

# THE LANGUAGE OF ADOPTION

Compiled by Lund Adoption staff, March 2021

Words matter!

We focus on using language that conveys accuracy about adoption and respect for all members of an adoption constellation. We are constantly discussing the words we use, and the “preferred” terms can of course change over time. In general, we use person-first language. We avoid phrases that imply judgement, and use words that affirm people’s dignity. We use inclusive language. We avoid phrases that reduce people to one singular identity, when possible. We prioritize the terms that individuals use to describe themselves.

There is nuance in all of this! For example, many people use “adoptee” as a preferred self-identification. Describing a family as an “adoptive family” is common. One thing to ask ourselves is—is this descriptor relevant to the context?

<b>Instead of this....</b>	<b>...try this.</b>
Birth Family	Birth Family Former Family Family of Origin
Potential birth mother	Expectant parent
Pregnant mom	Pregnant person
Give up for adoption Give away for adoption Adopt out Put up for adoption	Make an adoption plan Choose adoption Find a family to parent your child
Real mother / father / parent Natural mother / father / parent	Birth parent/Former Parent/Parent of origin
Keep the baby / child	Parent the child Decide to parent
Failed adoption	Dissolved adoption Disrupted adoption
Adoptee	Person who was adopted/who experienced adoption Adoptee
Their adopted child	Their child Their child who was adopted Their child who joined their family by adoption
Their own child Their real child Their natural child	Their child Their child by birth
Adoptive family	Family joined by adoption Forever family Adoptive family Family of Experience
Adoptable child	Child waiting for their forever family Waiting child
Is adopted	Was adopted
Closed adoption	Confidential adoption

## OTHER USEFUL TERMS:

**Adoption constellation:** refers to everyone touched by the adoption process: birth parents, adoptee, adoptive parents, adoption professionals, extended family, and/or chosen family/support people. This replaces “adoption triad” or “adoption triangle.”

**Adoption or Guardianship Assistance Agreement:** The financial and medical assistance available to most families who adopt through the Child Welfare system to help meet the special needs of the child. It MAY include a monthly payment, health insurance, access to childcare support funding, additional one time services funding and other Title XX services. (Vermont specific definition)

**Transracial adoption, cross-cultural adoption:** The adoption of a child who is from a different culture or of a different race than their adoptive parent(s).

**Finalization:** Adoption finalization is the court proceeding where the judge signs the adoption order and adoptive parent(s) become the legal parent(s) of the child.

**Open adoption: (When not a Legal Term):** Involves ongoing contact between adoptive family and birth family members and/or previous foster parents. We often talk about openness on a spectrum.

**Private adoption:** An adoption where expectant parent(s) work with a licensed adoption agency or lawyer to make an adoption plan for their child. Private adoptions do not involve DCF/children in state custody.

**Child Welfare Adoption:** Adoption occurring when a child cannot safely return home after DCF involvement. Child Welfare department works to recruit/find/place a child with a permanent family – including Kin families.

**Kinship adoption:** The adoption of a child by extended family members or other adults who have significant prior connection.

**Permanency:** A legally established relationship between a child and a caregiver.

**Post Permanency Support Services:** Post-Permanency Services can be a general term used to refer to the constellation of services that families joined by adoption or guardianship utilize (therapy, childcare supports, Mental Health services, adoption/guardianship competent services, Adoption Assistance support etc.) Post-Permanency Support Services is a specific service provided to families joined by adoption or guardianship that is focused on supporting families to navigate the adoption and guardianship specific aspect to their family. Providers are adoption competent and trauma informed and often support the needs of the whole family while looking at the family through the lens of adoption and guardianship. This service was formerly known as *Post-Adoption Services*. The work transformed over time to include supporting families joined by guardianship since oftentimes the themes were similar in nature. The term shifted to reflect the inclusiveness of supporting families joined by guardianship.

**Search:** Also referred to as Search and Reunion. Refers to process of members of the Adoption Constellation who seek out other members of their constellation.

### **Clarification of 3 terms related to Adoption placement interruptions:**

**Adoption Disruption:** When a youth is placed with a family for the purpose of adoption and the child leaves that family **prior** to the adoption being finalized.

**Adoption Discontinuity:** The adoption has been finalized and the youth experiences an out of home placement for a period of time. This may include higher level of care stays, inpatient mental health, residential school, time with extended family/kin, etc. The youth does return home after the out of home care.

**Adoption Dissolution:** The legal tie between the parents and the child is severed by court. This may occur after Child Welfare involvement or a family may decide to place their child with another family for the purpose of adoption sometimes referred to as the **Unregulated Custody Transfer** of youth.