

# OPEN ADOPTION MYTHS AND REALITIES

## International & Domestic

**Myth:** If an adoption is open the adoption is at risk of the birthmother changing her mind.

**Reality:** Openness and at risk placement are two very separate issues.

**Myth:** Children of open adoption are confused about having two mothers and two fathers.

**Reality:** Children are able to understand the different types of roles that adults have in their lives. While they may have a birthmother and birthfather and adoptive mom and dad, children understand their parents are their adoptive mom and dad.

**Myth:** Adopting parents are "adopting" the birthmother along with the child.

**Reality:** Adoptive parents usually become attached to the birthmother prior to the birth of the child and welcome an adult relationship with the birthparents. In fact, sometimes the birthmother is more distant than the adoptive parents would like.

**Myth:** Birthparents will be intrusive to the adoptive family.

**Reality:** Most adoptive parents, across all levels of openness, are happy with their relationships with the birthparents. Post Adoption Contact Agreements will be very specific about the number of visits per year and other types of contact (phone, email, and letters). Most adoption professionals will not do a written contact agreement for extensive contact (e.g. monthly visits). If you are nervous about how "open" to have a relationship, it is best to start with limited contact and over time add contact as a level of trust is developed. Most adoptive parents feel they have the respect of the birthparents and can control the level of involvement with the birthparents.

**Myth:** International adoptions are always closed adoptions.

**Reality:** While the percentage of closed international adoptions is higher than domestic adoptions, there are open international adoptions. Adoptive parents occasionally get to meet members of the birth family when they travel. Sometimes, upon returning home, adoptive families learn of biological siblings that have also been adopted in the states and develop relationships with the sibling's family. Birthmothers have been known to contact US adoption agencies years later to learn how their child is doing and some request contact with their birth child. Increasingly, adoptive parents and children are successfully searching for birth families with the help of the internet, search organizations, and ads in newspapers in the city where the child was born.

**More Realities:**

- Each arrangement has its unique challenges and opportunities.
- Open adoption relationships can create family dynamics that are more complex which increases the need for communication and flexibility.
- Adoptive parents in open adoption tend to be less fearful of birth parents reclaiming their child and feel more in control.
- The level of openness should be decided on a case-by-case basis; no single arrangement is best for everyone.
- On occasion, adoptive parents and birthparents seek out the assistance of their agency, attorney or a mediator to renegotiate their agreement on their post adoption openness.