



ADOPTION TERMS DEFINED

*Arranged alphabetically. Please always consult an adoption attorney for legal clarifications. ***

In adoption, what does 'abandonment' mean?

A child is 'abandoned' when he/she is deserted by the birth parent or guardian without any provisions for childcare or evidence of intent to return. According to state law, when a birth parent has no contact with the child for a specified period of time (mostly between six months to one year), the child is considered abandoned by the parent. Also, see *Legalized Abandonment*.

Who is an 'adoptee'?

An 'adoptee' is a child who has been taken into a family through the process of adoption. While such a child is technically called an adoptee, in reality, such children do not wish to be referred this way. They consider themselves to be a part of the family they have been adopted into and want to be seen as the adoptive parents' natural child as opposed to an 'adopted child'.

What is an Adoption Assistance Program/Adoption Assistance Payment (AAP) Adoption?

These are adoption subsidies that are granted to prospective parents who are adopting and caring for children with special needs. These subsidies are funded by federal law (Title 42, Chapter 7, Subchapter IV, and Part E) and administered by individual states. Children not covered under Title IV-E may be eligible for state subsidies.

What is adoption?

Adoption is a legal process through which a parent-child relationship is established between adults and a child where there is no biological relationship. The adoption process transfers all responsibility of caring, nurturing, and providing for the child on to the adoptive parents. In other words, it provides the same rights and obligations that exist between children and their biological parents.

What is an 'adoption agency'?

An adoption agency is a licensed organization that aims to connect children needing parents with adoptive parents looking for children. Such an agency can be a public, private for-profit, or private not-for-profit agency licensed by a state to provide services to birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoptive children.

While the organizational structure of an adoption agency may differ from one another, most of their services are similar. Some agencies offer full-service adoptions, including preparation of the home study, coordination of birth family intakes, and placement of the child in the adoptive family's home. Some agencies provide home studies for independent adoptions, allowing families to find birth mothers with the help of an attorney or an adoption facilitator.



What is 'adoption assistance'?

Adoption assistance is the same as adoption subsidies. It is any kind of short-term or long-term financial assistance from State or Federal funds, given to adoptive families to take care of children with special needs. It can be in the form of medical insurance, counseling services, respite care for adoptive parents, or even a monthly stipend to meet extraordinary expenses. Any financial help given to adoptive parents. *See AAP for additional information.*

Who is an 'adoption attorney'?

An adoption attorney is a legal professional who is an expert in State and Federal laws relating to adoption issues. Adoption attorneys are experienced with filing, processing, and finalizing adoptions in court.

Adoption attorneys perform a wide variety of roles. Some attorneys provide assistance with locating a child, speaking to birth parents, requesting medical records, networking with attorneys in the birth mother's state, and providing all requisite adoption services, with the exception of the home study, while others prefer to process only the adoption paperwork. Some attorneys work with adoption facilitators to locate birth mothers for their clients, while others prefer prospective parents to find birth mothers on their own through other resources.

What are 'adoption benefits'?

Adoption benefits are those offered through an employer-sponsored adoption benefit program. These benefits are a part of an employee's compensation package and may include the following – resource and referral services, direct cash payments to help cover adoption expenses, reimbursement for all or part of qualifying expenses incurred in the process of adopting a child, or provisions for either paid or unpaid "parental" or "family" leave.

What is an 'adoption decree'?

This is a document that is signed by a judge to finalize an adoption. Once an adoption decree is signed, it formally recognizes that a parent-child relationship has been formed between the adoptive parents and the adopted child in the same manner as a biological child with its natural parents. It sanctions complete legal custody of the child to the adoptive parents.

What is 'adoption disruption'?

Sometimes an adoption attempt may fail *before* it is finalized due to many reasons. This is termed as 'adoption disruption'. Some of the common reasons for such disruption include adoptive parents changing their minds (also known as a failed adoption), birth parents revoking their consent (also known as a reclaim), or when it is



found that the adoptive parents are endangering the child or are not complying with requirements set by the agency (also known as a failed placement).

What is 'adoption dissolution'?

An adoption attempt may be interrupted or may fail *after* the finalization of the adoption. Such interruption or failure is called 'adoption dissolution'. Some of the common reasons for such dissolution include mismatch in the needs of the child and the capabilities of the family or change in family circumstances that make the adoption relationship impossible or impractical to continue. Dissolution requires court action and can be initiated by the adoptive parents or the courts, but not by the birth parents.

What is 'adoption exchange'?

Adoption exchanges are mostly non-profit organizations that find and recruit prospective parents and connect them with adoption agencies. They mostly help parents adopt children with special needs and those in a foster care system. There are many regional, national, and international exchanges that facilitate adoption matches between prospective families and children. These exchanges, typically run by State departments of human services, may provide advocacy, training, support, and resource services, as well as referrals for adoption agencies and adoptive families.

Who is an 'adoption facilitator'?

A professional organization or individual who helps bring together birth families and prospective adoptive parents for the purpose of arranging an adoption plan for a child. They should be bonded and licensed where state laws permit, such as California. Facilitators usually locate and work directly with birth parents seeking to place a child for adoption.

When working with prospective adoptive parents, some help only to find a child, while others follow an adoption to finalization. They do not handle the legal aspects of adoption or home studies. Some facilitators offer counseling by outside licensed sources. Laws vary from state to state regarding the payment and use of facilitators by a prospective adoptive family. In many cases, a qualified and experienced facilitator can prove to be a valuable asset and, as an adoption professional, can guide and assist families in the completion of an adoption.

What is an 'adoption home study report'?

A 'home study' or 'adoption study' is a comprehensive written report about the prospective adoptive family by a licensed social worker or other professional designated by state law who meets the family on several occasions before filing the findings. The report will include details such as family background and upbringing,



lifestyle, medical history, financial statements, values, beliefs, interests, family support systems, and parenting styles.

During the home study, the family is educated about the process of adoption, investigated for child abuse or criminal background, and taken through an in-depth series of interviews. Besides incorporating a background check on all adults living in the home, the study may include an FBI and/or state fingerprint check, if it is required by the state in which the birth mother lives. The home study includes several on-site visits and must be completed before a child is placed in the home.

What is 'adoption insurance/adoption cancellation insurance'?

An adoption insurance (or adoption cancellation insurance) is an insurance policy that protects prospective adoptive parents against financial loss incurred when an adoption proceeding is underway and the birth parents decide not to place their child for adoption. The policy holders can get financial reimbursements of certain adoption costs, up to the purchased policy limit. However, this insurance is not always available and can be expensive.

What are 'adoption laws'?

Adoption laws are those state and federal statutes and regulations that birth parents, adoptive parents, and adoption professionals are required to comply with concerning the adoption process. These laws are laid down by legislators to protect the interests of all the parties involved in the adoption process, particularly the child. When the birth parents and the adoptive parents come from two different states, an adoption attorney must be consulted for possible legal questions and problems that may arise.

Who is an 'adoption lawyer'?

An adoption lawyer or attorney is someone who specializes in adoption laws. They may practice exclusively matters of adoption or they may assist with the adoption as part of their overall services. For more information on adoption lawyers, see *Adoption Attorney*.

What is an 'adoption petition'?

It is a legal document filed in a court on behalf of the adoptive parents in order to begin the process of adopting a child. This petition will include details such as the reasons why the adoptive parents think they are suitable and qualified to adopt the child, the name to be given to the child upon finalization of adoption, and so on.



What is 'adoption placement'?

It refers to the process that leads to the child coming to live with the prospective adoptive parents. Adoption placement begins when a child first lives with his or her prospective adoptive parents and continues until the adoption is finalized.

What is an 'adoption plan'?

An adoption plan is a written document made by one or both of the biological parents of the child to be placed for adoption. In addition to stating the decision to place the child for adoption, the plan may include specifics on the type of family the parents want to adopt their child, who will be present at the birth, type of adoption and how much future contact they wish to have with the child and the adoptive parents, who will pay for counseling services, medical care of the birth mother, choosing the adoption agency, and so on.

What is an 'adoption profile'?

This refers to all the information on prospective adoptive parents that is collected and presented to the birth parents. Many domestic adoptions involve the creation of such adoption profiles on the prospective parents. Such profiles are also known as an Adoptive Parent Profile, Dear Birth Mother Letter, or Résumé.

What is an 'adoption registry'?

An adoption registry is a registry with open adoption records that allows adoptees, birth parents, and biological siblings to locate each other through a list of adoptees and birth relatives who have voluntarily offered their identifying information.

Through this registry an adoptee can obtain his/her original Certificate of Live Birth/Birth Registration, with his or her original name and the names of his/her natural parents and a birth parent can obtain a copy of the birth registration and adoption court order showing the adoptive name of the adoptee. Most of these registries are 'mutual consent registries', meaning both parties must agree to exchange such identifying information.

What does 'adoption reversal' mean?

It also known as 'revocation'. It refers to the process by which birth parents nullify their consent to adoption previously signed and wish to reclaim the child placed in adoption. Mostly, these cases arise out of a sudden change of heart of birth parents. The laws concerning such reversal differ from state to state and are governed by factors such as the circumstances and time limits under which reversal is possible.

Who is an Adoption Service Provider (ASP)?

An adoption service provider can be a licensed agency or a qualified social worker who is certified by the state to assist birth parents and adoptive parents with the placement of a child in an independent adoption. Some



states may require that an individual ASP must provide satisfactory evidence that he or she is a licensed marriage and family therapist who has a minimum of five years of experience providing professional adoption casework services, lives within 100 miles of the birth mother, and available for a specific fee.

What does 'adoption subsidy' mean?

An adoption subsidy is a payment made from state or federal funds on a short-term or long-term basis to adoptive families of children with special needs. It is a form of assistance to adoptive families to provide ongoing care to such children. These payments will depend upon the needs of the child. For more information, see *AAP*.

What are adoption tax credits?

Adoption tax credits reduce the tax liability of adoptive parents. Any adoption-related expense such as adoption fees, court fees, attorney fees, and travel expenses will qualify as non-refundable credits that may reduce taxes owed by adoptive parents. This credit can be claimed on federal tax returns and, in some states, on state tax returns.

What are the adoption tax exclusions?

Adoption tax exclusions are basically IRS provisions in the federal tax code. These exclusions allow adoptive parents to exclude any cash or adoption benefits for qualifying adoption expenses received from a private-sector employer when computing the family's adjusted gross income for tax purposes.

What is an Adoption Tax Identification Number (ATIN)?

An ATIN is a temporary number used for a taxpayer's child if the child's adoption is pending. If an authorized adoption agency places a child in your home, you may be able to claim the child as your dependent and also claim the child- and dependent-care credit.

What does 'adoption triad' mean?

It is a term used to refer to the three parties involved in an adoption process: birth parents, adoptive parents, and the adopted child/children. Each of these parties is interdependent and interrelated to one another. This term is also referred to as an 'adoption triangle' or 'adoption circle'.

Who are 'adoptive parents'?

The term adoptive parents may refer to two groups of people – those who have already adopted a child and/or those prospective parents seeking to adopt a child into their family. Adoptive parents are given all the legal rights and responsibilities of a birth parent through a court-approved adoption process. They are held



responsible for the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of the adopted child, just as natural parents are responsible for providing a safe and secure home for their children.

What does 'adult adoption' mean?

Adult adoption refers to the adoption of a person who is over the age of majority, as defined by state law. Most states consider a person of 18 years or above as an adult. In most states, an adult can legally adopt another adult as long as the adoptive adult is at least 10 years older than the person being adopted.

What is an Affidavit?

An affidavit is a written legal document containing statements that the author of the affidavit (known as the 'affiant') swears to under oath. By signing the affidavit and swearing under oath in the presence of a notary public or authorized official, the affiant admits that the statements in the document are true and correct to the best of his or her knowledge.

What does 'agency adoption' mean?

Agency adoptions are those adoption placements made by state licensed adoption agencies. These agencies will screen prospective parents and supervise the placement of children in adoptive homes until the time the adoption is finalized and made legal.

While agency programs and services vary, most provide home study services to prospective adoptive parents, counseling to birth parents, birth parent relinquishment services, and post-placement follow-up. Some agencies are full-service, offering features such as special-needs adoptions and both domestic and international adoption programs.

What is 'agency-assisted adoption'?

Agency assisted adoptions refer to those adoption placements done through agencies that provide home study services and help with paperwork, advertising, training, and more to prospective parents who have already identified and are working with a birth mother. Such agencies handle the paperwork and finalization of the adoption and may provide services to both birth mothers and adoptive parents.

Who is an 'alleged birth father'?

An alleged birth father is a man who is suspected by the birth mother to be a possible biological father of the child but who has not had his paternity legally established. The alleged father of a child born out of wedlock, also referred to as a putative father or reputed father. A man is deemed to be the alleged, putative, or reputed father of a child if the birth mother claims that he is the father.



What is an 'amended birth certificate'?

An amended birth certificate is a new birth certificate issued for an adopted child after the adoption becomes finalized. This new certificate shows the new name of the adopted child as well as the names of the adoptive parents as though they are the biological parents of the child. This new certificate is placed in the child's public records in place of the old birth certificate, which is stored in a secure location and can be viewed only by court order.

Some states allow adoptees to obtain an uncertified copy of their original birth records prior to adoption by submitting a notarized written request. State laws vary and are changing yearly.

What is an 'apostille'?

An apostille is a standardized form to certify certain adoption-related documents, which is used in countries that comply with the Hague Convention. This form verifies the legality and authenticity of documents such as birth certificates, marriage records, and home studies. Where a foreign country is involved in the adoption process and the country complies with the provisions of the Hague Convention, all documents needed for the inter-country adoption must be attached with an apostille.

What do you mean by 'attachment'?

Attachment refers to the formation of an emotional connection between a child and the significant others in the child's life. This process begins in early infancy as the child gets attached to primary caregivers. The inability to bond to a primary caregiver in the first 5 years of a child's life may lead to reactive attachment disorder and other difficulties in social relationships, which are serious problems often found in abused or neglected children.

What is meant by attachment disorder/reactive attachment disorder?

This disorder is a serious problem that arises in children aged five years or less when they lack proper care and nurturing in their formative years. Such children have difficulty establishing healthy social relationships with others. Some of the common symptoms of this disorder include developmental delays, refusal to make eye contact, hyper-sensitive to sound and touch, inability to make social interactions with others, susceptibility to infections, and so on.

What is 'authentication'?

Authentication is a process in which foreign countries verify that the documents presented for adoption are authentic and genuine. It is a necessity in international adoptions, where notarized and certified documents are viewed and approved by the consulate or embassy of the country from which the family is adopting.



The authentication process includes almost all the documents in the adoption file and can be time-consuming and expensive. However, it is a necessity and must be complied with and followed precisely, in order to avoid any snags in the adoption process.

What is a Birth Certificate (original)?

A birth certificate is a certified document indicating a child's birth information, mother's and father's names and the name given to the child at the time of birth. It is an important document and one that can be useful for many legal purposes. See *Amended Birth Certificate for more information*.

Who is a 'birth parent'?

It is another term used for a child's 'biological parents'. The term birth parent can refer to either the mother or father of the child, irrespective of whether they are married to each other or their names are shown as parents of the child on the child's birth certificate.

For the purpose of adoption, this term refers to parents who conceived and gave birth to a child, made an adoption plan for the child, and subsequently relinquished the child for adoption.

What does 'black market adoption' mean?

This term refers to adoptions that do not conform to the state and federal adoption laws. Most of these adoptions take place through the exchange of huge amounts of money in order to avoid the provisions of the law. The money is usually paid to unscrupulous individuals, birth parents, adoption facilitators and/or agencies. Black market adoptions are against the law and may lead to criminal prosecution of people involved in such adoption as well as taking away the adopted child and placing him/her with another adoptive family.

What is 'bonding'?

'Bonding' refers to the lasting emotional attachment and ties a child develops in his/her formative years with immediate or primary caregivers. It is a very special relationship and is probably the first developmental task of any human being. The ability of a child to bond with immediate caregivers is central to him/her forming healthy relationships with other people throughout his/her lifetime, especially as an adult. Children who are not able to form a bonding relationship in formative years are likely to have difficulty forming relationships later on in life.

What is a 'bonding cycle'?

This term is otherwise known as 'the cycle of need'. The bonding cycle actually begins in the mother's womb. As the baby grows through infancy, there will be many times of need i.e., hunger, pain, discomfort, and tiredness. During those times of need, the baby cries out for attention and help. As the primary caregiver



answers those expressions of need by meeting the immediate need, the baby develops a sense of trust and gratification.

This cycle of discomfort-need-gratification-trust is repeated time and time again between an infant and a primary caregiver throughout infancy, to form a bonding cycle.

What is a Certificate of Citizenship?

It is a document declaring the citizenship of an individual. Adoptive parents of children adopted internationally can obtain a U.S. Certificate of Citizenship by filing form N-643. This can be done immediately after the child arrives in the U.S. or after finalization of the adoption, depending on the child's type of visa (see *IR-3* vs. *IR-4*). Once the child is granted citizenship, the full rights and privileges of United States citizenship are conferred. A Certificate of Citizenship differs from citizenship through naturalization in that the latter does not include full rights and privileges.

What is meant by 'certification'?

This term refers to the process of judicial determination that a prospective adoptive parent is a fit and proper person to adopt. To receive certification for adoption, whether for a specific or unknown child, an individual must complete and submit a formal application for adoption, as well as a certification investigation and report. The components include:

- A completed Family and Home Application, including a financial statement
- Licensing/employment information for each adult member of the household
- A physician's report
- FBI fingerprint clearance

The application is reviewed and a recommendation made to the court regarding the suitability of the applicant to become an adoptive parent.

What is a Certified Document?

A certified document is a copy of a document—such as a marriage license or birth certificate—obtained from, and validated by, a county or state. In international adoptions, certification for dossier purposes refers to documents that are notarized by a registered notary public, which are then forwarded to the Secretary of State's office for verification of the notary's signature. Documents can also be certified at a county level, a process sometimes referred to as a “juret.”



The type of certification required in international adoptions can vary by country. Prospective adoptive families should check the dossier packet or speak with an attorney or adoption professional before certifying any documents.

What are 'child abuse clearances'?

This involves a way of determining whether an individual has a history of child abuse. Federal laws provide a foundation for states to identify certain acts or behaviors that characterize the abuse or maltreatment of a child. The home study part of an adoption process includes investigating the adoptive parents' and foster parents' background for any history of such abusive behaviors. The child abuse clearances must be updated every year in order to keep it current.

What does 'closed adoption' mean?

Closed adoption is a traditional type of adoption that was widely used previously but is slowly becoming less popular among both adoptive families and birthparents of the child. A closed adoption is one in which the birth parents and adoptive parents do not share any identifying information. It supports total confidentiality and sealed records, with no contact or ongoing relationship among the parties involved.

However, the adoptive family will receive non-identifying information relating to the health and background of the child and birth parents before the adoption placement takes place. After the adoption is finalized, all documents are sealed and will not be available to the adopted child.

What is 'concurrent planning'?

Concurrent planning refers to the process of planning to reunite a child with his or her birth family, while simultaneously investigating alternative placements with relatives or an adoptive family. It is a foster care case management tool used by caseworkers and child welfare staff to primarily reunite the child with the family. The advantage of this process is that, if family reunification fails, an alternate adoption plan is already in place and nearing completion. This ensures that the children spends as little time as possible in temporary placements or foster care.

Who is a 'confidential intermediary'?

It refers to a government employee or trained individual sanctioned by the courts and allowed access to sealed adoption records for the purpose of finding information at the request of a member of an adoption triad. Any information obtained during the course of this investigation is kept strictly confidential, and is used to arrange contact between the individual who initiated the search and the sought-after biological relative, or for the purpose of obtaining consent for the release of adoption records.



When the confidential intermediary, on behalf of another individual, locates a biological relative, the intermediary must obtain consent from both parties, indicating that they wish to communicate with one another. Contact is made only when the court receives this consent. If consent for personal communication is not obtained from parties, all relinquishment and adoption records and any information obtained by the confidential intermediary during the course of his or her investigation are returned to the court and remain confidential.

What is 'confidentiality'?

It is a legally-required principle or practice that adoption professionals must not disclose any identifying or signification information about the parties involved in the adoption process. This principle of confidentiality is binding upon all adoption attorneys, social workers, employees of adoption agencies, court personnel, and other professionals. Where there is a need to disclose information, the adoption professionals can do so only upon the written consent of the parties involved.

What does 'consent' mean?

Consent is the agreement made by a parent—or a person or agency acting on behalf of a parent—to give up a child for adoption and release all rights and duties with respect to that child. Birth parents can legally change their minds about consent at any point before the birth of the child and up to the time their rights are terminated. State laws differ regarding the time frames when this consent may be given and withdrawn.

What is a Contact Veto?

A contact veto is a provision in the records access law that allows the birth parent or any other party to the adoption to file a document with the government stating that they do not wish to have any contact with the child given up for adoption or by the party searching for contact information.

What does 'cooperative adoption/open adoption' mean?

An open adoption refers to arrangements made between the adoptive family and the birth family as an agreement to contact and exchange information after the finalization of the adoption. These arrangements can be oral or written agreements. Contact can range from sending cards and photos of the child to agreeing to personal visits between the families.

What is 'co-parenting'?

This term can mean two different things: A long-term, formal or informal agreement made between birth parents and adoptive parents to support the needs of adopted child or sharing of normal parenting duties between primary caregivers who may or may not include the birth parents or the adoptive family.



What is 'counseling'?

The term counseling refers to assistance and guidance provided by a trained professional to an individual in order to help resolve personal issues and difficulties of the individual and helping him/her to assess situations, consider alternatives, and make decisions.

Adoption counseling should be handled by experienced adoption counselors. Birth parent counseling may include the exploration of options, such as keeping and parenting the child; making an adoption plan that includes relatives, friends, or prospective adoptive parents; foster care; and various other types of temporary or permanent placements.

What is a 'criminal clearance'?

It is a clearance obtained through the State Police Department to determine if a person has a criminal record. Each state can supply the appropriate forms. In many states, the clearances must be updated on an annual basis. In adoptions, all adults living in a household must obtain criminal and child abuse clearances before the placement of a child in their home.

What does 'custody' mean?

Custody is the care, protection, and provision for a child. Custody can be awarded by the court to agencies in case of child abuse or parents in case of divorce, separation or adoption proceedings. Child welfare departments are the legal custodians of children in foster care as foster parents do not have legal custody of the children placed in their care.

What is meant by 'de facto'?

The term 'de facto' means 'in actual fact'. It is a Latin term that essentially translates to “actually existing but not officially approved.” For example, a de facto family is one where the individuals have emotional and/or psychological ties with each other, but are not related to each other by birth or marriage. They do not have any legal document to recognize their family relationship.

What is a 'de facto adoption'?

It refers a form of adoption where the prospective adoptive parent had entered into an oral agreement to adopt the child, based on which the child was placed in the physical custody of the parent. A de facto adoption is used as a legal process, in such cases, to establish inheritance rights of the child when the prospective parent dies before formally adopting the child.



What is a Decree of Adoption?

It is a document signed by a judge to finalize an adoption. This document formally establishes a parent-child relationship between the adoptive parents and the adopted child, as though the child were born as the biological child of its adoptive parents. When this document is signed, it places full responsibility for the child on the adoptive parents. In addition, it changes the name of the child to the name selected by the adoptive parents, and orders a new birth certificate to be prepared and issued for the adopted child.

What is the Department of Human Services (DHS)?

This is the state agency that handles adoptions and foster care for children who are in custody of the state. It employs social service workers to conduct home studies for the adoption process. The name of the department varies by state, and can be called Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) or Department of Social Services (DSS).

Who is a 'dependent child'?

This term usually refers to a child who has been placed in the legal custody of either the state or the county foster care system by the courts. A child is typically placed in custody of the state or foster care system when he/she is abandoned, abused, or neglected by the parents or caregivers.

What is a 'designated agency adoption/identified adoption'?

An identified adoption is one where the birth mother has chosen the family that wants to receive her child in adoption. The birth mother may do this from reviewing information of a few or many couples and she may or may not have met the adoptive parents she identifies as the ones to adopt her child. It is essentially a process by which birth parents choose their child's adoptive parents and authorize the placement of the child with the assistance of an adoption agency.

What is 'disclosure'?

Disclosure is nothing but the release of information that was previously kept confidential, concealed, or was not known. In adoption, it refers to the official release of information that pertains to the legal adoption of a child.

What is a Disclosure Veto?

It is a document filed by an individual disallowing the release of any identifying information about that person to another individual. In adoption, it is a challenge to balance the desire for information with any promises made by the parties in the past concerning the release of information. In disclosure veto, a person may submit a written document preventing the release of such information.



What is a Dossier?

In adoption, this term refers to the set of authenticated documents used in international adoption cases. It is basically used to process the adoption of a child in its home country by the adoptive parents or for the adoptive parents to obtain the legal custody or guardianship of the child in the foreign court. Once this is obtained, the adoptive parents are free to bring the child to the United States for adoption.

What is 'domestic adoption'?

Domestic adoption is nothing but the adoption of a child living in the United States by a family in the United States. Both the child and the adoptive parents must be citizens and residents of the United States in order to qualify for domestic adoption.

What is 'disruption'?

It is a situation in which a child leaves an adoptive home prior to the finalization of the adoption. Disruption can occur when the birth parents revoke their consent to the adoption, the adoptive parents decide not to proceed with the adoption, or the agency or court agent feels it is not in the best interest of the child to complete the adoption. The latter may be due to the family's noncompliance with requirements of the court or the belief that the child is endangered in some way.

What is 'dissolution'?

Dissolution is a term which refers to an adoption that fails after finalization, resulting in the return of the adoptee to foster care or to another adoptive family. Birth parents may not dissolve an adoption, but adoptive parents may petition a court to do so. A judge may choose to allow or deny dissolution based on the likelihood that the family can remain intact and whether or not the child's ongoing presence is considered a threat to the child or the family.

What is an 'equitable adoption'?

Equitable adoption is a legal process that is used in some states in order to establish the inheritance rights of a child. This is applicable when a prospective adoptive parent clearly indicates the wish to adopt the child and the placement occurs, but the prospective parent dies before the finalization of adoption of the child in placement.

What is meant by 'employer assistance'?

This term refers to any adoption benefits offered by an employer to an employee. It can be part of an employer-sponsored benefit program that is part of the employee's compensation package, similar to medical



and other benefits provided. The benefits may include cash assistance to cover adoption expenses, reimbursement of approved adoption expenses, and paid or unpaid family leave.

What are FBI Criminal Clearances?

FBI criminal clearances form part of a home study report conducted by the FBI and involving the fingerprinting of every adult in a prospective adoptive home. While not all states require such clearance, it may be required by the birth mother's state prior to an adoption. It is an inexpensive solution to ensuring that the adopted child is placed in a safe and secure family environment.

What is 'family preservation'?

It is a social service program with the goal of keeping birth families together by providing intervention and support services to children and parents. This program observes, evaluates, and treats individuals in a family together. This program is based on the premise that birth families are the preferred means of providing family life for children.

What is a 'fathers' adoption registry'?

This registry is a listing created for fathers who wish to receive notice from the court if plans are made to place their children for adoption. A man may register before the child is born, but must register within thirty days of the child's birth to ensure that his rights are protected.

What is 'finalization'?

This is the last legal step in the adoption process. Finalization involves a court hearing during which the judge orders the adoption decree, which states that the adoptive parents are the child's permanent, legal parents. The time this court hearing takes place differs by law from state to state.

Who is a 'facilitator'?

Facilitators are individuals who match birth parents with prospective adoptive parents. The use of unpaid adoption facilitators is sanctioned by most states. Examples of such facilitators are ministers, nurses, doctors, family members, friends, and so on. For more information on facilitators, see *Adoption Facilitator*.

What is 'foster adoption/fost-adopt/fos-adopt'?

It is a form of adoption in which a child, who is unlikely to be reunited with his or her birth family, is placed with specially-trained foster-adopt parents and eventually adopted by the foster parents. It can also refer to child placement where the birth parents' rights have not been terminated or they are appealing the court's decision. In such a situation, the foster parents may agree to adopt the child if and when the parental rights



are terminated. The primary reason for making such a placement—also called legal risk adoption—is to keep the child from being moved from place to place.

What does 'foster care' mean?

It is placing a child temporarily in the care of a family that is not the child's biological family. It is a temporary arrangement, either informal or arranged through a social services agency or court, in which persons other than the birth parents care for a child for a period of time. It could be due to problems in the birth family or important procedures of the adoption process are being completed.

What is a 'foster care plan'?

A foster care plan is a written document detailing why a child is in foster care and how long the child will need to remain there. The plan usually includes timelines and requirements for either birth family reunification or eventual adoption.

Who are 'foster children'?

Foster children are those who are under the legal custody of the state, or adoption/foster care agency, but have been placed in under the care of foster parents in their homes. This could be due to their parents or caregivers being abusive, neglectful, or otherwise unable to care for them. These children generally live with the foster parents until the time comes for reunification with their birth families or they are adopted by another family.

Who are 'foster parents'?

Foster parents are adults licensed by the state to provide a temporary home for children whose birth parents are unable to care for them. They are individuals or couples, licensed by the state or county, who have temporary care of a child but no legal rights to determine certain aspects of that child's life. Foster parents occasionally become adoptive parents. The goal of foster care is to return a child to the family of origin unless the courts decide it is not in the child's best interest to do so.

What is 'grief'?

Grief refers to a deep feeling of emotional loss. It is acute mental anguish that is often experienced as the result of a loss; sorrow; or a feeling of emotional deprivation. In adoption, all members of the adoption triad may experience grief. It also includes people who are collaterally involved in the adoption process and includes siblings, after-born children, foster parents, and other caregivers.



What is a 'group home'?

A group home is a home – like setting where children are placed along with other unrelated children for different periods of time. It is an alternative to the traditional in-home foster and can be run by one set of house parents or a rotating staff of trained caregivers. Special therapeutic or treatment homes are equipped with trained staff to care for children with behavioral problems.

Who is a 'guardian'?

A guardian is a person who is legally responsible for the care and management of a minor child, while the courts or birth parents may continue to hold some jurisdiction over the child. Guardians do not have the same reciprocal rights of inheritance as birth and adoptive parents. Guardianship is subject to ongoing supervision by the court and ends when the child reaches legal age or by order of the court.

Who is a 'guardian ad litem'?

It refers to citizens or attorneys who volunteer to become part of a court program to represent the best interests of an abused or neglected child who is the subject of judicial proceedings. A guardian ad litem serves as the child's representative before the court, social service agencies, and the community, especially if the child is a minor. He or she also protects the child during the family crisis and court proceedings, and follows the child's progress after the court disposes of the case. The legal protective status of a guardian ad litem exists only within the confines of the particular court case in which the appointment was made.

What is the Hague Convention?

The Hague Convention on Inter-country Adoption is a multilateral treaty designed to apply to all international adoptions between countries that endorse it. It is the result of a five-year process involving participants from 66 prospective member countries. Under the terms of the treaty, an adoption may take place only if:

- The country of origin establishes that the child is adoptable
- It is believed that an inter-country adoption is in the child's best interests
- After counseling, the necessary consent to the adoption is given freely
- The receiving country determines that the prospective adoptive parents are eligible and suited to adopt
- The child they wish to adopt is authorized to enter and reside permanently in that country

Every country must establish a national government-level central authority to carry out certain non-delegable functions that include cooperating with other central authorities, overseeing the implementation of the Convention in its country, and providing information on the laws of its country.



What does 'home study' mean?

A home study is also called an 'adoption study'. It is a written report that helps a court find out if the prospective adoptive parents are qualified to adopt a child, based on the criteria of the state adoption laws. For detailed information on home studies, see *Adoption Home Study Report*.

What is an I-600 and I-600A Visa Petition?

These are a set of forms that act as an official request to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to classify an orphan as an immediate relative in order to provide faster processing and issuance of a visa to allow the child to enter the United States after having been adopted abroad or in order to be adopted in the United States.

What is an I-600A--Application for Advance Processing of Orphan Petition?

It is a form filed with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) by prospective adoptive parents in order to receive approval to bring a child from another country into the United States for the purposes of adoption. Parents must submit the I-600A with photocopies of their birth certificates, marriage certificate (if applicable), and divorce decree (if applicable), as well as two fingerprint cards per person (completed by an authorized fingerprinting agency) and the appropriate fee. An adoption home study report must be received by INS before approval will be given.

What is 'identified adoption'?

It refers to a situation in which a prospective adoptive couple locates a birth mother or birth parents who are making an adoption plan for their child. With the help of friends, family, a physician, an attorney, or an adoption professional such as a facilitator, adoptive parents and birth parents find each other and proceed to an agency or an attorney to complete the adoption process.

What is 'identifying information'?

It refers to any information related to the birthparents, adoptive parents, or adoptee child that reveals the identity of the individuals. Identifying information includes last names, home and office addresses, phone numbers, drivers' license numbers, social security numbers, and birth dates.

What is an 'income statement'?

An income statement helps ascertain the financial position and stability of an adoptive couple. The home study poses questions that will help determine if prospective adoptive parents can reasonably afford to meet the needs of a child. Income verification may take the form of paycheck stubs, a W-4 form, or an income tax



form (1040 or 1040 EZ). Details will be gathered regarding savings, insurance policies, and other investments and debts, including monthly mortgage or rent payment, car loans, and credit card payments.

What is an 'independent adoption'?

Independent adoptions are those that are arranged by an intermediary other than an adoption agency. It could be a lawyer or a physician or someone other than a caseworker associated with an agency. The intermediary may find birth mothers for prospective adoptive couples or adoptive families for birth parents. Independent adoption is handled by attorneys, adoption facilitators, and other intermediaries, and is not legally permitted in all states.

What is the Indian Child Welfare Act?

It is a federal law, passed in 1978, regarding the placement of Native American children. The act establishes the tribe's sovereignty as a separate nation over the welfare of children who are tribal members or who are eligible for tribal membership. In other words, it supersedes local adoption laws to authorize Native American Indian Nations and Tribes to control adoptions involving their tribal members and their children.

What is 'infertility'?

Infertility is the inability to conceive or to bear or carry a child to term by natural means. In medical terms, a couple is seen as infertile after an inability to conceive after a year of unprotected intercourse. If a couple is not able to conceive even for the first time, it's called primary infertility. Secondary infertility refers to a situation where it is difficult to conceive the second time after the birth of the first child.

What is the INS?

It refers to the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service, which is a federal agency under the Justice Department that oversees all visas issued to allow entry into the United States. In adoption, this agency is responsible for reviewing documents and issuing approval for a child adopted from a country outside the U.S. to immigrate to the United States.

What is the I-171H--Notice of Favorable Determination Concerning Application for Advance Processing of Orphan Petition?

It is a document received from the INS after successful filing of form I-600A Application for Advance Processing of Orphan Petition. This is a lengthy process that can take up to several months to complete. (An FBI fingerprint check alone can take up to three months or longer.) However, this extended timeframe is not always the case and varies considerably from state to state.



What are IR-3 and IR-4 Visas?

An IR-3 visa is for orphans who are adopted in their birth country and then immigrate to the United States. An IR-4 visa is for orphans whose adoptions are finalized in U.S. state courts after immigration to the U.S. The regulations of the birth country determine which procedure is used. U.S. State Department data on international adoptions is based on the number of visas issued to children adopted from other countries by U.S. citizens, although technically the visa data tracks the immigration of the children to the U.S., not their adoptions.

What is meant by 'institutionalization'?

It refers to the short-term or long-term placement of children in hospitals, institutions, or orphanages. Some experts suggest that such placement during critical developmental stages and for lengthy periods may be associated with developmental delays due to environmental deprivation, poor staff-child ratios, and/or lack of early stimulation.

What is an 'inter-country or international adoption'?

It is the adoption of a child who was born in a country other than where his/her adoptive parents reside or are citizens of. Legal work through immigration services must be done to authorize an international adoption and approval must be obtained from both domestic and foreign governments. Travel by the adoptive parents may or may not be required. International adoption should be conducted by a reputable agency.

What is the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)?

It is an agreement that regulates the placement of children across state lines. All fifty states, plus the District of Columbia and the U.S. Virgin Islands, have independently adopted the ICPC as statutory law in their respective jurisdictions. The ICPC must give its approval to any child moving from one state to another for the purpose of adoption, foster care, or residential care. The ICPC 100A form must be approved by both the child's state of origin (sending state) and the state where the child will live (receiving state) before the child can legally cross state lines. In an interstate adoption, the agency or attorney from the state where the child resides is most often responsible for processing the interstate paperwork.

What is the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA)?

It is an agreement between member states that governs the interstate delivery of, and payment for, medical services and adoption assistance payments/subsidies for adopted children with special needs. These agreements are established by the laws of the compact member states.



What does 'inter-ethnic placement' mean?

It refers to the placement of children under the coverage of Section 1808 of P.L. 104-188, Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption. This section affirms the prohibition contained in the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act of 1994 against delaying or denying the placement of a child for adoption or foster care on the basis of race, color, or national origin of the foster or adoptive parents or the child involved.

What is meant by 'involuntary termination of parental rights'?

It is a legal procedure where the parental rights of the birth parents are terminated by the court without their signed consent. Decisions for such termination of parental rights are generally based on the needs of the child and the specific situation. Most involuntary termination of parental rights happen due to abandonment, repeated or severe abuse, and neglect of the child by the birth parents.

What is 'kinship care'?

Kinship care refers to the full-time care and nurturing of a child by someone who is related to the child through family ties. It can also be through someone who has a prior relationship connection with the family or the child. Some of the common examples of such kin are relatives, godparents, stepparents, members of their tribes or clans, or any adult who has a kinship bond with the child.

What is 'kinship adoption'?

It is also known as 'relation adoptions'. As the name implies, it is a form of adoption wherein the adoptive parents are biologically related to the adopted child—such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, or other relatives. In kinship adoption, the relatives legally adopt the child. Kinship adoptions arise when the birth parents are unable to care for the child's needs and family members step in to fill those needs.

What do you mean by 'learning disabled'?

It is a term used to describe a child who has difficulty with reading, math, and/or writing skills, and who performs below the age-appropriate level in school or other activities. Children with learning disabilities may be of average or above average intelligence, but experience difficulty with learning, differentiating, processing, storing, and/or making use of information. Some children with learning disabilities find it difficult to learn in a conventional classroom environment.

Learning disabilities are as common in the general population as they are among children who are adopted. Parents who educate themselves about learning disabilities through study and interaction with other parents will be able to help their adopted children by working with them and finding appropriate special education.



What is 'legal custody/ legal guardian'?

It refers to a legal relationship that is established by a court order in which one individual is appointed as the custodian and given legal authority and responsibility over another individual called the 'ward'. This legal custody is given when ward is disabled, underage, or not in a position to care for his/her self. When a minor child is involved, it includes care and responsibility for the child and his or her property.

What does 'legalized abandonment' mean?

A woman with an unwanted pregnancy has two options – to seek an abortion or to give up the child for adoption. Sadly, there are instances of women abandoning newborn babies in dumpsters and other public places. This has necessitated the creation of laws in many states to make abandonment legal by allowing such mothers to anonymously abandon infants at predetermined drop centers. This is called legalized abandonment.

What is 'legal risk adoption'?

It is an adoption program that allows prospective adoptive parents to act as foster parents to children before they are legally available for adoption. It is one where the child to be adopted is placed with the prospective adoptive parents prior to the termination of the birth parents' rights. In such instances, the birth parents can revoke their consent to the adoption and have the child returned to them. The legal risk period is determined by each state. Legal risk adoptions are rare in special-needs adoption.

What is 'legal risk placement'?

It refers to the placement of a child in a prospective adoptive family when a child is not yet legally free for adoption. In such cases, it is expected that the family will eventually adopt the child, even though the birth parents' rights have not been fully terminated or the parents are contesting the legal action. It is otherwise known as 'legal risk adoption' and is not available in all states.

What does 'legally free' mean?

This term is based on the premise that a child can have only one set of legal parents at a given point in time. When the parental rights of a child's birth parents are terminated by voluntary or involuntary consent, death, or any other means, then the child becomes 'legally free' to be adopted by another set of legal parents.

What is a 'life book'?

A life book is a documentation of text and pictures that records the life of a child. In adoption, this book helps the adopted child understand and appreciate his or her unique background and history. It may include birth



parents, other relatives, foster parents and their families, homes where they child has lived, and childhood experiences and events.

What does 'long-term foster care' mean?

It refers to the intentional and planned placement of a child in foster care for an extended period of time. After adoption has been explored and rejected, after placement with relatives has been considered and found unfeasible, long-term foster care may be seen as a viable option. However, this plan is increasingly viewed by some state's child welfare systems as a poor placement alternative.

What is 'loss'?

It is a sense of emotional deprivation experienced by all human beings at some point in their lives. It is a state of grief experienced when deprived of someone or something of value. Almost all of those involved in adoption experience a sense of loss at some time in their lives. Birth parents feel the loss of giving up their child for adoption while adoptive parents struggling with infertility feel the loss of their inability to conceive and bear a child. Even the adopted child may feel a sense of loss when he or she comes to know about the adoption.

What is 'matching'?

Matching is the process of bringing together two key parties to an adoption – qualified adoptive parents seeking a child to adopt and willing birth parents who wish to give up their child for adoption. It is an important act as it involves finding parties who are compatible with each other and who are willing to the terms of adoption. Matching can take place before or after the birth of the child. This term is not to be confused with “placement.”

What is a 'maternity home'?

A maternity home is a group residence where a pregnant woman who wishes to place her unborn child for adoption can live until she gives birth to the baby. It is usually a residence maintained by a non-profit or private organization and has a long waiting list. The women can stay for free or sometimes pay a nominal fee. Counseling, birthing classes, and vocational and educational programs are available to the women who stay here.

What is Multi-Ethnic Placement Act?

It is a federal law enacted in 1994 and implemented through state policy. This act bans the delay or denial of any adoption or placement in foster care due to the race, color, or national origin of the child or the foster or adoptive parents, and requires states to provide for diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive



families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children for whom homes are needed. The 1996 amendment—the Removal of Barriers to Interethnic Adoption Act—affirms the prohibition.

What does 'non-identifying information' mean?

It refers to information on health and family background that would not lead to any personal discovery by another person. Such non-identifying information is usually limited to age, physical description, talents and hobbies, and basic medical data. State laws vary regarding the release and definition of non-identifying information. Cost, as well as the amount of information received, depends on the agency or court that releases the information.

What are 'non-recurring adoption costs'?

It refers to certain one-time adoption expenses, which, through the provisions of the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980, may be at least partially reimbursed by the state to families adopting children with special needs. Expenses that are allowed for this reimbursement benefit can include the cost of a home study, adoption fees, court costs, attorney fees, physical and psychological examinations, travel to visit with the child prior to the placement, and other expenses related to the legal adoption of a child with special needs.

What is North American Council on Adoptable Children?

This Council was founded in 1974 by adoptive parents. It is committed to meeting the needs of waiting children and the families who adopt them. Since its inception, NACAC's mission has remained essentially unchanged, advocating the right of every child to a permanent, continuous, nurturing, and culturally sensitive family.

What is National Council for Adoption?

It is an organization operating at local, state, national, and international levels to help build happy families. It was founded in 1980 with a mission to focus on infant adoption, international adoptions, and adoption out of foster care. It is a non-profit adoption advocacy organization that promotes adoption through effective education, research, and legislative action.

What do you mean by 'open adoption'?

It is a form of adoption that allows the birth mother or birth parents to have a choice about the family adopting their child. In open adoption, a wide range of options are available, including, but not limited to: meetings between families before or after the birth of the child, the presence of the adoptive parents at the birth of the child, the continuation of relationship between families through various combinations of letters, photos, videos, gifts, and personal visits. For more information on open adoption, see *Cooperative Adoption*.



What are 'open records'?

It refers to the accessibility to adoption records, including identifying information, by all members of the adoption triad. In certain states where this is legally permissible, an adult adoptee who is usually over 21 years of age can obtain his or her original birth certificate without the need of a court order to do so.

Who is an 'orphan'?

It refers to a child who has no living parents or parents have disappeared or abandoned the child. In other words, a child under the age of 18 whose parents have died, have relinquished their parental rights, or have had their rights terminated by the courts can be deemed as an orphan.

What is an 'orphanage'?

An orphanage is an institution that accommodates children who are orphaned, abandoned, or whose parents are no longer able to care for them. Although the term 'orphanages' is used frequently abroad, it is rarely in the United States anymore. Instead 'group homes' are the preferred alternative to orphanages.

Who is an 'orphan', according to international adoption definition for immigration purposes?

According to this definition, an orphan is a child under the age of 16 whose parents have died or are not in touch with the child; a child who has been separated from the parents through abandonment or whose sole surviving parent is impoverished by local standards and incapable of providing that child with proper care, and who has, in writing, irrevocably released the child for emigration and adoption.

Who are the parties to an adoption?

It refers to the adoptee child and the adoptive parent(s). For an adoption to take place, a person who is eligible to be adopted must be placed in the home of a person or persons who are qualified to adopt. There are state laws that define who are eligible to adopt and to be adopted. Generally, a single adult, a couple, or a step-parent is eligible to adopt a child or children.

What is a 'passive reunion registry'?

It is a type of reunion registry that requires the parties involved to give their consent to release information prior to a match. It is a centralized place where birth parents and adult adoptees can register their identifying information and request to be notified if other parties in their adoption also register. In cases where data is incorrect, a match cannot be made. Some states have state-run registries, and there are also privately sponsored registries such as the Soundex Registry.

What is 'paternity testing'?



Paternity testing is otherwise known as 'DNA testing'. When a child is conceived it inherits half of its DNA from its mother and the other half from its father. This genetic testing can be used to determine the identity of a child's biological father. If there is no match, a possibility of biological connection can be ruled out. However, if the DNA matches it only proves that the man is the 'alleged' father as other related individuals such as brothers can have the same DNA pattern. Usually a DNA test is 99% accurate to prove paternity.

What is 'permanency planning'?

It refers to the systematic process of carrying out certain goal-driven activities that are geared towards helping children live in permanent families. The primary aim of permanency planning is to provide the child with loving and nurturing parents or caretakers and the chance to create lifelong family relationships.

What is a 'photo listing book'?

A photo listing book is a publication that contains the photographs and details of children waiting to be adopted. These resources are available both online and in book form. These books are available at each state social service agency for individuals who have completed their home study or are looking to adopt a child with special needs. Some adoptive parents support groups list photos of children available for adoption in their newsletters.

What is a 'placement date'?

A placement date refers to the date a child begins to live with the adoptive family. Some adoptive families choose to celebrate this date as it's when they finally brought their child home into their family as one of their own.

What are 'post-adoption services'?

It is fairly common for adoptive families to need some support and guidance after their adoption is finalized and the child comes to live in their home. Post adoption issues such as explaining adoption to the child, helping other siblings handle the newcomer, dealing with the stress of a new member in the family, and so on crop up in many adoptive families. Post-adoption services such as case management services, referrals for counseling, or other supportive services are available to families after finalization of an adoption to help them deal with these issues.

What is 'post-placement supervision'?

It refers to counseling and supervision provided by a licensed social worker to the adopted parents and child subsequent to the child's adoptive placement and before the adoption is legally finalized in court. The caseworker will visit the home several times over a specific period of 6-12 months and will gather necessary information to file a report. Reports made during this time are presented to the court of jurisdiction.



What are 'post-reunion issues'?

It refers to all the feelings and thoughts that occur when members of the adoption triad experience both the joy and grief that occur after reconnecting through reunion. These feelings may include guilt, anger, jealousy, confusion or happiness that accompanies any reunion process. It can also be a time where family members may or may not try to negotiate an ongoing relationship.

What is 'pre-certification'?

In order to protect birth parents and children from unscrupulous adoptive parents, a pre adoption certificate is required from adoptive parents showing that they are qualified to adopt a child. This court approval of a prospective adoptive parent is granted upon review of the home study, references, child abuse clearance, fingerprints, medical status, employment verification, and other documents. Upon such approval, the court issues a certificate, which remains with the court, stating that the person(s) can adopt a child. The necessary paperwork is submitted by an attorney and is typically required for an agency adoption.

What is meant by 'private adoption'?

It is an adoption arranged without the involvement of an agency, or an adoption facilitated by people or agencies that are privately funded. An intermediary, such as an adoption facilitator or attorney, is involved. A private adoption can be an open adoption, although that is not always the case. Private adoptions should not be confused with private agency adoptions. For more information on this topic, see *Independent Adoption*.

What is a 'private agency adoption'?

It refers to the placements made by licensed organizations that screen prospective adoptive parents and supervise the placement of children in adoptive homes until the adoption is finalized. These licensed private agencies serve the needs of both birth families and adoptive families and may be nonprofit or for-profit agencies.

Who is a 'psychological parent'?

A psychological parent is one who is seen as a parent by a child even though the individual may not be biologically related to the child. In other words, it is a person not biologically related to a child whom the child considers a parent. This person is sometimes referred to as a “de facto” parent.

What is 'public agency adoption'?

It refers to an adoption facilitated by the Department of Human Services, also known as the Office of Children and Youth Services. This agency places children who come into its care either voluntarily or involuntarily. It is



responsible for most adoptions of older children and for handling cases where children have been abused, neglected, or abandoned by their birth parents.

Who is a 'putative father'?

It is a legal term for the 'alleged' or 'supposed' father of a child. It refers to a man who may be a child's biological father, but who is not married to the child's mother on or before the date the child was or is to be born, and/or has not established paternity of the child in a court proceeding.

What are 'putative father registries'?

It is a registry system that ensures the protection of a birth father's rights. Some states require that birth fathers register, while others presume that a birth father does not wish to pursue paternity rights if he does not initiate legal action. States generally require a putative father to register or acknowledge paternity within a certain time frame in order to receive notice of adoption proceedings. Approximately 21 states have statutes authorizing the establishment of putative father registries. Several states, however, only mandate by law that a putative father file a notice of his paternity claim within a certain period of time. Failure to register or file may preclude the right to notice of adoption proceedings.

What is 'relinquishment'?

It is the voluntary termination of parental rights, sometimes referred to as surrender or making an adoption plan for one's child. This is a process by which birth parents willingly terminate their parental rights in order to free their child for adoption. It is a legally binding, permanent procedure involving the signing of documents and court action.

What is a 'residential care facility'?

It is a 24-hour care residential facility with trained staff that provides psychological services to help troubled children. These children may suffer from severe behavioral, emotional, mental, and psychological problems that affect their family relationships, social relationships, and school achievement.

What is 'residential treatment'?

It refers to treatment at a facility to assist those who are unable to live satisfactory lives within their own home environment. For children and adolescents, residential treatment tends to be the option of choice when a child is considered to be in danger of hurting himself or others. However, it is usually viewed as a last resort.

What is 'respite care'?

It is a temporary or short-term child care that occurs outside the child's home and is provided by an adult or adults other than the child's birth, foster, or adoptive parents. It can be on a paid or voluntary basis and is



usually provided as an opportunity to recharge and have some time off between parents and child as a way to handle parenting challenges.

What is a 'reunion'?

It is a term used to describe the personal meeting of an adoptee with members of his or her birth family. A reunion is an emotionally charged occasion and can lead to post-reunion issues. It is wise to take some time to ease into a relationship in order to build a strong and healthy relationship rather than allow high emotions to overcome you during a reunion.

What is a 'reunion registry'?

It is a large database of identifying and non-identifying information on the members of the adoption triad, namely, adoptive parents, birth parents, and adoptee. These registries are available in different formats offline and online. For more information on reunion registries, see *Passive Reunion Registry* and *Voluntary Adoption Registry*.

What is 'reunification'?

It refers to the attempt to return foster children to the custody of their parent(s) after placement outside the home. This can happen after the children spend some time in foster care placement outside their birth family due to reasons such as family problems, marital problems between the birth parents, and so on.

What are 'reunification services'?

It refers to all the efforts made by social workers to reunite a child with the birth family. In other words, it is a process through which social service agency workers help birth families find solutions to problems so the family can live together. They try to bring children who have been placed in foster care and the birth family to a point of reconciliation and reunion.

What is meant by 'revocation of consent'?

It is a legal process whereby a birth parent withdraws the consent he or she signed to an adoption plan and requests that the child be returned to his or her custody. In states that allow revocation of consent, there is a limited period of time for the parent to choose this option. However, state laws vary and are constantly changing with time.

What is 'search/adoption search'?

It is a process in which an attempt is made to establish some contact between the birth parent and the biological child. This attempt is usually made by the birth parent, adopted person, or adoptive parent.



What are 'search and consent procedures'?

These are procedures under state law that authorizes a public or private agency to help a searching party find another party for adoption. These procedures are made available for the consensual disclosure of identifying information. A “confidential intermediary service” is available to help adoptees over the age of 21 and biological relatives locate each other and ascertain whether they are willing to release their names or have personal contact with each other.

What is a 'semi-open adoption'?

It is a form of adoption in which the birth and adoptive parents establish the extent of some type of limited, ongoing contact between the birth parents and the child. This can take many forms and is commonly facilitated through letters and photos that can be exchanged through a third party, usually an adoption agency. It is a combination of the traditional closed form of adoption and the recently popular open adoption formats.

What is 'special-needs adoption'?

It is the adoption of a child with particular needs or challenges. Adoptions of this type generally involve more extensive training on the part of the parents, and fees are lower or nonexistent. Special-needs children include older children, sibling groups, children facing physical, emotional, or intellectual challenges, and children of mixed race or minorities. Federal and state subsidies are sometimes available to parents who adopt special-needs children.

What do 'SSI benefits' mean?

It is a Social Security Administration program that provides financial support to persons—including children—with specific, defined handicapping conditions. After an adoption is finalized, these benefits are tied to the adoptive parent’s income.

What is 'stepparent adoption'?

It is the adoption of a child by the spouse of the birth parent. The stepparent who adopts the child assumes all legal and financial responsibility over his or her spouse's child or children. Stepparent adoption laws differ from state to state and address issues such as consent from non-custodial parent, home study requirements, and so on.

What is 'subsidy'?

It is otherwise known as adoption assistance payment or adoption subsidy. It refers to financial payments made to adoptive families to support them in caring for a child with special needs. These payments can be



made through state or federal funds that are distributed through a local agency. For more information on subsidy, see *Adoption Assistance Payment*.

What does 'substitute care' mean?

Substitute care refers to any form of custodial or residential care, sanctioned by the court of jurisdiction in which a child lives, with someone other than the birth parent.

What does 'surrender' mean?

In adoption, the term surrender refers to any voluntary giving up of parental rights by the birth parent or birth parents of the child that is available for adoption. This is done when the birth parent formally signs Consent to Adoption document in the presence of a notary public. Please refer to *Relinquishment* for more information.

What are 'surrender papers'?

It refers to the legal documents that attest to the fact that the birth parent has voluntarily relinquished his/her or their parental rights over the child who is available for adoption. These documents are usually signed in the presence of a notary public with one or more witnesses.

Who is a 'surrogate mother'?

A surrogate mother is a woman who carries and bears a child for another woman or a couple by a pre-arranged legal contract. A surrogate mother is chosen by couples who are infertile and unable to conceive or bear a child for the full term. Surrogacy is a bit complicated with legal issues and is not legally permissible in all states.

What does 'system' mean?

It is a term that is often used to refer to the 'public child welfare system'. This system is a huge network of governmental agencies and services that provides for welfare services to children in its jurisdiction.

What does 'termination of parental rights' mean?

It refers to a permanent ending of all legal parental rights of a birth parent. It has to be done through a court proceeding where the judge declares the termination of parental rights. The termination of parental rights can be voluntary or involuntary but it must be declared before a child is legally free to be adopted.

What is meant by 'therapeutic (or treatment) foster home'?

In adoption, it refers to a foster home in which trained caregivers provide care for children and adolescents who may suffer from major emotional or behavioral problems. Parents in such therapeutic foster homes are more closely supervised and receive more support when compared with parents in regular foster homes.



What do you mean by 'traditional adoption'?

It refers to a domestic infant adoption where total confidentiality is maintained. In other words, it is a 'closed adoption'. This is a more traditional form of adoption, which ensures a complete privacy of any details concerning the birth parents of the adopted child.

What is a 'traditional agency adoption'?

It is an adoption through an agency that locates a birth mother, counsels her, and provides assistance for an adoption to take place. The birth mother may or may not pick the prospective adoptive parents from biographical resumes, and the adoptive parents may or may not have contact with the birth parents.

What are U.S. Adoption Laws?

These are laws with which persons contemplating adoption must obey. In general, adoption issues are subject to state laws and regulations. State adoption laws are comprised of laws from two sources: state statutes and state case law.

What is a 'voluntary adoption registry'?

It is a reunion registry system that helps adoptees, birth parents, and biological siblings to locate each other through a voluntary list of adoptees and birth relatives. It is a completely voluntary system and people in the adoption triad are free to register their details if they are willing to do so.

What is a Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA)?

It is an agreement made through the courts or a social service agency with the parents of a child who must remain in foster care while the family meets certain requirements specifically outlined in the agreement. If the agreement and plan are not successful, the child may be removed permanently and placed for adoption.

What is meant by 'voluntary termination of parental rights'?

It is the voluntary 'giving up' of parental rights by birth parents. The birth parents willingly create an adoption plan and legally free their child for adoption.

Who are 'waiting children'?

It refers to non-infant and school age children who are waiting to be adopted. These are children in need of permanent, loving adoptive homes. They are usually older and in the care of jurisdiction or the foster care system. They are not in a position to return to their birth families. Waiting children are also considered special-needs children.



What is a 'waiting period'?

This refers to the time, before placement, that a family spends waiting to get approved for adoption by an agency.

What is a 'waiver of confidentiality'?

A waiver of confidentiality is a document that is filed by a person allowing for disclosure of records or identifying information to another person.

***Accurate at the time of this writing. Adoption laws and requirements are always changing. Will be updated as frequently as we are able, but please be advised to always rely on the advice of a qualified adoption attorney.*