

## ***Advice for Adoptive Parents from Birth Parents After Birth***

This document was created to aid adoptive parents with semi-open and open adoption post placement contact. As each adoption is different and unique, the suggestions here are intended as suggestions only. Each family can choose what is right for them and their birth parent. Some of these ideas might also be in your open adoption agreement if you have one. If not, please read these over, as some of these suggestions come from actual birth parents.

- Phone calls after birth. If you have exchanged phone numbers after birth, then please call the birth parents a few times within the first year. It is always suggested that you call after you get home so that the birth parents know that their child is safe in their new home. We also suggest calling at two, four and six months just to say hi. Do not call unless you have made arrangements with your birth parents through the agency or their caseworker as you do not want to invade their privacy. If you have given your phone number to the birth parents and they call you, please return the call. Most birth parents do not wish to invade on your privacy either but wish to know how the child is doing. Please reassure them that the child is loved and doing well.
- Photo Album: Most adoptive parents want to know what they can give the birth parents as a token of their appreciation at the hospital. We suggest a family photo album that they can put the child's pictures. You can also give the birth parents pictures of yourself, your extended family and your community. This allows the birth parents to look at the photos at their leisure the adoption.
- Adoption Journal: This can be given as a gift to your birth parents so they might write about their feelings and experiences throughout the adoption journey. This is a wonderful gift even at the beginning of your relationship.
- Send pictures you took at the hospital (with you, the baby and the birth parents). If you can give them to the birth parents before you leave town, that is ideal. If you have given the birth parents a photo album, they can place these first pictures in the album.
- 8 x 10 and/or wallet of professional 1<sup>st</sup> photos from hospital. If this is available and you contacted the hospital about these photos, it is really nice to send these to the birth parents. You can do so digitally or in hard copies.
- Pictures of child with other children or relatives: This shows the birth parents that the child is loved by your extended family and community as well. Please make sure that the child is smiling. Adoptive parents tend to fear that the birth parents will want the child back if the child is smiling and happy in the pictures. However, that is not the case. The birth parents desire that the child is happy and healthy in their home.
- Cards/letters sharing the child's progress (holding head up, crawling, walking). Many birth parents want to know that a child's milestones are met. These updates should tell what the child has been doing and what progress they have made.
- Share funny habits the child is developing. Birth parents might have done the same thing, and it is very touching to know that parts of them are present in their

- children even thought they are not raising them. Do you see the birth parents' eyes, nose in the child? Let them know. There is something very comforting about knowing this information.
- Cassette, DVD of child learning to crawl and walk, or at a family gathering. These items can now be placed digitally on a web page or emailed to the agency/birth parents.
  - A lock of hair after first haircut. Send this directly to the agency, which will forward it, if you do not have direct contact with your birth parents.
  - Handprints/footprints if they are made. Sometimes these are in ink and sometimes in plaster. Send these to the birth parents through the agency or directly. They are a great keepsake.
  - Any artwork the child may do even at a young age: As parents, you will find that your child does countless artwork as he/she grows. Set aside one or two of these pieces each year to send to the birth parents.
  - Pictures of that first birthday cake with the child's face (maybe some cake on that face too!).
  - Necklace with picture in it or bracelet with child's initials on it (just an inexpensive keepsake): This is another inexpensive gift that adoptive parents might give birth parents. They will treasure this item.
  - A small scrapbook at the end of the year.
  - As the child grows, send copies of school pictures and let the birth parents know what the child is good at counting, reading, etc.
  - Candle that birth parents can burn and always remember the strong love & guidance that their child is receiving. This is a great hospital gift for birth parents.
  - Scan pictures into e-mail and send updates digitally.
  - Create a website just for your child for you to update online. Give the birth parents the web address and pass code they can view pictures as much as they wish. This also is a great way to update pictures for family and friends.
  - Some birthmothers enjoy emailing back and forth to adoptive parents for updates: The free email address on the web gives each party complete access without the hassle of mail service and costs. This form of communication is becoming very popular.
  - Pictures of special occasions/holidays/birthdays.
  - Picture of baby on a bookmark.
  - Remember birth parents on Mother's and/or Father's Day (it means a lot to them to be recognized for having brought a beautiful life into the world!)
  - Key chains, magnets, coffee mugs with baby's picture on them.
  - MySpace and Facebook: This form of communication is also becoming very popular. Adoptive parents as well as birth parents usually have a page and communicate effectively through these popular sites. Please remember that if you have one of these pages that all the information you provide is available to everyone with a MySpace/Facebook page for viewing. This includes birth parents.

# ***Updates to Birth Parents- Definitions***

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Please know that updates are not about “gifts” but way to communicate and have a relationship with your birth parents. All types of updates are heart-warming and appreciated by birth parents. The first few are critical in helping birth parents feel peace that their baby is happy and surrounded by love. Please send agreed upon items in a timely manner as birth parents often check their mailbox multiple times per day in anticipation!!! In the end, birth parents love anything given to them and appreciate being remembered. Everyone in the process should have the best interest of the child in mind when sending letters, updates and communications.

- ✓ ***What exactly is an update?*** An update is general information put together by you and sent to the birth parent. An update usually consists of general information on the child, including overall health, weight, height and general development (i.e. crawling, talking, walking, etc.) Updates can include any fun stories or activities the family has done. There is no exact format to an update. It can include anything you feel comfortable including.
- ✓ ***Why provide updates?*** Updates allow birth parents to feel connected to the child. It reassures them their child is safe, happy and well-adjusted. Updates make a birth parent feel respected, special, and important. Updates are very significant to a birth parents.
- ✓ ***When do we provide updates?*** The recommended times for sending updates are immediately (1-2 weeks after placement), 3 months, 6 months, 9 months, 12 months, 18 months and once a year until the child is 5. After 5, the update schedule can be reevaluated by you and the birth parent. However, a birth parent may request more or fewer updates than this, or may choose not to receive updates. When agreeing upon a schedule for updates, it is important to remember that they must be on time. A birth parent who requests updates is depending on you to send them at a certain time, and when you send them on time, you are showing that they can trust you.
- ✓ ***Where are updates sent?*** Send the updates to the agency which forward to your child’s birth parents. No confidential information, such as your address is released unless you personally choose to release it.
- ✓ ***How long do we send updates?*** You should send updates for the agreed time between you and the birth parent.
- ✓ ***What are some ideas for updates?*** There are many ways to create a fun and thoughtful update for everyone. Some ideas include pictures of the child playing and interacting with family, DVD/video of the child, cards, letters drawings by your child, handprints, or any items that may have special meaning. Have fun with it!