

COMMON ADOPTION TERMINOLOGY

Abandonment - a parent refuses to physically, emotionally, or financially support his or her child. (A signed relinquishment or surrender of parental rights legally constitutes abandonment.)

Abuse - harm inflicted on a person through physical, verbal, emotional, or sexual means; may cause victim to develop emotional or behavioral problems, some of which may not appear until later in life. Help from an experienced counselor or therapist may be needed to work through abuse issues.

Acting-out Behaviors - in abused children, behaviors that reflect abuse they have experienced or witnessed. For instance, physically abused children may be more inclined to hit and hurt other children, and sexually abused children may try to engage other children or adults in sexual activity.

Adoption - the legal transfer of all parental rights and obligations to another person or couple.

Adoption Assistance - payments and other benefits designed to offset the short- and long-term costs of adopting eligible children who have special needs.

Adoption Benefits - these are the benefits such as financial assistance or monetary reimbursements, given for the expenses of adopting a child. These are usually available to workers through some employer-sponsored program or government benefits, such as Employment Insurance.

Adoption Exchange - are organizations that have information, about children who are waiting for adoption.

Adoption Order – is a legal document that results from the finalization of an adoption.

Adoption Probation - time between the placement with the adoptive family and legal finalization by a court. This may vary from province to province, but it usually averages from 6 to 12 months.

Agency Adoption - an adoption completed with assistance from an organization of licensed, trained adoption professionals.

Attachment Disorder - a condition signaled by an inability to develop significant emotional connections with others. Abused and neglected infants and children may find it difficult to form significant ties. Signs of attachment disorder include difficulty maintaining eye contact, lying, and not responding to affection.

Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) - a lifelong developmental disorder, which affects one's ability to concentrate and control impulses. A child who has ADD is not hyperactive, but often has trouble staying on task and concentrating for long periods.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) - a lifelong developmental disorder, which involves problems with attention span, impulse control, and activity level. Typical behaviors include: fidgeting; difficulty remaining seated; distractibility; difficulty waiting for turns; difficulty staying on task; difficulty playing quietly; excessive talking; inattention; and engaging in physically dangerous activities without considering consequences.

Behavioral Disorders - influenced by heredity, brain disorders, diet, stress, and family functioning – that cause symptoms like hyperactivity, aggression, withdrawal from social interactions, self- injurious behavior, immaturity, learning problems, excessive anxiety, or abnormal mood swings.

Bipolar Disorder - a mental illness characterized by cycles of mania and depression. During manic periods, individuals may seem very happy and be hyperactive, wakeful, and distractible. In severe episodes, psychotic symptoms may also be present.

Birth Family - those who share a child's genetic heritage; blood relations; extended family members.

Birth Parent - a child's biological mother or father.

Closed Adoption - an adoption in which birth and adoptive families have no contact and know only non-identifying information about each other.

Cocaine-Exposed - infants exposed prenatal to cocaine are often premature, have low birth weight, and are at risk for developmental delays. Newborn withdrawal symptoms include unrelieved crying, shaking, body tension, and irritability. Many drug-exposed children have problems with language development and attention deficits.

Cognitive Delays - delays in the customary development of a person's ability to process information or think logically or analytically.

Conduct Disorder - a condition signaled by a strong unwillingness to meet societal norms or expectations. A child with conduct disorder may bully or threaten others; initiate fights; stay out late without permission; use weapons that could cause serious harm; be physically aggressive or cruel to animals or humans; force someone into sexual activity; or steal, lie, or break promises to obtain goods or to avoid debts or obligations.

Developmental Delays - delays in a child's developmental progress as measured against other children's mastering of skills (such as sitting up, walking, toilet training, talking, etc.) at the same age.

Developmental Disabilities - any condition or disorder of the body, mind, or emotions that interferes with a child's normal development.

Direct Placement - when the birth parent/s of the child find a family and place their child directly with that family. Most jurisdictions require a home study to be done of the adoptive family. Not all Canadian jurisdictions allow direct placements.

Disruption - describes an adoption, which does not get finalized, resulting in the child returning to foster care and/or to another adoptive parent(s).

Dissociative Disorder - a condition – often sparked by trauma – in which people disconnect from a full awareness of self, time, or external circumstances as a defense against unpleasant realities or memories.

Dissolution - describes an adoption that fails after legal finalization, resulting in the child returning to foster care and/or another set of adoptive parent(s).

Emotional Disturbances or Disabilities - a condition that is often evidenced by a lack of respect for authority, school problems, an inability to handle changes, and problems with other children. Other characteristics include sleep disturbances, mood swings, and a tendency to act impulsively without considering consequences. Therapy is recommended throughout childhood and adolescence.

Fetal Alcohol Effect (FAE) - a disorder associated with cognitive and behavioral difficulties in children whose birth mothers drank alcohol while pregnant. Symptoms are similar to fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) but less severe.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) - birth defects and serious lifelong mental and emotional difficulties that result from a child's prenatal exposure to alcohol. Symptoms may include learning and behavioral disorders (including attention deficits and hyperactivity), poor social judgment, and impulsive behaviors.

Finalization - the last legal step in the adoption process, involving a court hearing where an adoptive parent becomes a child's legal parent.

Foster Children - children placed in the government's legal custody because their birth parents were deemed abusive, neglectful, or otherwise unable to care for them. While under provincial/territorial care, such children often live in foster homes or group homes.

Fostering With View to Adoption - A foster placement that is intended to result in an adoption if and when the child becomes legally free.

Foster Parents - state-licensed adults who provide a temporary home for children in state custody whose birth parents are unable to care for them.

Group Home - a facility staffed by social workers and counselors that houses groups of children – typically those over the age of five, including teens and sibling groups – who need emergency temporary shelter or a long-term living arrangement.

Home Study - a process through which prospective adopters are educated about adoption and evaluated to determine their suitability to adopt.

Identifying Information - Information such as full name, place of residence, - that would allow the individual to be located.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP) - a plan drawn up by a child's special education teacher and other concerned parties that outlines specific skills the child needs to develop as well as learning activities that build on the child's strengths.

In Utero - in the womb - before birth.

Learning Disabilities - Is a condition that makes it hard for a person to take in, sort, and store information - not a sign of below-average intelligence.

Legally Free - a child whose birth parents' rights have been legally terminated or relinquished so that the child is free to be adopted by another family.

Legal-risk Adoption - Is the placement of a child in an adoptive home, when birth parents' rights have not yet been voluntarily or involuntarily terminated.

Loss and Grief Issues - unresolved emotional distress that can result from being removed from one's family, experiencing a parent's death, moving from one placement to another, or having one's parents' parental rights terminated. Because children have a hard time expressing and dealing with feelings about losses and separations, these issues can cause depression and acting-out behaviors.

NACAC - The North American Council on Adoptable Children, an international organization which acts as an information source for adoptive parents, adoption support groups and adoption professionals. NACAC can be reached at nacac@nacac.org. NACAC sponsors the largest annual adoption related conference in North America.

Neurological Disorder/Problems - emotional or mental disorders or problems that appear in the form of anxieties, obsessions, phobias, etc., but are not typically so severe that the person loses touch with daily realities.

Non-identifying Information - information about a person that gives a general sense of what the person is like, but does not reveal specific details such as the person's name, address, phone number, etc.

Open Adoption - an adoption that involves some amount of direct contact between the birth and adoptive families, ranging from exchanging names to sending letters and scheduling visits.

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) - a disorder characterized by behavior such as frequent loss of temper, a tendency to argue with adults, refusal to obey adult requests, deliberate behaviors to annoy others, spiteful and vindictive behavior, use of obscene language, and a tendency to blame others for mistakes.

Photo Listing - a publication or Internet site with photos and descriptions of children who are available for adoption.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) - a syndrome, sparked by traumatic events, where a person emotionally re-lives past traumas and becomes withdrawn from current events. Symptoms may include sleeping problems, nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and difficulty with concentration.

Prenatal Exposure - exposure to a certain substance or influence while inside the womb.

Private agency - An agency licensed by the provincial government in whose jurisdiction the agency operates. Private agencies operate on a fee for service basis.

Psychotherapy - a general term that refers to the treatment of mental disorders by intellectual and verbal means such as suggestion, analysis, and persuasion; often used in conjunction with other treatment courses like medication.

Public Agency - An agency funded by the government in whose jurisdiction they operate. Most services provided by public agencies are provided with no cost, but for some services there may be charges.

Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) - a condition, resulting from an early lack of consistent care, characterized by a child's inability to make appropriate social contact with others. Symptoms include developmental delays, lack of eye contact, feeding disturbances, hyper- sensitivity to touch and sound, failure to initiate or respond to social interaction, indiscriminate sociability, self-stimulation, and susceptibility to infection.

Relinquishment - the legal process by which birth parents voluntarily surrender rights to parent their children.

Residential Care/Treatment - a structured 24-hour care facility with staff that provide psychological therapy to help severely troubled children overcome behavioral problems that adversely affect family interaction, school achievement, and peer relationships. Residential treatment tends to be the last resort when a child is in danger of hurting himself or others.

Respite Care - childcare and other services designed to give parents temporary relief from their responsibilities as care givers.

Ritalin - a commonly prescribed methylphenidate drug that helps to control some symptoms of attention deficit disorders. It has a calming effect on some children and helps them to concentrate.

Semi-open Adoption - an adoption in which a child's birth parents and pre-adoptive parents exchange largely non-identifying information. After the child is placed in the adoptive home, contact with the birth family may involve letters or pictures or other communications sent through an intermediary or the adoption agency.

Separation Anxiety - excessive and persistent anxiety about being separated from one's home or parents that interferes with normal activities.

Sexual Abuse Symptomology - symptoms that indicate that a child may have been sexually abused, including excessive masturbation, sexual interaction with peers, sexual aggression towards younger and more naive children, seductive behavior, and promiscuity.

Special Needs – conditions that make some children harder to place for adoption, including: emotional or physical disorders, age, race, being in a sibling group, a history of abuse, or other factors. Guidelines for classifying a child as having special needs vary. Common special needs conditions and diagnoses include attachment disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), developmental disabilities, fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS), learning disabilities, and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD).

Subsidies - See Adoption assistance.

Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) - the court process through which a birth parent's legal claim to his or her child is permanently removed. TPR actions are brought when birth parents will not voluntarily relinquish their rights.

Therapeutic Foster Home - a foster home where the parent or parents have received special training in dealing with a wide variety of children – including those who are retarded, moderately or severely disturbed, delinquent, or medically fragile. Parents in therapeutic homes are also supervised and assisted more than parents in regular foster homes.

Waiting Children - children in the care of the public child welfare system (foster children) who cannot return to their birth homes and need permanent, loving families to help them grow up safe and secure. In Canada there are more than 20,000 children who are permanent wards of provincial and territorial governments.

Prepared with material from North American Council on Adoptable Children (NACAC).