

# Maintaining Connections and Openness

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

Welcome back to the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training for Mental Health Professionals. This lesson is: Maintaining Connections and Openness.

### 1.2 Section 1: Lesson Objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- Recognize the therapeutic value of openness, and
- Describe the importance of past connections in mitigating loss and grief

### 1.3 A Note About Openness

Before we talk about the benefits of openness, it's important to recognize that the opportunities for openness vary by the type of adoption itself, including private/ domestic, public child welfare, or intercountry adoption, as well as the child and family's personal journey.

Openness exists on a continuum from not having any contact with birth families or even much information about one's birth to sharing pictures and letters with birth family members to birth parents being actively involved in the child's and family's life.

In closed adoptions where records are sealed, there is no opportunity or expectation of contact with birth families. But even in these cases it is possible for openness to occur over time with the rise of internet searches, DNA testing, and social media.

In intercountry adoption from orphanages, opportunity for openness may not exist if important history and birth parent names are not known.

On the other hand, a child or youth adopted from child welfare may have had regular contact with birth family prior to the adoption and may desire ongoing contact. In open adoptions, contact is negotiated and may occur anywhere on the continuum of openness.

Regardless of how open or closed an adoption is at the beginning, the level of openness may change over time.

As a clinician, you may find yourself supporting families to navigate this continuum of openness throughout the family's lifecycle.

## **1.4 Openness**

As we discussed in the Guiding Principles, we all come to this work with our own beliefs and values. However, it is essential in working with this population, that you are able to honor birth family, heritage, and community connections and support the need for adoptees to explore openness as part of their journey.

## **2. Maintaining Connections and Openness in Adoptions**

### **2.1 Maintaining Connections and Openness in Adoptions**

Another guiding principle that is essential to your work with this population is honoring children's connections to birth family.

### **2.2 Openness Mitigates Manifestations of Grief**

Maintaining connections to the people who are important to children and to the people who value them can also be a protective factor in reducing the severity of grief and loss in adoption and guardianship; mitigating depression, anxiety, fear and other manifestations of grief.

### **2.3 Mattering**

In his book, *The Adoption Constellation: New Ways of Thinking About and Practicing Adoption*, Dr. Michael Grand talks about the importance of "mattering." He sums up the idea as follows:

*"Mattering is a new concept in the adoption field. People have to feel that they matter: not just that they matter to someone else but that other people matter to them. It's bidirectional and that bidirectionality is important. There are two things that come out of mattering: a sense of safety and trust in the relationship between parent and child."*

*When adopted children struggle, it's often because they feel they don't matter to anyone, and because they haven't had experiences that showed them adults can be trusted to tolerate their strong emotions, to protect their secrets, or even not to abandon them."*

### **2.4 Child's Perspective on Mattering**

Mattering is an important concept for you to consider in your clinical practice and raises a question that you should be asking the child or youth repeatedly as you help them to integrate their story.

From the child's or youth's point of view, the people who matter to them may be different than who they or their parents have identified.

As the child's or youth's story unfolds, ask them who has been important in their life, the role that person played, and whether that person is someone they wish were in their life now.

Doing this work can bring to light the importance of these relationships. Acknowledging these relationships can mitigate the child's overwhelming sense of loss and separation from what they perceive as meaningful connections.

## **2.5 Extended Family-Based Communities**

Additionally, it is important as a clinician to be aware that children from extended family-based communities often have an extensive network of people with bi-directional or reciprocal relationships, even if separated by large geographic distances.

If a child comes into care early, they may not know the extent of the network to whom they matter. Helping them learn about, and connect to, their extended family, clan, tribe, and those that are considered "like kin" or "like family" can promote resilience, a sense of belonging over time, and a lifelong resource for identity and support.

*Image courtesy Thomas Barrat / Shutterstock.com*

## **2.6 Benefits of Maintaining Connections**

Now let's talk about why openness is beneficial in adoption and guardianship.

Maintaining connections with important people in a child's or youth's life, and fostering openness in relationships, will help to ameliorate losses, and can also allow children and youth to make new healthy attachments more easily.

Adoptive parents who support their children's curiosity about, and connection with, birth family, including extended family, are likely to create a caregiving environment in which children feel understood, nurtured, and supported, which is the foundation for developing a secure attachment.

Closed adoptions rarely foster the child's or youth's sense of connection and can contribute to the unresolved grief and loss you will see played out in their behavior, affect, and emotionality.

## **2.7 Fantasy Birth Parent**

Even when the adoptive or guardianship family does extraordinary things to help children sustain important connections, children will often maintain the fantasy birth parent. This may be especially true for intercountry placements or placements across different backgrounds and communities because children desire a connection with someone like them.

They will also fantasize about what life might have been for them if they had been kept by their birth parents, and they will wonder what they did to make their parents “give them away,” or struggle with being “taken.” This can create loyalty issues that impact and inhibit attachment.

You can help parents understand that these issues are normal, and you can help both the child and their parent address them through honest communication. If there cannot be contact, you will need to help parents explain truthfully why this can't occur.

A quote from child psychiatrist, Dr. Paul Steinhauer, sums this up:

*“Attempts to make children relinquish their psychological ties to the birth parents by permanently severing all physical contact serves only to perpetuate their idealization and retention in fantasy of the birth parents.”*

## **2.8 Openness Comparison**

Now, let's define the ideal elements of openness with the following descriptors.

Openness is:

- Child-focused.
- Comprehensive and respectful.
- Active and dynamic.
- Trusting.
- Unfolding over time.
- Both structural and communication-based.
- Flexible.

Let's also define what openness is NOT:

- It is not closed or confidential.
- It is not shared parenthood.
- It is not about having an “open house” with no limits.
- It is not without boundaries or parental roles.
- It is not the answer to all the child's or youth's losses and grief.

## **2.9 Factors for Openness**

Jayne Schooler, author and adoption educator, has developed a list of factors to be assessed as a foundation for mediation around openness. These should be considered if you are working with a child or youth toward placement with an adoptive or guardianship parent. They are also useful with a family considering opening an adoption or moderating an existing one.

Click on each image to hear more about key factors for the child or youth, adoptive or guardianship parents, and birth family.

1. Key Factors for the Child or Youth:
  - Child's or youth's feelings and wishes regarding contact
  - Relationships with birth family members, including siblings, that are positive sources of nurture and identity
  - Emotional and developmental functioning
  - Psychological resilience and ability to form or extend attachments
  - Extent of trauma experienced with birth parent
  - Developmental stage
  - Safety considerations
  - Interactions with birth family members in the past
2. Key Factors for Birth Family Members or Other Significant Attachment Figures:
  - Reasons child or youth came into care and is unable to return to primary caregiver
  - Characteristics of family members' relationships with their child
  - Extent to which they give their child permission to be part of the adoptive family
  - Birth family views about placement and their previous experience with contact
  - Their emotional well-being and current level of functioning
  - Arrangements for review, support, and mediation over time
  - Assumptions or judgments toward the adoptive family's heritage or socioeconomic status
3. Key Factors for the Pre-Adoptive, Adoptive, or Guardianship Parents:
  - Views and experiences in relationship to connection and contact
  - Ability to put the child's needs first
  - Attitudes and understanding regarding connection
  - Arrangements for review, support, and mediation
  - Ability to set boundaries with birth family members
  - Ability to be empathic with birth family members
  - Assumptions or judgments toward the child's heritage or socioeconomic status

You can use these guidelines in helping parents to assess the value of openness, and the frequency and nature of the contact agreement. If you are working with a family over time, the nature of the contact might change with the child's needs, and keeping the child's or youth's needs in the forefront of any arrangement will be important.

## ***2.10 Role of Siblings***

Siblings are critically important connections. Older siblings may have an especially difficult time if they are separated from younger siblings for whom they have felt responsible and helped to parent. Feelings of guilt and shame about not being able to protect siblings can be debilitating. Even siblings who have never lived together may have a strong yearning to connect with one another.

In some families, cousins are considered brothers and sisters.

At times, siblings are separated because of a history of conflict, where one has bullied or abused the other. Although unsupervised contact may be inadvisable in such cases, as a clinician, you may be able to play a role in fostering therapeutic contact.

The grief over the loss of siblings, as defined by the child or youth, can be profound and crippling. Whether or not siblings are raised together, their connection to each other should be maintained and supported. In some cases, when siblings are separated at a very young age, they may not know about each other. Secrecy about adoption or the existence of a sibling placed elsewhere can test trust between parent and child if the truth is ultimately revealed.

A powerful demonstration of the implications of secrecy and sibling separation is evident in the documentary *Three Identical Strangers*. Check out the Resources tab for a link to the trailer.

### **2.11 Today Show Video**

Take a moment and watch the following Today Show segment about a reunion of two brothers, one adopted by non-relatives, and one raised by his biological grandmother, who grew up apart and found each other by chance at a community swimming pool.

As you are watching this video, pay attention to two important things: First, the power of a sibling bond, and secondly, the ramifications of secrecy in adoption.

[Video Transcript]

*This is an amazing story of unexpected crossed paths. Two strangers, really, boys at the swimming pool doing as boys sometimes do, horse playing around, when one of their friends said, "You two are fighting like brothers." That's when Isaac and Dakota wondered, "Might it be true?"*

*KERRY: At first glance, who would guess these siblings had not grown up together? They like the same sports, love the same video games, even dress alike. But until recently, the brothers were strangers.*

*ISAAC: My name is Isaac, and I'm 12.*

*DAKOTA: My name is Dakota Zimmer, and I'm 13.*

*ISAAC: And my brother is Dakota Zimmer.*

*DAKOTA: My brother is Isaac Nolting.*

*KERRY: That Isaac, from rural Washington, Missouri, and Dakota from Augusta, only 12 miles away, met is one of those chance events in life that makes you wonder if fate really exists.*

*For 10 years, Isaac, who didn't know he was adopted, and Dakota, who was being raised by his grandmother, lived oh, so close, but never crossed paths. Then, one day, at the community swimming pool, they started splashing each other.*

*DAKOTA: I kept splashing him, and he goes, "Why are you backing up?" And he had like that expression, "Why you backing up?"*

*ISAAC: "What? Are you scared?" And he kept on saying, "No."*

*KERRY: What does somebody say to you about the way you're fighting? So this friend says what?*

*ISAAC: He just says that you're fighting like brothers and stuff.*

*DAKOTA: And I look at Isaac, and at first, I'm like, "Well, he sort of looks like me and stuff." So I was starting to get like curious.*

*KERRY: The type of curiosity that only two boys would so openly examine.*

*DAKOTA: Here's my nose and here's his. Same size.*

*KERRY: While friend Jaden said, "They laugh alike. They walk alike. At times they even talk alike." Isaac had to be sure.*

*ISAAC: I went to go ask my mom. I told her to sit down on her bed, and then I asked her.*

*ISAAC'S MOM: And he looked at me and he said--*

*ISAAC: "Am I adopted, and do I have a brother?" And then she said--*

*ISAAC'S MOM: Isaac, what makes you think that?*

*ISAAC: I said, "I met my brother." And we started crying and like the whole night.*

*DAKOTA: I was just really happy that I knew that I found my brother now.*

*KERRY: There are some snapshots of the two brothers together as toddlers before their birth mother and father unexpectedly died. Their grandmother, who was raising Dakota, had always wondered how, after so many years, she could bring him together with Isaac, who'd been adopted.*

*GRANDMOTHER: To have all my grandkids together, it's like a miracle.*

*KERRY: An improbably series of events that's not lost on these two young brothers who aren't sure what to make of this old photo other than brotherly love is a connection that was never really broken.*

[END OF AUDIO]

Video obtained from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-l\\_nVcqf7k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t-l_nVcqf7k)

## **2.12 Today Show Video Reflection**

After watching this short segment, consider the following question: What might the impact of the secrecy have on Isaac and Dakotah?

### ***2.13 Today Show Video Reflection***

You may have considered the following:

- A bond of trust was broken between Isaac and his mother.
- Both boys lost their ability to have a relationship with their sibling before they were reunited.
- Isaac lost an early relationship with his grandmother.
- Isaac had a compromised identity due to not knowing he was adopted.
- Both boys perceived themselves as only children, rather than their identity as part of a sibling group.

## **3. Reflections on Challenges Associated with Openness**

### ***3.1 Reflections on Challenges Associated with Openness***

It is important for you, in your clinical work, to understand and support families through the challenges that come with openness.

### ***3.2 Challenges Reflection***

Take a few minutes to list 5 things that you think could be a challenge for the child, their adoptive or guardianship parent, or the birth parent in an open adoption.

### ***3.3 Challenges Response***

You might have considered some of these:

- Safety of the child
- Child's repeated separations from the birth parent, recreating trauma
- Contact with the birth parent re-traumatizing the child
- Child's constant reminder of what they lost
- Adoptive parent being afraid that the birth parent will want their child back
- Adoptive parent not feeling entitled to be the primary parent
- Adoptive parent not being able to set limits
- Adoptive parent fearing that the child will identify strongly with their heritage or community of origin
- Birth parent losing the child over again after each visit
- Birth parent not being able to grieve the loss
- Birth parent wanting to reclaim the child

### ***3.4 Parental Concerns Reflection***

In your clinical work with adoptive parents who are fearful about opening an adoption, or maintaining openness as their child gets older, ask them what their fears are.

If an adoptive parent raised the following concerns about openness, what would you say to address their concerns?

Type your responses to each concern in the boxes on the right.

- *“My teenage son might want to go live with his birth mother if he sees her.”*
- *“If we have visits with our daughter’s birth family, they will have a harder time getting over the fact that she is our daughter now.”*
- *“If my daughter sees that her birth mother is sad, she will feel guilty.”*
- *“We never know if our son’s birth father will be clean and sober when we plan a visit.”*
- *“If our son visits the reservation, won’t he start acting like “those” people?”*

### **3.5 Parental Concerns Response**

Click the mother’s concerns to hear a response to each. As a reminder, you can access the full response in the Transcript tab.

*“I understand you have concerns about what will result from these visits. This contact is about his need to know where he came from or what happened in his birth family. It’s not a rejection of you. Not acknowledging or allowing the relationship doesn’t make his curiosity or feelings go away. In fact, oftentimes reality helps to counter the yearning for the birth parent fantasy.”*

*“It’s possible that having visits will help them to see that your daughter is doing well and thriving. It could help them deal with their feelings of guilt or sadness about the relinquishment, and build a healthy bridge for both the birth family and her.”*

*“We will prepare your daughter for the visits and then help her talk about and process her feelings afterwards. If it becomes painful for her, we can discuss how to address that. If I have the opportunity to meet with her birth mother ahead of time, I will help her to be as supportive of her child as possible and support her sadness and grief, as well.”*

*“We can meet with the birth father and come up with a plan for the visits to make sure they are safe for the children. That will include what happens if he comes to a visit under the influence of substances, including terminating or cancelling the visit.”*

*“I understand that you are not familiar with his reservation. Your child’s healthy identity development will take some risk and learning on your part, but it is essential to his healthy identity formation. Let’s talk about your beliefs and how they might affect your son.”*

### **3.6 Setting Boundaries with Birth Parents Video**

Let's hear an adoptive mom, Debbie Schugg, talk about her experience with setting boundaries with a birth mom.

[Video Transcript]

*DEBBIE SCHUGG: In terms of setting boundaries, the very first time we saw birth Mom, after the girls had been placed with us, we were going to a big deaf event, right? And so there were probably 3,000 deaf people in this building, this big fairgrounds building. And we greeted Mom; she came up to us and we were polite and courteous, gave her a hug, all of that. And she picked up the eight-year-old and turned and disappeared into a sea of deaf people. And we couldn't call after her; we couldn't announce over the PA system, because everyone was deaf. And so there was this moment where the child that had just been placed with us had disappeared into this sea of people.*

*So we kept our cool and we spent probably thirty minutes looking for them and then saw her, sitting with her daughter in her lap, watching one of our other daughters perform a skit. So we waited until the skit was over and then went up to her and said, "This cannot happen. We want to see you; we want the girls to have contact with you; we respect your relationship with them. We are responsible for the girls. This absolutely can't happen again. We've got to communicate."*

*And from that moment on, she was fantastic. We would see her at all kinds of events at the school for the deaf and the girls would, well, maybe go to the playground or go to the snack bar with her, whatever, and she would be like, "Wait, let's ask your mom," and was very respectful of the fact that we were responsible for the girls and our role as parents.*

*So setting boundaries early on is usually pretty effective, and I think when those boundaries get crossed and you have to kind of reign things in a little bit it doesn't mean that you can't then venture back there. You know, if someone has regular visits and then perhaps they relapse in substance abuse, they have to put things on hold but it doesn't mean they can't ever start visiting again.*

[END OF AUDIO]

### **3.7 Closing an Open Adoption Reflection**

If the child's contact with birth family members negatively impacts them, you may need to support the suspension of contact in order to address what is impacting the child and stabilize them. What are some reasons for suspending contact?

### **3.8 Closing an Open Adoption Response**

Click each triangle to hear some possible reasons:

1. Birth family member is sabotaging the stability of the placement by criticizing the adoptive parent, making promises about reclaiming the child, or threatening legal action to re-gain custody.

2. Birth family member is coming to visits under the influence of alcohol or drugs on a regular basis, causing the visits to be canceled.
3. Birth family member is experiencing mental health issues and is not interacting with the child in a rational way.
4. Child or youth is asking that visitation be stopped for any reason.
5. Child or youth is exhibiting behavior after a visit that indicates that they are stressed, fearful, or experiencing negative reactions, visits may be stopped until the reason for the behavior is determined.

### ***3.9 Clinician Role***

Your role as the clinician is to help the parents and their child determine if contact is having a negative impact, and to assist them in setting boundaries that are healthy for their child. An intentional plan with clear boundaries that are known by their child can help the adoptive or guardianship family manage when the birth parent behavior is unstable.

Abruptly stopping contact, without helping the child understand the reasons, will reinforce feelings of rejection and self-blame, enhance anxiety or depressive symptomatology, and may trigger previous trauma.

### ***3.10 Open Adoption Study Results***

Now let's look at what research tells us about openness in adoption, based on the Minnesota Texas Adoptions Research Project, a longitudinal research study that focuses on the impacts of variations in openness in adoption arrangements for all members of the adoptive kinship network and for the relationships within these family systems.

Click on the blue buttons to hear what the research tells us.

1. Parties in fully disclosed open adoption are not confused about their parenting rights and responsibilities.
2. Birth mothers do not attempt to "reclaim" their children.
3. Children in fully disclosed open adoption are not confused about who their parents are, and they understand the different roles of adoptive and birth parents in their lives.
4. Differences in adolescent adoptive identity or degree of preoccupation with adoption are not related to the level of openness in the adoption.
5. Adoptive openness does not appear to influence an adopted person's self-esteem in any negative way.
6. Adoptive parents in open adoptions do not feel less in control, and indeed have a greater sense of permanence with their child.

7. Open adoption does not interfere with adoptive parents' sense of entitlement or sense that they have the right to parent their adopted child.
8. Birth mothers in open and ongoing mediated adoptions do not have more problems with grief resolution; in fact, they show better grief resolution than those in closed adoptions.
9. Researchers did find that birth mothers in time-limited, mediated adoptions (where contact stopped) had more difficulty resolving grief at the first interview of the study (when children were between ages 4 and 12 years).

### **3.11 Benefits for Teens in Open Adoptions**

Another study on adolescents' feelings about openness in adoption found that adopted teens with ongoing contact with birth family are more satisfied with their level of openness and identify a range of benefits. Click each number to hear the benefits.

1. Coming to terms with the reasons for their adoption
2. Touchstones to identify where physical traits come from
3. Information that aids in identity formation
4. Positive feelings toward birth mother
5. A better understanding of the meaning of adoption
6. More active communication about their adoption with their adoptive parents
7. Positive identity about heritage

*Source: Berge, J.M., Mendenhall, T.J. Wrobel, G.M., Grotevant, H.D. & McRoy, R.G. (2006). Adolescents' feelings about openness in adoption: Implications for adoption agencies. Child Welfare, 85(6), 1011-1039.*

### **3.12 Positive Aspects**

What we know now is that the benefits of openness outweigh the challenges.

Openness is an opportunity to honor the child's or youth's relationships, answer questions as they arise developmentally, lessen the child's or youth's fantasy about birth family, and lessen the mystery about what happened and why.

### **3.13 Ways Openness and Maintaining Connections are Helpful**

Other ways that openness and maintaining connections are helpful to the child include that it:

- Honors the child's or youth's beginnings and past
- Helps to maintain honesty about the child's story
- Increases self-esteem by valuing the whole child
- Updates familial and medical information
- Helps the child's or youth's understanding of themselves and their story developmentally
- Keeps siblings and other key relatives connected

- Lessens anxiety about what it is safe to share about their past with their adoptive and guardianship parents
- Helps the child or youth accept the reality of their circumstances
- Supports, and may even deepen, the child's or youth's attachment to the adoptive family
- Prevents children and youth from shouldering the burden of being moved from their birth parents
- Helps to foster a positive sense of self
- Helps the child or youth to feel that they still matter to their birth family and other important people in their life

### ***3.14 Utilizing Positive Aspects of Openness Reflection***

Now, list three ways that you might use these benefits to support a child and their parents in your clinical work.

### ***3.15 Utilizing Positive Aspects of Openness Reflection***

Did you consider the following as possible ways openness can help in your clinical work?

- Including birth family members in the family therapeutic work can help to correct the child's or youth's misunderstanding of what happened to them as they integrate their story, especially if they were placed at an older age.
- Facilitating sibling contact and including siblings and their parents in therapeutic sessions from time to time can help to strengthen sibling ties, and clarify their adoption story, especially if siblings are separated.
- Encouraging parents to include people important to their child in celebrations can make birthdays and holidays more meaningful for their child and reinforce that they matter to others and are loved, increasing positive self-esteem.
- Access to important people in the child's or youth's life can give you, as the clinician, an opportunity to understand their early life or even in-utero experiences or exposures.
- Information gathered from connections to people in the child's or youth's life may help to explain behaviors that might otherwise be misdiagnosed.

### ***3.16 Openness in Adoption Video***

In the long run, openness in adoption can be healthier for all parties, when it is safe, well-planned, and parties accept the boundaries established for their relationship. Let's watch the following clip of Sophie, a birth mother, and Katie and Ben, adoptive parents, that reflects the benefits of openness.

[Video Transcript]

*NARRATOR: At only 16 years old, Sophie was pregnant and facing a daunting decision: parenting or adoption.*

*SOPHIE: Parenting, it has its own challenges and adoption has its own challenges. It is very hard but it's not a goodbye forever.*

*NARRATOR: Over the past few decades, adoptions in America have undergone a radical transformation. Where closed, secretive adoptions were once the norm, today about 95 percent of adoptions have some degree of openness between the birth mother, the child, and the adoptive parents. Sophie knew that if she chose the adoption path she wanted to have some kind of ongoing relationship with her child. She found what she was looking for at an adoption services center.*

*SOPHIE: So this was a family book that was given to me in the counseling office.*

*NARRATOR: Leafing through albums of potential adoptive parents, Sophie felt a connection to one couple: Katie and Ben.*

*SOPHIE: Something was telling me the entire time like, "If you're going to choose that path, then this is the family."*

*NARRATOR: Katie and Ben had always wanted to have a family.*

*KATIE: Everyone assumes that you're going to have your own biological children. And then when it was clear that it wasn't happening between the two of us, then adoption was just the natural place to go. I mean, that wasn't a hard consideration.*

*NARRATOR: Katie and Ben were not new to open adoption. They'd adopted their first son, Angelo, less than a year earlier.*

*KATIE: The first adoption just felt so right and so natural. It was like, "Oh, this was how our family was meant to grow." It made it that much easier to then start the second process because we weren't afraid of it; we were quite comfortable with it.*

*NARRATOR: Katie and Ben's comfort with the process of adoption eased some of Sophie's fears and helped her arrive at a very difficult conclusion.*

*SOPHIE: I came to the decision of adoption because I really felt like Ben and Katie were such amazing people, that they could really step up and be the best parents I could ever imagine for him. I just felt like they were the answer.*

*NARRATOR: Having been through the process once before, Katie and Ben understood what it took for Sophie to entrust Tao to their care.*

*KATIE: It's very humbling to be on the other side of that. It is the epitome of love--that you give till it hurts and yet you keep giving, because you know that it's the right thing.*

*BEN: It's very humbling to be on the receiving end. People sometimes ask us, "Is it hard?" And it's like, "We didn't do the hard part."*

*NARRATOR: It's now been more than two years since Sophie entrusted her son Tao to Ben and Katie. When we last saw her, Sophie was optimistic about their future together.*

*SOPHIE: They're such wonderful parents to him and whenever I go over and I see him, I know in my gut that they were meant to be his and he was meant to be theirs. So they are his parents.*

*NARRATOR: Sophie's selfless act of entrusting Tao to Katie and Ben has given him a stable home and an older brother, Angelo.*

*BEN: They're always seeking each other.*

*KATIE: Angelo is always looking for Tao. [CROSSTALK] Tao's looking for Angelo.*

*BEN: Yeah.*

*KATIE: We're a family.*

*NARRATOR: This modern arrangement is built on strong foundations of communication and respect. But most of all, a shared love for a special child.*

*BEN: We're doing all that we can to take the best care we can of Tao; everybody's doing their best, all that they can for these two boys. That's really all that it is about.*

*KATIE: Yeah, I couldn't agree more.*

[END OF AUDIO]

*Video obtained from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FbVnhVDd1X4-show>.*

## **4. Conclusion**

### **4.1 Wrapping Up**

In this lesson, we talked about the importance of openness, maintaining safe connections, and the role of the clinician in helping families make decisions about openness.

### **4.2 Your Journal**

Please click on the journal page to write down your reflections on this lesson.

### **4.3 Journal Reflection**

Reflecting on this lesson, what are your key takeaways and how might you apply these in your practice?

#### ***4.4 Journal Response***

Click the "Print Results" button to print and save your answers.

#### ***4.5 Conclusion***

Congratulations! You have completed Maintaining Connections and Openness. In the next module, we will focus on the impact of trauma on brain development and children's and youth's behavior.