how you will handle contact via social media.

Social media and it's role in adoption

With many young adults and teenagers using social media as a communication tool, it is very possible that he/she may come into contact with their birth parents. Either they may search for them online, or their birth parents will find them. As your child's parents, you want your child to be safe online so this may be of some concern to you. Finding the balance between monitoring your child's online activities while still allowing them to be "normal" can be tricky. Child Welfare Information Gateway offers the following suggestions for handling birth parent contact via social media:

- Talk to your child about their adoption, giving them as many age-appropriate details about their birth parents as possible.
- Give alternative methods for learning about/contacting their birth parents when they are ready.
- Discuss with your child the pros and cons of re-connecting with birth family members via social media. Talk about being safe online, and to never give out

personal information like phone numbers or addresses.

- Emphasize the importance of having a strong support network in place before reaching out to their birth family.
- Talk to your child about the possibility that their birth parents may contact them via social media, and brainstorm together some ways that they could respond. If your child reveals that he/she is already in touch with his/her birth family via social media, become involved. Contact your child's birth parents and discuss what future contact will look like. Remember, you are the child's parents so you may set boundaries.
- Monitor your child's online activity by adding them on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. Keep your computer in a general location, such as the kitchen or family room so you can keep an eye on what your child is doing online. Lock your computer with a password, allowing access for home work or only during certain times of the day.

Some families may be open to the idea of using social media as a form of contact between their child and their birth parents. If this is something you would be open to, consider the following in establishing that relationship:

- Discuss upfront your comfort level when it comes to sharing photos and other information via social media. Make sure that your child's and your privacy is being maintained.
- Discuss what social media outlets will be used: Facebook, Twitter, email, etc.
- Set boundaries.

One suggestion Child Welfare Information Gateway has for adoptive parents is to open up a private Facebook group between you, your child and your child's birth parents. This way you will be able to monitor all contact between your child and his/her birth parents, and you will be in control of what gets shared and who gets to see it.

Creating the terms of your open adoption

If you choose to have a semi-open or open adoption with your child's birth parents, you may want to draw up a contract that outlines the terms of the relationship. Lora Diaz, host of the video series "Lunch-N-Net" offers the following suggestions for creating your open adoption terms:

- Consider your intentions, and why you are agreeing to an open adoption. Are you doing it because it benefits your child, or is it out of guilt? What are your child's thoughts and feelings about contact with his/her birth family? Does he/she want to

have contact with them?

- Work with the child's caseworker, therapist, CASA and perhaps a former foster parent to come up with the terms of an open adoption. It may also be beneficial to work with your adoption attorney.
- Think about what types of contact will be the most beneficial for your child, and how often contact should take place.
- Make sure to get the terms of the open adoption agreement in writing. Be sure to include in the agreement what you will do if the relationship breaks down. Keep the language general and open, and allow yourself the capability to end communication at any time if you feel maintaining the relationship becomes a threat to your family's safety or well-being.
- If you are not comfortable with in-person meetings or contact via social media, consider opening a P.O. box in a city/town nearby that your child's birth parent may correspond with you through. This allows you to maintain your family's privacy, and gives you the control over how often communication takes place.
- Remember to think of an open adoption like a marriage, or any other significant relationship: it takes time for you to build the relationship, and it is constantly changing and evolving. Remember that a relationship is built over time, and does not happen overnight.

If you would like to watch the Lunch-N-Net episode that covers open adoptions, please visit the Lunch-N-Net episode list [here](#). Click "Past Episodes" on the left. The episode is from Season 2 and is titled **Episode 12: "The One About Open Adoptions"**.

Final thoughts

Open adoptions are not for every family, so consider your family's and child's needs before agreeing to one. Open adoptions only work if you are comfortable with the terms that are set. It's important to also remember that not all relationships with a birth family are going to be negative and full of drama. Sometimes being in communication with a birth parent can help a child adjust to their new life with you. It can also give them a sense of identity, and make them feel more comfortable with their story. It can also allow you to fill in gaps in your child's history which will help them avoid an identity crises.

Resources

You may find the following resources helpful in deciding if an open adoption is right for your family, and what level of contact you would like to maintain with your child's birth parents.

Child Welfare Information Gateway - [Openness in Adoption: Building Relationships Between Adoptive and Birth Families](#)

Adoptive Families - [AF Articles About Open Adoption](#)

Adoptive Families: [Understanding Open Adoptions](#)

NNEDV - [Privacy and Safety on Facebook](#)

TODAY - [Adopted as a baby, woman uses Facebook to find family](#)

Child Matching Events

Child Matching Events are a great way to connect one-on-one with a child's caseworker to introduce your family to the worker, and learn more about the children on their caseload! Families are required to pre-register and must have a current home study to participate. You can learn more about our upcoming matching events and register [here](#).

Upcoming Child Matching Events:

Wednesday, March 5th 2014 (TODAY!) at 11am PST. See the children that will be featured in the event [here](#). Please register [here](#).

**If you don't see any children listed on the event page, please continue to check back for updates.

If you have any questions about our Matching Events, please contact our Recruitment Coordinator Lisa Kinser-Wehr at lisa.kinser@afamilyforeverychild.org

Connect With Us!

