



FAMILY TIMES



FOR ADOPTIVE FAMILIES

JANUARY, 2015

Adoption: When Problems Occur with Birthparents

From Family Education, <http://life.familyeducation.com/adoption/adoptive-parents/45808.html>

Note from the editor:

The following article is talking largely about private infant adoption; however, much of the information and tips can be used by relatives and other adoptive parents who are maintaining connections to birth family.

Although your relationship with the birthparents may start out great, sometimes problems develop later on. Keep in mind that relationships with family members (including one's own parents) are sometimes strained, so it shouldn't be surprising if problems occasionally surface with an open adoption.

Even very strong proponents of open adoption emphasize that relationships between adoptive parents and birthparents can change, sometimes quite a bit, after the adoption. Being aware of the emotional and psychological experiences of others can help prepare adoptive parents for the situations that come up in their relationship with their child's birthmother. It's also important to realize that neither party can fix the problems of the other. If there is serious conflict, it is critical that you seek a third party to help everyone address the issues.

Birthparents Drop Out of Sight

When adopters agree to an open adoption, they are often very enthusiastic about it. Which is why it's hard for new adopters to understand why birthparents sometimes pull away or even drop out of communication for an extended period of weeks or months. Was it something that you said? Probably not.

One of the most difficult adjustment periods appears to be the first year after the adoption. The birthmother might want to step back for a while and *not* see the

child or the adoptive parents. She might find contact painful, and yet she doesn't want the adopters, whom she likes, to feel responsible for her pain, so she doesn't explain her actions.

Even if the birthmother remains in close contact for the first year or two, it's not unusual for her to start calling and writing less (or even drop out of sight altogether) after that time. This is normal. Birthparents pull away because they are "getting on with their lives." They can see that you are doing a good job as parents and the child is safe and happy. Although they still care about the child, they are moving into other areas of their own lives.

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Needy or Demanding Birthparents

Sometimes birthparents (especially young and immature birthparents) become oppressively demanding of adoptive parents, insisting on a lot more contact with the baby and with the adoptive parents than is comfortable for the adopters. Sometimes the adopters may feel like the young birthmother wishes she was adopted, too. And maybe she does wish that in some ways. But the needs of the child must be placed first. It's not the job of the adopters to parent the birthparent.

If this is going to happen, it's usually within the first few months or year of placement, when everyone involved is struggling to define their roles. Although you should be flexible and willing to negotiate changes, it's essential that you always do what is best for your child.

As new adopters, you may be tired from caring for the child, or you may just want to be left alone for a while. You probably don't want the birthmother dropping in whenever she

feels like it or constantly calling you. She may need to learn—by you telling her tactfully—that you have a life and a right to privacy.

The birthparent then may panic, and mistakenly assume that you are renegeing on your agreement. Birthparents and adopters can become quite upset with each other at this point. The problem is that the relationships are still so new, and they need to be worked on.

Here are a few issues you and the birthparents should agree on before the baby is placed with you:

- Whether or not the birthmother will be allowed to spend time with the child alone. Don't agree if you think that it would be unsafe to allow it (for example, if the birthmother has a drug or alcohol problem).
- What the child should call the birthmother.

- What to do with birth relatives, primarily birthgrandparents. Will they, too, be involved with the open adoption, or will your child's relationship be mostly with the biological parents?

Whatever the issue, make it clear that *you* are the parent with the ultimate and final say over the childrearing and that this is not a co-parenting arrangement.

I like what the authors of *The Open Adoption Experience* say about boundaries: "... open adoptions do not require that you live without rules or by someone else's set of rules ... An adoptive family can and should have appropriate boundaries about its relationship with the birthfamily. The difference between open adoption and confidential adoption is not that there are no longer boundaries but that there are boundaries where there used to be walls."

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Adoption Alert

Holidays may cause conflicts in the first few years of an open adoption. Will you allow the birthparents to see the kids on special days like birthdays, Christmas, Hanukkah, and so forth?

You can liken this issue to the learning curve of a newly married couple over the first year together. What most newlyweds learn to do is negotiate and compromise.

Similarly, you can negotiate issues like holiday and birthday visits with the birthparents. Make sure everyone accepts the solution and understands what their responsibilities are.

Your Life Changes

As we move on through life, our situations change—sometimes for the better and sometimes not. For example, you may get divorced (although studies indicate that adoptive parents have a lower divorce rate than non-adoptive parents). Or you may find yourself facing health or financial problems.

When you're in difficult straits, you may find yourself cutting

back on contact with the birthparents. Maybe it's because you're just too tired or upset to talk to them. Or maybe it's because you're afraid they will be disappointed in you. Most birthparents do realize that life situations change. And even if they don't realize it, they will need to accept it.

The Birthparent's Life Changes

You may have stayed about the same, but perhaps the birthparent's life has improved or worsened. If the birthmother had a problem with drugs or alcohol, she may have recovered and really turned her life around. You may need to re-evaluate her as she is now, rather than as she was when you first met her.

However, the birthmother may have developed some problems that weren't there before, as far as you know. Remember that you can always renegotiate how much time you allow her to spend with your child.

More Than One Child

Things can get tricky when you adopt more than one child from different birthmothers. No matter how hard you try, the open-adoption arrangement with one birthmother cannot be exactly equal to the arrangement with the birthmother for the other child. One birthmother may be very responsive to the child, while the other birthmom sends a card once a year and that's about it. Parents may feel upset for the child who has been “shortchanged” in the open adoption.

No matter how hard we want to equalize the situation for our children, it's impossible for their lives to be on an exactly even footing. Children need to learn that life will not provide equal opportunities for all. The open adoption experience will be different, even when both birthmothers are very enthusiastic participants.



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For additional information or to request services, please contact KVC at: 1-888-655-5500 or by e-mail at: adoptionspecialist@kvc.org

Angel has lots of energy and is generally a happy child. He is a funny little boy who loves animals and superheroes. He also loves playing outside. Angel is a little shy at first, but he gets along well with others. He would benefit from a caregiver with medical knowledge who will continue his services he receives that allow him to be successful. Angel needs a family that is dedicated to caring for him and devoted to being his forever family.

**For more information contact: Jenna Parker
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Nevaeh is an active young lady, who likes “pretty clothes” and climbing trees! She also likes to dance, ride her bike and play outside. Nevaeh is a really good student in school and enjoys Math class. She is proud of completing her household chores and she even does them without being reminded. Nevaeh needs a family that can provide her with consistency, structure, and a high level of supervision. She will need an understanding and patient family as she really just wants to be a part of a family and truly loves to participate in family-type activities. We are considering families from Kansas only, at this time, and preferably a family with no other children.

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