

Unplanned Pregnancy: Adoption

Grade 11 and 12, Lesson #9

Time Needed

One class period

Student Learning Objectives

To be able to...

1. Define adoption and foster care, distinguishing them from one another and from informal arrangements (with friends or family) as well as “baby-selling”.
2. Explain the basic types of adoption: independent v. agency, and open v. traditional.
3. Distinguish between facts and fallacies regarding:
 - birth parents,
 - adoptive parents, and
 - adoptees
 - the law.

Agenda

1. Introduce the lesson by acknowledging some students’ personal familiarity with the issue, and reiterating ground rules.
2. Use the Adoption Game (and the *Adoption Transparency* and discussion) to address common myths, concerns and misunderstandings regarding adoption.
3. Using the *Adoption Worksheet*, clarify the differences between adoption and foster care, independent and agency adoptions, and “open” and “traditional” adoptions. Summarize the key concepts, using a focused writing exercise and the *Adoption Information Checklist*.
4. Assign homework.

Materials Needed

Nine per class period of ...
Adoption Game Sheet

One class set of ...
9 story cards
9 “fact” cards and 9 “fallacy” cards *

One copy of ...
Adoption Transparency **

One per student of ...
Adoption Worksheet
Adoption Information Checklist
Family/Friend Homework Exercise “On Adoption”

* Either copy the “Fact” and “Fallacy” cards on ordinary paper and then tape each one to an index card for durability, or copy onto card stock to begin with. Cut up the “Fact” and “Fallacy” cards and drop 1 of each and 1 Adoption Game Sheet and 1 story card into each of 9 manila envelopes. Each period you will have to replace the Game Sheets with new ones, as the old ones will have been written on.

** Alternately, beginning in late 2006, all FLASH transparencies will be available as PowerPoint files on the FLASH web site: www.metrokc.gov/health/famplan/flash

Activities

1. Welcome the class to a lesson on adoption. Acknowledge that there are undoubtedly people in the class who were adopted, or people with adopted siblings, or who have foster care experience, or who have made adoption or foster care plans for a child of their own. Remind them that they need not share that sort of personal information, if they choose not to. But invite their input, to whatever extent they are willing to share today.
2. Play the Adoption Game: Have the class count off from 1 to 9, to create nine groups. Have all the 1's find each other, all the 2's and so forth.

Give each group one Story Card, one Fact Card, one Fallacy Card, and one Adoption Game Sheet. Each group will also need a marker. They should decide who will be the "fact person" and who will be the "fallacy person". They also choose a recorder, who will circle their answers on the Game Sheet.

Without letting other groups overhear them, they should read their Story Card aloud. The recorder should mark the correct answer on their Game Sheet. That is their "freebie". They'll have to work to get the other answers.

Starting with whichever group has Story Card Number One, the group reads the case study and question aloud. Encourage everyone to help with the reading. The other groups have 90 seconds to discuss it, decide if it's a fact or a fallacy, and record their answer. When every group has recorded an answer, have one person in each group stand up ... the person with the FACT card stands, if their group decided it was a fact, and vice versa.

Then, the group with Card Number One reads aloud the answer and the explanation. Groups with the correct answer mark that box with a big "C" for "correct".

Stop and discuss any Story Cards about which there seem to be questions.

After Card Number One, ask the class, "**Why is it against the law to buy or sell a baby?**"

Suggest three reasons, unless students suggest them first:

1. A baby is a person, not a product. Selling a baby is reminiscent of slavery. Most people in our culture consider it wrong.
2. It is not in the baby's best interest. If people could buy babies then babies would go to the wealthiest families, not necessarily the best families. People with enough money could avoid the kind of careful screening an agency would do. Even families with a history of child abuse, who had been turned down by reputable agencies, could buy a baby if they had enough money.
3. A woman should never feel pressured or obligated to place a baby for adoption. Even if the adoptive family is paying for her doctor bills, she must still understand that she has a right to change her mind, right up until the papers are signed (and, in Washington State, for 48 hours after they're signed). The more money she is offered, however, the harder it could be to turn it down. Poor women could become baby producers for the rich. As it is, some people are concerned about the ethics of adoptions of children from less developed

countries. Some people fear that impoverished families in famine-ridden nations will be pressured, or offered amounts of money that will seem enormous to them, in return for their children. Others feel that it is possible to safeguard against this sort of abuse.

After Story Card Number Four, stop to show and discuss **Adoption Transparency One**. In 1999, it was reported that about 28% of pregnant teens up to age 19 obtained abortions. That leaves about 72% who gave birth. One percent make adoption plans and the other 71% choose to parent. Of course, one percent is still a lot of people. If about 800,000 teens get pregnant in the United States each year, then 8,000 or so choose adoption.

After Story Card Number Six, make sure students realize that, as Shari Levine, Executive Director of Open Adoption & Family Services in Portland, Oregon, says, *“Unlike adoption, guardianship is not permanent. The birthparent can regain legal custody of their child. However, guardianship should not be perceived as an easy solution; it’s very challenging for the child emotionally to go back and forth between caretakers. ... The bottom line is that kids deserve a permanent plan as early in life as possible.”*

After Story Card Number Seven, stop to discuss these safe-haven laws. The states vary in the length of time they allow a birthmother to relinquish the baby legally at a safe haven. In 16 states, infants can be up to 72 hours old. Other states allow a month and in North Dakota and Missouri safe havens will accept a child up to 1 year old.¹ Some state laws let the parent to remain anonymous; others require them to show identification and share the baby’s medical history, but some of those still promise confidentiality. There’s disagreement about whether these laws protect babies who would have otherwise been abandoned; people do continue to abandon babies even in states with safe haven laws.

After Story Card Number Nine, make sure you reemphasize that, not only do the birth parents get to decide *how* the adoption will proceed; they get to decide *whether* it will proceed at all. Even if they are teens, they do not need their parents’ consent to place their baby for adoption. And they get to decide whether to spend time with the baby before the adoptive parents enter the picture.

The correct answers for all nine Story Cards are:

1=FALLACY
2=FALLACY
3=FACT

4=FACT
5=FACT
6=FALLACY

7=FALLACY
8=FALLACY
9=FALLACY

Reinforce the facts (3,4 and 5) by reading them aloud again. Finally, ask for a show of hands: How many groups got all nine correct? Eight? Seven? and so forth. We suggest a round of applause for the groups who got eight or nine; they are very knowledgeable about adoption.

- Hand out the **Adoption Worksheet**. You can either have students read it silently, filling in the blanks as they go, or have students take turns reading aloud from it. If you do it aloud, when you get to a blank, ask volunteers to suggest what the answer might be. Spell the correct answer on the blackboard. Stop and discuss as needed. Use the following lecture notes to expand upon the **Worksheet**.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE?

The answers (which go in the Worksheet blanks) are: **permanent** (or forever), and **birth** (or biological).

Why “birth” parents rather than “natural” or “real” parents? To call the birth parents “natural” or “real” implies that the adoptive parents are somehow un-natural or imaginary. That is a degrading implication. Both sets of parents deserve respect and sensitivity.

At this point, you might reiterate your invitation to people who have personal experience with adoption or foster care to think about (and to share, if they're willing) what other terms they find offensive or hurtful, relative to adoption and foster care. If they do share terms they consider insensitive, ask them to suggest more sensitive language with which to replace them.

Notice, for example, that we've avoided the terms “relinquish”, “surrender” and “give up” the baby, all of which describe a passive role. Instead, we've used the phrase, “to make adoption plans for” the baby. This is more respectful; it describes an active process in which birth parents take the lead in doing what they decide is best for their child.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “INDEPENDENT” AND “AGENCY” ADOPTION?

The answers (which go in the Worksheet blanks) are: **lawyer** (or attorney) and **counselors** (or case workers or social workers).

In 1992, the National Center for State Courts gathered adoption totals from a variety of sources, and estimated that 126,951 children were adopted through international, foster care, private agency, independent and step-parent adoptions. NCSC estimated that stepparent adoptions accounted for 42% of all adoptions and foster care adoptions accounted for 15%.²

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “OPEN” AND “TRADITIONAL” ADOPTION?

The answers (which go in the Worksheet blanks) are: **closed** and **pictures**.

Whether an adoption is “traditional” or “open”, an adoptee may want to meet his or her birth parents at some point. Some states have registries, where a birth parent or an adoptee can register his or her interest in contact, should the other person be willing when the adoptee is 18 years old. Sometimes, too, an agency is willing to be the intermediary ... to maintain current addresses, phone numbers, and health information, in case the people involved wish (or need) to find one another.

It is important to mention that, while “open-ness” may provide a birth parent some sense of control and the peace of knowing that the baby is healthy and well-loved, it does not eliminate the sense of loss or need to grieve that most birth mothers and many birth fathers experience. As with abortion, each person who places a baby has a somewhat different emotional experience. But intense grieving is very common. Of the sixteen birth mothers interviewed for one study (Montserrat's unpublished dissertation, described in Adoption Awareness, Lindsay and Monserrat), two said they had felt “absolutely no grief since the placement”. The others all had had a need to grieve, to one degree or another.

You may want to point out that being sad or feeling pain about one's choices in life does not mean that one has made "wrong" decisions. In some decisions, as in unplanned pregnancy, any alternative means loss. Even choosing to parent would mean a loss: loss of one's independence and, in many cases, of the kind of life one had hoped and planned for. For a teen, it can mean loss of adolescence, but that doesn't mean that it is the "wrong" choice, either. Each person or couple must decide, and then must experience the grief or other feelings that their choice may bring.

Even if you do the first part of the Worksheet aloud, allow people five or ten minutes, individually or in pairs, to complete the open-ended sections of the Worksheet. Then take five or ten minutes for people to report on their answers, suggesting that they add to their Worksheet's answers, as others make valuable suggestions they may not have considered. Jot the key words from their answers on the overhead, to encourage their contributions. Here are a few ideas to add, if students don't suggest them:

WHAT A PREGNANT WOMAN OR COUPLE NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT ADOPTION:

1. It is permanent.
2. It is legal.
3. She/they can have a great deal of control over the process ... but she/they may need to "shop around" for a lawyer, adoption counselor, or agency that shares their philosophy.
4. Adoption plans can be made before or after the birth. Even if people decide to parent, they may later realize they made a mistake and plan for an adoption.

When students have exhausted their ideas about what the woman or couple might want to ask, hand out the ***Adoption Information Checklist***.

WHAT IF THE BIRTHMOTHER AND BIRTHFATHER DISAGREE?

- a. Ultimately, if the woman wants to parent, she has a legal right to make that choice, whether or not he agrees. Legally, the father must provide half of the child's financial support, if she does choose to parent. Whether he provides other kinds of support (emotional, practical) is, by law, his decision. More about that in the next lesson (Lesson 10).
- b. If she is the one leaning toward adoption, he does not have the same degree of legal "right to parent" ... but he does have a right to a hearing to try to show a judge that he is qualified to do so. Presumably, if he did get custody, she would be obligated to provide financial support.
- c. There are counselors and social workers who will respect both individuals' feelings, and who may be able to help them reach a decision both can live with. A family planning program or an adoption agency can provide unbiased counseling. But, as above, they might have to "shop around" to find someone they both could trust.
- d. The sooner they start talking, the better ... for them, and especially to assure the baby's future.

WHAT I WOULD WANT TO ASK:

You can do three things with the questions students generate:

- a. If you are planning a panel, give them to the panelists ahead of time, and/or have students keep their papers and ask their questions of the panelists.
- b. If you have students doing Individual Field Trips involving adoption, give them these questions, so they can ask their interviewees and report back to class.
- c. Call an adoption agency yourself, ask the questions of a caseworker, and report back to class. Make clear, if this is the best you can do, that they are hearing your interpretation of a caseworker's interpretation, of what birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents would say.

4. Assign homework.

**STORY CARD 1**

Cindy was upset when she found out she was pregnant. The doctor suggested she think about adoption. She told Cindy she knew of a great family who wanted to adopt a baby. They would pay her doctor bills, buy her maternity clothes, and pay for the lawyer. Cindy felt troubled that the doctor wanted to talk about money.

FACT OR FALLACY? It is against the law for Cindy to accept this kind of financial help from the adoptive family.

ANSWER: That's a **FALLACY**... It's not true.

FACT: It is illegal to "sell" a baby ... to accept cash or big gifts. It is *not* illegal for the adoptive family or agency to cover legal and medical costs and other necessities. Cindy needs to know that even if she accepts this kind of financial help, though, she can still change her mind about adoption. She still has the right to decide what is best for her and her baby.

But this doctor seems to be pushing, and it is understandable for Cindy to feel troubled. She wants what is best for her and, if she decides to have the baby, for the baby ... not just what costs the least. She needs to talk with a doctor or counselor who will help her understand *all* her options and who will focus on Cindy's feelings and beliefs, before she makes up her mind.

STORY CARD 2

Elizabeth was twenty when she had Jude. She thought she could parent him and she tried. But after six months, she was very unhappy. She talked with a counselor for hours. She decided she just wasn't ready ... and that the best thing for Jude would be to have a family that was really ready. As hard as it was, she made an adoption plan for him, because she loved him.

FACT OR FALLACY? By law, Elizabeth can't change her mind now. You can only choose adoption on the day the baby's born.

ANSWER: That's a **FALLACY**... It's not true.

FACT: People sometimes decide to raise the baby and then discover they made a mistake. Or they place the baby in foster care until they can decide what to do. Of course, the sooner a final decision is made, the better it is for the baby. But once they do sign the paperwork, the birth parents can't change their minds, so no one should ever decide under pressure. (Actually, in some states the decision is final the day the papers are signed; in others they may have up to a month to change their minds. In Washington, there is a 48 hour "grace period" after papers are signed, during which the birth parents can change their minds. But basically, an adoption decision is permanent.)

**STORY CARD 3**

John's partner, Larrisa, is pregnant. She wants to make an adoption plan for the baby. He wants to raise the baby himself, if Larrisa won't.

FACT OR FALLACY? John has a legal right to a hearing, before the baby can be placed for adoption.

ANSWER: That's a **FACT**.

FACT: He has a right to try to prove to a judge that he can be a good parent. The United States Supreme Court says he has that right, regardless of his age or whether he is married. In some states, both birth parents must sign the adoption papers. In other states, at least an honest attempt must be made to notify the birth father — there's a legal process for doing this, in Washington State, for instance. What if Larrisa hadn't even told John she was pregnant? What if she had claimed she didn't know who the father was? Then, when John did find out, he could have gone to court to challenge the adoption ... even after the baby had begun to know his or her new parents. It is safest for the baby, to work it out in court, to begin with.

STORY CARD 4

Sarah and Dan are juniors in high school. They have been going together for six months when Sarah discovers she is pregnant. As they begin to think about what to do, they realize that everyone they know who has ever gotten pregnant has either had an abortion or raised a baby. They are leaning toward adoption, but they don't know of a single person they could talk with who decided on adoption.

FACT OR FALLACY? Only about one percent of unmarried teens who get pregnant choose adoption.

ANSWER: That's a **FACT**.

FACT: About 750,000 to 850,000 teens get pregnant in the U.S. every year. At least three quarters of those pregnancies were unintended (some studies say 95%). About 71% of pregnant teens decide to parent even though most of them didn't mean to get pregnant. About 28% decide to have abortions. About 1% — or 1 teen in 100 — decide on adoption.³ There are plenty of other teens Sarah and Dan could talk with, who have made that choice. An adoption agency can probably put them in touch with some young birth parents. There may even be a birth parents' support group in their area.



STORY CARD 5

Keith and Gina are thinking about adoption. But Gina is concerned the baby will get “bad parents”. She has heard stories about children being abused by adoptive parents. She wants what is best for the baby.

FACT OR FALLACY? The law says that every adoptive family must be “screened” by a caseworker.

ANSWER: That’s a **FACT**.

FACT: Every family must have a “homestudy”, which includes a criminal background check. But an agency may be more selective than a private lawyer or doctor. In fact, some people would say agencies that impose restrictions on adoptive parents based on age, race, marital status, religion or sexual orientation, are too selective. Gina has a right to be worried and to want to choose carefully. Of course, most adoptive families are joyful over having a baby to love ... if anything, they will over-protect the baby, not abuse or neglect her. But Gina and Keith can talk with several agencies, and ask how each one works. Generally, a case worker visits the home of people who want to adopt and talks with 3-6 references ... friends and neighbors who can discuss what kind of parents these folks would be. They need a clean, safe home and enough money to care for a child. More important, the worker will try to learn about their attitudes about children, their maturity, and their reasons for wanting to adopt. Most agencies choose couples in their 20’s and 30’s who have a healthy relationship. Some accept single parents, too, or older couples.

STORY CARD 6

Alicia is pregnant. She is thinking about letting her aunt and uncle adopt her baby. She doesn’t plan to see a lawyer; this is just between her and her family.

FACT OR FALLACY? It is against the law to just let them raise the baby, without going to court.

ANSWER: That’s a **FALLACY** ... It’s not true.

FACT: There’s no law against Alicia’s allowing a friend or family member to informally “adopt” the baby by acting as the baby’s *guardian*. It’s not a legal adoption; instead, it’s called “*kinship care*.” She may decide that it’s best for the baby to make it an actual legal adoption, by going to court, but she doesn’t have to.

Advantages of having a family member adopt the baby?

1. The baby grows up knowing his or her family and culture.
2. The child may grow up feeling the love of many grown-ups.

Disadvantages?

1. The child may grow up watching the family fight over who’s the “best” parent.
2. The child may not feel he or she really belongs with anyone.

**STORY CARD 7**

Elena got pregnant when she was just 13. She didn't want anyone to know, so she wore big bulky clothes. She was afraid and alone. She had no money and she didn't want to ask anyone for help. When the baby was born in the restroom of a fast food restaurant, she panicked. She dropped the baby off in a hospital emergency room and walked away.

FACT OR FALLACY? What Elena did is illegal and she can go to jail.

ANSWER: That's a **FALLACY** ... an oversimplification.

FACT: There was a time when girls like Elena would have automatically gotten in trouble. As of November 2004, 46 states had some type of "safe-haven law" providing ways for birth mothers to drop off babies in safe places - usually hospitals, police stations, and firehouses - without risking going to jail.⁴ It's still much better for the baby in the long run for the birthmother to *plan* an adoption. But leaving the baby somewhere safe is far better than leaving a baby to die in a dumpster.

STORY CARD 8

Leah is fifteen. She was adopted when she was four days old and she knows very little about her birth parents. She loves her Mom and Dad (who adopted her), but she would like to meet her birth parents some day.

FACT OR FALLACY? Unlike Leah, most adoptees would rather not know about their birth families.

ANSWER: That's a **FALLACY** ... an over-simplification.

FACT: Each person's different. Nineteen kids aged eight to sixteen were interviewed for the book *How It Feels To Be Adopted*. Some said they have met or would like to meet their birth parents. Some don't really care if they do. And some say they don't want to. Most are (or were) at least curious about them. They are also regular people; who sometimes feel loved, embarrassed, proud, jealous. They all get angry at their parents sometimes, as every kid does, and at those times they may think, "You're not my real parents." When they aren't mad, though, most feel as if both sets of parents are "real". Some think about their adoptions a lot, especially at certain times; others say they hardly ever think about being adopted.

**STORY CARD 9**

Joe and Robin are expecting a baby. They're thinking about choosing adoption, but they don't want people telling them what to do, rushing them, or taking the baby away before they are ready. They want to take baby pictures and spend a few hours together as a family. They want to plan the whole thing their own way.

FACT OR FALLACY? They cannot see the baby after it is born if they choose adoption.

ANSWER: That's a **FALLACY** ... It's no longer true.

FACT: In the past, the birth parents were often not allowed to see the baby at all, or were discouraged from doing so. That made adoption even more painful for some people than it is today. Now, it is up to the woman or couple whether to see the baby. Some birth parents, like Joe and Robin, want to see, hold, and care for the baby (even to breastfeed), for a day or more. In their book ***Mom, I'm Pregnant***, Witt and Michael say,

"Seeing your baby and holding him or her even for a little while can act as a 'sealer,' a reconfirmation that you made the right decision. Some [birth parents] feel that seeing the baby would make them change their minds. It might. But it may also calm any doubts or questions you had about the baby ... thereby bringing closure to your experience."

"No one should force you to see the child if you do not want to. It's your decision to make as you think best. It's good to know, though, that you do have a choice in this very important matter."

Joe and Robin may need to talk with many agencies or lawyers, and more than one hospital, before they find the one that's right for them and where their wishes will be respected.



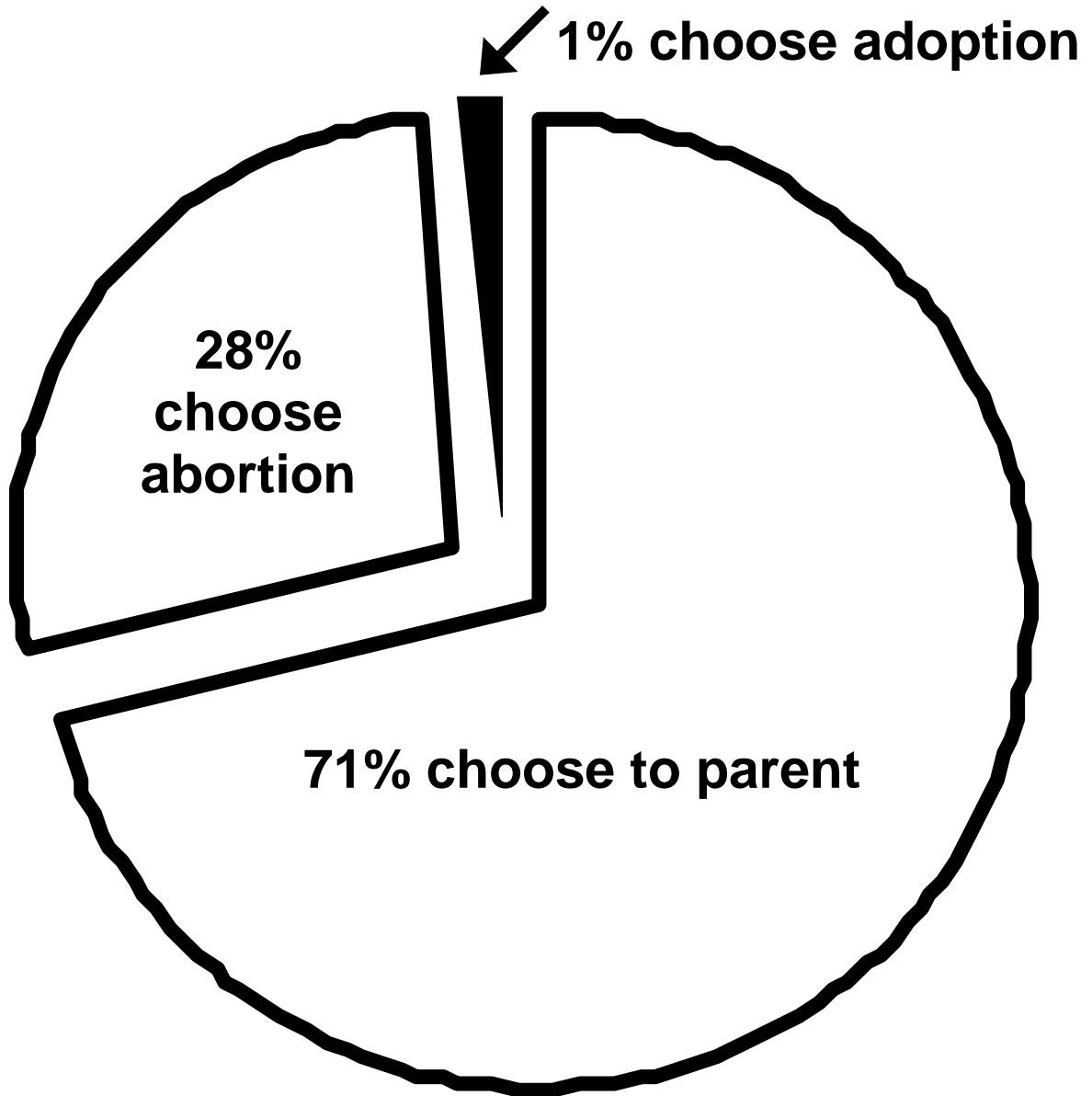
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Adoption Game Sheet

<p>— 1 — CINDY</p>	<p>— 2 — ELIZABETH & JUDE</p>	<p>— 3 — JOHN & LARRISA</p>
<p>— 4 — SARAH & DAN</p>	<p>— 5 — KEITH & GINA</p>	<p>— 6 — ALICIA</p>
<p>— 7 — ELENA</p>	<p>— 8 — LEAH</p>	<p>— 9 — JOE & ROBIN</p>

Adoption Transparency

PREGNANCY CHOICES TEENS MAKE



Adoption Worksheet

NAME _____ DATE _____ PERIOD _____

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE?

Adoption is _____. A baby or child becomes a legal, full-fledged member of his or her new family. He or she still has (and will always have) _____ parents, but they have decided they can't provide the kind of parenting their child deserves. They've chosen someone else who they believe can parent well. Loving sometimes means letting go. Once an adoption is final, they cannot change their minds.

Foster care is not permanent. A foster family is supposed to be temporary, until the birth parents are able to take over parenting or until they decide finally on adoption.



WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN "INDEPENDENT" AND "AGENCY" ADOPTION?

An "independent" adoption is arranged by a _____ (sometimes with a doctor or clergy). This is legal in some states and, as Lewis and Lewis say in their *Parent's Guide to Teenage Sex and Pregnancy*, it may "appeal to [birth parents who are] allergic to bureaucracies and regulations." It may feel more personal than an agency. It is wise, though, for the birth parents to have their own lawyer (who doesn't represent the adoptive parents) and their own counselor. The other lawyer is responsible to do what is best for the adoptive family ... so he or she may not really be able to be objective in helping a birth mother or couple decide what is best for them and their baby.

An “agency” adoption is arranged by a state-approved private or public adoption agency. They often have many more families to choose from, and can screen them very carefully. They usually have _____ who can discuss other options with a woman or couple, as well as adoption, taking care not to push one way or another. (Some adoption agencies will provide help with all options. Others oppose abortion, but can help with adoption, foster care or parenting.) Many agencies also provide emotional support to birth and adoptive parents after the adoption.

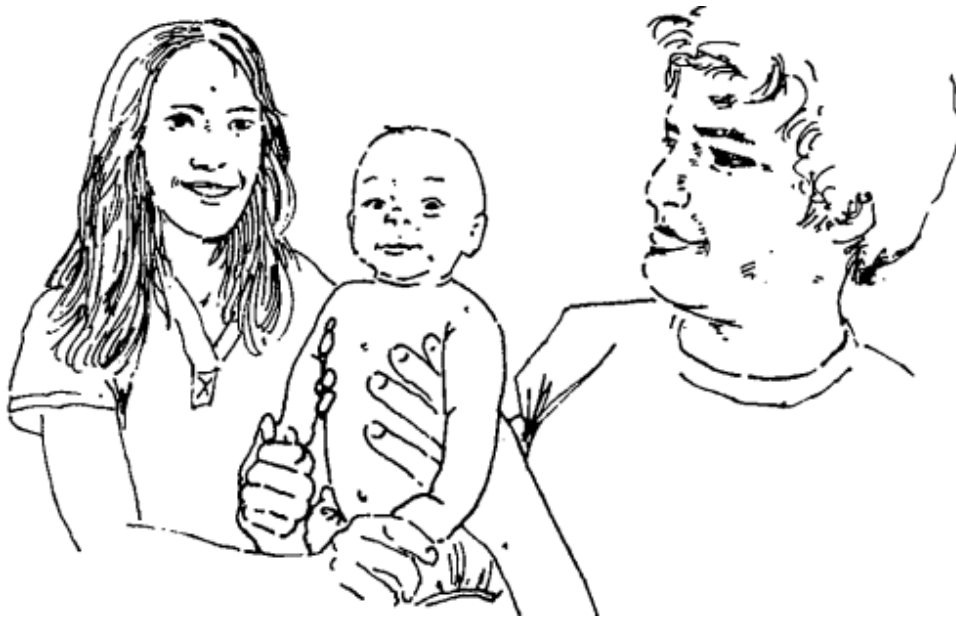
WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “OPEN” AND “TRADITIONAL” ADOPTION?

In a traditional or _____ adoption, all records are sealed. The birth parents do get to choose their baby’s adoptive parents. They usually can’t know the people’s last name or address, but they can read letters the people have written about their feelings and hopes. They can choose an athletic family who like to camp, or parents with a sense of humor, or who value education or music. But what makes the adoption “traditional” is that the birth and adoptive parents don’t communicate with one another. Some people prefer this kind of privacy.

Others prefer what is called “open” adoption. Each “open” adoption is a little different. In some open adoptions, the birth and adoptive parents meet or exchange _____ and letters. Some even go to prenatal appointments together. Many have ongoing visits after the baby’s birth. Many states now have legally enforceable open adoption agreements that outline the number of visits that occur each year. Open adoptions are most successful when the adoptive parents and birthparents create a comfortable, relaxed friendship. Birthparents choosing an open adoption have the right to create the adoption vision that meets their needs.

WHAT A PREGNANT WOMAN OR COUPLE NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT ADOPTION.

Suppose your friend tells you she is pregnant or your male friend says his girlfriend is pregnant. They are thinking about adoption. They ask you what you know about it, and what they should ask the doctor, lawyer or adoption counselor. What facts should they know? What questions should they ask?



WHAT IF THE BIRTHMOTHER AND BIRTHFATHER DISAGREE?

Suppose one of your friends wants adoption and his or her partner (also your friend) disagrees. What facts do they need to know? Where could they go for professional help?

WHAT I WOULD WANT TO ASK:

Suppose our class had a panel of teen and young adult birth parents (women and couples who made adoption plans for their babies). What would you want to ask them?

Suppose we had a panel of teens and young adults who were adopted. What would you want to ask them?

Suppose we had a panel of adoptive parents (people who have adopted one or more of their children). What would you want to ask them?

Adoption Information Checklist

If you are pregnant, or your partner is, and you're thinking about making an adoption plan, you may want to make a few phone calls. You want to find the right lawyer, counselor, or agency ... one you can trust and one that will respect your feelings and wishes.

Start by getting at least four names and phone numbers in your area. Search the Internet for adoption resources, look in the Yellow Pages, under "ADOPTION" or "PREGNANCY COUNSELING", or call one of these information lines:

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- Child Welfare Information Gateway (Washington, DC) – 800-394-3366
 - National Adoption Information Clearinghouse (Washington, DC) -- 202-842-1919
 - National Adoption Center – 800-TO-ADOPT (1-800-862-3678)
 - Children's Home Society, Adoption Resource Center (Seattle, WA) -- 206-695-3200
 - Open Adoption & Family Services (Seattle, WA) -- 206-782-0442
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When you call, tell the person who answers the phone that you are a teen and that you want the local phone numbers of public and private adoption agencies and clinics which provide pregnancy counseling, in your area. Then call each place to gather information. *They are not all the same.* This checklist of questions may help:

1. Is your agency licensed?Yes No
2. If I am unsure what I want to do, is there someone there with whom I can discuss all of my options?Yes No
3. What is your philosophy about abortion? _____

4. What is your philosophy about teen parents? _____

5. Would someone talk with me/us about the pros and cons of adoption? .Yes No

6. Do you work with birth couples or families where there is disagreement about which option is best? Yes No

7. Do you provide counseling for birth parents both before and after an adoption? Yes No

8. How much time does a teen usually spend with a counselor? (You want plenty of time; no place that is going to rush you into a decision!) _____

9. Tell me how you screen/choose adoptive families? If I/we decided on adoption, and I/we wanted... _____

If I/we decided on adoption, and I/we wanted...

For an open adoption:

10. Could we choose the adoptive family? Yes No

11. Could we look at all of your families rather than a few pre-selected families? ...Yes No

12. Will we have a large pool of families (50 or more) to choose from?Yes No

13. Could we read their homestudies?Yes No

14. Do you have legally enforceable open adoption agreements that outline the amount of contact and number of visits?Yes No

For a semi-open adoption:

15. Could we write letters or pictures that our child could see at age 18? ... Yes No

16. Could we meet the adoptive family and/or exchange letters before the birth? Yes No

17. Could I/we visit or exchange letters or pictures after the birth? Yes No

18. Could I/we give you a letter for our file, inviting the child to contact me/us if he or she ever chose to? Yes No

19. Can you give my name to a couple of people who have placed babies through your agency, and have them call me?..... Yes No

Or do you have a birth parents support group I could meet with? _____

20. How soon could I/we have an appointment? _____

21. Other questions you may want to ask might include:

Can you provide an interpreter in my language? Yes No

Can you provide a sign-language interpreter? Yes No

Can I bring a friend, partner or parent into the counseling session with me? ...Yes No

What bus line serves your clinic or agency? _____

Is there parking available? Yes No

If I need help reading the forms or filling them out, is there someone who can help? Yes No

22. Add questions of your own, that you want to remember to ask: _____

(Use extra paper as needed.)

Family/Friend Homework Exercise “On Adoption”

DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THIS PAGE.

Below are three questions about adoption and values. Read them and think about your own beliefs. For each one, circle the letter of the answer you most agree with or write in your own answer. Talk them over with a family member or another trusted adult or with a close friend. Together, sign the homework confirmation slip at the end. Separate the slip from the exercise, so your name isn't attached to your answers. Bring them both to class.

1. In my opinion, adoption is...
 - a. **never** the right choice, and it **should be against the law**.
 - b. **rarely** the right choice, and it **should be against the law except** if a family member wishes to adopt the baby.
 - c. **sometimes** the right choice, and **the law should make it easy to choose adoption**.
 - d. _____

2. In my opinion, adoption is...
 - a. a cruel thing to do to a baby, almost a kind of abuse.
 - b. an unfair and risky thing to do to a baby, like selling or abandoning him or her.
 - c. a caring thing to do, if you really can't care for the baby ... but not as good for the baby, in most cases, as raising him or her yourself.
 - d. a loving thing to do for a baby, if you can't provide the kind of parenting you think your baby deserves.
 - e. _____

- 3. If someone I loved was making adoption plans for her baby...
 - a. I would know in my heart it was the right choice for her and I'd try to support her 100%.
 - b. I might have serious concerns, depending on the situation, but I'd try not to show them. I'd try to support her 100%.
 - c. I would believe in my heart it was the wrong choice for her, but I'd support her the best I could anyway.
 - d. I would have serious concerns and I would feel it was my moral duty to express them. But I wouldn't try to stop her.
 - e. I would know in my heart it was the wrong choice and I'd try my best to stop her.
 - f. I would know in my heart it was the wrong choice and I'd do anything I had to to stop her.

g. _____



Family/Friend Homework Exercise "On Adoption"

CONFIRMATION SLIP

FOR FULL CREDIT, THIS EXERCISE IS DUE: _____

The student should complete this two-page Exercise. A family member or another trusted adult or a close friend, boyfriend or girlfriend should also complete it. Then discuss your answers. Practice really trying to understand the other person's point of view. Then, together, sign this homework confirmation slip. Return it for credit.

We have completed the FAMILY/FRIEND HOMEWORK EXERCISE: "ON ADOPTION", and discussed it with one another.

Date: _____

Student's signature

Signature of family member or friend

REFERENCES:

¹ Lee-St. John, J. (2006, September 25) A Mother's Choice. *Time Magazine*, p. 64.

² The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute. Overview of Adoption in the United States page. Available at: <http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/FactOverview.html> . Accessed October 10, 2006

³ Advocates for Youth. Adolescent Pregnancy and Childbearing in the United States page. Available at: <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/PUBLICATIONS/factsheet/fsprehd.htm>. Accessed October 10, 2006

⁴ Child Welfare Information Gateway. *Infant Safe Haven Laws: Summary of State Laws* report. Available at: http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/safehavenall.pdf . Accessed October 11, 2006