

Accurate Adoption Language

Words Convey Important Messages!

Words not only convey facts, they also evoke feelings. For example, when a TV show or movie contains language about a “custody battle” between “real parents” and “other parents,” this reinforces the inaccurate notion that only birthparents are real parents and that adoptive parents aren’t real parents. Members of society may also wrongly conclude that all adoptions are “battles.”

Accurate adoption language can stop the spread of misconceptions such as these. By using accurate language, we educate others about adoption. We choose emotionally “correct” words over emotionally laden words. We speak and write using appropriate adoption language in the hope of influencing others so that this language will someday become the norm.

Accurate Language	Less-Accurate Language
Birthparent/ biological parent	Real parent, natural parent
Birth child	Own child, real child, natural child
My child	Adopted child, own child
Person / Individual who was adopted	Adoptee
Born to unmarried parents	Illegitimate
Make an adoption plan, choose adoption	Give away, adopt out, give up, put up
To parent the baby/child	To keep the baby
Child in need of a family	Adoptable child/unwanted child
Parent	Adoptive parent
Child who has special needs	Handicapped child, hard to place
Was adopted	Is adopted
Choosing an adoption plan	Giving away your child
Finding a family to parent your child	Putting your child up for adoption
Parenting the baby/child	Keeping your baby
Confidential adoption	Closed adoption
Unintended pregnancy	Unwanted/problem pregnancy
Fully-disclosed adoption	Open adoption
Semi-open adoption	Open adoption