

Domestic Infant Adoption: Family Communication about Adoption and Adopted Child Curiosity

Gretchen Miller Wrobel, Ph.D.
Bethel University
St. Paul, Minnesota

Definition of Openness

- A continuum of contact and communication between members of the adopted child's birth and adoptive families.

(Grotevant & McRoy, 1998)

- Confidential
- Mediated
- Fully Disclosed

Openness as a dynamic process

- Intensity of desire for contact by any member of the adoption kinship network (adoptive parents, adopted children, birth parents)
- Adoptive and birth family dynamics
- Current level of openness
- Emotional Distance Regulation

Adoption Related Family Communication

- David Kirk's classic theory
 - Acknowledgment of Difference
 - Rejection of Difference
- Adoption Communicative Openness
 - Brodzinsky
 - Grotevant and Neil

Adoption Communicative Openness

- Communication with the child about adoption
- Promotion of the child's dual connection to two families
- Empathy with and tolerance of the child's feelings about adoption
- Communication with the birth family
- Empathy for birth relatives

Adoption Related Communication and Child Curiosity

- Possible Responses
 - Share all available information
 - Share all available information while seeking more
 - Share some information and withhold other information
 - Withhold all available information

What are adopted children placed as infants curious about at adolescence?

- 1. Reasons for placement
- 2. Other children being parented
- 3. Appearance
- 4. How the birth parent “was doing”
- 5. Personality characteristics

Information Seeking

- The gathering of information previously unknown the adopted person about his or her adoption and birth family.

(Wrobel & Dillon, 2009)

Thoughts for Practitioners and Families

- Curiosity is a normative experience and changes over time.
- Communication about adoption should remain open and flexible.

Thoughts for Practitioners and Families

- Deciding yes or not to information seeking is a normative process yet not all adopted persons seek out additional information.
- When contact exists between birth and adoptive families, there should be flexibility in the amount and type of information shared