

New Life Family Services

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 known. 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... placed...renewed emphasis on the power of genetic influence.” New understanding of the way people grieve brought more acknowledgment 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 New Life Family Services’ Position on Open Adoption?

New Life Family Services (NLFS) offers education for all adoptive and birth families on open adoption. NLFS 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. NLFS 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 Gritter, 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

- Steps of Grieving
- Re-evaluating decision

Committing to success of the relationship
Redefining your role as birth parent
Affirming their role as adoptive parents
Acceptance of your decision
Nurturing the relationship with adoptive family and child
Making steps towards life goals
Sharing your story with others

Tasks of Adoptive Parents in Open Adoption

Preparation
Gentle transitioning for the child
Committing to success of the relationship
Handling emotional indebtedness
Affirmation of Role
Finding security
Parenting
Life as an adoptive family
Nurturing the relationship with the birth parents

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 maintaining a satisfying relationship (not putting the burden on the child to keep the connection). James Gritter, *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.

What Does the Research Say About Open Adoption?

- Open adoption helps adoptive parents to see the birth parents, especially the birth mother, as real people, and not feel threatened by their role in the child's life. Adoptive parents feel they have the birth parent's permission to raise the child & more assurance that the birth mother has appropriately separated herself from the child. Groth, M., Bonnadrrel, D., Devis, D., Martin, J., & Vousden, H. (1987).
- Adoptees in closed adoptions said that a more open adoption would have decreased their insecurities that stemmed from fantasies about their birth parents and feelings of rejection. It would have helped them gain a more complete picture of who they are and help answer questions about their history. Lee, J.S. & Twaite, J.A. (1997). "Open adoption and adoptive mothers: attitudes toward birth mothers, adopted children, and parenting". *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*. 67(4). 576-584.
- It is easier for birth parents to let go of their child when they have taken responsibility for their child's well-being (eg. choosing the family and seeing that it is a good home). Most birth parents want the best for their children without being intrusive and over demanding. Sachdev, P. (1989). "The triangle of fears: fallacies and facts". *Child Welfare*. 68(5). 491-503.
- Openness in adoption can provide the adoptee a sense of continuity with his or her personal history, which can lead to enhanced self-esteem. Wrobel, G.M., Ayers-Lopez, S., Grotevant, H.D., Mc Roy, R.G., & Friedrich, M. (1996). "Openness in adoption and the level of child participation". *Child Development*. 67. 2358-2374.
- Current research on birthmothers concludes that being able to choose the adoptive family and having ongoing contact and/or knowledge results in lower levels of grief and greater peace of mind with their adoption decisions. Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (November 2006). "Safeguarding the Rights and Well-Being of Birthparents in the Adoption Process, Executive Summary". 3.
- An overwhelming proportion of birthmothers contemporary have met the adoptive parents of their children – probably 90 percent or more – and almost all of the remaining birthmothers helped to choose the new parents through profiles. Contrary to the stereotypes that have been created about them, almost no women choosing adoption today seek anonymity or express a desire for no ongoing information of contact. Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (November 2006). "Safeguarding the Rights and Well-Being of Birthparents in the Adoption Process, Executive Summary". 3.
- Almost all prospective birthmothers (approximately 90 percent) choose and meet the adoptive parents of their children. Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (November 2006). "Safeguarding the Rights and Well-Being of Birthparents in the Adoption Process, Executive Summary". 4.
- Those birthparents who have had contact with the adoptive family since placement have lower levels of grief, regret and worry, along with more peace with their decisions, than those who did not have this opportunity. Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute (November 2006). "Safeguarding the Rights and Well-Being of Birthparents in the Adoption Process, Executive Summary". 4.
- "Many of the fears about open adoption do not seem to be a problem," said Grotevant, a professor at the University of Minnesota and co-author with McRoy of Openness in Adoption: Exploring Family Connections.

New Life Family Services is a non-profit, Christian adoption agency licensed in the state of Minnesota with offices in the Twin Cities metro area and Rochester. For further information, call 612.866.7643 or visit us on the web at www.nlfs.org.