

ADOPTION GLOSSARY

*This Adoption Glossary is a series of excerpts from *The Family of Adoption* by Joyce Maguire-Pavao, Beacon Press, Boston, ©1998, and is reproduced with her permission for the purpose of helping adoptive parents distinguish between the many different types of adoption available to them as they embark on creating a family of adoption.*

“The definition of adoption, according to Webster's, is “A ready taking up of something.” To adopt is: (1) To take into one's family through legal means and raise as one's own child. (2) (a) To take and follow (a course of action, for example) by choice or assent. (b) To take up and make one's own. (3) To take on or assume.

In my work, I have found adoption to mean different things to different people:

To some, adoption is the act of adoption -- the legal moment in the courthouse.

To some it is the life of adoption that the adopted child lives.

To some it is the life of adoption that the adoptive parents live.

To some it is the life of adoption that the birth parents live.

To some it is the adoptive family, inclusive of the child.

To some it is the extended family of adoption, including the
birth parents (whether they are known or unknown, present or not).

To a child, adoption is about being with the family they are in.

Sometimes, ... when asked if they think about adoption, children say "no," and they are being honest. Children do, however, think about their birth family and wonder who they themselves are and where they came from. They do not see that as thinking about "adoption" while they are young and at a developmental stage of concrete thinking.”

“In an attempt to define various kinds of adoption, I give you the following list. No matter how sensitive one is to what one knows, things are often left out. I am prepared to have people write or call after reading this and say "you forgot. . .": And they will be quite right.”

Public Adoption

“In two U.S. states (Massachusetts and Connecticut), public adoptions are regulated by DSS or Child and Family Services, which require training in child welfare. In every state, public adoption services are available, either through a *public child welfare agency*, such as the Department of Social Services, Bureau of Children, or Child Welfare Agency, or through a *private child welfare agency*, such as Jewish Family and Children's Services, Catholic Charities, Lutheran Children's Services, or Casey Family Services.

Private Adoption

“In all but the two states that require the involvement of child welfare agencies in adoptions, lawyers and business people - some very good and ethical, and some simply in business - can arrange adoptions privately. Attorneys are often the ones who facilitate adoption. The adoption is then legalized in court.

In the forty-eight states that support private adoption, social workers, adoptive parents, or business people can decide to do adoptions and open private adoption businesses.”

Independent Adoption

“In all of our states, more and more frequently, birth parents want to have some say in who adopts their child. The birth parents are involved in choosing and then meeting with the preadoptive couple or person who will eventually parent the child. Sometimes, couples who want to adopt put ads in papers and send letters to their friends, clergy, and physicians asking for the referral of a mother who has decided to place her baby for adoption.

Increasingly, then, the people involved in adoption are making their own arrangements and calling in the professionals only for the legal paperwork and finalization of their plans. When the parties involved have the best adoption counseling to make a good plan, not only for now, but for a lifetime, this route to adoption can be empowering for all parties. Without the proper guidance, however, independent adoptions can involve manipulation on the part of birth parents, adoptive parents, or attorneys or others involved. Independent adoptions that do not include education and counseling, and are not done with sensitivity and honesty, too often result in ill feelings and adoption disruption.”

Closed Adoption

“A closed adoption is one in which the birth parents and adoptive parents know little or nothing about one another and have no identifying information. A large number of public and private adoptions are closed (educated guess: 45%). Most international adoptions are closed in the receiving country, but not in the sending country. In all adoptions...sealed records are said to protect. When a contract - any contract - is made, all parties are supposed to agree and sign. In the case of adoption, though, the infant or child is not old enough to agree to this closed arrangement.

In the United States, records are still closed in [many] states. This is not true in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and in many other countries, where open records are a fact and where, when the child is not endangered, some form of open adoption is the usual practice.”

Semi-open Adoption

“In a semi-open adoption, the birth and preadoptive parents meet once, without exchanging last names or addresses, and usually agree to send letters and pictures through an intermediary for a period of time. There is no agreement to any face-to-face contact or long-range connection other than an acknowledgment that the child will probably search for his birth parents when he becomes an older adolescent or adult.

Today, a high proportion of adoptions are semi-open. If the intermediary arrangement is working properly, so that if there is a hiatus in communication, the two parties can later reconnect through the intermediary, then, for instance, the adoptive parents and pediatrician can be kept informed of any medical information concerning the child. A semi-open plan can also become more open if both parties have developed a level of trust and are comfortable with that arrangement. Semi open adoption often makes the growing child or adolescent feel left out, since it's only the adults who all seem to know one another.”

Open Adoption

“Open adoption is not joint custody. Open adoption is an arrangement agreed to by the adoptive parents and birth parents in which there is an ongoing connection between them, to be determined by the parties involved. The birth parents still sign terminations of parental rights, and the adoptive parents become the full and legal parents of the child.

Open adoption ranges from what some people call open, but is actually semi-open, to a full relationship with ongoing connection and visits. Openness often varies over time, depending on the needs of the child and the parents' understanding of their roles and responsibilities. The success of open adoption depends on clear boundaries, the participants' respect for each other's roles and responsibilities, and the ability of the adults involved to put their egos aside in order to do what is best for the child.”

Legal Adoption

“Legal adoption occurs when the birth parents' parental rights have been terminated via a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) and the adoptive parents have taken on those parental rights through legal adoption proceedings.”

Emotional Adoption

“There are some adoptive situations in which a child is raised by people who love and consider that child to be their own, and it is clear that there is a parent-child relationship, though it has not been legalized. This is often true in kinship arrangements (a grandmother parenting a grandchild), guardianships, and long-term foster care situations.”

Infant Adoption: Same Race

“Most of the business of adoption, with private agencies, private attorneys, and adoption professionals, is same-race adoption, most commonly of a white infant by an infertile couple who want a child as much like the child they might have had as possible.

Same-race infant adoption is often done to keep a child who cannot stay in his birth family or extended birth family in his community of origin. Native American, Latino, Asian, Caucasian, and African American children are placed in families of the same ethnicity and culture when possible to give them a sense of community and connectedness.”

Infant Adoption: Transracial

“When all reasonable efforts have been made to keep the child with the birth family or within the same ethnic community, transracial adoption is a positive solution. Children do need families that are permanent and cannot be left in transitional homes for most, or all, of their childhood.

In a transracial adoption, it is crucial, needless to say, that the family adopting a child of another race is sensitive to racism and has respect for their child's ethnicity and culture of origin. The family must be willing to see itself as a transracial family, not to see the child as of another race.

The family should be willing to consider living in a diverse community so that the child can become familiar with and positive about his or her own culture, ethnicity, and racial background and can have positive adult role models of the same race.”

Infant Adoption: International

“Infant adoptions from other countries are often transracial as well, so the same issues apply. Most common today in the United States are Chinese infant adoptions.

It is important for adoptive families to have respect for and an understanding of their child's country of origin. It is also important for agencies doing international adoptions to work with the sending countries and bureaus to make sure that as much information as possible is transmitted to the adoptive family so that they will have it when the child is older and asking questions.

How we talk to internationally adopted children about the complex societal issues involved in their adoptions is important.”

Sibling Adoption

“Most child welfare professionals agree heartily that siblings should be kept together and adopted into the same family; this is what we mean by sibling adoption. All efforts are made to keep siblings together in public adoption. This is not as true in private adoption, in which siblings may be placed in separate households. In these cases, an open arrangement and commitment should be made between the two (or more) families to view themselves as extended family, so that the children can have some sense of ongoing family. This is important for their healing and growth. Giving a sense of continuity to siblings adopted into different families who are nevertheless willing to function as extended family is more possible in the case of domestic sibling adoption than it is in the more complicated international sibling adoption.”

Kinship Adoption

“Kinship adoption means the adoption of a child by a grandparent, aunt or uncle, or other member of the extended family or by someone considered kin by the family, such as a dear old friend, called aunt or uncle, or a godparent. Many kinship adoptions are emotional, but not legal adoptions. This has been quite common for centuries.

Open kinship adoption refers to a kinship adoption of any of the kinds described above in which the roles and relationships are talked about and are clear. A *closed kinship adoption* is one in which the child is not told the truth concerning her birthparent. Very often sooner or later in life she discovers the truth from a family member.”

Half Adoption

“When a partner in a couple adopts the birth child of the other partner, that child has been half adopted.”