

OPEN ADOPTION

by

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Open adoption is definitely a topic to discuss over a cup of coffee with a friend or a family member. Open adoption refers to a continuum of options that enables birth parents and adoptive parents to have information about and communication with one another before or after placement of the child or both times. I feel that when people adopt children, they should use open adoption.

In the 1940's, social workers were able to convince legislators in every state to pass laws sealing adoption records, forever preventing adult adoptees and their birthparents from learning about each other. By the 1970's adult adoptees were deeply wounded and angered by the secrecy that had denied them access to information about their origins and identities. Also, birthparents asserted that, contrary to what social workers had insisted, they did not forget about the children they had placed for adoption and always wondered if those children were alive, well, or if they knew they were adopted. I feel that the parents do have the right to know how their child is doing and open adoption can give that right to them. These two issues started people talking more and more about open adoption and how it might be a good idea after all.

A study was done in 1989 to research the effect of open adoption. Letters were sent to a few parents inviting them to participate in an interview as part of a study about parents' reactions to open adoption. The purpose of the study was to help other parents, as well as social workers and other professionals in the adoption field, improve the ways open adoptions are handled. The letter explained that the interview would be tape-recorded in the respondents' homes and that parents would be interviewed as a couple and were guaranteed confidentiality. The interviews asked respondents to describe the nature of their open adoption experiences.

In the interviews some parents admitted they had worried that the birthmothers would want their babies back, or the babies would be kidnapped. Despite the parents' initial fears, anxieties, and concerns, none of the respondents regretted participating in an open adoption. None thought that open adoption had been a mistake or wished that he or she had chosen a closed adoption.

Through my research I have found many advantages of open adoption. For example, I found that open adoption gave parents some control over which birthparents to work with. This belief served as an antidote to their feelings of helplessness and frustration over their infertility and increased their sense of personal efficacy. According to some parents,

It became clear that we were in a great deal of control. You can end a relationship with a birthmother at any point you want. You're not required to continue. If we felt uncomfortable, we could pull out. If it turns out you just can't communicate with her, you can seek a birthmother with whom you're better fit. (Siegel 18)

Another parent said, "We don't like going into things with our eyes closed. I want to make my own decisions with as much information as I can have" (Siegel 18). Open adoption helped many parents prepare for their role as parents and would help them parent more effectively. Contact with the birthparents enabled parents to find out about the birthparents' personalities, medical history, and health risks during pregnancy. This kind of information was reassuring to the parents preparing to adopt. Being able to talk directly to the birthmother is what people need because as one parent said, "I don't have to trust that someone else interviewed the birthmother thoroughly and accurately and then reported the information to me reliably" (18). I feel that open adoption would enable parents to answer their children's questions about their origins more adequately. One parent said, "I have a responsibility to be able to answer reasonable questions that my child asks. Open adoption gives us better tools to parent (Siegel 18). Some parents feel the need to know that the birthmother chose adoption freely and willingly because it alleviates their guilt about having someone else's child and alleviates the fear that the birthmothers will reappear to reclaim the child later. Some parents gain needed reassurance that the birthparents feel good about the decision. It would bother the parents in a moral sense to know that the birthparents think that the adoption has been a mistake. One parent explains, "I'm comforted by knowing she is not in anguish about knowing where this baby is" (18).

In my opinion open adoption has four advantages for the child. One advantage is openness makes information about the birthfamilies easily accessible to the children, should the children decide to search for them later. Another advantage is parents who know the birthparents' last names and addresses feel relieved that the information is not controlled by an agency or law, but could be freely handed over to the children when the parents deem it appropriate. The parents are also pleased that the children will have more adequate information about their biological heritage and about the reasons for the adoption. I feel that children have the right to access their biological parents and siblings and with an open adoption it will be easier.

I also think there are many advantages for the birthparents. For example, it is more humane and compassionate to enable the parent's to choose the children's families. Through open adoption the birthparents can be more comforted and reassured by knowing where their babies are and by having periodic updates about the babies' well-being. As one noted, "It is more comfortable to know you've placed your baby in a home you know, not in a social worker's arms or an agency, but with two people you've gotten to know and trust" (Siegel 19). With open adoption, everyone has a lot more control, except the agency. I simply think that open adoption enables a more natural relationship among all members of the adoption triad.

I feel that openness should be offered to every birthparent and prospective adoptive parent as one of the various adoption options to be considered. Agencies should allow and facilitate contact between birthparents and adoptive parents before or after placement or both. Siegel states,

It may be wise for each birthparent-adoptive parent match to delineate clearly, in writing, before placement, how often and what form of post-placement contact will occur. Because people's needs change over time, they should have an agreed-on mechanism for renegotiating their plan. For instance, they may agree that the person who wants a different arrangement will communicate that wish to the social worker, who will then contact the other party to begin formulating a new agreement. Leaving these issues inadequately explored before placement can arouse unnecessary anxieties and produce avoidable misunderstandings later. (Siegel 21)

I feel that open adoption is a good idea. I believe it is a good idea because it will benefit everyone involved in the long run. The birthparents will be aware of who will be caring for their baby and their minds will be put at ease knowing trust. The really good thing about open adoption is that anyone involved can back out of the open adoption at any time if they do not like what is going on. The adopting parents will know what kind of family their child comes from. I feel that this is extremely important because medical issues could come up later and knowing that background of the child will be very helpful. I hope with all this information one will be able to look at open adoption with an open mind.

Works Cited

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