Tips and Strategies for success in Openness planning

Openness planning starts at the very beginning of the adoption process in the form of learning in PRIDE and discussion during the Adoption Homestudy but it is an evolving process throughout the adoption journey. Here are some tips and strategies that may help families throughout the adoption process.

Pre-Adoption

- Read about openness – see some books and articles below
- Talk with families who have openness
- Start early to prepare extended family about the concept of open adoption
- Openly discuss fears and challenges family and friends express
- Discuss views on openness during Homestudy process and ensure your views are included in HS and profile. If your views and perspective change make sure your adoption worker is aware of this and your homestudy is updated to reflect new information.

During the Matching Process

- Meet with Child’s adoption worker and discuss views on openness. Get as much information as possible about family history, family members who will be involved in the openness and a clear understanding of what activities family members hope the ongoing contact will involve.

- Set up direct meetings with people involved in openness to discuss plans. A face to face meeting with all the adults who will be involved in the ongoing contact is very helpful to allaying fears and establishing communication.

- Consider creating a written agreement with birth family members to outline some shared vision, communication ground rules and some basic information about the parameters of the ongoing contact. Use KISS principle (Keep it simple silly. The agreement is simply a foundation to support the building of a good rapport and effective communication between two families.

- Start slow as a child needs time to establish relationship in the adoptive family. If too much time is spent with extended family it will be confusing for a child.
• Use creative ways to maintain connections when there are concerns about direct contact between parents. Use the support of the adoption worker and child's worker to support contact during the adoption probation period if necessary.

• Use the support of your adoption worker in during the adoption probation period if needed during visits if needed.

Ongoing Openness

• Openness changes over time. Parents should check in with birth family members and check in with child at regular intervals.

• Relationship should be within the adoptive family context. It is important that adoptive families be included in visits with birth family members especially in the early stages but also much of the time ongoing.

• Whenever possible, it is helpful for a child to have a predictable routine of contacts with birth family members.

• Expect a child to be confused and have emotional reaction to visits. Preparing children for visits and giving time to process feelings after a visit is important.
• If problems arise, be prepared to address them directly and make changes to plans as necessary.

• Always focus on the child’s need for stability in the adoptive family as well as to have a comfortable relationship with birth family members.