

OPENNESS IN ADOPTION

Tier II Day One
Kansas Child Welfare Professional Training Program



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INTRODUCTIONS AND QUESTIONS

Who in your family do you most resemble?

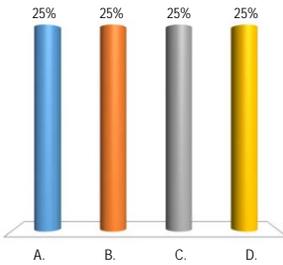
- Personality
- Talents
- Physical features
- Mannerisms
- Likes/dislikes



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My level of experience with openness in adoption is:

- A. Very experienced
- B. Somewhat experienced
- C. Limited experience
- D. No experience



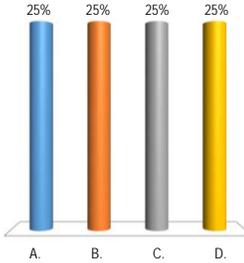
Experience Level	Percentage
A. Very experienced	25%
B. Somewhat experienced	25%
C. Limited experience	25%
D. No experience	25%



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When I first heard about openness in adoption, my first thoughts were:

- A. This sounds like a good idea.
- B. This cannot be a good plan for children and families.
- C. I would never want it for myself or my children.
- D. I am just not sure, but open to thinking about it.

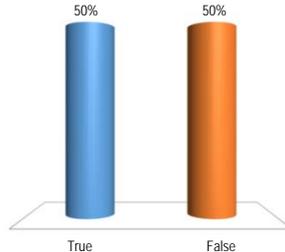


Option	Percentage
A.	25%
B.	25%
C.	25%
D.	25%

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I have personal experience with family or friends who have an open-adoption relationship.

- A. True
- B. False

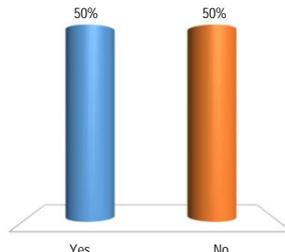


Response	Percentage
True	50%
False	50%

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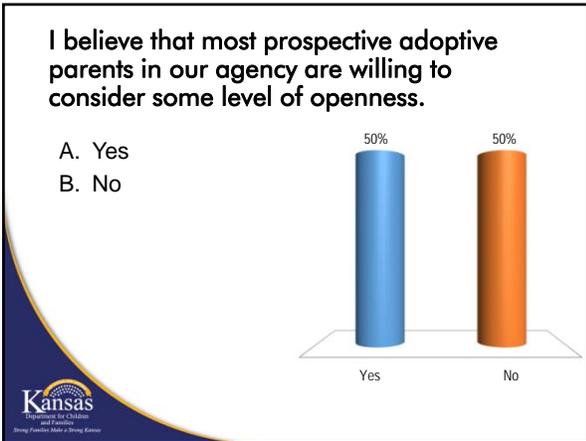
I believe that my agency is open to considering openness practice.

- A. Yes
- B. No



Response	Percentage
Yes	50%
No	50%

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- ### AGENDA
- Introductions
 - Key Concepts of Openness
 - The Importance of Openness
 - History and Trends
 - Impact of Openness on Triad Members
 - Openness and Adoption Issues
 - Openness and Child Development
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- ### LEARNING OBJECTIVES
- Explain the concept of openness and its importance in adoption practice
 - Describe the impact of openness on birth, foster, adoptive and kinship families
 - Explain the impact of openness on children and youth
 - Recognize the importance of their role in facilitating openness in adoption
 - Determine what tools and strategies to use with the adoption triad members involved in openness in adoption
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OPENNESS IN ADOPTION

A continuum involving varying degrees and types of communication and contact that exists among members of the adoption triad before, during and following the placement of the adopted person



Open Adoption

One of the components on the continuum



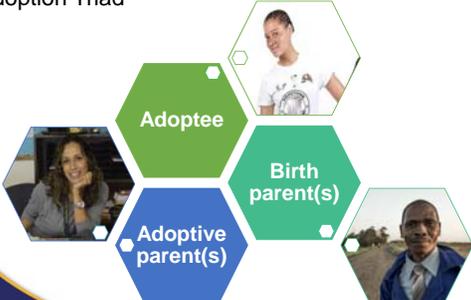
RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are the foundation of openness in adoption.



11 KEY CONCEPTS IN OPENNESS

1. Adoption Triad



11 KEY CONCEPTS IN OPENNESS

2. Adoption Constellation



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11 KEY CONCEPTS IN OPENNESS

3. Psychological Presence



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11 KEY CONCEPTS IN OPENNESS

4. Emotional Permanence



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11 KEY CONCEPTS IN OPENNESS

5. Structural Openness



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11 KEY CONCEPTS IN OPENNESS

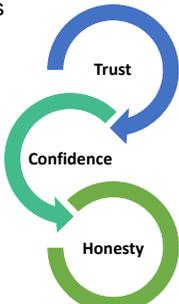
6. Communicative Openness



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11 KEY CONCEPTS IN OPENNESS

7. Collaborative Relationships



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11 KEY CONCEPTS IN OPENNESS

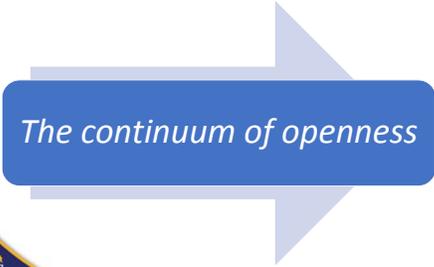
8. Closed Adoption



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11 KEY CONCEPTS IN OPENNESS

9. Semi-Open or Mediated-Open Adoption



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11 KEY CONCEPTS IN OPENNESS

10. Fully-Disclosed Open Adoption



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11 KEY CONCEPTS IN OPENNESS

11. Open Records



OPENNESS CONTINUUM

Confidential or Closed Adoption

Semi-Open or Mediated-Open Adoption

Fully-Disclosed Open Adoption



QUESTION

Which level of openness best reflects your agency's philosophy and practice?



FACT OR FICTION

When the birth parent(s) and adoptive parent(s) enter into an open-adoption agreement, they have entered into an agreement not legally binding or “enforceable” in court.

Fact

Open adoption is a relationship, perhaps requiring re-negotiation, but not a legally-binding contract.



FACT OR FICTION

Child welfare professionals involved in open adoption work must maintain control of the placement and the relationship between the birth and adoptive parents.

Fiction

Child welfare professionals involved in open-adoption work must be comfortable with relinquishing control to the parties involved in the adoption.



FACT OR FICTION

Openness in adoption supports the child’s racial and cultural identity development.

Fact

The birth family can serve as “cultural consultants” for the adoptive family and can help the child develop pride in his/her heritage.



FACT OR FICTION

When parental rights have been involuntarily terminated, the adoption should remain closed to protect both the child and the adoptive family.

Fiction

Some degree of openness can exist while maintaining safety for the adoptive family and the child, regardless of the circumstances leading to the termination of parental rights.



FACT OR FICTION

Once an adoption is finalized, the parties cannot change their minds regarding the degree of openness.

Fiction

Openness in adoption refers to relationships that may need to change over time to meet the needs of the child.



FACT OR FICTION

Openness in adoption eliminates grief for the adopted person and birth parent(s).

Fiction

Openness in adoption can help alleviate grief, but grief, loss and a sense of abandonment or rejection will continue to surface as adoption issues arise within the adoptive and birth families.



FACT OR FICTION

Open adoptions are similar to joint custody in divorce situation, in that the birth parent(s) and the adoptive parent(s) will be co-parenting.

Fiction

In open adoptions, the adoptive parent(s) are the only persons functioning as the parent(s), and they have full rights and responsibilities as the parent(s).



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FACT OR FICTION

Sensitive communication about adoption is less significant to the adjustment of the adopted child than the structure of an open adoption.

Fiction

Research indicates that family process factors, such as parental warmth, emotional sensitivity, nurturance and communicative openness, play a much more important role in the child's development than the specific type of openness structure.



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THE IMPORTANCE OF OPENNESS

Essential Connections



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WE ALL NEED

- Connection to significant relationships (persons, groups, special places)
- Information to help us
- A meaningful role
- A means of support
- A source of joy
- A system of values that guide principles and codes of conduct
- Attachment to the past, connection to history



CHILD WELFARE GOALS

Openness in adoption supports the goals of child welfare

- Establishes lifelong connections
- Helps normalize their experiences
- Keeps them physically and emotionally safe in the process



GOALS OF OPEN ADOPTION

- Minimizes the child's loss of relationships
- Maintains and celebrates the adopted child's connections with important people
- Helps child resolve losses with truth rather than with fantasies



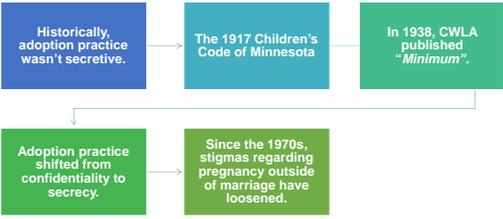
HISTORY AND TRENDS

Share reasons why some practitioners might have considered closed adoptions to be preferable.



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HISTORY

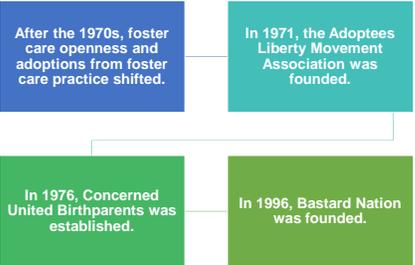


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graph LR; A[Historically, adoption practice wasn't secretive.] --> B[The 1917 Children's Code of Minnesota]; B --> C[In 1938, CWLA published "Minimum".]; C --> D[Adoption practice shifted from confidentiality to secrecy.]; D --> E[Since the 1970s, stigmas regarding pregnancy outside of marriage have loosened.];
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HISTORY



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graph TD; A[After the 1970s, foster care openness and adoptions from foster care practice shifted.] --> B[In 1971, the Adoptees Liberty Movement Association was founded.]; B --> C[In 1976, Concerned United Birthparents was established.]; B --> D[In 1996, Bastard Nation was founded.];
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TRENDS IMPACTING OPENNESS

- Demographics of children in adoption
- Current practices in adoption
- Changes in how society communicates



OVERVIEW OF IMPACT

Triad Members



CIRCUMSTANCES

Circumstances when a fully-disclosed adoption would not be in the best interest of the child...



OPEN ADOPTION

- What were the factors associated with either positive or negative outcomes for the birth and adoptive families?
- Why does it matter that birth and adoptive families who engage in openness establish positive relationships?



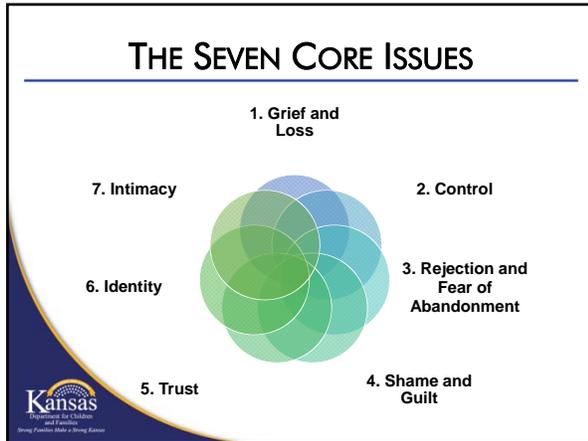
RESEARCH

- Research on openness in adoption concludes that it is dynamic and ever-evolving and that no single type of open adoption arrangement is best for everyone.
- When birth and adoptive families establish positive relationships with one another, children and youth are the primary beneficiaries.



IMPACT OF OPENNESS





CORE ISSUE #1

Grief and Loss

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CORE ISSUE #2

Control

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CORE ISSUE #3

Rejection and Fear of Abandonment



CORE ISSUE #4

Shame and Guilt



CORE ISSUE #5

Trust



CORE ISSUE #6

Identity



CORE ISSUE #7

Intimacy



QUESTIONS

- What factors or events might trigger these issues?
- How does openness lessen the effects?



IMPACT OF OPENNESS

One of the changes I would like to see is the movement away from “the best interest of the child” and towards “the best interest of the adult the child will become.”



QUESTIONS

- What might lead an adoptee to say this?
- How might practice change if workers change their thinking to “the best interest of the adult the child will become?”



THE ADOPTEE'S BILL OF RIGHTS

- At what age does an adoptee have the authority to engage in these rights—for example, to choose whether or not to have a relationship with the birth family?
- Does the age differ for some rights?
- What other factors or circumstances might influence when these rights are enacted?



FOLLOW AN ADOPTEE'S LEAD



ATTACHMENT



SELF-REGULATION



INITIATIVE



FITTING IN



IDENTITY FORMATION

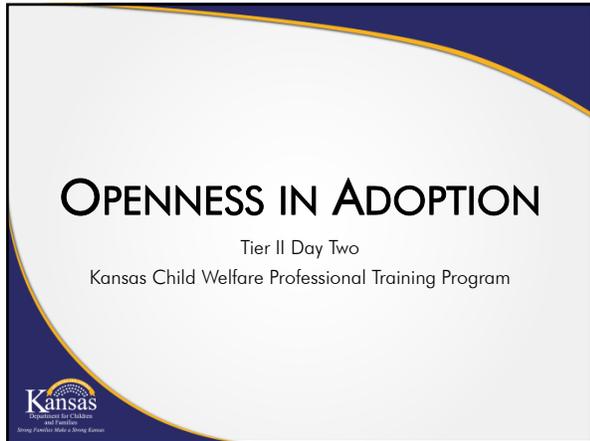


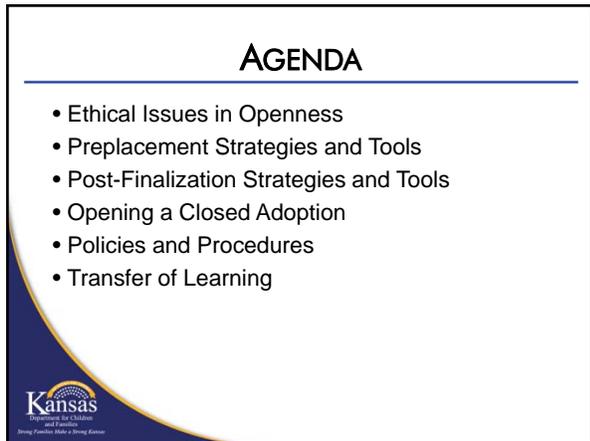
OPENNESS IN ADOPTION

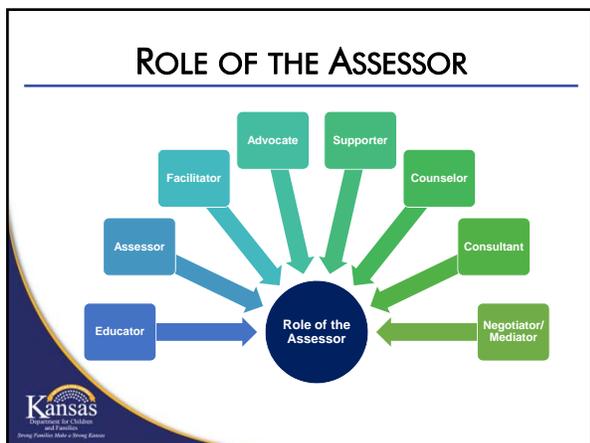
End of Day One



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FOUR ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN OPEN ADOPTION

Principle #1
Responsibility to Clients and Self-Determination

Child welfare professionals must understand their responsibility to their clients, whether that client is a birth parent, adoptive parent or an adopted person.



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FOUR ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN OPEN ADOPTION

Principle #2
Integrity

Child welfare professionals must understand their responsibility to avoid undue influence in helping to facilitate an open adoption.



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FOUR ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN OPEN ADOPTION

Principle #3
Care and Protection of the Most Vulnerable

Child welfare professionals employed in the field of child welfare must understand from an ethical perspective that the adoptee is of most importance.



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FOUR ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN OPEN ADOPTION

Principle #4

Communication, Honesty and Truthfulness

Child welfare professionals helping clients to navigate the waters of open adoption must commit themselves to full and complete honesty among the participants.



ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Lack of support and education for expectant birth parent(s) in exploring options

Lack of quality counseling

Misleading or pressuring birth parent(s)

Balancing worker bias

Engagement of the birth father or extended paternal relatives

Forced termination of parental rights as bargaining leverage

The influence of social media



DIMENSIONS OF ETHICAL DILEMMAS



SECURITY VS. PRIVACY



SECURITY

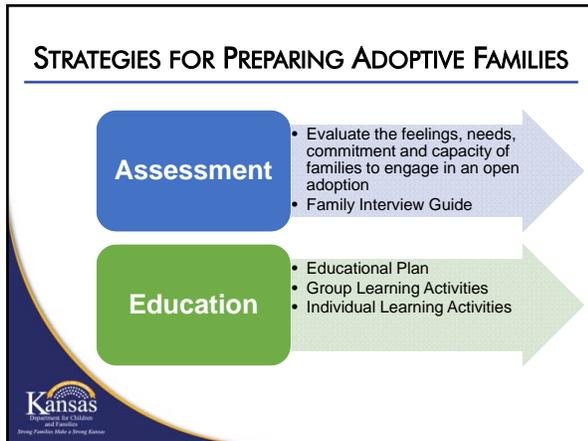
- Divisive
- Generates preoccupation
- Unhealthy relationships
- Counter to professional values
- Obsolete
- An illusion in today's world

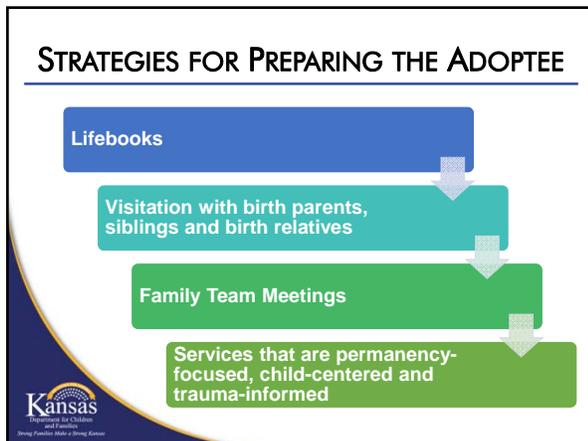


PREPARATION FOR OPENNESS IN ADOPTION









FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Assessing the child's capacity for openness

- Attachments
- Developmental level
- Understanding of adoption
- Emotional well-being and stability
- Other stresses the child is experiencing at the time
- Degree of birth family permission the child has to be part of the adoptive family
- Level of the child's participation in the openness arrangement
- Decision about the degree of information to provide/withhold



FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Assessing the birth family's capacity for openness

- Emotional maturity and health
- Ability to respect healthy boundaries
- Support of the adoption and ability to give permission to child to be part of the adoptive family
- Management of grief and stage of grieving
- Capacity to tolerate a relationship with the child they are not parenting
- Cultural differences between birth family and adoptive family



FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Assessing the adoptive parent's capacity for openness

- Emotional maturity and health
- Capacity to set healthy boundaries
- Degree of adoptive parent's ability to handle open communication regarding adoption
- Level of entitlement experienced by adoptive parents
- Cultural differences between birth family and adoptive family
- Flexibility of adoptive family
- Openness of adoptive family's milieu



FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Assessing open relationships for foster-to-adopt families

- **Parental rights:** Managing the shift from foster to adoptive parents
- **Child considerations:** Helping their child adjust to this shift
- **Visitation:** Managing the change in responsibility of visitation that was previously agency-supported and supervised
- **Agency Involvement:** Less agency presence/authority
- **Extended Family:** Ability to handle this shift in parental rights



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What are the birth mother's strengths?

What are the birth mother's limitations?

What barriers/challenges do you see in facilitating any level of openness?

What are the cultural barriers in your situation that may impact the openness arrangement?

Looking at the structural open/openness continuum, what might you suggest for the initial plan in your case study? Why are you making that suggestion?

Are there any other factors you need to consider?



PREPARATORY WORK

Preparatory work during the preplacement phase is essential to future outcomes with openness.

Assessors should:

- Encourage parents to communicate openly and honestly.
- Help educate birth and adoptive parents.
- Keep the focus on the needs and experience of the child.
- Support the development of written contact agreements.
- Recognize that preparatory work during preplacement is essential to successful outcomes.



STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Decision Making

- Help foster families who adopt understand what a shift in role to adoptive parent would mean.
- Help the prospective family to see themselves as parents, not as an infertile couple.
- Not making the decisions for an adoptive family at a pressure point
- Reinforcing their decision-making by asking, "What do you want?" "What do you need?"



STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Agreement

- Any understanding or arrangement reached between two or more parties

Contract

- A specific type of agreement that, by terms and elements, is legally binding and enforceable in a court of law



STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

Relationship Building

- Open adoption is a relationship, pure and simple. The nature of the relationship will vary as greatly as the individuals involved.
- Factors such as culture, family history and gender will impact how relationships are formed and maintained.
- The worker's role is first to prepare the parties in both the birth and adoptive families for the time of the initial meeting.



GUIDE VISITATION PLAN

- Who should be in contact with the adoptee?
- How often should they be in contact?
- What is the nature of the contact?
- What support services do all members of the triad need?
- What will be the ongoing role of the worker, if any?



THE ICEBREAKER

- Why is relationship-building considered a critical factor when foster parents adopt?
- What are the benefits of the open relationship in this foster care placement?



ICEBREAKER MEETING

- Held within the first few days of placement
- Relationship-building
- Information-sharing
- Strengthens communication
- Promotes lifelong family connections



BARRIERS TO OPENNESS IN FOSTER CARE RELATIONSHIPS

- Difficulty in communication related to diversity
- Differences in goals for case outcome (reunification vs. adoption)
- Stereotyping of birth parents as dangerous or untrustworthy
- Foster caregivers threatened by child's loyalty to birth family
- Birth parents threatened by child's loyalty or attachment to foster family
- Child successfully triangulating foster and birth families



STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME BARRIERS

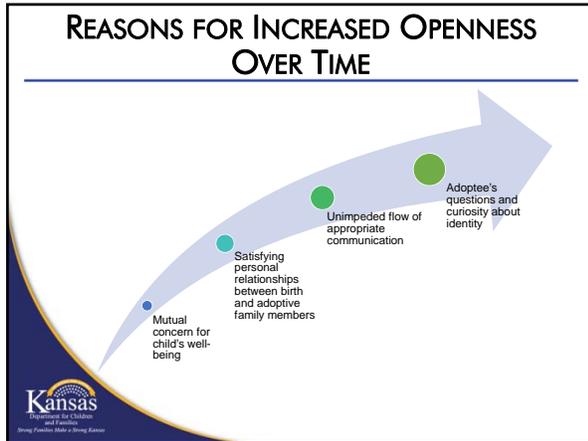
- Training/education regarding diversity competence (providing guidance and information that is specific to culture of child's family)
- Team meetings to discuss case plan goals
- Exploring stereotypes
- Determine what the child will call foster caregivers (rather than "Mom" and "Dad")

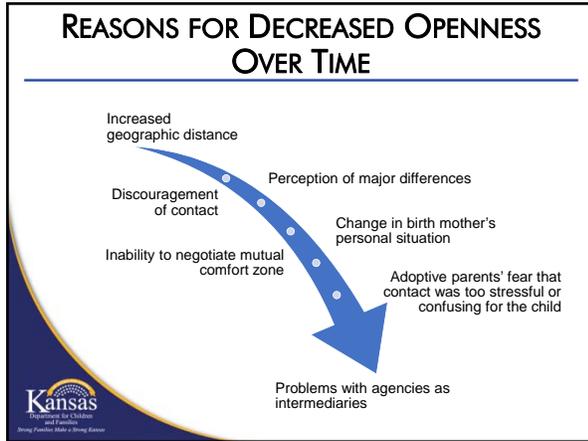


AS TIME MOVES ON

Relationships, circumstances and expectations about openness may change







PLANS CHANGE

- Birth and adoptive parents may have different needs or wishes regarding the frequency or type of contact they desire to have following their original agreement.
- Children adopted by their foster caregiver(s) may insist on continued contact with their immediate and extended family members. This becomes problematic if contacts with birth parent(s) are not considered to be in the child's best interest.

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STRATEGIES AND TOOLS

- Mediation
- Post-adoption services
- Connections with birth and adoptive families
- Maintain open communication
- Child-centered



THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA RELATIONSHIPS



STRATEGIES FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Between Birth and Adoptive Families

Discuss comfort level for sharing with each other

Decide which social media site is appropriate

Set boundaries upfront

Before posting, consider how it may be received by others



STRATEGIES FOR USING SOCIAL MEDIA

For Adoptive Parents



OPENING A CLOSED ADOPTION

- Why might a family choose to open a closed adoption?
- When an adoptive family seeks to open the closed adoption of minor children/youth, what will likely change within the family?



OPENING A CLOSED ADOPTION



OPENING A CLOSED ADOPTION

Adoptee may be worried and preoccupied about the well-being of birth family members

Adoptee may have a strong desire to have an ongoing relationship with birth sibling(s)

Adoptee may need more information about the skills, talents and positive characteristics of birth family members



WHAT MIGHT CHANGE?

- Birth and adoptive parents and adoptee must learn new boundaries.
- Birth and adoptive parents will be experiencing new and perhaps tense emotions.
- Adoptee will be experiencing new and confusing emotions.
- Adoptee will be dealing with reality and loss of fantasy
- Adoptee will be learning to manage new adult and sibling relationships.



RESEARCH

Research indicates many adoptees think about their birth families and are interested in searching.

Primary motivations include:

- To find out what they look like
- To tell them I am happy
- To tell them I am okay
- To tell them I am glad to be alive
- To find out why I was adopted



FEELINGS ABOUT BIRTH PARENT AND CONTACT

I wonder...

Loss	Why I lose everyone and everything that is important to me. What is the matter with me?
Rejection	If these people are really going to keep me
Guilt	What I did to make my own parents throw me away
Trust	If I can believe what these people are telling me



FEELINGS ABOUT BIRTH PARENT AND CONTACT

I wonder...

Identity	Who my people are and if I will be like them
Control	Why everyone else makes decisions about my life. When do I get to make important decisions about my life?
Divided Loyalties	If I should remain loyal to my birth parents, or if I should allow myself to love and be loved by my adoptive parents



THE ROLE OF ADOPTIVE PARENTS

- Give permission for discussion and search
- Listen to and support the child through his/her emotions
- Educate themselves on adoption issues and the search process
- Connect to supports
- Get non-identifying information



STRATEGIES TO PREPARE THE CHILD FOR OPENNESS

- Describe and introduce the birth parent(s) correctly
- Select an informal setting
- Prepare for the anticipated visit
- Address expectations, fantasies and feelings
- Deal with birth siblings still in the birth home
- Process reasons if delays prevent contact
- Be aware of diversity issues



DEVELOPMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS



MAKING THE FIRST CONTACT

- Address your fears and concerns
- Tell why you wish to open the adoption
- Tell them about yourself
- Talk about the benefits you see in opening up this adoption
- Assure them that you will respect boundaries
- Offer suggestions
- Tell them how to contact you



QUESTIONS

- What did you find difficult to express in your letter?
- What did you find helpful in the letter you read?
- How might cultural issues impact your contact or future relationship?



THE AGENCY'S ROLE IN OPENNESS

- Provides services to triad members
- Facilitates, negotiates and mediates openness arrangements between birth and adoptive families
- Educates



ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY TO BIRTH PARENTS

- Counseling services
- Supportive services/birth parent networks
- Mediation/negotiation in openness agreements
- Resources and information on openness
- Transition visits/ceremonies



ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY TO ADOPTIVE PARENTS

- Education and preparation
- Assess readiness for openness
- Mediation/negotiation services
- Resources and information on openness



ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY TO THE ADOPTEE

- Identify essential connections
- Assess and prepare for openness
- Family-team meeting and permanency roundtables
- Transition visits



AGENCY POLICIES AND PRACTICES

Should consider:

- Current State rules and regulations
- Educational preparation of adoptive families
- Availability of counseling services
- Child-centered services
- Individuality of the birth and adoptive parents and the child and his/her needs
- The levels of openness available through the agency
- Trained staff (Assessors) available to render services



AGENCY POLICY AND PRACTICES

Agency policy and practice factors associated with successful openness in adoption include:

- Education and training
- Shared identifying information
- A shared understanding of what open adoption is and is not
- Foundational relationship qualities
- Self-determination
- Collaborative communication

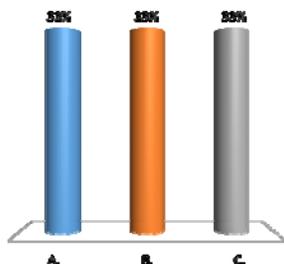


OPENNESS JEOPARDY



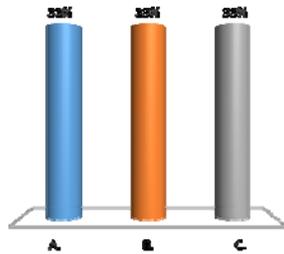
A family that talks openly of the birth parents, but has not met them would be an example of:

- A. Communicatively-open process
- B. Structural openness
- C. Psychological presence



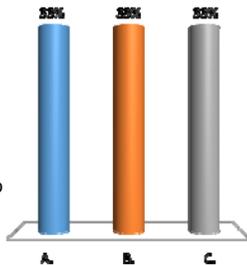
The birth parent, particularly the birth mother, is a powerful figure in the adoptive home, often even more so when the adoption is closed. This phenomenon is called:

- A. Psychological presence
- B. Anger management
- C. Disengagement



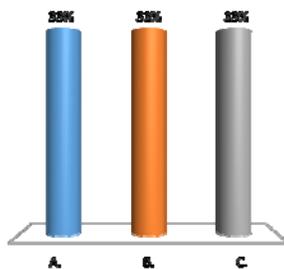
An area to explore with prospective adoptive parents regarding adoptions communication is:

- A. Which books about adoption they plan to purchase for the child
- B. The parents' willingness and ability to acknowledge and explore adoption issues both personally and with others
- C. Whether the parents plan to inform the child's teacher about the adoption



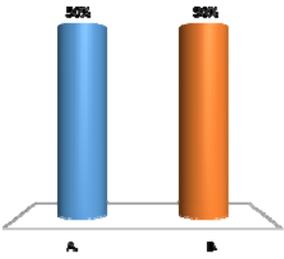
Adoptees can best integrate their past with their future if:

- A. They have accurate information about their histories.
- B. They are protected from negative information about their birth families.
- C. Adoption is discussed only when they ask questions about their birth parents.



Social media has changed the face of openness in adoption, making contact between adopted persons and their birth families more accessible.

A. True
B. False

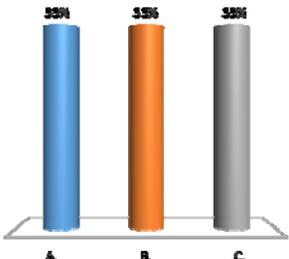


Option	Percentage
A	50%
B	50%

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Which state passed the first law that required completion of social investigations prior to adoption finalization and mandated confidentiality of adoption records?

A. Ohio
B. Minnesota
C. California

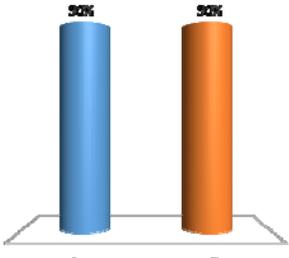


Option	Percentage
A	33%
B	33%
C	33%

Kansas
Department of Children and Family Services
Strong Families Make a Strong Kansas

Research shows a declining trend in foster caregiver adoptions in the U.S. over the past four or five years.

A. True
B. False

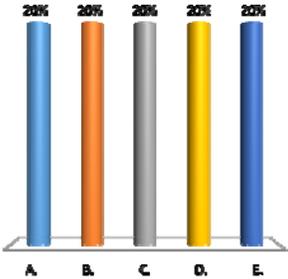


Option	Percentage
A	50%
B	50%

Kansas
Department of Children and Family Services
Strong Families Make a Strong Kansas

Which is not a core issue of adoption?

- A. Loss
- B. Jealousy
- C. Divided loyalties
- D. Control
- E. Identity

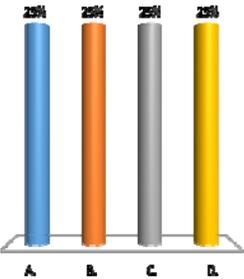


Option	Percentage
A	20%
B	20%
C	20%
D	20%
E	20%

Kansas
Department of Children and Family Services
Strong Families Make a Strong Kansas

Which of the following factors would not be considered a benefit of openness for birth families?

- A. Reassures their decision about their adoption plan
- B. Provides peace of mind in knowing how the child is doing
- C. Helps to establish a personal relationship with the adoptive family and child
- D. None of the above

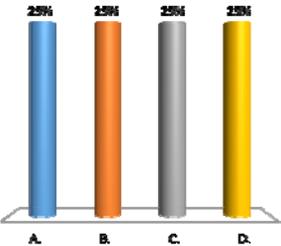


Option	Percentage
A	25%
B	25%
C	25%
D	25%

Kansas
Department of Children and Family Services
Strong Families Make a Strong Kansas

Assessors who help to facilitate openness in adoption will perform a variety of roles in their service delivery to triad members. Which of the following would not be considered one of their primary roles?

- A. Educator
- B. Assessor
- C. Counselor
- D. Coach

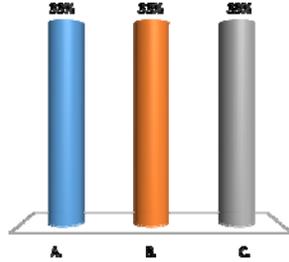


Option	Percentage
A	25%
B	25%
C	25%
D	25%

Kansas
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Strong Families Make a Strong Kansas

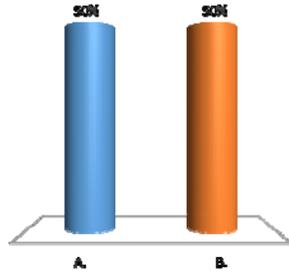
Research in adoption says that adoptive parents are dissatisfied by their level of openness due to the following reason:

- A. Too much birth-parent involvement
- B. Birth parents fade out of the picture
- C. Agency interference



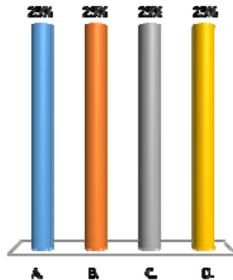
Birth parents in closed adoptions have reported few emotional or psychological implications as a result of their experience.

- A. True
- B. False



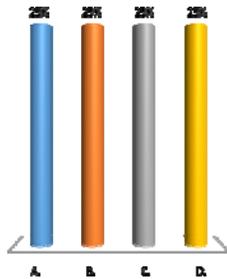
Factors that might indicate less openness within the adoptive relationship might include:

- A. A birth parent who does not support the adoptive parents as the parents of the child
- B. Adoptive parents who have difficulty drawing and maintaining clear boundaries
- C. A child who is afraid of the birth parents
- D. All of the above



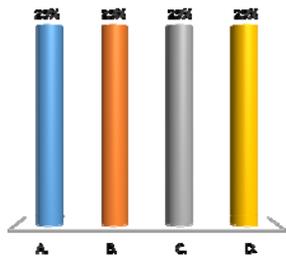
What is a benefit of openness in adoption?

- A. The adopted child receives "permission" from his/her birth parent to attach to the adoptive family.
- B. The adoptive parents can get a child more quickly.
- C. The birth parents can participate in parenting the child.
- D. It's less work for the Assessor.



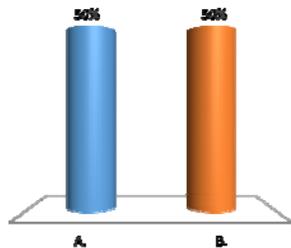
Cultural differences between the birth and adoptive families that might positively or negatively impact their openness relationship might include:

- A. Age
- B. Work schedule
- C. Socio-economic level
- D. A and C



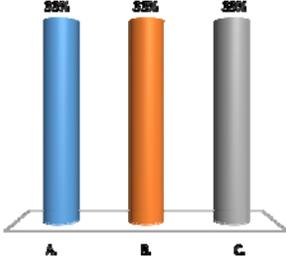
Family search and engagement programs are used by many agencies to locate, engage and connect family resources for youth.

- A. True
- B. False



A family who has exchanged only first names and some information through a mediated plan is an example of:

- A. Closed adoption
- B. Semi-open adoption
- C. Fully-mediated adoption

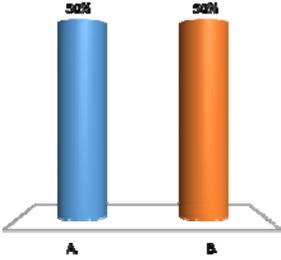


Option	Percentage
A	33%
B	33%
C	33%

Kansas
Department of Children and Family Services
Strong Families Make a Strong Kansas

Research indicates, since the 1980s, domestic adoption agencies in the U.S. have done little to change their views or practices regarding openness engagements between triad members.

- A. True
- B. False

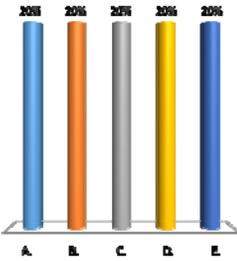


Option	Percentage
A	50%
B	50%

Kansas
Department of Children and Family Services
Strong Families Make a Strong Kansas

Promising a birth parent that he/she can maintain an ongoing open relationship with a child being placed for adoption constitutes what type of ethical dilemma in openness practice?

- A. Client self-determination
- B. Honesty
- C. Protection of the most vulnerable client
- D. Full disclosure regarding benefits and challenges of openness
- E. B and D

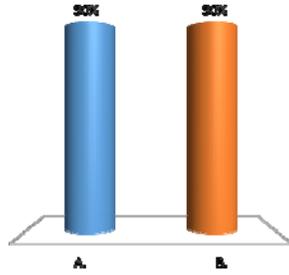


Option	Percentage
A	20%
B	20%
C	20%
D	20%
E	20%

Kansas
Department of Children and Family Services
Strong Families Make a Strong Kansas

It is important to follow the adoptee's lead when choosing the level of openness.

- A. True
- B. False



Agenda and Objectives

Agenda:

Day 1

I. Introduction	30 minutes
II. Key Concepts of Openness	60 minutes
Break	15 minutes
III. The Importance of Openness	25 minutes
IV. Historical Perspectives and Trends	50 minutes
V. Impact of Openness on Triad Members	75 minutes
Break	15 minutes
VI. Openness and Adoption Issues	45 minutes
VII. Openness and Child Development	45 minutes

Day 2

VIII. Ethical Issues in Adoption	75 minutes
Break	15 minutes
IX. Preplacement Strategies & Tools	90 minutes
X. Post-Legalization Strategies & Tools	50 minutes
XI. Opening a Closed Adoption	55 minutes
Break	15 minutes
XII. Agency Policy and Practices	30 minutes
XIII. Conclusion/Transfer of Learning	30 minutes

Learning Objectives:

1. Participants can explain the concept of openness and its importance in adoption practice.
2. Participants can describe the history of openness in adoption and identify current trends.
3. Participants can describe the impact of openness on birth, foster, adoptive and kinship families.
4. Participants can explain the impact of openness on children and youth.
5. Participants can recognize the importance of their role in facilitating openness in adoption.
6. Participants can determine what tools and strategies to use with the adoption triad members involved in openness in adoption.

Competencies

Competencies:

- 201-09-001 Knows the range of options for openness in adoption, their advantages and disadvantages and the potential effects on children and their adoptive and birth families
- 201-09-002 Knows the characteristics of birth family members, adoptive family members and adoptees that support adoption openness
- 201-09-003 Understands the potential ethical and practical dilemmas involved in open adoptions
- 201-09-004 Understands the nature of potential conflicts between adoptive and birth families in open adoptions and the effects on the child
- 201-09-005 Understands the benefit of openness in helping adopted children sustain relationships with people to whom they are strongly attached
- 201-09-006 Understands the effects of openness in helping children form their adult identities
- 201-09-008 Understands how an adopted child's relationship with birth family members may change over time, depending on the child's age, developmental needs and birth family circumstances
- 201-05-016 Knows how to support the development of positive relationships between birth and resource families to facilitate communication, enhance visitation and sustain children's attachments

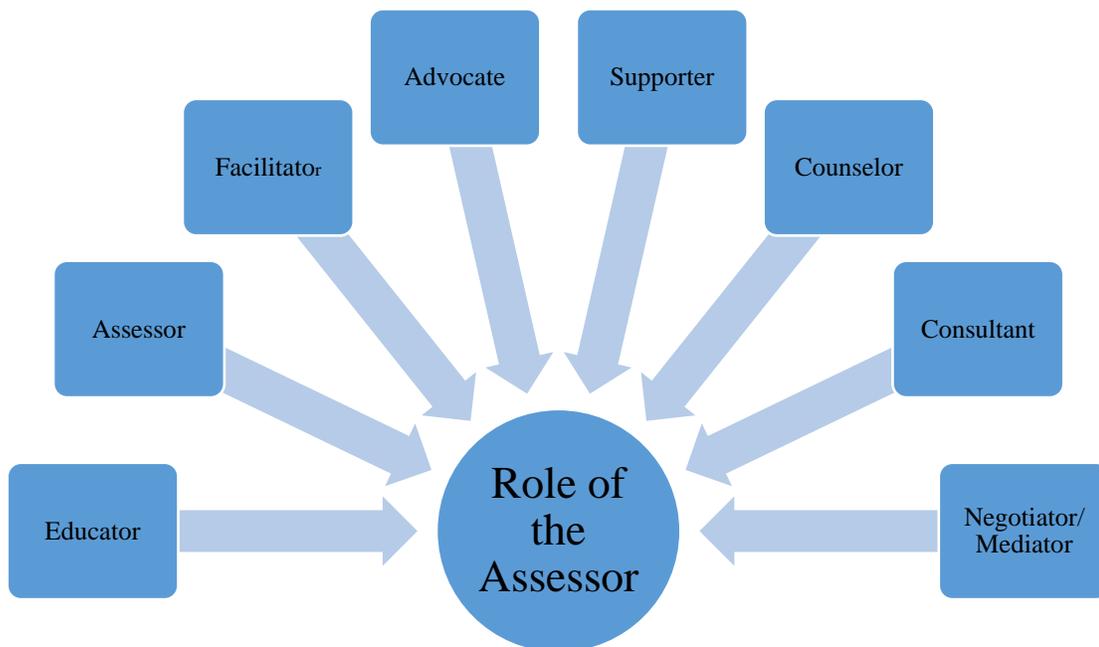
Day II

At the end of Day 2, you will be able to:

- Explain your role in facilitating openness in adoption.
- Determine what tools and strategies of intervention to use with the adoption triad members involved in openness in adoption.

Section VIII: Ethical Issues in Openness

- Assessors play an important role in facilitating ethical practice in openness and must adhere to ethical standards of practice.
- Openness in adoption practice is guided by four key principles:
 1. Responsibility to clients and self-determination
 2. Integrity
 3. Care and protection of the most vulnerable
 4. Communication, honesty, truthfulness
- Eight values provide the foundation for ethical practice.



OPENNESS IN ADOPTION

Definitions and Key Concepts of Openness in Adoption

Openness in adoption: A concept used in child welfare practice to describe the degree and nature of contact that exists among members of the adoption triad before, during and following the adoptive placement of the adopted person. It includes a continuum of arrangements that define expectations and levels of communication among the parties involved.

Adoption Triad: Refers to the birth parent(s), the adoptive parent(s) and the adopted person.

Adoption constellation: Refers to all individuals impacted by adoption, including the triad members, as well as the birth and adoptive grandparents and siblings, future spouses of the adoptee and birth parents, foster caregivers, assessors and close friends of triad members.

“Psychological presence”: Psychological presence was first identified by Pauline Boss, family therapist and professor of family science, toward the end of the United States war in Vietnam. Boss was working with families of missing-in-action soldiers. She observed that some families were troubled when the missing, physically absent soldier/father was psychologically present in the family in a way that kept the absent member part of the usual family life.

Emotional permanence: Refers to a strong sense of emotional security and belonging based on trusting, nurturing and enduring relationships that develop between children and their permanent caregivers [or other significant individuals].

Structural Openness: Refers to the level of contact between birth and adoptive families (Siegel & Smith, 2012).

Communicative openness: A free expression and discussion that takes place within adoptive families; the ability to talk freely and to feel heard and understood (Siegel & Smith, 2012).

Confidential/Closed adoption: No identifying information is shared between the birth family and adoptive family. This is also called *confidential* or *traditional* adoption. Information may be given to the agency to update the records, but is not intended for transmission to either party (McRoy, et. al., 1998).

Semi-open or mediated open adoption: Refers to the continuum of openness within relationships that can exist between members of the birth family and the adoptive family of a child. Openness may include knowledge of information about the “other” family of the child, the birthparents’ selection of an adoptive family for the child, contact through a third party, or ongoing visitation. The relationships may exist between the child, adoptive family and the birth parents or between the child, adoptive parents and birth siblings, grandparents, other relatives or kinship figures (including former foster parents).

Fully-disclosed open adoption: Means that everyone involved in the process, whether adoptive or birth parent, is open to meeting and talking with each other both prior to, and subsequent to, the placement. They know each other’s names and contact information. How much communication and contact will occur is impossible to say. But in an open adoption, the assumption exists that there will be as much communication as possible within the limits of courage, compassion and common sense (Severson, 1997).

OPENNESS IN ADOPTION

Child Development and Adoption

Age	Task	Relation to Adoption
Infancy	Learning to attach	Babies begin the attachment process in the womb, so even separation at birth can impact their ability to attach.
Toddlerhood	Learning to self-regulate (manage their emotions and behavior)	Children learn to regulate through their caregiver. If the caregiver isn't regulated, (is nervous, lacks confidence or is angry or upset all the time) the child cannot learn to regulate their emotions.
Preschool	Learning to take initiative; "magical thinking" stage of cognitive development	They will ask a lot of questions, even if they don't understand the concepts. They have an inflated sense of the control they have over their world. If adoptive parents are uncomfortable talking about adoption, they could decide adoption is shameful, and therefore they are shameful.
School Agers	Developing competence; understands the concept of adoption and loss; wants to fit in with peers	They are less likely to ask questions, even though they may be curious. They are identifying their strengths, likes and dislikes and are curious about traits that run in the family.
Adolescence	Forming their identity; peers more influential than parents	Children this age may resist authority and try on new identities. May be thinking about the future and separation from family.

Read the following case study, and then answer the questions for your assigned developmental stage:

- What adoption issues might be triggered for Jadonna?
- What behaviors and feelings is Jadonna expressing as she deals with these issues?
- How can openness (structural and/or communicative) help Jadonna with these issues?

Background:

Jadonna is a 14-year-old African-American female who was adopted by the Parker family. When Jadonna was only a few months old, her birthmother, Delanna, left her with a neighbor for several days. After multiple unsuccessful attempts to contact Delanna, the neighbor called the Department for Children and Families (DCF). Delanna was unable to be located, and DCF determined Jeanette's father, Carl, was serving a lengthy prison term for drug distribution. Delanna was a recent immigrant to America and had no family here. Carl's parents and siblings were contacted, but they were either unwilling to take Jadonna or found to be unsuitable placements.

Jadonna was placed in foster care. A few months later, Delanna was located when she contacted her neighbor about Jadonna. Delanna had overdosed on drugs and then entered a rehabilitation facility, where she was currently residing. Delanna was distraught that Jadonna was in foster care and contacted all of Carl's relatives until she was able to find a cousin of Carl's living in a neighboring state who was willing to help. DCF completed a homestudy and approved the relative, Cindy Parker and her husband Michael, for placement.

After Delanna was informed that Jadonna would be living with the Parkers, she decided to return to her home country. She felt she was not ready to parent, and without Carl's support, she needed to be near her family.

Scenario one – age 14 months:

Jadonna was placed with the Parkers just after her first birthday. She has been fussy and difficult to get to sleep. She is a very picky eater, and the Parkers are worried she isn't getting the nutrition she needs. She seems uninterested in her new toys and stuffed animals. Cindy is upset that Jadonna isn't settling into their home and worries if she did the right thing. She is often tearful.

Scenario two – age 4 years:

The Parkers have stayed in touch with Delanna through letters and Skype calls. They recently received a letter stating Delanna will be coming to the states for a visit next month. She has asked to see Jadonna. Jadonna has been asking a lot of questions about her birth parents, and Cindy caught her staring at the pictures of Carl and Delanna she has in her room and looking sad. Recently, Cindy punished Jadonna for writing on the wall with a marker, and Jadonna cried uncontrollably for several minutes. When she finally calmed down, she said she was bad, and that's why her parents didn't keep her. When Cindy asked Jadonna if she would like to visit with her birthmother, Jadonna looked slightly worried and asked if Cindy would be going too.

Scenario three – age 10 years:

Delanna has returned to the states twice and visited with Jadonna. They also email regularly. Jadonna seems to really like when Delanna sends her pictures of family events. When Delanna arrived in the states for her next visit, she got permission to pick Jadonna up from school and take her for ice cream. When she saw Jadonna walking with her friends in front of the school, she waved warmly and went to give her a hug. Jadonna squirmed out of her arms and ran quickly to the car. As they drove off, Jadonna yelled at her for embarrassing her and was angry that now all her friends would be asking who Delanna is.

Scenario four - age 14 years:

Recently, Jadonna received an email from Delanna stating that Carl would be getting out of prison next year. At that time, Delanna would return to the states to live. She shared a little about their plans and how excited she was that she would be living closer to Jadonna. Jadonna didn't tell her parents about this news. The Parkers noticed that Jadonna seemed sullen and spent more time in her room on her phone. They also noticed that Jadonna was dressing a lot

like Delanna and wearing her hair in the same way. One night, Cindy knocked on Jadonna's door and asked her to come play a family game. Jadonna screamed that they weren't her real family and slammed the door.

Essential Connections

Information	
Significant Person	
Group	
Means of Support	
Source of Joy	
Systems of Values	
History	
Special Place	

Adoption Ethics Case Studies

Case A — Public Agency Adoption

County A has two brothers, ages four and six, in foster care. The boys, Eddie and Tommy, have been in foster care 18 months, and have been with the same foster family during that time.

Birth Family

The birth mother abuses a variety of substances, including alcohol and cocaine; she has been in and out of treatment numerous times. She acknowledges that she is unable to care for the children at this point, but has been unwilling to sign a voluntary relinquishment of parental rights. When she visits the boys, she assures them they will be able to live with her again at some point in the future. Eddie and Tommy have different fathers; paternity of the younger child has never been established, and the father of the older child died following a drug-related shooting.

Adoptive Family

The foster family is very interested in adopting the boys. They currently dread visits with the birth mother, as the boys have behavioral issues both before and after visits. They would prefer an adoption with no face-to-face contact with the birth mother following termination of her parental rights.

Agency

The caseworker would like to pursue a non-adversarial adoption, with the birth mother signing a voluntary relinquishment of her parental rights. The worker promises the birth mother continued post-adoption contact if she signs a voluntary relinquishment; the worker adds there will be no post-adoption contact if the birth mother forces the agency to seek termination of parental rights. Further, the worker tells the foster family they must agree to a fully-open adoption, in spite of their reservations about contact, in order to proceed with adopting Eddie and Tommy.

Issues

1. What are the ethical dilemmas involved in this situation?
2. If the birth mother signs a voluntary surrender, and the foster parents proceed with adoption as directed by the agency, how do you think this openness arrangement will impact all triad members?
3. How would you guide the participants in ethical decision-making regarding openness?

Case B — Private Agency Adoption

Kidwell, a private adoption agency, is providing birth-parent counseling to a young woman who is in her eighth month of pregnancy. The birth mother has indicated her desire to place the child in a fully-disclosed adoption with ongoing contact, and she has indicated her desire to choose the adoptive family.

Birth Family

The birth mother is a 24-year-old woman who has not divulged the name of the birth father. She states the birth father is “unknown;” in reality, he is a married man with three children, and he is unaware of this pregnancy. The birth mother is being treated for Bipolar Disorder. She disclosed this information to the caseworker. However, the caseworker, concerned that this would impact the child’s “adoptability,” did not record the information.

Adoptive Family

The prospective adoptive parents for Kidwell are given little training about openness in adoption during the pre-placement phase. They are told during the pre-service training that the agency promotes openness in adoption, but they are given little rationale for this practice and no guidance about decision-making regarding openness. Prospective adoptive parents are likewise given little information about adoption communication with the child about the birth family or about the adoption itself.

Agency

The caseworker fears the prospective adoptive parents may not agree to adopt this child or agree to openness in the adoption if they are aware of the birth mother’s mental health history.

Kidwell believes strongly that the birth parents should be empowered to choose the adoptive family for their child. However, the agency very selectively only shows the birth parent one adoptive family profile at a time. If placement with the first family is rejected by the birth parent, the agency provides another profile (again selectively) for the birth parent’s consideration, and so on.

Issues

1. What are the ethical dilemmas involved in this situation?
2. How might these dilemmas be managed?
3. How would you guide the openness decisions in this case to best meet the needs of the child?

Top 10 Ethical Considerations in Open Adoption Practice

By Mary Martin Mason

Open adoption is designed to be a child-centered arrangement based upon the premise that humans need genetic continuity to attain a healthy identity. Open adoption benefits children by providing a lifelong, authentic relationship and a genuine connection to their lineal heritage, ongoing answers to questions, and healing for the losses that permeate adoption. Open adoption benefits birthparents because the grieving process that follows all adoption needs not be complicated by having to live with the ambiguity of not knowing what happened to their children. Adoptive parents feel parental entitlement in open adoption and have access to the continuing genetic, medical and family information needed to raise the child.

Open adoption is a standard, common practice today, as revealed by the November 2006 White Paper written by the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, "Safeguarding the Rights and Well-being of Birthparents in the Adoption Process." Researchers found that 90 percent or more of contemporary birthmothers have met the adoptive parents of their children, and almost all of the remaining birthmothers helped to choose the new parents through profiles.

The 10 principles that follow are guideposts for open adoption practice and policy:

1. To fulfill in the goal of benefiting the child, an open adoption should be a fully-disclosed adoption and should move beyond the practice called mediated or semi-open adoption, in which an agency serves as an intermediary to exchange information between parties.
2. The child should be given the option to be a full participant in the open adoption rather than the adoptive parents maintaining contact with birth family members without the child's knowledge.
3. Agency workers need to be educated and overcome fears about allowing clients to be in contact without agency control. An agency that simultaneously practices semi-open adoption and fully-disclosed adoption communicates its distrust of the foundation of openness, often communicated as, "We let clients make that choice". Professional standards require that agencies provide guidance and education to clients, including the few birthparents who insist on confidential adoption. Ethical standards require that agencies refuse to do a confidential adoption, even if it means losing a client.

4. Systemic change must take place in agencies that practice open adoption, requiring a shift in policies, in job descriptions for workers and ultimately, in post-adoption services that will eschew secrecy as the foundation for adoption.
5. Birthfathers, as in other forms of adoption, need to be identified, notified and invited to participate in open adoptions. Father-friendly inclusion should be the mission of those practicing and participating in open adoption. Professionals frequently need training in revamping services to be father-friendly before successfully engaging birthfathers.
6. Services such as pre-adoptive education, legal representation and post-adoption mediation or counseling should be equalized for birth and adoptive parents.
7. Open adoption should never be used to entice, pressure or coerce anyone experiencing a crisis pregnancy to choose adoption.
8. Post-adoption contact agreements should be standard and fully enforceable in all states, for both independent and agency adoptions.
9. Legal counsel should not be shared between parents considering adoption and prospective adoptive parents because they have conflicting interests.
10. Agencies that practice open adoption while opposing the right of adoptees to have access to their original birth certificates "serve two masters". If a foundation of truth and full disclosure is solid, then it should serve adoptions moving forward, as well as adoptions that took place in the past.

Reference: Mason, M. (2016). *Top Ten Ethical Considerations in Open Adoption Practice*. American Adoption Congress.

Retrieved from: www.americanadoptioncongress.org/open_mason_article.php

Openness Toolbox

Choosing an open adoption relationship requires special skills and abilities on the part of both birth parents and adoptive parents. The key element in facilitating open adoption is the preparation of the birth and prospective adoptive parents. The time period available to prepare the participants in an individual adoption plan may vary from months to days. The role of the adoption professional/assessor is to serve as the navigator, not the captain of the plan. The assessor offers the “map,” but the parties choose the direction, route and speed of the plan. As an assessor, it is important develop a good solid map to prepare for the adoption experience. The following is a list of areas to include in the preparation plan/map.

I. Assessment Phase

At the outset of adoption planning, the worker must have an understanding of key factors that must be considered when facilitating an openness adoption arrangement, specifically child welfare foster-to-adopt arrangements.

During this assessment period, workers should be aware of basic characteristics of adoptive parents who have been successful with the open adoption experience. These characteristics include:

- A. **Confidence:** Adoptive parents have confidence in their own parenting abilities and styles. They do not need to always second-guess themselves about discipline or boundary setting.
- B. **Risk Taking:** Adoptive parents are able to take risks. Open adoption relationships require risk taking. Adoptive parents with these ongoing relationships need to be able to function without all the answers "up-front" and clear. It is impossible to know all the answers when it comes to working out these types of arrangements.
- C. **Sensitivity:** Adoptive parents are aware of and sensitive to the core issues of adoption that impact not only their child, but the birth mother as well. Open adoption does not eradicate the grief, loneliness and guilt for these birthmothers. It can ease feelings of loss, but does not erase them.

A critical component of the Assessment Phase is the consideration of the cultural needs of the birth and adoptive families. Workers should discuss with the parties their family’s attitudes, values and beliefs relative to privacy, family relationships, the importance of family history and ancestry. This will assist the worker in developing and facilitating a plan for open adoption that is compatible with the birth and adoptive families’ cultural norms. This increases the likelihood of success and decreases the risk of crisis.

Workers involved in open adoption relationships with older child adoptions should be aware during this assessment period of their role in the plan. Workers should guide a visitation plan to benefit all members of the triad:

- Who should be in contact with the child?
- How often should they be in contact?
- What is the nature of the contact?
- What support services do all members of the triad need?
- What will be the ongoing role of the worker, if any?

II. The Education Plan

Part of facilitation of openness in adoption is the educational plan that is developed for the families involved. Educational activities can be divided into two different categories:

A. Group Learning Activities – This aspect of training can include the following information for families:

1) Introduce basic adoption education

- Present language of adoption
- Instruct on concept of openness
- Present language of open adoption
- Introduce adoptive parent and/or birth parent involved in an open arrangement
- Communicate skills on dealing with attitudes within family/community regarding adoption in general and open adoption

B. Individual Learning Activities – This aspect of training is tailored to meet the needs of each individual adoptive family. These activities can include:

- Give recommended reading lists
- Encourage a visit to an adoptive support group and adult adoptee support group
- Recommend videos such as *Immediate Family and Losing Isaiah*

The worker should select educational activities that are compatible with the parent's culture. For example, a parent's values and beliefs may discourage the sharing of personal information to anyone outside the family system. Group learning activities would not be effective and, in fact, would be stressful to that person. Individual learning activities may be more appropriate and effective.

III. Decision Making

Decision-making is an important aspect of the facilitation of open adoption relationships. In many cases, families who come to adoption through infertility come with damaged decision-making skills. Part of the worker's job is to help the family repair their damaged decision-making abilities. This is done by:

- Helping the family to see themselves as parents, not as an infertile couple
- Not making the decisions for couples at a pressure point
- Reinforcing their decision making by asking "What do you want?" "What do you need?"

IV. Relationship Building

Open adoption is a relationship—pure and simple. The nature of the relationship will vary as greatly as the individuals involved. Factors such as culture, family history and gender will impact how relationships are formed and maintained. The worker's role is first to prepare the parties for the time of the initial meeting. It is somewhat like helping a friend to get ready for a blind date:

- How to make a good impression
- What to talk about
- What if I'm asked a question I'm not prepared to answer
- Where do we meet—what is a "safe" place
- What if I don't like them
- Anticipation of questions

Also like a blind date, open relationships may fizzle or take off after the initial "date" or meeting. If the relationship starts to grow and evolve, the worker should be there to assist in answering questions, be a sounding board or consultant.

The worker is not supposed to be the glue that bonds the relationship, but the temporary support to enable the bonding to occur. The ultimate goal for an open relationship should be for the parties involved to maintain a positive relationship without the assistance of the worker. Communication is key to any successful relationship. Cultural differences in communication styles and behaviors can lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation on the part of birth and/or adoptive parents. The worker should be able to determine problem areas that are communication difficulties.

Once communication difficulties are identified, the worker may address these with the birth parents and adoptive parents to work toward improving the communication. The worker should also be able to remind and reassure the parties that some relationships are not workable/acceptable for parties. Open adoption is a life-long commitment. That is a long time to be in a relationship that is not a positive experience. It is in the best interest of everyone, especially the child, that this is addressed prior to entering a permanent relationship.

Questions for Birth Parents – A Self-Assessment

The following are questions to ask yourself concerning your adoption decision. You can discuss your answers with your worker.

- 1) Why am I choosing adoption?**

- 2) How do I define open adoption?**

- 3) What do I want in an adoption?**

- 4) What do I want for my child in an adoption?**

- 5) What are my major concerns and fears about this open adoption?**

- 6) What is my vision for my open adoption in the...**
 - **First year**

 - **Five years from now**

 - **10 years from now?**

- 7) What qualities do I hope for in an adoptive parent?**

Questions for Adoptive Parents – A Self-Assessment

(Infant Placement)

The following are questions to ask yourself concerning your adoption decision. You can discuss your answers with your worker.

- 1) Why am I choosing adoption?**

- 2) How do I define open adoption?**

- 3) What do I want in an adoption?**

- 4) What do I want for my child in an adoption?**

- 5) What are my major concerns and fears about this open adoption?**

- 6) What is my vision for my open adoption in the...**
 - First year**

 - Five years from now**

 - 10 years from now?**

- 7) What qualities do I hope for in a birth parent?**

Questions for Adoptive Parents – A Self-Assessment

(Special Needs/Older Child Placement)

The following are questions to ask yourself concerning your adoption decision. You can discuss your answers with your worker.

- 1) Why am I choosing adoption?**

- 2) How do I define open adoption?**

- 3) What do I want in an adoption?**

- 4) What do I want for my child in an adoption?**

- 5) What are my major concerns and fears about this open adoption?**

- 6) What is my vision for my open adoption in the...**
 - First year**

 - Five years from now**

 - 10 years from now?**

- 7) What qualities do I hope for in a birth parent?**

Open Adoption Issues and Questions for Special Needs/Older Children Adoptive Parents

(These issues/questions should be discussed with the adoptive parents)

During the initial home study and pre-finalization period, the worker should focus on the family's willingness and ability to acknowledge and explore adoption issues, both personally and with others.

- a. How open is the family to examine their motivation for adoption?
- b. How comfortable is the family with the similarities and differences created by adoptive family life as compared to biological parenting?
- c. How willing and able is the family to discuss difficult and emotionally-charged issues related to their child's past. How have the parents discussed other sensitive or difficult topics within the family?
- d. How well does the adoptive family understand the child's need to feel some level of connection to the birth family? (That connection may not be physical, but emotional through communication. Parents must always remember that for a child to develop a healthy sense of value, they need to feel valued—even from the birth parents who did not or could not care for them)¹.
- e. How have the parents handled the discussion around dealing with difficult relatives?

Additional Behavioral Questions to Ask

- a. Give an example of a time that you have had to choose to meet the needs of a child (or someone else) over the needs or demands of another. What did you do and how did it work out?
- b. Tell me about a time when you experienced rejection from someone in whom you have invested a lot of time. What was the reason for the rejection (loyalty to another)? What did you do, and how did it work out? (This question addresses the parent's ability to deal with the child's rejecting behavior due to birth parent loyalties.)

¹ Brodzinsky, David Smith, D.W & Brodzinsky, A. (1998) *Children's Adjustment to Adoption: Developmental and Clinical Issues*, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing)

- c. Give examples of how you have helped a child (or another person) through a major disappointment. What did you do and how did it work out? (This question addresses the parent's ability to deal with a child's pain as a result of missed contacts.)

- d. How have you managed boundary issues with your extended family and close friends? What have been instances of boundary violations and what did you do? How did they work out? (This addresses the parent's ability as the adoptive family to establish boundaries and guidelines.)

Openness in Adoption Addressing a Child's Expectations, Fantasies and Fears

Questions to Ask About Contact

1. What kind of contact do you want (phone/email/social media/face-to-face)?
2. How often do you think you would like to have contact with them?
3. How do you feel about meeting them?
4. How do you think they feel about having contact with you?
5. If you want to meet them, what do you think the first meeting will be like?
6. What questions do you hope your birth parents can answer?
7. What are the most important things for them to know about you?
8. What do you think would be the best thing that could happen if you are able to have contact with your birth family?
9. What would be the worst thing that could happen if you were to have contact?
10. Do you think things will change in your adoptive home? If so, how?

Questions to Ask About Face to Face Meetings

1. Would you like to contact them by letter or phone prior to meeting them?
2. What questions or information would you like to have before a visit or contact?
3. Where do you want the visit to take place?
4. What do you want to do at the visit?
5. What questions do you want to ask your birth mother or birth father?
6. What would you like to tell your birth family about yourself, your family, school, etc.?
7. What do you think your birth parents are going to say to you?
8. What do you want to wear?
9. Are there items you want to take with you to show them, such as a report card, trophies/awards, pictures, etc.? Do you want to take a gift or card for them?
10. Who would you want to be with you, if anyone, at the visit?
11. What signals could we use if you change your mind or want to end the visit?
12. What do you want to do after the meeting?

Bridging the Gap of Separation between Children and Their Families

A Continuum of Contact for Foster Parents

- Exchange letters with child's family via caseworker
- Call child's parents on phone
- Request pictures of child's family to display in child's room
- Give parents pictures of child
- Share copies of homework & report cards with family
- Have positive view about birth parent
- Talk openly about family to child
- Send snack/activity for visit
- Praise parents' progress
- Dress child up for visits
- Provide written report for case planning conference
- Share monthly progress reports
- Host/arrange sibling visits
- Brag to parent about child
- Request cultural information from birth parent
- Transport child to visit
- Talk with parent at visit
- Encourage parent to phone child
- Meet child's family at placement
- Non-threatening attitude
- Refer to child as "your child" to birth parent
- Share parenting information
- Attend staffings, case-planning conferences, court hearings
- Help birth parent find community resources
- Encourage/reassure reunification
- Share child's Life Book with parents
- Attend training to learn how to work directly with parent
- Learn about, understand and respect birth parent's culture
- Transport child to/from parent's home
- Review child's visits with parents
- Give parents verbal progress reports
- Ask parent to come to appointments
- Foster parent transports birth parents to meetings
- Invite child's family to attend school programs
- Assist in planning child's return to birth home
- Welcome child's parents into your home
- Attend parenting classes with parents
- Serve as support to family following reunification
- Foster parent provides respite care
- Include birth parent in farewell activities

Openness in Adoption

Seven Wonders of Adoption

Wonder # 1: Loss and Grief

“I wonder why I lose everyone and everything that is important to me. What is the matter with me?”

Wonder # 2: Rejection/Abandonment

“I wonder if these people are really going to keep me.”

Wonder # 3: Guilt and Shame

“I wonder what I did to make my own parents throw me away.”

Wonder # 4: Trust

“I wonder if I can believe what these people are telling me.”

Wonder # 5: Identity and Self-Esteem

“I wonder who my people are and if I will be like them.”

Wonder # 6: Control

“I wonder why everyone else makes decisions about my family, my name, how much information I get, how old I have to be to meet my siblings or birth parents... When do I get to make important decisions about my life?”

Wonder # 7: Divided Loyalties

“I wonder if I should remain loyal to my birth mother or if I should allow myself to love and be loved by my adoptive mother.”

- Betsy Smalley

