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Amherst

Where the Rubber Hits the Road: Clinical Practice Basics, Challenges Old and New, and a Tiny History Lesson that can inform the Future

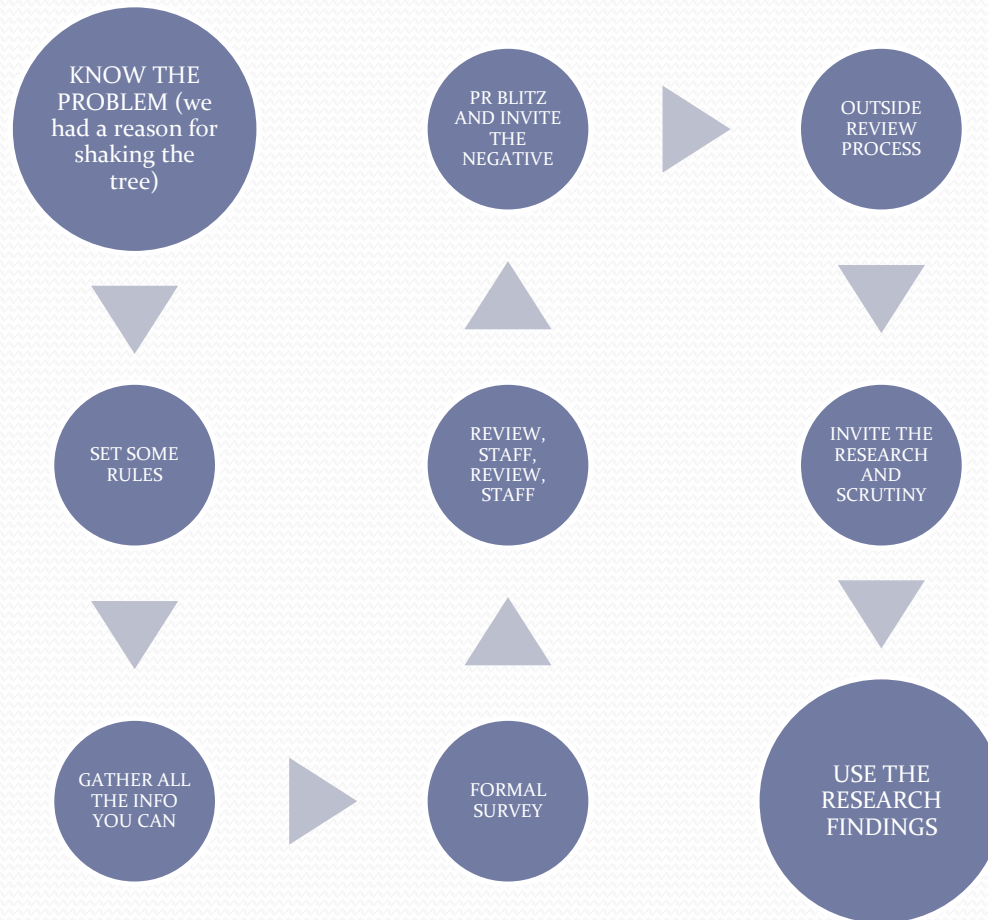
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PRACTICAL MATTERS

Clinical Tools For All Open Adoptions

Janie Cravens, LCSW

PUDDLE JUMPING IN A PRETTY STRAIGHT LINE



BRICKS IN THE FOUNDATION

CLIENTS

PSYCHODYNAMICS OF
ALL TRIAD MEMBERS

HOW CHILDREN MAKE
SENSE OF ADOPTION

DEVELOP
-MENT

THE
COMMON
MYTHS

COMMUNICATING
WITH CHILDREN

BOUNDARY
SETTING

BRICKS IN THE FOUNDATION *PROFESSIONALS*

.....everything from the prior slide.....plus

1. RESEARCH INFORMED PRACTICES

2. Group process

3. Child development

Janie's core competencies

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CORE COMPETENCIES FOR WORKING IN ADOPTION

1. Know your clients FEARS and WOUNDS and help them move past this and into compassion.
2. The PROCESS, the EMOTIONS, the COMMON CHALLENGES of the other parties involved in the adoption drama.
3. How to deal with OPEN ADOPTION, whether this one is open or not.
4. How to respond to the COMMON QUESTIONS and COMMENTS of others.
5. How to TALK WITH KIDS ABOUT ADOPTION (and how adoptees make sense of adoption)
6. How to MOVE children from one home/place to another
7. TRANSRACIAL issues and how they play out over the lifespan.

Adoptive Parent Education Topics

The realities of adoption

Special concerns of the particular type of adoption

What do kids (and adults) want to know

3 Tasks of entitlement

How to talk with kids about adoption

Understanding the bio clan

● **BENEFITS AND COSTS OF OPEN ADOPTION**

● **By Carol L. Demuth, LCSW**

● While open adoption is often talked of in terms of benefits and risk, it is more helpful to think of the costs involved and the benefits gained from the experience. This is not to deny that risks exist, but rather to accept that risks are inherent in ***all*** relationships—including those that may occur as a result of open adoption.

● In entering any relationship, we risk that:

● Parties may not be equally committed.

● Changing wants, needs or desires may result in conflict

● Miscommunications and misunderstandings may occur.

● We may experience feelings of rejection, ambivalence, hurt, jealousy, anger, fear, powerlessness and being manipulated.

● The relationship may come to an end.

● Costs are associated with every choice we make and are usually weighed against the benefits we hope to gain. Sometimes this process is so automatic, that we rarely give much conscious thought to it.

● Both open and closed adoptions have costs associated with them. In open adoption, the adoptive parents and birthparents take on more of the costs, whereas in closed adoptions, the costs fall, for the most part, on the adopted person.

● Following is a list of benefits and costs often associated with open adoption. You may think of others, or have some in mind that specifically apply to your situation.

BENEFITS

(For Adopted Persons)

- Lessens sense of total abandonment or thoughts that the birth parents did not care about them.
- Access to biological heritage, providing for a sense of history, continuity and rootedness.
- Through communication the child has the realization that the birth parents remember him and care about him, resulting in a better sense of self

(For Adoptive Parents)

- A stronger sense of entitlement as a result of being chosen by birth parents. In some cases, the birth parents literally place the child in the parent's arms.
- Parents can deal with the birth parents as "real people," rather than fantasy or phantom characters.
- Ability to provide child with answers to questions about the birth parents and updated information.

(For Birth Parents)

- Participation in selection of the family that will raise their child, leading to an increased sense of responsibility and cooperation.
- Ongoing knowledge about the child, allowing the birth parents to deal with "the known" and to share in the joys of the child's growth.
- A channel through which to impart information and express continued caring for the child.

COSTS

(For Adopted Persons)

- Must deal with the reality of birth parents possibly raising and parenting other children.
- Must let go of fantasies and idealizations, and sometimes deal with difficult information.
- May feel the need to "protect" adoptive parents if they have difficulty with the birth parents' expression of care. Child may have to deal with birth parents' lack of communication if contact doesn't occur.

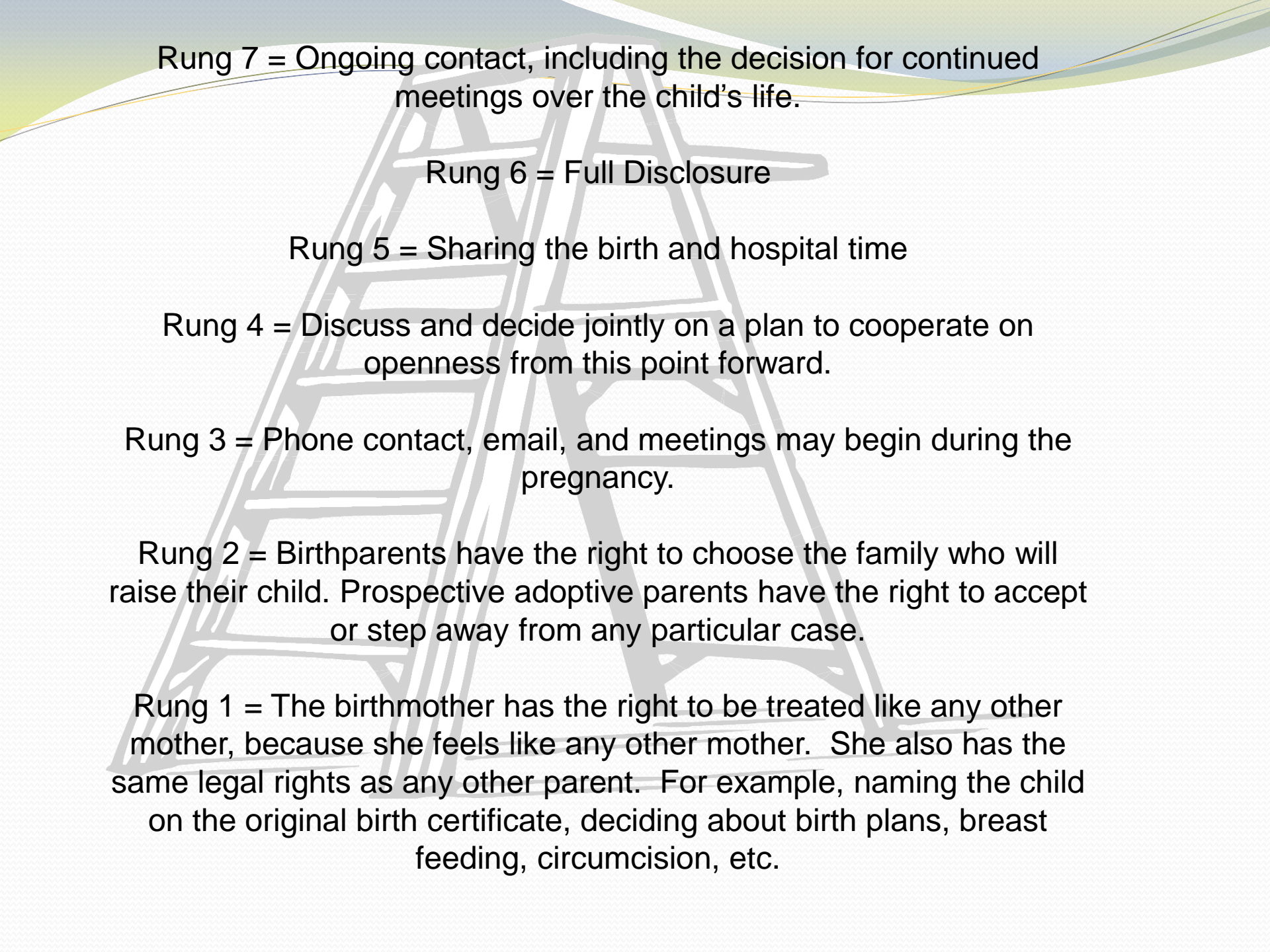
(For Adoptive Parents)

- A direct awareness that the joy of receiving a child has come from the painful experience of the birth family letting the child go.
- Having to let go of the fantasies or idealizations and helping the child to cope with difficult information.
- Helping the child to deal with the reality of "what is."

(For Birth Parents)

- Feeling more responsible for the "outcome" of the adoption.
- Being aware of what is being missed in not parenting the child.
- Being aware of the child's feelings, which may at some point include anger and or resentment.

VOLUNTARY	CPSC	INTERNATIONAL
COST & BENEFITS	COSTS & BENEFITS	COSTS & BENEFITS
Ladder	Abandonment	1st World/3rd World
Secondary gains & hidden blessings	Why WHY was I moved?	Intermediaries & Interpreters
		Permission to be a family



Rung 7 = Ongoing contact, including the decision for continued meetings over the child's life.

Rung 6 = Full Disclosure

Rung 5 = Sharing the birth and hospital time

Rung 4 = Discuss and decide jointly on a plan to cooperate on openness from this point forward.

Rung 3 = Phone contact, email, and meetings may begin during the pregnancy.

Rung 2 = Birthparents have the right to choose the family who will raise their child. Prospective adoptive parents have the right to accept or step away from any particular case.

Rung 1 = The birthmother has the right to be treated like any other mother, because she feels like any other mother. She also has the same legal rights as any other parent. For example, naming the child on the original birth certificate, deciding about birth plans, breast feeding, circumcision, etc.

- Sonia & Robert (son Davis): July 2008, Ethiopia
- We are in ongoing contact with our birth family and have visited them 5 times over 5 years (twice with Davis). The birth family includes, birth Mom and Dad, 2 brothers, maternal grandparents, 4 uncles, 1 aunt. They are all lovely and an important part of our lives. I have been able to create the image of Ethiopia and our birth family and relinquishment for Davis in a positive light and we all benefit from staying in touch via e-mail, post, and visits.
- If your openness is in some other form (letters, emails, etc) please describe: Visits when we go work on our literacy missions (davismoonproject.org) and family specific visits.
- What are plans for future contact? ongoing
- Did [do] you use an intermediary? Interpreter? yes
- Please list all benefits you believe come from this contact (or benefits that will come in the future): Davis has a true sense of self and grows emotionally with every visit and contact. He is proud of Ethiopia being his birth home and feels a true belonging both here and Ethiopia. The love that his birth family surrounds him with is incredibly rewarding and he is not left to wonder or create a false reality about his family in Ethiopia.
- Please describe what is hard about this contact (for you and for the bio family): The most difficult part is seeing the difficult reality for his brothers Nebu (12) and Lewe (2) and wishing we could do more to help them. We sponsor Nebu's school and send supplies to both Nebu and Lewe.
- What advice would you give other adoptive families about openness options? My experience has been overwhelmingly positive in dealing with our birth family. My advice would be not to have preset ideas about the relationship, expect them to ask for financial aide and be ready to address the issue of need, and encourage honesty even when it is tough.

- Kimberly (Emmy, age 3 – Tanzania)
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- Date of placement and country your child came from: We found her in an orphanage and as soon as you get the living parent's consent you have the right to take them out of the orphanage.
- If you actually met any member of the bio clan, describe when this happened, and write a brief description of the contact: We met Emmy's father when we met him 1st to see if we could adopt Emmy, then we met him with an attorney to get his legal consent. After this it took us 2 years to get the adoption from the TZ courts. During that time we lived in Arusha, TZ on and off and were able to get to know Emmy's father, Grandmothers and 1 sibling quite well. We also met aunts, uncles, nieces and nephews. She is from the Masai tribe and so she has a lot of extended family. We got along very well with them although they didn't speak English and we didn't speak Swahili. They were very polite and loving people and were so happy that we were wanting to adopt Emmy.
- What are plans for future contact? Plan to visit Emmy's family next year (2014). We keep in contact with her father monthly through emails, text message and mail.
- Did [do] you use an intermediary? Interpreter? No, I paid for Emmy's father to attend English classes in Tanzania.
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- Please list all benefits you believe come from this contact (or benefits that will come in the future): I think the main benefit will be for Emmy. She will know where she came from and that she has a biological father that loves her and that her mother went to heaven, but that she came from a very proud and wonderful place. She will know that we love her and that we were lucky that God decided that she should be our little girl and grow up with us as her family and her mommy and daddy. She will know there is no reason to hide anything and that she is amazing.
- Please describe what is hard about this contact (for you and for the bio family): Nothing is really hard about this contact for us except that sometimes her father will ask us for money to help him along as he is extremely poor.

- Jodi & Mark : Lydia - June 2003, Russia; Cade - July 2005, Russia
- If you actually met any member of the bio clan, describe when this happened, and write a brief description of the contact: We never actually met either of our children's biological family in person
- If your openness is in some other form (letters, emails, etc) please describe: We made contact with each of our children's biological mothers about one year after their adoptions. We used an intermediary who was in Russia and he or his representatives made contact with, and met with each of the children's birth mothers in their hometowns. With our daughter's birthmother, we used letters and emails to communicate for the next couple of years. At first we were sending our letters to a translator to have them translated and then sending the letter to our intermediary to forward to the birthmom. Eventually, that changed to email contact and we were just using online translators back and forth.
- In our son's case we made contact with his birthmom, as well as his great grandmother and great grandfather. We sent a follow up letter after the contact was made, but never received a response, and we were advised by the intermediary that contact may be too painful for the birthmom at this time and we did not pursue further contact.
- What are plans for future contact? Neither birthmother has made any attempt for contact with us in recent years. We have been advised that contact may not be wanted. We may attempt another letter to each birthmom in the future.
- Did [do] you use an intermediary? Interpreter? Yes.
- Please list all benefits you believe come from this contact (or benefits that will come in the future): We initially made contact to answer medical questions, as well as to put a face to the name. As parents, we are happy to have this information and feel that as our children get older, having the information and the pictures will be comforting to our children and erase some questions that they may have about their identity.
- Please describe what is hard about this contact (for you and for the bio family): The lack of ongoing contact with the birthfamilies may at some point feel like a second abandonment for our children.
- What advice would you give other adoptive families about openness options? I fully support the attempt to make contact and gain as much information about our children's biological background as is possible.

- Heather B ---- ETHIOPIA – girl, aged 6, August 2007
- Our agency arranged for us to meet birthmother and birthmother's brother. We met outside a church. It was raining so loud and we were huddled under an overhang straining to hear one another thru the translator. We spent 30 minutes together asking questions about our son's history, why she chose to relinquish and about her and her family's history (where they were born, her siblings and parents and occupations, interests, etc.)
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- If your openness is in some other form (letters, emails, etc) please describe: We have sent a few photo books over but do not know if they ever arrived to birthmother.
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- What are plans for future contact? We are discussing hiring a private detective to find birthfamily and re-establish contact. We would like to take our son to visit Ethiopia and meet birth family in the future.
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- Did [do] you use an intermediary? Interpreter? Yes
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- Please list all benefits you believe come from this contact (or benefits that will come in the future): Having questions answered, knowing one's story and having compassion for challenges that faced (or cont to face) birthfamily, connection to origins and culture.
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- Please describe what is hard about this contact (for you and for the bio family): Language barrier, cultural differences, distance, lack of infrastructure set up in birthcountry to make communication easier (for example, no physical address or internet)
-
- What advice would you give other adoptive families about openness options? Openness allows for a child to better have their questions answered. It can also give the child a more positive view of self, connection to roots, knowing where they came from, cultural richness and knowing birthfamily heritage.

- Jaime and Aaron.....Uganda (two sisters)
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- 1. Date of placement and country your child came from: Tentatively April 2013, Uganda
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- 2. If you actually met any member of the bio clan, describe when this happened, and write a brief description of the contact: We met the biological aunts who are the guardians of the girls. We met before court at our attorney's office. We had approximately an hour to talk and get to know the aunts and ask questions. Meeting was very positive.
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- 3. What are plans for future contact? We hope to stay in contact with the family via the organization in Uganda. The family does not have access to internet. We told the family we would send photos and updates of the girls and would like to return to Uganda one day.
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- 5. Did [do] you use an intermediary? Interpreter? The aunts spoke some English, for the most part no. Sometimes an interpreter was used to better communicate.
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- 6. Please list all benefits you believe come from this contact (or benefits that will come in the future): This will be very beneficial and important to our children as they get older and want to know where they came from, their story, what family looks like etc. We had a very positive experience and hope to stay in contact.
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- 7. Please describe what is hard about this contact (for you and for the bio family): The contact was positive. It will be hard for the family to say good bye to the girls, it was obvious they love these girls very much. A very sad scenario of extreme poverty and lack of medical care in rural areas that this situation came about. We were sad to see the bond between the girls and family be separated and that's why we want to stay in contact and bring the girls back.
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- 8. What advice would you give other adoptive families about openness options? Depends on the situation. We have been fortunate that the family loves their nieces and has been wonderful to them.

