

Glossary of Adoption Terms

Adoptee:

A person who joins a family through adoption.

Adoption:

A legal process when a permanent child and child relationship is formed by the transfer of parental rights from the birth parents to another individual or couple.

Adoption Agency:

An organization that is licensed by the state to prepare families for adopting and parenting adopted children. Adoption agencies are also charged with assessing the family's emotional, financial and physical fitness. Adoption agencies are also known as child placing agencies which means that the birth parents can relinquish their child to the agency which in turn places the child with an adoptive family.

Adoption Plan:

A plan created by the birth parent(s) that is planning to place the child with an adoptive family. It can be formal or informal. It includes the birth parents desired level of openness and contact with the adoptive family prior to and after placement, what services and expenses will be provided to the birth parents, who will provide them, and who will pay for them.

Adoptive Parent:

A person or persons who become the permanent parents of a child through adoption with all the social, legal rights and responsibilities of a parent.

Birth Parent:

The parents who made a plan of adoption for a child that they have given birth to.

Child Abuse Clearances:

A process that adoptive parents undergo to show that they have no history of abuse to others. Every state has a different process obtaining the abuse clearance. It can involve checks with the state abuse and sex offender's registry, fingerprinting with the state and the FBI, local criminal back ground checks. Child abuse clearances are part of the home study process.

Closed or Confidential Adoption:

An adoption where there is no contact or exchange of identifying information between the birth parents and adoptive family.

Confidentiality:

The withholding of identifying information.

Consent to Adoption:

The document that is voluntarily signed by the birthparents in an adoption that allows the adoptive parents to adopt their child. In some states it must be signed in front of witnesses and a Notary Public. In some states the consent is taken in front of a judge. Every state has different laws regarding when the consent can be signed. State law also varies widely concerning the issue of revocation. In some states, the consent is irrevocable when signed, meaning it cannot later be taken back or voided by a birthparent unless the birth parent can prove coercion, duress or fraud. In other states, there is a period of time that the birth parent can revoke their consent without having to prove these conditions. Generally, Consent to Adoption is the term used in an independent adoption versus relinquishment which is used in an agency placement. The term consent is also used when an agency consents to an adoption at finalization after the supervisory period has passed.

Counseling:

A process in which a person can receive independent and neutral counsel regarding their options when facing an unintended pregnancy. This counseling includes exploration of their options, the pros and cons of each choice and the short term and long term consequences of each choice. Birth parent counseling should include exploration of all options including parenting the child, kinship adoption, foster care and various types of adoptions.

Criminal Clearances:

Similar to the child abuse clearances, this is part of the home study process. Criminal clearances can involve local police clearances, fingerprint checks with the state and FBI. In adoptions, all adults living in a household must obtain criminal and child abuse clearances prior to a child being placed in that home.

Finalization:

The court hearing which results in the adoption decree. This is the moment when the adoptee becomes the permanent, legally adopted child of the adoptive parents. Every state varies in the length of time between placement, filing of the adoption petition and finalization.

Foster Care:

A temporary arrangement whereby persons other than the birth parents care for a child for a period of time. Foster families are typically approved by the agency involved in the adoption.

Homestudy:

A home study assessment is process that involves evaluation and education of potential adoptive parents. Every state has a different process for home study assessment. The home study is usually conducted by a social worker affiliated with a licensed adoption agency or one who is credentialed by the state to conduct home study assessments. Home study assessments or pre-placement investigation typically involve interviews of

the adopting individuals, couples interviews with any adults or children living in the home. Financial statements, medical statements, proof of income, references checks, criminal clearances, child abuse clearances and a home inspection are typically involved. The home study assessment process leads to a written document either approving or disapproving the individuals or couple as adoptive parents.

Involuntary Termination of Parental Rights:

A legal procedure where the legal rights of birth parents to a child are terminated by the court without the signed consents of the birth parents. Circumstances for such proceedings include may include abandonment, abuse or neglect of the child, failure to support, and lack of participation in the putative father registry.

Kinship Adoption:

An adoption of a child that is closely biologically related i.e. grandchild, sibling, niece or nephew. In kinship adoption, the relatives legally adopt the child. In many states, the adopting parents are not required to have a home study assessment in a kinship adoption.

Legal Risk Adoption:

An adoption where the child to be adopted is placed with the prospective adoptive parents prior to the termination of the birth parents' rights.

Open or Disclosed adoption:

An adoption where there is contact between the members of the adoption triad and the identities to the parties are shared. The contact can be frequent or infrequent. The contact can continue as the child grows or may be limited to pre-placement contact. All open adoption are very different and depending on the desires of the birth parents and the adoptive parents.

Independent or Private Adoption:

An adoption which is arranged without the involvement of an agency. Typically an adoption attorney serves as the intermediary who coordinates the legal processes and refers the adoptive parents and the birth parents to the needed services. Independent adoptions are usually direct placement adoption i.e. the birth parents consents to placement directly to the adoptive parents. Adoption agencies or licensed adoption professionals often involved in an independent adoption since the adoptive family will need a home study assessment and post placement supervision.

Relinquishment:

The termination of custodial and legal rights to a child by a birth parent. This is a legally binding, permanent procedure involving the signing of legal documents and court action. Some states refer to relinquishment as a surrender.

Putative father's registry:

A voluntary registry maintained by the state where the father gives notice of his intent to claim paternity

Reunion Registry:

Large databases that contain both identifying and non-identifying information about birth parents, adoptive parents, adoptees who wish to learn about each other. Those interested can register their data and request to be notified should the other parties in their adoption also register. These registries can be private or coordinated by a state agency.

Revocation of Consent:

A birth parent revokes the consent to adoption that they had signed previously and requests that the child be returned to his/her custody. Every state has a different process of revocation of consent. This is called reversal in some states.

Termination of Parental Rights:

The process in which a birth parent voluntarily terminates or in which the rights are involuntarily terminated.

Voluntary Termination of Parental Rights:

The birth parents of the child voluntarily makes an adoption plan for the child by legally relinquishing their legal rights to the child.