

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT OPENNESS IN ADOPTION OF ABUSED CHILDREN*



ACT

Participant
Resource
Notebook

Supporting
the
Permanent
Family
Practice
Tools

Myths:

- Children should never have contact.
- It is best for children to forget about their birth family.
- Children cannot love “those people.” Children do not want contact with people who have hurt them.
- Abusive birth parents do not deserve contact with their children.
- Abusive birth parents will hurt children again.
- Adoptive parents who are parenting these children should not have to, or will not, deal with the birth parents.

Facts:

- Abused children are often attached to their birth parents.
- Abusive birth parents can offer their children things adoptive families cannot, including permission to attach to the new family, as well as a social history.
- Children and adults do better dealing with reality, even when harsh, than with secrets and fantasies.
- Issues frequently can be “resolved” more quickly and thoroughly when the child confronts the reality of birth parents. Children can “heal” traumas and forgive birth parents, thereby acquiring a sense of freedom from the past, and permission to become “themselves.”
- Contact helps circumvent divided loyalty issues and children’s fantasies that they were kidnapped by the adoptive family.
- Extended birth family may be used to keep connections with the child when birth parents are not appropriate.
- People change and grow; abusive birth parents may be more available for a relationship with the child a few years down the road.
- Openness may allow the child to be adopted; birth parents who meet adoptive parents may relinquish the child voluntarily, circumventing a long legal process filled with animosity and lengthy appeals.
- Some birth parents who had problems with substances can provide education better than “preachy” adoptive parents.
- Adoptive parents may acquire access to important information about the child’s birth history.

*Adapted from:

Melina, L.R., & Roszia, S.K. (1993). *The open adoption experience*. New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers.