



Disclosure of Background Information to Adoptive Parents

Practitioner Check List

- ✓ If you are responsible for preparing disclosure documents, begin by reviewing the entire case record for the child or youth as well as the birth family record. Prospective adoptive parents will need the information you collect for two distinct tasks: first, to determine whether they should formally accept adoptive placement and second, to inform their parenting on an ongoing basis.
- ✓ In addition to providing a written summary of all known information about the child/youth and birth family background, provide actual copies of reports, assessments, and other documents as permitted by law. Support the family in thinking through the meaning of the information in relation to how they will respond to the young person's needs in the years to come.
- ✓ Avoid the trap of assuming that disclosure is "just a formality" for relatives or current foster parents. While these caregivers may sometimes know as much or even more than the agency does about the child and birth family, this is not always the case. In any event, relatives and current caregivers who are adopting must be afforded the same formal disclosure process as any other prospective adoptive parents.
- ✓ Avoid interpreting the meaning of diagnostic statements and other reports. Stick to the facts and refer the prospective adoptive family to physicians, mental health professionals, educators, and other experts who can help them to understand the information and its implications for the young person's current and future functioning.
- ✓ Gently remind prospective adoptive parents that it is very possible that there is information about the child and the birth family that is not known to the agency and, therefore, is not available to be disclosed.
- ✓ Be sure you are current with the laws and policies on adoption disclosure in your state. Seek out supervision and training opportunities to make sure you keep up with any changes in legal requirements.

Coaching Tips for Supervisors

- Keep current! Be sure that you and your staff are up-to-date on the laws and policies governing adoption disclosure in your jurisdiction.
- Offer ongoing coaching and education so that staff members know not only what must be disclosed but also how to share it so that prospective adoptive parents can best obtain and consider the information they need.
- Review disclosure documents for completeness and to assure that they do not offer interpretations of information outside of the expertise and scope of practice of your staff.
- Assist staff members in making referrals to professionals who can explain diagnostic labels and interpret specialized reports.
- Encourage staff members to use their best writing skills for disclosure reports since they will have lasting value for persons who have been adopted and adoptive families. Research writing programs that are available in your jurisdiction and refer staff for assistance as needed.
- Look for opportunities to strengthen your system's capacity to collect and disclose background information. Participate in work groups and advocate for improvements as needed.