

MYTHS AND FACTS OF OPEN ADOPTION

A large body of myths has developed in our society regarding adoption, most of them based on what the practice was like 30 to 40 years ago. Adoption has changed dramatically in recent years, but the myths still persist. Listed below are some of these myths and the realities. For many people who begin the adoption process, it is difficult to envision an open adoption. To many potential adoptive parents, openness can be a frightening and strange prospect. It is not until they begin to educate themselves about adoption that openness becomes more alluring.

MYTH: *Isn't openness really a form of co-parenting?*

FACT: Openness is not meant to be a means by which birthparents are able to continue to parent the child. Adoptive parents need to feel entitled to parent their child. An open adoption must have clear boundaries, discussed and agreed upon by both birth and adoptive parents. Birthparents have no authority over the adopted child. Birthparent involvement is based on good will and cooperation, not authority. Birthparents clearly understand this, and this significantly reduces the likelihood of power struggles sometimes associated with co-parenting.

MYTH: *If birth parents are involved, the child will be confused as to who the real parents are.*

FACT: First, both birth and adoptive parents are real, neither are fake. Second, children are much more able to understand adoption than we often give them credit for. It is very clear to a child that the parents that gave them birth are their birth parents and the parents that they know as their mother and father are their adoptive parents. While they have a very loving, special, and unique relationship with their birth parents, it is not the same as the loving, day to day, relationship they have with their adoptive parents. It is their adoptive parents that are truly their mom and dad.

MYTH: *If the birthmother knows what we look like or where we live, she'll track us down to take the baby back.*

FACT: The reality is that birthparents also want what is in the best interest of their child. They have chosen to make an adoption plan in order for their child to be in a permanent home with a loving adoptive family. In addition, meeting or receiving information about an adoptive family increases their sense of trust and reduces curiosity about the unknown. In addition, studies have also shown that adoptive parents have much fewer fears about birth parents attempting to reclaim their children when involved in open adoptions as compared to other levels of openness.

MYTH: *Openness will serve to deepen the birthparent's' grief or cause them to want to take the child back.*

FACT: In reality, just the opposite is usually the case. Seeing a happy, healthy, and much-loved baby gives the birthparents a sense of peace and security that they did, in fact, make the correct decision for their child. Rather than regretting their decision, contact with the adoptive family after placement usually serves to reaffirm the birthparent that making an adoption plan was a loving choice. For birthparents, pictures, letters, and visits are an important part of the healing process. In fact in a study conducted by Harold Grotevant and Ruth McRoy (1998), explained that birthmothers that participate in fully open adoptions resolve their feelings of grief easier and more completely than those who place their child in closed or semi-open adoptions.

- MYTH:** *Parents who place their children for adoption must not care about them and don't want to be bothered with them.*
- FACT:** Children are placed for adoption are not unloved or unwanted, just unplanned for. Most birth parents who choose adoption do so because they want what is best for their child. The birthparent may feel unprepared financially and emotionally to provide the sort of future they would like for their child, opting for a stable two-parent home for their child. Adoption is a loving, caring decision, **not** an act of rejection.
- MYTH:** *Secrecy is needed in adoption to protect the child.*
- FACT:** Historically, secrecy was a product of the shame and guilt that surrounded an out-of-wedlock birth and was designed to “protect” the child from knowing the “truth” of his/her “illegitimate” birth. Nowadays most people recognize that all children are “legitimate” and that the adoption of a child into a family is a cause for celebration rather than being something hidden in shame and disgrace.
- MYTH:** *No one could ever love a child as much as its birthparents.*
- FACT:** Just as husbands and wives (who are not biologically related) can love one another deeply, so too can adoptive parents love an adopted child. Loving and attachment are not dependent on biological connectedness.
- MYTH:** *Birthparents will eventually forget about the child they placed for adoption.*
- FACT:** Birthparents never forget their child. Even years ago when birthparents were advised to put the experience behind them and forget the child, they didn't. Although a parent's legal rights and responsibilities for the child end when they place their child for adoption, their love and concern for the child are ongoing.
- MYTH:** *Adoption persons who search for their birthparents must not really love their adoptive parents.*
- FACT:** Most people who search for their birthparents consider their adoptive parents to be their “real” parents and are not attempting to replace them by searching for their birthparents. Their motives to search include basic curiosity and a desire to know their roots and heritage. The most common questions asked by adopted persons searching are, “Who do I look like?” and “Why was I placed for adoption?”.

The preceding article was compiled with information from the following sources:

Common Fears About Open Adoption

by Jim Gritter

A Perspective: Fears and Reality about Open Adoption

by Sandy M. Batton, MSW

The Myths of Adoption

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