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for Adoptive Families



Safety planning for birth parent contact

Studies show adoptees benefit when they are free to ask questions and have information surrounding their history and biological family. Many adoptive families and birth families have proven open adoption can promote good collaboration and healthy relationships (Siegel & Smith, 2012).

While many families find a way to build those connections with their child's birth family, there are times when safety keeps that from happening. In those cases, a good safety plan can benefit the adoptive family. Any good safety plan begins with a conversation between the adults in the family about what they will do should their child have contact with their birth family. It's important that all adults are on the same page and know what the plan is should a crisis arise.

Good safety plans:

- Are family-specific and address the entire family group
- Must be implemented and remain active as long as a potential crisis exists
- Establish the family's immediate response to a potential danger and clearly describe the specific safety actions and other responsibilities of all family members

Putting together a safety plan also requires the following steps:

- **Before an incident or crisis occurs, talk to your**

child. The conversation surrounding your child's history should be started early and always be open for discussion. Let your preteen/teen know what expectations you have regarding contact with their birth families, including:

- What type of contact is acceptable and what is not
- Whether or not you expect your child will let you know if they are contacted by their birth parent
- That you are responsible for your child's well-being and you have their best interest in mind
- **Specify what type of contact will be allowed.** If contact has been initiated, it's vital to be clear with your child about the boundaries that must be in place. Good questions to ask:
 - Is your child allowed contact through telephone and social media?
 - Can your child have in-person contact with the birth family? What type of contact and with whom specifically?
 - Does contact need to be supervised by you or someone you have designated?
 - Can contact be spontaneous or does it need to be scheduled in advance?
- **In the event of a crisis that arises around contact with a birth family member, specify who is to be notified and how.** If your child has been in contact with a birth family member, let them know what they should expect. Will you:

"Safety doesn't happen by accident."

— Author Unknown

- Use a parental control setting if the contact is through social media?
- Contact the birth family member directly to discuss the situation?
- Let your child know you are aware of the situation and have taken steps to bring them into compliance with the agreed upon plan?
- Take other steps that have not been discussed but seem appropriate for the situation?

Whatever steps you have agreed to need to be clearly stated in the plan. Review the safety plan with your children so everyone in the family understands and can ask questions or offer suggestions.

Don't be afraid that broaching this topic with your child will plant seeds about birth family contact they hadn't thought of. Most children do think about making contact. Talking about the subject won't make it happen but will allow for everyone to be on the same page and navigate a healthy approach to connection. It will also allow you to anticipate and plan for contact with a birth parent in an acceptable way, helping everyone feel like they're more in control should a difficult situation arise.

Adapted from the article, "Safety Planning for Birth Parent Contact" by Rosemary Jackson, LMSW, Michigan State University, School of Social Work, and Mac Ballantine, adoptive parent, 2014 (Used with permission). And D. Siegal, Ph.D. & S. Smith, LCSW. (2012) "Openness in Adoption: From Secrecy and Stigma to Knowledge and Connections," Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute.



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Check out postadoptionrc.org for past editions of our newsletter, events, helpful articles, and more information about us and services we offer.

All three Post-Adoption Resource Centers have many family fun events planned, as well as support groups and trainings. Please check your Post Adoption Resource Center region's Facebook page or website, watch for monthly calendars, or give us a call to find out what is available near you.

REGION 2

Bethany Christian Services
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