

Open Adoption Choices

By: Anita F. Stevens, Executive Director of Family Connections, Inc.

A few months ago, I was sitting in a hospital waiting room on the maternity floor waiting for a young woman to give birth to her baby. What was different about this birth was the fact that this woman was planning to place her child with the adoptive parents she had met and chosen. The father of her child was supporting her through the delivery and adoption. The adoptive parents were sitting with me in the waiting room. When I stepped out of the room to take a phone call, the birth father of the child came into the waiting room to talk to the prospective adoptive parents. A nurse walked by and saw the father speaking to the adoptive parents. She came over to me and asked me with much agitation in her voice if I knew that the father of the baby was in the same room as the adoptive parents. I nodded my head to indicate that this was okay and said “Don’t worry.” She told me again that the father of the baby was TALKING to the adoptive parents. I told her again “It’s okay, don’t worry” and then I finished my telephone conversation and joined them.

These two families were waiting for the same child to be born – one family was giving birth to a baby and one family was waiting for the baby to join their family through adoption. Why is it so surprising that these two parents, the birth parents and the adoptive parents, were talking with each other? The birth parents met with the adoptive parents several times before the baby was born. They had had their first meeting in a restaurant to get to know each other and for the birth parents to ask the adoptive parents some questions about themselves so that they could decide if this was the family they wanted for their child. The birth parents were also making decisions regarding any pictures, letters or visitations they might want after the adoption of their child. The two families then met together for lunch and for a doctor appointment (the birth mother wanted her Doctor to meet the adoptive parents). Both sets of parents

were involved in the adoption process that was going to affect this child forever. Their communication was more than appropriate. The presence of the adoptive parents at the hospital was at the request of the birth parents. The birth parents wanted the adoptive parents to be a part of the birth of the child. Family Connections was respecting their choice and their plan. This communication that we call open adoption is practical, natural, as well as emotionally satisfying for both the birth parent and the adoptive parent. It forms the basis for any post adoption relationship the two families agreed and planned for together.

Open adoption is an adoption where the birth parents (biological parents) make the choice to not only choose the adoptive parents for their child but also to develop a relationship with them. The initial introduction of the prospective adoptive parents is done by Family Connections, the adoption agency. The agency shows the birth parent pictures and general information regarding qualified adoptive families (we call these a family profiles). The agency will then arrange for and participate in meetings between the birth family and one or several adoptive families so that the birth parent can well-informed decision regarding which family they wish to make an adoption plan with. We usually enjoy a nice lunch together.

After birth parents choose an adoptive family and cultivate a relationship with them, the birth parents and adoptive parents can decide to have post-adoption communication and contact. They may wish to exchange pictures and letters regarding the child, share an annual visit, or have ongoing contact. In an open adoption, the agreement for post adoption communication and contact will be honored via a court enforceable contract. Family Connections helps the birth parents to negotiate the level and type of post-adoption contact they wish and then has an attorney draw up the legal document (Post Adoption Contact Agreement). The Post Adoption Contact Agreement becomes a part of the final



order of adoption and the adoptive parents are required to comply with the agreement. Choosing to place your child in an adoptive home, knowing where your child is and getting to know the adoptive parents for yourself can bring you comfort and peace. It may be hard to imagine having a relationship with the people you chose to adopt your child but after you meet the families waiting to adopt, you will make a personal connection to a particular family. These connections will then evolve into relationships that can be as close as you chose. Some birth parents after the adoption chose to receive pictures and letters, others chose to have regular visitations, and some families have a relationship that develops into a friendship or extended family like relationship. The degree of openness depends on the choice of the birth family. The peace that comes to birth parents when they have met the adoptive family who will parent their child is remarked on by every birth mother and father that has chosen to meet the adoptive family. It helps the birth family to heal and find peace in their decision.

A few days ago, the birth mother I spoke of earlier came to the office to see the pictures that the parents who had adopted her child sent for her. As she looked through all the happy pictures and saw the child's and family's joy,

she smiled and commented on how comforted she felt by seeing the love that surrounded her birth child. We told her that the adoptive parents were still open to any meetings if she changed her mind. She wasn't ready to visit but she knows that she can. The father of the baby is not yet ready to view any pictures but he knows we have them when he is ready. The respect, love and gratitude that these families feel towards each other is lovely. It can only be good for these little ones who are born to one family and lovingly placed with the family that was chosen for them. The children will know that they were always loved. If you are a birth mother or father considering adoption, please contact us at Family Connections, Inc. to learn about your options. You can learn more about our agency and view waiting adoptive families at www.adoptfamilyconnections.org. Please contact us at 1-800-536-5556 or info@adoptfamilyconnections.org so we may help you design an adoption plan that works for you and honors and protects the choices you make.

Anita F. Stevens, is the Executive Director of Family Connections, Inc., a New York State authorized adoption agency located in Cortland, New York and providing adoption services throughout all of New York State. Anita has been working in the adoption field for over twenty years.

Gregory A. Franklin, Esq.

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