



A Guide to Open Adoption



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Introduction: Adoption can be the beginning of a beautiful, lifelong journey.

Adoptions With Love has been helping expectant/birth mothers and adoptive families design thoughtful and loving adoption plans for almost 30 years. Throughout our history, we have seen adoption evolve significantly. For many years, most adopted children had limited information about their birth parents and their adoption stories. People believed that a sense of secrecy would protect everyone involved in the adoption and that it would be easier for the birth parents, adoptive parents, and children to adapt to a “normal” life. However, many adopted children were left with burning questions and no concrete answers. Significant pieces of their identity and future remained missing.

Fortunately, the shadow that was once held over adoption has been lifted. Openness in adoption is becoming more common. Today, most adopted children know that they are adopted and are actually given the chance to meet their birth families. Many adopted children even establish relationships with their birth parents and extended families as they grow up and become adults.



A New Beginning

Open adoption is a lifelong journey that can help you realize your dreams for your baby and yourself.



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Introduction, cont'

The beauty of adoption today is that there are boundless options for expectant mothers who desire to place their baby in a permanent, loving home. If you are pregnant and considering adoption, you have the opportunity to design an adoption plan completely tailored to you and your child. You may want to be a part of your child's life, but know that at this moment, you are not able to give your baby the home and life that he or she deserves. Creating an open adoption plan can help realize your dreams for both you and your child.

For those just beginning the adoption process, the idea of open adoption can be intimidating. It is an unfamiliar territory, and many do not fully understand what it means or how it works. The truth is, there is no standard definition of "open adoption." Just like every individual is unique, so is every adoption plan. The most important key to open adoption is **you**.

When you work with a private, domestic adoption agency, you decide what openness will mean to you. You have control in how your adoption plan will go. **Adoptions With Love** has created this guide so that you, as an expectant mother, can understand all of your options when it comes to creating an adoption plan, and to help you decide if an open adoption is right for you.



Adoption has Changed

Many birth mothers today choose open adoption, so that they can still be a part of their child's life.



What is Open Adoption?



“Open Adoption” means something different for everyone. It can take on various forms and unfold in many different directions, through open, semi-open, or closed adoption plans.



If you choose to place your baby for adoption, you have the opportunity to define just what open adoption means to you. There is no step-by-step manual for adoption. There is no right or wrong way to make an adoption plan. Only you, as an expectant mother, will know what is right for you and what is best for your baby. **Adoptions With Love** can help you to design an adoption plan that is uniquely special to you, your desires, and your needs.

As an expectant mother, you may be most comfortable with a closed or “confidential” adoption. Closed adoption means that no contact at all will occur between you and the family who adopts your baby. In a closed adoption plan, your identity as a birth mother will be completely protected. No identifying information will be revealed to the adoptive family or your child without your consent. If you are uncomfortable maintaining contact with your child, choosing a closed plan may be best for you at this time. The benefit of working with a private adoption agency is that you always have the opportunity to change your mind. As time goes on, you may want to receive letters and pictures to know how the child is growing. We welcome you to do so, and will help you if and when you are ready.

Most adoptions today do involve some level of openness—a level that is first defined by the expectant/birth mother and the adoptive family of her choice. Generally in an open adoption, the birth parent(s), the adoptive family and the adopted child are all known to one another and have some form of initial or ongoing contact. This contact may be as much or as little as one desires, remotely or in person, and can change over time. If you choose to make an open adoption plan with

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What is Open Adoption? *cont*

us, know that your comfort level is a priority. All of the waiting families at **Adoptions With Love** agree to at least a semi-open adoption plan.

A semi-open adoption plan involves minimal contact, directly or indirectly, between the birth and adoptive families. If you would like, all contact between you, your child, and a family of your choice can be mediated through an adoption professional. A semi-open adoption will allow you to receive updates (through letters and pictures) and to keep in touch without having to reveal personal or identifying information. This type of adoption is ideal for birth mothers who want to maintain privacy, but also desire updates or some form of communication.

There is no formal or universal definition of open adoption. What open adoption means to one person may mean something completely different to another. There is no one-size-fits-all plan. Open adoption is two families coming together to define just what it means to them, and how they will make it work. The term “open adoption” is only used to describe a variety of contact arrangements among the adoption triad. You define this contact. Your plan may begin with a single exchange between yourself and a potential adoptive family. It may involve you choosing a family for your baby, or having that family there in the hospital the day your baby is born. Your open adoption plan may be a continued relationship between you, your child, and your family—through letters, emails, phone calls, social media exchanges, or face-to-face visits.



Your Open Adoption Plan

There is no one-size-fits-all plan. Your plan will be completely unique to you.



Benefits of an Open Adoption.



As a private open adoption agency that has been helping families grow for almost 30 years, **Adoptions With Love** has seen countless beautiful relationships stem from open adoption plans. If you are currently considering adoption, we encourage you to see how positive an open adoption plan can be for you and your child.

In a fully open adoption, birth parents and adoptive parents accept each other as “extended” family, with the child at its core. This acceptance is beneficial for various reasons. In an open adoption, birth parents and adoptive families have the opportunity to truly get to know one another. The mutual respect and trust established from this relationship also significantly benefits the child.

Open adoption gives a child a sense of wholeness and identity. Children in open adoptions can understand who their birth parents are in real life, and are not stuck creating a fantasy of who they may be. They do not carry burning questions about where they came from, or what their biological parents may have been like. Instead, they can carry the pride of knowing that both their adoptive and biological families love them unconditionally.

Open adoption can also give birth mothers a great peace of mind. Choosing an open adoption experience will allow you to have the comfort of knowing your child is totally loved and cherished. You will constantly be reminded of the wonderful life you chose for your baby. You may also be grateful knowing that you still chose to be a part of it.



Openness is Positive

Open adoption gives a child a sense of wholeness and identity, and birth mothers great peace of mind.



The Stages of Open Adoption.

As you begin your adoption plan, ask yourself what having an open adoption would mean to you. Will you choose the family for your baby? Will you meet the adoptive family before the birth and placement of your child? Do you want to maintain contact with them following the adoption?

You are in control of your adoption plan, and there are many decisions you will have to make along the way. Typically, choosing an adoptive family for your baby is the first stage of the open adoption process. As an expectant mother, you likely already have an idea of what kind of family will love and raise your baby. We welcome you to share these dreams with us! At **Adoptions With Love**, there are loving families who have all been professionally screened, waiting to become parents through adoption. We can help you find the one that best meets all of your hopes and desires, and guide you forward with this admirable decision. This thoughtful choice can help diminish any anxieties you have about your baby's future. You can rest assured knowing that you provided your baby the best home imaginable.

If you would like, you can meet the adoptive family you choose. Meeting an adoptive family in person can be a very positive experience for expectant mothers. Putting a face to a name or a picture can ease your worries and further establish a connection with the parents who will adopt your child. This meeting can give you tremendous peace of mind and heart. You can gain an understanding of who they are, where they



Your Hopes & Dreams

As an expectant mother, you may already have an ideal picture of your baby's future in mind. We welcome you to share your dreams with us!

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The Stages of Open Adoption, con't

come from, and where they believe raising a child will take them. A meeting will allow you to ask questions and to talk openly about how your adoption plan will go. If a connection is established right away, you will also have the opportunity to build a relationship with the adoptive family and maintain contact throughout your pregnancy and beyond.

Maintaining contact with an adoptive family and your child is always an option with open adoption. In fact, at least 90 percent of expectant mothers that come to us at **Adoptions With Love** desire this kind of openness. Like the meaning of open adoption, this contact means different things for different women. One may decide she just wants letter and picture updates. Others desire to have an email address dedicated solely to contact with his or her adoptive family.

Adoption is a lifelong journey, and open adoption implies a lifelong relationship. Like any relationship, it is constantly evolving. As you begin your plan, we encourage you to remain flexible and open to change as the years go on. No matter what level of open adoption you choose now, understand that your plan may change as you and your child grow.



A Lifelong Relationship

With open adoption, you have the opportunity to build a relationship with your child and the adoptive family of your choice.



Possible Options for Your Open Adoption Plan.

As you begin your adoption plan, remember that you are representing yourself and your baby. Every decision you make now should have your child at the heart of it. If you decide that open adoption is right for the both of you, **Adoptions With Love** can help you understand all of your options. By lending caring support, counseling, and professional advice, we can then help you decide the level of openness best suited for you and your child's life moving forward.

You have many options as an expectant parent considering open adoption. You may desire an open adoption plan that involves direct communication with your child and his or her adoptive family.

If you are not comfortable with a fully open adoption, there are other choices for you. Many open adoption agencies like **Adoptions With Love** support semi-open adoption plans. A semi-open plan is one where you can choose how and when you will receive updates of your child's growth. You can ask for these letter and picture updates when you are ready. You are also welcome to send something back to your child if you wish.

Every adoptive family at **Adoption With Love** supports some level of openness and is happy to walk at your pace. Adoptive families regularly submit letters and picture updates of their child to our agency. This letter and picture program allows us to stay an active part of their lives, and further gives birth mothers access to tangible updates on their children when they wish. Our letter and picture program has worked beautifully for 30 years! Adoptive parents enjoy sharing the love, joy, and pride they have for their child. As your child grows up, they will be more than happy to share these updates with you!

An open adoption establishes a connection between two families. Your child is the link, and should be at the center of your open adoption plan.





A Flexible Adoption Plan.

In the beginning, the birth mother and the adoptive parents are responsible for making an initial adoption agreement. Will the birth mother visit? How often? No matter what decisions are made, both families must recognize that this original plan may need change over time. As the child grows, so will his or her emotional needs. The child will eventually need to decide what kind of relationship he or she will have with the birth family.

Open adoption is a fluid term in the sense that there should always be room for change. For example, you may initially feel as though you want a closed adoption plan. However, upon the birth of your baby, you may realize that you want to have more of a connection. Wanting more openness down the road is common for birth mothers. We see it every day. If you want the opportunity to meet your child in the future, **Adoptions With Love** can help facilitate this meeting.

A successful open adoption plan is a flexible one. **Adoptions With Love** can assist you in creating a plan that will evolve with you and your child's needs over time. We are an open adoption agency that is here for you and ready to lend a loving hand whenever you ask. We are committed to helping birth families, adoptive families, and children maintain successful, respectful relationships over the years.



Flexibility is Key

We encourage you to remain flexible and open to change. As you and your child grow, your wants and needs may evolve.



Mediation Through an Adoption Agency.



The beauty of working with a private, open adoption agency is that we are constantly involved. We are here for you at the time of your pregnancy as well in the years to come. Our goal is to ensure that your adoption experience is a positive and successful one. We write contracts that are legal and binding, but always leave room for renegotiation over the years.

Many birth mothers choose to begin their adoption journey with a professional agency to assure that the placement of their child is both legal and secure. Private agencies like **Adoptions With Love**, however, offer services far beyond legal paperwork. We realize that many families do not know where to begin when making an adoption plan. Expectant/birth parents and adoptive parents often have different visions of adoption. They may need guidance in establishing relationships with one another. They may need help in deciding on how much contact they would like to have, as well as help navigating changes in their relationships as time passes.

In cases such as these, mediation with an adoption professional can be extremely beneficial. Mediation means that a neutral third party can meet with you and the adoptive parents to help facilitate communication during the adoption process. Adoption is a very emotional experience for everyone involved, and mediation with a professional, experienced agency can help ease any emotional stress. Prior to the birth of your child, we like to discuss with you and the adoptive family regarding what adoption means to each one of you. We welcome you to explore what you want from this adoption, what you want for your child, as well as your hopes following your child's placement. In generating this conversation, we can help guide you to agree on an open adoption plan that works for everyone.



Open Adoption Agencies

Working with a reputable adoption agency like Adoptions With Love will ensure that the placement of your child is both legal and secure.



Top Questions to Ask When Making an Open Adoption Plan.



Before you begin your plan, we want you to feel confident in your choice of making an adoption plan for your baby. There are many options for you, and we hope that you explore all of them as you move forward in this journey. The possibilities of open adoption are endless. As you begin to design your adoption plan, carefully consider how openness could potentially affect you and your child. Think about the present and the future. What does your ideal adoption plan look like? Before getting started, ask yourself:

- What sort of family do I want for my baby?
- Will I be involved in choosing who will raise my child?
- Do I want to meet my child's adoptive family before the birth?
- Do I want the adoptive family to be at the hospital the day the baby is born?
- Do I want to continue contact with my child's family after the adoption takes place?
- Do I want my child to know about me? How much do I want him or her to know?
- What is my comfort level regarding openness?
- What would contact look like in my own open adoption plan? What forms of communication would I be most comfortable with?
- What would this contact mean to my child?
- What role will I play in my child's life?
- Do I want to meet my child in person? If so, how often?
- How do I envision these meetings? Who will be there?
- How would I react if my child tried to change our means of contact over time?

Only you know what kind of adoption plan will work best for you and your baby. We encourage you to ask yourself these questions, but more importantly, to be honest with your answers. Only then will you decide if open adoption is the right choice for you.



This is Your Plan - This is Your Choice.

While there are many benefits of open adoption, an open adoption plan may not be right for everyone. Some expectant mothers still feel that ongoing contact with their child will make it difficult to move forward with their lives. Some feel that open adoption will only confuse their child in the long run. Others are afraid that it may be too painful to see their child again in the future.

At **Adoptions With Love**, we respect your wishes—whether you opt for an open adoption plan, a semi-open or a closed one. No matter how your adoption plan goes, know that you are still making a positive choice and giving your child a wonderful life. Adoption is a selfless act of love and consideration for your child. It takes bravery and compassion to place your baby for adoption. We admire you for considering it as a possible positive option as you move forward in your pregnancy.



An Act of Love

No matter what plan you choose, know that adoption is an admirable act of love and we respect your choice.



Your Next Steps.

As you contemplate if open adoption is right for you, try to stay focused on what is in the best interest of your child. Decide what expectations you have for your child, for your adoption plan, and for the future. Stay true to yourself, and what is true in your heart. Most of all, we encourage you to talk through any questions, concerns, or anxieties you may have before pursuing an adoption plan. Call adoption professionals and get unbiased, honest advice about open adoption. By being educated about all of your options as an expectant parent, you can better understand if and how open adoption will be beneficial for you.

Adoptions With Love makes a lifelong commitment to every child and family that works with us. Every day, we receive phone calls from expectant parents, birth parents, adoptive parents, and children who wish to reconnect. We would be honored to hear from you. No matter what time of day, or what day of the week, our team at **Adoptions With Love** will always be available to you. Whether you are facing a challenge, want to explore making an adoption plan for your baby, or even if you simply want to chat, we will happily pick up your call.

Contact Amy, Nancy, Claudia, or Amelia toll-free at **1-800-722-7731**, or **text us confidentially at 1-617-777-0072**.

We look forward to hearing from you!



Our Promise to You

Adoptions With Love makes a lifelong commitment to every child and family that works with us. We are always here for you!

