

CALLED TO ADOPTION: OPEN, SEMI-OPEN, & CLOSED ADOPTIONS



*“Defend the weak and the fatherless;
uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.”*

Psalms 82:3

With an **OPEN ADOPTION**, birth parents have the opportunity to select the family who will parent their child. The adoptive parents and birth parents may speak, meet, and get to know each other before the birth, and then communicate afterwards, as well. As the birth mother progresses in her pregnancy, she can send ultrasound photos and share additional photos, if desired.

There is a trust on both sides of adoption, and typically all parties feel as though this is a special journey, creating a relationship that is best for the child in the long term.

Communication after adoption can take many forms. These can include communication via a website, (such as a social networking site or a private web site), text messaging, email, phone calls, and even old fashioned letters and pictures sent in the mail. Visits after adoption may occur, but are usually casual in nature and do not involve leaving the child alone with the birth family. They involve the birth mother (or birth family) getting together with the adoptive parents and the child for lunch, a visit at a park, or perhaps even a day at a county fair, for example. Open adoption is not co-parenting, but can be seen as more people to love your child.

SEMI-OPEN ADOPTION involves the sharing of some information, but not necessarily identifying information. For example, a birth mother may choose the adoptive family but may not know their last names, state of residence, or have their direct phone number. Open communication may exist, but it can be through email or a third party, such as your adoption professional. It can even be in the form of adoptive parents communicating with the birth grandparents of the child, rather than the birth mother.

As you think about it, you may feel some fear or discomfort about committing to ongoing communication with someone you don't know, but experience can soften our hearts and bring us to the understanding that birth families typically want contact because they, too, love this child.

TYPES OF ADOPTION

OPEN	Birth parents may select adopting family. Free exchange of information and identification. Communication during pregnancy and after birth is common.
SEMI-OPEN	Birth parents may select adopting family. Some exchange of information, sometimes through a third party. Communication during pregnancy and after birth, if desired.
CLOSED	No identifying information is shared. No contact between birth parents and adoptive parents during pregnancy or after birth. Records are often sealed.

Helpful Tip:

When you take photos, have a couple extra printed and drop them into a waiting card and envelope for your birth mother. Then, you'll be prepared when it is time to send an update. When you send that card, start a new card immediately so it is ready to receive your new photos. This makes it easy to keep your commitment.

In most circumstances, semi-open adoption can change to become more open as the relationship develops between adoptive parents and a child's birth family, if mutually agreed upon.

Ron and Liz were open to a semi-open adoption, sending photos and letters through our adoption center. They clearly stated that they were not comfortable with more, nor were they open to occasional visits. They were chosen by Renee, a teenage birth mother who preferred no ongoing communication whatsoever.

At the hospital, as Ron and Liz were awaiting their son's birth, they met Renee's parents and instantly hit it off! Both couples were in their early 40's, and during the long labor, learned that they had a lot in common. A few days later, when it was time for the baby to be discharged, Ron and Liz realized that they wanted to see Renee's family. Now, more than six years later, they still spend a week each summer together.

"We weren't looking for a relationship like that," Ron shares. "But God had it waiting for us! They are part of our son's family, and He opened our hearts to see that they are now part of our family, too. We didn't know what He had in store. Adoption has been a life-changing experience for us."

In the case of a domestic adoption where there is little contact with the birth mother, you can still gather enough information to be able to answer questions your child will have. In adopting a foreign-born child, you will learn very little about the birth parents, but you can usually discover enough about the village the child came from or the circumstance that brought him to the orphanage or foster care. Children who grow up knowing that they were adopted by honest, trustworthy, and supportive parents will grow up with a healthier sense of self.

As a Christian and an adoption professional, I believe that open or semi-open adoptions are most beneficial for all involved. The birth mother has the peace she needs that her child is happy and healthy, and that she made the right decision. The adoptive parents have access to the birth family should they need medical information or have other questions. And the child has the opportunity to know that his adoption was a choice made out of great love, with a birth mother who cared more about him than her own desires, and that his adoptive parents embrace not only him, but his biological heritage, as well. I have found, too, that parenting is less stressful and fears are calmed when the birth mother is known, embraced, and available.

Rely on Him when you feel doubt or need strength. He has all we need.

"The Sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer, He enables me to go on the heights."

Habakkuk 3:19

Easy Ideas for Ongoing Communication in an Open or Semi-Open Adoption

1. Mail letters and photos to the birth mother, either directly or send them through your adoption professional.
2. Email, instant message, or text message with the birth mother.
3. Create a website, blog, or social networking account online for the birthmother to view your updates. Make the site private if you want to limit access.
4. Connect occasionally through phone calls or video calls via the Internet.
5. Coordinate annual visits.

Oftentimes, God is more in tune with what would be good for us and our adoption. Allow Him to prepare your heart for the adoption He knows you can handle. This can mean putting your emotions aside until you find peace, as I did in my adoption. The benefits far outweigh any risk.

A **CLOSED, CONFIDENTIAL, OR TRADITIONAL ADOPTION** is one in which there is no identifying information shared with anyone who is a party to adoption. There is typically little information available, and later on, sealed or destroyed records may make it impossible to learn much more than basic medical information or other minor details for the child.

In a closed adoption, there is no contact between the birth parents and adoptive parents either before or after the adoption, and the child may never have opportunity to find his biological family, if he desires.

Hopeful adoptive parents seeking an adoption like this are encouraged to explore why they may have fears of birth parents or want no contact, as closed adoption is not considered to be in the best interest of children. Most adoption professionals know from personal experience and from research that it's a disservice to an adopted child if his parents do not have adequate information to share about his birth parents and why he was placed for adoption. When he asks a simple question about his heritage, for the sake of his emotional health, parents cannot respond with secrecy, lies, or blank stares.

Consider Jacob, who was adopted through a closed adoption. As he approached the age of 18, his mother discussed with him the opportunities of filing with the adoption agency to get information about or to contact his birth parents, if that was his desire.

"Why would I want to do that?" he asked. "She never cared about what happened to me."

Despite explanations to the contrary, Jacob truly believed that the lack of information about his birth family was because they didn't love or want him. In his mind, if they could give him away so easily, he didn't want them to be a part of his life and found it difficult to discuss his feelings surrounding adoption.

Closed adoption does not provide the framework for an understanding of the circumstances surrounding adoption choices or the opportunity for reassurance. If, after learning the facts and praying about it, you still feel the desire for a closed adoption, explore the international adoption of orphans. Continue to prayerfully consider this choice, and do not choose closed adoption simply out of fear.

*"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;
I will remove from you your heart of stone
and give you a heart of flesh."*

Ezekiel 36:26