



The Keys
to a Successful
Open Adoption



Table of Contents

Introduction 1

One Look at Two Very Different, But Very Successful Open Adoptions. 2

How Does Open Adoption Work?..... 3

Key #1: Keeping Your Child’s Best Interests in Mind 4

Key #2: Partnership, Not Competition, and Clear Roles Among Parents 5

Key #3: Emotional Stability..... 6

Key #4: Respect 7

Key #5: Trust 8

Key #6: Open & Honest Communication 9

Key #7: Open-Mindedness & Flexibility..... 10

Key #8: Consistency 11

Key #9: Professional Open Adoption Help 12



Open Adoption is Positive

Today, birth parents can choose the family for their baby. They can also stay in touch with the adoptive family and child over the years.



Introduction

Most people know that when a woman chooses to place her baby for adoption, it is a decision made with great love and consideration. Most people know it is a brave and selfless sacrifice made in the best interest of her child. Still, however, we hear phrases like “give up” and “put up” for adoption. If you are facing an unplanned pregnancy, we want you to know that choosing adoption does not mean giving up.

Choosing adoption means giving your baby the best possible life you can give, even when you are not ready to become a parent. It means making a thoughtful plan for your child’s life ahead, even when you did not plan for this pregnancy. If you wish, you can now choose to be an ongoing part of your child’s plan and your child’s *life*. This is possible through open adoption.

If you read our previous “Guide to Open Adoption,” you may already have a good idea of what open adoption entails. Right now, you may be considering open adoption as a positive choice for you and your baby. You know you are not ready to become a parent, but also want to remain a part of your child’s life in some way. Still, you have some hesitations about the open adoption process. Like many expectant/birth parents, you might be confused about how open adoption works, and also what makes it work well. *Will it cause confusion? Will it stir feelings of regret? Will being a part of your child’s life keep you from moving forward with your own?*

Research shows that birth mothers who make open adoption plans generally report greater peace of mind. They have comfort in knowing how their child is doing and growing. They are able to move forward with their lives without any anxieties or unknowns. They can also begin beautiful, lasting relationships with their child’s adoptive family. Today, more than 9 out of 10 women who make an adoption plan request some level of openness with the adoptive family.

Adoptions With Love is a non-profit, full-service, open adoption agency working with expectant/birth parents nationwide. For over 32 years, we have helped women make the best possible plans for their babies, whether open, semi-open, or closed adoption plans. We can also help you. This eBook is designed to help you create a successful, meaningful, and healthful open adoption plan.



One Look at Two Very Different, But Very Successful Open Adoptions

We recently spoke with one adoptive family who has adopted twice through Adoptions With Love. They adopted a beautiful son and daughter, both of whom have an open adoption. Their open adoption plans each look very different, but are both successful in how they have taken shape. This adoptive family is very open to continuing positive and healthy relationships with their children's birth mothers. Here is a look at their open adoption success:

For our daughter's adoption, we never met the birth parents before her birth. We met the birth parents around two years after she was born, along with the birth mother's grandparents. It was a pleasant and positive experience for everyone. Both birth parents are busy in college, and their personalities seem to indicate that they are a bit shy to reach out. However, since the meeting, we have received a couple of cards from her maternal great grandparents. The birth mother also continues to stay in touch via occasional text messages. We will continue to try to foster whatever relationship is best for our daughter's needs, while being respectful to her birth parents' privacy and availability.

For our son's adoption, we met the birth mother and her mother about a month before the birth, when we all went down to Kentucky and stayed there for two days. That gave us a wonderful opportunity to bond with both of them and to really feel like we were part of an extended family now. We then traveled back to Kentucky for the birth.

When we came back to Massachusetts, the birth mom initially (and understandably) had a very difficult time with the separation. It was difficult to find common ground to allow her to grieve, while also allowing us time to adapt to and get comfortable with our new family dynamics. It was, at times, a difficult experience because we felt some sense of unwritten obligation to send her daily texts, pictures, and videos. We soon realized that we all needed some space to move on independently which is where our Adoptions With Love social worker really helped. The birth mother needed space for the healing process; we needed it to bond with our son. We now have a very healthy relationship with our son's birth mom and clearer understanding on both sides. We have tentative plans to meet with her this spring.



How Does Open Adoption Work?

Before you can understand what makes open adoption work, you must first understand what open adoption is. In its simplest sense, open adoption is a type of adoption plan that involves a relationship between a child's adoptive family and his or her biological (birth) parents. The extent of this relationship can vary greatly. Every adoption plan is unique. At Adoptions With Love, you can choose to have a fully open adoption, a closed adoption, a semi-open adoption, or a plan that falls in between.

Today, the majority of domestic infant adoptions involve some level of openness. For many birth parents, this means receiving letters and pictures of their child over the years. For some, it involves a combination of emails, phone calls, video chats, or in-person visits with their child. For others, an open adoption plan will involve only indirect contact through an adoption agency professional.

An open adoption relationship can also be as minimal as a birth mother choosing an adoptive family for her baby. She may decide to meet with them before the adoption takes place, during her hospital stay, or later down the road. Open adoption plans are generally flexible. Many adoption plans, for example, start completely closed and move towards more openness as everyone's needs and feelings evolve.

The extent of your open adoption will depend on your needs, your comfort level, as well as what you feel is in the best interest of your child. Adoptions With Love can help you decide what "openness" means to you, and design an adoption plan that makes the most sense for you and your baby.

There is no right or wrong way to make an open adoption plan. There are, however, steps you can take to ensure your adoption plan is a positive and successful one. What makes a successful adoption plan, exactly? Lori Holden, author of *The Open-Hearted Way to Open Adoption*, describes success as this:

“Success means the child is happy. That updates, visits, and relationships are ongoing. That no one in the [adoption] triad feels victimized. That promises are kept.”

In this guide, Adoptions With Love will walk you through some of the many keys to a successful open adoption experience. From establishing a trust with your child's adoptive family to pursuing counseling and support, these will help you create the most positive open adoption plan for you and your child.



Key #1: Keeping Your Child's Best Interests in Mind

As an expectant/birth mother, you are considering adoption out of great love and hope for your baby. You want to give your child a life beyond what you can provide at this time, a life full of opportunity, stability, and support. You may feel that adoption will provide the best possible outcome for your baby long-term. Know that this love and selflessness can carry over to a very successful open adoption plan.

Every loving parent wants what is best for their child. They speak, act, and make decisions with their child's best interest in mind. In an open adoption arrangement, there is not one, but two sets of parents that wish the best for their child. There is the birth parent (the biological parent) that chooses to place her baby in a stable and loving home. There are the adoptive parents, who nurture, support, and raise their child to become the best possible person he or she can be. These parents share the same interest in doing what is best for their child; they desire to create a healthy, open adoption arrangement that works.

A successful open adoption means putting your child first. It means coming together with the adoptive parents to make decisions that are based on your child's needs. While your needs as a birth mother play a major part in the creation of your open adoption plan, you must also continuously consider the needs of your child: How much communication, if any, will be beneficial for your child down the road? How will an open relationship affect your child as he or she grows?

Studies show that children in open adoptions typically have the most positive adoption experiences. They are able to answer questions such as, "What do my biological parents look like?" or even "Why was I adopted?" By having communication with a birth parent, they can understand who they are, where they came from, and build a better sense of self. Openness alleviates much confusion for the child and establishes a greater sense of love and respect among both families.

As an expectant/birth mother, it is important to realize and accept that this journey is centered on your child and his or her best interests. The adoptive family you choose will also recognize this, and will put your child's needs first.



Key #2: Partnership, Not Competition, and Clear Roles Among Parents

When many people first hear about open adoption, they often think *Isn't that confusing for the child? Isn't it difficult to share the role of parenting between two families?* These are some of the many misunderstandings surrounding open adoption plans.

A successful open adoption is not confusing for the child, largely because it does not involve co-parenting or sharing parental roles. In an open adoption, there are two very distinct, yet very important sets of people. There are the parents who provide the daily nurturing and caregiving, who tuck their child in each night. There is also the parent who gave their child life, who stands as the root of their child's biology. Most children in open adoptions understand who each parent is and what role they play in the adoption triad.

What makes an open adoption successful is the recognition that each family – adoptive and biological – has an unconditional love for their baby. They understand that the adoption could not have happened without one another taking part. They appreciate each other's roles in their child's life, and recognize that each can benefit their child in a different way:

Open adoption gives a child both nature and nurture, both roots and wings. Through open adoption, your child will have the benefit of knowing his or her background, as well as a supportive family and stable home life. With these, as well as double the unconditional love, your child can truly thrive.

If you would like to make an open adoption plan, be sure to establish clear roles and a secure relationship with your child's adoptive parents from the very beginning. You can start this even before your baby is born, if you wish. With an open adoption, you have the option to choose a family for your baby. You can also meet them over the phone or in-person if you would like. They will meet you, wherever you are, to get to know you and your hopes for your baby.



Key #3: Emotional Stability

Adoption, in any form, is an emotional journey. While it is full of new beginnings and relationships, adoption can also bring about many delicate ones. The key to any successful adoption plan is knowing how to manage the more delicate and difficult feelings and relationships in a healthy and positive way.

Many expectant/birth mothers who make adoption plans will choose to receive counseling before, during, and after their child's placement. Counseling gives these courageous women the emotional support they deserve, the opportunity to voice their feelings and questions, and guidance in making the best possible decision for their baby. It helps to understand that many emotions will arise post-placement. Counseling is imperative to feel these emotions openly, work through the healing process, and regain a sense of strength and stability after the adoption takes place.

In open adoption arrangements, emotional stability is especially important – not just for birth parents, but for adoptive parents as well. A stable and positive parent will also be a very healthy influence in their child's life. As you consider an open relationship with your child's family down the road, it is important to keep your child's best interest in mind. Think about how you can be the most positive figure for your child and for the adoption relationship as a whole. Positive feelings – including acceptance, maturity, confidence, and respect – will be essential to your open adoption. These feelings will also be essential in becoming the healthiest version of you.

Adoptions With Love offers complete, confidential counseling services at no cost to expectant/birth mothers making an adoption plan. Our experienced, compassionate counselors can assist you in making an open adoption plan that fits best with your desires and needs. We can also help you navigate any emotions, communication, and relationships that occur after post-placement, to ensure your open adoption is a successful one. Adoptions With Love will always be here for you – now and in the future.



We're Always Here for You

Our adoption counselors will listen to you, answer any questions, provide emotional support, and help you through the adoption process.



Key #4: Respect

Some women considering open adoption worry about an ongoing relationship with the adoptive parents, wondering things like: Will it be a tense or competitive relationship? Will the adoptive family resent or look down on their decision? Will they, the birth mothers, come to resent the adoptive family for parenting their child?

The truth is there is no resentment in a successful open adoption plan. This is because respect and gratitude are always at the heart of it. We often hear from adoptive families who are forever grateful to the birth mothers who helped them become parents. They wholly respect the birth moms' courageous decision to make an adoption plan. We also hear from birth parents who are so comforted in knowing that their child is in a safe and loving home. They respect the adoptive family for lovingly raising and providing for their child.

While it is true that open adoption involves very delicate relationships, it has also founded some of the most respectful and treasured relationships out there today.

In an open adoption, a great level of respect and understanding is established from the very beginning. When making an open adoption plan, the birth parents express their hopes and needs with an adoption agency. Those wishes are to be respected by the agency and adoptive family. Together with a professional, the birth parents and adoptive parents agree on a certain level of openness. They come to a mutual level of respect for one another and for the roles they will have in their child's life. They think continuously about their child, and agree on decisions that will work in their child's best interest long-term. This often means choosing to keep contact as their child grows up and is able to ask more questions about his or her adoption story.

The key to making ongoing contact work is a full respect for everyone involved. As an expectant/birth parent, this means respecting the adoptive parents of your child, as well as their home, their rules, and their parenting choices as your child grows. Equally important, you must also respect yourself and the decision you made for your baby. Adoption is a brave and admirable act. You deserve the utmost respect for it. You will get this from your child's adoptive parents, who will respect you for being such a big piece of their child's life.



Key #5: Trust

Open adoption is truly a relationship based on trust. As an expectant/birth parent, you likely already know how much trust will play a part in making your adoption plan. You want to trust the adoptive family who will raise your child. You want to trust that your baby will be in good hands. If you are considering open adoption, you want to trust that this family will continue to communicate with you over the years. You also want to trust that your adoption agency will be there when you need.

By making an open adoption plan with a licensed adoption agency, you can personally select a family that best meets your hopes and dreams for your baby. You can also trust that the family is fully ready to raise a child for life. Like you, we want your child to have a safe, secure, and loving home. That is why Adoptions With Love pre-screens all of our families through an extensive background checks and home study evaluations, to ensure that they are fully capable of giving your child the life he or she deserves.

By choosing to work with an open adoption agency, you can also trust that each family is open to some ongoing contact. At Adoptions With Love, all waiting adoptive families have agreed to at least a semi-open adoption, which includes sending letters and pictures of your child over the years. Many are open to full openness, which might involve emails, phone conversations, and/or in-person visits. The staff at our agency will help you design your ideal open adoption plan. We will also write a post-adoption contract according to the laws of your state. This will ensure that everyone involved in your open adoption honors the agreements made at the time of placement.

Finding a trustworthy adoption agency is also key to open adoption. You want to choose an adoption agency that you trust will be there for life, that is available 24/7 to answer your call, and that will respect any choice you make. Trusted agencies are typically licensed, non-profit organizations that will keep your best interests, as well as your child's, at the center of their work. Adoptions With Love is a licensed, non-profit, full-service adoption agency. We will never pressure you into choosing adoption; we are here to help you explore your options, navigate this journey, and make the best decision for your baby.



Key #6: Open & Honest Communication

Open adoption establishes a platform for ongoing communication between a birth and adoptive family. A successful open adoption ensures that these communications, and the relationships formed from it, are both open and honest from the very beginning.

Ongoing, open conversations between birth and adoptive families can help a child better understand his or her adoption story. This contact can take place through letters, phone calls, emails, texting, FaceTime or Skype, or even in-person meetings. It can also be mediated through an adoption agency professional, if you wish. Ongoing communication is beneficial for adopted children, allowing them to ask questions, get answers, and form a greater sense of self. Honest communication also helps build the foundation for healthy, open adoption relationships down the road.

Open and honest communication is essential to any relationship. It builds the foundation for trust and respect. To have a successful open adoption, both you and the adoptive family you choose should be honest and open from your very first interaction. On both sides, it is essential to only make promises you can keep. An open adoption contract can help with this. If an adoptive family promises to send you photo updates over the years, they will be accountable for doing so.

Honesty goes hand-in-hand with openness. If at any time you feel overwhelmed by the amount of communication with your adoptive family, you can express this in an honest and appropriate way. If an adoptive family needs time to adjust and bond with the child, they should also be honest with you. Adoptions With Love can help you navigate these tougher conversations.

Always be honest with yourself, your feelings, and the adoptive family throughout the open adoption process. These honest conversations will be important to a loving and lasting relationship with your child's adoptive family, as well as the happiness of everyone involved.



Key #7: Open-Mindedness & Flexibility

In order for an open adoption to be successful, both the adoptive family and the birth parents must remain flexible: flexible to meet each other's needs and flexible to meet their child's needs as he or she grows. Your needs, as well as your child's needs, may change over the years. It is important to stay open-minded to any changes that may arise.

Consider this situation: When you first start making an open adoption plan, you may choose to only receive letter and picture updates of your child. You may not feel ready to have direct contact with your child's family, and therefore collect these updates through your adoption agency. Over time, however, you may feel a bigger need to connect. You may wish to open the adoption further. This is where flexibility is key in an open adoption. Together with an adoption professional and the adoptive family, you can renegotiate the extent of openness in your adoption plan.

Another situation we commonly see is that birth parents initially desire full disclosure between themselves and the adoptive family, but with time may need to pull back from this type of relationship. From the very beginning, they want to receive letter and picture updates, to visit them in person and maintain frequent contact via texting. Over time, however, they find that this fully open contact is not what is best for them. Their needs change. To help cater to these changes, we help set limitations for contact, whether it be establishing boundaries on texting and conversations or adjusting the frequency of communication.

Above all, the most important aspect of an open adoption agreement is the child's best interests. As your child grows up and starts making decisions, he or she may feel the need for more or less contact with you. Both you and the adoptive parents need to be prepared for this possible change in your open adoption plan. You both must understand how the child feels and make changes that will benefit everyone involved. This is where flexibility, along with open-mindedness and respect, come into play.



Stay Flexible for Your Child

At the heart of every adoption is a child. Your open adoption plan should always reflect your child's best interests as he or she grows.



Key #8: Consistency

As the old saying goes, “Consistency is key.” This is especially true for open adoption, where consistent communication is needed in order to maintain healthy adoption relationships.

Just as honest communication is key to a successful open adoption, so is the consistency of those conversations with your child and his or her family. When making your adoption plan, think about if (and how often) you would like to communicate with the adoptive family. Consider how you would like to keep in touch with them post-placement, whether through phone calls, emails, letters, or mediated meetings with an adoption counselor. Outline these wishes in your open adoption agreement. Make a consistent plan for communication that everyone — both you and the adoptive parents — can honor.

Use your open adoption agreement as an opportunity to also set expectations with your child’s adoptive family. Take some time to talk about what you expect from one another. For example, do you expect them to send you pictures every birthday? Do they expect you to visit once a year? Do you expect them to inform you of a phone number or address change, and vice versa? Having clear expectations on both sides will help ensure that communication remains consistent as the years go on.

In a successful open adoption, you will not just be a part of your child’s life, but rather a consistent part of your child’s life. Your child will be able to expect that yearly phone call. Or, you can look forward to that regular photo update from your child’s adoptive family. By having consistent conversations, and by setting consistent expectations for those conversations, you can ensure that no one is left hurt or disappointed, particularly your child. Again, this level of consistency takes honest communication as well as healthy boundaries and expectations between families (knowing how or when to contact one another).



Our Promise to You

Adoptions With Love is always here for you. Call us toll-free at 1-800-722-7731 or text us at 617-777-0072 at any time, any day for help.



Key #9: Professional Open Adoption Help

Finding a reputable, trustworthy, and compassionate adoption agency is essential to any successful adoption plan. These are the professionals that will not only educate you about open adoption, but also help you navigate your open adoption long-term. Feelings can change in an open adoption. Relationships and expectations can change. Communication can get difficult or sensitive at times. In these situations, an open adoption agency can be an extremely valuable resource to you.

Professional, licensed open adoption agencies are also very helpful for those just starting their adoption plans. If you would like to move forward with open adoption, your agency can help you clearly define the level of openness you wish for, as well as the frequency of contact, in an open adoption contract. This is a legal and binding agreement written by a licensed adoption professional, in accordance with the laws of your state, that can be modified in the future as needs and wishes change.

A successful open adoption requires respect from the adoptive and birth families, as well as a commitment to openness and honesty. It also requires great flexibility and understanding over the years. Adoptions With Love wishes for you to have the most successful and positive adoption plan possible.

Open adoption can be a very positive option for everyone touched by adoption. Even a small amount of openness can make for a very enriching and healing experience. Through open adoption, your child can come to understand why you made this courageous choice. As a birth parent, you can have peace of mind in knowing that your child is doing well. The adoptive parents will also benefit from having you as such a valuable resource and loving figure in their family's life.

Of course, we understand that open adoption is not right for everyone. That is why Adoptions With Love offers open, semi-open, and closed adoption plans to expectant/birth parents. As you contemplate open adoption, we encourage you to talk through all of these options, as well as any questions or concerns you might have, with an adoption professional. You can always call Adoptions With Love. We are available any hour of the day, any day of the week, to provide unbiased, honest, free-of-pressure and free-of-cost adoption advice. That is our promise to you.

Call Amy, Nancy, Claudia, Nellie, or Amelia **toll-free at 1-800-722-7731** or **text us confidentially at 1-617-777-0072** to learn more about creating an open adoption plan.