

APPENDIX III

Adoption and Social Media: Recommendations For Healthy Ongoing Communication

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Today the use of social media is the “norm.” However it is a new forum for those who are touched by adoption... allowing us to “find” each other on social media sites and stay in touch can provide both positive and challenging experiences. Before using social media as part of your adoption journey it is important that you educate yourself on the pros and cons of such a venture. Contact your adoption agency to see if they have a policy on the use of social media.

The recommendations below are broken up into four sections. The first deals with things to consider before you decide to conduct your adoption search via the Internet and social media sites, the second focuses on developing a plan for post adoption contact that addresses whether or not all involved feel comfortable with social media as a way to connect. The third section provides recommendations for those parenting older adoptees and the fourth section shares general recommendations for all parties. This document was prepared to address both the adoptive family and the birth family.

The Internet and social media sites are definitely incredible ways for prospective adoptive parents and expectant birth parents to connect with each other. In addition these same venues enable all parties to keep in touch if you “mutually select to do so.” This is the key. Do all parties feel comfortable with staying connected by way of social media? Have all parties discussed this between themselves before the connection occurs?

I. Guidelines for Prospective Adoptive Parents and Expectant Birth Parents who wish to “find” each other online:

1. Before you begin searching for information online share your plans regarding making connections with an adoptive family or birth family on social networking sites with your partner, if applicable. It is important that he or she be as interested in selecting this as a viable way to make an adoption plan.
2. Discuss your plans with your adoption agency representative. The agency has both professional and personal experience with adoption journeys via the World Wide Web and is able to educate you and support you through the process as well as help you navigate through potentially risky situations.
3. If you are a current social media user, before delving into your adoption journey, you need to rethink the ways you use social media sites. Do you currently share your confidential information on your profile? What type of posts do you typically make during the week? What type of political or humorous statements or links do you tend to post? If someone searched for you, and they are not currently an online friend of yours, what might they see on your site? Recognize that you may wish to utilize these social media sites differently than you have been.
4. If you are not currently a social media user or not a frequent user, then become very

familiar with these sites and forums before you utilize them to begin your adoption journey. There are many features that should be understood regarding the different ways to communicate. Some communication is deemed private or public and often users become confused by which method they are using. Become very familiar with the privacy settings on each social media site and be aware that these sites often change setting options.

5. Social media sites allow for immediate communication between parties, sometimes such communication may be exciting at first but can also be misinterpreted or unwanted or overwhelming. To really get to know each other, it is recommended to rely on other forms of communication. Utilize the agency as a place to meet each other, or arrange a telephone call or restaurant meeting. It is important to still value personal contact.

6. E-mail communication while still an e-connection is a bit more private and personal. Email addresses can be set up just for this type of communication.

7. Consider the use of private websites and blogs before engaging in adoption searches via social media sites.

8. Once you are “matched” (whether it be via a social media connection or another more traditional way) be careful about sharing the news on a public forum because a match is not an adoption until after a placement occurs. Also the comments replying to your announcement are available for others to read and you may feel comfortable or uncomfortable with such comments.

9. Be careful to not share information about the adoptive/birth family particularly on public posts. This is important because this will ultimately become your child's story and once it is viral, it is no longer private and no longer your child's story to learn about from you as s/he grows.

10. Sharing photos and videos is a really neat part of the social networking platform. Be aware who will be privy to viewing these and perhaps revisit your privacy settings or share these items more selectively. Sharing photos is something for all parents to consider, not just adoptive parents and birth parents. If you are not comfortable sharing photos publically of your children than choose to send these via other online sites through private invitation only. Sites like Shutterfly, Snapfish, Kodak Gallery, etc., make it easy to upload and selectively share photos. Of course you can also email and mail photos as well. Hard copy photos are still an incredible gift to share with one another and may very well be a part of the requirement set up by your adoption agency and the parties involved in the adoption.

Many of the above suggestions will prepare you for next section relating to the creation of an open adoption plan, or Post Adoption Contact Agreement (PACA).

II. Guidelines for Adoptive Parents and Birth Families When Creating a PACA:

1. Before the placement of a child, it is important to begin discussing the type of communication you would like. These desires will then be placed into an agreement known as a PACA. PACA stands for Post Adoption Contact Adoption. Included within this document would be your desires regarding sharing and receiving letters and photos. It is also recommended that you list if you would like contact via email.

2. Your adoption agency can truly be helpful to you in setting up an understanding in your PACA related to the type of communication all parties hope to have after placement occurs. Social

networking may be something added to the PACA.

3. It is important to remember that communication via social media sites is public, and things we thought would be private may end up being viewed by other people. Inviting each other to be “friends” on such sites also opens you up to sharing more identifying information than you may previously have felt comfortable sharing. It is recommended to add this topic in your PACA.

4. If you receive an unexpected “friend request” from the birth/adoptive family or child or relative of the child, reach out to the agency first to ask for support and advice before responding. There are ways to have contact by redirecting that person to a private email, a phone number, a social worker at the agency, etc., to have more direct and more personal contact.

III. Guidelines for Parents of Older Adoptees:

1. If you have older children who utilize social networking they must be guided about how to use it if they wish to engage in searching for their birth family members as well as guided, should they be contacted this way by members of their birth family. Discussing such things before they occur will allow for a more meaningful dialogue and one that will better prepare your child and you should these things occur. Being prepared will help you deal with any challenges should they arise.

2. If an adoption took place some time ago and only now you have chosen to connect via social media, please connect with your adoption agency. If you no longer have this resource, seek out another adoption professional to discuss this form of contact before you engage in it. Prepare your child and your partner and other family members that may be affected by this type of communication.

IV. General Recommendations For All Parties Involved in an Adoption:

1. Connecting socially on networking sites exposes each party to the daily happenings of the other person’s life. This may be positive, overwhelming or difficult to learn so much about another person. You may learn things you didn’t intend or even want to know so evaluate whether it will be healthy to accept a friend request or send a friend request to one another. If you are uncomfortable, then do not be concerned about sending the wrong message. Setting boundaries from the beginning will help you to form a stronger and healthier long-term relationship. You are not saying you do not want to stay connected, but rather you are saying you do want to be connected, just not in this manner.

2. Communication via social networking is forever, so consider what you post before you post something especially if it relates to the adoption process, the adoptive/birth family, or your child.

In conclusion, connecting and maintaining adoption contact via social media sites is new and exciting but can also be overwhelming and challenging. It is “intense” to have this direct and immediate type of contact and if this is the route both birth and adoptive families choose to go, it is important to know you have support available to you through your adoption agency.

It is also imperative to remember two key points: Do all parties feel comfortable with staying connected by way of social media? Have all parties discussed this between themselves before the connection occurs?