

Growing Intentional Families Together

ADOPTION TERMS DICTIONARY

A Clear Guide to Adoption Definitions

An Adoption Coaching Firm providing



Growing Intentional Families Together™

Adoption Attuned Parenting Practices for Happier, Healthier Adoptive Families

OUR COACHES

SALLY ANKERFELT
SHARON BUTLER-OBAZEE
SUSAN DAVID
GAYLE SWIFT

800-653-9445
giftfamilyservices.com
giftcoach@giftfamilyservices.com

GROWING INTENTIONAL FAMILIES TOGETHER INVITES YOU TO EXPLORE THE FOLLOWING IMPORTANT ADOPTION TERMS

To navigate the adoption process with skill, understanding, and precision, you will need to master the language of adoption to ask the right questions. As you have experienced, every aspect of life has its own "lingo"— language with a unique meaning in a specific context. This is true of the language used in the adoption world as well. You probably do not yet know the unique vocabulary of the adoption world.

Once you learn the language of adoption, you will understand the process better and ask better questions. You wonder what to ask, how to ask, and who to ask. You've undoubtedly heard the expression, "I don't know what I don't know." Because of this knowledge void, there are some questions you won't even think of asking. This dictionary is an excellent tool! It will help you talk more effectively about adoption. Familiarizing yourself with these terms will support you as you begin your adoption journey and later once you are actively parenting.

ACEs: Adverse Childhood Experiences are potentially damaging experiences with negative effects that linger for years and a lifetime. Having endured multiple ACEs can devastate a child's physical, mental, and emotional health

Adaptive self: A sense of self that focuses on pleasing others instead of being one's authentic self.

Adaptive self: A sense of self that focuses on pleasing others instead of being one's authentic self.

Adoptee: A person who was adopted.

Adoptee rights: A belief that adopted persons are entitled to their biological history, Original Birth Certificates and to know their birth parents' identity.

Adoption: The legal process by which parental rights are terminated from the parents, and all rights, and responsibilities for the child are permanently transferred to another.

Adoption agency: A licensed child-placing entity that arranges adoption for children.

Adoption annulment: The right to void a finalized adoption, especially regarding an adult adoptee electing to terminate their adoption.



Adoption Attorney: A licensed attorney who specializes in the practice of child adoption. Not all attorneys are affiliated with or subscribe to the competency and ethical standards outlined by the Academy of Adoption and Assisted Reproductive Attorneys.

Adoption Attunement: A child-centered philosophy of adoption that focuses on education, preparation, and tuning into the child's needs, validating their complex self-development, honoring their roots, understanding the ambiguous losses for children and parents, and honoring the need for connection to birth parents.

Adoption competent: A person rigorously educated on the lifelong complexities of adoption.



Adoption consultant: A person providing guidance to prospective adoptive parents and Post-placement. Training and expertise can vary significantly.

Adoption constellation: All those connected by adoption, especially the child, adoptive parents, birth parents, grandparents, and extended

family. It may also include foster parents and/or other significant relationships.

Adoption Decree: A court-issued document stipulating the finalization of a child's adoption.

Adoption Facilitator: A person engaging in the matching of an expectant mother and a post-placement. Usually, they are unlicensed and unregulated.

Adoption grief: A unique life-long experience of grief due to a child's separation from their biological family and lineage, the loss of their "original" self and the experience of the Primal Wound. Adoption grief is complex, ambiguous, and intensified at various life stages and by life milestones.

Adoption listing services: Child welfare agencies maintain a list that includes photos and brief descriptions of foster children available for adoption.

Adoption myths: Presuppositions and cultural beliefs that are inaccurate, outdated, incomplete, and/or false.

Adoption plan: An intention or agreement to place a child for adoption. It is not legally binding before the child's birth.



Adoption tax credit: A one-time federal tax credit offered to encourage adoptions by offsetting the expense of adoption. Qualifications must be met to be eligible, e.g., stepparent adoptions do not qualify.

Adoption triad: The adoptee, his birth parents, and the adoptive parents

Ambiguous loss: An open-ended, unbounded loss for which closure is unlikely to occur e.g., a birth parent is absent and present in the adoptee's life.

Amended birth certificates: A legally created document that replaces the original birth certificate and substitutes the adoptive parents' names for the birth parents' names.

Attachment: The process by which one individual becomes emotionally connected with another. Attachment between parent and child grows from multiple interactions in which a child expresses a need and a parent responds appropriately and consistently.

Adoption friendly: A term usually meant to indicate that the rules in a specific state are less rigorous and more favorable to adoptive parents. This can compromise the child's best interests.

Attachment style: The connection which binds people together is divided into four basic styles: Organized, Disorganized, Avoidant, and Anxious avoidant. An individual can have varying styles with different people. Attachment between parent and child often reflects the attachment styles parents had/have with their parents.

Authentic self: The person one would naturally be if not striving to become a version that conforms to the expectations or requirements of others.

Baby Broker: A person—usually unlicensed and unregulated—who helps to identify pregnant women and link them with prospective adopters. The focus is on finding a child for a prospective adopter instead of finding the best parents for a specific child. Sometimes little or no effort is made to ensure that a child and adoptive parents can mesh as a family and that the child can flourish with a particular family.

Biological parent: A child’s genetic parent, sometimes referred to as the natural parent

Birth mother: The mother who gave birth to a child. (In the case of surrogacy, a birth mother is not necessarily the genetic mother.)

Both/And: A viewpoint that accepts that situations do not need to be adversarial and can include two divergent interests that can both be true simultaneously.



Black market adoptions: Illegal placement of a child for adoption. This can include baby or child buying, kidnapping, and misrepresentations to birth parents. All parties can be prosecuted, and the child eventually can be removed. Sometimes attorneys, baby brokers, and facilitators can be involved. Usually involves large sums of money. In a black-market adoption, a child is essentially sold for financial exchange.

Brave love: This term presupposes that adoption is the best and most obvious choice the mother will make if she is brave enough and cares enough— because of this underlying presumption, the term is coercive.

CASA: Court Appointed Special Advocate responsible for protecting the interests of an abused or neglected child in legal proceedings.

Child trafficking: Buying and selling a child in the black marketplace



Child Centric: A point of view firmly centered on a child's needs and best interests. This is exemplified by the belief that the purpose of adoption is to find families for children who need them versus to find children for parents who want them.

Choose to parent: When an expectant mother decides—before her child is born or after—to parent her child instead of placing the child for adoption.

Closed adoption: In traditional adoption, birth and adoptive families have no contact and exchange no information. Closed adoption has been almost totally replaced with some degree of openness.

Coercive language: Regarding adoption, language subtly pressures a mother to place her child for adoption. e.g., placing her child for adoption. e.g., *Do the right thing. Your baby deserves better than you can provide. It is God's will. It is meant to be.*

Coercive counseling Counseling in which an expectant mother's confidence and self-esteem are undermined, her shortcomings magnified, potential resources are not shared with her, the benefits of adoption are emphasized/magnified, and the negative aftereffects of placement on her and her child are minimized.

Color blindness: A failed belief that thought adoptive parents could raise their children as if race was not a factor in their lives. This point of view denied the reality of the child's experiences and



left them unprepared for the challenges of racial and cultural identity formation and racism.

Commodification (of children): Treating children as something to be acquired, losing sight of their humanity in an eagerness to become their parent. Some facilitators and brokers engage in commodification by focusing on making a placement versus finding the best placement for the child.

Co-parenting: When two or more parents share the responsibilities of raising and caring for a child.

Contact: Communication /interaction between birth parent and child, whether in person or via media, e.g., Zoom, Facebook, Instagram, letters, telephone, photos.

Cultural identity: The knowledge of the traditions, practices, values, behaviors, and beliefs held by one's ethnic group and race or country and the "belonging" that results.

Custodial parent: A parent with whom a child resides.

Custodianship: A temporary responsibility for the care, maintenance, control, health care decisions, and raising of a child. Not as comprehensive as full parent status regarding rights and decision-making ability on the child's behalf.

Disruption: The termination of an adoption agreement after the child's placement in the adoptive family and before finalization

Dissolution: The termination of an adoption after the adoption was finalized.

Divided loyalty: When a child is torn between two factions, e.g., birth and adoptive parents or



mother and father. This causes the child psychic and emotional stress.

Either/or perspective: A perspective that allows only one point of view to be seen as valid.

Embryo adoption: An adoption of the frozen embryo of biological parents usually unrelated to the child. The embryo is placed in the adoptive mother's womb. Pregnancy and birth may or may not result.

Emotional parentification: When a parent relies on a child emotionally for comfort and reassurance and prioritizes their own emotional needs over the child's and/or the parent shares age-inappropriate information. Many children in foster care have experienced this.

Epigenetics: The process by which genes are expressed, suppressed, or moderated by circumstance, nurturing, or life experience. The presence and expression of intergenerational trauma can be influenced—moderated or intensified—by epigenetic factors.

Expectant mother: A woman who is pregnant. (A woman does not become a birth mother until birth.)

Ethical adoption: An adoption made in the best interest of the child with no coercion, and that truthfully discloses the likely emotional impact on both child and birth mother and accurately represents the physical and emotional health of the prospective adoptive parent(s), is not made for financial gain, and follows all legal requirements.



Family of Experience: Adoptive Family

Family of Origin: Birth family, first family, natural family

FASD: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: (FASD) is a range of symptoms, physical deformities, behaviors, learning difficulties, and challenges that result from prenatal exposure to alcohol. These can range from minor to profound and can last a lifetime.

Finalization: The legal completion of an adoption placement that transfers the rights and responsibilities of parenting to the adoptive parent(s). An adoption cannot be overturned after finalization except in cases of fraud or illegality, e.g., a black-market adoption or a dissolution.

First parent: Genetic parent, birth parent

Forever Family: An outmoded term initially applied to the adoptive family. In fact, both adoptive and birth families are permanently part of a child's identity.

Foster Care: Placement of a child in the temporary care of another family with the goal being family reunification.

Foster-to-adopt: When reunification of a child's family of origin is impossible, their foster family may be permitted to adopt them. This is distinct from the situation in which someone undertakes fostering with the purpose of ultimately adopting the child. This is a conflict of interest because the goal of foster care is reunification, not adoption.

Fully disclosed adoption: An adoption in which birth and adoptive parents agree to complete openness in action and mindset before and after adoption.

Full disclosure: The complete exchange of information about a child's physical, mental, and emotional health and social history--including any potential abuse they may have suffered. This helps ensure that the adoptive parents are willing, prepared, and able to parent the child and understand the challenges he will likely present. All parties to adoption are best served when there is honest and complete disclosure of pertinent information by birth parents and prospective



adoptive parents so they can all make an informed decision based on facts.

GAL: (Guardian ad Litem) is a court appointee responsible for a child's best interest.

Gaslighting: Persuading a person that their lived experience is imagined or wrong to the point that they may even begin to doubt their sanity

Genetic genealogy: Using DNA testing data to reveal genetic ancestry and identify parentage.

Genetic father: The male parent who provides the sperm with which an embryo is created

Genetic mother: The female parent who provides the egg from which an embryo is created, not necessarily the gestational mother.

Genetic parent: Parent whose egg or sperm is used to create a child.

Gestational mother: The woman in whom a baby grows before birth; not necessarily the genetic mother.

Ghost kingdom: Term coined by renowned psychiatrist Betty Jean Lifton to describe the psychological world in which adoptees think about who they might have become had they not been adopted, as well as how ancestral relationships might have continued had they remained with their family of origin. Similarly, adoptive parents have their own ghosts: the children whom they might have conceived and born.

Gray market adoption: Adoption arranged directly between the expectant mother and the prospective adoptive parents. Because it occurs without the oversight and expertise of a professional, both mother and adoptive parents may be vulnerable. The expectant mother may not receive counseling before or after she places her baby for adoption. She may be subjected to conscious or unconscious, obvious or subtle coercive conversations with the prospective parents. She will be directly exposed to their hunger and desperation to adopt a child.



The adoptive parent may not receive adequate preparation for parenting an adopted child, which will impact their ability to parent well and understand the psychological and emotional complexities their child will face because of their adoption.



Neither expectant nor adoptive parents will have adequate education to help them separate facts from myths about adoption. All will feel the fallout of this lack of knowledge.

Guardian: A person legally responsible for another. It may be temporary or permanent.

Guardian ad Litem: A court-appointed person responsible for ensuring a child's best interest when they are involved in a legal proceeding.

Home study: An analysis of the safety and suitability of a prospective adoptive parent and of the home in which a child may be placed for adoption.

ICWA: In 1978, the Federal government passed The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). This law establishes the rules and regulations that pertain when an American Indian child is removed from his family. It strives to ensure the stability of indigenous tribes, preserve a child's cultural connections, as well as ensure the best interests of a child. Anyone attempting to adopt an Indian child must abide by all the ICWA strictures or risk the nullification of the adoption.

Identity One's sense of self as an individual, family member, culture, race, gender, career, etc. It



may be influenced by the expectations of others as well as by fear of rejection and abandonment.

Inclusive Family Support Grid: A grid is used to depict the range between openness/secrecy and between contact/no contact. The goal is to maximize both openness and contact when it is safe to do so.

Independent adoption: (Private adoption) is an adoption arranged directly between a birth mother and adoptive parent(s). All adoptions require court approval. It is prudent to have an attorney review the documents to ensure that the adoption complies with all laws and regulations and cannot be nullified because of legal errors. Adoption law varies state by state and whether it occurs within one state or involves interstate placement.

Individuation: The process of forming one's authentic, fully realized adult identity. This is an incredibly complex task for an adoptee who must cope with all of the challenges facing a non-adopted teenager, as well as discern how he can blend the strands of his family of origin (birth family) with his family of experience (adoptive family) to achieve a whole and healthy sense of self.

Infertility effects: The ambiguous grief, and emotional aftermath of infertility can linger permanently unless addressed, processed, and resolved. These effects are often periodically reawakened by personal and family milestones and/or events. Infertility after-effects can also interfere with the parent and child's attachment and bonding process unless they are acknowledged and resolved.

Intermediary: A person who mediates (ideally without bias or preference) between two persons with shared interests to forge a mutually satisfactory resolution. Some unlicensed individuals operate between expectant mothers and prospective adoptive parents for profit and without supervision, education, or training. These individuals may be more focused on completing a transaction and getting paid than on the child's welfare.

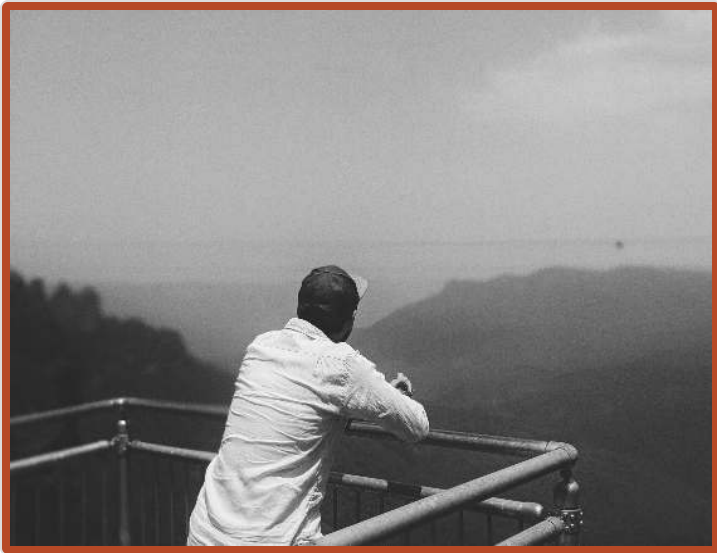
Interracial adoption: An adoption between a child and parent(s) who do not share the same race also called a transracial adoption.



Joint custody: When two adults share the parenting rights, privileges, and obligations of raising a child. It may be permanent or temporary.

Life Book: This book documents and preserves the FACTS of a child's life BEFORE their adoption. A life book is truthful and as complete as possible. It starts with the child's birth, mentions the birth parents, honors the child's experience, affirms the child, and grounds him in his story.

Long view: Looking down the lens of time to consider the ramifications of decisions and actions,



and recognizing that after a child becomes an adult, they will look back on their childhood and examine their experience through an adult viewpoint instead of the blind acceptance of a child.

Loyalty expectations: A parental attitude that expects their child to choose a primary, preferential, and often, undivided loyalty to them in preference to the child's

regard and affection for their family of origin.

Mediated contact: In cases when it is *unsafe* to have in-person contact with birth parents, contact can be accomplished by using the services of another person who acts as a go-between. Keep in mind that secrecy should not be the goal; safety is.

Medical history: A comprehensive picture of any physical and mental illnesses and diseases that have occurred in a child's family of origin. This should contain as much information as possible to help ensure the child's ongoing health. Ideally, it should be updated regularly.

Natural parent: Birth parent, biological parent, "real" parent (in actuality, both the birth parents and adoptive parents are "real"; however, in our culture, when people lack education on the subject, people often use "real" parent when they mean birth parent.)

NICWA National Indian Child Welfare Act

Non-custodial parent A parent with whom a child does not primarily reside.

Non-identifying information: Information disclosed to an adoptee that does not reveal their birth parents' identity.



OBC: Original birth certificate, a document that lists the name of the mother who gave birth to a child. It may include the birth father's information. Historically, it often did not identify the father, and the information was often inaccurate.

Open Adoption: An adoption in which the identity of birth parents and adoptive parents are known to each other and includes ongoing communication and some degree of contact.

Open adoption agreement: An agreement between adoptive parents and birth parents that outlines each party's rights, responsibilities, and privileges. In most states, it is not legally enforceable and relies on the commitment of those agreeing. Promising an open adoption and intending to close it soon after placement is unethical.

Openness: Contact and openness are not equal. Openness is an attitude of the heart and mind and can occur with little or no contact. Contact can occur with little or no openness. Individual circumstances will shape how much openness and contact are possible and safe. These may change over time. An adopted child generally benefits from full openness and safe, fullest contact. When openness and contact with a birth parent are not possible, it can often be created with other members of their family of origin until it is again safe to resume contact.

Original Birth Certificate: A document that lists the name of the mother who gave birth to a child. It may include the birth father's information. Historically, it often did not, nor was the information consistently accurate.

Parent of experience: A parent who raised a child

Parent of Origin: The biological or genetic parent



Parentified child: A child who, because of circumstance or the failure of parents, steps into a role and behaves as a pseudo-parent. The child may take on the care of parents and siblings. Many foster children have had to function in such a pseudo-parental role. Helping the parentified child to relinquish these learned, parentified behaviors is a complicated process that may be difficult for them to release.

Permanent custody: When an adult is responsible for a child's care, responsibility, well-being, and health on a permanent basis yet has not formally and legally adopted them.

Positive Adoption Language: Language that strives to be respectful of the feelings of those involved in an adoption. Sometimes, however, PAL is used to cover up or deny the grief and loss inherent in adoption to paint a hyper-positive picture or to minimize the genuine pain and grief inherent in adoption.

Post-adoption services: Any services provided after an adoption occurs. The recipient can be the child or the birth mother. The most common services are counseling and serving as an intermediary.

Post-finalization: Anything that occurs after the adoption is legally finalized.

Post-placement: After a child is placed in a home. It can refer to the time before or after an adoption is finalized. The length of time varies by state.

Post-placement contact: Contact that takes place after separation from birth parent care. It may be temporary or permanent and may involve foster care, guardianship, and/or adoption.

Pre-birth counseling: Counseling with an expectant mother occurs before her child is born. Ethical counseling is scrupulously neutral and avoids all coercive language or efforts to undermine the mother's confidence or efforts to gather adequate resources so she can opt to parent her child instead of choosing adoption.



Pre-birth matching: A relationship between an expectant mother and prospective adoptive parent(s) with an understanding that the child will be placed for adoption with them. The mother can legally change her mind after the child is born and cannot be required to place the child even if she received financial support during her pregnancy, nor can she be mandated to repay those funds.

Primal wound: A term coined by Nancy Verrier, a therapist, and adoptive mother, to describe the pain of permanent separation from the biological mother and the lingering aftermath of this separation—psychological, emotional, and physical. These repercussions must be processed so the adoptee can reach full physical, emotional, and mental health.

Private adoption: An adoption arranged directly between a birth mother and adoptive parent(s). All adoptions require court approval. Having an attorney review the documents is prudent to ensure the adoption complies with all laws and regulations. Adoption law varies state by state and whether it occurs within one state or involves interstate placement. In private adoptions, there is often little or no education on adoption complexity, The Seven Core Issues of Adoption, etc. There may not be adequate pre-placement and post-placement counseling.

Privacy: A desire to keep personal information and circumstances personal and to decide if, when, and with whom one wants to share. An adopted child's story is personal and should not be shared with others before they know it themselves.

Provisionary period: The time after placement of a child with their adoptive family and prior to the legal finalization.

Psychological parent: When a child views an adult as a parent, and the child relies on the adult for care, financial support, and emotional connection, even if no official and legal arrangement exists.



Psychological presence: A sense that an individual is on one's mind and has influence even when they are not present or alive.

Qualified Expenses: Legally allowable expenses of an expectant mother that prospective adoptive parents can pay. Qualified expenses vary by state law. If an expectant mother changes her mind after her child is born, she cannot be required to repay those monies.

RAD: See Reactive Attachment Disorder

Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD): Difficulty in accepting affection and comfort from a parent or caregiver. As a result of significant abuse and/or neglect, the child's nervous system defaults to protection instead of connection. This leads them to emotional isolation, extreme self-reliance, an excessive need for control, and often violence.

Readoption: Refers to the process of having an international adoption legally affirmed in your state. If a child has an IH-4 or IR-4 visa, the state may require a readoption in the adoptive parent's state of residence. If the child's name is being changed, the readoption certificate can reflect that change. Readoption is NOT the same as rehoming.

Rehoming: The unregulated transfer of custody and parenting responsibilities from an adoptive parent to another individual. Because of the lack of oversight, rehoming leaves children vulnerable to exploitation, neglect, trafficking, and abuse.

References: As part of the home study process, prospective adoptive parents must provide statements from friends, families, etc., to demonstrate that they can provide a safe and emotionally healthy home that is adequate for the child's well-being and security.



Relinquishment: Creating a permanent separation between the birth parent and child so that he can be adopted by another parent(s). Relinquishment is an experience that is distinct from adoption. Typically, these two events take place with a separation of time which can be brief or lengthy. Relinquishment and adoption are separate experiences with which the adoptee must eventually come to terms. Relinquishment can be voluntary or mandated by the state.

Responsibilities/Rights: Adoptive parents and birth parents are entitled to certain privileges (rights) and obligations (responsibilities). For the sake of the child's best interests, all involved in adoption must strive to honor their commitments and respect the boundaries of each.

Right choice: A subtly coercive phrase often used to help persuade a woman to place her baby for adoption.

Sealed records: The closing of adoption files and “locking” of original birth certificates began in 1917. Sealed records prevent adoptees, birth parents, and adoptive parents from learning one another’s identities and hiding birth certificates that designate a child as a bastard. Some states still seal adoption records. Many no longer do so. The anonymity of birth mothers was not the purpose.



Secrecy: Hiding information even from those entitled to know, e.g., withholding

information from an adoptee about their family of origin or conveying a sense that their adoption is shameful and, therefore, must be hidden and kept secret, that it cannot be discussed or disclosed.

Social worker: Persons trained to help others. An adoption social worker helps to facilitate the adoption process. They may operate as an individual contracted to perform a home study or as part of an agency.



Spirit of openness: Not only believing in an open adoption and following the *letter* of any agreements made but also committing to sustaining an attitude of openness because it best serves the child.

Stork drop baby: An offensive term used for a baby whose birth mother did not pre-arrange an adoption yet wishes to place her child for adoption.

Suicide: Adoptees attempt suicide four times as often as non-adopted persons.

Surrender: To transfer one's child by choice or legal mandate so they can be adopted. The preferred term is to place a child for adoption. (Relinquish)

Surrogacy: A legal agreement between a woman and prospective adoptive parent (s) to carry a pregnancy to term and promise to allow the prospective parents to adopt the child. The fetus may be related to the adoptive parents or use the surrogate mother's egg, the adoptive father's sperm, or a donor's sperm.

Surrogate mother: A woman who becomes intentionally pregnant and agrees to carry a fetus to term for adoption. A surrogate is not necessarily the genetic mother.

Termination of Parental Rights: The legal ending of a biological parent's right to raise and have custody of their child. Termination can be voluntary, or state mandated.

Toxic phrases: Words that can cause an adopted child irreparable harm, e.g.,

"I wish we'd never adopted you."

"My biological children would never be like you"

"Adopting you was a big mistake"

"You should be grateful we adopted you."

"Maybe I'm not your real mom/dad but you're not my real kid either."

"You're so puny, or such a big Amazon, or ____ " (insert a phrase that attacks your child's being.



“You’re a loser* just like your birth mother (or father) (or insert another negative quality or behavior of a birth parent)

TPR: Termination of parental rights, the legal ending of a biological parent’s right to raise and have custody of their child.

Transracial adoption: An adoption between a child and parent(s) who do not share the same race.

Trauma: Emotional and physical reverberations of a terrible experience. Trauma can be a single event, a long-term experience, or a cumulative experience. Regardless of the reasons that precipitated an adoption, all adoptions originate in maternal/child separation trauma.

Unsanitized language: The language intentionally presents a hyper-positive tone that seeks to minimize, ignore and deny painful realities. It may be done unintentionally or purposefully.



Waiting period: Time between placement and adoption finalization. During this period, a birth mother may change her mind and decide to parent her child.

Adoption interaction improves
when we all speak the same
language.

Your Certified Adoption
Coaching Experts



Over 100 Years Combined
Experience



SHARON BUTLER-OBAZEE - SUSAN DAVIS - GAYLE SWIFT - SALLY ANKERFELT