



Approximately ninety-five percent of domestic infant adoptions in the US have some degree of openness with varying levels of ongoing connections between adoptive families and their children's birth families. Although less common, it is also possible to have an open adoption in foster care adoptions and international adoptions.

In the vast majority of domestic infant adoptions, the adoptive and expectant parents considering adoption meet each other, and the expectant parents pick the new family for their baby. In many

infant adoptions, openness continues on some level once the adoption is finalized. The level of openness varies from sending letters and pictures through an adoption agency, to online connections via Facebook, to periodic phone calls and texts, to scheduled visits. It is important that both the expectant and adoptive parents are informed of their options for open adoption before they are matched, and that both parents find the right level of openness going forward.

Openness in adoption has evolved over the last 25 years because of the input from adult adoptees and research by mental health professionals. Longitudinal adoption research has shown that open adoption is better for adoptees, adoptive parents, and birth parents.

#### + How Common Is Open Adoption in the US?

Approximately two-thirds of domestic infant adoptions in the US involve some level of ongoing contact between the adoptive family and birth family. Adoption agencies report that of their domestic infant adoptions in the last several years:

- 55% had identifying and contact information fully shared between birth and adoptive families
- 40 % had contact mediated by the adoption agency
- 5% were closed adoptions (confidential adoptions)

#### + Why Should I Consider Open Adoption? Who Does It Help?

The main reason to consider open adoption is that research shows it is better for the kids. It does not hurt that it is also better for both the adoptive and birth parents. The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute report, *Openness in Adoption*, found that:

- Most participants in open adoptions report positive experiences, and greater openness is associated with greater satisfaction with the adoption process (Grotevant & McRoy, 1998; Grotevant, Perry, & McRoy, 2005; Ge, et al., 2008).

- Birthmothers who have ongoing contact with their children report less grief, regret, and worry, as well as more peace of mind, than do those who do not have contact (Cushman, Kalmuss & Namerow, 1997; Henney, Ayers-Lopez, McRoy & Grotevant, 2007).
- The primary benefit of openness is access by adopted persons – as children and continuing later in life – to birth relatives, as well as to their own medical, genealogical and family histories. Adolescents with ongoing contact are more satisfied with the level of openness in their own adoptions than are those without such contact, and they identify the following benefits: coming to terms with the reasons for their adoption, physical touchstones to identify where personal traits came from, information that aids in identity formation, positive feelings toward birthmother, and others. Youth in open adoptions also have a better understanding of the meaning of adoption and more active communication about adoption with their adoptive parents (Berge, et al., 2006; Grotevant, et al., 2007; Wrobel, et al., 1996 & 1998).
- Adoptive parents as a group report positive experiences with open adoptions and high levels of comfort with contact. For them, greater openness is linked with reduced fear of and greater empathy toward birth parents, more open communication with their children about adoption, and other benefits in their relationships with their adopted children (Berry, et al., 1998; Grotevant & McRoy, 1998; Grotevant, Perry, & McRoy, 2005; Grotevant, et al., 1994; Siegel, 2008).

#### + Is Open Adoption the Same As Co-Parenting?

Many people at the beginning of their adoption journey have never heard of or considered open adoption, and thus are often wary. It is very important that both adoptive parents and expectant parents become educated on open adoption and their options for creating an ongoing relationship that will work for all parties in the best interest of the child.

Additional resources:

- [The Other Mother: What life is like in an open adoption](#) (guest blog post)
- [Who Holds the Power in Adoption: Birth Parents or Adoptive Parents?](#) (blog post)
- [What is it Like Being Raised in an Open Adoption?](#) (1 hr. radio show w/ panel of guests)
- [What You Need to Know About Open Adoption](#) (1 hr. radio show w/expert)
- [What Birth Moms Want Adoptive Parents to Know](#) (1 hr. radio show w/ panel of guests)

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