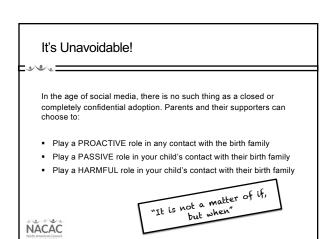
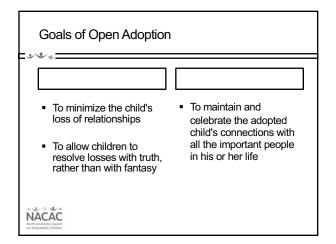


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## Dispelling the Myths of Open Adoption

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- Open adoption does NOT interfere with adoptive parents entitlement to parent their child, nor does it diminish their sense of control
- Parents are NOT confused about their parenting rights and responsibilities, and...
- Children are NOT confused about who their parents are
- Birth parents do NOT attempt to "take back" children

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### Dispelling the Myths of Open Adoption, cont.

- Birth mothers in open adoptions do NOT have increased difficulty in resolving grief, they are faring better than those in closed adoptions
- Openness does NOT affect the child's self-esteem in any negative way
- Adolescents in open adoption are NOT more preoccupied with adoption *per se*
- Openness does NOT appear to directly affect adolescents' sense of identity

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### Factors in Increased Openness

- The birth and adoptive parents' mutual concern for the child's well being
- An emergence of friendship or a personally satisfying relationship between the birth and adoptive parents
- Regular flow of communication between the birth and adoptive families



Factors in Decreased Openness

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- Geographic distance between families
- Major differences in values, life circumstances, etc.
- Relatives or friends who discourage contact
- Inability to mutually negotiate contact
- Agency inability to support ongoing contact
- Adoptive parents concerns for child
- Change in birth family

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### Developmental Issues as Relates to Openness

Infant: No adoption awareness

- Age 1-5: Aware of differing appearance, asks simple questions about physical differences, ready to learn and re-tell his personal adoption story
- Age 6-12: Thinking about *meaning:* to be adopted means one was first given away, sense of loss; grieving for birth parents, may romanticize his birth parents, discomfort with being "different"; asks more difficult questions: Why am I adopted? Where are my birth

parents?

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### Developmental Issues, cont.

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 Age 13-15: Understands the implications of being adopted; acknowledges two sets of parents, ambivalence towards both; grief related to loss of birth parents; asks "why am I adopted?" - seeking depth in answers; emotional search for birth parents; self-esteem challenged re: concept of early abandonment; integrate adoption into one's sense of self



The Center for Support and Education (C.A.S.E.)

# Developmental Issues, cont.

 Age 16-19: Yearn for connection to genetic past; loss of birth parents extends to loss of a part of one's self; may try on traits of birth parents; awareness of not fitting in physically with family; identity formation: challenge "who am !?" - must figure out who they are in relation to adoption; differentiation can be complicated by one set of parents being unknown; new curiosity about origins; consider searching for birth parents

The Center for Support and Education (C.A.S.E.)

# Why Do Children Want Contact? NATURAL CURIOSITY Identity development – Who am I? Who/where/what do I come from? Why am I this way? Who could I have been? Am I of value? Am I to repeat parental patterns? Medical information

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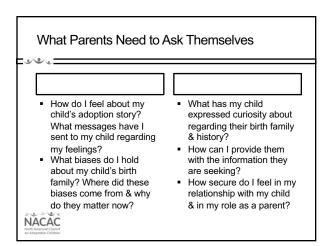
### Why Would Children Hide Contact?

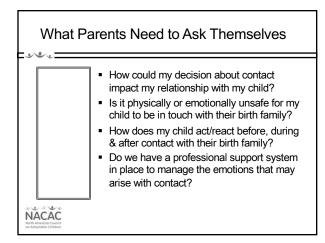
Fear of:

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- Hurting, disappointing, or "betraying" adoptive parents
- Being judged
- Contact being cut off
- Adoptive parent expectations/pressure
- Distrust in the long-term possibilities of the relationship

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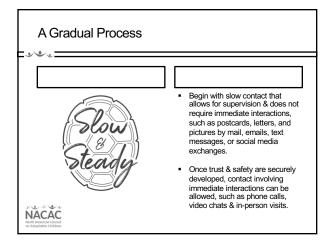


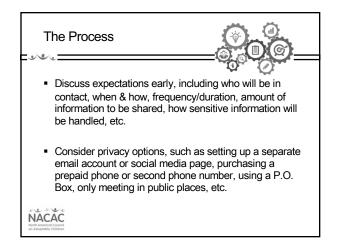
### Questions Parents Should Ask Children

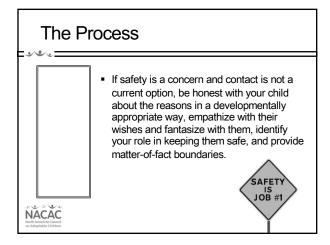
- Who do you want to contact?
- What are you hoping for when you contact your birth tamily
- What worries you about contacting your birth family?
- How would you like to contact your birth family?
- What are the rules we should put in place when you are in contact with your birth family to make sure that everyone feels safe & comfortable?
- What is it like for you when you are in contact your birth family? What is it like for you before & after contact with them?
- How will you know if you need more, less, or a different type of contact with your birth family? How will you let me know what you need?
- How would you like me to be involved in your birth family contact?

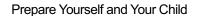
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- Emotions that may arise how to recognize and express them
- Wishes/hopes
- Worries/fears
- Setting realistic expectations
- How to handle confusion/disappointment
- Background on birth family members' appearances, physical disabilities, mental health issues
- Health symptoms, living environments, etc.
- If you are not confident in your ability to adequately prepare your child for birth family contact, seek support from an adoption-competent therapist.

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### Child's Rights

- Child has the right to decide if and when they want to begin contact.
- Child has the right to end or take a break from contact at any time and for any reason.
- Child has the right to ask their birth family any questions directly related to their history and identity.



### **Openness for Foster Kids**

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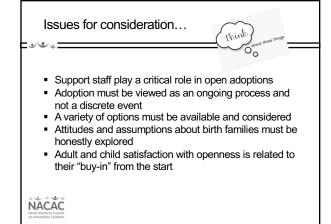
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- Children in care whose goal is adoption are likely to achieve better outcomes by maintaining their existing connections with extended birth family members, siblings, and other attachment figures
- Decrease in adolescent resistance to adoption
- Decrease in adolescent loyalty issues
- With fost/adopt, there is usually an existing relationship between the families which naturally continues



### Potential Benefits of Shared Parenting Creating supportive relationships with birth parents may:

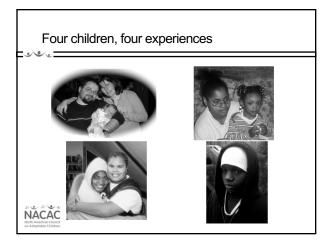
- Enhance child development, learning, and well-being by encouraging the child to return to the child role;
- Decrease children's defiant behavior by reducing their desire/need to demonstrate loyalty to birth family;
- Provide information and insights that enable foster parents to meet children's needs earlier and in a more effective way, thus helping children and reducing foster parent frustration;
- Reduce conflict with birth parents over various issues;
   Increase birth parent support for foster parents by reassuring them their children are being well cared for and that foster parents do not seek to replace them; and
   Create a positive connection
- Create a positive connection between the foster parents, the child, and the child's family that will not have to end, even if the placement does.



### One Undisputed Fact

There is no one level of adoption openness that best fits all families. Each type of adoption has its own benefits and challenges that should be considered for each particular situation.

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### Additional Resources

- Helping Children Connect with their Birth Parents
   https://www.nacac.org/resource/helping-children-connect-with-birth-parent
  - Co-Parenting or Shared Parenting
  - Building Bridges Between Birth Parents, Foster Parents
     https://chronicleofsocialchange.org/featured/building-bridges-birth-pare
  - Facilitated Openness Can Benefit Children Adopted from Care
  - <u>https://www.nacac.org/resource/facilitated-openness-can-benefit-children-adopted-from-care/</u>
  - Ambiguous Loss Haunts Foster and Adopted Children
     <u>https://www.nacac.org/resource/ambiguous-loss-foster-and-adopted-children/</u>

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