

An Adoption Glossary from The National Adoption Center's Learning Center

Adoptee:	A person who joins a family via adoption.
Adoption:	A permanent, legally binding arrangement whereby persons other than the birthparents parent the child.
Adoption Agency:	An organization that is licensed to prepare families to adopt children and to do all the necessary legal, administrative and social work to insure that adoptions are efficiently handled and are in the best interests of the children.
Adoption Decree:	The document issued by the court upon finalization of an adoption, stating that the adoptee is the legal child of the adoptive parents.
Adoption Exchange:	An organization that assists in the matching of children in need of homes with parents wishing to adopt. Exchanges also perform other support and resource services.
Adoption Plan:	The unique, individual plan a particular set of birth parents makes for the adoption of their child.
Adoptive Parent:	A person or persons who become the permanent parents with all the social, legal rights and responsibilities incumbent upon any parent.
Affidavit:	A legal document in which the party who makes it swears that the information contained in the document is true, and correct to the best of his knowledge.
Amended Birth Certificate:	The document issued, after a child has been adopted, reflecting the adoptive parents as the child's parents.
Birth Certificate (original):	A certified document (in PA this must be obtained through the Department of Vital Records in New Castle) which indicates the birth information of a person including mother's and father's name and the name given to the child at the time of birth.
Birth Parent:	The parents who gave birth to a child, made an adoption plan for the child and subsequently relinquished the child for adoption.
Child Abuse Clearances:	A method of checking to see if a person has a history of child abuse. This is used as part of the approval process for prospective adoptive parents. In Pennsylvania there is a central registry where the names of all child abusers are kept on file. A prospective parent (or employee) must complete a form and submit it to this registry and the registry will send back information indicating that the person is either clear or has a record. These clearances must be updated annually.
Closed Adoption:	An adoption where there is no contact between birth parents and adoptive parents. Also called traditional adoption.
Confidentiality:	Protection of one's personal identifying information. Adoption agencies may not disclose identifying information about any client to any other source except in special circumstances as described in licensing regulations (such as when there is a child abuse allegation).
Consent to Adoption:	(1) A legal document signed by the birth parents to give legal intent to his/her desire for the adoption of his/her child. It may be revoked (in PA) until the Court enters a final termination decree. (2) A second consent to adoption is issued by the adoption agency allowing the adoptive family to finalize the adoption after all agency and legal requirements have been met. An adoption cannot be finalized without this consent.

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Co-operative Adoption:	An adoption which allows for some form of association between the birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents. This can range from picture and letter sharing, to phone calls, to contact through an intermediary, to open contact between the parties themselves. Also known as "Open Adoption."
Counseling:	A process where a person can receive assistance in sorting out issues and reaching decisions appropriate to their life circumstances. Counseling for adoption should be done by trained, experienced, adoption counselors. Birth parent counseling should include exploration of all options including parenting the child, kinship adoption, foster care and various types of adoptions.
Criminal Clearances:	Similar to the child abuse clearances, this is a clearance through the State Police Department to determine if a person has a criminal record. Again, the state supplies forms and the clearances must be updated on an annual basis. In adoptions, all adults living in a household must obtain criminal and child abuse clearances prior to a child being placed in that home.
Disruption:	A child leaves the adoptive home prior to the finalization of the adoption. This can occur in three situations: (1) the birth parents revoke their consent to the adoption; (2) the adoptive parents choose to return the child for reasons of their own; or (3) the agency disrupts the adoption if the adoptive parents are not complying with post placement requirements or are endangering the child in any way.
Dissolution:	Similar to disruption, but it occurs after the adoption is finalized. Birth parents cannot dissolve an adoption, but adoptive parents or the courts can.
FBI Clearances:	Similar to the criminal clearances described above, except that these are federal clearances through the FBI. In addition to completing an information form, the person must be fingerprinted. The cost is about \$50 per person and must be updated annually. While not (yet) required in PA, they are required in other states, including New Jersey, prior to an adoption.
Finalization:	The court hearing which results in the adoption decree. This is the moment when the adoptee becomes the permanent, legally adopted child of the adoptive parents. In PA this cannot occur less than 6 months after the adoption.
Foster Care:	A temporary arrangement whereby persons other than the birth parents care for a child for a period of time. This can be informal or arranged through the courts or a social service agency.
Foster Child:	A child being cared for by foster parents.
Foster Parent:	A person who has been approved through a screening, licensing and training process to provide foster care services for a child.
Fost Adoption:	A form of adoption where a child is placed into a home as a foster child, but, is eventually, legally adopted by the foster parents.
Homestudy:	A three-part process required before a child can be placed with a family for foster care or adoption: (1) Written portion includes autobiographies, references, medical reports, financial statements, child abuse and criminal clearances and other written materials; (2) Social work process includes a series of visits in the applicants' home to discuss a variety of issues from the applicant's background to their motivations to adopt and their understanding of adoption and parenting; (3) Educational process includes training in adoption and parenting issues. The end result of this process is a written document completed by a licensed agency giving a summary of the applicant's family life. This document indicates approval of the applicant for adoption (or foster care). It must be updated annually.
Intent to Adopt Petition:	A brief document which gives identifying information about the adoptive parents and the child to be adopted. This, together with the adoptive parents' homestudy, is filed with the court to initiate adoption proceedings.

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Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC):	The Interstate Compact is an organization with members in all 50 states that 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 cross state lines. In an interstate adoption, the agency with custody of the child is responsible for processing the interstate paperwork.
International Adoption:	Any adoption occurring when the child and the adoptive parents are from two different countries. Extra legal work through immigration services must be done to authorize an international adoption.
Involuntary Termination of Parental Rights:	A legal procedure where the legal rights of birth parents to a child are terminated by the court without the signed consents of the birth parents. Circumstances for such proceedings include abandonment and repeated or severe abuse or neglect of the child.
Kinship Adoption:	A form of adoption where the adoptive parents are biologically related to the child to be adopted, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles or other relatives. In kinship adoption, the relatives legally adopt the child.
Legal Risk Adoption:	An adoption where the child to be adopted is placed with the prospective adoptive parents prior to the termination of the birth parents' rights (This is true of most infant adoptions in PA). This means that the birth parents could revoke their consents to the adoption and the child would have to be returned to the birth parents. In PA the legal risk period is approximately 45 -100 days from the time of placement.
No claim to Paternity Document:	A document the agency (or attorney) processing an adoption will obtain from the Child Support Enforcement Bureau that discloses if any person has filed a claim to be the father of a particular child.
Open Adoption:	See Co-operative Adoption
Parent-Initiated Adoption:	(Also known as "Identified Adoption") is an adoption arranged by adoptive parents and birth parents who already know each other, but the process is done through a licensed agency.
Petition to Confirm Consent:	A legal petition (in PA) consisting of about eight pages that provides certain information about the birth parents of a child to be adopted and about the circumstances surrounding the signing of the adoption consents by the birth parents. The consents must be attached to this document and the filing of this petition with the court initiates the Termination of Parental Rights hearing.
Private or Independent Adoption:	An adoption which is arranged without the involvement of an agency. Often an intermediary, such as an adoption attorney, is involved. Although these can often be open adoptions, this is not always the case. Also, private/independent adoptions should not be confused with private agency adoptions (below).
Private Agency Adoption:	An adoption handled by a private, licensed agency. A private agency is not government-sponsored, but must meet state requirements to obtain and keep its licensed status. The agency will provide services to birth families, adoptive families and children.
Public Agency Adoption:	The public agency is the Department of Human Services and/or also known as the Office of Children and Youth Services. This is a publicly-supported and managed agency that places children who come into their care either voluntarily or involuntarily. The public agency is generally responsible for most older child adoptions and for handling cases where children have been abused, neglected or abandoned by their birth parents.
Relinquishment:	The giving-up of custodial and legal rights to a child by a birth parent. This is a legally binding, permanent procedure involving the signing of legal documents and court action.

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Reunion Registry:	A centralized place where birth parents and adult adoptees who wish to learn about each other can register their data and request to be notified should the other parties in their adoption also register. Some states have state run registries; there are also privately-sponsored registries such as the Soundex Registry.
Reunion:	A term used to describe the point in time when a birth parent and an adoptee are re-acquainted with one another after not having had contact due to a closed/traditional adoption.
Revocation of Consent:	A birth parent revokes the consent they had signed to an adoption and requests that the child be returned to his/her custody.
Search:	Two meanings: (1) a process used by the agency to locate a missing birth parent in order to notify him/her of rights and responsibilities in regard to a child; and (2) a process whereby a birth parent or adoptee seeks information and/or contact with a family member from whom they were separated through adoption proceedings.
Special Needs Child:	In terms of adoption, this includes a child who meets one or more of the following criteria: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A child with a specific physical, medical, mental or emotional handicapping condition 2. An "older child", usually over age 5 3. Siblings (2 or more children) who must be placed together (the placement of twin infants is not generally considered special needs, however)
Special Needs Adoption:	The adoption of a "special needs child". Generally includes a more extensive training process and often involves lower fees.
Subsidy:	A federally and state-funded program to provide financial assistance to families who adopt special needs children in the custody of the state's child welfare department. In PA, children placed through private agencies, are not eligible for any type of subsidy.
SSI Benefits:	A program through the Social Security Administration that provides financial support to persons, including children, with specific, defined, handicapping conditions.
Termination of Parental Rights:	A process involving a court hearing whereby a judge enters a decree permanently ending all legal parental rights of a birth parent to a child. This must occur before a child is considered to be "legally free" for adoption. In PA, there is a 30-day appeal process after this hearing takes place. This can be voluntary or involuntary.
Voluntary Termination of Parental Rights:	The birth parents of a child voluntarily (of their own desire and choice) make an adoption plan for a child and relinquish their legal rights to the child.