

# OPENING UP ABOUT OPEN ADOPTION

## BENEFITS OF OPEN ADOPTION

Melina, L. R., & Roszia, S. K. (1993). *The open adoption experience* (pp. 223-224). New York: HarperPerennial.

- ☞ Children do not need to lose the connection between themselves and their birth relative to gain permanent parents able to meet their needs in a consistent way.
- ☞ Children can have more people in their lives who love them and care about them. They see that they can have both birth parents and adoptive parents in their lives without having to choose between them.
- ☞ Children can obtain up-to-date medical, social, and historical information about their families of origin.
- ☞ Children can have access to valuable information as they develop a personal identity, such as who they look like, what kinds of abilities might be genetically influenced, and how people in their birth families grow and develop.
- ☞ Children can learn about their ethnic or racial heritage and have contact with people who share that heritage. They can have the opportunity to learn about their ethnicity within that heritage rather than apart from it.
- ☞ Children can channel their energy into other aspects of personal development when they do not have to struggle to obtain information about themselves as they grow up.
- ☞ Children can feel a greater sense of control because they have access to answers to their questions.
- ☞ Information children receive may be more credible because it comes directly from the birth parents. Children can observe the birth parents themselves and draw their own conclusions about who they are and what they are like. Children have fewer missing pieces about who they are. They can deal with reality rather than fantasy.
- ☞ Children may feel less rejected or abandoned. The birth parents can communicate to the children that their adoption plan was made because of birth parents' circumstances rather than any qualities or lack of qualities in the children. The birth parents can demonstrate their love and concern for their children, and take responsibility for the adoption plan so that children don't have to feel they were to blame.
- ☞ Adoptive parents may be better able to meet their children's emotional needs because they have had to work through their feelings about the birth parents to develop a long-term relationship with them. This can leave them feeling more secure in their parenting role and in their relationship with their children.

## WHEN PROVIDING THE CHILD WITH INFORMATION, KEEP IN MIND:

- ☞ Children have the right to know all the available information about their origins and about the circumstances that led to their adoptions.
- ☞ Children should be given this information as they are able to understand it and are able to deal with it emotionally, not as a onetime revelation.
- ☞ Children should be given information by their adoptive parents or birth parents in a gentle, understanding way.
- ☞ Even potentially disturbing information, such as a family history of mental illness, should be shared with a child at the appropriate age. The information should be shared honestly, but in such a way that it does not damage a child's self-esteem.
- ☞ Children should not be knowingly deceived, either by what is said or by what is left unsaid.
- ☞ Information about a child's origins is private (but not secret) information that should not be shared outside the family without the child's permission.
- ☞ Children have the right to ask questions and express their feelings without worrying that doing so might threaten their relationships with their adoptive parents or birth parents.
- ☞ Children are not responsible for other people's feelings about each other or about the adoption.
- ☞ Parents should not wait for children to ask questions but should anticipate the child's needs and look for the appropriate opportunities to share information. Sometimes by "priming the pump" with a little information, children are stimulated to ask questions. At the same time, parents should be sure that information is being given to benefit the child and is neither given nor withheld to reduce a parent's anxiety, to meet some artificial timetable, or to please another parent or family member.