



Growing Intentional
Families Together®

This dictionary reflects our efforts to honor the Tri-relational Interconnectivity that joins all adoption triad members. It will help create clarity, respect, and mutual understanding within the adoption triad and the greater adoption community.

In the words of philosopher Martin Heidegger, "Language is the house of being." It is language that allows us to share ideas, insights, emotions and experiences. Language can unite or divide us. It can create understanding or sow seeds of discord. In the adoption community, language can create bridges or walls, validation or invisibility.

We encourage you to use this dictionary as a tool that serves the adoption community, honors a Tri-spective point of view, and supports efforts to address and acknowledge the complex realities of adoption and attune to the needs of those shaped by adoption.
Growing Intentional Families Together, LLC

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Adoption Terms

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

Adoptee Consciousness Model: This term was coined by JaeRan Kim, Ph.D., an adopted person. It describes the ongoing individual and collective movement toward social activism that adoptees may encounter throughout their lifespan. The model is conceptualized with five touchstones within the spiral: 1) status quo, 2) rupture, 3) dissonance, 4) expansiveness, and 5) forgiveness and activism. The model considers intersecting racial, ethnic, and cultural identities while also promoting empathy for adoptees wherever they are on the spiral of adoptee consciousness."^[1] To learn more, click [this link](#).

Adaptive self:

ADHD: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder marked by hyperactivity, inattention, and impulsivity

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 adoptions for children

Adoption annulment: The right to be able to void a finalized adoption, especially in regard to 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 Attuned Parenting®: Parenting following the pillars of the Adoption Attuned Parenting® Model

1 JaeRan Kim Ph. D, "Coming to consciousness" by Harlows Monkey, June 23, 2022, <https://harlows-monkey.com/2022/06/23/coming-to-consciousness/> Posted on June 23, 2022 click this text to edit.


Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Adoption Attuned Parenting®Model: An adoptive parenting approach based on the pillars of the AAP model, which are: The Tri-spective viewpoint, The Adoption Attunement Elements, Curiosity mindset, and Awareness that language matters

Adoption Attunement: A child-centered philosophy of adoption that focuses on education, preparation, and tuning into the child's needs, validating their complex adoption-connected experiences, encouraging their authentic self-development, honoring their roots, understanding the ambiguous losses for child and parents, and honoring the need for connection to birth Parents. Includes 19 elements or principles

Adoption Attunement Elements: The 19 principles that define the Adoption Attuned Parenting Approach

Adoption Attunement Quotient (AQ): The AQ refers to the degree of awareness, understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of adoption complexity in a deeply attuned, well-informed, and adoptee-centric manner. AQ builds on the widely recognized theory of "Multiple Intelligences" advanced by psychologist Howard Gardner, as well as Daniel Goleman's theory of Emotional Intelligence (EQ). AQ refers to the degree of awareness, understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of adoption complexity in a deeply attuned, well-informed, adoptee-centric way



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

Adoption Competent Therapist: A therapist who has completed The National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI)™ and has a thorough understanding of adoption complexity, adoptee needs, and appropriate mental health modalities

Adoption constellation: All those connected by an adoption, especially the child, adoptive parents, birth parents, grandparents, and extended family. May also include foster parents and/or other significant relationships

Adoption consultant: A guiding prospective adoptive parents and Post-placement.

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

Adoption discernment: The process of exploration and education that a prospective parent completes to determine if adopting a child is a choice they wish to pursue

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

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 is intensified at various life stages and by life milestones as well. It is often disenfranchised.

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.

Adoption listing services: Lists that child welfare agencies maintain and include 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 paradox: The coexistence of opposing thoughts and feelings experienced by an adopted person, such as grief, gratitude, and anger; the loss of a family and the gain of a new one; the experience of belonging and being rejected. Jean Kelly Winder coined the term in her book, "Adoption Paradox."

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

Adoption subsidy: Financial assistance provided by the Department of Health and Human Services to an adoptive family to help pay for medical care, therapy, counseling, or special equipment for children with special needs who might not otherwise be adopted. Benefits vary by state. Most children adopted from foster care qualify for an adoption subsidy.

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

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



Adoption Attunement Elements:

- Operate with a child-centric focus.
- Recognize the Seven Core Issues in Adoption.
- Understand the Attachment process
- Use respectful adoption language.
- Talk about all aspects of adoption
- Acknowledge the grief and loss issues of all adoption constellation members.
- Parents address their own issues.
- Respect birth parents and first families.
- Follow ethical practices.
- Recognize adoption is a family experience
- Honor a child's need to know and connect with their birth family.
- Integrate a child's birth heritage.
- Remember a child's story belongs to them.
- Model, teach, and hold healthy boundaries.
- Use Adoption Attuned discipline methods.
- Educate family, friends, teachers, and faith communities about adoption.

Nurture and value a child's innate talents and encourage them to be themselves.

Encourage playfulness and good humor as a family value.

Adoptive parenting differs from bio parenting and includes unique responsibilities and challenges.



Adjudicated Dependency: When a court finds that a child has been abandoned, abused, and/or neglected, lacks proper care, supervision, or protection, and requires court supervision and intervention. It allows the court to provide some of these services. This does not automatically sever parental rights. However, it can be used as grounds to do so.

Adoptism: A term coined by adoptee and adoption researcher, Dr. Michele Meritt. She defines *adoptism* as "the unique form(s) of marginalization to which adopted persons are subjected. Adoptism shows up primarily as enforced gratitude, and this injunction to be grateful carries with it epistemic harms that have heretofore been overlooked because the dominant social narrative surrounding adoption is that it is an overwhelmingly positive practice." Merritt, Michele. 2024. "Be Grateful or Be Quiet: Confronting the Epistemic Harms of Adoptism". *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 10 (3). <https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/fpq/article/view/15240>.

AFCARS: The Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) gathers information on children in the foster care system and children adopted with Title IV-E agency involvement.

AI: Artificial insemination

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

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Amended Birth Certificates: A legally created document that replaces the original birth certificate. It creates an amended birth certificate that substitutes the adoptive parents' names for the birth parents' names.

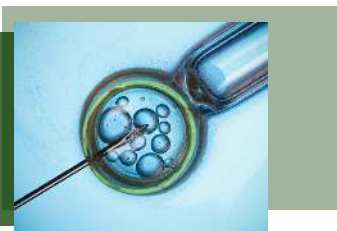
Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement: A legal custodial arrangement with a non-relative to provide for the care of a child until adulthood when their parents are not able to do so. APPLA is an alternative to adoption, foster care, or guardianship. It does not provide legal permanency.

APPLA: An acronym that means Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement. An acronym that means Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement a custodial arrangement with a non-relative to provide for the care of a child until adulthood, when their parents are not able to do so. APPLA is an alternative to adoption, foster care, or guardianship. It does not provide legal permanency

Anticipatory rejection: This presupposes rejection by others even before it occurs in reality. This often leads the person to reject others prematurely, before others can reject them in reality. "AQ": AQ refers to the degree of awareness, understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of adoption

"AQ": AQ refers to the degree of awareness, understanding, knowledge, and appreciation of adoption complexity in a deeply attuned, well-informed, adoptee-centric way. AQ builds on the widely recognized theory of "Multiple Intelligences" advanced by psychologist Howard Gardner, as well as Daniel Goleman's Theory of Emotional Intelligence (EQ) AQ refers to the degree of awareness, understanding, and knowledge, and an appreciation for the complexity of adoption in a deeply attuned, well-informed, adoptee-centric manner.

**ART: Assisted
Reproduction
Technologies.**



Artificial insemination: When a physician places sperm directly into a woman's cervix, fallopian tubes, or uterus. Donor sperm may be used.

Assisted conception: Conception that occurs via interventions like IVF or artificial insemination.

Assisted Reproductive Technology: Treatments or procedures that help a woman become pregnant. For and a parent responds appropriately and consistently. example, the handling of human eggs or embryos, in vitro fertilization (IVF), gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT), zygote intrafallopian transfer (ZIFT), tubal embryo transfer, egg and embryo cryopreservation, egg and embryo donation, and gestational surrogacy.

Assisted reproduction: Methods other than sexual intercourse used to try to achieve pregnancy.

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 Attuned Dictionary Terms

Attachment process: The cycle of "serve and return" interactions between a child and his parents. When a child expresses a need that is promptly, consistently, and effectively met, he comes to trust, depend on, and attach to the parent. The child learns that his "voice" and needs matter and that he can rely on the parent to be there for him.

Attachment style: The connection that binds people together is divided into four basic styles: Organized, Disorganized, Avoidant, and Anxious Avoidant. An individual can have varying styles with different people. The attachment between parent and child often reflects the attachment styles that parents had or have with their own 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 adoptive parent, rather than finding the best parents for a specific child. 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.

Biosynchronicity: The similarities in temperament, biology, gestures, aptitudes, and interests that originate from shared DNA and common biology.

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

Birth certificate father: A father listed on a child's birth certificate but who is not the genetic father

Birth certificate mother: A mother listed on a child's birth certificate but who is not the genetic mother

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

Birth mother grooming: Intentionally building emotional, relational, and financial entanglements that subtly, or overtly, pressure an expectant mother to complete an adoption plan that she would prefer not to make.

Birth order disruption: The reconfiguring of children's birth order within a family when a previously unknown or unrecognized child is integrated into the family.

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.

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Black market adoptions: Illegal placement of a child for adoption. This can include baby or child buying, kidnapping, and misrepresentations made 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 money. The black market has racial overtones and therefore, we discourage its use and encourage the use of the terms underground or illegal adoption.^[2]

Brave love: This term presupposes that adoption is the best and obvious choice that an expectant mother or birth mother will choose for her child. This underlying presumption, together with the biased language, creates a potent coercive force.

Brother raised with: A brother raised with a person who was believed to be unrelated biologically, but who turns out to be a bio sibling or half-sibling

Bruncle: "Brother," who turns out to be a person's uncle

(BRW): Brother raised with

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

Centimorgans: A unit of measurement that indicates the degree of shared DNA

Child trafficking: Buying and selling a child

Child Centric: A point of view firmly centered on the needs and best interests of a child. 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—either before her child is born or after—to parent her child instead of placing him for adoption.

Closed adoption: Traditional adoption in which birth and adoptive families have no contact and exchange no information. Closed adoption has been almost totally replaced with some degree of openness.

Cocooning: An intentional period of time when new adoptive parents limit the presence of other people. They create a safe, private space and time with their newly adopted child time to give them time to become accustomed to their new parents and begin to see them as familiar, safe caretakers. s a text placeholder - click this text to edit.

cM: Centimorgans, a unit of measurement that indicates the degree of shared DNA

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Coercive language: In the context of adoption, it is language that subtly puts pressure on a mother to place her child for adoption. e.g.,
Do the right thing.

Love your baby enough to give him two parents.

It is God's will.

It is meant to be.

Your baby deserves better than you can provide.

Coercive counseling: Counseling in which an expectant mother's confidence and self-esteem is undermined, her shortcomings are 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 adoptive parents could raise their children as if race were not a factor in their lives. This point of view not only denied the reality of the experiences the child faced but also left them unprepared for the challenges of racial and cultural identity formation, as well as the challenges of racism.

Color Brave: A term coined by Kenisha Coon. It describes an attitude that views, appreciates, values, and respects a person's race. *Color Brave* is the antithesis of *Color Blind*, which views race as a negative or as something that ought to be ignored.

Coming Out of the Fog: Moving beyond a view of one's adoption as totally positive and starting to appreciate the complexities, lost relationships, and experiences, as well as the range of losses and grief.

Complicated Grief: Is debilitating grief that lingers for more than a year or longer and interferes with daily living. Symptoms include unrelenting longing and sadness, and inability to accept the loss. Complicated Grief requires professional support from a mental health practitioner.

Communicative Openness: An attitude of welcome and openness to discussing adoption complexity and the spectrum of thoughts, feelings, and beliefs connected to adoption. Communicative Openness also includes receptivity to the permanence of birth parents and birth culture in the child and willingness to share information honestly.

Commodification (of children): Treating children as something to be acquired, losing sight of their best placement for the child, some facilitators and brokers engage in commodification

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



Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

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

Co-regulation is: a process by which one person's calm emotional state helps the other person reset their dysregulated state.

Crib name: A name given to a child before their adoption. It may be designated by the birth/first mother and/or the adoption agency. Some may find the term insensitive.

Cross-sibling: Persons who have one or more half-siblings in common, e.g., if one person has at least one maternal half-sibling and at least one paternal half-sibling; the maternal and paternal half-siblings are cross-siblings to each other.

Cultural identity: The knowledge of the traditions, practices, values, behaviors, and beliefs held by one's ethnic group and/or 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 in terms of rights and decision-making ability on the child's behalf.

Customary Adoption: The traditional tribal practice in American Indian culture that provides for the care and parenting needs of a child without terminating parental rights.

DCP: donor-conceived person or donor-conceived people

Deparenting: The loss that a child experiences when their biological parents' rights to them are legally severed.

Dependency: See adjudicated dependency. Also known as adjudicated dependency--When a court finds that a child has been abandoned, abused, and/or neglected; lacks proper care, supervision, or protection, and requires court supervision and intervention. It allows the court to provide some of these services. This does not automatically sever parental rights. However, it can be used as grounds to do so.

DIA: Domestic infant adoption

Diblings: Half-siblings who have a donor biological parent in common. This is a new term that is not yet widely accepted.

Disenfranchised grief: Grief that is unrecognized, minimized, dismissed, invalidated, or misunderstood by social norms

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Disinhibited Reactive Personality Disorder: A type of attachment disorder in which children are indiscriminately friendly and show little or no preference for their parents over strangers. They also exhibit little stress or discomfort when separated from their parents. They may also experience difficulty in developing genuine attachment relationships.^[3]

Disinhibited Social Engagement Disorder: Children who exhibit indiscriminate friendliness toward strangers and are overly affectionate with them. They frequently have deficits in social and emotional competence.

Disruption: The termination of an adoption agreement after child placement in the adoptive family and prior to 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 psychological and emotional stress.



Donor-conceived person: A person who was conceived using gametes from a donor sperm or egg

Double donation: When an embryo is created using both a donor egg and a donor sperm

Dysregulation: A state where emotions are out of balance and control is out of reach.

Earned secure attachment: Attachment is achieved by transforming formerly insecure individuals into secure ones.

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 unrelated to the child. The embryo is placed in the adoptive mother's womb. Pregnancy and birth may or may not result.

Emotional Adoption: Family relationships akin to adoption but without legal authority.

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.

Entrance Narrative: The story of how a child joined their adoptive family. It provides details and facts that explain how the child's adoption happened. It should focus on the child's experience and needs and should avoid casting the adoptive parents as heroes or saviors. It should also be respectful of the birth parents. Stories that assert that the adoption was God-ordained or "meant to be" can cause emotional harm and confusion in the child.

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

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.

Epistemic Injustice: Devaluing a person's lived expertise and knowledge because of who the person is. For example, stories shared by adoptees are often dismissed if they do not align with the cultural narrative that holds adoption as totally benign.

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

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

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

Family of Experience: Adoptive Family

FASD: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

Father that raised me: The father who raised a child. They may or may not be biologically related to the

Father of experience: The father who raised a child. They may or may not be biologically related.

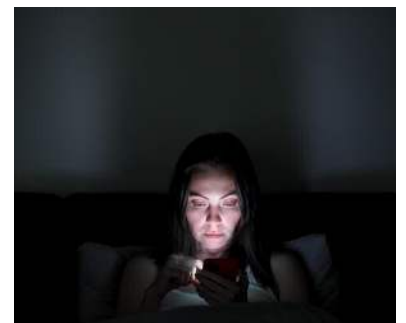
Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: (FASD) is a range of symptoms, physical deformities, behaviors, learning difficulties, and challenges that result from prenatal alcohol exposure. These can range from minor to profound and can last a lifetime. Includes Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS), Partial FAS (pFAS), Alcohol-Related Neurodevelopmental Disorder (ARND), and Alcohol-Related Birth Defects (ARBD)

Fictive kin: A person unrelated by biology or law who serves is viewed and serves as *family* and provides significant emotional and social support.

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., an underground or illegal adoption.

First family: Biological family

First parent: Genetic parent, birth parent



Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

FOG: Has a dual meaning in the context of adoption. I can refer to the period before an adopted person is in the "fog" and does not yet fully appreciate the trauma caused by adoption. It can also serve as an acronym for "Fear, Obligation, and Guilt."

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 of family reunification.

Foster-to-adopt: When the reunification of a child's family of origin is impossible, their foster family may be permitted to adopt them. This is distinct from the notion that fostering leads to the adoption of the child ultimately. 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 an adoption are best served when there is an 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.

Gamete provider or donor: Also known as "sperm donor" or "egg donor"

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

GB: Genetic Bewilderment

Genetic Bewilderment: The feeling that children experience when genetically unrelated parents raise them. The lack of genetic mirroring often causes a feeling of not belonging and not fitting in.

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

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Genetic family: Those related by biology

Genetic mirroring: Seeing one's self reflected in one's family and generations, e.g., shared habits, patterns, aptitudes, physical attributes, race, and ethnicity because of shared DNA.

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

Genetic parent: A 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 them. The lack of genetic mirroring often causes a feeling of not belonging and not fitting in

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: An adoption that is 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 are vulnerable. The expectant mother does 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, and she will be directly exposed to their hunger and desperation to adopt a child.



The adoptive parent does not receive adequate preparation for parenting an adopted child, and this will have an impact on their ability to parent well and to understand the psychological and emotional complexities their child will face because of their being adopted.

Neither expectant parents nor adoptive parents will have adequate education that will 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. 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.

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

High AQ Family: A family well-versed and committed to living in alignment with the principles of Adoption Attunement

Hiraeth: A longing for a place or home one never actually had or never existed.

HAL: Honest Adoption Language, also known as Unsanitized Adoption Language

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

Honest adoption language (HAL): Language that accurately conveys the emotional experience inherent in adoption and acknowledges the

grief, loss, and trauma involved. Unsanitized Adoption Language retains the emotional weight of the

feelings involved in the adoption process. This supports a more balanced picture of the losses as well as

the gains, also known as Honest Adoption Language.

I Am Adopted: Viewing being adopted as a lifelong identity

I Was Adopted: Viewing adoption as an event that happened to oneself.

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 their family. It strives to ensure the stability of indigenous tribes, to preserve a child's cultural connections, and to ensure the best interests of a child. Anyone attempting to adopt an Indian child must abide by all of the ICWA strictures or risk the nullification of the adoption.

Identified adoptions: When friends or family introduce expectant parents to a prospective adoptive parent, and then an agency or attorney assists in the completion of the adoption process.



Identity: One's sense of self as an individual, a member of a family, culture, race, gender, career, etc. May be influenced by the expectations of others as well as by fear of rejection and abandonment. Adoptees must learn how to braid together the dual influences of their biological family (nature) and their adoptive family (nurture.)

Identity disorders: Distortions in one's sense of self that can result in memory gaps and behavior changes

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Illegal adoption: An adoption that transgresses ethical guidelines and/or legal requirements

Inclusive Family Support Grid: A grid that is used to depict the range between openness/secretcy and between contact/no contact. The goal is to maximize both openness and contact when it is safe to do so. Created by Lori Holden and Angela Tucker

Independent adoption: (Private adoption) 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 applicable laws and regulations and cannot be nullified due to 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 especially 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 attachment and bonding process between parent and child 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—for profit and without supervision, education, or training—between expectant mothers and prospective adoptive parents. These individuals are more focused on completing a transaction and getting paid than on the child's welfare.

International adoption: An adoption of a child from one country by parents from a different country

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



Intrauterine insemination: Placing sperm directly into the uterus

IUI: Intrauterine insemination

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

Kept child: A term some use to refer to the child a biological parent raised to distinguish them from any of their child/ren placed for adoption

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Kinship adoption: An adoption by a biological grandparent, aunt, uncle, or older sibling

LDA: Late discovery adoptee

Late discovery adoptee: A person who discovers *as an adult* that they were adopted because it was hidden from them in Childhood.

Late discovery donor-conceived person: A person who discovers *as an adult* that they were conceived through assisted reproduction because it was hidden from them in childhood.

LDDCP: Late discovery donor-conceived person;

Legal permanency: A legally recognized parent-child relationship, e.g, by birth, adoption, and legal guardianship

Lifebook: A book that documents and preserves the FACTS of a child's life BEFORE their adoption. It is as truthful as complete as possible. It starts with the child's birth, mentions 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 any regard and affection the child has for their family of origin.

Maladaptive guilt: Feelings of excessive or chronic guilt generated by unrealistically high standards and/or expectations

Mattering: "The feeling that one matters to someone else and that other people matter to them; Mattering is bi-directional and two things come out of mattering: a sense of safety and trust in the relationship between parent and child.^[4]"

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 the illnesses—physical and mental—and diseases that have occurred in a child's family of origin. To help ensure the child's ongoing health, this should contain as much information as possible. Ideally, it should be updated regularly.

Misattunement: A misalignment between a child's needs and their caregiver's efforts to meet those needs

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Mother of experience: Woman who raised a child. They may or may not be biologically related to them

MPE: Misattributed parentage experience

Misattributed parentage experience: Discovering that one's perceived parent is not their biological parent

Mother that raised me: The woman who raised a child. They may or may not be biologically related to them.

Name change: A child's name may be changed after adoption. When a child is adopted and already has a name, it is usually healthier for them to keep their original first name to prevent identity confusion.

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.)

ND-PAE: Neuro /developmental Disorders-Prenatal Alcohol Exposure

Neurodevelopmental Disorders: Disorders of the brain and nervous system that emerge when a child is young, continue into adulthood, and can affect the development of motor skills, cognition, communication, and behavior.

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.

NPE: Not parent expected or Non-paternal event.

Non-biological kinship: Parafamilial ties that provide emotional connection, commitment, intimacy, and support similar to family yet are not based on biological connection

Non-paternal event: DNA reveals that one's parent is not who the person believed was their parent

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Not parent-expected: DNA reveals that one's parent is not who the person believed was their parent

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 frequently 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 the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of each party. In most states, it is not *legally* enforceable and relies on the commitment of those making the agreement. It is unethical to promise an open adoption with the intention of closing it soon after placement.

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. In general, an adopted child benefits from full openness and the fullest contact that is safe. When openness and contact with a birth parent is not possible, often it can be created with other members of their family of origin until it is once again safe to resume contact.

Open records: When adoptees have access to their own adoption file and original birth certificate

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 always accurate.

PAE: Prenatal Alcohol Exposure

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

Partial FAS: Partial fetal alcohol Syndrome

Permanent custody: When an adult is permanently responsible for the care, responsibility, well-being, and health of a child, yet has not formally and legally adopted them.

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

(pFAS): Partial fetal alcohol Syndrome

Plenary adoption: Complete severance of all legal ties to a family, including the right to inherit

POC: Products of conception

Products of conception: Tissue that results when sperm fertilize an egg

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 and/or the birth mother. The most common services are counseling and serving as an intermediary.

Post-finalization: Anything that occurs after an adoption is legally finalized. The length of time varies by state.

Post-placement: After a child is placed in a home, it can refer to both the time before or after an adoption is finalized.

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

Post-placement communication: Contact or communication that occurs during the post-placement period when a child is no longer in parental custody. Can be written, electronic, video, audio, or in-person.

Pre-birth counseling: Counseling with an expectant mother 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 is legally able to 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—psychological, emotional, and physical—of this separation. These repercussions must be processed so the adoptee can move forward to full physical, emotional, and mental health.

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Private adoption: An adoption arranged directly between a birth mother and prospective 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. Adoption law varies from state to state, and whether it occurs within a single state or involves interstate placement. Often, in private adoptions, there is little or no education on adoption complexity, The Seven Core Issues of Adoption, adoption grief and loss, and adoption complexity, nor is there 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.

Provisional Period: The time between a child's placement in an adoptive family and the day the adoption is finalized.

Psychological parent: A person whom a child holds in a parental role and on whom they rely for care, financial support, and emotional connection, even if no official and/or legal arrangement exists.

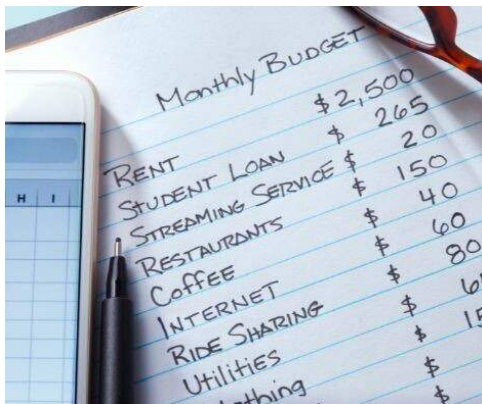
Psychological presence: A sense that an individual is on one's mind and has influence even when they are not physically present and/or alive.

Public adoption: Adoption through foster care

Putative Father: A man who asserts that he is the biological father of a child for whom paternity has not yet been proven legally

Putative Father Registry: A state-run registry system in which a man can assert his belief that he is the biological father of a child. This allows him to preserve his right to be notified and to consent or prevent the adoption of his child.

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.



Race vs. Ethnicity: Race is an identity based on a person's physical appearance and characteristics, while ethnicity is an identity based on a location, culture, language, and history.

RAD: See Reactive Attachment Disorder

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Raising family: The family that raised a child, and with whom they might or might not have a legal or genetic connection.

Raising parent: The parent who raised a child. They may/may not be the genetic parent and are financially responsible for the child.

Raised child: A term that distinguishes between the children that a parent raised from the children they placed for adoption

Raised sibling: A term used to distinguish between siblings raised by biological parents versus those placed for adoption

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 be prone 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 the adopting parent's 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.

Regulated: A state of emotional balance

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.

Rehoming: Is commonly understood to describe the relocating of an adopted child to another family *without* the oversight and supervision of the proper authorities. Children are moved without proper protections, oversight, and support. This can leave them vulnerable to child trafficking and predation.

Relational permanence: A lifelong emotional and relational connection between parent and child, whether they have a legal bond or not. Some adoptive parents and children have legal permanence, yet fail to sustain *relational* permanence.

Relinquishment: The creation of a permanent separation between birth parent and child so that the child 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 and/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.

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

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

Retrospective loss: The loss of the emotional comfort that one's fantasies previously provided after they have been proved inaccurate

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

Sanitized Adoption Language: Language that intentionally presents a hyper-positive tone that seeks to minimize, ignore, and/or deny painful realities. The use of Sanitized Adoption Language may be done unintentionally or purposefully.

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 hide birth certificates that identified a child as a bastard. Some states still seal adoption records. Many no longer do so. Anonymity of birth mothers was not the purpose.

Second parent adoption: The process of adopting a partner's biological or legal child ensures that the non-biological, second parent is legally recognized as a parent.

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS): The sense of overwhelm and physical exhaustion experienced by the professionals who work with children with traumatic histories. Although they do not experience the trauma directly, they still suffer emotional distress. Adoptive parents can also experience similar symptoms, such as STS can look like PTSD, anxiety, hypervigilance, and avoidance.

Secrecy: Hiding information even from those who are entitled to know, e.g., withholding information from an adoptee about their family of origin and/or conveying a sense that their adoption is shameful and therefore must be hidden and kept secret, that it cannot be discussed or disclosed.



Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

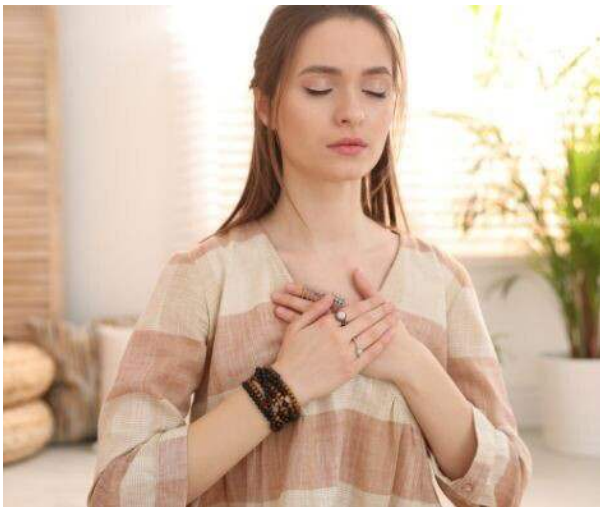
Semi-open adoption: An adoption that has some level of contact between adoptive parents and the first parents/family through an and who was believed to be unrelated biologically, but who turns out to be a bio sibling or half-sibling

Social parent: The parent who raised a child. They may/may not be the genetic parent, and they are financially responsible for the child.

Social Worker: Person(s) 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 and/or as part of an agency.

SOGIE : Sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression

Somatic relaxation techniques: Somatic techniques are body-focused methods that use physical sensations and movement to help process emotions, trauma, and stress. Since much of the trauma that is connected to adoption is stored in the body, somatic techniques can be particularly useful.



Spirit of openness: Not only believing in open adoption and following the *letter* of any agreements made but also committing to the *intention* of 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.

STS: Secondary Traumatic Stress is the sense of overwhelm and physical exhaustion experienced by professionals who work with children with traumatic histories. Although they do not experience the trauma directly, they still suffer emotional distress. Adoptive parents can also experience similar symptoms, STS can look like PTSD, anxiety, hypervigilance,

and avoidance.

Subtractive Adoption: Complete severance of all legal ties to a family, including the right to inherit from the birth family

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 may be created from the surrogate mother's egg or a donor's egg, plus the adoptive father's sperm or a donor's sperm.

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Surrogate mother: A woman who becomes intentionally pregnant and agrees to carry a fetus to term for the purpose of its being adopted. A surrogate might be the genetic mother, but not necessarily.

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.

Therapeutic parenting: Parenting that fosters connection and relationship to build felt safety. It typically includes high structure/high nurture, empathy, clear boundaries, and an intentional focus on building attachment and emotional healing

Tone Policing: Constraining a person's conversation in a way that devalues the content because it differs from the listener's expectations and/or contradicts their beliefs regarding the topic. Tone policing focuses on the speaker's tone or emotions and devalues the content being offered.

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 termination of a biological parent's right to raise and have custody of their child.

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

Traditional adoption: Closed adoption in which an adoptee and adoptive parents do not know and/or interact with birth parents.

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

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 the trauma of maternal/child separation.

Trauma-informed parenting: Recognizes the impact that trauma has on a child and parents in a way that promotes healing, felt safety, trust, and emotional regulation.

Traumaversary: A date on which a significant, traumatic event occurred that tends to trigger dysregulation in a person. This can be unconscious.

Tri-relational Interconnectivity: The emotional, physical, and psychological ties that link adoption triad members together

Tri-spective Coaching Model: A coaching Model based on three core principles. They are: being Adoptee-centric, recognizing Tri-relational Interconnectivity, and embracing Adoption Attunement

Tri-spective Experience: Considering adoption not only as an individual experience, but also as a collective experience that affects and connects the entire triad.

Tri-spective Point of View: A perspective of adoption that considers the experiences and points of view of all of the parties: adoptee, birth parents, and adoptive parents.

Underground adoption: A race-neutral term for Illegal adoption.

Unsanitized adoption language: Language that accurately conveys the emotional experience inherent in adoption and acknowledges the grief, loss, and trauma involved. Unsanitized Adoption Language retains the emotional weight of the feelings involved in the adoption process. This supports a more balanced picture of the losses as well as the gains, also known as Honest Adoption Language.

Waiting child: A child who is available for adoption because the parental rights have been terminated or are in the process of being terminated.

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

Adoption Attuned Dictionary Terms

[1] JaeRan Kim Ph. D, "Coming to consciousness" by Harlows Monkey, June 23, 2022, <https://harlows-monkey.com/2022/06/23/coming-to-consciousness/>

- Posted on
- [June 23, 2022](#)

[2] [Say This Instead: "Blacklist," "Blackball," "Blackmail," "Black market," etc.](#)

[3] [What are Attachment Disorders?](#)

[4] National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI) A Service of the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services. Based on the work of Dr. Michael Grant and his book "The Adoption Constellation"

