



Adoption Lingo – Learn the language!

Once you start Googling and making calls to potential adoption providers, you will quickly notice several new phrases and terms being tossed around – possibly some you’ve never heard! Adoption professionals as well as parents who have previously adopted often speak in their own language that can sometimes lead to feeling frazzled about pursuing adoption or uncertain about the information you’ve received.

We have designed this guide to start you off with the basics – learning adoption lingo – to help give you confidence and knowledge to succeed in your adoption journey!

Adoption Agency – a child-placing agency regulated and licensed by a state department (Dept. of Children and Families in the state of Florida) and is able to perform and complete an adoption placement of a child.

Adoption Attorney – an attorney specializing in the practice of adoption law, particularly private adoption. Adoption attorneys are legally able to complete an adoption placement of a child.

Adoption Entity – a child-placing agency or adoption attorney able to complete an adoption placement of a child. Term often used by hospital staff, attorneys and legal staff, and/or the judge/courts.

Licensed Professional – a licensed clinical social worker (LCSW), licensed psychologist, or licensed mental health counselor (LMHC) who is legally eligible to provide adoption home study and counseling services in the state of Florida. These professionals are licensed and regulated by the state and are required to meet specific ethical and procedural standards. These professionals are also able to assess, diagnose, and treat mental health concerns in individuals, groups and families. They also hold a Master’s degree, and have completed necessary experience, supervision, and examinations to obtain licensure.

Adoption Case Worker/Coordinator – a professional staff member who has a Bachelor’s degree in social work or related study including a human services or child welfare program. They are NOT required to hold any specified number of years experience, a Master’s degree, or a clinical license or adoption competency certification. They often assist with paperwork, manage case details, and provide support and guidance to birth and/or adoptive parents, although they are often used by agencies in a role to provide “counseling” although they are not qualified counseling providers.

Adoption Competent Certified - a 32-hour training certification offered to case workers, case managers, and social workers in the state of Florida by the Department of Children and Families indicating a specialization and competency in the field of adoption.

Private adoption – An adoption placement of a child that is completed by a private adoption agency or attorney and does not involve the state foster care system or dependency court. Termination of birth parents’ rights is often voluntary rather than mandated by the state due to abuse and/or neglect.



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Domestic infant adoption – An adoption placement completed within the United States by a private adoption agency or attorney where birthparents voluntarily make an adoption plan and adoptive parents adopt an infant, often taking placement upon discharge from the hospital.

Adoption Triad (or Constellation) – a term coining the members involved in the adoption process. The term recognizes and acknowledges the connection between the 1) birth family, 2) adoptive family, and 3) adoptee; hence, the term “triad.” It is used to acknowledge that all of these members are impacted by adoption and need to be acknowledged and supported. “Constellation” is a newer version of the term recognizing extended birth and adoptive family members as well as bio- and adoptive siblings.

Closed/traditional adoption – an adoption where no identifying information is shared between the birth and adoptive parents and records are sealed upon finalization of adoption. The birthparents do not select the adoptive parents and do not have any contact prior to or after the adoption placement. This type of adoption is no longer a standard practice in today’s society, as it does not acknowledge grief/loss in adoption, and is not supportive to the adoption triad.

Semi-open adoption – an adoption where limited identifying information is shared between the birth and adoptive parents, an in-person meeting sometimes occurs prior to placement, and ongoing contact consists of indirect communication mediated by an adoption entity. Contact following the placement is typically set to specific time increments (e.g., 1 month, 6 months, 1 year) and consists of pictures and letters.

Open adoption – an adoption when birth and adoptive parents share full identifying information, and typically have direct communication during the pregnancy, while making an adoption plan, and also following the placement. Prospective birthparents are able to select the adoptive family of their choice, and both parties are able to determine the type and frequency of ongoing contact. Contact in open adoption ranges from sharing pictures and letter or email updates, to calls/video chat, and/or in-person visits and is decided with the assistance of an adoption professional.

Expectant Mother/Parent – a pregnant woman who is voluntarily considering or pursuing adoption to place her child with prospective adoptive parents.

Prospective Birth Parent – a pregnant woman or mother parenting a child who is voluntarily considering or pursuing adoption to place her child with prospective adoptive parents.

Birth Mother/Parent – a woman who has already placed a child for adoption.

Birth Father/Parent – a man who has already placed a child for adoption.

Biological father – An adoption term used in Florida for any man identified by the prospective birth mother as a potential father of her child prior to placing the child for adoption.



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Legal father – An adoption term used in Florida for a man who is required to consent to an adoption in addition to the prospective birth mother. A man who is legally married to the prospective birth mother at the time of conception and/or birth is one example of a legal father.

Prospective adoptive parent(s) – a single individual or couple who is pursuing adoption as a way to expand their family.

Matched – a term used when prospective birthparent(s) and adoptive parent(s) mutually decide to exclusively plan an adoption together. Upon “matching,” neither the prospective birthparent(s) nor adoptive parent(s) should be seeking or having contact with any other adoptive prospects.

Hospital Plan – a tentative verbal or written plan created by the prospective birth mother regarding her wishes and desires for the hospital stay and birth of child (e.g., contact with baby, involvement of adoptive parents). This may be made individually with birthmother’s social worker, or could be a joint meeting including birthfather and/or prospective adoptive parents. It is beneficial when the adoption social worker shares this plan with the adoptive parents and hospital contact in preparation for the placement.

Post-adoption contact agreement (aka open adoption agreement) – a signed agreement detailing the parameters (e.g., type, frequency, duration, special considerations) of contact the birthparent(s) and adoptive family intend to have with one another following the placement and throughout the child’s life. If your adoption entity files it with the adoption court(s), this agreement is a legal document in the state of Florida. The purpose is to ensure the contact agreement is upheld, but can never be grounds to overturn an adoption. Laws regarding these agreements vary state to state.

Adoptive Placement – the process of a prospective birth mother signing consent to adoption documents and the adoptive parents taking the child into their care. In domestic infant adoption, this often occurs upon discharge of the hospital.

Consent Signing/Consent to Adoption – the process when a prospective birthmother and/or birthfather signs legal documents facilitated by an attorney or agency representative/social worker in the presence of witnesses and a notary (and in some cases a court reporter) to voluntarily relinquish his/her legal rights as a parent and designates to place his/her child for adoption. Some states refer to this process as signing “**surrenders**” or “**relinquishments.**”

ICPC – Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children – a required process when an adoption crosses state lines. Both states involved will review adoption documents to ensure each state’s laws and procedures are followed. Your adoption entity will correspond with the ICPC office regarding this process, as adoptive parents do not have any contact or access to ICPC representatives.

**For example, an adoptive family who resides in Florida and adopts a child from New York would be required to complete the ICPC process. Following the adoptive placement, the adoptive family and child will remain in New York until both New York and Florida state ICPC offices have cleared them to return home. At that time, the adoptive family will legally be able to return to their home state of Florida.*



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Post-placement Period/Supervision – a supervised period of time (often 3-6 months) for the adoptive family when a case worker/social worker will meet with the family to ensure both child and family are adjusting well and the placement continues to be in best interest of child. The adoption agency or social worker completing supervision is required to submit their recommendation based on interactions and observations. This period starts upon the time of the adoption placement of the child and ends upon the finalization hearing when the adoption is approved and finalized by the courts. Guidelines vary state to state.

TPR or Termination of Parental Rights – the legal process when the judge approves to terminate legal parental rights of the birthmother and birthfather(s) and a TPR order is issued. In Florida and many states, the adoption attorney will prepare and complete this process, and adoptive parents are not required to attend any court hearing.

Finalization – the process when an adoption becomes legally complete and the adoptive parents have equal rights to the child as if he/she were a biological child. This process consists of a court hearing when the judge approves the adoption and a final judgment of adoption order is issued. The adoptive parents, baby/child, and adoption attorney are typically present, and in occasional out-of-state circumstances, this process can be done via video or conference call.

Original birth certificate – A birth certificate issued upon child's birth and lists the child's biological/birth parent(s) and also lists the child's name as given by birthparent(s). *Note: Some birthparents choose a name and others use the name adoptive parents intend to give child.* This birth certificate is valid until the amended birth certificate is issued, where at that time it becomes no longer legally valid and turns into a sentiment/memento for birthparents, adoptive parents, and the child.

Amended birth certificate – A permanent birth certificate that is issued upon finalization for the child who was adopted. The amended birth certificate shows the child's name as the adoptive parents have chosen, and also lists the adoptive parents as the legal parents.